

How the A & B Battery Commemorative Envelope Came To Be

By: LCol (Ret'd) John McNair

The genesis of the commemorative envelope marking the 150th anniversary of A and B Batteries was in the gun room of the Fort Frontenac Officers' Mess in Kingston. The occasion – the change-of-command from MGen Jean-Marc Lanthier, Commander of the Canadian Army Doctrine and Training Centre, to MGen Simon Hetherington, RCA. The date was 26 April 2017. The Col Cmdt, BGen (retd) James Selbie was present, and we spoke of the 150th anniversary, which at that time seemed far in the future. Naively I asked the Col Cmdt if there was a plan to request a commemorative envelope from Canada Post. He replied that if I would take on that project then, yes indeed, there was a plan! I was to work very closely with BGen Selbie throughout the project.

Canada Post's horizon for such requests being about two years, I drafted a letter for the Col Cmdt to send to the Stamp Advisory Committee at Canada Post a year earlier than necessary – in May 2018. This was done especially early as we were requesting not only an envelope but also a stamp to mark the anniversary. The Committee replied fairly promptly and approved the request for a Canada Post designed commemorative envelope, but not a stamp. Some months later an intervention was made on the Regiment's behalf by the then Army Comd, LGen Wynnyk, making a strong case for an RCA stamp as well as the envelope. This fell on deaf ears, however.

Serious liaison with Canada Post's design team began in June 2020. I must say that from the get-go Canada Post was tremendously cooperative and eager to produce the best envelope they could to mark the Regiment's celebration. My principal POC, one Leslie Jones, was most helpful and possessed a terrific can-do attitude. The regiment was well served by her approach. There were four basic elements to the overall design: the stamp, the cancellation, the text on the reverse and the design itself.

RHQ provided a large number of photos and these were sent to Canada Post. The first four designs were delivered to us in September, and there was a general sense of disappointment by myself and the Col Cmdt. The designs were similar to those used for previous regimental anniversaries (e.g. all the regimental 100-year envelopes that came out in the 2014-18 timeframe). Clearly hope was not a viable course-of-action and more direction was needed. At that point the Col Cmdt made it clear that we would focus on the 1871 event itself, A and B Batteries, and not the entire history of the RCA over 150 years. BGen Selbie suggested the 1871 helmet badge (which appears upper-left of the envelope, the image coming from RHQ), and the possibility of incorporating the seldom-used grenade for the cancellation. Again, with an image from RHQ, the designers came up with a striking cancellation. The only item retained from the designer's original proposals was the stamp. Céline Morisset, the designer at Canada Post, produced the elegant and appropriate RCA flag stamp and it was immediately approved and retained for all subsequent designs. More on that later, however. With the decision to stick to the origins of A and B Batteries, more older images were needed, and this proved a difficult undertaking. The Col Cmdt put out many feelers to those he felt would have access to older images of A and B Batteries, and some began to trickle in. Most were of the "standing around a gun" pose, or small groups of officers or NCOs in the typical late 1800s somewhat stilted pose. These weren't exactly what we wanted, but we had some and so went

with that. The next group of four proposals was more what we were looking for, and all four were quite different. Included in that group was a concept I proposed to the designer, to blend the old with the new to create something appropriate yet unique. Céline came through in spades!

Major Michelsen, the Regt Maj, drafted text for the reverse of the envelope, and I edited this somewhat and sent it to the Col Cmdt for review and editing. Once complete, the text was sent to NDHQ/Dept History and Heritage for their blessing. Included was the French translation provided by Col Masson, Regt Col. That was done by December. Now we had three elements largely complete: the stamp, the cancellation and the text. The design itself, however, proved more challenging than first thought.

From the early days it was clear that final approval of the design would have to come from the Regimental Senate. However, with four completely different designs the ground would have to first be carefully prepared. This took place through December 2020 into January 2021, and notes were taken on what pleased and what pleased less (there was a poll in advance of the Senate meeting in late January). Two designs dropped off the table, leaving just two: the “blended old and new” and the “traditional” Canada Post multi-image historical design. At that point a rather surprising suggestion came forth, that the photos on the multi-image envelope reflect the full 150 years and not focus just on the creation of A and B Batteries! A step back, for sure, but the proposal had to be followed through. This would result in yet another troll for decent images, and the selection of eight to ten for the cover. But there was no time to do this before the Senate vote on the final design, 26 January 2021. So, members were told to “visualize” the range of photos on the multi-image envelope (instead of the late 1800s images that were displayed). It was, as they say, a close run thing: the Senate voted 13 to 12 for the blended design. After that it was mostly all downhill: some translation by Canada Post, tidying up images and fonts and colours (there were several go-arounds with different shades) and some back-and-forth on French usage (which the Regt Col put to bed) and we truly had a final design. But, then, on 21 April, after send had been pressed on the final, final design approval back to Canada Post, the Regt Maj noticed that the image on the RCA flag was the wrong one! The 2006 image should have been used but was not, plus there was a spelling error in the Latin text under the gun. Fortunately, the designer was able to quickly switch out the images and all was well again. Forensics revealed that the designer had pulled the flag image from the internet in the late summer of 2020 and unfortunately it was the wrong one. Everyone who laid eyes on the stamp loved it and the error went unnoticed for months. A good catch, Regt Maj!

Smooth sailing at that point, but yet another pothole appeared in the road. Canada Post was reluctant to allow the Regiment to display the envelope publicly prior to release, or at least prior to a point shortly before release (21 October). Approval was sought from on high at Canada Post and thankfully that approval came, on 10 May. The Regiment still does not have approval to show the reverse of the envelope, with the bilingual text and a surprise image, but in due course that, too, will be revealed.

Four years and approximately 225 e-mails to and from Canada Post, but this was, like most good things, a team effort. In the end The Royal Regiment has a fitting souvenir of its anniversary, one that will be noted by philatelists around the world and one that will, 50 years from now or even or longer, still exist to mark this special occasion.