

Lest we Forget

Remembrance Service in Hong Kong



by Cassandra Ip

Every year for the past 63 years, the Consulate General of Canada in Hong Kong organizes a Remembrance Service, not on November 11, but the first Sunday in December.

This special service is to honour and remember the 550 Canadians who gave their lives in the defense of Hong Kong during World War II. Since the handover of sovereignty of Hong Kong from the British to the Chinese in 1997, Canadian Scouts have been invited by the Canadian Consulate in Hong Kong to participate in this service.

December 6, 2009, dawned bright and sunny. Although it was winter, the weather was mild and warm. As the clock struck ten o'clock, the Right Honorable Stephen Harper came down the center stairs with a WWII Veteran, Hong Kong Ex-Serviceman, followed by the Official Party.

The Remembrance Service was deeply moving, with members of Scouting involved from the beginning to the end. It started with an opening prayer, and Prayer of Remembrance. Scout Tiffani Wong read the Act of Remembrance in French. When the Last Post was played for the two minutes of silence, our three Scouts lowered the Canadian flag to half-mast.



Photos: Luke Wong (top right) by Jason Ransom



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Next on the agenda was to hear about the bravery of Sergeant-Major John Robert Osborn. John was the first Canadian soldier in the Second World War to perform an act of such great bravery that he would be awarded a Victoria Cross. But his heroism on December 19, 1941 in the Battle of Hong Kong was not known until after the war when the story was finally pieced together from Hong Kong veterans liberated after the Japanese surrender. His citation, issued on April 2, 1946, tells the tragic story: "with no consideration for his own safety he assisted and directed stragglers to the new company position, exposing himself to heavy enemy fire to cover their retirement." The Japanese got close enough to the entrenched Canadians to lob grenades into their position. Osborn threw them back. Then one landed in a place where Osborn knew he could not return it in time. He shouted a warning to his comrades, and then threw himself on the grenade. He was killed instantly. Two of Osborn's grandchildren spoke of their grandfather's heroism.

Prime Minister Harper represented Canada by laying a wreath honouring the sacrificed Canadian soldiers. Other wreath-layers followed, and Cassandra Ip represented Scouts Canada with another wreath. Scouts and Venturers of the 1st Hong Kong Canadian Scout Group then placed poppies on Canadian soldiers' graves while the Canadian International School Choir sang Amazing Grace. The ceremony ended graciously with blessings and singing of national anthems. X

— *Cassandra Ip is the Group Commissioner for the 1st Hong Kong Canadian Scout Group in Hong Kong.*