

National War Memorial Aug 2015

Mr. Minister, members of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to speak to you on this occasion and on behalf of 435-436 Burma Squadrons Association I thank Veterans Affairs Canada and the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association for making it possible.

It is appropriate that our two associations share this occasion, this celebration of the end of World War II, because we already share not only the fight against Japan, but also the questionable distinction of having been involved in a forgotten war.

The trouble is, Japan actually fought two wars, one called the Pacific War and the other known, if known at all, as the South East Asia war. Thanks to the dramatic opening act at Pearl Harbor and the zeal of the American press, the Pacific War stole the show. Our war was simply overlooked, unjustly forgotten.

I want to spend just a minute now correcting that injustice.

Seventy minutes **before** the bombs dropped on Pearl, Japanese troops landed in force on the eastern shores of the Malayan peninsula and began the war in South East Asia.

Why?

Because Japan desperately needed oil, rubber, and rice to carry on and complete its war against China and to feed its starving population at home. Malaya produced 90% of the world's rubber, the Dutch East Indies produced 60% of the world's oil, and Burma exported more rice than any other nation. The South East Asia campaign was not just a side-show - it was the main event and deserves to be recognized as such.

It's not just a matter of correcting the historical record. It is a matter of reminding Canada that 2500 young Canadians were sent into a Hong Kong trap and then endured four punishing years in Japanese PoW camps; 550 of them died there. It's a matter of reminding Canada that 7 or 8 thousand young Canadians fought in Burma and more than 500 are still there.

The Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association is doing a good job in telling the story. Thank you for that. And with events such as this, Veterans Affairs is trying to do its part. But there is more to tell and it is good when we tell it together. This weekend is a good beginning; may the work continue.

Thank you and God bless you all.