

A Brief Look at Wartime Gander's U.S. Commanding Officers

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Major Jarred Vincent Crabb. Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force Website

In May 1941, Major (later General) Jarred V. Crabb of the 21st Reconnaissance Squadron became the first commanding officer of the U.S. Army Air Base at Gander. Born in 1902 in Olney, Illinois, Crabb “graduated from Purdue University in 1925 with a bachelor of science degree,” reads his U.S. Air Force biography. “In February 1929 he enlisted in the Army as a flying cadet and attended the Air Corps Primary Flying School at March Field, Calif., followed by the Air Corps Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, Texas. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Reserve a year later. From May 1930 until 1942, General Crabb served in various

assignments in the United States, Panama Canal Zone, and Newfoundland, where he was commanding officer of Gander Air Force Base.”

For more on Crabb visit:

<http://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/107354/major-general-jarred-v-crabb/>

The 41st Reconnaissance Squadron replaced the 21st in August 1941 and brought with it a new commander in the form of Major (later General) Joseph C.A. Denniston. Born in 1901 in Newport, Rhode Island, Denniston graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1925,

and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the air service. "The following year he graduated from primary and advanced flying schools, was rated a pilot, and assigned to Maxwell Field, Ala. In June 1927, he was named a flying instructor at Brooks Field, Texas, and later was a flying instructor at Randolph Field, Texas.

In September 1932, General Denniston was assigned with the Second Observation Squadron at Nichols Field, Philippine Islands. In December 1934, he was assigned to the Ninth Bombardment Group at Mitchel Field, N.Y. In June 1940, he was transferred to the Second Bomb Group at Langley Field, Va. He assumed command of the Newfoundland Army Air Base in August 1941 and while serving in that capacity flew anti-submarine patrol missions."

For more on Denniston visit:

<http://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/107249/brigadier-general-joseph-c-a-denniston/>

Major Arthur A. Fickel, a native of Fort Niagara, New York, succeeded Denniston in April 1942. Born into a military family in June 1913, Fickel entered West Point in 1931 and attended flying school at Kelly and Randolph Fields. "After obtaining his wings in 1936, he married his girl from cadet days, Helen Kaelin," reads his West Point memorial page. "They went to France Field, Panama, on his first assignment, where he served as combat officer. He later served in this capacity at Mitchell Field. In 1941, he went to Newfoundland and became Commander of the Army Air Force there. After war was declared, Arthur and his men spent long, arduous hours patrolling the North Atlantic on submarine hunting duty. During this tour at Gander his only child, Susan, was born. In 1942 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire for his service in Gander in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Air Force."

For more on Fickel visit:

<http://apps.westpointaog.org/Memorials/Article/10282/>

November 1942 marked the arrival of a new commander, Colonel Harold W. Beaton. Born in 1890 in Chicago, Illinois, Beaton served in the U.S. Army Air Service during the First World War. Immediately after the war, he served at Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas, and Bolling Field, Washington, and in 1921 completed Air Services Communications School at Post Field, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. In the mid-1920s, Beaton served as communications and armament officer with

the 2nd Observation Squadron at Kindley Field in the Philippines, and then with the 20th Bombardment Squadron at Langley Field, Virginia. He competed for the Air Corps in the U.S. National Air Races in the late 1920s before attending Air Corps Tactical School, where students studied American strategic and tactical air doctrine. The year 1938 found him with the 23rd Bombardment Squadron at Hickam Field in the Territory of Hawaii. Prior to arriving at Gander, he served at Savannah air base in Georgia.

In August 1943, Colonel Frederick D. Lynch assumed command, which came at a time of organizational change as jurisdiction over the American sector at Gander transferred from the Newfoundland Base Command (headquartered at Fort Pepperrell in St. John's) to the North Atlantic Wing, Air Transport Command, which was responsible for the ferrying of combat aircraft. The American component at Gander was thereafter renamed the 1387th Army Air Forces Base Unit.

Born in Chicago in 1893 and university educated, Lynch enlisted in the army in May 1917 and was transferred to the aviation section of the signal corps. Commissioned a second lieutenant in May 1918, he was sent overseas just before the armistice and served in France with the army of occupation. He returned to the army as a first lieutenant in the air service in 1920. Sent by the military in 1925 and 1926 to Yale University, he obtained a master's degree in communications engineering. Lynch advanced steadily through the ranks, served in Corregidor, and traveled through China and Japan. He attended Air Corps Tactical School in the late 1930s and was at Hickam Field, Hawaii, as a technical inspector when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour in December 1941. He was promoted to full colonel's rank in January 1942, and returned to the U.S. mainland as commanding officer of the army air forces storage depot in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Colonel Sigmund F. Landers, right, commander of U.S. forces at Gander from July to Dec 1944. Landers took over from Colonel Frederick D. Lynch, left. The background mural was located in the Officers' Club. It was 40 feet in length and among a series of murals made by base personnel at the Art Workshop. Photo courtesy Gloria Brown.

In July 1944, fifty-three-year-old Missourian Colonel Sigmund F. Landers took command at Gander. Landers began his commissioned army career in 1918 when he was appointed a second lieutenant. He completed aviation ground school training at the University of California and advanced training at Lake Charles, Louisiana. During service at Langley Field in 1920/21, he participated in the experimental bombing of battleships under General Billy Mitchell. Landers served in the Philippines from 1924 to 1926 and then spent four years at Brooks Field, San Antonio, Texas. He then transferred to Maxwell Field for a six-year tour and attended Air Service Mechanics School and Air Corps Tactical School. Landers was stationed in Panama from 1940 to 1942 when the Canal Zone was building up its defenses, returning to the U.S. for successive postings at the San Bernardino Air Depot, Charleston Army Air Base (South Carolina), Bangor, Maine, and then Gander. "His wife had been with him at all of his stations previous to

Gander,” records the 1387th base unit history. “She was evacuated from the Canal Zone when the war broke out, and travelled by Army transport to New Orleans ... Although he had piloted pursuit planes, including the P-47, Colonel Landers professed a preference for flying the heavy planes of which the B-17 was his favorite.”



Gander's next U.S. commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ronald C. McLaughlin, arrived in December 1944. He spent his early years in the Philippines where his father served as a missionary with the American Bible Society. Returning to the U.S., McLaughlin attended university and soon became interested in flying. He entered army flying school in California and graduated from Kelly Field, Texas, in 1931. Next, now

Second Lieutenant McLaughlin went on active duty with the 1st Pursuit Group at Selfridge Field, Michigan. He returned to civilian life and flew as co-pilot with United Airlines and later as both pilot and co-pilot with Northwest Airlines. In March 1942, he was called to active duty as captain and stationed in Baltimore before becoming group commander of the Second Ferrying Group of the Ferrying Division at Wilmington, Delaware. When this assignment ended in October 1944, he was transferred to the North Atlantic Division and sent to Manchester, New Hampshire, to await assignment at Gander.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard Loomis, Gander's last wartime U.S. commander, arrived in May 1945. Loomis was no stranger to Gander, having commanded a service squadron there in 1943, and until his departure in March 1944, held the position of base air inspector. He was next appointed executive officer at Presque Isle, Maine, and then attended Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Texas. Prior to his first tour of duty at Gander in 1943, Loomis served as a Ferrying Group engineering officer at Romulus Field, Michigan. Before entering the air force, he owned and operated an airport and at the time of taking command of Gander had accumulated 2800 hours of civilian flying and 800 hours of military flying. “He is rated as a first pilot on 54 types of civilian aircraft,” wrote Gander's base historian, “and 45 different types of military aircraft, including all modern pursuit

and attack aircraft, light, medium, and heavy bombing airplanes, and all modern cargo craft.”