



WASURERU-NAI "Never Forget"



National Newsletter of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association Spring 2021 Edition

Editor: *Jim Trick*

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President's Message



Mike Babin

We all continue to chafe under the restrictions and threats posed by COVID-19. I hope that you and your families have been able to avoid the worst effects. Now that vaccinations appear to be close for all of us,

let's hope that our lives return to normal very soon.

This year is the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Hong Kong. Even after so many years, there continue to be new and fascinating things to learn about this important part of our country's military history. As part of our commemoration of the anniversary, I'm delighted to announce the details of our virtual events program for 2021!

Beginning on March 22, we will offer a 1-hour presentation once a month that will be open to all HKVCA members as well as anyone else who may be interested. We have picked topics and speakers which we think will be of interest to everyone, and perhaps showcasing aspects of the Battle of Hong Kong that you may not be familiar with. The speakers will be engaging and knowledgeable, and there will be the opportunity for you to ask questions of the presenters.

The presentations will be offered via Zoom, a very easy-to-use online system that can be accessed from any smartphone, tablet or desktop computer.

Here is our current lineup of events for the first half of the year (all times are **Eastern Time**):

Date	Time	Topic
March 22	7:30pm	Capt. Reid – 'C' Force Doctor
April 19	7:30pm	Postal History of 'C' Force
May 17	7:30pm	Finding War Relics in Hong Kong
June 21	7:30pm	Lt. Kay Christie's Story, and Medals at the Royal Canadian Military Institute

You should have already received a separate email with an invitation to register for the first event. If not, you can register by clicking [here](#). Registration is free, and is open to everyone, whether an HKVCA member or not. I encourage you to forward the invitation to your family members and friends and urge them to join in.

Veteran George Peterson just celebrated his "100th" birthday. Happy Birthday, George!

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

In Memoriam

Ladena Mabley on January 6, 2021. Ladena was married to John Hodgkinson WG, HK vet then married Jerry Mabley WG, HK vet.

Elizabeth "Beth" Stewart Pollock, widow of Allison Pollock, RRC, on October 14, 2020

Online Updates



Jim Trick

Recent Additions

Thanks to generous members and the public, we've been able to add online versions of some books that are listed on our Suggested Reading

page.

In our last issue we told you of the addition of [Leonard Corrigan](#)'s story, and we've since added [The Home Front - Hopscotch and Heartache While Daddy was at War](#) by Margaret Dennis Owen. Margaret's memories of how Lt. Dennis's family coped is fascinating reading.

Submitted by Bill Rogers: *My dad passed away when I was just 19. He did get to see me attend Royal Military College which I know pleased him. His dad served 51 years in the Royal Navy. My dad joined the British Army as a boy soldier, but was 31 when he was captured on Christmas Day 1941.* [40 Miles From Freedom](#) - the story of Ernest Rogers, Royal Engineers, as a POW and escape planner. A different point of view from a British Army NCO.

Letter to My Father - included in this issue. A letter of love and pride written by daughter, Cory, to her dad, Richard Johnson (WG), whose story [My Time in Hell](#), is now published on our website.

Also included in this issue: Colin Standish, grandson of S.Sgt Standish, RRC, has produced two profiles: one on Hormidas Fredette, the other on Ralph Maclean.

Letter to my Father



Cory Turner (daughter of Richard Johnson, Winnipeg Grenadiers)

March 6, 2002

Dear Dad,

Having had time to read and reread your journal and, to the best of my ability, absorb the horror of your ordeal, I want you to know how very proud I am that you are my dad. The first word that came to mind after reading your story was "honourable". I cannot really explain why, but it was my first reaction.

From Author Raffaella Cortese

From the site: [Wartime Friends Org](#), Raffaella has submitted a link to this account of 'C' Force soldiers of Italian heritage:

[ITALIAN-CANADIAN SOLDIERS IN THE FAR EAST
THE BATTLE OF HONG KONG, 1941
AND WHAT FOLLOWED](#)

Programming Online Services

As fewer and fewer of us own a cheque book, paying for services online has become a way of life, especially for those of us with more years in front of us than behind us. HKVCA introduced online payments a few years ago, and while the application gets the job done, it is long overdue for a makeover. Our humble programmer (me) has reached the limit of his expertise and so we are casting a wide net to find a volunteer to work on the next major version.

Specifically, we're looking for someone well-versed in applications development including database design and development.

[Technical details](#) are available.

To help out, get in touch by emailing webmaster@hkvca.ca.

I would like to say that I and all the people who love you, are glad you didn't fight to the finish. I know that's easy for me to say – I can only begin to imagine what you went through. I'm sure your journal tells of only a small portion of what went on in those 44 months. Your courage and will to live is awesome – it would have been much easier to give up.

I admire your courage in being able to write your journal. I know it was very painful for you. I'm sure you would rather have kept it buried, but it didn't want to stay buried any longer. I am so sorry you had to carry this around with you for all this time. I wish I could make it all go away for you.

I read something the other day which had quite an impact on me and I wanted to share it with you:

“Most people have no idea what it is like to be in combat. However, you have known combat as well as the horrific kind a prisoner of war faces. In combat, the enemy is largely unseen. He is somewhere out there until the shooting starts and even afterwards, and when the shooting stops, the battle stops. There are opportunities for a hot meal, for a furlough, even for a reassignment. However, to a prisoner of war, the enemy is everywhere. He controls your fate, your future, even your bodily functions. You are at war every second. Your diet is always the same. You are never given leave. You can never leave the combat zone. Even today nearly 60 years after the end of your captivity your life is still shaped by your experiences.

Your victory was measured by your survival and in maintaining your faith and your loyalty to your country, when the reward for maintaining that loyalty was continued starvation and brutality. You place honour before everything, even before having a whole self.

You absorbed with your bodies the blows that were intended for our nation and its people and you sacrificed your own freedom for the freedom of the world. The world honours your service and is grateful for your sacrifices.”

You know, that kind of sounds like a hero to me - I'm quite sure you will never be convinced that you are a hero, but to me and to the rest of the world, you are.

You didn't fail. You were sent to do a job which you were not allowed to do – you had absolutely no choice or control over

Sgt Gander Project - Update



J P Bear

I wanted to take a moment to enlighten you about how my project is advancing... As I know we are all having to deal with this pandemic and the way it is changing the way we are living, for now, I would like to

let you know that I have some good news to express.

Recently, I have been in contact with the Director, Andrew Wall of Refuge 31 Films, based in Winnipeg. Mr Wall's company deals with producing documentaries in the Christian and Military genre. We have been in talks over the last couple of weeks, and he and his staff are working with me on getting grants and to work on the production of my Sergeant Gander Film project. I feel that the project, although stalled over the last year, seems finally to be moving in a forward motion, once again... AMEN!!

With Andrew's assistance I feel that 2021 just might be the year that will get the film onto the big screen. No guarantees, mind you, but I do find that I am going to move

the situation. You accepted your fate as well as you could, did whatever you could to help anybody worse off than yourself, and then stood up for some poor guy you didn't even know and stoically accepted the consequences for that act of defiance. I guess maybe that's where the honourable part comes in.

In my opinion, the Japanese were a bunch of cowards – they talked about hari-kari and death before dishonour but who went running down the road when the war was finally over? And how they dare talk of honour when they spent almost four years torturing, taunting and mistreating human beings, often for no other reason than their own enjoyment. I'll bet their kids are real proud of them. I would have gladly shot the lot of them.

This has been such a great burden on you since an unbelievably young age. I hope by writing your journal and sharing some of your experiences with people who care about you, will help make the burden a little lighter. I wish this for you with all my heart.

I firmly believe that all things happen for a reason but this is one thing I simply cannot find a reason for. The only positive thing is that despite almost insurmountable odds, you survived and I, for one, am so very glad you did.

I love you so much and I am proud of you.

Cory

(R.T. Johnson's story is [available on our website](#))

closer to the end of the tunnel and the completion of my quest.

I was glad to send a “100” birthday wish to George Peterson. I did mention that I knew his first 100 years had some bad issues, but that I thought his next 100 years would be better... God Bless him and all the Veterans and their families, for sure!

I am not sure if I will be able to attend the reunion in August, but I am keeping my fingers crossed that the PM of Canada will open up the border to allow me to attend. With that said, I will stay in touch and keep you all posted.

Recently I spoke with George MacDonell and Phil Doddridge, to wish them well and to keep them informed as to how things are going.

I will close my update and I will keep in touch with all of you so you will know how things are going.

See You All Soon (I hope) God Bless – Cheers to All!!



One Stranger's Kindness

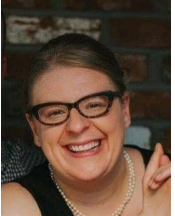
Lori Atkinson Smith

Social media can be a wonderful thing! Can you imagine losing something you cherish and finally realizing you will not see it

again or hold it in your hand again?

Here enters a lost medal that had been presented to a HK veteran family.

A few days short of Christmas, 2020, I received a Facebook message from Beth van den Elst, Edmonton, Alberta, asking me if I was related to WG Jack Smith L2721. (I am not). Beth reported that while picking up trash around the park at her local community hall in September, 2020, she found a medal laying in the dirt. Beth returned home, put it in a drawer with other

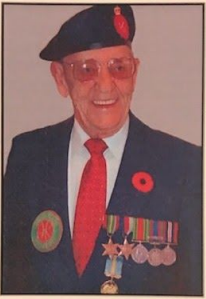


treasures she had discovered while cleaning up the neighbourhood, and forgot about it.

In December, bored and stuck in the house due to COVID lockdowns, Beth decided to clean out her treasure drawer.

Beth came across the medal once again and noticed an engraving on the back: L2721 J. Smith.

Beth did some googling, and found the HKVCA website. Beth was able to identify that the "J" stood for Jack. Beth then went to the HKVCA Facebook page and searched for Jack Smith. A [post](#) came up that I had commented on less than a month earlier.



It was at that point that Beth messaged me, inquiring whether or not I was related to Jack. When I stated that I

Veterans' Profiles



Colin Standish

Ralph Maclean profile from April, 2019

"It was right over my bed. Picture me with a roof at my feet. With your friends at your feet. There was a guard on duty and he had apparently stepped out the door, and the whole shed came down around him."

It was New Years' Eve 1944, and the barracks containing 180 Canadian Prisoners of War in Japan collapsed under a wet snowfall, with himself spared by a hole in the roof.

was not, Beth asked if I was able to assist her in tracking down any family members that the medal could be returned to.

Well people, you know about our FAMILY called Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association. I called a HKVCA rep out in Alberta, after getting her phone number from her nephew who lives in Ontario. Our rep made a few phone calls and came up with the family related to Jack Smith. Beth was able to reach out via a phone call and ask them about the medal she had found. It turns out Jack's son-in-law had inherited the medal when Jack passed away.



While on a business trip in Edmonton two years ago, the medal, which was kept on a necklace chain, disappeared in his hotel room. The son-in-law was devastated! He shared that he had called the hotel every month for the past 2 years to see if it had been turned in, but it never turned up.

Memorial Cross

Beth was happy to report to him that she had found the medal, in a community hall parking lot on the opposite side of town from where it was last seen, and agreed to mail it home. How it made its way across the city will forever be a mystery, but fortunately, it ended up back where it belonged.

Thanks Beth. This act of kindness is so very appreciated.

Note: for further information on the Memorial Cross see [Derrill's notes from 2019](#) on our site.

POWs desperately tried to dig out their friends from under the rubble, but were ordered by Japanese guards to form up and be counted, lest they attempt an escape in the chaos.

Canadians were left trapped, crying, moaning and entombed. 8 Canadians died that night.

Their frozen bodies were too big for the coffins provided, and their corpses were broken at the elbows and knees.

Of all things that might kill a Canadian in the Far East during war, death by snow seemed a cruel irony.

Ralph Maclean was from Grindstone Island, Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.

He recalled his trip to Asia, with his troop ship stopped in Pearl Harbor in November, 1941 to be greeted by 'Hula' dancers and a near mutiny over poor rations of poorly cooked tripe and mutton.

Upon capture on Christmas Day, 1941, he was roped together with his platoon mates with barbed wire, and placed in the middle of the Jockey Club Stadium.

He had signed up with his best friend Deighton Aitken, who was separated from him during a diphtheria epidemic.

This disease forms a mucus membrane in your throat suffocating you and, if this is survived, releases toxins into the bloodstream. Ralph returned to POW Camp in HK to find Deighton had died.

His platoon Sgt. Bill Pope was from my hometown of Cookshire, and my Grandfather's best friend from childhood and college.

Bill's Grandfather was a Senator and his Great-Grandfather was a MP and the first Minister of Agriculture and Railways.

"He was just perfect. He was a fine man," recalled Ralph.

Bill died while a POW in Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong, he carried buckets of dirt by hand to move hills to expand Kai Tak Airport until he was sent to Japan on a 'draft' to the Japanese homeland to work in factories, mines and shipyards.

Locked in the hold of a 'Hell Ship', Ralph and other Canadians were locked in the dark cargo holds far below the waterline, with only buckets of rice and others to use as bathrooms in two 7 day stretches.

I had not previously published his story last year as I was hoping to interview him again for a few follow-up questions.

However, Ralph passed away this past March, days before Covid lockdowns commenced, and before we had a chance to speak again.



May he rest in peace.

Hormidas Fredette from a Remembrance Day

"I used to close my eyes and chomp, chomp, chomp (gestures eating) to eat the cup of rice so I couldn't see the maggots and bugs in it," he chuckled about his prisoner camp rations.

Meet Hormidas Fredette.

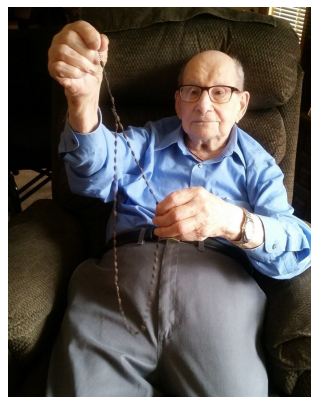
Hormidas is 103 years old.

He is the last remaining Eastern Townships veteran of the Battle of Hong Kong.

He is from Richmond Quebec, lived in Windsor, Quebec and now lives in New Minas, Nova Scotia.

It is incredible to think he was born in 1917, over a year before the end of World War 1, and during the Russian Revolution.

"I hope I'll still be around!," he exclaimed when I told him I was coming to see him.



Pictured, Hormidas is showing me his prized rosary beads, that he carved from fruit pits and wired together from scrap metal in the factories he was forced to work in.

Originally from Richmond Quebec, he fought with The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong and was a Prisoner of War there and in Japan.

He only met my Grandfather C.Q.M.S. Colin A. Standish, another Royal Rifle, once: they shared a beer together in Quebec City.

On leave from Valcartier, Hormidas, a Private, spotted my Grandfather, a NCO, near the Citadelle in Old Quebec.

Hormidas called him over and they drank a beer together in a parking lot, caught up on Townships life and went their separate ways.

It's funny to think of what people might remember of you someday...

Hormidas fought in the Battle, was pressed into hard labour by the Japanese and moved hills, bucket by bucket of earth, to construct Kai Tak Airport in Hong Kong.

In Japan, he had to paint the sides of ships in drydock, where an earthquake once knocked his scaffolding off the side of the ship leaving him hanging there until rescued by other workers.

Hormidas returned home, married his sweetheart, and retired to the Annapolis Valley with his two sons.

I was reluctant to contact Hormidas initially, as there is a moving video of him (I encourage you to watch it) rejecting the Japanese apology in 2011 and breaking down on screen.

However, he was a warm and gentle man, who welcomed me into his home and was eager to share his war experiences without reservation.

I returned the favour from many years ago and brought him a beer.

Flag Raising December 7, 2020



Gene M. Labiuk, Niagara Military Museum

On December 7, 2020 at 10:00 a.m., over 20 members of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, Royal Canadian Naval Association (Niagara Chapter) and the Niagara Military Museum (NMM) gathered for a flag-raising of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association (HKVCA). On this date in 1941, Japan attacked Hong Kong as well as other countries throughout the far east and brought World War II to Asia and the Pacific.

Just under 2,000 Canadian soldiers and 2 nursing sisters were sent to the Defence of Hong Kong. The Battle of Hong Kong began on December 7, (December 8 local time zone). During the conflict, 290 Canadians were killed in the fighting, and on December 25, 1941, the Governor of Hong Kong surrendered the Territory to the Japanese attackers. The British Commonwealth defenders laid down their arms and spent the next 44 months in Japanese POW camps.



To commemorate this event, the Niagara Military Museum raised the flag of the Hong Kong Veterans Association where it will be flown at full mast until December 25, when the flag will

be lowered to half-mast in honour of those who lost their lives in the battle and those who died at the hands of the Japanese in the POW camps. The flag remained at half-mast until the end of the year.

This is intended to be a yearly event to show our gratitude to the brave men and women who went overseas.

BC Region Report



Gerry Tuppert

To say it's quiet on the Western front is an understatement for sure. Covid 19 and the prevention protocols have affected all veteran commemoration activities in some form or another. I can say with certainty that we are all waiting patiently for our vaccinations, so life can return to normal everywhere across the country.

An example of how this pandemic has hit home to our membership is the recent birthday celebrations for one of our five remaining 'C' Force Veterans, Winnipeg Grenadier George Peterson. George turned "100" this February 8th, and what would have been a very well attended and festive affair, was subdued by the restrictions in place at his retirement home. His daughters Allison and Pat made it as memorable

Jim Doherty, President of the Niagara Military Museum opened the occasion with a short introduction and was followed by LT.Col. Bernard Nehring (Retired) who continued as the emcee and then Mike Babin, President of HKVCA, expressed his thanks to the Niagara Military Museum for their dedication and thoughtfulness.



Niagara Military Museum President Jim Doherty, delivering the opening introduction to the event with LT.Col. Bernard Nehring (Ret'd) at the left of the photo

The Niagara Military Museum would like to thank Delta Bingo for their charitable support for the exhibit, "C' Force, The Hong Kong Story".

and loving an event as they could under the circumstances, and we hope that our supportive presence as an organization was felt. Best wishes George, now and always.

I know we all share the importance and the meaning of being together to remember our Veterans despite these disruptive times.

Several weeks ago I attended a virtual talk by HKVCA member and Royal Philatelic Society of London presenter, Mr. Sam Chiu. The topic featured, "The Postal history of 'C' Force". I was more than pleasantly surprised at all the new information that could be gleaned from a few letters and envelopes. In particular, the censoring of the outgoing POW mail by our own officers.

There is always something to learn about the Hong Kong story, and if you are fortunate enough to have some of these

precious letters from the POW camps, there may be some hidden gems contained in those postmarks.

Mr. Chiu will be part of our virtual series and we look forward to seeing his new material. Stay tuned to our web page and Facebook for information on when that will be.

Since then I have been inspired to revisit the very fine and comprehensive article written by Mr. Gene Labiuk on the postal history and repatriation movements of 'C' Force.

His four-part article titled "They Came Home via The Philippines", is featured on our HKVCA web at the link:

Prairie Prose



Carol Hadley

Greetings from the freezing Prairie Region. As we start writing this article the temperature is -44C with wind chill, so my daily walks have not happened for a couple of days. We are still in the Red zone of medical orders but with a slight

lessening of restrictions as our numbers come down. We hope that you are all staying safe and healthy.

The activities in this Region have come to a standstill with the medical orders in place and with it the uncertainty of when we can resume our meetings or gatherings. We have 4 plaques on hold until the facilities open before we can do the dedications. Many events that we are usually planning at this time have been cancelled i.e. the Red River Heritage Fair which involves student displays at the University of Winnipeg.

However, we are having monthly virtual meetings with the Board of Directors to look after the affairs of our organization. You will see in this addition some of the plans for this 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Hong Kong. Please join us as the announcements are published on the website, Facebook and our region emails.

We are pleased to celebrate the "100th birthday" of George Peterson, the last Winnipeg Grenadier, Hong Kong Veteran. Although we couldn't be with him due to the Covid-19 medical orders, we encouraged our members through Facebook and our website to raise a glass to wish him well.

As this is the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Hong Kong, we would like to suggest that families/friends do a short summary of any person in the 'C' Force database on our website. You

Ontario Offerings



Shelagh Purcell

Yvonne Southworth (Widow of Donald Southworth RRC) has been found! Not really lost at all, she just moved to a new location in Lindsay, and is doing okay.

<https://www.hkvca.ca/submissions/PHSC/index.php>. I must say, if you are investigating the circumstances of how your father made his way back to Canada, this bit of research is most enlightening.

I wish I had more to convey in our newsletter content, so please if you can help, feel free to contribute by sending our Webmaster any material you think might be of interest to our membership- webmaster@hkvca.ca

Stay safe everyone and may the vaccine queue be short and swift for your loved ones.

don't have to be related but if you know of some of the history of these special Canadians, it would be wonderful to fill in their story. This information can be added to their page for reference by future generations.



We are saddened to inform you of the passing of Ladena Mabley, who succumbed to pneumonia on January 6, 2021. We have extended our sympathy to Patricia Bale (who was a member of our Education committee for several years) Heather Kerr, Marilyn Thalman and their families. Ladena was

married to John Hodgkinson WG, HK vet, then married Jerry Mabley WG, HK vet when both spouses had passed. Jerry and John were good friends growing up in Kelwood MB.

We also are saddened to report the passing of Gloria Sokalski, daughter of WG George Sokalski, who passed away on January 19, 2021.

We are not always notified of a member's passing but we try to recognize them as we learn of the death. Please keep us apprised of the status of our members – change of address, email, phone number, etc as it is important to stay in touch to keep you informed.

Take care everyone and stay healthy. God Bless.

Jim Hurd (Son of Edmond Lionel Hurd RRC) says he's had the best winter in years. He compared the quarantine to the nearly four years the Hong Kong POWs spent during the war.

Frank Miller (Son of David R. Miller RRC) is already thinking of summer, which he hopes to spend in Gaspé. He's 91 and has lots of memories of Gaspé fellows.

Donna Drimmie (Daughter of Victor Oliver Fehr RRC) is staying at home. She remembers rations during the war years when her mother went to make grape jam and found the sugar was gone. It had been used to make wine instead!

Barry Fair (Son of John Grey Fair RRC) remembered a trip to Hong Kong and Japan in 2000 and their experiences in two different countries treating the POWs and their families.

Oda Barlow (Widow of Edwin Barlow RCASC) has lots of memories of women's groups during the war. She remembered the Prime Minister receiving a letter from HKVCA President Mike Babin who sent a letter regarding the published letter to Japan about the longtime good relationship between Japan and Canada with no reference to the Canadian POWs.

Agnes Fehr (Widow of Victor O. Fehr RRC) is doing fine and still reads the HKVCA newsletter.

Gloria Fortune (Hubert Fortune WG) is doing well and staying home because of the pandemic.

Esther June Geraghty (Widow of Donald Geraghty RRC) keeps well and stays home because of the pandemic.

Jean Killoran (Widow of John Killoran RRC) is in a nursing home. She talked about family times and helping each other. She remembered the convention in Quebec City, and how all the men were happy to see each other.

Margaret MacDonald (Widow of Allison MacDonald RRC) is also staying home because of the virus and still reading the newsletter.

Dorothy Sauson (Widow of Oliver Ray Sauson RRC) is doing fine.

Quebec Region Report



Lucette Mailloux Muir

Greetings everyone from a mild sunny Quebec. Spring is in the air with the smell of maple sugar. Maple trees are giving us their sweet sap which will become our golden syrup. A spring delight for the sweet tooth.

During these still difficult times, everyone is following health instructions and activities, gatherings are still closed or very limited. Widows and members have been contacted, and are doing well considering these times. The region is continuing

with the help of our members by renewing their memberships, continued support and donations. Thank you all.

Since our last report, we have lost a very supportive member Elizabeth 'Beth' Pollock, widow of Allison Pollock, RRC. Our deepest condolences were sent to her family.

Happy Easter everyone in a safe way.

That will be it at this time, stay safe and take care.

Put Your Stamp on It



The association has designed a new HKVCA stamp for the exclusive use of its members.

You can order a sheet of 50 of these handsome stamps, each with a mailing value of a regular letter mail stamp for just \$65.00.

To place an order send a cheque for \$65.00 to HKVCA

c/o 22 Tunis Bay, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2X1

Looking for something else? [Visit our store.](#)

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Please note: underlined words in articles refer to links that are active in our online version or are active if you view our PDF copy on screen.