

SYNOPSIS: *The Elusive Canadian WW2 Thomas Cook Undercover Mail Scheme that used "Box 615" in Lisbon to link with Nazi Europe.* [The "625" is a typo.]

Attached is an article from 2020 that appeared in the philatelic magazine *The Posthorn*, published quarterly by the Scandinavian Collectors Club. (Issue 2, published 10 June 2020, pages 14-18.)

This article and its new information were previously unavailable and only became possible putting together the details from 4 sources. The most recent was the (unpublished?) Canadian *Report on Censorship During the War 1939-1945* provided through the Canadian Military Archives Library. This Report was released in Jan. 1946 as "Top Secret" and was only finally declassified and became public in 1984. (356 pages, of which a 144 page section relates to postal censorship. However, it apparently remained unexamined by philatelists. The Civil Censorship Study Group (CCSG) now has received permission from Canada to show the full Report as a PDF photocopy.)

The other sources used overall were the Canadian Archive records on microfilm, U.S. Archives wartime files, and some emailed information from the (past) Thomas Cook Company Archivist. Also, apparently for the first time, this article shows a complete Canadian Thomas Cook instruction sheet for writing to "Enemy or Enemy Occupied Countries".

However, the story needs some further background:

1. To date, no Canadian publicly available instruction sheets have been found. That's pretty unusual! However, we do have drafts of the planned instructions in the Canadian Archives, and we have the ones used in Great Britain which were revised and re-issued regularly to update rule changes, and were sometimes even published in the British press, including the specific countries service was offered to write to. [Finland, for example, was not included as enemy occupied, but was later added after June 1941 – apparently at Russia's request.] The Canadian instructions did largely reflect the Great Britain approach. It is interesting, however, that the Canadian example here is only an Archive's copy. It is not known if this version was distributed. It is longer, and does not specify the intermediary address as all the ones in Great Britain do.
2. The Article title refers to "Nazi Europe" – a bit misleading in two ways. First, Finland was not accurately considered a Nazi country or Nazi occupied – but normal Canadian mail service was suspended. Second, the Thomas Cook scheme also allowed Canadians to write to German occupied countries in North Africa, although I don't know of reported usages after "Box 252" didn't work for that following Dec 1941. (An article about the use and some additional information about the functioning of Box 252 is shown in this same magazine, pages 6-13, also submitted for display at this show. It involves an unusual 1940 cover and letter from Norway.)

As a serious guess, a couple hundred covers addressed to Box 252 are in collectors' hands now. That well confirms its usage. However, looking over the years for examples of any usages involving Box 615, Lisbon, for Canadians or others, none could be located. Only in more recent decades has usage clearly been confirmed by just these 2 covers described here! And now the 1946 Censorship Report Usage Table suggests Box 615 was likely the address used for several thousand letters from 1942-1945!

A note for further hunting: A few more Thomas Cook Lisbon Box numbers are in Archive and even newspaper records and some censorship form text references. They were apparently set up by Thomas Cook for other countries in the Commonwealth or Colonies - but no actual usages have been found.

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