



Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

BY EMAIL

May 1, 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

In your welcome of Prime Minister Abe of Japan on April 28 you referred to “90 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and Japan”. The inference was that this has been 90 harmonious years.

On behalf of the nearly 2,000 Canadians who were sent by our government to Hong Kong in 1941, I wish to remind you that from December of 1941 to August of 1945 Japan perpetrated unspeakably brutal treatment of Canadian soldiers in its prisoner of war camps in Hong Kong and Japan. These soldiers had been sent to Hong Kong by our government to assist in the defence of Hong Kong in the face of an anticipated attack by the Imperial Japanese Army. The attack took place on December 8, 1941. After an intense 17-day battle against an overwhelming number of Japanese attackers, the Governor of Hong Kong surrendered, and the surviving soldiers were taken prisoner. Nearly 300 Canadians died during the battle. A nearly equal number succumbed to starvation, beatings, forced labour and other abuse during their 3 years and 8 months of captivity. Those who survived the ordeal suffered from a variety of serious illnesses, and many were permanently disabled as a result.

The government of Japan had never ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, which prescribes the humane treatment of POWs. After the war, it hid behind this fact to excuse its actions and to avoid paying reparations. It was not until 66 years later, in 2011, that Canada’s veterans of the Battle of Hong Kong finally received an apology from the government of Japan.

There is much to celebrate in today’s relationship between Canada and Japan. But ignoring this aspect of history does a disservice to both those who lived it, and to those who can learn from it. Next year marks the 75th anniversary of the liberation of those POWs. I hope we may count on the government of Canada to mark this significant chapter of our country’s military history.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Babin
President

cc: The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, P.C., M.P. – Minister of Veterans Affairs