

# First Person Story

## A Visit to a Faraway Place by Mel Borofsky

As a young stamp collector, back in the late 1940s, stamp collecting allowed me to imagine what it was like living at some far-off location such as Tuvalu, Fiji and many other exotic sounding places. Through my stamps I was able to escape the day to day living in crowded South Philadelphia. My knowledge and interest in geography and travel grew out of my hobby.

In the spring of 2002, as a magazine editor and photographer, I was assigned to cover a series of maritime rescue competitions on the waters off the coast of St. Johns, Newfoundland. While doing my preliminary research of the area a location popped up that brought back those early stamp collecting days. Off the southern coast of Newfoundland lay the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, known only to me through my stamps. I decided to visit those islands and went through the necessary red tape that allowed the visit.

St. Pierre was first discovered by Spain in the 1500s and eventually was colonized by France. Today, as in 2003, St. Pierre and its neighboring island of Miquelon are departments of France. When on the islands, you are actually in France, using French currency (the franc back then), solely speaking the French language, French cooking and flying the French flag. St. Pierre is nothing more than a huge five square mile granite rock rising out of the Fortune Strait, an offshoot of the Atlantic Ocean. The inhabitants are a friendly, if not curious group of people. They actually move from one side of the island to the other as the seasons change. Being on the windward side of the island allows them to generate their own household electricity with private windmills driven by the seasonal prevailing winds. Annual vacations are a ferry visit to the almost barren sister island of Miquelon. I took that excursion with many local families who took their tents, goats and chickens along for the one or two week "vacation."



They live an isolated existence, depending on the French mainland for most of their daily necessities. The main products, to this day, are fishing and stamps. One of the largest buildings on the main island of St. Pierre is the post office and maritime museum. Their only hotel is a throwback to the days of prohibition. Its claim to fame is that Al Capone used the hotel as a meeting place and guest house when visiting his liquor holding sites on the islands. Remember, the islands are France, not subject to the back then import prohibitions of the U.S. and Canada, and Capone took advantage of the situation. Huge Quonset huts, used today as storage warehouses, are remnants of that era. A small airplane landing strip is a throwback to those days when Capone and his henchmen visited the island.

I certainly would never have considered a visit to the islands if it were not for the lure afforded by my stamp collecting. I have since visited many "far away" places, but none as remote and interesting as St. Pierre and Miquelon.

**[Editor's Note – I encourage every member of the CFSC to write a First Person account of how they became involved in the hobby. It can even be published anonymously if one prefers.]**

# BARRIER FLIGHTS?

By Josh Furman

Most of us remember or have heard of the DEW line, a cooperative effort between the United States and Canada to provide Distant Early Warning of an enemy attack. At that time, the supposed enemy was Soviet Russia, and our fear was over attacks from there over the North Pole area.

As an adjunct to the DEW line, the United States developed another barrier line which stretched from Newfoundland far over the ocean to a point somewhere near the Azores. This Barrier line was intended to alert our defenses to potential attacks on the northeastern part of our continent.

The Barrier Forces included a surface portion made up of radar-equipped destroyer escorts based out of Newport, Rhode Island, and an air portion commanded from the U. S. Naval Station in Argentia, Newfoundland. This airborne contingent consisted of three squadrons that maintained a 24-hour surveillance of the north Atlantic. This effort was ongoing 24/7 from 1956 to 1965.



The aircraft in use for this operation were the WV-2 "Warning Star", the military version of the Lockheed Super Constellation 1049G, a four-engine plane that was equipped with the latest (for that time) radar and electronic countermeasures equipment. The aircraft were capable of detecting air and surface craft at long ranges.

The 10,000<sup>th</sup> Barrier Flight was flown as of March 3, 1961, and this cover was prepared to celebrate that accomplishment. Enclosed in the envelope was a letter from R. B. Moore, Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy, Commander Barrier Forces, U. S. Atlantic Fleet describing the operation and maintenance of the Barrier Forces.