

**The Second Mission: Canadian Survival in Hong Kong Prisoner-of-War Camps, 1941-1945**

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## Abstract

In November of 1941, 1,973 Canadian soldiers and two nurses sailed from Vancouver for Hong Kong to garrison the British colony and help defend it in the event of a Japanese attack. The ensuing battle was a decisive defeat for the defenders. 555 Canadians never returned home, over half of those dying in captivity, either in Hong Kong or later once transferred to Japan. The prisoners would become Canada's longest serving prisoners-of-war of the Second World War and arguably suffered worse than any others. Yet, despite the high casualties, 84 per cent of the 1,684 initial captives survived the ordeal as prisoners in Hong Kong. Once one begins to understand what these men went through, it seems remarkable that so many of them managed to survive at all.

This thesis explores Canadian survival in Hong Kong prison camps and the various methods these captives used to overcome boredom, violence, disease, hunger, loneliness, and hopelessness. Using as a research basis clandestine diaries, journals, memoirs, and letters to and from family members, this thesis argues that the Canadians survived due to strong leadership, commitment to duty, creative ingenuity, and a firm determination to return to their families. Uncertainty was an unyielding enemy from day to day and the Hong Kong POWs had to rely on themselves and their compatriots to keep mentally sharp and physically fit. Canadian prisoners in Hong Kong were abused by their captors, fed meager rations, suffered a myriad of tropical diseases, and lived in appalling conditions. The fact that so many survived is a testament to their courage and resilience. This thesis will show how they did it.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Professor Serge Durflinger. I have been fortunate to have him as an instructor at the undergraduate and graduate level and have worked under him as a teaching assistant on two occasions. Not only has he helped me become a better historian and writer, but he has also offered timely advice on becoming a father for the first time after the age of forty.

The University of Ottawa's History Department is blessed with some fantastic faculty and staff. Thank you to Suzanne Dalrymple, the department's academic assistant, for all the administrative reminders that I may have otherwise forgotten. I am in debt to Professor Thomas Boogaart, for if we had not had that drink at the Royal Oak I may never have pursued my master's degree. In addition, there are many other fine professors at the University of Ottawa, current and former, who have both taught me and fostered my love of history. Many thanks to Professors Eric Allina, Corinne Gaudin, Brenda Macdougall, Galen Perras, Patryk Polec, and Mark Slolarik. I am also grateful to the family of Achille Pinard for the generous scholarship that I was awarded.

I spent a great deal of time poring over prisoners' diaries and using the library at the Canadian War Museum's Military History Research Centre and wish to thank Carol Reid, the former archives collections specialist, for her enthusiastic help and expertise. Thank you also to Dr. Tim Cook who led me to some valuable sources.

A most special thanks to Hong Kong veteran George MacDonell who I had the pleasure of meeting in October 2016. He not only inspired the title of this thesis but inspired the overall theme of this work: survival. He also gave me confidence that there was still plenty to be written about Hong Kong POWs. His last words to me were that he hoped I would find something special to say. I believe I have.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My parents Tom and Jane Schwarzkopf who gave me plenty of encouragement and editorial suggestions. My sisters Laura and Angela, both University of Ottawa alumni, the latter of whom served as my "accountability buddy" and made me check in with her every week to give updates on my progress. I could never have done this without my wonderful wife Sandra, who supported me every step of the way through five-plus years of university. Last, but by no means least, my daughter Norah who was born during the research phase of this thesis. The many, many sleepless nights were quickly remedied the following mornings with smiles and cuddles. If that is not motivating than I don't know what is.

## Acronyms

CGS – Chief of the General Staff

COS – British Chiefs of Staff Committee

IJA – Imperial Japanese Army

GOC – General Officer Commanding

HKVAC – Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada

HKVDC – Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer

POW – Prisoner of War

RAF – Royal Air Force

RCCS – Royal Canadian Corps of Signals

RRC – Royal Rifles of Canada

WG – Winnipeg Grenadiers

YMCA – Young Men's Christian Association

## Introduction

### **“A Prisoner of War: It is a Melancholy State”<sup>1</sup>**

The Canadian participation in the Pacific Theatre during the Second World War is generally a footnote in this nation’s historiography, even its military historiography, and is not well known amongst the general Canadian public. The focus on the European Theatre of war is unsurprising considering the large number of soldiers committed there, and the important victories to which they contributed. No victory was to be had for the 1,975 Canadians who, in December 1941, engaged the Japanese at Hong Kong in Canada’s first major ground operation of the war. But their actions are no less worthy of study thereby. The two battalions sent to help defend the British colony had a war experience quite unlike that of their counterparts serving in Europe. Most were captured and, under the direst of circumstances, had to use a combination of mental and physical strategies just to survive. For Canadian prisoners in Hong Kong, real victory meant emerging from captivity alive.

The Winnipeg Grenadiers, the Royal Rifles of Canada (from Quebec), and a Brigade Headquarters, collectively known as “C” Force, arrived in Hong Kong on November 16, 1941 and joined their British and Indian comrades in what was assumed would be little more than garrison duty and a show of strength to ward off potential Japanese aggression. On December 8, Imperial Japan’s well-equipped and well-trained Twenty-Third Army, battle hardened from several years of operations in China, attacked mainland Hong Kong. On December 18, Japanese forces landed on Hong Kong Island, and the garrison surrendered on Christmas Day. The Battle of Hong Kong inflicted 100 per cent casualties on the Canadian units as every man (and the two

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<sup>1</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *A Roving Commission* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1930), quoted in Van Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Publishers, 1994), 33.

nurses) were either killed, wounded, missing, or captured. A total of 1,684 Canadians became captives of a nation that did not recognize the Red Cross and had not signed the 1929 Geneva Convention concerning the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs). What followed for the Canadians were three years and eight months of psychological and physical abuse at the hands of their captors.

Conditions in the prison camps were deplorable as men had to contend with with flies, fleas, lice, rats, and a myriad of tropical and deficiency diseases. Prisoners had to live on approximately one-third of their regular caloric intake, their diet consisting of little more than rice and green vegetables, and if lucky, some fish or the contents from a rare Red Cross package. The captives also suffered without the benefit of proper medical care and every one of them was a hospital patient at some point during their captivity. Diphtheria killed 58 Canadians in 1942 alone, but dysentery, malaria, tuberculosis, parasitic worms, beriberi, and pellagra were consistently present as well. A total of 132 Canadians died while in Hong Kong camps, 136 more perished once transported to work in Japan. No fewer than 555 of the 1,973 men and two nurses who sailed to defend Hong Kong died in the Far East, a very high proportion considering results in other campaigns.<sup>2</sup> However, 84 percent of the 1,684 initial captives survived the ordeal as prisoners in Hong Kong and Japan. Once one begins to understand what these men went through, it seems remarkable that so many of them managed to survive at all.

Accordingly, this is a work about survival. Veteran George MacDonell of the Royal Rifles believes that he and his “C” Force comrades had two missions: one to fight on the battlefield, and one to survive as prisoners. The first mission ended in defeat, but 1,418 prisoners

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<sup>2</sup> C. P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1: Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain, and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), 488-89.

completed the second mission. How precisely did these POWs manage to survive despite the obstacles that they faced? What kind of mental and physical strategies did they employ? How critical were factors such as morale, unit cohesion, and military training? What motivated soldiers to push on day after day? Most of the work on Canadian POWs in Hong Kong paints them as victims, and while they certainly were, a new work is needed that empowers them. This thesis is the first comprehensive synthesis that focuses exclusively on Canadian POWs who remained in Hong Kong from the end of 1941 until August 1945. It highlights the more positive aspects of their experiences and how those contributed to their survival. This work shows them to be industrious, clever, generous, proud, and committed to fulfilling their duties and returning home. They all had reasons to make it home alive. They all had reasons to complete the second mission.

The Battle of Hong Kong and the resulting POW experience for survivors has led to a rare bone of historiographical contention between Canada and Great Britain, and accordingly much of the literature is imprinted with anger and national bias.<sup>3</sup> Two of the most prominent examples are *The Fall of Hong Kong* by Briton Tim Carew and *Desperate Siege: The Battle of Hong Kong* by Canadian Ted Ferguson. Something more recent from the Canadian side is *Betrayal: Canadian Soldiers Hong Kong 1941* by Terry Meagher.<sup>4</sup> The latter author argues, as have others before him, that the Canadians at Hong Kong were betrayed twice, once by the Canadian government for sending them in the first place and a second time by their British

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<sup>3</sup> For a summary of the historiography and the debates about Hong Kong's loss, see Galen Roger Perras, "Defeat Still Cries Aloud for Explanation: Explaining C Force's Dispatch to Hong Kong," *Canadian Military Journal* 11, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 37-47. The author is critical of several books that use the horrors of the POW experience to attack the decision to reinforce Hong Kong without acknowledging the broader context of the Asia-Pacific region in 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Tim Carew, *The Fall of Hong Kong* (London: Anthony Blond Ltd, 1961); Ted Ferguson, *Desperate Siege: The Battle of Hong Kong* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1980); Terry Meagher, *Betrayal: Canadian Soldiers Hong Kong 1941* (Kemptville: Veterans Publications, 2015).



comrades. In the years, and even minutes, after the battle, the two sides found a great deal of fault in each other's front line performance. In Canada a great deal of anger has been directed at the Canadian government for the way the veterans have been treated in the years since. Perhaps the most well-known example is Carl Vincent's *No Reason Why: The Canadian Hong Kong Tragedy - An Examination*, in which the author launches a blistering attack on the government's decision to send "C" Force to the Pacific.<sup>5</sup> In the 1950s, the Battle of Hong Kong was well-covered by the two nations' official army histories, but the POW aspect was largely absent in both.<sup>6</sup> Much has been written on Hong Kong since then, and though many works include both the battle and the POW experience, the tendency has been to go heavy on the former and light on the latter, even though the battle lasted a mere seventeen days while the POW nightmare lasted for 1,330 days. The POW experience has usually been relegated to a single chapter or part of the conclusion.<sup>7</sup> However, since the 1990s, the POW experience has been separating itself from the larger battle narrative and has begun to find its own feet as a field. The growing literature covers a broad range that encompasses academic monographs, popular history, and personal memoirs.

Canadian works that covered prisoners in Hong Kong as a separate subject were uncommon until the 1980s. One of the first books to give the Hong Kong POWs more space was journalist Daniel Dancocks's *In Enemy Hands: Canadian Prisoners of War 1939-1945*, published in 1983. Dancocks claimed that Canadian prisoners of war were the forgotten men of the Second World War. Arguing that the plight of Canadian POWs was mostly unknown to the Canadian public, Dancock's intention was to give the reader an idea of what it was like to be a

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Vincent, *No Reason Why: The Canadian Hong Kong Tragedy - An Examination* (Stittsville: Canada's Wings, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*; Stanley Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1: The Loss of Singapore* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Brereton Greenhous, *"C" Force to Hong Kong: A Canadian Catastrophe, 1941-1945* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997).

prisoner during the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> More than 9,000 Canadians were POWs between 1939 and 1945, and Dancocks travelled across Canada to collect stories from 165 of them. His last three chapters provide a glimpse into POW life at the hands of Imperial Japan as the men described their ordeals as prisoners and forced labourers in Hong Kong and Japan; the interviewees are the real authors and Dancocks is merely the compiler. Though more descriptive than analytical, *In Enemy Hands* accomplishes the goal of making available raw and unfiltered human experiences. However, the section on Hong Kong is brief and there is little on important aspects of the POW experience, notably how the soldiers maintained morale and how they kept themselves occupied, two such themes that this thesis will discuss in detail.

In 1990 a unique cross-cultural work by two Canadian historians and two Japanese historians was published titled *Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese during the Second World War*.<sup>9</sup> The purpose was to show that both wartime Canada and Japan looked at the Japanese and Canadians under their respective control as “mutual hostages”. As Japan viewed its overseas interned citizens this way, according to the authors, it apparently tempered its policies towards prisoners under its control as a means of protecting Japanese nationals from recriminations. The Canadian government acted towards Japanese Canadians with the belief that any severe action against them could trigger reprisals against Canadians in Japanese hands. The authors lament in their introduction that, by 1990, very little had been written about Canadians who were Japanese captives in the Far East, a claim which was certainly true at that point. But *Mutual Hostages* itself falls short of presenting POW life under the Japanese.

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel G. Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands: Canadian Prisoners of War 1939-45* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Patricia E. Roy, J. L. Granatstein, Masako Lino, and Hiroko Takamura, *Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese during the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

Jonathan Vance's *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* does marginally better.<sup>10</sup> Appearing in 1994, it traces a history of Canadian prisoners from before Confederation to the Korean War. The central argument is that POWs are not the forgotten or misunderstood casualties of war as is so often portrayed and implied in the literature. Vance examined how the Canadian government and various non-governmental agencies took steps to assist overseas prisoners, particularly through relief supply programs and attempted negotiations to secure their releases. He argues that every effort was made to alleviate the suffering of men and women in captivity, although he readily admitted that this was not always successful. One chapter is devoted to prisoners under the Japanese in the Second World War, whom Vance declares suffered the "deepest and most afflicting physical and emotional scars" of any Canadians imprisoned in any war this century.<sup>11</sup> Vance adequately, though briefly, covers POW life under the Japanese but mainly takes exception to the notion that a more coordinated effort between the Allies could have greatly improved camp conditions for prisoners in the Pacific. As the Japanese had no intention of improving life for prisoners under their control, which weakens the 'mutual hostages' theory, there was little any organized effort could accomplish in dealing with a nation that, according to many, viewed its prisoners with contempt and only distributed relief supplies when it best suited its own purpose.<sup>12</sup>

In 1997 a book exclusively dealing with Canadian POWs in Japanese hands finally appeared. Former *Legion Magazine* staff writer David McIntosh's *Hell on Earth: Aging Faster, Dying Sooner, Canadian Prisoners of the Japanese During World War II*,<sup>13</sup> easily falls within

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan F. Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>13</sup> David McIntosh, *Hell on Earth: Aging Faster, Dying Sooner, Canadian Prisoners of the Japanese During World War II* (Whitby, Ontario: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1997).

the category of ‘angry national bias’. Half of McIntosh’s book is dedicated to driving the point across, in the starkest possible terms, that the Japanese brutalized their Canadian captives, while his secondary argument is that Canadian survivors of Japanese prison camps were betrayed by their own government after the war. Ottawa failed to provide adequate compensation and prevented veterans from suing the Japanese government for fear that litigation would upset an important trading relationship. McIntosh accused the Canadian government of giving “a much higher priority to its relations with Japan than its relations with some of its own citizens” and declared that the battle was a “British waste of Canadian manpower.”<sup>14</sup> While passionately expressed, the book retains overtones of journalistic sensationalism and historical amateurism. And as with the previous works, much of the content concerns the plight of the Canadians in captivity and does not discuss how they survived that captivity, something this thesis seeks to correct.

In 2001, Dr. Charles Roland published *Long Night’s Journey into Day: Prisoners of War in Hong Kong and Japan, 1941-1945*,<sup>15</sup> the culmination of a project Roland had been undertaking for more than twenty years. Roland taught at McMaster University for nearly two decades as a professor in both the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Department of History. Roland’s principle argument is that the Hong Kong POW story is an explicitly medical one that should be told by a medical historian. This contention makes sense if one considers that over a period of 191 weeks of incarceration every POW suffered a medical problem of one kind or another, with many of the men starving or seriously ill with little medical care available. Roland’s exceptional book is harrowing and uncompromising. But it has a broad range, covering

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., vi.

<sup>15</sup> Charles G. Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day: Prisoners of War in Hong Kong and Japan, 1941-1945* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001).

prisoners from many nationalities in both Hong Kong and Japan. And while survival and daily prisoner of war life is covered, it is not the focus.

Following in Roland's imposing footsteps, in 2009 the independent scholar Tony Banham published an important work concerning the lives of Allied POWs under Japanese control. Banham already had established himself as an historian of the battle for Hong Kong with two previous works.<sup>16</sup> *We Shall Suffer There: Hong Kong's Defenders Imprisoned, 1942-45* completes Banham's Hong Kong trilogy and continues the rich and informative work present in his two earlier books.<sup>17</sup> Like Dancocks's *In Enemy Hands*, Banham has assumed the role of curator while the prisoners are the real authors, and the POW experiences are shared through their own words. The book is a straightforward sequential recounting of POW experiences that focuses more on chronology and detail than analysis. By contrast, this thesis is more focused on analysis and addresses one issue not present in Banham's work: how the men *survived*. Still, Banham's work is absorbing.

Another independent scholar took on the subject with the 2010 book *The Damned: The Canadians at the Battle of Hong Kong and the POW Experience, 1941-45*.<sup>18</sup> Nathan Greenfield notes that the Hong Kong veterans fought three battles: one on foreign fields, one in prison camps, and one against the Canadian government for restitution. *The Damned* aims to tell the story of the first two, while Greenfield also wishes to clear up some misconceptions: that the Canadians were poorly trained; that they were poorly led; and that they were duped into enlisting

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<sup>16</sup> Tony Banham, *Not the Slightest Chance: The Defence of Hong Kong* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003); *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru: Britain's Forgotten Wartime Tragedy* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Tony Banham, *We Shall Suffer There: Hong Kong's Defenders Imprisoned, 1942-45* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield, *The Damned: The Canadians at the Battle of Hong Kong and the POW Experience, 1941-45* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

because of mindless nationalism. But, his account of the battle consumes two-thirds of the book, leaving the POW experience, as with many of the works cited earlier, lacking in substance and depth.

Still, Greenfield interviewed thirty former POWs for his book. In his hands the prisoner experience feels real and frightening, but there is also hope, resilience, and courage, traits generally absent in other works. This thesis will add to and expand on these themes and demonstrate that there were brighter moments that went together with the often-mentioned misery. Instead of focusing on death and dying, the present work will highlight the determination to survive and just how this was achieved. Additionally, Greenfield's section on the POW experience focuses mainly on the men in Japan and the remaining captives in Hong Kong are only returned to periodically. This thesis will be specific to the men who remained in Hong Kong throughout the war.

Finally, for Canadian works, there are several outstanding veteran memoirs that have contributed to the field and that were of particular significance to the present study. William Allister's *Where Life and Death Hold Hands* from 1989 was the first to be widely published. In 1961 Allister had penned *A Handful of Rice*. Though it is a fictional account of prisoners under the Japanese in Malaya, it was no doubt inspired by his experiences as a prisoner in Hong Kong and Japan.<sup>19</sup> Allister was with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and his books, paintings, and willingness to speak publicly about his experiences made him a recognizable figure and veteran. *Where Life and Death Hold Hands* is more than a formulaic memoir. Allister's narrative is almost storybook-like and his writing is at times casual. Some of the more unpleasant aspects of

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<sup>19</sup> William Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1989); William Allister *A Handful of Rice* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961).

incarceration exist, but the story is interspersed with witty conversations, vivid and colourful descriptions, snappy remarks, and occasional jokes, something that differentiates it from the other memoirs. Allister does not shy away from the horrors of prisoner life, but he interweaves them with moments of overcoming those hardships and a willingness to confront them. Indeed, in his biography on the back cover of *A Handful of Rice* Allister calls prison life the “most horrible and rewarding experience of my life.” This thesis will build on these more positive moments and elaborate on them, showing them to be critical to the men’s survival.

Of the more serious variety of memoirs is *One Soldier’s Story 1939-1945: From the Fall of Hong Kong to the Defeat of Japan* by Royal Rifles veteran George MacDonell.<sup>20</sup> MacDonell was one of only 11 members of “C” Force still alive as this thesis was written, and in 2015 was still well enough to make public appearances. The book is more a story of MacDonell’s whole life rather than just his time as a POW, although that is the framing component of the work. *One Soldier’s Story* is written in a simple, sincere tone that presents the experiences of battle and captivity in a touching, human manner. This memoir makes an excellent comparison with Allister’s in how two opposing styles can be effective at delivering the same message, that of perseverance and survival. Several other memoirs by Canadian veterans exist, but these are the finest.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, some diaries have been published in their entirety, such as those by William Allister’s Corps of Signals comrade Georges Verreault and that of Winnipeg Grenadier Leonard Corrigan.<sup>22</sup> There is also *Letters to Harvelyn*, a collection of letters that Major Kenneth

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<sup>20</sup> George S. MacDonell, *One Soldier’s Story 1939-1945: From the Fall of Hong Kong to the Defeat of Japan* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See also: Kenneth Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito* (Vancouver: PW Press, 1990) and Leo Berard, *17 Days Until Christmas* (Barrie: L.P. Bérard, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Georges “Blacky” Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan, 1941-1945* (Rimouski: Vero, 1995); Leonard B. Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan, Winnipeg Grenadiers, C Force: Prisoner-of-War in Hong Kong, 1941-1945*, (s.l. : s.n., c2008), copy located in the Canadian War Museum Library.

Baird wrote to his wife and daughter while he was a prisoner in Hong Kong.<sup>23</sup> All these published primary sources are thorough and contain vital information on how these respective men kept up their morale and remained as physically and mentally fit as possible, factors that are crucial for this current study.

Unsurprisingly, there are several British books about the battle and the POW experience. Both Tim Carew and Oliver Lindsay, who wrote on the battle with *The Fall of Hong Kong* and *The Lasting Honour: The Fall of Hong Kong, 1941*,<sup>24</sup> respectively, returned with books on the POWs. Carew's *Hostages to Fortune* is broken down into four chapters, but strangely only one of them covers the British at Sham Shui Po Camp (a British Army barracks that became the main POW camp), while the others deal with a lengthy recount of the battle, the sinking of the Japanese troopship *Lisbon Maru* that held many Commonwealth POWs, and the end of the war in Japan. The chapter "The Camp" lavishes praise on the British prisoners while excoriating the Canadians once they arrived at Sham Shui Po.<sup>25</sup> A more balanced approach is Lindsay's *At the Going Down of the Sun: Hong Kong and South-East Asia 1941-1945*.<sup>26</sup> This book covers a lot of ground and is largely Anglocentric, although it does include a chapter on the Canadian prisoners who spent nine months of 1942 at North Point Camp, making it a rarity among British works. It also presents a reasonably favourable portrait of the Canadians, another rarity for British writers.

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<sup>23</sup> Major Kenneth G. Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn: From Japanese POW Camps – A Father's Letters to His Young Daughter During World War II* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Tim Carew, *The Fall of Hong Kong* (London: Anthony Blond Ltd, 1961); Oliver Lindsay, *The Lasting Honour: The Fall of Hong Kong, 1941* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971).

<sup>25</sup> Tim Carew, *Hostages to Fortune* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971). Pages 72-74 are particularly critical of the Canadians and their conduct as prisoners.

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Lindsay, *At the Going Down of the Sun: Hong Kong and South-East Asia 1941-1945* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981).



Two of the most professionally written British accounts are G. B. Endacott's *Hong Kong Eclipse* and Edwin Ride's *British Army Aid Group: Hong Kong Resistance 1942-1945*.<sup>27</sup> The former is a sweeping three-part general history that deals with Hong Kong before the battle, during the war (including the POW experience), and in the aftermath of the war. Considerable coverage is given to the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, something sorely needed in the historiography, but it leaves the sections on the battle and the POWs feeling rather compressed. The latter is an account of Ride's father, Lieutenant Colonel Lindsay Ride, and his work with the British Army Aid Group who provided intelligence to POWs and helped organize escapes. While both offer plenty of insight into their corresponding topics, neither Canadians nor the prisoner-of-war experience in general are given much space.

As with members of C Force, many former British POWs wrote memoirs on their experiences in Hong Kong. Several of them are principally concerned with fleeing from the prison camps, such as *Escape Through China* by David Bosanquet, a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, and *Escape from the Bloodied Sun* by Captain Freddie Guest of the Middlesex Regiment.<sup>28</sup> Amongst those dealing more with life as a POW is the unfortunately titled *Prisoner of the Turnip Heads* by George Wright-Nooth who was interned in the Stanley Prison Camp for civilians. As the title might suggest, the author is not one to forgive and this part diary, part memoir is laced with anger and contempt for the Japanese. One of the more recent additions is *Resist to the End: Hong Kong, 1941-1945* by Charles Barman a Quartermaster Sergeant with the Royal Artillery who was held at the Argyle Street Camp for officers and later

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<sup>27</sup> G. B. Endacott, *Hong Kong Eclipse* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978); Edwin Ride, *British Army Aid Group: Hong Kong Resistance 1942-1945* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> David Bosanquet, *Escape Through China* (London: Robert Hale, 1983); Captain Freddie Guest, *Escape from the Bloodied Sun* (London: Jarrolds, 1956).

at Sham Shui Po.<sup>29</sup> The book is largely based on Barman's secret diary, but he reworked it after the war and it is difficult to tell what sections constitute the original material and which parts were added with the revisions. These memoirs cover many of the varied British military units in Hong Kong, but the authors' interactions with Canadians are barely or not mentioned at all. Bosanquet only mentions the Canadians in the context of the battle, while Guest and Wright-Nooth do not cite them at all. Barman refers to them once, a comment on how the French-Canadian members of the Royal Rifles seems to be lacking the will to live. His language is obviously borrowed from Tim Carew who made the same assessment in *Hostages to Fortune*.<sup>30</sup>

Very few Americans were prisoners in Hong Kong. Those who were were mostly civilians, but there were some American merchant seamen. However, as befitting their large commitment in the region, there is a rich literature on the American prisoner experience during the Pacific War. A work with an exclusive focus on the Americans in Asia is E. Bartlett Kerr's *Surrender and Survival: The Experience of American POWs in the Pacific 1941-1945*.<sup>31</sup> Kerr's father was one of 25,000 American prisoners of the Japanese and one of those who did not live to make it home. The author was inspired by visiting former POW camp sites in the Philippines and claimed that through his research into the sinking of the *Oryoku Maru* (the Japanese passenger ship that carried his father) he was dismayed to discover that a full account of American POWs was nowhere to be found. His book is an attempt to correct that oversight. Kerr examines not only prisoner life under the Japanese, but also the efforts of American aid agencies and the actions of US bombers and submarines which indirectly caused many of their own men's

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<sup>29</sup> George Wright-Nooth with Mark Adkin, *Prisoner of the Turnip Heads* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994); Stanley Wort, *Prisoner of the Rising Sun* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2009); Charles Barman, *Resist to the End: Hong Kong, 1941-1945* (Aberdeen: Hong Kong University Press, 2009)

<sup>30</sup> Barman, *Resist to the End*, 134; Carew, *Hostages to Fortune*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> E. Bartlett Kerr, *Surrender and Survival: The Experience of American POWs in the Pacific 1941-1945* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985).

deaths. And while it presents many of Imperial Japan's atrocities, the book does not ignore American cruelty against the Japanese or the unsavory behaviour of some American POWs, including a rare instance of collaborating with the enemy.

Historian Gavan Daws spent ten years of research and interviewed hundreds of former POWs to complete his book *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific*. Though his work covers many of the Allied nations, the author chose to focus on Americans for the "simple reason that Americans covered the whole range of the experience, across the broadest geographical sweep of territory."<sup>32</sup> Daws explores who the prisoners were, how they were taken captive, what happened to them in the prison camps, and how being a POW affected their later lives. The result is an absorbing narrative with a focal point on group bonding and survival. A similar work in the Canadian literature is lacking and this thesis seeks to correct that. Gaws also points an accusatory finger at the American government and official US histories for minimizing or neglecting the experience of their prisoners, something to which the Canadian POWs can relate.

Once literature on the Canadian involvement in the Battle of Hong Kong and its resulting POW experience began to appear in the 1980s, it has been produced with remarkable regularity ever since. This level of sustained interest is a bit peculiar given the Hong Kong campaign's small size and its relative insignificance within the larger context of the Pacific War. Perhaps the prominence of this historiographical bias in Canada is fitting given that it was the nation's only major engagement with the Japanese.<sup>33</sup> The consistency of this production shows that even

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<sup>32</sup> Gavan Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific* (New York: Quill, 1994), 26.

<sup>33</sup> Though Hong Kong was the principal commitment for Canadian soldiers in the Pacific Theatre there were other contributions. Canadian pilots fought the Japanese in the Aleutians, the Royal Canadian Navy also participated in the Aleutian campaign, and over 5,000 Canadian troops participated in the (unopposed) invasion of Kiska in 1943. Additionally, Canadian air crew also operated in Burma.

seventy years after the Second World War ended, the minor campaign at Hong Kong still elicits enthusiasm and curiosity from historians, journalists, veterans, family members, and an inquisitive public. But something is missing – a complete analysis of the men’s survival, physical and mental, and this thesis attempts to fill that gap.

This thesis relies heavily on prisoner diaries and these constitute the main source of evidence used in this work. The majority were examined at the Canadian War Museum’s Military History Research Centre in Ottawa. Three others held at Library and Archives Canada were also analyzed. The information gleaned from these sources is invaluable for studying the subject of Hong Kong POWs, and many works, including this thesis, would be next-to-impossible without them. The men who kept diaries in Japanese-run prisoner-of-war camps did so at great risk to themselves. At best, the discovery of one would result in its immediate confiscation. At worst, the offender would be harshly punished, especially if the diary detailed the brutal treatment meted out by the Japanese or if it contained disparaging remarks about Japanese soldiers; and they often did.<sup>34</sup> In these diaries, the men wrote about the commonalities of prisoner life. They wrote about food, home, work, the weather, their pastimes, their health, their friends and fellow soldiers, and their Japanese incarcerators. Ultimately, they wrote about what was important to them, and their words served a dual purpose: to remind them of their experiences and to provide evidence of their captivity. Signalman Georges Verreault wrote on the first anniversary of his diary that it was his old friend, “to who[m] I confide all my feelings and thoughts. It relates my war, my imprisonment, rice, my hopes, my disappointments.”<sup>35</sup> He carried it until the war ended.

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<sup>34</sup> For example, the officer in charge of the Hong Kong POW camps, Colonel Tokunaga Isao, was commonly referred to as a pig due to his large size.

<sup>35</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 98.



*The Diary of Arthur Ray Squires, with pen shown for scale. ©Matthew Schwarzkopf*

The notebooks used for diaries would have been smuggled into camp after the surrender. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that the Japanese would have allowed the men to keep these as they often contained details about the battle and unflattering words about their opponents; therefore, the smaller the diary the better. Most of them, including Signalman Arthur Squires's, were not much longer than a standard pen and only half that length in width, thereby making it easier to keep them hidden. Others improvised to record their thoughts. Lieutenant Collison Blaver of the Royal Rifles used an old British logbook for 1938 which he converted to serve his own purposes by altering the dates. Sergeant Frank Ebdon, also of the Royal Rifles, made his diary in late 1942 by using paper that he had been collecting over the previous few months.<sup>36</sup> Rifleman James Flanagan kept his diary in separate parts, something that greatly benefitted him during a snap inspection in October 1942. The section that detailed his first ten months as a prisoner was taken away and never returned. Luckily, he did not suffer any repercussions. But Flanagan learned his lesson and hid the remaining sections, including his descriptions on the Battle of Hong Kong, in the lining of his boot reasoning that "they couldn't take what they didn't know existed." He also learned to choose his words carefully, especially when describing the men's treatment by the Japanese.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 259.8, Collison Alexander Blaver, Diary, 1942-1945; Library and Archives Canada, Frank William Ebdon Fonds, 1928-1980, Fonds Collection, MG30-E328 vol. 1, Diary entry for December 26, 1942.

<sup>37</sup> Andy Flanagan, *The Endless Battle: The Fall of Hong Kong and Canadian POWs in Imperial Japan* (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2017), 70.

Unsurprisingly, the greatest challenge of a clandestine diary was how to keep it hidden from the prying eyes of the camp guards.

Signalman William Allister kept his diary in the pocket of his greatcoat, which, in hindsight, was a terrible mistake. One day while using the latrines he hung his coat on the door but forgot it there and later returned to find it had disappeared, and the diary with it. Allister was forlorn and one of his fellow prisoners remarked that he looked as if he had lost his best friend; he practically had. However, this only inspired him to create a new diary by “sanding down two strips of wood with holes bored through them and looseleaf sheets of paper bound with a shoelace drawn through paper and wood.” Civilian George Porteous of the YMCA, who was also the Auxiliary Services Supervisor for the Winnipeg Grenadiers, provided him with the paper. Allister kept this new diary for the remainder of the war, hiding it “in many strange places.”<sup>38</sup> In May 1944, frequent Japanese searches compelled Captain Lionel Hurd to hide his diary inside a can that was previously used to hold roofing tar. After the war, he was able to retrieve his diary, sticky but intact. Random searches also forced Winnipeg Grenadier Lieutenant Harry White to take desperate measures in hiding his diary: he buried it in the ground. However, as persistent rain caused him to fear that it would become ruined, he decided that it was better to keep it on his person despite the obvious risk involved. Another Grenadier lieutenant, Leonard Corrigan, also buried his diary, but for a much longer period. On August 17, 1945, with the war over, Corrigan recorded that he had spent the previous day recovering sections of his diary buried throughout

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<sup>38</sup> Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 54.

the camp grounds. Some of it had “rotted to dust,” but fortunately most of it was undamaged and still legible.<sup>39</sup>

Not only had many of the diaries withstood captivity in Hong Kong, but several men who were transported to Japan managed to keep theirs hidden and unscathed until they were released. This was an impressive feat considering that the men were searched before boarding the ships that carried them to the Japanese home islands. Keeping a diary, under the most gruelling of circumstances, required bravery, determination, and ingenuity, three qualities that the Hong Kong POWs displayed in ample amounts. It is testimony to these courageous soldiers that we can piece together precisely what life was like for a prisoner of war under the Japanese. We know what they ate, how they were treated, how they kept themselves occupied, and most importantly, how they survived.

In addition to the diaries, other primary sources used for this thesis from the Canadian War Museum include letters written to and from family members, drawings, and random lists and notes that were made by the prisoners during captivity. Some documents were gleaned from Library and Archives Canada including, letters, memoirs, notebooks, medical reports, and the fonds of George Puddicombe, a lawyer who was a member of the Canadian Army War Crimes Investigation Unit’s legal team for the trials of Japanese officers and camp personnel accused of atrocities against Canadian prisoners of war in Asia. This thesis also uses interviews with former POWs collected by the Canadian War Museum, The Memory Project, and the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association. Unpublished memoirs written by prison camp survivors also make a valuable contribution, as do personal narratives that were completed or written by

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<sup>39</sup> Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd quoted in Grant S. Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945* (Carp: Baird O’Keefe Publishing, 2001), 199; Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 24.4, Harry L. White, Diary, 1941-1945, August 7, 1943; Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 187.

family members. For example, Andy Flanagan and Michael Palmer wrote about their respective father and grandfather, Riflemen James Flanagan and George Palmer, while Edith Hodkinson wrote about her father-in-law, Winnipeg Grenadier Ernest Hodkinson.<sup>40</sup> The intention of employing all these sources is to tell the story of Canadian survival in Hong Kong, as much as possible, by using the soldiers' own words.

The opening chapter provides the contextual foundations for the thesis that follows. First, it places Hong Kong within the larger picture of the Second World War by looking at British military strategy in the Crown Colony and how it sought to thwart Japanese aggression. Then it discusses the Canadian government's decision to send troops to Hong Kong and the subsequent deployment of "C" Force. The Commonwealth defences are examined before summarizing the Battle of Hong Kong and the events which led to Allied capitulation and the men's imprisonment. Next, the chapter looks more closely at the Japanese victors, their disregard of the 1929 Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, their *Bushido* mentality, and the physical abuse that they inflicted on their interned civilians and captured soldiers. Lastly, this chapter details the general conditions found in the prison camps and hospitals, including the lack of bare essentials, the nuisance of bugs and rodents, and the oppressive and unpredictable Hong Kong weather.

The second chapter begins this thesis's examination of Canadian survival in Hong Kong prison camps by focusing on health and sickness. Food was of primary concern to prisoners and it constantly occupied their thoughts and dictated their actions. This chapter looks at how prisoners survived on little more than rice and vegetables and how they supplemented their meals

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<sup>40</sup> Flanagan, *The Endless Battle*; Michael Palmer, *Dark Side of the Sun: George Palmer and Canadian POWs in Hong Kong and the Omine Camp* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 2009); Edith Hodkinson, *Ernie's Story*, [s.l. : s.n., 200?], located in the Canadian War Museum Library.



through the black market, trade, and Red Cross supplies. It also shines a light on the importance of tobacco as a commodity in the prison camps and the practice of sharing in food and other goods between senior officers and their men. Next, the attention turns to disease and medical treatment to explore how the soldiers' bodies were further ravaged by numerous ailments. Every man was sick at some point and some diseases, such as diphtheria in the fall of 1942, were responsible for many deaths within camp. The chapter concludes with a word on the medical officers and their remarkable ability to perform their work with a scarcity of medical tools and supplies.

The third chapter focuses on morale. Building on how the POWs physical bodies survived, this chapter explores the ways that they kept their mental state intact and stayed motivated to complete the second mission, the mission of survival. It begins with the significance of writing and receiving letters, and the complications that surrounded getting mail sent to and from Hong Kong. High morale complemented a strong will to live and the importance of hearing from loved ones cannot be understated. Next, this chapter will examine some of the physical objects kept by the soldiers and the value that they attached to them. The crucial themes of duty and discipline will follow, as will the critical role that senior officers played in galvanizing their men. Lastly, I look at two additional methods that the men used to strengthen their resolve: maintaining a sense of humour, plus the encouragement that they felt when US aircraft bombed Japanese targets in Hong Kong.

The fourth chapter combines mental and physical strengths and looks at how the men kept themselves busy for nearly four years. It describes the varied hobbies and pastimes undertaken by the men with special attention paid to how ingenuity and resourcefulness helped sporting and cultural activities thrive under difficult and hostile circumstances. Despite the harsh

conditions it was often possible to learn a new language, play a game of ball, listen to a concert, or take in a play. This chapter also notes how the prisoners occupied themselves through work, whether as labour for Japanese projects or tending to their own camp gardens. A constant theme is how togetherness played an important role in alleviating boredom, and how the soldiers very importantly instilled a sense of normalcy under anything but normal conditions. Everyday things in life that are often taken for granted, such as playing cards or singing in a choir, could have a major effect on collective determination.

This thesis paints a picture of Canadian survival in Hong Kong prisoner-of-war camps. It demonstrates that the POWs survived because of themselves, but also because of each other. Who they were and what they believed in was critical to completing the second mission. The men of “C” Force had strong leadership and committed medical personnel. They also cared deeply about each other and never forgot their duty as soldiers. Critically, they worked hard to keep their physical and mental states strong. Perhaps most importantly, they were determined to return to their families. The prisoners who had a purpose or goal to achieve in the future, whether it was seeing a loved one again, starting a farm, or returning to school, were emboldened and therefore the most likely to survive. For the POWs, there needed to be a “why” connected to their survival. This thesis will show that the Canadians had a “why,” but it will also argue that the “how” was just as important to their survival.

## Chapter 1

### From Garrison Duty in North America to Prison Camps in Hong Kong

“As soldiers, we will see this thing through to the end, and we will live to have the last laugh.”<sup>41</sup>

- George MacDonell, Royal Rifles of Canada

This chapter, which provides the framework for the remaining thesis, begins with a brief history of Colonial Hong Kong and the British presence, followed by the deployment of Canadian troops which added to the Crown Colony’s defences. Next, the Battle of Hong Kong is detailed to establish how the Canadians became prisoners. The chapter then examines their Japanese incarcerators to learn why they treated their captives in the manner that they did. It concludes with an examination of the prison camps and reveals some of the many challenges that the prisoners faced, such as physical abuse by the guards, inadequate living facilities, the threat of disease, and Hong Kong’s notoriously rainy weather.

Britain first occupied Hong Kong Island in 1841 and China officially ceded it to them following the conclusion of the First Opium War in 1842. In 1860, the Crown Colony added the Kowloon peninsula to its territory, while in 1898 the New Territories joined on a ninety-nine-year lease, giving Hong Kong a considerable foothold in mainland China. The natural harbor between Kowloon and the north side of the island developed into one of the world’s great international ports and had become a key distribution route for British goods in southern China. The total area of the Crown Colony was 410 square miles, with Hong Kong Island occupying only twenty-nine square miles. The topography of the territory is very mountainous and rugged,

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<sup>41</sup> George S. MacDonell, *They Never Surrendered: Allied POWs Who Defied their Captors in Hong Kong & Japan* (Toronto: ORBIT Design Services, 2014), 54.



*A map of colonial Hong Kong. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.*

particularly Hong Kong Island with its highest point being Victoria's Peak at 1,800 feet. Also named after the former British Queen was the colony's major city and de facto capital of Victoria, located in the northwest corner of Hong Kong Island. As Hong Kong's climate is sub-tropical, it receives heavy and often unpredictable rainfall to complement its winter and summer monsoons. The hottest temperatures are between the spring and

the fall when the mercury commonly rises above thirty degrees Celsius. The winter months bring some relief and are generally cool and dry, although Hong Kong's notorious humidity can be present all year long. The population of Hong Kong had grown dramatically since Japan's invasion of China in 1937. As hundreds of thousands of Chinese refugees sought shelter in the Crown Colony, by December 1941, the number of civilians stood at between 1,500,000 and 1,750,000.<sup>42</sup>

Before war's outbreak in Europe in 1939, Japan had seized much of northeastern China, many of its coastal cities, and the area bordering Hong Kong's New Territories. Despite heavy fighting, massive Chinese casualties, and unspeakable civilian massacres, neither Chinese President Chiang Kai-shek nor the communist army of Mao Zedong would yield, and the

<sup>42</sup> Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 107-109; Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 455.

fighting persisted.<sup>43</sup> European powers with colonies in Asia expressed concern, but they were busy dealing with the threat of war closer to home and the Japanese were not considered a serious risk as they had been unable to subdue a stubborn China. Still, the British were alarmed as they held many possessions in South-East Asia, including Burma, Malaya, and Singapore. But in the fall of 1937 the British Chiefs of Staff Committee (COS) decided against dispatching any forces to Asia, settling instead on maintaining forces large enough to act as a deterrent to Japanese expansionism. The COS believed that Japan had limited financial and natural resources, too many men tied up in China, had fallen afoul of American public opinion, and had to contend with an unpredictable neighbour in the Soviet Union as Japan's conquests in Manchuria had given it a disputed border with the communist state. This combination of circumstances led the COS to believe that Japan would not consider an attack on Hong Kong for that action would mean war with the British Empire.<sup>44</sup>

War erupted in Europe with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Less than a year later most of Western Europe had fallen to the Nazis leaving Great Britain alone, isolated, and expecting a major attack. Strengthening overseas territories was not a priority, yet there were some who argued that it was necessary, especially since Britain's apparent weakness might invite Japanese aggression. Between November 1938 and July 1941, the General Officer Commanding in Hong Kong was Canadian Major-General Arthur Edward Grasett. Serving in the British Army, Grasett is the man who, in Canadian circles, is often held responsible for the decision to send Canadian troops to the British colony.<sup>45</sup> Though Britain had its hands full in

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<sup>43</sup> Terry Copp, "The Decision to Reinforce Hong Kong: September 1941," *Canadian Military History*, 20, no. 2, (2011): 3.

<sup>44</sup> Galen Roger Perras, "'Our Position in the Far East Would be Stronger Without This Unsatisfactory Commitment': Britain and the Reinforcement of Hong Kong, 1941," *Canadian Journal of History* 30 (1995): 238.

<sup>45</sup> Vincent, *No Reason Why*, 24; Greenhous, "*C" Force to Hong Kong*, 15-16.

Europe, in October 1940 Grasett began raising the issue of reinforcing Hong Kong. His confidence in his own troops was high and his opinion of Japanese competency was equally low. Still, he pressed his superiors for the four existing battalions of British and Indian troops to be expanded to five, but the COS was not convinced that extra men could be provided.<sup>46</sup> The following month British Commander-in-Chief in the Far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham arrived in Singapore and, being of the same opinion as Grasett, also pressured London that Hong Kong be reinforced. His request for an additional two battalions<sup>47</sup> was denied, but he raised the issue again in January 1941. This time British Prime Minister Winston Churchill weighed in, stating that “this is all wrong. If Japan goes to war with us there is not the slightest chance of holding Hong Kong or relieving it...I wish we had fewer troops there, but to move any would be noticeable and dangerous.”<sup>48</sup> For a third time the matter appeared closed.

In July 1941, Grasett retired from his command and was replaced by Major-General Christopher Maltby. In August Grasett returned to England by way of Canada, allowing him to visit his friend and fellow Royal Military College of Canada graduate Major-General H.D.G. Crerar, Canada’s Chief of the General Staff (CG). The two had previously studied the complexity of defending Hong Kong in 1934 at the Imperial Defence College in London. James Layton Ralston, Canada’s Minister of National Defence, partook in the generals’ discussions and heard Grasett put forward the idea that two extra battalions would make Hong Kong strong enough to repel any Japanese attack, although Grasett did not specifically suggest Canadian units for this task.<sup>49</sup> Grasett continued on to London where he again made his case for the two

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<sup>46</sup> Kent Fedorowich, “Cocked Hats and Swords and Small, Little Garrisons: Britain, Canada and the Fall of Hong Kong, 1941,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no 1. (2003): 131.

<sup>47</sup> A battalion in the British, Canadian, and Indian armies in the Second World War would have contained between 600 and 1,000 men.

<sup>48</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 438-439.

<sup>49</sup> Copp, “The Decision to Reinforce Hong Kong: September 1941,” 5.

additional battalions, but at this time he suggested that Canada might be willing to offer assistance. The Americans had reinforced their colony of the Philippines in August 1941, soon after Australia committed soldiers to defend Malaya. If Canada could be convinced to reinforce Hong Kong, it would send a message to the Japanese that the Empire was taking their threat seriously and that Britain would fight for Hong Kong.<sup>50</sup> Churchill reluctantly agreed, and on September 19 Britain's Dominion Office formally requested two infantry battalions of Canada.

For Canada, there were important political considerations. Canadian troops had been in Britain for nearly two years but had yet to see any action. As the Conservative opposition used such inaction to argue that Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and his Liberals were reluctant to fight, turning down a request for men from Britain in a time of war might play poorly in the press and in the House of Commons.<sup>51</sup> On September 27, Colonel Ralston expressed his approval but suggested that two fresh units should be provided from within Canada, and not from those stationed in Britain. The Canadian government had not gathered its own intelligence on the situation in the Far East, preferring instead to rely on British assessments. Still, Ralston believed that "anything which would either defer or deter Japan from coming in [to the war] would be highly desirable from our point of view." On October 2, the Cabinet War Committee approved the decision and asked Ralston, in conjunction with the General Staff, to choose two units from a list prepared by the Director of Military Training. Preference was to be given to units that were

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<sup>50</sup> J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 195; Fedorowich, "Cocked Hats and Swords and Small, Little Garrisons: Britain, Canada and the Fall of Hong Kong, 1941," 134.

<sup>51</sup> Perras, "'Our Position in the Far East Would be Stronger Without This Unsatisfactory Commitment': Britain and the Reinforcement of Hong Kong, 1941," 250.

the best trained and with experience in coastal defence, but it was considered unwise to pry battalions away from existing divisions, so two stand-alone units were selected.<sup>52</sup>

The Canadian detachment sent to Hong Kong was made up of two infantry battalions, the Winnipeg Grenadiers, the Royal Rifles of Canada, recruited mainly in Quebec's Eastern Townships, and a Brigade Headquarters.<sup>53</sup> No fewer than eight provinces were represented among the men and many were from the same areas, notably Winnipeg or Sherbrooke, and had much in common with each other socially, culturally, and linguistically. The group consisted of 1,975 personnel, including two medical officers, two Nursing Sisters, two officers of the Canadian Dental Corps, three chaplains, two civilian Auxiliary Service Officers, and a detachment of the Canadian Postal Corps. The Grenadiers and Royal Rifles had recently completed garrison duty, the former in Jamaica and the latter in Newfoundland. Neither unit was at full strength when selected and the men's training in tactics, small arms, or large-scale exercises was far from complete. Relying solely on British intelligence, Crerar still believed war to be unlikely and he deemed the battalions suitable for the assignment, which he felt would be mere garrison duty. The man tasked with commanding "C" Force, as the Canadian detachment became known, was Brigadier J. K. Lawson, a Permanent Force officer who had been the Director of Military Training in Ottawa. On October 27, 1941, the Canadians departed from Vancouver aboard the troop transport HMT *Awatea* which was escorted by the Canadian armed merchant cruiser HMCS *Prince Robert*. The ships arrived in Hong Kong on November 16, but the freighter *Don Jose*, which carried "C" Force's 212 vehicles, never arrived. When it reached Manila en route, war had broken out and the United States Army used the vehicles to defend the

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<sup>52</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 441-443.

<sup>53</sup> A brigade normally consists of three battalions. By providing a headquarters, the Canadians had fully expected that they would exercise control over their own soldiers.



Philippines.<sup>54</sup> The Canadians were stationed at the Sham Shui Po Barracks, a British Army facility constructed in the 1920s. After the war, Hong Kong veterans remembered Sham Shui Po not as a barracks but as a prison.

The General Officer Commanding in Hong Kong, Major-General Christopher Maltby, had a force of approximately 14,000 at his disposal although he considered the number of “fighting troops” to be closer to 11,000.<sup>55</sup> Maltby’s command included the 1st Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, which had been stationed in Hong Kong since 1937, and the 2nd Battalion, Royal Scots which had been there since 1938. Two Indian battalions were part of the defence, the 5th Battalion, 7th Rajput Regiment and the 2nd Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment, in Hong Kong since 1937 and 1940, respectively. However, some units were understrength as 110 of the Royal Scots had contracted malaria; while the Rajputs had sent detachments for service elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> Additional support was provided by the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC) which had its own infantry, artillery, and various other arms. The naval forces, already marginal, were further reduced when two of the three destroyers were ordered to Singapore on the eve of war. The air forces were tiny and obsolete, with only five outdated fighters based at Kai Tak Airport on the Kowloon Peninsula. The closest Royal Air Force (RAF) base was in Malaya nearly 1,400 miles away. The fixed-defences were more substantial, with eight 9.2-inch guns, fifteen 6-inch, two 4.7-inch, and four 4-inch. Mobile artillery included 32 guns ranging from 6-inch to 3.7-inch, plus 10 additional guns for beach defence. Anti-aircraft

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<sup>54</sup> Veterans Affairs Canada, *Canadians in Hong Kong*.

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/canadians-hong-kong>.

<sup>55</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 457. The official British history puts the number at 12,000, Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 115.

<sup>56</sup> Fedorowich, “Cocked Hats and Swords and Small, Little Garrisons: Britain, Canada and the Fall of Hong Kong, 1941,” 147.

defences included only 14 heavy and two light guns. However, there was a shortage of mobile artillery and much other equipment.<sup>57</sup>

The defence plan called for the garrison to be split into a Mainland Brigade commanded by Brigadier Cedric Wallis, and an Island Brigade commanded by Canadian Brigadier John Lawson. The mainland group was comprised of the Royal Scots, the Punjabs, and the Rajputs. The island defence was made up of the Middlesex and the two Canadian battalions. The primary defensive fortification on the mainland was the so-called Gin Drinkers Line, an eleven-mile-long line of entrenchments augmented by concrete pillboxes at regular intervals. In his postwar dispatch, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham observed that the Gin Drinkers Line needed at least two divisions, some 30,000 men, to hold it properly.<sup>58</sup> Maltby had just a quarter of that recommended strength. While the British were confident, that feeling was not shared by senior Canadian officers. A week after landing at Hong Kong, a Canadian officer challenged the defensive capabilities at a briefing.<sup>59</sup> Noting that everything in the defence plan counted on the Japanese attacking by one certain route, what if, he asked, their attack on the island was concentrated across the narrowest point on the harbor side which was sparsely defended? The concern was considered, but Maltby remained satisfied with his defensive arrangements.<sup>60</sup>

By November 1941, the Japanese controlled all territory surrounding the Crown Colony of Hong Kong. They had occupied the adjacent province of Canton (now Guangdong), the island of Hainan, large swathes of French Indo-China, and had long held Formosa (Taiwan), thereby

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<sup>57</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 456-458.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 459; Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 115.

<sup>59</sup> It is not specified, but the Canadian officers mentioned were likely Lawson and the two battalion commanders, Lieutenant Colonel W. J. Home of the Royal Rifles and Lieutenant Colonel J. L. R. Sutcliffe of the Winnipeg Grenadiers.

<sup>60</sup> Fedorowich, "Cocked Hats and Swords and Small, Little Garrisons: Britain, Canada and the Fall of Hong Kong, 1941," 147.

severing Hong Kong from other Allied possessions in the region. Speaking to Canadian officers shortly after their arrival, Maltby declared that the Japanese had 5,000 troops with little artillery support. Amongst his staff, the commonly held view was that their Japanese counterparts were not well-equipped, that they could not fight at night, and that their poor eyesight coupled with outmoded aircraft meant that dive-bombing would not be a concern. It was believed there was only one tank battalion and one medium brigade of artillery. In fact, the 23rd Army stationed in Canton included four infantry divisions equipped with tanks and artillery in much greater supply than originally anticipated.<sup>61</sup> Some estimates have put the Japanese strength as high as 52,000 troops. But that estimate likely refers to the entire 23rd Army which numbered near 60,000 soldiers, while only 20,000 members of the 38th Division are thought to have landed on Hong Kong Island with fewer actively engaged in the fighting.<sup>62</sup>

The Japanese unit tasked with capturing Hong Kong was the 38th Division, commanded by Lieutenant-General Tadayoshi Sano. It fielded three infantry regiments, with strong artillery support. Additionally, a substantial air force would ensure immediate air superiority.<sup>63</sup> Historian George Beer Endacott remarked that the Japanese “proved to be disciplined, supremely fit, aggressive, resolute, well-led, sensibly armed and equipped, and prepared to use unorthodox tactics. They seized the initiative from the start and never lost it.”<sup>64</sup> Fully cognizant of the Gin Drinkers Line, Japan’s battle plan included a major thrust to break through it. Once the Kowloon Peninsula had been secured, a second assault would commence against Hong Kong Island.

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<sup>61</sup> Terry Copp, “The Defence of Hong Kong: December 1941,” 7; Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 116.

<sup>62</sup> Banham, *Not the Slightest Chance*, 337.

<sup>63</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 463.

<sup>64</sup> Endacott, *Hong Kong Eclipse*, 66.

On December 8, 1941, at 8:00 am, and without any formal declaration of war against the British Empire, the Japanese attacked Hong Kong. The first air strike destroyed all five RAF fighters and eight civilian aircraft and damaged the Sham Shui Po barracks.<sup>65</sup> An hour later Japanese troops began crossing the border. The first defenders they encountered were a company from the 2/14 Punjabs, but the latter quickly fell back to the Gin Drinkers Line. A key position along the Gin Drinkers Line was the Shing Mun Redoubt, a piece of high ground that served as a primary objective for the Japanese. On December 9 the redoubt was attacked close to midnight. Despite some ferocious fighting in the tunnels and above ground, the myth that the Japanese could not carry out night operations was shattered and they seized control of the position.<sup>66</sup> It had taken the Japanese a mere 36 hours to break the mainland's major line of defence.

Maltby ordered all troops to retreat to the island excepting the Rajputs who were instructed to hold the Devil's Peak peninsula which overlooked Hong Kong harbor and the Lye Myn Passage, the shortest crossing distance between Kowloon and the island.<sup>67</sup> But when the Japanese attacked the Rajputs late in the afternoon on the 12th, despite brave resistance, as Maltby recognized that resupplying that outlying position would be nearly impossible, he ordered the Rajputs to withdraw. By the next morning Maltby had all troops on the island where he reorganized them. The island was roughly split down the middle from north to south with the Wong Nei Chong Gap being the dividing line. The easiest and most direct route across the island, the gap was a crucial position which housed Lawson's brigade headquarters. Lawson commanded West Brigade which contained the Royal Scots, the Grenadiers, and the Punjabs. East Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Wallis, consisted of the Royal Rifles and the Rajputs.

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<sup>65</sup> Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 119.

<sup>66</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 465.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 467.

The Middlesex battalion served under Fortress Headquarters.<sup>68</sup> This new system became effective at midnight the 13-14 December, but it had one egregious drawback. The Canadian brigade had been split, while the urgency of the situation permitted no time for the Royal Rifles to become acquainted with their British commanders and staff officers.<sup>69</sup>

On December 13, the Japanese commander, Lieutenant-General Takashi Saki, issued an ultimatum to Governor Mark Young to surrender or suffer the consequences. When Young promptly refused, Sakai thereupon began a heavy artillery bombardment of Hong Kong Island. The shelling continued for several days and on the 17th the Japanese made a second surrender demand. When it was rejected too, Sakai issued the order to attack the island. His intention was to land his forces at positions between North Point and Lye Mun, precisely the location raised by the Canadian officer during the November defence briefing.<sup>70</sup> The first amphibious wave landed some 7,500 Japanese troops who smashed through the Rajputs and Royal Rifles and headed for the high ground positions and the area around the Wong Nei Chong Gap. On the morning of the 19th, a company of the Grenadiers was ordered to reclaim two of those positions, Jardine's Lookout and Mount Butler. The latter was held for several hours, but a ferocious Japanese counterattack forced a retreat to the gap; the whole force was surrounded and took heavy casualties. In the eastern sector, the Royal Rifles and East Brigade were defending positions around Repulse Bay and the Stanley Peninsula in the southern part of the island. Brigadier Wallis attempted to push north, but his forces were driven back and the Rifles, holding some of the high ground, became separated. Wallis ordered his forces to return to their former positions.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 127-128.

<sup>69</sup> Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 469.

<sup>70</sup> Greenfield, *The Damned*, 58.

<sup>71</sup> Banham, *Not the Slightest Chance*, 97; Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 137.

Meanwhile, the Japanese closed in on the West Brigade headquarters at the Wong Nei Chong Gap. Brigadier Lawson's position was quickly overrun and he was killed in the fighting. Colonel H. B. Rose of the HKVDC succeeded Lawson. The same day, the Japanese reached Repulse Bay on the island's south coast, permanently separating the east and west brigades. As they consolidated their advantage, the Japanese received a communique from Imperial Headquarters informing them that the 38th Division was to be redeployed in the South Pacific. The message was clear: finish the job in Hong Kong. On the 22nd, the Royal Rifles were ordered to the Stanley Peninsula at the southern tip of the island where it was believed the exhausted defenders would have a better chance of fighting since it was on level ground. Five days of continuous combat had taken its toll on all ranks. Climbing hills through treacherous trails, assembling defensive positions under fire, a lack of rest, and meager to non-existent rations had all contributed to the fatigue.<sup>72</sup>

On Christmas Eve, the Japanese tightened their stranglehold on Victoria City and relentless bombing had crippled the reserve water tanks at Stanley Fort.<sup>73</sup> On Christmas morning, the Japanese sent a final request for surrender, but it was rebuffed. At noon on Christmas Day, Brigadier Wallis ordered a company of the Royal Rifles (some 100 men) to charge the Japanese in Stanley Village. This senseless daylight attack saw the company virtually annihilated as less than a dozen men returned unscathed.<sup>74</sup> By then the garrison in the northern part of the island had capitulated and at 3:30 pm Maltby issued the official order for the remaining parts of the island to surrender by 8:00 pm. The battle for Hong Kong had ended, but it had taken a heavy toll on

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<sup>72</sup> Banham, *Not the Slightest Chance*, 187; Oliver Lindsay, *The Battle for Hong Kong 1941-1945: Hostage to Fortune* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 132; The Royal Rifles of Canada, *Hong Kong War Diary: 1<sup>st</sup> December to 25<sup>th</sup> December 1941*, 35. Accessed at <https://www.hkvca.ca/historical/RRC-War%20Diary.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 143.

<sup>74</sup> Lindsay, *The Battle for Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 141-142.

both sides. British casualties stood at approximately 4,440, which included 290 Canadians killed and 493 wounded. Japanese casualties were put at 2,754 though this is an estimation given that no complete casualty list is known to have survived the war. Civilian deaths numbered at least 4,000 with a further 3,000 badly wounded.<sup>75</sup> The Crown Colony suffered extensive damage to its infrastructure, power supply, and water reservoirs. Hong Kong was the first land engagement for Canadian soldiers in the Second World War and it was the only battle during which they suffered 100 percent casualties as every man of “C” Force was either killed, captured, wounded, or went missing. No fewer than 1,684 Canadians fell into captivity. These survivors had failed in their first mission and were given a second chance to make it home alive, but it would not be easy.

While “C” Force soldiers knew little about their opponents before the battle, after becoming prisoners, they learned that many of the senior Japanese officers cared little for the rules which governed how POWs should be treated. This attitude often went down the chain of command. On July 27, 1929, in Geneva, Switzerland, fifty-three state parties and nine state signatories agreed to the *Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*. The state parties, including Germany, later ratified the convention, while the state signatories, including Japan, did not. The convention came about after the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expressed concern at the way some prisoners had been abused and mistreated during the First World War. During that war the ICRC broadened its commitment to aid prisoners captured in battle, not just those wounded in combat as it had previously done. These efforts led to the 1929 Convention which sought to protect prisoner rights by enacting laws to ensure that they received food and medicine and that they were not subject to assault, humiliation, or forced

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<sup>75</sup> Kirby, *The War Against Japan Volume 1*, 150; Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Volume 1*, 489; Banham, *Not the Slightest Chance*, 318.

labour.<sup>76</sup> The Japanese signed a document detailing treatment for the ill and wounded in battle. The Japanese Diet did ratify the convention on soldiers wounded in the field but not the one concerning prisoners of war. In 1934, Japan's army and navy decided against its ratification, explaining that it would work unfairly against Japan for as Japanese soldiers did not expect to become prisoners, the commitment to honour the convention would fall on Japan alone.<sup>77</sup> The Imperial Army, therefore, was not legally obligated by international law to adhere to the convention's articles. This became a serious concern after the string of Japanese victories in late 1941 and the capture of tens of thousands of Allied soldiers. To lessen Western fears, Japan released a statement through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 29, 1942 reiterating Japan's legal position relative to the 1929 convention but also declaring that it would "apply mutatis mutandis the provisions of that Convention to...prisoners of war in its power."<sup>78</sup> The Japanese government insisted that it would honour the spirit of the convention, if not the actual wording. Many units of the Japanese Army did not follow through with that promise, including some of those stationed in Hong Kong.

The second article of the 1929 Geneva Convention affirms that prisoners of war must be humanely treated and protected against violence and reprisals. Other articles are more specific, including Article Eleven that stated that prisoners must receive equal rations as those soldiers holding them, while Article Thirteen obliged captors to provide their captives with healthy and sanitary conditions to prevent disease. Further articles covered labour (forbidding dangerous work), external relations (granting the right of correspondence), disciplinary punishment

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<sup>76</sup> David P. Forsythe and Barbara Ann J. Rieffer-Flanagan, *The International Committee of the Red Cross: A Neutral Humanitarian Actor* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 44.

<sup>77</sup> Charles G. Roland, "Allied POWs, Japanese Captors and the Geneva Convention," *War and Society* 9, no. 2 (1991): 84-85.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Roland, "Allied POWs, Japanese Captors and the Geneva Convention," 85.



(preventing corporal punishment and cruelty), and judicial punishment (to guarantee a fair trial).<sup>79</sup> Although Japan had not ratified the convention and while their aggressive actions in China had become well known, the Allies could never have imagined that nearly every main article would be so flagrantly violated, especially given Japanese re-assurances. Before the Second World War, Japan's record of treating its prisoners had been honourable. The Japanese Army had taken thousands of Russians prisoner during the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War, but their mortality rate was an astonishingly low 0.5 per cent. In the First World War, Japan captured and interned thousands of German and Austrian soldiers, but they were generally treated well and provided with adequate living conditions. Some even wished to remain in Japan once the war concluded. Again, the mortality rate was low at only 1.8 per cent, but would have been lower still if not for an influenza pandemic. By comparison, the mortality rate for Allied POWs in the Second World War was approximately 4 per cent in Europe and 28 per cent in Asia.<sup>80</sup> Something in the Japanese mentality and practices had changed in the interwar period.

The word *Bushido* is synonymous with Japan's aggressive wartime behaviour and its often-inhumane treatment of prisoners and civilians. Meaning "the way of the warriors", *Bushido* was an umbrella term for the codes and ethics that governed the samurai way of life. First put into writing in the sixteenth century, it became the code of conduct for samurai under the Tokugawa shoguns and after the Meiji restoration of 1868 it became the foundation for "emperor worship." By the turn of the twentieth century, the Japanese Army had begun touting the concept of death before dishonor. To die in battle or to commit suicide were preferable to being captured,

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<sup>79</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, July 27, 1929, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/305?OpenDocument>.

<sup>80</sup> Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 184; Kurosawa Fumitaka, "Why did the Japanese Army Abuse Allied Prisoners of War? The Primary Historical and Structural Causes," In *Japan and Britain at War and Peace*. Edited by Hugo Dobson and Kosuge Nobuko, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 39-40; Roland, "Allied POWs, Japanese Captors and the Geneva Convention," 86.

which was viewed as cowardly and shameful and would earn a soldier the public's scorn should he return home under such embarrassment.<sup>81</sup> After the First World War, revived militarism and fervent nationalism fostered strong support in Japan for old ideals. By the 1930s, the military had advocated *Bushido* as the code of conduct to guide the Japanese in battle. That soldiers should kill themselves rather than be captured became an integral part of military training prior to the Second World War. Indeed, in his trial after the war, former Prime Minister Hideki Tojo stated that a Japanese soldier taken prisoner was considered a disgrace and that under criminal law “anyone who becomes a prisoner while still able to resist has committed a criminal offense, the maximum punishment for which is the death penalty.”<sup>82</sup> Treating their POWs with the disdain and contempt that the Japanese felt they deserved was seen by the Japanese military as part of *Bushido*'s essence. But other factors also were at play.

Historian Kurosawa Fumitaka has noted that the Japanese vastly underestimated the number of POWs that would fall under their control, and they did not adequately account for the physical space that would be required to hold them. As Japan faced labour shortages at home, it formulated a policy that would put prisoners of all nationalities to work. Moreover, Japan's world view was based on the notion of its racial superiority and that the Emperor represented the height of worthiness. Therefore, individuals and groups were measured by their closeness to the emperor, and Western POWs with corrupted and inferior Western values were near the bottom of that hierarchy. Western standards were no longer comparable with Japanese values and concepts of patriotism. Fumitaka wrote that it was a “misguided ideology disparaging capture by enemy forces combined with a sanctimonious nationalism against the backdrop of the tyranny of

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<sup>81</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 370-1; Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 119.

<sup>82</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 305-306.

military priorities” that led to the attitudes which condoned and accepted the abuse of prisoners.<sup>83</sup> And though the treatment of POWs often depended on the temperament of the camp commander, Japanese soldiers had been inculcated with the notion that there would be few, if any, repercussions if physical and mental abuse were meted out against enemy combatants who surrendered in disgrace.<sup>84</sup> Even so, this does little to help explain some of the more cruel and heavy-handed measures the Japanese took towards their prisoners, including civilians. Many POWs in Hong Kong suffered physical abuse at the hands of the Japanese Army, and some of the more appalling incidents occurred even before the fighting there was officially over.

The Salesian Mission on north-east Hong Kong Island served as a training school for the clergymen of the Salesian Society of Hong Kong. Before the battle it was converted to house army medical supplies and was well stocked with medical equipment. On the morning of December 19, and despite the presence of Red Cross signage, Japanese troops burst through the mission doors and captured everyone in the building. The women were released, but the men were stripped of their possessions and forced to walk to a nearby clearing where the Japanese bayoneted their victims and attempted to behead some with their swords. No fighting had taken place near the mission, no resistance had occurred, and most of the staff were clearly marked as medical workers. Almost every member of the 40-person team was murdered.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Fumitaka, “Why did the Japanese Army Abuse Allied Prisoners of War? The Primary Historical and Structural Causes,” 48.

<sup>84</sup> Japanese enlisted ranks were treated harshly by their officers and NCOs. Given such a brutal system it is not surprising that many Japanese troops felt little empathy towards their prisoners. For a detailed look at how the Imperial Army trained and educated its enlisted and officer ranks, see Edward J. Drea, “Trained in the Hardest School,” In *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) 75-90.

<sup>85</sup> Charles G. Roland, “Massacre and Rape in Hong Kong: Two Case Studies Involving Medical Personnel and Patients,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 1 (1997): 44, 46-48.

Even more shocking was what took place at St. Stephen's College, located near the entrance to the Stanley Peninsula on the south shore of Hong Kong Island. The main building had been converted during the fighting for use as an emergency hospital. On Christmas morning, as the battle neared its end, approximately 100 patients were in the main hall and the nearby classrooms. The staff numbered around two dozen doctors, nurses, and orderlies. Again, the building was clearly marked as a medical facility and most personnel wore Red Cross insignia. This did not prevent about 200 Japanese soldiers from storming the makeshift hospital. The senior medical officer, Lieutenant-Colonel G.D.R. Black of the HKVDC, attempted to surrender but his pleas were answered with a gunshot to his head. The Japanese proceeded through St. Stephen's attacking wounded soldiers lying in their hospital beds. More than 50 patients were bayoneted, while wounded soldiers housed in the classrooms were crowded together and arbitrarily shot. All the nurses, British and Chinese, were gangraped, eight of them were sadistically mutilated and murdered. Only four of them survived the slaughter.<sup>86</sup> "C" Force Nursing Sister Kay Christie later remarked that "The rape business seems to be their reward when they overrun a city or an auxiliary hospital...they seem to feel that's their right."<sup>87</sup> How else could such behaviour be explained? The massacre only ended because the battle had ceased. The survivors were forced to dispose of the bodies. One later recounted that the Japanese executed 14 of their own men for the hospital carnage, though this remains unverified. In any event, far more than that had participated.<sup>88</sup> These stories spread amongst the Canadians who were getting an idea of the brutality of which their captors were capable. And during the initial

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 52-54.

<sup>87</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 267.9, Kathleen Georgina Christie, Interview, April 5, 1992.

<sup>88</sup> Banham, *We Shall Suffer There*, 10.

stages of captivity, the behaviour of some of the Japanese did little to quell fears that the worst was yet to come.

Leslie Canivet of the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps was lucky to survive the battle. Seriously wounded in the fighting at Stanley Peninsula, he managed to escape with three others, but they were captured by a Japanese patrol, shot execution style, and left for dead. Incredibly, Canivet survived and he made his way to Bowen Road Hospital in Kowloon. Once healed and integrated into camp with the rest of the prisoners he witnessed his share of abuse and brutality. He recalled how one form of torture employed by the Japanese was to gag a prisoner and put lit cigarettes up his nose. Canivet also mentioned that the POWs were initially made to learn Japanese. When he refused to do so he was punched and kicked by a guard. The prisoners learned not to lodge any complaints. “You complained about anything you got beat up... They had no feeling for a prisoner of war in any way, shape, or form.”<sup>89</sup> Grenadier Ernie Hodkinson recalled a particularly brutal form of torture. Guards would come into a hut and randomly pick out a prisoner. The man would be beaten, made to stand out in the sun until he fainted, or even placed in a metal-roofed shed and left to cook.<sup>90</sup> But typically, Chinese nationals suffered the worst of the abuse.

Less than two weeks into captivity, Royal Rifle Raymond Elliott wrote in his diary about the Japanese disdain for Chinese civilians. The guards had caught a Chinese man stealing money from Japanese soldiers. He was beaten and left tied up overnight. Still alive in the morning, he was subsequently shot dead. Elliott simply commented “It don’t pay to steal.” First World War veteran Kenneth Baird of the Grenadiers described how dangerous it was to pass goods through

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<sup>89</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 52F 1.2, Elward G. Burnside, Interview with Leslie Malcolm Canivet, Film and Video Archives, 1995.

<sup>90</sup> Hodkinson, *Ernie’s Story*, 57.

the fence that separated the prisoners and civilians. Two Chinese girls, perhaps as young as twelve, were shot by the Japanese for trying to sell items at the fence causing Baird to note that “Life is very much in the raw here and life is held very cheaply.”<sup>91</sup> The violence towards the Chinese took other forms. Perhaps as many as 10,000 girls and women were raped by Japanese soldiers in the first month after their victory in Hong Kong.<sup>92</sup> Civilians and prisoners alike had to tread carefully around their captors, never knowing when a random incident of violence might be carried out. The prisoners learned quickly to obey rules and not to antagonize their incarcerators. Despite such fears, there were some who decided to do something about their situation.

If the Japanese could not understand why a soldier would surrender, they might have been equally perplexed as to why one would attempt to escape given the consequences if recaptured. After members of the Royal Navy escaped early into their captivity, the remaining prisoners were warned by the Japanese that any further attempts would incur reprisals.<sup>93</sup> Camp Commander Colonel Tokunaga ordered all men to sign an affidavit promising not to escape. Those who would not bend were summarily punished, including Royal Rifle Jack Porter who was beaten, tortured, and given meager rations. “I could not eat the rice or drink the tea on account of its maggoty and filthy condition,” he later recounted. Porter and the other holdouts eventually signed after their meals were stopped.<sup>94</sup> Even if one were so inclined and determined, escaping from Hong Kong was challenging. The territory was ringed with water while Caucasians would surely stand out amongst the Chinese population. Potential escapees would be

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<sup>91</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives. 58A 1 17.10, Raymond W. Elliott, Diary, 1940-1945, January 4, 1942; Major Kenneth G. Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn: From Japanese POW Camps – A Father’s Letters to His Young Daughter During World War II* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2002), 55.

<sup>92</sup> Roland, “Massacre and Rape in Hong Kong: Two Case Studies Involving Medical Personnel and Patients,” 57, 59.

<sup>93</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 63.

<sup>94</sup> Statement from Lance Corporal Jack Porter, recorded on June 8, 1942, in Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 17.2, Everette E. Denison, Diary, 1941-1945,

handicapped by their inability to speak Chinese and the fact that there was a considerable distance to be covered through Japanese-occupied areas before they could reach Chinese lines. Nonetheless, there were several escape attempts while Hong Kong was occupied. Some were successful, others went horribly awry.

In August 1942, some members of “C” Force took stock of their situation and came to what Royal Rifle George MacDonell called a “collective determination.” They were resolute that their war would continue and that failure to perform one’s duty was not an option. “We will never forget who we are and we will live up to our best traditions. As soldiers, we will see this thing through to the end, and we will live to have the last laugh.”<sup>95</sup> Reasoning that it was a Canadian soldier’s obligation, four Grenadiers, led by Sergeant John Payne, attempted to escape. Resources were pooled to aid the breakout and the four men were provided with supplies. Payne and his three companions fled North Point Prison Camp on August 20, 1942. They had barely made it across Victoria Harbour before they were intercepted by a Japanese patrol boat. The four men were tortured, but never revealed their co-conspirators. They were later executed to send a clear message to the rest of the prisoners. Senior officers were implicated and jailed, but they were later released unharmed.<sup>96</sup> Reprisal for the escape attempt was swift. That evening the prisoners, even the very ill and bedridden, were made to stand outside in the pouring rain. The men were released at 5:30am and returned to their huts; 90 minutes later they were back outside.<sup>97</sup>

The Japanese may have felt that escape attempts deserved a collective punishment, but there were occasions when it appeared as if abuse and punishment were administered to satisfy

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<sup>95</sup> MacDonell, *They Never Surrendered*, 54.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-57; CWM, Squires Diary, August 30, 1942.

<sup>97</sup> CWM, White Diary, August 29, 1942.

the sadistic guards on duty. One of the Japanese soldiers, Kanao Inouye, became notorious among Canadian POWs. Better known to prisoners as the Kamloops Kid or Slap Happy, Inouye was born in British Columbia to Japanese parents. In 1936, he went to Japan for university, but when war broke out he was drafted into the Japanese Army. Given his fluency in English, Inouye was stationed at Hong Kong in a dual role as guard and interpreter.<sup>98</sup> Growing up in Canada, Inouye had been teased and bullied because of his Asian heritage. Not forgetting these slights, Inouye took advantage of his position in Hong Kong to exact revenge on those whom he perceived had wronged him, namely Caucasian Canadians.

Royal Rifle Ken Gaudin recalled that Inouye made them stand at attention in the rain at night, while Grenadier Claude Corbett remembered how the interpreter once punished a one-armed man by making him carry 70-pound blocks across camp.<sup>99</sup> George MacDonell wrote in his memoir that he had to stand by helplessly as Inouye subjected his men to several different forms of torture. Leslie Canivet called Inouye “One of the meanest Japs anybody would ever want to meet, just hated Canadians... We had a rough time with him, he’d beat you up for anything, slightest provocation.” Harry White recorded in his diary that during one inspection Captain John Norris was late bringing his men out to the parade square. A furious Inouye knocked Norris to the ground. Challenged to get up and take it like a man, Inouye continually knocked the captain back down and beat him until he was nearly unconscious.<sup>100</sup> Inouye’s vicious behaviour continued unabated for the remainder of the prisoners’ captivity and he was thought to be directly responsible for at least three Canadian deaths. After the war, Inouye was

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<sup>98</sup> Greenfield, *The Damned*, 281.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 240-241.

<sup>100</sup> MacDonell, *One Soldier's Story 1939-1945*, 101; CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995; CWM, White Diary, December 23, 1942.



set to be tried by a war crimes tribunal, but when it was discovered that he was a Canadian citizen, his case was moved to a civilian court in Hong Kong. Subsequently, he was convicted of treason and hanged on August 27, 1947, at Stanley Prison.<sup>101</sup>

While physical abuse was one challenge the Hong Kong POWs had to face, another was the dreadful camp conditions for prisoners. Once the fighting ended, surviving members of “C” Force and other Allied soldiers were moved to their former quarters at Sham Shui Po Barracks for temporary internment. Under strict supervision, the Japanese allowed foraging parties to return to the city to retrieve usable materials. As a result, some canned food supplies and amenities such as books and band instruments were brought into the camp. Sham Shui Po had two identical barracks and two more recently built married quarters buildings.<sup>102</sup> It barely resembled the place that they had left three weeks earlier. On re-entering the site, Harry White vividly described the scene in his diary. The camp had been “stripped by the Chinese; the wiring, light fixtures, doors and windows were gone. In fact, everything moveable, and if they’d had another two weeks, they’d have taken the huts too.” No cooking facilities existed, dishes and cutlery were scarce. The camp was squalid, causing immediate concern among the medical officers that diseases were already present or soon would be. The bucket-type latrines were not plentiful enough for the number of men and diarrhea caused many to relieve themselves where they stood. The washing facilities were in poor condition, the pipes and taps had been removed, and only a minimal amount of cold water flowed from them.<sup>103</sup> The Senior Medical Officer for “C” Force, Major John Crawford, claimed that while they had left Sham Shui Po a clean, habitable barracks capable of housing 2,000 men, they returned to a looted mess with no

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<sup>101</sup> Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 226.

<sup>102</sup> Waterford, *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, 223; Banham, *We Shall Suffer There*, 249.

<sup>103</sup> CWM, White Diary, December 30, 1941.

furniture, no shelter, and no food that was expected to accommodate more than 7,000 prisoners. He recalled that it was cold and that they had no heat so they “huddled together for warmth. Under such circumstances it was not surprising that disease soon menaced us. Many of the troops, due to the failure of the water supply, had developed dysentery during the battle, and this spread quickly through camp.” Raymond Elliott saw “quite a few dead bodies lying around,” writing that on December 31, he had spent the entire day cleaning up.<sup>104</sup> The start of captivity was fraught with adversity, but the nightmare was just beginning.

It was in this early stage of their POW experience that the men of “C” Force began displaying the type of discipline, solidarity, and determination to survive that would mark the length of their imprisonment. Leo Berard noted the initial challenges, but also that their own officers had been ordered by the Japanese to keep their men under control. Accordingly, “daily routine was much the same and that was good but we were quickly learning how to be prisoners.” As many were already sick with dysentery and diarrhea, the doctors were overwhelmed. Thus, Berard and the stronger men began to aid the sick and wounded “fast learning to become nursemaids...changing and cleaning bedding and helping those who could not help themselves.”<sup>105</sup> Then just as a routine and basic facilities were being established, the Japanese chose to separate the prisoners largely based on their nationalities. The British and Volunteer troops remained at Sham Shui Po while the Indian units were sent to Ma Tau Chung Camp, originally built to house mainland Chinese refugees fleeing the war with Japan. Another refugee camp, Argyle Street, was used for most commissioned officers, while civilians were sent to the former grounds of St. Stephen’s College in the Stanley Peninsula. On January 23, 1942,

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<sup>104</sup> J. N. Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong.” Canadian War Museum Library reprint of article from *Manitoba Medical Review* 26, no. 2 (1946): 3-4; CWM, Elliott Diary, December 30, 1941.

<sup>105</sup> Berard, *17 Days Until Christmas*, 98.

the Canadians were sent to North Point Camp on Hong Kong Island where they joined others who had been held there since the battle's end. "C" Force stayed there for the next nine months.<sup>106</sup>

North Point Camp was the third camp originally built for refugees, but it had the misfortune of being near the Japanese landing on Hong Kong Island and had been badly damaged in the fighting. The area was used by the British and their opponents as a garbage dump and the latter had also used it to stable their horses. Animal and human excrement were everywhere. John Crawford described the nearby beach as being "covered with dead and rotting bodies." Leslie Canivet called North Point, "one of the filthiest rat holes I have ever seen...there was mud, pure mud, and a bunch of little huts."<sup>107</sup> Kenneth Baird noted that those huts were 20 feet wide by 120 feet long and expected to hold as many as 75 men and their few belongings. The space was constantly menaced by millions of flies that fought the soldiers for food at every meal. Baird wrote that they killed "thousands every day, but the supply seems inexhaustible." Arthur Squires wrote in his diary that he would sleep better now that a rat in the rafters had moved on, but he was still bothered by crickets who chewed on him and everything else. But he stayed positive, a characteristic so crucial in captivity, and noted that "fortunately [the crickets] carry little disease." He also recorded how the bedbugs forced the men to sleep outside to gain

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<sup>106</sup> In September 1942 the Japanese began sending drafts of British prisoners to Japan to work in various labour projects. This greatly reduced the overall number of prisoners and on the 26th North Point Camp was closed and 1,404 Canadians were moved back to Sham Shui Po where they rejoined the remaining British soldiers. In 1943 the Japanese started sending Canadians to Japan. By April 1944 there were only about 220 members of "C" Force still in Hong Kong. This group was largely composed of officers and the seriously ill.

<sup>107</sup> Crawford, "A Medical Officer in Hong Kong," 5; CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995.

relief, but for him the rats and spiders were a bigger nuisance.<sup>108</sup> The greater danger were likely mosquitoes as they carried diseases such as malaria and dengue fever.

Once again, the soldiers had to organize a habitable prison camp with few supplies and no help from the Japanese. As beds in North Point went to the sick and wounded first, men like Baird devised what they could with what they had on hand. In March 1942 his sleeping arrangement was a blanket on a wood bed with rice sacks serving as the mattress. It was “anything but a Beauty Rest” he wrote, but he was grateful to have at least that.<sup>109</sup> Baird made it a personal project to improve his “Beauty Rest” during his incarceration, and his diary and letters demonstrate that he never lost his sense of humour and was always trying to better himself and help those around him. Crawford also never stopped helping others even though his role as a medical officer was nearly impossible to perform effectively under such conditions. Now limited to only his own staff, Crawford had more orderlies trained while they turned a “small warehouse with a very leaky, shell-scarred roof” into their new hospital. North Point had one advantage over Sham Shui Po in that it was on the same side of the harbour as Bowen Road Hospital, the main medical facility in Hong Kong which was internally controlled by Allied medical officers but governed by Japanese regulations. This allowed Crawford to get the most critically ill to Bowen nearly every day. If lucky, he would return with supplies.<sup>110</sup> But so many men crammed together made it difficult to contain diseases such as dysentery. Major Gordon Gray of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps recalls the difficulty of watching men with abdominal pain and severe diarrhea suffer while it was known that the medical stores in Hong Kong had had plenty

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<sup>108</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 67; Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 214.10, Arthur Ray Squires, Diary, 1942-1945, July 11, 1942; August 16, 1942.

<sup>109</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 83.

<sup>110</sup> Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong,” 5.

of sulphur drugs for treating bacterial infection before the Japanese had pilfered them for their own use.<sup>111</sup> This denial of medical aid was repeated throughout the imprisonment. The officers, soldiers, and medical staff carried on as best they could and worked to improve what was within their control,<sup>112</sup> but there were some things they could do very little about.

The unsanitary housing conditions were worsened by Hong Kong's erratic tropical weather. Avoiding close quarters was difficult when a day of rain would force everybody inside. The climate often came in extremes and was difficult to predict. Most of the year Hong Kong was hot and humid, but winters could be deceptively cold. Many Hong Kong prisoner diaries make mention of the impact that the weather had on their daily lives. By the middle of March 1942 Royal Rifle Delbert Welsh was already recording that it was "very very hot," in May, his comrade Lance Ross wrote that it was 43 degrees Celsius in the shade. James MacMillan noted that the autumn did not bring much relief, writing on September 30 that the "heat seems to sap all the strength right out of you."<sup>113</sup> The short winters were cold, even for Canadians, as there was no heating except for those times a small fire was overlooked by the guards. The temperature plummeted to 5 degrees Celsius in February 1942 according to Harry White. Georges Verreault wrote the next day that he never thought it could be so cold in China causing him to wear every piece of clothing that he possessed. Even during the winter of 1944/45, their last in Hong Kong, Arthur Squires was still surprised by this "country of contradictions" writing

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<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 230.

<sup>112</sup> The evidence strongly refutes the claims of Tim Carew in his book *Hostages to Fortune*. The author wrote that in North Point "The Canadians did nothing to rise above their deplorable surroundings. Instead of getting to work on the removal of the ordure which littered the camp, they simply sat down in limp despair and added to it." Other falsehoods include his assertion that the four Canadians caught for attempting to escape (discussed earlier) survived their interrogation by Interpreter Nimori and later gave evidence at his war crimes trial. Carew, *Hostages to Fortune*, 74 and 86.

<sup>113</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 24.5, Delbert Louis William Welsh, Diary, 1941-1942, March 14, 1942; Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 285; Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 271.2, James C.W. MacMillan, Diary, 1941-1945, September 30, 1942.

that 10 degrees Celsius with a “cold damp raw atmosphere” was enough to send a chill through the men.<sup>114</sup>

At any time of the year, they could expect heavy rain. Squires commented the first August of his imprisonment that he had “seen more rain since I have arrived here than in all my life.” Two non stop weeks of rain brought Verreault to one of his lowest points. But when the sun finally came out he said it boosted the men’s spirits and helped them forget their hunger.<sup>115</sup> At times the weather would cooperate and have a positive effect on Canadian morale. In January 1943, after a long stretch of miserable weather, Royal Rifle Frank Ebdon was delighted to see the sun as he started his day. In May 1943, Harry White recorded that something truly special had happened. On one of his regular evening walks he and a friend were blessed with “a most beautiful moonlight night, stars in the millions, when suddenly we saw what must have been some kind of Meteor, seemed quite large and the most brilliant colours streaking out behind it...a wonderful sight.”<sup>116</sup> Perhaps this reminded White and his companion that beauty still existed, even in a world at war.

The abusive treatment by the Japanese and the conditions the POWs were made to live in were early warnings of how difficult their captivity would be. But several members of “C” Force recognized these challenges and swiftly worked out ways to overcome them showing character traits that would aid in their survival. They were duty bound to help their fellow soldiers and with luck and ingenuity they created the best possible living conditions within their means. Moreover, they worked hard to maintain a positive attitude, high morale, and a sense of humour.

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<sup>114</sup> CWM, White Diary, February 11, 1942; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 57; CWM, Squires Diary, December 6, 1944.

<sup>115</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, August 2, 1942; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 61.

<sup>116</sup> LAC, Ebdon Fonds, diary entry for January 16, 1943; CWM, White Diary, May 27, 1943.

Prisoner diaries from Hong Kong are not just filled with the worst that incarceration brings, but also moments of hope, camaraderie, and determination. However, character can only benefit survival to a point. Other factors can be more important. A prisoner of war cannot survive without proper sustenance and this was always their primary concern. Unsurprisingly, there is nothing Hong Kong POWs mention more often than the struggle for food and health, the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### The Battle to Stay Healthy

“It would be stupid to die of starvation after having survived the war.”<sup>117</sup>

– Georges Verreault, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, January 13, 1942

Food becomes an obsession for prisoners of war. In the diaries and memoirs of captives in Hong Kong, no other subject is mentioned nearly as often. After two weeks as a prisoner, Grenadier Thomas Forsyth wrote in his diary that the only topics of conversation throughout the entire camp were food and how soon they might be freed.<sup>118</sup> Prisoners were preoccupied with when their next meal would come and what it would be. Food dominated conversations in the prison yard. Men compared favourite dishes, vividly describe which foods they missed the most, and write down meals that they desired to have once they were released. Some POWs, such as Royal Rifle Delbert Welsh and Grenadier Francis Martyn, wrote of little else.<sup>119</sup> But it is thanks to soldiers such as these two that we have a largely complete record of what prisoners were fed during captivity in Hong Kong. Welsh wrote down what he ate nearly every day in 1942. Martyn was able to maintain a comprehensive list of what he was served for almost every day of his captivity, making his diary and notes an invaluable source. The Japanese provided enough rations to prevent outright starvation but did little beyond that. Rice was the principal foodstuff with items such as bread, vegetables, and tea also being reasonably common. On occasion, meat,

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<sup>117</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 50.

<sup>118</sup> Library and Archives Canada, Thomas Smith Forsyth Fonds, 1941-1945, 1993. Fonds/Collection. MG-E181, R2463-0-8-E, Diary entry for January 10, 1942.

<sup>119</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 24.5, Delbert Louis William Welsh, Diary, 1941-1942; Library and Archives Canada, Francis Denis Ford Martyn, Diary, 1941-1945, MG30-E324, R2097-0-5-E.



fish, or fruit were added to the menu. To obtain additional sustenance, the prisoners relied on trade, ingenuity, luck, the Red Cross, and each other.

This chapter concerns how the prisoners fought to keep their health during their imprisonment. It begins by describing their principal foodstuff of rice and their struggles to cook and eat it. Then it discusses the vital contribution that Red Cross packages played in the battle to stay healthy. Next, the focus turns to the practice of trading for food before moving on to the importance of tobacco as a commodity in the prison camps. Lastly, it looks at the various medical ailments that the POWs suffered and the difficulties the medical staff faced to save lives. A constant theme in this chapter is that the men of “C” Force worked collectively to survive. They shared food, cigarettes, and Red Cross goods, and supported and motivated each other when they were sick. This fraternal bonding was crucial during the challenging first year of captivity and it grew stronger as the years passed.

As few Canadians in the 1940s would have eaten rice as a staple, for many prisoners in Hong Kong it was their first experience with the cereal grain. Some could stomach it easily, but others detested it and traded away their portions for a different morsel of food or a cigarette. However, as they were often served rice two to three times a day, being willing and able to consume it was pivotal to maintaining some semblance of health. Once liberated, several prisoners swore off rice for the rest of their lives. “I never want to see or eat rice again as long as I live, in fact I don’t even like the sound of the word”, declared Frank Ebdon to a local newspaper when he returned home to Delhi, Ontario. “Rice was our main food daily all the time we were prisoners of the Japs and it got to the point where we detested the sight and taste of it

but we had to eat it to keep alive.”<sup>120</sup> Most of the rice served to Commonwealth prisoners in Hong Kong derived from a British stockpile put aside in case of a lengthy siege. Thus, initially the Japanese were serving the prisoners their own supplies. This rice was the highly polished variety which is less nutritious than vitamin-rich unpolished rice.<sup>121</sup> Rice was almost always available, but there were complications surrounding how to cook it, its quality, and the quantity served.

It is unlikely that any of “C” Force’s cooks knew how to prepare rice, but they learned quickly for their own benefit and the benefit of their fellow prisoners. Sergeant Howard Donnelly of the Winnipeg Grenadiers recalled that after the first few days, the Japanese supplied their camp with some gasoline barrels and bags of rice. This constituted their cooking implements and ten days of rations. They boiled the rice in the barrels, but it became a “gooey paste” that smelled of gasoline. Donnelly notes that while they enlisted a Chinese gentleman to teach them how to cook it properly, they still had to eat carefully to avoid the stones, maggots, worms, and rat droppings found in the rice.<sup>122</sup> Royal Rifle Donald Languedoc said that they nicknamed their sticky gruel “Rice-O” and that it swam with “insects, straw, grit and other extraneous material.”<sup>123</sup> The quality did not improve over time. In the late spring of 1942, food shortages were already apparent so the Japanese decided to raise a transport ship full of rice that had been sunk in the harbour. Having sat underwater for four months, the rice had turned soggy and many kernels had a black head the men referred to as kernel worm. The cooks started to make bread by pounding the rice into flour, but it was not enough nourishment, especially for

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<sup>120</sup> LAC, Ebdon Fonds, Newspaper clipping.

<sup>121</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 130.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 229; MacDonell, *One Soldier's Story 1939-1945*, 96.

<sup>123</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 29.6, Peter Louis MacDougall, Notes and Letters, 1941-1945, Donald Languedoc Interview.

those engaged in physical labour. It soon became apparent that the men would have to eat the worm-infested supplies. Leo Berard wrote that as it took great patience to separate the kernels of rice from the kernel worms, men simply gave up and ate everything. “The change to meat was nice,” Berard noted with a heavy dose of sarcasm.<sup>124</sup> Some benefitted from patience, like Lucien Brunet of the Canadian Postal Corps who used chopsticks to eat even though he also had western utensils. He reasoned that the longer that it took him to eat, the more enjoyment he derived from it.<sup>125</sup>

With the cooking of rice better understood, the enterprising chefs found that they had to invent new cooking methods when a different foodstuff was introduced. On New Year’s Day 1942, the Japanese brought some live pigs into the prisoner camp but neglected to show or tell the POWs how they were supposed to be cooked. A few days later four pigs became the test subjects. Harry White wrote that they converted the gasoline barrels by cutting off the upper portion. Once cleaned out, a pig could be placed inside and the whole barrel would be put over an open pit fire to cook the meat. White adds that there was not much to go around for approximately 2,000 men, but with added tinned vegetables and some greens, it made for the first decent meal that they had had. Major John Crawford recorded that the pigs allowed for each man to have about 180 grams of food, but it was a rare delicacy served so infrequently that it made little difference to men’s health. With the prisoners averaging 226 grams of rice per day, Crawford estimated that the total daily caloric intake for the first month hovered at around 900.<sup>126</sup> In the first three weeks of January 1942, Francis Martyn documented in his food log that breakfast consisted of rice, dinner was often “nil” or on occasion tea, and supper was rice

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<sup>124</sup> Berard, *17 Days Until Christmas*, 102-103.

<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 235.

<sup>126</sup> CWM, White Diary, January 1, 1942; Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong,” 4.

sporadically served with pork or soya beans. On January 17, Delbert Welsh wrote of the inadequate diet in his diary, “just had rice for breakfast and never had enough of that, never had any dinner, had enough rice for supper.”<sup>127</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this meager diet caused drastic weight loss amongst the POWs. The results were almost immediate as Lieutenant Collison Blaver recorded that he weighed 180 pounds when the Battle of Hong Kong commenced, but that only two weeks later he had lost 20 pounds. Over time the effects were even more startling. Lance Ross weighed 216 pounds back home in Quebec; but by February 1943 in Hong Kong he had lost nearly half of his body weight, weighing in at 113 pounds. This was the last time he was weighed so it is possible that he lost even more weight before being freed. Ernie Hodkinson’s medical records showed that he weighed 189 pounds in December 1941. But in July 1945, even after benefitting from all the packages and parcels received in that final year of the war, he weighed only 118 pounds.<sup>128</sup> By any measure, the soldiers were not fed enough, and it was up to the industrious and determined POWs to acquire extra sustenance.

Beyond what was served at mealtimes, there were a few other ways that one could get additional food. One method was to secure a job in the kitchens, thereby giving a POW the opportunity to scrounge a little extra from the pots when cooking or cleaning, a practice that brought resentment from fellow prisoners. Theft was another unscrupulous way to get food. While it did occur, most soldiers were reluctant to steal from each other and taking from the Japanese would almost certainly result in severe punishment. Growing fruit and vegetables in the

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<sup>127</sup> Library and Archives Canada, Francis Denis Ford Martyn. Diary, 1941-1945. MG30-E324, R2097-0-5-E, no date; CWM, Welsh Diary, January 17, 1942.

<sup>128</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date; Diary of Lance Ross, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 295; Hodkinson, *Ernie’s Story*, 86.

camp gardens proved effective in the final years of imprisonment, a subject that will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter which concerns POW pastimes. But the primary means of acquiring more food came from the Red Cross packages that periodically made their way into the camps.

The Red Cross has its origins in the 1859 Battle of Solferino. As the French and Austro-Hungarian empires fought in Northern Italy, a Swiss businessman named Henry Dunant was appalled to find that veterinary care for horses was better than the care given to wounded soldiers. He organized locals to assist him with medical relief, and in 1863 a group of Genevans, hoping to emulate Dunant's work, started an organization that became the International Committee of the Red Cross. More than fifty countries had ICRC delegations that were operational during the Second World War.<sup>129</sup> A major wartime activity for the Red Cross was the distribution of food rations and medical supplies to prisoners of war. But the Second World War severely tested the Red Cross's ability to perform its duties, particularly in Asia because the Japanese did not recognize the organization and did not feel bound to comply with its efforts. In Western Europe, with the exception of the last few months of the war, prisoners received Red Cross packages nearly every week. However, POWs in locations held by Japan, including Hong Kong, were lucky to receive five or six packages over the entirety of their imprisonment.<sup>130</sup> Many shipments of food rations, cigarettes, clothes, and medical supplies were delivered to Hong Kong, but the Japanese appropriated a generous portion for themselves. One Canadian claimed a reliable source told him that the Japanese had stolen 30 percent of the Red Cross packages and

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<sup>129</sup> Forsythe and Rieffer-Flanagan, *The International Committee of the Red Cross*, 1; International Federation of Red Cross, *National Societies Directory*, <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/who-we-are/national-societies/national-societies-directory/>.

<sup>130</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 72.

only released the others when they saw fit. Another Canadian, Leslie Canivet, stated that after the war that the prisoners found a warehouse full of undistributed Red Cross goods.<sup>131</sup> However, some packages were approved for delivery to the prisoners in Hong Kong and their importance to the soldiers' health, morale, and survival cannot be understated.<sup>132</sup>

The diphtheria epidemic in the fall of 1942 brought many of the soldiers to their lowest point. The war dragged on, men were dying from disease and malnutrition every day, and no long-term improvement in quality of life or sustenance seemed possible. The Japanese informed the Canadian senior officers in early October 1942 that a Canadian Red Cross shipment had arrived, but weeks later nothing more had been heard.<sup>133</sup> The high anticipation followed by crushing disappointment would have been demoralizing, but on November their patience was rewarded. Stores of corned beef (Bully Beef) and raisins were issued, and on November 28 group parcels were distributed to the officers and medical staff and individual parcels were released to the prisoners. The effect that this had on health and morale was immediate. Raymond Elliott indicated that two ounces of Bully Beef was the first meat that he had eaten in five months. On receiving the goods James MacMillan declared that "the unbelievable had happened," while Georges Verreault simply called the packages "a gift from heaven."<sup>134</sup> The individual parcels delivered on the 28th contained fourteen items of food and one bar of soap.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 159; CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995.

<sup>132</sup> Red Cross packages, although more frequently distributed, were equally valuable to Allied prisoners in Europe. Military historian Simon MacKenzie wrote that Red Cross parcels in German POW camps "saved the lives of many thousands of men and generally made life more bearable where it had verged on the intolerable." S. P. MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 160.

<sup>133</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 131.

<sup>134</sup> CWM, Elliott Diary, November 21, 1942; CWM, MacMillan Diary, November 21, 1942; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 108.

<sup>135</sup> Donald Geraghty recorded the contents of this Red Cross parcel in his diary. The food items were as follows: 1 bar of chocolate, 1 tin each of margarine, condensed milk, tomatoes, gelatin, syrup, cheese, apple pudding, steak and tomato pudding (M&V), bacon, creamed rice, biscuits, 2 tins of sugar, and 1 package of tea. CWM, Geraghty

Lieutenant White reported on the men's elation at receiving such varied and sought-after supplies: "talk about kids at a Christmas tree, nothing to the way we danced around here. The morale in camp has improved 100 per cent." MacMillan concurred by noting that "one can't imagine what kind of change a little cheer like this brings over the whole place." The odd man would eat his whole parcel in one or two sittings, but most realized the importance of spreading it out. Dr. Crawford recalled that the supplies raised optimism amongst the men that if their delivery became a regular occurrence, they might just survive captivity. Nevertheless, the medical staff decided to distribute the group foodstuffs very carefully, just enough to bring the caloric intake up to 2,800 daily calories. This policy ensured that unit supplies lasted throughout 1943, when no new Red Cross parcels were received, and into 1944.<sup>136</sup>

Individual supplies did not last nearly as long, but the effect on one's mood was profound. Lance Ross commented that men were still dying the day the parcels were issued, but that going forward they would save a lot of lives. Donald Geraghty was weakened with sickness when he received his parcel but noted that after a few days the condition of his inflamed feet improved, and he managed to get some deep sleep for the first time in a week. Arthur Squires, also feeling better thanks to the Red Cross, remarked on December 11 that it had been a week since they had a death in camp and that that was a "wonderful improvement."<sup>137</sup> The receipt of so much in such a short span of time inspired the men to create makeshift immersion heaters to

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Diary, p. 2. Captain Lionel Hurd wrote in his diary that the officers had received their parcels a day earlier on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Though the contents were similar, and they contained the same number of items, Hurd noted that his parcel had things such as fish paste, raspberry jam, and candy from the Pascall company. It is unclear why there would have been a difference. Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 191.

<sup>136</sup> CWM, White Diary, November 29, 1942; CWM, MacMillan Diary, November 30, 1942; Crawford, "A Medical Officer in Hong Kong," 7-8.

<sup>137</sup> Quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 304; CWM, Geraghty Diary, December 3, 1942; CWM, Squires Diary, December 11, 1942.

cook their food, once again putting their ingenuity and resourcefulness on display. They used cans filled with water and bamboo strips connected to barred wires to heat the water, but this practice caused power failures and provoked the Japanese to intermittently shut off their electricity.<sup>138</sup> This setback aside, by 1942's end health was on the rise. And with the bulk foods in that shipment and individual food parcels, many men were able to save something for their Christmas meal. The saved food, in conjunction with the meal that the kitchen was preparing, ensured that the soldiers had something to celebrate on Christmas Day. They were captives, but at least they could fill their stomachs on a special occasion. It proved to be much more memorable than their previous Christmas in Hong Kong when they surrendered to the Japanese Army.

Arthur Squires recorded that the following items were on the Christmas menu: Bully Beef, M&V (a meat and vegetable stew), cake, pudding, greens, cocoa, stewed pears, and a pear pastry. Notwithstanding the greens and cocoa, many would have been tasting the other items for the first time in nearly a year, causing one soldier to declare it "a darn good Xmas."<sup>139</sup> Private Stan Baty of the Winnipeg Grenadiers said years later that he did not think he had ever enjoyed a Christmas meal as much as that one. It was a hopeful end to what had been the most difficult and challenging year of those men's lives. Writing on January 1, 1943, James MacMillan said that the only joy from the previous year was the receipt of the Red Cross packages. He thanked God for the salvation the Red Cross provided and noted the improvement in camp health as sight was returning to some who had lost it, while others were finally finding relief from dysentery and chronic diarrhea.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 243-244; CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995.

<sup>139</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, January 4, 1943; CWM, Geraghty Diary, December 26, 1942.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Daniel G. Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 244; CWM, MacMillan Diary, January 1, 1943.



For some, depending on which camp, hospital, or location to which they were transferred, this was their only Red Cross package for the entire war. Others were more fortunate. By 1943's end most of the Canadians had been moved to Japan to begin a new phase of their captivity as war industry labourers. The most infirmed patients remained in Hong Kong as did the senior Canadian officers who would have access to more Red Cross supplies. In February 1943, Donald Geraghty reported that more individual parcels had been released. Major Baird, who was in hospital with dysentery at the time, commented that "You have no idea how we appreciate them. The little extras we get seem to taste so good, and the boys cheer up and seem to improve in health right away." In April, Lieutenant White recorded that the Red Cross had provided ten yen (\$55.00 in 2018) for each man. He echoed the feelings of many, stating "thank God there is such a thing as the Red Cross. Will always subscribe to them when and if I get home. It's certainly saved lives."<sup>141</sup> By the spring of 1944, most of the initial shipment had been exhausted, but in April and May the camp received parcels from the Chinese Red Cross. Lieutenant Corrigan of the Grenadiers wrote of the former shipment that the men owed their lives to the food. Of the latter shipment he also thanked God and was grateful "that organizations of this kind are allowed to perform at least some of their functions in wartime."<sup>142</sup>

In August 1944, the prisoners received some more individual food parcels from the Canadian Red Cross,<sup>143</sup> but the shipment's most important part was the medical supplies. For the first time Dr. Crawford's staff had enough vitamin products to address the persistent problem of

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<sup>141</sup> CWM, Geraghty Diary, February 14, 1943; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 161; CWM, White Diary, April 7, 1943.

<sup>142</sup> Lieutenant Corrigan recorded that both Chinese Red Cross parcels contained food items such as peanut butter, shark oil, bran, brown sugar, and soybean powder. Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 124 and 128.

<sup>143</sup> Geraghty again recorded the contents in his diary. This time the parcels contained: milk powder, butter, biscuits, jam, Bully Beef, luncheon meat, salmon, sardines, chocolate, sugar, raisins, prunes, cheese, salt and pepper, tea or coffee, and a bar of soap. CWM, Geraghty Diary, p. 35. This time, Captain Hurd's list was the same. Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 200.

malnutrition. Again, caution was exercised, and the supply lasted into the new year. Major Baird wrote in September 1944 that “if it weren’t for the Red Cross, this camp would be really in a serious condition.” He credits the food and medicine for a rise in the men’s physical state and that he and others were gaining weight for the first time in captivity. But, by the end of October, his diary noted that they had used up their Red Cross boxes and were back to losing weight. Fortunately, at the beginning of March 1945 a shipment of individual British Red Cross supplies (of 1942 origin) were released to the prisoners, as was a stockpile of drugs from the American Red Cross.<sup>144</sup>

There is no former prisoner of war in Hong Kong who will not sing the Red Cross’s praises. The evidence from prisoner diaries and memoirs shows that the organization’s supplies, and their timely distributions, raised hope, morale, and most importantly, health to acceptable levels. Careful management and sharing ensured that food and medicine lasted for the longest possible period. The general spirit in camp soared when Red Cross supplies were delivered. It showed the prisoners that they were not forgotten, and it was a key motivational factor, physically and mentally, for the POWs’ struggle to survive.

Besides the Red Cross packages, the principal means of acquiring more food was to trade for it. North Point Camp was encircled by a barbed-wire fence approximately seven feet high. In the early months of captivity, before a parallel electric fence was erected in the late spring or early summer of 1942,<sup>145</sup> it was possible to trade through the fence with Hong Kong locals or Chinese refugees. The Japanese allowed many prisoners to enter camp with what little money

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<sup>144</sup> Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong,” 9; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 210, 211, and 215. Baird noted that the British parcel was like the first Canadian one that they had received more than two years earlier. The difference was that this one had “been here all the time spoiling.” Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 237.

<sup>145</sup> Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, 57.

they still possessed as part of their personal possessions. A few days into imprisonment Harry White wrote that despite being patrolled by a dozen sentries, a constant crowd at the fence tried to sell looted goods such as cigarettes, biscuits, and Bully Beef to the prisoners. In some instances, soldiers were buying back their own rations but at an exorbitant price. On the inflated cost, White noted that three small buns would cost around 27 cents Canadian (\$4.00 in 2018), while Raymond Elliott recorded in early January 1942 that one dollar (approximately \$15.00 in 2018) could only buy ten cigarettes leading him to exclaim “if we could get out of here we would ring there dam [*sic*] necks.” Delbert Welsh also discussed the fence trade in early January, mentioning that he and a friend bought some cakes and cans of rice one morning and in conjunction with their regular meals it was “just enough.”<sup>146</sup> As some Japanese guards were indifferent to the activity, trade through the fence flourished at first. But as early as January 21, 1942, Kenneth Baird bemoaned that it was becoming rare and would soon cease entirely as the authorities were beginning to crack down on it. “The Japs are shooting the Chinese that bring things to the fence for sale” he wrote adding that the previous Sunday two young girls had been killed for such an infraction. Canadians were not exempt from these punishments either as Thomas Forsyth recorded on February 3, 1942, when a fellow soldier was caught buying goods through the fence. He was slapped about the face, had his goods confiscated, and was taken away to see the camp commandant.<sup>147</sup> With trade through the fence largely shut down after the first few months, the prisoners had to try different ways to acquire extra rations.

Some prisoners traded food that they disliked for something that they found easier to stomach. Royal Rifle Donald Geraghty, one morning after a “very poor breakfast,” exchanged

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<sup>146</sup> CWM, White Diary, December 30, 1941; CWM, Elliott Diary, January 2, 1942; CWM, Welsh Diary, January 5, 1942.

<sup>147</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 55; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for February 3, 1942.

his rice to a fellow prisoner for an additional bun. Some received extra rations if ill or employed in labour. Others shared a part of their meal with a friend if they felt that he needed it more. Harry White mentioned a friend named “Ted” who gave him the rice and greens he was unable to, or did not want to, finish. This extra sustenance “sure helps a lot,” White penned in the summer of 1944. In April 1945, as the war’s end neared, creative prisoners began to sell food that they had made. A kind of toffee was created using brown sugar and peanut oil, and the one-inch squares were sold for a yen a piece (about \$5.50 in Canadian dollars in 2018).<sup>148</sup> Such cooking supplies were more common in the first few months of 1945 as the Japanese granted more parcels from the Red Cross and Canada entry into Hong Kong. These extra supplies gave the Canadians an unusual level of financial clout with their captors and they used it to their advantage, especially where cigarettes were concerned. Canadian tobacco was traded to the Japanese who, in turn, traded it in downtown Hong Kong and returned to camp with foodstuffs for the prisoners. “It’s the most excitement we’ve seen since becoming prisoners”, White exclaimed. “The morale is way up, everyone as optimistic as hell.” But the supplies dwindled quickly. By May, White had sold his last pack of cigarettes for eggs and in August he was forced to sell his great coat and battledress jacket for beans.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, the importance of cigarettes in Hong Kong prison camps cannot be discounted; next to food, they were easily the most valuable commodity. Once traded they *were* food.

In fact, tobacco may have been more valuable than food, because according to Leslie Canivet, “money in POW camps was cigarettes.” He claimed, for example, that a ring might secure a couple of packs of cigarettes, and for one cigarette you could buy a handful of greens to

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<sup>148</sup> CWM, Geraghty Diary, September 19, 1942; CWM, White Diary, August 14, 1944 and April 12, 1945.

<sup>149</sup> CWM, White Diary, February 30, 1945, May 14, 1945, and August 10, 1945. Presumably, White was selling his possessions to the Japanese as it is unlikely that prisoners would have had much food to trade.

put in your rice or some sugar to go with your tea. “This is pretty well how I survived”, he recalled. In July 1942, Thomas Forsyth commented that cigarettes were still the primary means of exchange in camp with guards and with each other. “One fag buys a bun, 2 or 3 a stew. Half of one a sweet sauce or an issue of black China tea.” Non-food goods were also available. On one occasion Baird was able to buy a sun helmet for 30 cigarettes and indicated that he would be willing to part with the same number of smokes for two sheets to help modify his “Beauty Rest.” Signalman Arthur Squires wrote that initially one pack could buy a shirt, a pair of socks, or a mess tin, while two packs could secure a battle dress or razor blades.<sup>150</sup> Some Canadians went into camp with their own cigarettes, but when this supply was quickly exhausted, they had to acquire tobacco by other means.

The Japanese were happy to sell or trade cigarettes with the prisoners, especially since they valued foreign brands more than their own. They also provided cigarettes to men who worked on various assignments around camp. Squires once helped load wood onto a truck and was given two cigarettes for his efforts. He traded one for a slice of bread with the intention of doing the same thing the following day. James MacMillan noted that a full day of work at Kai Tak Airport was also worth two cigarettes. Canivet recalled that work at Kai Tak brought in ten cents (\$1.50 in 2018) a day. But as a pack of Ruby Queen cigarettes could cost as much as twenty-five cents (\$3.75), he and his mess mates pooled their resources and shared with each other. It seems cigarettes were smoked and used as currency in equal measures. Raymond Elliott wrote that he was paid ten cents a day (\$1.50) and three cigarettes for work at Kai Tak in October 1942. He noted the modest canteen in camp and the availability of certain food items,

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<sup>150</sup> CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for July 23, 1942; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 86; CWM, Squires Diary, March 6, 1942. Squires does not specify where these supplies came from, but they were likely stolen after the battle from either British camps or stores in Hong Kong and then sold to prisoners.

but the prices were so high that he would have to work for 38 days to buy one tin of sardines.<sup>151</sup> Cigarettes were almost always in short supply and it is unsurprising that camp morale would soar with the acquisition of a large supply. This typically happened in one of two ways: with the arrival of a package from the Red Cross or from loved ones in Canada, or from their senior officers who unselfishly shared with their men.

Article Twenty-Three of the 1929 Geneva Convention states that “officers and persons of equivalent status who are prisoners of war shall receive from the detaining Power the same pay as officers of corresponding rank in the armed forces of that Power.”<sup>152</sup> Incredibly, this was one provision that the Japanese complied with. Thus, in mid-March 1942, Canadian officers began to be paid. Historian Brereton Greenhous noted that majors received 140 yen a month and lieutenants received 58, although he added that the Japanese deducted money for “board and lodging.”<sup>153</sup> Other ranks received no money until work parties started in mid-June, but officers opened a successful voluntary fund and recommended that officers contribute 60 percent of their pay to said fund. Unsurprisingly, this policy put the senior men in good stead with their soldiers.<sup>154</sup> Even if they partook in that act of kindness, officers still had the means to purchase extra goods, especially cigarettes which, at least initially, could be bought in the camp canteen.

There is evidence to suggest that Canadian officers were very generous with their cigarettes. This act of sharing a prized possession was appreciated by the recipients, but was also

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<sup>151</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, March 6, 1942; CWM, MacMillan Diary, September 27, 1942; CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995; CWM, Elliott Diary, October 30, 1942. In March 1942, the Japanese allowed a canteen to be opened and provided some supplies to be sold. But the limited money the soldiers had was quickly spent and expensive prices kept most away. However, it did sell cigarettes and once the soldiers were earning money from work projects the canteen became useful again. Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 68.

<sup>152</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, *Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, July 27, 1929, Article 23, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/305-430024?OpenDocument>.

<sup>153</sup> Greenhous, *“C” Force to Hong Kong*, 122.

<sup>154</sup> Lindsay, *At the Going Down of the Sun*, 55.

gratifying for the giver. The officers considered it their duty to take care of their men, and sharing tobacco was a simple method of raising morale and keeping their men happy. Grenadier Major Baird wrote on January 14, 1942, that the supply of tobacco he had brought into camp was already depleted. He had shared about half with the men in his company reasoning that “when a person can have a smoke, the lack of food isn’t nearly so bad.” It would be a struggle to abstain from cigarettes, but Baird noted that most of them “are in the same boat.” If his men were going to suffer, Baird would suffer with them. Later in May, when he had purchased more, he commented on the difficulty of evenly distributing smokes amongst a company of at least a hundred men. But in the same passage he indicated that his soldiers were making sandals and other things to sell for cigarettes, another instance where prisoner ingenuity proved resourceful and timely, as sandals were necessary for comfort in the hot weather. In June, a brief Delbert Welsh diary entry revealed that an unnamed officer had given him two cigarettes and a cake of soap, both valuable gifts that could be used or traded.<sup>155</sup>

On December 24, 1942, nearly all POWs wrote of receiving a Red Cross package and ten yen (\$55.00 in 2018) from the people of Canada as a Christmas gift. “Our big surprise came today,” announced James MacMillan, who described the indispensable present as arriving in a white envelope adorned with Christmas trees and the words “Christmas greetings from the people of Canada.” Baird took his money and bought cigarettes for the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and men of his company. Though it only left him with a single yen (\$5.50) he was confident that this was the right thing to do as “it was the only thing I could buy that they would appreciate.” On Christmas Day, Baird took his largesse where it would be needed most, the hospitals. He visited his 40 men spread across three hospitals, “the Dip[htheria]., the General,

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<sup>155</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 51 and 105; CWM, Welsh Diary, June 18, 1942.

and the Dip. convalescent ward” where he distributed a few smokes to each man and stayed for a talk. Unconcerned with his own health and the possibility of contracting disease, Baird’s selfless act surely inspired and motivated his men. The surprise shipment inspired Harry White to write on Boxing Day of how the packages and money were able to provide “C” Force with some measure of Christmas cheer. The Red Cross goods ensured that they had a special meal, with the orchestra providing the music and the officers handing out a pack of cigarettes to each man. According to White, the British officers did no such thing for their men and did not contribute to the joint funds that had been set up to aid the most infirm of men as the Canadians had done.<sup>156</sup> Even as the war and their imprisonment dragged on, the officers became no less charitable. In late February 1945, a signalman from Victoria wrote that some of the boys had not received any cigarettes from their Canadian comfort parcels. However, several officers, having received thousands of cigarettes from the Royal Rifles of Canada Prisoner of War Association and in their private parcels, donated a total of 22,000 meaning that each man would get 100. Lieutenant Leonard Corrigan confirmed his involvement in this benevolent act and said that “everyone in camp was smoking Canadian cigarettes before the day was out.” He also recorded that Canadian generosity had not gone unnoticed by some members of the other units and that he received many complimentary comments.<sup>157</sup>

Sometimes, to encourage participation in camp activities, cigarettes were given out by the officers as prizes. It was important to keep men active and involved in camp activities, so the officers would attach some extra motivation. On Dominion Day, July 1, 1942, there was a sports day with baseball, volleyball, and distance throwing making up the games, while cigarettes

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<sup>156</sup> CWM, MacMillan Diary, December 24, 1942; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 143 and 147; CWM, White Diary, December 26, 1942.

<sup>157</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, February 27, 1945; Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 163.



served as the trophies. On another occasion a member of the Royal Rifles wrote that he received a cigarette from his lieutenant just for playing ball, a cigarette he promptly traded for a slice of bread. Major Baird spoke of weekly quiz contests and spelling matches that “keep the men interested and the prizes are cigarettes.” He calculated that he handed out about five for every one that he smoked, and though this practice often rendered him light of tobacco, he did it “to make the men’s lives a little more livable.”<sup>158</sup> This fraternal pooling and distributing of cigarettes was instrumental in the prisoner’s survival. The men respected their officers and their generosity, and it boosted unit morale. But more importantly, possessing tobacco gave one the opportunity to trade it for the most crucial component of their survival: food. Indeed, cigarettes made life more bearable in many ways, but they also had devastating consequences for those unable to control their addictions.

Cigarettes and smoking could play a contrasting role in the prisoners’ lives. Having cigarettes gave one a certain measure of power. A nonsmoker or a casual one would have much to gain by trading tobacco rations for extra food or other items, or by sharing and buying favour with fellow prisoners or Japanese guards. But a smoker with a severe addiction could jeopardize his health, and his life, in a quest to satisfy his nicotine cravings. Three weeks into captivity both Georges Verreault and Thomas Forsyth commented on how desperate smokers were picking up discarded butts hoping that there was still a puff or two left at the end, but this was quickly halted by the medical officers who feared it would spread dysentery and other communicable diseases. Kenneth Cambon, who volunteered as an orderly in Hong Kong and became a physician in his postwar life, wrote that the need was so acute for some that they had no qualms about trading their rations for cigarettes. One prisoner estimated that “about 40% of internees will trade a slice

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<sup>158</sup> CWM, White Diary, July 1, 1942; CWM, Elliott Diary, March 16, 1942; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 107.

of bread or a ration for a cig” and that half of the cigarettes were shared individually by at least four men despite efforts to stop the practice.<sup>159</sup>

Cigarettes are highly addictive, and the forced abstinence was crippling for some. Smokers needed help and some soldiers were committed to giving their comrades some encouragement to break the habit or at least get a grip on their addiction. Verreault had a friend who smoked constantly and refused to eat his rice. After ‘Beaton’ traded his watch for a few packs of cigarettes, Verreault figured this “hardheadedness will likely kill him” and that he would not have the strength to fight diseases when they came. So Verreault took it upon himself to ensure that his friend would eat. By warming, roasting, and frying the rice he was able to convince his compatriot to ingest some. Though described by Verreault as “slowly dying” and “a walking skeleton”, John Beaton survived imprisonment in Hong Kong and Japan, passing away in 2005. Though concerned with helping his friend, Verreault suffered from addiction himself, writing on one occasion that he smoked small slivers of wood in his pipe since he could no longer tolerate not smoking. Baird found being without cigarettes worse during the middle of the night when one “wakens and can’t go back to sleep.”<sup>160</sup> Smoking alleviated the hunger pangs for many, including Lieutenant White who wisely rationed his cigarettes to allow for one in the morning and one in the afternoon and evening. But after selling his watch for fifteen packs, he found himself to be popular with his fellow prisoners who would congregate around his bed.<sup>161</sup> Sympathetic and ignoring rules he should have been following as an officer, he occasionally shared a smoke with up to six men. White often tried to quit but failed. Raymond Elliott was

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<sup>159</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 51; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for January 14, 1942; Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito*, 38; CWM, Squires Diary, March 6, 1942.

<sup>160</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 52, 60, and 70, 1942; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 62.

<sup>161</sup> White does not state to whom he sold his watch, though it might have been a Japanese officer as it is unlikely that a prisoner would have the need for a watch or the cigarettes with which to trade for it.

more successful, perhaps due to making a cash bet with a friend.<sup>162</sup> Health and the motivation to maintain it were crucial to survival in the POW camps. Some gave up too easily. Others saw it as their duty not only to survive themselves, but to help their friends and comrades. Still, being fit and reasonably well fed could only do so much for one's health once diseases began to ravage the camps. In most instances, even for the medical officers, there was little the men could do to help each other if they contracted dysentery or diphtheria.

Dr. Crawford kept a monthly return and nominal roll for the sick men under his care. From December 28, 1941 to January 31, 1942, he recorded that 117 Canadians had been admitted in internment camp hospitals at Sham Shui Po and North Point for various ailments. Diarrhea and dysentery accounted for 95 cases, malaria and fever were responsible for another 13. This was a sign of things to come, especially for the former two illnesses. But for the moment there was good news. Of the 117 patients, 94 were discharged and one was transported although to where is not mentioned. That left 22 men under care, meaning that none of them had died.<sup>163</sup> Crawford and his staff would not be so helpful in the future.

Dysentery was the most persistent and widespread of the diseases facing the Canadian POWs. Easily communicable, it causes intense abdominal pain and the discharge of bloody stool. The loss of blood could be substantial, and more severe cases often resulted in death.<sup>164</sup> In North Point an old warehouse had been converted to serve as the dysentery hospital, although serious cases were sent to Bowen Road Hospital. Royal Rifle Geoffrey Marston had such a dangerous battle with the disease that he titled his unpublished autobiography, "The Scourge of Dysentery."

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<sup>162</sup> CWM, White Diary, March 9, 1942 and June 18, 1944; CWM, Elliott Diary, March 2, 1942.

<sup>163</sup> Library and Archives Canada, John Neilson Crawford Fonds, 1941-1945, Fonds/Collection, MG30 E213 Vol. 1, File #1.

<sup>164</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 171-172.

He describes frequent bowel movements, stomach cramps, nausea, and general weakness. He soon found his “stool streaked with blood and mucus.” Sent to the camp hospital he was given a cot on the warehouse floor under a roof which leaked rain. “The atmosphere was frightening,” he recalled. “Patients were tottering at a snail’s pace along a narrow aisleway to reach a closed-in quarter at the end of the ward that was used as a toilet. Those unable to muster strength to leave their so-called beds lay in their own muck. Dirty blood-stained pieces of toilet paper littered the floor.”<sup>165</sup> The existing supplies of sulfa drugs and tooth powder were quickly exhausted, meaning the cure was often a starvation diet of tea only for four days. Some considered themselves fortunate to be among the worst afflicted as a transfer to Bowen Road usually meant better food and conditions.<sup>166</sup> Marston became one of those patients and managed to survive dysentery, giving full credit to the exhausted and overworked medical staff. He singled out the nursing sisters, Katherine Christie and Ann Waters, for particular praise.<sup>167</sup> Unable to contain his emotions, he cried upon discharge. “I owed my life to them” he stated. Before he left the hospital, he went from bed to bed, holding hands with the patients to offer some encouragement.<sup>168</sup> He had survived; possibly others could do so too.

While dysentery was rampant and caused many deaths over the course of incarceration, the most feared disease was diphtheria which became a lethal epidemic in the fall of 1942, killing at least 58 Canadians. Highly infectious, the disease is caused by bacteria that produces a heavy membrane on the inside of the throat. As with dysentery, the disease in Hong Kong was

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<sup>165</sup> Library and Archives Canada, Geoffrey C. Marston Fonds. 1942, 1970. Fonds/Collection. MG31-G7, R5057-0-2-E, “The Scourge of Dysentery,” unpublished autobiography, 2.

<sup>166</sup> Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 48; Palmer, *Dark Side of the Sun*, 53.

<sup>167</sup> Christie and Waters tended to patients at Bowen Road Hospital and later at the Stanley Internment Camp for civilians. In September 1943 the United States and Japan agreed to a prisoner exchange and the two Nursing Sisters were among Canadian civilians included in the deal. The two women returned to Canada on December 2, 1943 and remained in contact with each other for many years thereafter.

<sup>168</sup> LAC, Marston Fonds, “The Scourge of Dysentery”, 16.

largely the result of unsanitary conditions and overcrowding. Death is usually caused by either asphyxiation or by the toxins developed by the bacteria which incites heart failure.<sup>169</sup> Royal Rifle Kenneth Cambon noted that his battle with diphtheria began because the Institut national de santé publique du Québec and the Canadian Army had failed to immunize the men against the disease.<sup>170</sup> Diphtheria manifested itself at North Point in August 1942, leading Dr. Crawford to report that an epidemic was likely. But his warning was ignored by the Japanese who refused to provide any anti-toxins. In Sham Shui Po the disease spread quickly as there were only twelve latrine buckets for 500 patients. At least 50 patients were crowded into a hut that was only large enough to accommodate 32, meaning that most huts were without enough beds on which the sick could rest.<sup>171</sup>

In September and October 1942 diphtheria was killing prisoners almost every day. Royal Rifle Delbert Welsh wrote that he was admitted to hospital on September 29. On October 4 he recorded his three meals as he had consistently done since captivity started. On the 5th he penned his final entry “Never eat [*sic*] anything all day. Couldn’t swallow.” He died the following day at just 21 years of age. The disease was devastating for camp morale. Georges Verreault, so terrified by the death around him and fearing that he may be next, gave his diary to new friend William Allister for safekeeping. Raymond Elliott also wondered “who will be next?” after writing at October’s end that 50 Canadians had died in the previous six weeks.<sup>172</sup> A common element in prisoner diaries at this time, indeed throughout incarceration, was the scrupulous recording of the names of ill comrades and of those who had succumbed to disease. Elliott noted

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<sup>169</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 157.

<sup>170</sup> Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito*, 45.

<sup>171</sup> Library and Archives Canada, George B. Puddicombe Fonds. 1939-1951. Fonds/Collection. MG30-E567, R10740-0-8-E. *Summary of Evidence*, File 1-15.

<sup>172</sup> CWM, Welsh Diary, October 4 and 5, 1942; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 92; CWM, Elliott Diary, October 29, 1942.

when friends went into or came out of the hospital, as did Welsh before his death. Collison Blaver and Francis Martyn kept lists of “fallen comrades” recording the dates and causes of deaths.<sup>173</sup> Perhaps to serve as evidence of their atrocious living conditions, it is just as likely that these meticulous recordings were meant to memorialize those who could not complete the second mission by surviving their captivity. Though prisoners, they were still soldiers and felt it was their duty to remember their fallen brothers.

Many diaries and memoirs mention the death of the commanding officer of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, Lieutenant-Colonel John Sutcliffe, who died of beriberi and dysentery in April 1942. The loss of the most senior man was demoralizing, as described by Leo Berard: “The knowledge that one of our senior officers had died of disease took part of our spirit as well. It was particularly sad and cruelly ironic that the one man who took care to ensure that we maintained the highest standards of hygiene and sanitation should be one of the first fatal victims.” Nathan Greenfield noted that Sutcliffe’s funeral attendance was the largest for any of the 500 men who had died in battle or in the camps. The Japanese commandant allowed 32 officers and men to attend the service which was conducted by three Canadian chaplains and a British padre.<sup>174</sup> The loss of friends never became easier despite it being a constant occurrence for nearly four years. In the summer of 1945, both Ernie Hodkinson and Kenneth Baird were devastated by the illness and subsequent death of their close friend Harry Hook. Only a few weeks from the war’s end, Hook passed away on July 7 from meningitis and malaria. His hometown friend, Hodkinson, wrote, “He was extremely courageous and cheerful...carrying more than his share of all things during our incarceration – a very pitiful end for a genuinely true, honest, sympathetic,

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<sup>173</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date; LAC, Martyn Diary, no date.

<sup>174</sup> Berard, *17 Days Until Christmas*, 103; Greenfield, *The Damned*, 256.

sacrificing, noble character.”<sup>175</sup> The death of these two role models indicates that other health concerns accompanied dysentery and diphtheria. Moreover, despite the best efforts of the men to remain healthy and active, the range of diseases in Hong Kong did not discriminate.

Due to the low-protein and low-vitamin diet of the prisoners, deficiency diseases such as beriberi, pellagra, and electric feet (also known in camp as burning feet or happy feet) syndrome were also a regular menace. Beriberi, caused by an extended lack in the diet of vitamin B1, produces swelling due to the body’s retention of fluids. Too much swelling in the chest can result in heart failure. In April 1942, Arthur Squires wrote that a friend succumbed to malaria, dysentery, and beriberi, but he felt that his friend might have pulled through were it not for the last disease. The pain begins in the feet and legs, so Squires would take to massaging a friend’s limbs to offer some relief.<sup>176</sup> This simple act was yet another example of the men pulling together to help each other through the toughest times. Sometimes pellagra and beriberi afflicted prisoners at the same time. Resulting from a lack of lack of vitamin B3, pellagra affects the skin, stomach, and brain, causing skin lesions, failing vision, sore feet, and as with beriberi, persistent urination. William Allister commented that it “brought open, running pus sores to many parts of the mouth and body.”<sup>177</sup> Prisoner misery was further compounded in the fall of 1942 as a third deficiency disease made its presence felt.

Arguably the most painful sickness resulting from malnutrition was electric feet, better known as Grierson-Gopalan syndrome. Major Baird lamented in May 1942 that “on top of everything else the boys have what they call electric feet. They burn and ache...you see men sitting and holding their feet, rocking back and forth and crying like a child...” One prisoner said

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<sup>175</sup> Hodkinson, *Ernie’s Story*, 84-85; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 252-253.

<sup>176</sup> Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, 141; CWM, Squires Diary, April 24, 1942.

<sup>177</sup> Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, 151-152; Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 65.

they called it electric feet because it felt like “pins and needles of searing, shooting fire. It would hurt so severely that slaves<sup>178</sup> would walk on the parade square at night to ease the pain.”

Another added that it “shocks as though a needle or electric wire contacted the feet, and constantly all day and night. No wonder some of the men are nearly batty.”<sup>179</sup> If they did not cause death, all three diseases had the potential to disable men for the rest of their lives.

Blindness was added to the list of woes. By May 1943, Arthur Squires estimated that ten percent of the men could not recognize a face at forty yards. Avitaminosis, a condition caused from a lack of vitamins, and diphtheria were responsible for full or partial blindness in 66 members of “C” Force.<sup>180</sup> With such a range of health concerns afflicting the prisoners, it must have been devastating to lose one’s sight in addition to everything else. The medical officers did what they could given their means. But credit must also go to the average soldier, as many of them were determined to help their sick comrades, even if all they could offer was moral support. Many of them recognized that if they were to survive, they had a better chance of doing it together.

Some soldiers, as their senior officers had, visited sick friends to encourage a speedy recovery. Tom Forsyth was touched by the kindness of his fellow Grenadiers who visited him in both Sham Shui Po and North Point when he was recovering from dysentery. Furthermore, he drew inspiration from hospital mate Eric Anderson who was badly injured in the fighting. Despite having shrapnel in both legs and one arm, Forsyth commented on Anderson’s indomitable spirit, writing that he was “remarkably cheerful, though both legs are in a cast from

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<sup>178</sup> In his memoir *17 Days until Christmas* Berard often refers to the prisoners as “slaves.” Though they were usually paid a small amount of money for work on various projects, most veterans would likely agree with that assessment.

<sup>179</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 111; Berard, *17 Days Until Christmas*, 105; CWM, White Diary, December 23, 1942.

<sup>180</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, May 7, 1943; Serge Marc Durflinger, *Veterans with a Vision: Canada's War Blinded in Peace and War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 195-196.



toes to knee.”<sup>181</sup> On January 1, 1943, several Royal Rifles visited their friends in Sham Shui Po’s so-called agony ward where the sickest men were confined. Raymond Elliott, feeling healthy for the first time in a year, took the opportunity to check in with those less fortunate, noting “some men deaf, some men blind. All from lack of food.” Frank Ebdon echoed those words when he and another Rifle visited their company mate Harry Adams, commenting that he “still looks bad, he was blind, deaf + light in the head all due to Malnutrition and Electric feet.”<sup>182</sup> Adams survived his illness and made it home to Canada. These hospital visits reminded the men that their brothers-in-arms were still there and that they still cared. In his study of POWs in the Far East author and *The Times* journalist Brian MacArthur reasoned that kinship and togetherness were critical factors for prisoners under the Japanese. “The strength of the strongest increased the chances of survival of the weakest, and the men became their brothers’ keepers.”<sup>183</sup> It was yet further proof for the Canadians that survival depended on teamwork and a belief in each other.

Compassion for their fellow Canadians was an enduring characteristic during “C” Force’s imprisonment. In late spring 1944, Grenadier Campbell Rutherford weighed less than 100 pounds, was badly jaundiced, and had contracted parasitic worms. To give his body a mental and physical boost, the men in his company voted to give him their eggs that the Japanese had brought into camp. One onlooker remarked that “to most of them it would be the first egg they’d had in months and was a real sacrifice.”<sup>184</sup> There were few sacrifices greater than giving up food, but it seems that this was done often with no complaints.

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<sup>181</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entries for February 21, 24, and March 16, 1942.

<sup>182</sup> CWM, Elliott Diary, January 1, 1943; LAC, Ebdon Fonds, Diary entry for January 1, 1943.

<sup>183</sup> Brian MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese in the Far East, 1942-1945* (New York: Random House, 2005), 157.

<sup>184</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, 1942-1945, May or June 26, 1944. It is unclear in the diary which month this is.

Others felt duty-bound in different ways. Georges Verreault wrote to his wife wondering if he should visit the family of a friend who had died in the early stages of the war. Being from the same neighbourhood, the two men had discussed celebrating their return to Canada together. Later that year, after another friend had died from dysentery, Verreault noted that he would be singing at the funeral, his way of offering “a last friendly gesture before his body is carried away in that rough box.”<sup>185</sup> Funerals became a part of life in Hong Kong and occurred with such regularity during the diphtheria epidemic that the Canadians stopped playing the “Last Post” when someone died to avoid harming group morale. In October 1942, there were two or three funerals every day, 41 of them for Canadian soldiers.<sup>186</sup> Yet, there would have been even greater camp casualties if not for the tireless effort of “C” Force’s medical staff -- a medical staff that was always fighting an uphill battle.

In addition to Major Crawford, the medical staff included three other medical officers, two nursing sisters, and two dental officers. Prisoner diaries routinely recognized their efforts as a primary reason why so many sick and infirm men managed to survive captivity. Crawford was often mentioned by name and his courage and leadership, when it was needed most, were exemplary. Early during their incarceration, Crawford was offered the opportunity to join an escape, but he refused for three reasons: it was obvious that medical personnel would be desperately needed; he felt that his height and appearance would give him away; and he was scared and “preferred to stay with the devil I knew. I deeply regretted my decision on a good many occasions subsequently.”<sup>187</sup> The men of “C” Force were fortunate that he stayed.

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<sup>185</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 64 and 106.

<sup>186</sup> LAC, Puddicombe Fonds, *Summary of Evidence*; Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong,” 7.

<sup>187</sup> Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong,” 4.

Major Ernie Hodkinson told his family a story about hitting his lowest point in Hong Kong. The senior officers often set the examples when it came to motivation, but even they could become despondent. As the war entered 1943, Hodkinson found himself in a state of apathy, too discouraged to leave his bunk. Crawford came to his bedside and said, “Goodbye Ernie.” Hodkinson asked where the doctor was going. “He said he wasn’t going anywhere but I would soon be leaving for a grave if I didn’t get up and eat. Dr. Crawford just wouldn’t give up on me and literally nagged me into getting up and eating something. He saved my life.”<sup>188</sup> Performing their work with little medicine and very basic instruments, the medical staff did commendable work. Razor blades and jackknives were used to perform surgery and supplies such as tongue depressors and needles were cleaned and reused.<sup>189</sup> One POW wrote that on a kit inspection by the Japanese in March 1942, they seized the medical and technical books further compounding the difficulty of treating sick prisoners. With practically no medicine provided, the doctors had to trade on the black market to secure certain drugs such as antidiphtheritic serum and nicotinic acid (niacin or vitamin B3) which was used to treat pellagra. Something that worked to their advantage was that Japanese soldiers with venereal disease, usually syphilis, occasionally consulted the Canadian doctors for fear that they would be admonished or punished by their own officers.<sup>190</sup> The Canadians would treat them with quinine or thiamine in exchange for more black market drugs, but it was never enough. Additionally, the medical staff were not immune to the violence that was common in camp. During the diphtheria epidemic the Japanese blamed the medical staff for the mounting number of deaths, physically assaulted some of the orderlies, and beat Dr. Crawford with a rubber hose. The Japanese also forbade Crawford from listing

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<sup>188</sup> Hodkinson, *Ernie’s Story*, 75.

<sup>189</sup> Greenfield, *The Damned*, 275.

<sup>190</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for March 16, 1942; Hodkinson, *Ernie’s Story*, 76.

“diphtheria” as the cause of death, insisting that he record “dysentery” instead. Crawford felt his dignity was hurt more than anything, and even joked that “Oddly enough, nobody died the following day. Perhaps the Japs had the right idea.”<sup>191</sup>

The Japanese, fearing that the disease would infect their own troops, finally released some anti-toxin serum to quell the spread. But for the Canadians the short supply created another problem. According to Major Gordon Gray of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, the medical staff were now in the unfortunate position of having to play God, as there was not nearly enough serum to treat everyone who was infected. They decided to prioritize fresh cases and those who were being made to go out on work parties. If the Japanese called for 500 working men, the doctors had to provide them with 500 bodies healthy enough for the task. Gray credits the men for their remarkable compliance, “because never once did they complain about your judgement. I thought morale was surprisingly good for what they were going through.” Remarkably though, the first serum used for injection was not provided by their captors but instead smuggled into camp by an anonymous hero. “God only knows how many lives that man has saved,” James MacMillan wrote in November 1942.<sup>192</sup> There were other unsung heroes among the Canadian soldiers when it came to treating illness. Some, such as Kenneth Cambon, signed up early to help as an orderly. Others, such as Arthur Squires, unselfishly volunteered when it was needed most: during the diphtheria epidemic. The tireless efforts of the medical staff, plus the willingness of ordinary prisoners to assist them undoubtably saved lives, but these acts were motivating for unit morale as they showed that these men were willing to fight and survive for each other.

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<sup>191</sup> CWM, MacMillan Diary, October 17, 1942; Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong,” 7.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 241; CWM, MacMillan Diary, November 10, 1942.

Without being fed a minimal amount of food and having the very basics of medical care, it is impossible to imagine that any of the POWs would have survived their imprisonment in Hong Kong. But the soldiers of “C” Force quickly learned how to make use of their rudimentary cooking supplies and shared with each other what little food the Japanese provided. Sharing of the Red Cross supplies was also instrumental in the battle for health as was the convenient timing of their distribution. Clever trading brought in additional sustenance and strong leadership ensured on several occasions that the men had cigarettes to use as they saw fit. Lastly, the indefatigable efforts of the medical staff, and the compassion exhibited by ordinary soldiers gave the Canadians encouragement to complete the second mission. This chapter discussed how the Red Cross parcels and the exceptional work of the medical staff were important to unit cohesion and in raising spirits. The following chapter will take a closer look at morale and explore some of the different ways that the prisoners kept themselves, and others, motivated to survive captivity and make it home to Canada.

## Chapter 3

### The Struggle for Morale

“Throughout the entire year [1942] in spite of [the] amount of sickness present, in spite of scarcity and the quality of the food received and the deplorable living conditions the morale of the officers and men remained surprisingly high.”<sup>193</sup>

- Honorary Captain Francis Joseph Deloughery, Chaplain to “C” Force, written in late 1942

High morale is critical to a prisoner of war’s survival. If food was of primary importance for the prisoner’s physical state, then morale was vital to bolster their mental state. The following chapter seeks to uncover the various ways that the prisoners boosted their morale and explores how it was connected to their survival. First, will examines the written communication prisoners had with their friends and family in Canada. Letters from home were tremendously important to the POWs as they provided them with motivation to push on and reminded them of what was waiting for them once the war was over. Of equal importance to the men was that their families received word from Hong Kong. Knowing the relief that it provided their loved ones was also a comfort to the captured soldiers. Beyond letters, there were other physical objects to which the soldiers attached meaning, and these also served as inspiration for survival. Many of “C” Force’s members remained committed to their duty as men in uniform and maintained their discipline for the benefit of their comrades and to keep up group morale. For others, looking on the lighter side of things helped to alleviate the burden of their captivity. Lastly, this chapter analyzes the bombing of Hong Kong by American forces and how, despite the obvious danger to the

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<sup>193</sup> Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association Personal Accounts, Report of H/Capt F. J. Deloughery, <https://www.hkvca.ca/historical/accounts/rcpadre/padre.php>.

prisoners, this served as another crucial factor in raising POW morale. American bombing reminded the men that the war continued and that the pendulum had swung in favour of the Allies.

During his extensive research for *Long Night's Journey into Day*, Charles Roland interviewed dozens of veterans who survived Hong Kong prison camps. When asked to identify which parts of POW life that they found the most upsetting, they often gave two inter-related answers: they were anxious because their families had no idea whether or not they had survived the battle; and they bemoaned the excessively slow postal communications which meant that word from home was rare, if it arrived at all.<sup>194</sup> Indeed, if there was anything that occupied a prisoner's mind as much as food, it was thoughts of family and home. The sending and receiving of mail during wartime was a cultural peculiarity that the Japanese found difficult to comprehend as most Japanese soldiers received little to no word from home once they were posted overseas. And as has been demonstrated in Chapter Two, the Japanese Army was not overly concerned with the plight of its prisoners. If the Japanese would not provide their captives with enough food and medicine, it is hard to imagine that allowing letters to and from home featured high on their list of priorities. Moreover, every letter or postcard that left the Hong Kong camps, plus those coming in had to be thoroughly examined and censored by the Japanese authorities. Given a shortage of English-language translators, unopened mail tended to pile up. Adding to the complications was the arduous journey that the letters from Canada took to arrive in Hong Kong. While letters from Canada to Germany might take six or seven weeks, the mail sent to prisoners of war held by Japan took considerably longer. On leaving Canada, letters went to England first, then to Iran, and finally to the Soviet Union which was not at war with Japan until August 1945.

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<sup>194</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 91-92.

After making their way to Vladivostok in eastern Russia, the letters went to Tokyo where censors were expected to do their work before mail made the final trip to Hong Kong.<sup>195</sup> One thing that simplified life for the censors, and perhaps for the prisoners as well, was using pre-printed cards. Prisoners did not write on the cards themselves but rather crossed out words and sentences so that what text remained would ultimately convey their message. Roland commends the POWs who chose the “I am well” message even though they may have been too ill to wield a pen under their own strength, writing that “this tenacious desire to reassure their loved ones is a tribute to the men’s spirit.”<sup>196</sup> Almost every member of “C” Force had friends, family, or a significant other in Canada to make it home to and receiving a letter from them was motivating for the men to push on as it served as a stark reminder of what they were fighting for.

For nearly the first six months of their imprisonment the POWs could not send or receive any mail. Fully aware of the calamitous end to the Battle of Hong Kong, Canadian families had no way of knowing whether their loved ones had been killed, wounded, missing, or had been captured. In May 1942, Major Ernie Hodkinson’s wife, Irene, received a telegram from the Canadian Army that gave the first indication that her husband was still alive. It stated that his name was “included in a short list of Canadian officers reported unofficially to the British Ambassador at Chungking China as being held at North Point internment camp in Hong Kong.”<sup>197</sup> After five excruciating months of not knowing anything, and even though the word ‘unofficial’ appeared in the telegram, it must have brought overwhelming relief to her. The families of enlisted soldiers had to wait even longer. Grenadier William Bell recalled that his mother received a letter from the military on August 12, 1942, stating that a list of 300 men who were

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<sup>195</sup> Greenfield, *The Damned*, 269-270.

<sup>196</sup> Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, 92.

<sup>197</sup> Hodkinson, *Ernie’s Story*, 50.



unaccounted for would be arriving shortly. Bell's name was not on that list, and she had to wait another two months for official confirmation that her son was alive and a POW in Hong Kong. In fact, it took an astonishing 18 months before the Canadian government obtained all the names of Canadians in Japanese hands.<sup>198</sup>

The wait for communication was equally agonizing for the POWs. A few weeks after the battle ended, Georges Verreault desperately hoped that the Japanese would allow some form of correspondence. As he wrote in his diary, "my greatest wish is to be allowed to send a telegram home. My father must be terribly worried. He may even think I'm dead."<sup>199</sup> This fear no doubt was shared by his fellow prisoners. POW mail to Canada was approved by the Japanese on May 26, 1942, with the understanding that each man could write home once a month.<sup>200</sup> Three days later, Thomas Forsyth recorded that a long list of rules concerning the writing of letters had appeared on the camp bulletin board. The regulations now stated that camp huts would draw lots to see which men would be allowed to write home first. The draw in North Point took place on June 1. Still, even after reducing the number of letters permitted, the Japanese censors had more work than they could handle. Forsyth wrote the next day that "the men who wrote home have had their letters returned to them and told they must rewrite them, shorten to 200 words and not ask for anything."<sup>201</sup>

The guidelines were equally strict for mail coming from Canada into Hong Kong. On April 28, 1942, the Royal Rifles of Canada Prisoners of War Association, a prisoner-next-of-kin organization registered under the War Charities Act, sent a letter to the families of those

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<sup>198</sup> Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association Personal Accounts, William Bell's Story, <https://www.hkvca.ca/williambell/chapter4.php>; Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 185.

<sup>199</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 49.

<sup>200</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 92.

<sup>201</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entries for May 29, June 1 and 2, 1942.

incarcerated in Hong Kong which clearly expressed how letters to prisoners should be written. Mail could only contain personal affairs and must not make any reference to the war. The handwriting had to be legible, written on one side only, and the relationship to the prisoner had to be included following the signature. The letters were not restricted to family members, giving friends and others the opportunity to write to the POWs. On August 21, 1943, a letter from the Royal Rifles Prisoners of War Association was circulated to family members informing them that the *S.S. Gripshom*, a vessel from neutral Sweden, would sail from Canada carrying supplies for Canadian prisoners in Hong Kong and Japan. Since medical and other relief supplies were given priority on the ship, personal packages were not permitted although letters were. This time families were notified that they could write one letter per person a month. Also, they were asked to type letters whenever possible and they were strongly reminded of the strict Japanese censorship which would limit content to personal matters only.<sup>202</sup> Still, even with the rules of writing letters plainly established, the sending and receiving of mail followed no standard and was only permitted if the senior officers felt like allowing it. Rifleman Philip Doddridge, who spent his entire incarceration in Hong Kong, recalled that his mother wrote often but that the letters never made it to him. He also wrote to her as many times as he could, yet he thinks that in nearly four years she may have only received two cards from him.<sup>203</sup> Still, any word from home was important for morale and had a positive effect on the prisoners.

Word to home was just as important for concerned family members. On June 18, 1942, Rifleman Douglas Rees wrote to his mother in St. John's, Newfoundland. His brief one-page

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<sup>202</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 6.14, Lloyd Cissell Doull, Fonds, 1942-1945, letter dated April 28, 1942; CWM, MacDougall, letter dated August 21, 1943.

<sup>203</sup> The Memory Project Veteran Stories, Philip Doddridge, <http://www.thememoryproject.com/stories/1396:philip-doddridge/>.

letter is an excellent example of the kind of communication that passed the Japanese censors, yet also conveyed necessary information to calm his family's fears. He wrote that he is a prisoner of the Japanese, but that he was in good health and that they should not worry. Prisoners have been "given the privilege to write once a month," he continues, and that they have started work which will help pass the time. He also mentioned that they "are permitted to play softball" and that he is getting plenty of sleep because there is "very little else to do." His careful choice of words such as "privilege" and "permitted" make it appear that life was bearable in a Japanese prison camp, especially as a result of Japanese munificence. This claim, coupled with Rees's claim to be in good health, gave a positive portrayal of his predicament and there was nothing that the censors were likely to misconstrue as being suspicious or provocative. But there is one sentence near the end of his letter that provides telling proof of the kind of togetherness and camaraderie exhibited by the Canadian soldiers. He asked his mother to "get in touch with Miss Clara Miller at the Library and tell her Maurice is well."<sup>204</sup> The prisoners were given precious little space in which to write their letters and Rees used part of his correspondence to help a friend and his worried family. Perhaps Maurice wrote a letter home himself, perhaps not, but Rees was looking out for a comrade and trying to ensure that his family received word that he had survived the battle and was safe.

Percy Wilmot was another member of the Royal Rifles of Canada who spent his entire captivity in Hong Kong. A veteran of the First World War, Wilmot was affectionately known as 'Pop' to his fellow soldiers. He was fortunate to have both sent and received several letters while in Hong Kong. On November 21, 1944 he wrote to his wife, "Dearest Agnes. Hope you and Stan

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<sup>204</sup> Library and Archives Canada, Douglas B. Rees Fonds, 1941-1946, Fonds/Collection R5323-0-6-E, letter dated June 18, 1942.

are both well. Had letter from Cissie also from you. I am feeling fine. Received Red Cross gifts. Hope all are well. Regards to all friends and relations. Take care of yourselves. All my love to you both. Your loving husband Percy.” Wilmot gave the impression that things were well with him even though, at this advanced stage of his imprisonment, his health had deteriorated badly. His wife wrote back to him on March 30, 1945, and though it is not clear if this letter made it into his hands before the war ended, it is also a good example of a message that passed the censors without any alteration. She penned the following: “Dearest Percy; I hope you are well this Good Friday; we are. Stanley dug garden, I pruned roses and attended Church. Longing to see you. Loving you. Agnes.” Aware of the censorship rules, she only provided the most banal of information and, quite obviously, does not mention that by then the war had completely turned in the Allies’ favour. Though Wilmot’s communication with home was very limited, it kept his spirits up. He was far from alone in this respect.<sup>205</sup>

Signalman Arthur Squires frequently mentions letters in his diary and the effect that these had on his mental state. On March 23, 1942, he composed a letter to his wife, telling her that he found that “absence certainly does not make love grow colder rather is glows on and builds up more strongly.” He elaborated: “When I go to bed nights [*sic*] you seem very close even though 7000 miles separates us. I can honestly say that the main thing I live for is to be back with my wife, that thought makes this life tolerable, and gives me an optimistic viewpoint so sorely needed here.” In March 1943, before he heard from his wife a month later, he received a letter from a Mr. Woods who informed him that she was doing well, causing Squires to exclaim “he will never know how much his letter was appreciated.” A visual reminder could be especially

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<sup>205</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 230. 3-4, Percy Horace Wilmot, Letters, 1941-1946, letters dated November 21, 1944 and March 30, 1945.

motivating and when he received a letter from his wife in October 1943, it contained a cherished photograph that made him feel that much closer to her.<sup>206</sup> Royal Rifle Lieutenant Collison Blaver expressed his joy on receiving letters from home and indicated that he read them dozens of times. He also made suggestions for what letter writers should include for POWs. “Send all sorts of pictures, send mail as often as possible, send news of all other people, repeat things in several letters, give them all kinds of sports news, give current events both local and worldwide, prominent people stage screen etc.”<sup>207</sup> And though some of those suggestions would have been scrupulously censored by the Japanese authorities, it indicates what kind of news the men were desperate to hear. But while letters from home were always welcome, they could be bittersweet for some, if they were received at all.

Harry White eagerly anticipated letters but was constantly disappointed for more than a year. In February 1943, he heard that while there were 300 Canadian letters in camp, none were for him. However, several prisoners shared their personal letters with friends who had received none and during that February, White was fortunate to benefit from this generous act of camaraderie. The fraternal bond strengthened through the shared hardship meant that even private messages improved communal morale. While Rifleman Donald Geraghty recorded instances where letters from home made him feel better, a letter received in January 1944 also made him feel “a little homesick.” On March 11, 1944, White finally received letters from home that were dated from 1942 and early 1943. He noted that he “couldn’t keep the tears out of my eyes,” but that after reading through them several times he found that they came with a “let-down feeling.”<sup>208</sup> Leonard Corrigan wrote on October 27, 1943, that a letter from his wife had

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<sup>206</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, March 23, 1942 and, March 19 and October 10, 1943.

<sup>207</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, undated entries.

<sup>208</sup> CWM, White Diary, February 27, 1943 and March 11, 1944; CWM, Geraghty Diary, January 6, 1944.

taken a toll on his “mental process” and that he was an emotional mess the following morning after having spent hours imagining himself at home. But Corrigan also noted on April 7, 1944 that some letters “came along at the most opportune time” as his physical health was weakening. Kenneth Baird wrote in early 1945 that his morale was slipping, but that a letter from his daughter, sealed with a lipstick kiss, brought his mood back up and gave him “a wonderful kick.”<sup>209</sup> Despite causing obvious homesickness, letters from Canada were enormously important to improve POW morale. Word from home gave the prisoners a connection to their former lives and provided a measure of hope for their futures.<sup>210</sup>

Letters were certainly treasured objects, but some men found meaning and significance in other items. Some of “C” Force’s members were relatives or friends and had known each other before enlisting and leaving for Hong Kong. Under the most difficult of circumstances those friendships were sustained, and many new ones were forged. Perhaps no source examined for this work better exemplifies how important friendship was than Rifleman Percy Horace Wilmot’s autograph book. Wounded in the battle, as a prisoner Wilmot suffered from malaria and dysentery often, and incurred also jaundice, pellagra, and beriberi. Finally, in April 1945, just months from liberation, he suffered a heart attack.<sup>211</sup> Yet, through it all, he endured, writing home frequently to his wife and son insisting that he was in good health.

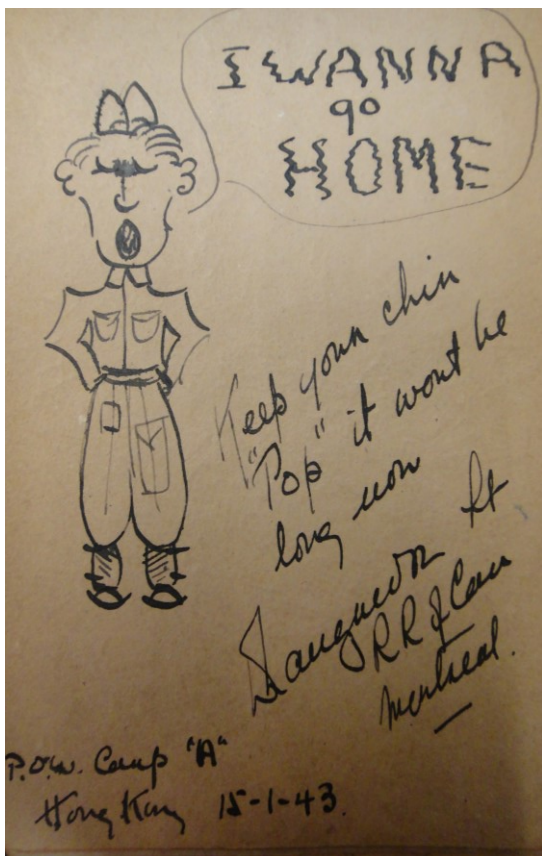
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<sup>209</sup> Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 105 and 124; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 231.

<sup>210</sup> In his study *Prisoners of the Japanese* Gavan Daws commented on the universal importance of prisoner letters. “Mail was special, rare, the sweetness of home. It was quan (similar to qi/energy) for the mind and soul.” He goes on to write that the sharing of mail in prison camps was an act of “true generosity.” Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese*, 128.

<sup>211</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 230. 5, Percy Horace Wilmot, *Book of Autographs, 1939-1945*.

In camp, Wilmot had a small, dark brown, leather-bound notebook that simply says “Autographs” on the cover. It is unclear if he brought it into camp with him or acquired it once inside. On the inside page he marked the date January 15, 1943, and wrote, “This is my book so



An entry in Percy Wilmot's autograph book.  
©Matthew Schwarzkopf

please write your pieces so as I may look at it in time to come with memories of joy not grief.” Instead of recording his own thoughts, he sought the words of others. The pages are filled by his fellow captives who inscribed their addresses in Canada, wrote poems, quoted Bible verses, drew pictures, scribbled jokes, and offered words of comfort and thanks. On January 29, 1943, Rifleman Kenneth Muir eloquently penned the following sentence, “‘Pop’ In your golden chain of friendship please consider me a link.” Wilmot kept the autograph book throughout his ordeal in

Hong Kong. An undated entry from Grenadier Alex

Skibinski, written after liberation from the Japanese, reads: “At last it’s over Pop. You’ve been through a rough time – A mark of courage to us younger fellows.” The Canadians who appear in this thesis are well represented in his book with Kenneth Cambon (RRC), Leonard Corrigan (WG), and Arthur Squires (RCCS) all making entries. Still, what is most remarkable is the international aspect of the autograph book, reminding one of the broad range of nationalities incarcerated in Hong Kong. Americans, Australians, British, Dutch, and members of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps all signed for Wilmot. Pop wanted this book to help him

remember something positive from his experience as a prisoner of war: the friends that he made. The POWs in Hong Kong had formed a family and collective survival was to become as important as individual survival.<sup>212</sup>

POWs hold onto possessions that provide various kinds of motivation. James Andrew Flanagan found his inspiration in a different type of object. The Battle of Hong Kong had just ended and the surrendering Canadians had begun stacking their weapons in the centre of Stanley Fort when Flanagan noticed the victorious Japanese soldiers trampling a Union Jack flag. Finding this disrespectful, he retrieved the flag from the ground when the guards were occupied. Believing that a flag that touched the ground meant surrender, he cleaned it up and put it away with his belongings. Flanagan kept the flag throughout his time as a prisoner, and proudly displayed it upon returning home as a sign that he had never capitulated.<sup>213</sup> This reflected the popular sentiment within “C” Force that the men had been ordered to put down their weapons and had never yielded of their own accord. Pride and duty were important to these soldiers and many resolved to complete the second mission, surviving their imprisonment, seeing as the decision to accomplish the first mission had been taken out of their hands. Flanagan kept that flag as a reminder that he was fighting for something. His discipline increased his morale, which in turn encouraged his survival.

Once released, prisoners had to decide which objects could be taken home. Size and weight influenced those decisions which helps to explain why creative items were favoured over functional ones. Once home, POWs had no use for makeshift bowls or mugs. But if they were

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<sup>212</sup> Captain Rowley Richards, an Australian doctor who was a POW in Singapore, identified several factors that went into his survival. Among them were, luck, determination, improvisation, a positive attitude, and camaraderie (or mateship for Australians). Quoted in MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword*, 155.

<sup>213</sup> Flanagan, *The Endless Battle*, 49.



personalized or had belonged to a friend there was a greater sentimental attachment, and this dominated the selection process.<sup>214</sup> William MacWhirter had one such object. As the soldiers were being marched from Stanley Fort to their prison camp, stragglers were being forcefully encouraged by the Japanese to keep up with the rest of the prisoners. Goldie Ramier, a good friend of MacWhirter's brother, too slow for his captors, was bayoneted in the back. Believing him to be dead, MacWhirter collected Ramier's mess tin and later used a nail to scratch the fallen man's name and "died" onto the object's cover. MacWhirter used this mess tin throughout his time as a prisoner of war in both Hong Kong and Japan. Unbeknownst to MacWhirter, Ramier, in fact, had survived his wounds and made it home after the war. The two men met in Canada, but Ramier was uninterested in reclaiming his property. Many years later, after Ramier's passing, MacWhirter met the man's son and presented him with his father's mess tin.<sup>215</sup> William MacWhirter was unlikely to forget the relevance of this object and how he had carried it for nearly four years as a prisoner of war. But he had carried it long enough, and now it rested with someone who would attach an equally important significance to it: remembering a loved one.

Lucien Brunet of the Canadian Postal Corps attached great significance to part of his uniform. On display in the Canadian War Museum's section on the Battle of Hong Kong are Brunet's field service cap, his cap badge, and his uniform's shoulder flashes. From North Point and Sham Shui Po in Hong Kong to shipyards and coal mines in Japan, Brunet held onto these pieces of his uniform to remind himself of who he was and to what he belonged.<sup>216</sup> These four

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<sup>214</sup> Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum, "The Importance of Creativity Behind Barbed Wire," in *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire*, edited by Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum (New York: Routledge, 2012), 11-12.

<sup>215</sup> The Memory Project Veteran Stories, Bill Willington MacWhirter, <http://www.thememoryproject.com/stories/1448:bill-willington-macwhirter/>.

<sup>216</sup> Canadian War Museum, Gallery 3 display, Lucien Brunet field service cap (CMC 1984.38.1), cap badge (CMC 1984.38.2), and shoulder flashes (CMC 1984.38.3).

objects: an autograph book, a flag, a mess tin, and a uniform, reflect four ways that POWs in Hong Kong kept up their morale: through friendship, honour, memory, and identity. The emotional bond with these objects carried enormous meaning and that is why they were brought home. Through these items the soldiers would find inspiration to survive in their friends, their mission, their fallen comrades, and themselves. They were, after all, still soldiers.

Losing the battle was demoralizing and the accommodation and food that the Japanese provided were anything but encouraging, but some of the men were determined from the beginning to remain committed to their cause. They were prisoners now, but still soldiers, and they had to carry on no matter the circumstances. As a result, the first few weeks saw some progress in improving camp facilities: the latrines were fixed, the plumbing was repaired, and scrounged materials made it possible to build rudimentary kitchen facilities. Kenneth Cambon claimed that early on in captivity “there was a spirit of cooperation and discipline that was not evident in later camps, particularly in Japan where there was more of a “dog eat dog” attitude.” Captain Charles Price of the Royal Rifles also recalled the benefits of this early cooperation as the men retained their discipline as they transitioned from soldiers to prisoners. “Our men behaved extremely well. Our Regimental organizations were maintained during the first few months of captivity and our affairs were conducted in an orderly matter so that food, quarters, etc. were equally and fairly shared; which I am convinced minimized the terrific sufferings we were to undergo later...”<sup>217</sup> This sense of togetherness and mutual effort was critical for the men going forward.

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<sup>217</sup> Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito*, 36; Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 109.

But with so many men surviving under such strenuous conditions, trouble was bound to occur. Theft between prisoners was not unheard of, neither were fights and arguments. Some had trouble coping mentally with their captivity and there were at least a few suicides.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, these types of incidents were rare according to Company Sergeant Major George MacDonell of the Royal Rifles. Most men adhered to the strict discipline expected from a soldier. Officers continued to issue daily orders and to administer punishments for those who did not follow them. “We were an organized military unit, with its formal structure and ranks intact and fully operational. No unit was left outside this formal, regimented organization, and each individual was reminded that he was a Canadian soldier who was only temporarily under the control of the Japanese,” wrote MacDonell, who was certain that this conduct and attitude was responsible for saving lives and providing encouragement to those who needed it most. “The will to live is strong,” he wrote, and “the desire to not to disgrace your uniform or to let your officers and comrades down through personal weakness is just as strong.”<sup>219</sup> This persistent discipline was instrumental in their new key objective, survival. The men of “C” Force were fortunate to have superiors who cared about them and would not let them forget who they were, where they were from, and what their duties and responsibilities were.

Arthur Squires was reminded of his responsibilities by Padre Uriah Laite at a church parade on March 29, 1942. He “prayed that we may stay for as long as duty required then be returned to our friends,” which Squires felt was an appropriate way to put it.<sup>220</sup> Indeed, those are two of the best reasons for a prisoner to carry on: to do one’s duty as a soldier and then to return

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<sup>218</sup> Dr. Charles Roland quoted one Canadian soldier who remembered only four successful suicide attempts among several thousand POWs. However, this number included all nationalities, not just Canadians. Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, 192.

<sup>219</sup> MacDonell, *One Soldier’s Story 1939-1945*, 104.

<sup>220</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, March 29, 1942.

to those you love. The senior officers also played a part in encouraging the younger men to remain committed to their duty as soldiers. In early January 1942, Thomas Forsyth recorded that Major Kenneth Baird had given them a pep talk and told them not to get “downhearted.” Two weeks later, he noted that his company engaged in ten minutes of squad drills, presumably so the men did not forget their basic training. The Japanese guards, perplexed by this type of behaviour, simply stared at them. On January 24, Forsyth again recorded how the officers were determined to keep control over their men. A stern lecture cautioned the soldiers that beards were unacceptable and had to be removed within 24 hours. Additionally, they were told that “any breach of discipline would be severely dealt with by loss of pay, detention or field punishment.”<sup>221</sup> The senior officers reasoned that a soldier’s dignity, self-control, and uniformity could be maintained by keeping up their appearance. Additionally, discipline ensured that order would be upheld and that turmoil or the ‘every man for himself’ attitude would be obviated.<sup>222</sup>

Lieutenant Harry White of the Grenadiers was one of those officers. He borrowed a razor and toothbrush after finding it impossible to acquire his own, and washed his clothes in cold water. The finishing touch was provided by one of his men who came into camp with a tin of Brasso polish. White applied a small amount to the button on his tunic so that it “shined for the first time in a month.” William Allister wrote that one of the men somehow acquired clippers and a pair of scissors, which he used to set up a makeshift barber shop. He cut hair for the soldiers but would only accept IOUs as payment. In his typical lyrical fashion, Allister declared that this “very act was a defiant declaration of faith in the future, played out with a brash confidence that was a tonic in itself.”<sup>223</sup> These types of selfless acts encouraged collective spirit.

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<sup>221</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entries for January 3, 16, and 24, 1942.

<sup>222</sup> MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, 128.

<sup>223</sup> Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 55.

Beyond the men's appearance, officers such as Lieutenant White also felt it was a soldier's duty to carry an air of respect for others, even if it was the enemy. After the battle, some of the men were able to keep their band instruments and brought them into camp. Music was a welcome presence during captivity and the instruments were put to good use with small concerts being a regular occurrence. Occasionally, the Japanese band would play for the Allied soldiers as well. White mentions that once when this occurred an unnamed British brigadier and several others walked away when the Japanese were playing their national anthem. White found this disrespectful and counterproductive, "Damn bad show I think. That's no way to carry on. We're in here now and have got to make the best of it – no use in antagonizing the enemy."<sup>224</sup> This was a reasonable assessment, but not easy to instill in the men as some did not even respect each other. But in spite of the prevailing companionship, tensions between the men, and between the men and their officers, were not unheard of.

On July 14, 1942, White noted that it had rained every day so far that month and that there were concerns that a typhoon was headed for Hong Kong. The awful weather, in conjunction with the increasingly poor quality of food, caused a near mutiny within the Grenadiers' "D" Company. Many protested the horrible rations by refusing to eat. White recorded that he "had about a dozen on orders and that they were stripped of rank and told they'd be turned over to the Japs if there was any more of it." He found it hard to blame the men under the circumstances, but there was little else that he could do.<sup>225</sup> Donald Geraghty recalled that the officers ran the camp as if it was a Canadian army base. Although such measures caused resentment among some men, looking back, Geraghty admitted that "it kept up morale a little bit

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<sup>224</sup> CWM, White Diary, January 5 and 6, 1942.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., July 14, 1942.

inasmuch as the discipline was maintained.”<sup>226</sup> Indeed, asserting discipline and the presence of authority was important for morale as well as unit cohesion. Strong leadership is key for morale. Soldiers need to believe in their officers, otherwise they might feel demoralized. With examples set, such incidents became rarer although there was still the odd infraction. Forsyth recorded on July 25, 1942, that one man was charged with using inappropriate language towards a staff sergeant of the postal corps and received seven days of extra fatigue duty for his slip of the tongue. A week later, a lance corporal “was stripped and reduced to the ranks” for missing a physical training parade, while another man was punished for talking back to an NCO.<sup>227</sup> The introduction of these rules seemed to have some effect, as breaches of conduct went virtually unrecorded in prisoner diaries and memoirs. Despite the earlier outbursts, some men used their words to remind themselves that, even in their present conditions, life did not always have to be taken seriously.

Some people can find humour in anything and, almost unbelievably, this was true for many Hong Kong POWs. As part of getting on with life and making the best of a bad situation, some members of “C” Force did their best to retain their sense of humour. Lieutenant Collison Blaver went into camp with a notebook planner of which one of the pages had a heading that read “January Engagements 1942.” Blaver wrote under this “mostly cancelled by the Japanese.” In 1943 he returned to write that his engagements were “still cancelled by the Japanese,” although his humour turned to cynicism in 1944 when he added “your guess is as good as mine.” For 1945 he simply wrote “I’m afraid to guess this time.”<sup>228</sup> James MacMillan’s diary also contains comical injections. On December 10, 1942 noting that there were not many shopping

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<sup>226</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 231

<sup>227</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entries for July 25 and August 1, 1942.

<sup>228</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date.

days left until Christmas, he wondered if the Japanese might let the men go downtown to purchase gifts. On December 12, he began concluding his diary entries with “Only \_\_\_ more shopping days till Christmas.”<sup>229</sup> His countdown continued until the 25th arrived.

On April 24, 1942, Arthur Squires proudly declared that he possessed a “nice handle bar mustache with waxed ends,” but that his companions, thinking it was awful, encouraged him to shave it off. On May 4, he wrote that he had taken their advice, but the satisfaction of his friends immediately inspired him to grow another one. This kind of banter between mates would have been good for keeping the mood light and the fact that it existed at all was remarkable. Life went on. Even Lance Ross, whose diary is notable for being full of short and depressing statements, managed a wisecrack, writing that April 20, 1942 was “Hitler’s birthday also Aunt Bessie’s. Many more to her.”<sup>230</sup> Major Baird was another whose letters and diary entries contained the odd joke, sometimes at his own expense. An early meal of scorched rice caused Baird to write that it was the kind of food that would never get mentioned in a *Good Housekeeping* cookbook. He even found something funny in his weight loss, writing to his daughter that she would not have a chance to tease him about his tummy as it did not show anymore. He emphasized that he was “quite proud of my girlish figure though it seems to be covered with knobs and bumps in places.” Unsurprisingly, there was more humour inserted into his letters written shortly after liberation. On August 20, 1945, he remarked that two days before any food stuffs arrived they had received a large shipment of toilet paper. He and his men were able to see the humour in the timing, but the Japanese did not understand why they found it so funny. In one of his last letters home he mentioned to his wife his hope that he would make it home in time for their

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<sup>229</sup> CWM, MacMillan Diary, December 10 and 12, 1942.

<sup>230</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, April 24 and May 4, 1942; Diary of Lance Ross, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 279.

anniversary. Should such a reunion take place, “well, the atomic bomb would be a mild explosion to what we would cause,” Baird warned.<sup>231</sup> Despite living an existence of malnutrition, disease, and physical abuse, some of the POWs were able to keep a smile on their faces. Coping mechanisms are used to manage stress in demanding situations, and these attempts at humour were one method the men used to cope with the demands of their imprisonment.

Joking about their experiences, during and after captivity, must have been therapeutic for members of “C” Force. Nothing is more illustrative of this than the menu items served at a dinner for the Royal Rifles of Canada 1st Hong Kong Battalion on April 13, 1946 at the Château Frontenac in Quebec City. Eight months after they had been liberated and sufficiently recovered from their ordeal, members of the Royal Rifles got together to eat, celebrate, and reminisce. The appetizers included Kowloon Celery and Stanley Olives followed by Lyemun Tomato Soup. The main course was North Point Turkey with Tai Tam Dressing, Potatoes à la Kai Tak, and Sham Shui Po Peas. For dessert there was Strawberry Coupe, likely a play on ‘strawberry balls,’ a nickname the prisoners gave to their swollen red testicles, another effect of malnutrition and lack of vitamins, and Kriegsgefangenen (prisoner of war in German) Coffee.<sup>232</sup> It is unclear who assigned these appropriate names. It is also uncertain if every member present would have appreciated the light heartedness as the trauma of the experience still would have been fresh. But still, it is telling that these men could get together and joke about what was surely the most traumatizing experience of their lives. Perhaps this sort of thing was a reminder not only of what they had survived, but also served as a form of closure as they moved on with their lives. Trying to maintain a sense of humour during captivity would have been uplifting and helped with

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<sup>231</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 50, 60, 262, and 266.

<sup>232</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 259.8, Collison Alexander Blaver, Royal Rifles of Canada dinner tendered to 1st "Hong Kong" Battalion menu, April 13, 1946.



morale, as did receiving word from home, keeping a special object, and reminding oneself of one's duty. However, not all prisoners would have been able to keep their spirits high.

Fortunately for them, some events took place beyond the confines of the camp that proved motivating for all prisoners.

By October 1942, life for prisoners of war in Hong Kong had become a series of mundane routines. Men who worked at the Kai Tak airfield or on other projects tried to pass the time and avoid illness. Rumours of American victories in the Pacific and impending bombings of Japanese targets circulated, but by this point the soldiers were reluctant to believe the gossip as none of the previous whispers had proved accurate. Indeed, as early as March 1942, Captain E. L. Hurd, the Quartermaster of the Royal Rifles, recorded in his diary that he heard that there had been a truce in the Philippines and that US soldiers had landed in Japan, forcing Tokyo to sue for peace. Arthur Squires wrote on May 4, 1942, that the guards were anxious as American bombers were expected. He predicted that the prisoners' location beside the naval dock and close to Kai Tak would afford them a good view of the proceedings. Georges Verreault noted on the May 10 that U.S. bombers were due to strike the area and that the Japanese were preparing the prisoners for what to do in case of such an event.<sup>233</sup> None of these rumours proved correct. Rumours that seemed too good to be true were often just that and, after a series of disappointments, the POWs learned not to get their hopes up. But that changed in the early afternoon of October 25, 1942.

At approximately 1:30 pm, American B-25 Mitchell medium bombers escorted by P-40 Warhawk fighters from the Fourteenth Air Force, flying more than 1,000 km from the China Air Task Force Base in Kunming, China, attacked Japanese targets in Hong Kong. The effect on the

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<sup>233</sup> Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 185; CWM, Squires Diary, May 4, 1942; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 76.

Canadian prisoners' morale was immediate and nearly every diary consulted for this thesis mentions this air raid. It had been ten months since Hong Kong's surrender to the Japanese. Notwithstanding the danger that stray bombs posed, the Canadians rejoiced. Lance Ross reported that "the bombs didn't miss here by much, but they sounded good." "What delight," added Verreault. "Dear Yanks, if they're your bombs, don't let up. Let them have all you can give even if you kill us with the Japs. These explosions are music to our ears. I'm happy! More! More! Again! Again!" he wrote. Major Baird shared that enthusiasm, "Oh! Molly, they sounded just great; it means we haven't been forgotten after all these long months. A cheer went up from all our camp." Raymond Elliott commented on how nice it was to see friendly planes overhead for a change. James MacMillan said that they had been rewarded for their patience as "we had prayed and waited for this so long that it all seems quite unbelievable. Perhaps, we might be free by Xmas."<sup>234</sup> That last sentiment proved to be wildly optimistic, but the POWs had obtained concrete proof that the fight was being taken to the enemy.

If the prisoners needed more assurance, they received it the following day when American planes returned to bomb targets in Kowloon and on Hong Kong Island. This raised Verreault's morale to the point where he chose to fight harder for his health and discarded his cane, reasoning that he did not need it anymore. "Hope is alive again" he enthused. Two days later, on October 28, a third strike successfully bombed Japanese ships in Hong Kong harbour, a feat that Captain Hurd had confirmed by his men who were working at the airport. Lieutenant Harry White wrote on that day that despite causing a complete blackout and provoking anxious

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<sup>234</sup> Diary of Lance Ross, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 299; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 98; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 130; CWM, Elliott, Diary, October 25, 1942; CWM, MacMillan, Diary, October 25, 1942.

sentries to shoot into the night, the bombings were thrilling to watch.<sup>235</sup> But the danger to prisoners was real as bombing was far from an exact science during the Second World War. John Harris, a member of the British Royal Engineers, recalled that in Sham Shui Po the POWs were not permitted to prepare air-raid shelters. Heightening the risk was the fact that the Japanese had stored oil drums filled with highly flammable aviation fuel within the camp perimeter. The Japanese decided not to remove the drums on the premise that the Americans would not bomb Allied men.<sup>236</sup> This was a strange assumption considering how difficult it would have been to avoid hitting the camp, but luckily the oil drums were never hit. It would be ten long months until the bombing raids recommenced. By then the diphtheria epidemic had passed and many Canadians had left to labour in Japan. But for those who remained in Hong Kong the reminder of American air power was a tremendous motivation for them to hold on, to survive; salvation might be at hand at long last.

After numerous reconnaissance missions, American P-40s and B-25s returned over Hong Kong. On July 13, 1943, Captain Hurd recorded that Stonecutters Island, a mere half mile from the camp, had been bombed. On the 29th a larger strike hit the Japanese naval dock yards and oil tanks in Victoria Harbour. This attack was especially motivating for the men because, as soldiers, they understood the significance of the targets. Additionally, the brief appearance of the aircraft once again reminded the men that they had allies in their fight against a common enemy.<sup>237</sup> Not only were the bombings morale boosting, they were also a form of entertainment and, since they occurred on a near monthly basis after July 1943, they gave the men something to

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<sup>235</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 98; Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 191; CWM, White Diary, October 28, 1942.

<sup>236</sup> Quoted in Lindsay, *The Battle for Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 181.

<sup>237</sup> Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 194; Greenfield, *The Damned*, 298.

look forward to. Another raid at the end of August caused Lieutenant White to proclaim, “It’s sure exciting, gives one a tremendous lift.” The men were ordered by the guards to stay in their huts, but they ignored that command and crowded around the windows and doorways to get better views. On September 2, White recorded the bombing and destruction of more oil tanks which resulted in a massive explosion. “Sure bucks you up a thing like that. We’ll beat these little bastards yet.”<sup>238</sup> In 1944 the raids continued and, even though freedom remained elusive for the POWs, the positive effects of the attacks remained. On December 8, the third year anniversary of the Battle of Hong Kong, Donald Geraghty was delighted to note that the Americans celebrated by dropping bombs “all over the place.” He recorded numerous other raids in his diary over the following month, with one on January 16, 1945 getting specific mention as “the place was literally carpet bombed.” But this incident also caused him to write, “bad on the nerves good to the mind”<sup>239</sup> thereby showing that the raids could have contrasting effects on a soldier’s psyche. The bombings also had the potential to encourage Japanese reprisals against the POWs.<sup>240</sup> Crucially, the American bombings of Japanese targets were immensely important to the POWs’ morale. Hong Kong had not been forgotten in the larger picture of the Pacific War. Canadians became steadfast in their determination to endure as their American friends reminded them that others were continuing the fight for which so many of their comrades had perished. The POWs were also reminded that they were not merely prisoners, they were soldiers, they were at war, and they had a duty to survive.

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<sup>238</sup> CWM, White Diary, August 27 and September 2, 1943.

<sup>239</sup> CWM, Geraghty Diary, December 8, 1944 and January 16, 1945.

<sup>240</sup> Former West Point psychology professor Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman noted that prisoners had no reason to believe that incoming bombs were personal or intended to harm them. Conversely, guards would have taken the matter personally, knowing that someone was trying to kill them and that they had a responsibility to fight back. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Bay Back Books, 2009), 56-57.

Morale for the Hong Kong POWs came in a variety of ways and each of them contributed to the overall goal: survival. Word from home was one of the biggest boosters, but not every member of “C” Force was lucky enough to receive letters. Luckily, many of those men had friends who would willingly share their own letters to help a comrade feel connected to his homeland. Others held on to different physical objects to remind themselves of what they considered important, while some found it imperative to remain dutiful and keep their discipline so as not to forget why they were in Hong Kong in the first place. Maintaining a sense of humour showed that some of the men were able to see the lighter side of things despite their precarious situation. Lastly, morale came from seeing first hand that friends were taking the fight to the Japanese and this gave the soldiers hope that the war was turning in their favour. Morale was vital for the prisoners’ mental state, just as food and nutrition were important for their physical well-being. But three years and eight months is a long time to be a prisoner of war, and even the healthiest and most spirited of men would have great difficulty completing the second mission if they did not have things to do in camp that would keep them occupied. The following chapter will investigate how the POWs kept themselves busy by using their ingenuity and resourcefulness to pass the time and how they worked together to fight boredom.

## Chapter 4

### Fighting Boredom

“I have never been bored, one can’t be when kept busy.”<sup>241</sup>

- Arthur Ray Squires, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, December 6, 1944

Along with hunger and loneliness, boredom is one of the great adversaries for a prisoner of war. This chapter explores how the Canadians preoccupied themselves and managed to keep busy for three years and eight months, or 1,330 days. Concurrently, it shows that this was another fundamental element in their survival. The POWs were fortunate that they were taken captive in an urban area. As a result, goods such as sports equipment and books could be made available, if they were found by the foraging parties that were sent out in the early stages of captivity and if the Japanese allowed them to be brought into camp. In other cases, the soldiers had to make do with what they had. Adaptation is one of the keys to survival for a prisoner of war, and this is even more applicable for the Hong Kong POWs as the Japanese provided them with very little to ease the burden of their confinement. Necessities and amenities were always in short supply and such shortages encouraged many of the prisoners to display one of their most noteworthy characteristics: ingenuity. Several instances of prisoner inventiveness have been noted in the previous chapters, such as the building of immersion heaters, the making of toffee, and using what was available to create a more comfortable living environment in the camps and hospitals. Ingenuity also extended to prisoner pastimes and, as was so often the case, the men of

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<sup>241</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, December 6, 1944.

“C” Force worked together to endure their imprisonment, survive, and complete the second mission.

With plenty of free time on their hands, some of the POWs took the opportunity to learn a new skill or language. Many of the men were motivated to learn new things, not just to quell boredom, but also because they believed that such things could be useful in their futures -- futures they fully anticipated having. Early during their captivity at North Point, the Canadians formed small lecture groups to provide fellow prisoners with makeshift educational classes. One of the foraging parties allowed out shortly after the battle returned with a blackboard and books, and chalk was obtained through an interpreter. Later foraging parties returned with even more books, including texts from Hong Kong University. If the weather was decent, the classes were held outside between the huts, and if it was raining, classes were moved inside.<sup>242</sup> Harry White wrote in early February 1942 that classes were started not only with the intention of alleviating boredom, but also to “keep up morale and mental keenness.” He noted that math, civics, public speaking, and French were the first subjects added to the curriculum. In his diary under the heading “time spent in captivity,” Lieutenant Collison Blaver wrote that he had taught arithmetic, shorthand, and an NCO course. In return, he learned algebra, geometry, and French.<sup>243</sup>

Since as many as 30 percent of the Royal Rifles were Francophones, their Anglophone counterparts seized the chance to learn French from them. This kind of educational engagement had a two-fold purpose for the POWs. It gave them an opportunity to pass the time in a constructive way and, by giving their brains some much-needed exercise, it helped keep their

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<sup>242</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 103.

<sup>243</sup> CWM, White Diary, February 4, 1942; CWM, Blaver Diary, 1942-1945, no date.

minds sharp. Private Leslie Canivet of the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps was one of those enlisted to teach French, though he later conceded that he was not sure why he had done so and did not think that he did a great a job of it, although “it filled the hours.” Raymond Elliott took his first French class on January 17, 1942, indicating just how early these classes were started.<sup>244</sup> But one prisoner who appeared to take his French studies very seriously was Royal Rifle Sergeant James MacMillan. In addition to his diary and drawings, MacMillan kept a study book which contained approximately forty pages of detailed French language lessons. His notes are well written and well organized, and without context one could easily assume that they were written in a high school or university classroom. One page titled “La Grammaire française” contains a lesson on definite, indefinite, and partitive or contracted articles, with English language explanatory notes and examples written in French. Subsequent pages deal with nouns, pronouns, impersonal verbs, and vocabulary. Another page is clearly indicative of the situation in which James MacMillan and his comrades found themselves. Titled “Personal Injuries, Diseases, Hygiene, etc,” these notes show MacMillan trying to learn what French words would be most useful to him under his current circumstances, that of a prisoner of war with French-speaking comrades whose health was constantly at risk. MacMillan thought it was important to learn words such as infection, swelling, to bandage, sore throat, and diphtheria.<sup>245</sup> With this knowledge he could better understand and better help his fellow soldiers if they were not proficient in English.

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<sup>244</sup> CWM, Canivet Interview 1995; CWM, Elliott Diary, January 17, 1942.

<sup>245</sup> CWM, MacMillan, Study book, 1941-1945.



French, however, was far from the only language learned in a camp with such a linguistically diverse group of prisoners.<sup>246</sup> POWs were made to learn their prisoner numbers in Japanese, but James Flanagan went beyond that, wisely believing that it would be beneficial to learn the language of his captors. One day early in his captivity fortune smiled on Flanagan as he happened to find a can of curry that had fallen out of a guard's knapsack. Discreetly collecting the can, he later traded it and two yen (ten Canadian dollars in 2018) to another guard for an English-Japanese dictionary. "I was determined to learn Japanese" he recalled, "so when a Jap guard showed me the dictionary, I offered him the curry. He took the can and wrote '¥2' in the dirt. I gave him the last change I had in my pocket and he passed me the book."<sup>247</sup> It seems surprising that he would give up food for a book, but perhaps the book was more important to him at the time. In addition to French, Grenadier Major Ernie Hodkinson sought to learn Japanese and Cantonese. Until sometime in 1944, the Japanese permitted their version of the *Hong Kong News* to circulate in the prison camps and lessons in both languages were often printed inside. Hodkinson kept many of these clippings, and along with his diaries and letters he brought these mementos back to Winnipeg after the war, perhaps to remind him of how he made it through captivity.<sup>248</sup>

The addition of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps POWs to North Point camp in mid-1942 brought people "from just about every walk of life that you could think of" according to Leslie Canivet. Professors, engineers, and meteorologists were just some of the skilled volunteers who joined the Canadians and more classes were organized. Signaller William

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<sup>246</sup> The HKVDC was largely Chinese and the officers were mainly British, but there were also Portuguese, Russians, and other European expatriates within its ranks.

<sup>247</sup> Flanagan, *The Endless Battle*, 60-61.

<sup>248</sup> Hodkinson, *Ernie's Story*, 55.

Allister wrote that he tried to learn Chinese (presumably Cantonese) but gave up and tried Chinese history instead. “We sat, paper and pencil in hand, weak and emaciated, probably the world’s hungriest students, filling our minds as we tried forgetting our empty bellies.” But weeks later, the Volunteers were moved again, this time to Sham Shui Po, and with them, wrote Allister, “went a large slice of richness and colour.”<sup>249</sup> But in September 1942 North Point was closed, and the Canadians rejoined the Volunteers at Sham Shui Po. However, the drafts of POWs to Japan in 1943 and 1944 to provide additional labour for the Japanese war effort greatly depleted the number of prisoners in Hong Kong while POW escape attempts compelled the Japanese to terminate group classes. The larger the group, the captors reasoned, the more trouble they could cause by plotting together.

Nevertheless, the learning continued. Instead of large classes held outdoors, the remaining POWs instigated a series of lectures and met privately within the huts during the evenings. Men with a background or knowledge of a special interest subject were invited to participate as lecturers. Captain Lionel Hurd was one such man. Having worked in the mines of northern Canada, he presented a talk on his experiences. Sometimes the men petitioned the Japanese to hold bigger public lectures, but this was usually denied, as was the case when George Porteous requested to give a talk entitled “Psychology of Personality.” Apparently, the Japanese deemed the topic too incendiary to be discussed among the soldiers. But the talks and classes that were allowed had the desired effect. Author Grant Garneau notes that “to a certain degree depression was combatted and minds were kept active in consideration of events and subjects beyond the camp environment.”<sup>250</sup> Anything that lessened the boredom was constructive and

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<sup>249</sup> CWM, Cavinet Interview, 1995; Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 70 and 72.

<sup>250</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 127-128.

learning something new gave the soldiers something to look forward to, including meeting new people and engaging in much-needed social activity. POWs who had a desire for new knowledge discovered that while textbooks were useful, their greatest asset in learning was each other.<sup>251</sup>

While the prisoners had opportunities to exercise their brains, they also had opportunities to exercise their bodies. Weather permitting, and if their weary frames would allow it, there were occasions that the prisoners could exercise. Walking was the most usual physical pastime as it required no equipment and could be done alone or with others. Collison Blaver recorded that at one point he was walking two or three miles every morning with some friends. William Allister preferred to walk by himself at night as it provided him a chance to “step out of collective living and be alone.” He reflected that the prisoners’ life in the camps was a new kind of war, but that while some of the men were winning, others were losing. While walking one evening he resolved to “develop new combat weapons and, harder still, give this life shape and meaning.”<sup>252</sup> Running was also possible, although the small confines of the camps likely meant the men ran in circles or small loops around the perimeter. Delbert Welsh wrote of very little besides food before he succumbed to diphtheria in October 1942, but he did note that on January 31 and February 1, 1942, he was “still running” despite not feeling very well. Donald Geraghty spent much of 1944 in the Sham Shui Po camp hospital as malaria and beriberi ravaged his body. Discharged in November, by December he was feeling well enough to work in the kitchens, resume walking, and on the 2nd “actually did [some] running.”<sup>253</sup> If the men were to survive and

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<sup>251</sup> Midge Gillies, *The Barbed-Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War* (London: Aurum, 2011), 197.

<sup>252</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date; Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 60.

<sup>253</sup> CWM, Welsh Diary, January 31 and February 1, 1942; CWM, Geraghty Diary, December 3, 1944.

make it home, they would need healthy bodies for their future lives. Moreover, exercise helped maintain discipline. A sense of normalcy was important. Life had to go on.

One attempt at keeping a normal life was to engage in group sports. The foraging parties sent out shortly after the battle returned with a variety of sports equipment to make it possible to play such games as soccer, softball, field hockey, and cricket. A sports program was initiated early on in North Point and saw considerable participation at first. But by the summer, and certainly by the fall of 1942 when the move to Sham Shui Po was completed, these activities petered out for two reasons. The declining health of the prisoners meant that they had little energy to spare for physical activity, especially since most were engaged in work parties. Moreover, sports equipment could not be replaced if it became broken or overused. Charles Roland provided an example of how a cricket match was abandoned after the only two balls in the prisoners' possession had burst open.<sup>254</sup> Nevertheless, for at least half a year many of the Canadians engaged in group sports and wrote enthusiastically about doing so.

Collison Blaver noted several instances where he played soccer and softball, and at least once he started a hockey game although he did not mention what they used for sticks. Matches were often Royal Rifles against Winnipeg Grenadiers and sometimes the teams were divided by rank, such as one game that Blaver recorded that saw "officers vs sergeants." Other times "C" Force would engage with different units as Frank Ebdon noted on December 27, 1942, when the HKVDC beat a team of Canadians in softball.<sup>255</sup> The competitive nature of the games would have been good for comradeship and bonding and would have provided another opportunity for the men to get to know each other better.

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<sup>254</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 103; Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 101.

<sup>255</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date; LAC, Ebdon Fonds, diary entry for December 27, 1942.

Incredibly, there were even games when the prisoners took on their Japanese captors. Physician and author Tim Wolter wrote that playing ball served as a reminder to prisoners that life existed “beyond the barbed wire” and that “on even rarer occasions could be a fragile bridge between captive and captor.”<sup>256</sup> Royal Rifle Sergeant James MacMillan wrote of one such game that took place on December 29, 1942, where a pick-up team of Canadians bested a team of Japanese camp staff in softball. Such a win must have been satisfying and good for morale. If they could not beat the Japanese on the battlefield, at least they could claim this minor victory over their opponents. MacMillan, though, was also quick to point out the irony of this kind of match, “Quite a thing, isn’t it? One day they play a game of ball and the next day they bot [*sic*] you around with the butts of their rifles.”<sup>257</sup> The unpredictability of the Japanese was confounding to the prisoners, but in this instance it was welcome.

Lieutenant Leonard Corrigan attempted to initiate early morning volleyball games, but quickly abandoned it as he “found the others somewhat lacking in ambition in the cold grey light of dawn.” Harry White started a lawn bowling program despite the notable handicap of not having a lawn to play on. He was able to acquire a roller from the Japanese which he used to pack down the sand and dirt. This game proved to be popular for, as White noted, it “doesn’t require much effort.” White also recorded that on May 14, 1944, he had begun a boxing class, but that four days later he had cracked a rib from the activity.<sup>258</sup> The injury was unsurprising considering how brittle his body must have been after two and a half years as a prisoner. But the ambition to create such activities shows that many of the Canadians were committed to keeping

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<sup>256</sup> Tim Wolter, *POW Baseball in World War II: The National Pastime Behind Barbed Wire* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002), 5.

<sup>257</sup> CWM, MacMillan Diary, December 30, 1942.

<sup>258</sup> Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 47; CWM, White Diary, December 10, 1943, May 14 and 18, 1944.

busy. As was often the case, it was officers such as lieutenants Blaver, Corrigan, and White who took the lead. Competitive spirit was healthy and it helped with the sense of normalcy that the men sought to instigate in the camps. Physical activities, however, became rare once the men were forced to participate in work projects.

While Leo Berard was writing his memoir *17 Days Until Christmas*, he noted that a new airport was being built in Hong Kong. “I don’t know what is to become of the old airport,” he wrote, “but I do know that the blood, tears and misery of many Canadians and other P.O.W.s still lies mixed with the gravel under the tarmac at Kai Tak.”<sup>259</sup> He was not exaggerating. In mid-June 1942, the Japanese ordered that Canadian work parties be sent to extend the runway at Kai Tak Airport on the Kowloon Peninsula.<sup>260</sup> Part of the job involved removing an ancient burial hill that contained Chinese tombs. Previously, the British had not extended the runway out of respect for the gravesite, but the Japanese showed no such courtesy. Nor did they show any chivalry to the British POWs who had been working at the airport since early February. Landslides and cave-ins had killed several men and their bodies were left where they had fallen.<sup>261</sup> Regardless of the danger, many Canadian prisoners initially were enthusiastic about joining the work parties because, as Lieutenant Corrigan put it, “for about eleven hours, the men were away from the unexciting monotony of camp life.”<sup>262</sup> Pay ranged from 25 sen (about \$1.40) per day for warrant officers to 10 sen (about 55 cents) per day for rifleman and privates. The Japanese, on occasion, provided the workers with cigarettes. In a rare instance of compliance with international

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<sup>259</sup> Bérard, *17 Days Until Christmas*, 105.

<sup>260</sup> The Japanese viewed POWs as an expendable and essential source of labour for their war effort. After all, the soldiers were fortunate that they had been spared on the battle field so why should they have it easy as prisoners? Philip Towle, “Japanese Culture and the Treatment of Prisoners of War in the Asian-Pacific War,” in *Prisoners in War*, edited by Sibylle Scheipers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 146-147.

<sup>261</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 286; Greenfield, *The Damned*, 263.

<sup>262</sup> Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 93.

conventions, the Japanese did not require commissioned officers to engage in physical labour, although many senior men chose to accompany the work parties in the hope that their presence would limit the abuse inflicted by the camp guards.<sup>263</sup> The effort was not always successful, but it did show the men that their officers supported them.

Winnipeg Grenadier Harold Atkinson described a typical working day: “We would be up at 5:00 in the morning, have breakfast at 5:30 and be on our way at 6:00 to the airport to work all day... Those work parties would finish at 6:00 at night, be back into camp by 7:00, into bed and up the next day the same way.” His Royal Rifle compatriot Vincent Calder elaborated: “It made no difference whether it was raining or not, we still went to work. 12 hours in the hot sun at Kai Tak Airport and you were ready to drop, making 16 to 18 hours from the time you got up until you got back to camp again.” Calder also recalled that every day that they returned to camp, they were notified that more men had died.<sup>264</sup> The gruelling work and dismal rations -- sometimes only a bun or a portion of rice was provided for lunch -- quickly dulled the early enthusiasm, but the soldiers found something else in the work to keep them motivated.

Part of the job at Kai Tak concerned mixing the appropriate amounts of concrete and sand to be used for the runway tarmac. Rifleman Kenneth Cambon spoke of how none of the men in his work party had experience with such materials and that they would purposely put as little cement into the mixture as possible, without attracting the attention of the guards.<sup>265</sup>

Corporal Edward Shayler of the Grenadiers fondly recalled the result of this act of sabotage.

Once the runway was complete the Japanese rewarded the prisoners with a piece of bread and

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<sup>263</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 103, and 125-126.

<sup>264</sup> HKVCA Personal Accounts, Harry Atkinson's Story, <https://www.hkvca.ca/historical/accounts/HarryAtkinson.php>; HKVCA Personal Accounts, Vince Calder's Account, <https://www.hkvca.ca/historical/accounts/Vince%20Calder/index.php>.

<sup>265</sup> Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito*, 41.

invited them to watch the first plane land. According to Shayler, “it got about a quarter of the way down the new part and a wheel broke through the cement and made a furrow about two hundred yards long.”<sup>266</sup> The Japanese were furious, took back the bread and beat some of the prisoners. But Leslie Canivet remembered that “the senior Japanese engineer was held responsible since he was in charge,” and he further believed that the Japanese executed the engineer for this deficiency in the work project.<sup>267</sup>

This was not the only act of sabotage carried out against the airport and their Japanese overseers by “C” Force men. Another task saw the men use small rail trolleys to move rocks and gravel from an uphill quarry down to the airport. Once the load was dumped, a fixed diesel engine pulled the trolleys back up to the quarry.<sup>268</sup> Rifleman Philip Doddridge noted that the trolleys were equipped with a simple brake that when wedged against the wheel slowed the car on its descent. Some Canadians were put in charge of operating this device and as Doddridge put it, “we arranged for as many “accidents” as possible.” If the trolleys came into a curve with too much speed, they derailed and spilled their load. Of course, the soldiers were made to carry out the repairs, but Doddridge said they “always found subtle ways to slow the process.” Inevitably, some men were injured during these staged derailments, but a broken ankle was the worst damage endured by a Canadian.<sup>269</sup> For some, the temptation to joyride in one of the trolleys was too much to bear. Rifleman James Flanagan was one of the trolley conductors and one day he and a workmate, in what was either a moment of extreme defiance or sheer madness, jumped into the cart and headed downhill. Although Flanagan applied the brake, it was not enough to

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<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Palmer, *Dark Side of the Sun*, 61.

<sup>267</sup> CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995. According to Canivet this was true, but it has not been confirmed through other sources.

<sup>268</sup> Flanagan, *The Endless Battle*, 76.

<sup>269</sup> HKVCA Personal Accounts, Memories Uninvited Phil Doddridge’s Story, <https://www.hkvca.ca/memoriesuninvited/index.php>.



prevent the cart, and the men, from overturning. Seemingly uninjured, and luckily unnoticed, the two soldiers returned the trolley to the track and carried on with the job.<sup>270</sup> Such reckless behaviour may be difficult to comprehend, but perhaps this was a way of injecting some much needed excitement and fun into the tediousness of camp life.

Prisoners of war, especially those under the Japanese, were wise to never directly antagonize their captors, but any act of disruption that would negatively affect the enemy was also a part of their duty as Canadian soldiers. The sabotage activities at Kai Tak were brave displays by men who must have known that repercussions for their actions would be severe, perhaps even fatal. Most of the work at the airport was completed by the end of 1943 and Japanese aircraft arrived and took off regularly after that. But, for a time, the prisoners had prevented and prolonged that from happening, and this surely gave them some satisfaction as they were, no matter how small the measure, continuing to take the fight to their enemy. Other work projects existed in Hong Kong, notably carrying out various repairs and cutting grass, but none of them was particularly exciting or beneficial. However, there was one job that the prisoners were happy to engage in.

One of the more remarkable, and certainly one of the more advantageous pastimes, was the tending of camp gardens. The benefits of keeping a garden are obvious. Firstly, the food would have provided a much-needed extra source of essential vitamins. Fresh fruit was exceptionally rare, and vegetables served were often not much more than chrysanthemum tops. Secondly, the gardens were another social activity that the prisoners could do together. Lastly, it

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<sup>270</sup> Flanagan, *The Endless Battle*, 77.

was something in which the men could take pride as they witnessed the tangible results of their hard work.

The Japanese, who provided the POWs with some seeds to start with, saw the gardens as a harmless and productive pastime for the prisoners. It would keep them out of trouble and give them some extra food to eat. The garden at North Point appears to have been started in the spring of 1942. Leonard Corrigan's diary makes the earliest mention of this on May 1. He remarked that a mixture of Canadian soil and Hong Kong rainfall would make a potent combination. However, the soil in camp was "decent" and though most of the plants looked as though "they lacked permanency," the bananas were doing rather well.<sup>271</sup> Grenadier Thomas Forsyth, put on a gardening project on May 9, two days later wrote that a working party of 25 Grenadiers and 25 Royal Rifles were cultivating an acre and a half of land to ready it for a garden. "We are spading it, picking up stones, carrying down good earth from the hillsides and putting it in long narrow trenches in which we will grow our seeds." Arthur Squires also partook in the gardening and took a lot of pleasure from it, writing that "I have papayas, bananas, a few tomatoes and some hibiscus." He added that, "plants grow easily here if watered due to the high humidity. The sun is very strong."<sup>272</sup> For once the men may have actually been happy to see it rain in Hong Kong. When the Canadians were moved from North Point to Sham Shui Po in late September 1942, they took their industrious new hobby with them.

Private Leslie Canivet, who spent his entire captivity in Hong Kong, recalled that it afforded the POWs more open space than the camps in Japan, and that they took advantage of

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<sup>271</sup> Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 63.

<sup>272</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entries for May 9 and 11, 1942; CWM, Squires, *Diary*, June 14, 1942.

this.<sup>273</sup> He remembers growing sweet potatoes but they rarely ate them although he did not say why, choosing instead to cut the tops off and use the greens. But as with much else in camp, the garden depended on whether Japanese officers felt like allowing it or not. “Every now and then the Japs would come in and take away our garden, except for one or two potatoes, and we’d have to start all over again,” he reflected in an interview.<sup>274</sup> Beyond Japanese interference, keeping the garden productive was not always easy and, as they so often did, the Canadians had to resort to self-made solutions. Lieutenant Donald Languedoc said the garden was a great method to combat boredom and they had many tomato and bean plants, but that they had to resort to using their own “waste” as fertilizer. Without rain, irrigation was an obvious problem, but the men got around this by using what was available to them, namely scrap lengths of pipe and old water tanks.<sup>275</sup>

As time wore on and as rations became scarcer, the garden took on even greater significance. Lieutenant Harry White of the Grenadiers, ever the leader and often more concerned with others than himself, wrote in April 1943 that he was hoping the garden would produce food not only for the soldiers in camp but “particularly for the hospital.” In addition to working on the group garden, he started a small one of his own in October 1943. By November 1944, he recorded that gardens had taken over every possible plot of available land and that everyone was “at it to try and get something to help our diet.”<sup>276</sup> According to Kenneth Baird, by December 22, 1944, the men were also raising chickens that produced about 30 eggs a day, “and as we have 470 people in this camp we should get one every 20 days if the hens and ducks keep

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<sup>273</sup> As a long-time member of the Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada, Canivet likely made this presumption after talking with veterans who had been sent to Japan.

<sup>274</sup> CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995.

<sup>275</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 29.6, Peter Louis MacDougall, Notes and Letters, 1941-1945, transcript of interview with Donald Languedoc; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for May 24, 1943.

<sup>276</sup> CWM, White Diary, April 10 and October 29, 1943, and November 24, 1944.

working.” The same day saw Baird fry a couple of tomatoes from the garden. “Believe me they were good,” he wrote.<sup>277</sup> It must also have been gratifying to eat “homegrown” produce. Captain Stanley Banfill, one of the chief medical officers, noted that, especially in the last two years of the war, “gardening was not only a recreation but made valuable contributions to our diet.” In their postwar study, medical officers John Crawford and J. A. G. Reid recorded the average daily diet, in grams, for Canadian POWs in Hong Kong by tabulating what the Japanese issued and what was provided from other sources. From July 1944 until the end of the war there was the sudden appearance of fresh vegetables and undoubtedly this was due to what the gardens were generating as these were never issued by the Japanese.<sup>278</sup> Many pastimes and means of keeping busy existed in the Hong Kong prisoner camps, but it is difficult to imagine that any of them were more important to the men’s survival than their communal gardens.

However, besides food, there were other concerns, and once again resourcefulness came into play. Once the men were herded into prison camps with what few belongings they could carry, it became clear that their army boots would not make appropriate footwear for Hong Kong’s hot and rainy weather. One of the soldiers, Rifleman Kenneth Cambon, entered camp without anything to protect his feet and had developed nasty blisters. He was fortunate that his friend, Rifleman J. S. Hickey was a competent artisan who crafted a pair of sandals for his mate. Cambon had no idea where the materials came from, but noted the durability of the sandals as he still had them in his possession when he was sent to Japan in August 1943.<sup>279</sup> Indeed, sandals became prominent as they provided some foot support and allowed weary feet a chance to

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<sup>277</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 221.

<sup>278</sup> Quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 321; J. N. Crawford and J. A. G. Reid, “Nutritional Disease Affecting Canadian Troops Held Prisoner of War by the Japanese,” *Canadian Journal of Research* 25, no. 2 (1947), 55.

<sup>279</sup> Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito*, 36.

breath. Thomas Forsyth wrote in early January 1942 that Major Baird had advised them to make “wooden sandals or clogs to save our shoes.” Baird himself wrote a few weeks later that he was making sandals of his own as he only had one pair of shoes and that they had to last him an indeterminate amount of time. In May, Baird wrote that his men were making “sandals and all sorts of things to sell for cigarettes.” In addition to his homemade sandals and cribbage board, Baird also was the proud owner of a wooden cane his men had made and given to him as a gift. This generous token showed that the soldiers still respected their senior officers. Sandals were apparently available for purchase at the canteen, but the prices were so exorbitant that nobody could afford them.<sup>280</sup>

Other commodities or necessities were quickly manufactured or improvised. One Royal Rifle was seen eating rice out of an ornamental hubcap he had repurposed for a bowl. A Signaller with Brigade Headquarters found a small knife and carved himself a spoon and cup to replace those he had lost during the battle. He went on to make more of each which he would sell for cigarettes.<sup>281</sup> Collison Blaver took up the carving of small ashtrays, Grenadier Joseph Kitkoski carved a set of chess pieces, and Rifleman Raymond Elliott shaped a piece of cotton into a passable mosquito net. Philip Doddridge recalled that “some enterprising chap built a steam generating device out of an old oil drum.” The intention was to rid their clothes of lice and, though it was not successful, at least an attempt was made.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for January 1, 1942; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 63 and 105.

<sup>281</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for January 19, 1942; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 54.

<sup>282</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for July 26, 1942; CWM, Elliott Diary, April 23, 1942; Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association Personal Accounts, Memories Uninvited - Phil Doddridge's Story, <https://www.hkvca.ca/memoriesuninvited/index.php>.

Other creations were more fruitful. Small tin cans with strings dipped in peanut oil provided some light during the dark evenings.<sup>283</sup> Foraging parties brought back electrical pieces from downed aircraft that were used to make a clandestine radio. Leslie Canivet called the radio their own “bamboo telegraph” and that they were able to keep up to date with BBC news. He also remarked that the Japanese knew that they had the radio, but they could never find it as it was constantly moved around and kept by trusted people. Harry White wrote that on September 14, 1943 they were made to stand in the sun for nine and a half hours while the Japanese searched for the radio. White noted that the radio was no longer in camp, but he did not mention what happened to it.<sup>284</sup> Another success was created by Royal Rifle Lance Ross who fashioned a device to catch Chinese doves. Using a box with a long piece of string as the trap and a bit of leftover rice for the bait, he waited patiently until an unsuspecting bird landed to pick at the rice. A pull of the string added some meat to his meager diet. But the next day more hunters and more boxes appeared and soon the doves grew wise and never returned.<sup>285</sup>

With so much inventiveness and creativity it is hardly surprising that some handicraft exhibits were held in the prison camps. Presumably, the Japanese authorities saw no problem with this and two displays were held in North Point in May and July 1942, while at least one was held in Sham Shui Po on November 30, 1944. Major Baird described the first exhibition: “some of the carvings and woodwork are really wonderful: rings made of silver coins, gloves, socks, mitts knitted on needles made of wood, drawings, etchings and carvings, inlaid cigarette cases, boxes, canes and dozens of things.” He noted that there were more than 60 entries, including several drawings that were etched by a member of the Royal Rifles. The handicraft show held in

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<sup>283</sup> Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 52

<sup>284</sup> CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995; CWM, White Diary, September 14, 1943.

<sup>285</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 287.

1944 was organized with an even greater purpose: to raise money for the widows and children held in the civilian internment camp at Fort Stanley. Baird was eager to display a brass plaque that he had made from a shell casing and on which he had been working industriously since February 1942. Such a long-term project “helped me to fill in many weeks that were darned tough to get over in the past two years,” he wrote. Baird was clearly patient and motivated to accomplish something that helped keep him occupied. On December 7, 1944, he declared with great pride that the show was a success and that “lotteries, sideshows, games, and sales of articles” had raised a considerable amount of money for their designated charity.<sup>286</sup> It is a striking show of character that after nearly three years as prisoners, men who had so little were committed to sharing what they did have with those whom they considered in greater need. The generosity and ingenuity displayed by the Canadians did not go unnoticed by some of their fellow prisoners.

Arthur Ernesto Gomes, a Portuguese volunteer who served with the HKVDC, was a prisoner of war in Sham Shui Po with the Canadians. In an oral history interview for the Imperial War Museum he recalled that a uniquely Canadian stereotype held true, at least for him. The Japanese brought large logs into camp for the prisoners to use as firewood. Gomes said that all they had to cut it with was a small hand axe, making it an implausible task. “But the Canadians showed us how to do it,” Gomes recalled. “They were lumberjacks.” By taking a four-foot length of waterpipe and affixing the hand axe at one end they created an implement that could be swung hard enough to split wood. Gomes marveled at how the Canadians could hit the same spot every time and that after 30 or 40 strokes the wood would crack open.<sup>287</sup> This kind of skill is hardly a

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<sup>286</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 109, 217, and 219.

<sup>287</sup> Imperial War Museum Archives, Arthur Ernesto Gomes Interview, Catalogue Number 21131: Reel 7, March 23, 2001, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80021242>.

revelation considering many of “C” Force’s soldiers were recruited from rural areas, especially the men of the Royal Rifles, who largely hailed from Quebec’s eastern townships, the Gaspé Peninsula, and the Maritime provinces. “Many were farmers, fishermen, lumberjacks, paper makers, and miners,” wrote Company Sergeant Major George MacDonell. “They were used to hard work and life in the open, and they were fit and tough as nails.”<sup>288</sup> But less strenuous activities were always welcome. Sometimes the men simply wanted to sit down together and play cards.

Games constituted an easy form of mental occupation for the members of “C” Force. The Chinese tile game of mahjong was a favourite with some prisoners, as was chess which, as Signalman Arthur Squires remarked, “is a good game for this place.”<sup>289</sup> By improving his own game and by teaching a friend, Squires had found something that could occupy large amounts of time. A more peculiar game was mentioned by Raymond Elliott who wrote on April 8, 1942 that he had made a Monopoly board.<sup>290</sup> Unfortunately, there is no further mention of this in his diary and it is unclear what he would have used for the board or game pieces, but his creation reflected his ambition to find a way to keep busy, as Monopoly, as with chess, can be played over long periods of time. Collison Blaver and Kenneth Baird both recorded making cribbage boards, and there is one on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa that was made from the sole of an old shoe.<sup>291</sup> On December 14, 1944, Lieutenant Harry White recorded that a different game had made its way into camp: bingo. The classic game was modified for camp use by Francis ‘Huck’ O’Neill, an officer with the Canadian Auxiliary Services, and proved to be very popular

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<sup>288</sup> MacDonell, *One Soldier's Story 1939-1945*, 44.

<sup>289</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, September 10, 1942.

<sup>290</sup> CWM, Elliott Diary, April 8, 1942.

<sup>291</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 63.



with White noting that at least half the camp had gathered one afternoon with “bits of cards and some stones for markers.” O’Neill asked for a few Japanese sen (maybe 10 or 15 cents) per card to play, allowing him to hand out a few cigarettes as prizes.<sup>292</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most popular game played among the POWs was bridge. Requiring only players and a deck of cards, bridge was a game that could be easily played in prison camps and provided another opportunity for social interaction. Leonard Corrigan remarked that on days when rain would keep them inside, bridge was the obvious choice to pass the time. Corrigan taught others how to play, but also noted that he managed to lose to his pupils quite often.<sup>293</sup> For those looking to learn the game on their own there was help available in the form of a unique guide. Captain Charles Price of the Royal Rifles possessed a notebook that indicated it was bound and printed in Sham Shui Po in April 1943, though precisely how is unclear. *Notes on Contract Bridge*, compiled by Lieutenant William Nugent of the Grenadiers, contained information that he presented in a series of talks in camp to encourage more men to play bridge. The notebook also served as a guide and source of reference for those who attended classes on the subject. Nugent’s preface contains a humorous disclaimer that says, “The writer finds that he has positively no desire to interview the irate partners of any players into whose hands this book may fall.” Part one details ‘bidding and strategy’ and part two covers ‘hints on playing’.<sup>294</sup> Many Canadians played bridge to pass the time and the game is referred to often in the diaries and memoirs. Interestingly, there is only one mention of someone playing solitaire. The games played in the Hong Kong prison camps focused on teams or groups rather than individuals. After

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<sup>292</sup> CWM, White Diary, December 14, 1944.

<sup>293</sup> Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 46 and 71.

<sup>294</sup> Library and Archives Canada, Papers of Charles E. Price, “Notes on Contract Bridge,” compiled by W.F. Nugent, MG30-E437, R7031-0-2-E.

all, the men survived together, not on their own. And for group entertainment, it was even more imperative that the soldiers worked together.

The two most prominent and common forms of mass entertainment were to attend concerts and stage plays. Remarkably, many musical instruments had survived the destruction wrought from the battle. The Winnipeg Grenadiers arrived in camp with virtually all their band instruments intact, while, luckily, a piano had been salvaged from St. Elbert's Convent Hospital and brought into North Point camp. Furthermore, members of the HKVDC, with permission from the Japanese, were able to have friends and relatives on the outside send in even more instruments.<sup>295</sup> As a result, bands and orchestras were organized, and music became a constant and welcome presence in the prison camps.

The first concert, according to prisoner diaries, occurred very early on during captivity. Rifleman Delbert Welsh wrote on January 6, 1942, that a Japanese band had played for them before breakfast. Grenadier Thomas Forsyth bluntly remarked that, "we were invited to attend - or else." But he added that "not to be outdone, what was left of our band, along with the remainder of the Royal Scots band got together and played a few selections."<sup>296</sup> For some, music has exceptional healing powers, and it is evident that having music in the prison camps had a profound effect on the mood and morale of the soldiers. Harry White wrote on January 24, 1942 that a guitar and saxophone had made their way into the camp, and at night the prospect of music would bring the men together. "Funny how an hour's singsong can take you right out of the camp altogether. You can forget your surroundings, etc." he said. Signalman Georges Verreault also found that music transported him to a better place. On February 22, 1942, he wrote that "last

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<sup>295</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 104; Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 95.

<sup>296</sup> CWM, Welsh Diary, January 6, 1942; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for January 6, 1942.

evening I was happy for a few hours. I had saved myself some bread and made myself some toasts on a small fire while the Grenadier Orchestra in the next hut was playing dance music. During these hours, I forget this hell.” Later in Sham Shui Po, Kenneth Cambon recalled a concert that was “simply fabulous” due to its elaborate costumes and staging. He credited this show to the imaginative Pole Jan Solecki, who was raised in Harbin, China, and joined the HKVDC shortly before war’s outbreak. “These concerts did much for the morale of everyone as for an hour or two one was wafted over the barbed wire into another world.”<sup>297</sup> The concerts were aided in no small part by the fact that many talented musicians were amongst the prisoners.

Private Bill Ashton of the Winnipeg Grenadiers recalled that his unit had “the best swing band in the nation” and that many members of their marching band were professional musicians from around Manitoba. One of them, George Sweeney, was a highly regarded clarinetist and saxophonist, while another, Johnny Matheson, “could make a trumpet drip honey.” Ashton noted that not only was music allowed by the Japanese camp commandant, but that after the second concert in North Point the commandant ordered a shipment of lumber to be brought in, so a stage could be constructed. The commandant occasionally sat and watched the performances with his interpreter.<sup>298</sup> Verreault wrote that his new friend William Allister was the host for many of these musical soirées and that, for a time, the intermission entertainment was provided by amateur wrestlers “Bruno and Charron” who were so good that Verreault declared “professionals could not make it more realistic.” Cambon also remembered the array of talent, and that it extended to the staff at the Bowen Road Hospital where, perhaps, the healing power of music was needed most. A piano and a few string and brass instruments in conjunction with the “surfeit of

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<sup>297</sup> CWM, *White Diary*, January 24, 1942; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 60; Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito*, 50.

<sup>298</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 242.

entertainment talent among the hospital staff” provided weekly concerts for the infirmed.<sup>299</sup>

Fortunately, musical instruments were not lacking, and even those who did not have their own managed to find a way around that problem.

The much-discussed ingenuity of Canadian prisoners also extended to music. On August 7, 1942, Thomas Forsyth wrote that two of his Grenadier companions, James Murray and Thomas Weir, had “constructed a curious string instrument and are producing some weird sounds from it.” And Lance Corporal Thomas Weir was apparently not one to give up easily. On March 16, 1943, Forsyth wrote in his diary that Weir was “still trying to make a stringed instrument,” but that many within camp were hoping that he would fail.<sup>300</sup> Weir, despite his resourcefulness, was not a talented musician. Harry White also wrote about how ingenuity was a contributing factor in maintaining musical harmony throughout the camp. In an example often mentioned in other works, he explained that Major Maurice Parker of the Royal Rifles had fashioned a cello out of an old oil drum and that he was actually able to play it in spite of its large and awkward size. In the same entry, White wrote that another prisoner named Kubichuck somehow managed to construct a guitar.<sup>301</sup> The theatrical shows also involved a degree of inventiveness and participation, and though once again Canadians were heavily involved, the Portuguese contributions were just as noteworthy.

Major Kenneth Baird wrote to his wife and daughter on January 27, 1943, that the Portuguese contingent of the HKVDC had staged a “really excellent” show. It was so popular that it ran for three consecutive evenings and motivated Baird to see it again. “Wish you could come,” he wrote to his family, but on second thought he persuaded himself that, “No, I don’t – I

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<sup>299</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 82; Cambon, *Guest of Hirohito*, 47.

<sup>300</sup> LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entries for August 7, 1942 and March 16, 1943.

<sup>301</sup> CWM, White Diary, September 9, 1942.

wouldn't have you in this damn country for all the gold in the world."<sup>302</sup> Harry White, ever the prolific scribe, recorded on May 21, 1943, that the prisoners had managed to get some lights for their stage,<sup>303</sup> and that the previous evening they had produced their best play thus far. He noted the creativity that went into making the props and costumes, "wigs from the string of rice sacks, mosquito nets for evening dresses, wooden frames with paper glued on for wings, rice glue, and some chalk colouring the Japanese had provided." However, a performance by one of the Portuguese actors came in for special praise. Ferdinand "Sonny" Castro performed the female lead in most of the stage plays as he "has all the little quirks of a girl. He's a good looking lad anyway, and his smile, the way he rolls his eyes, his hands, etc., he could pass as a girl anywhere," White remarked. Captain Lionel Hurd of the Royal Rifles also noted that Castro was "a marvel at impersonating a girl."<sup>304</sup> This unnamed show also ran for three nights, and one of those evenings was especially for the hospital and all able-bodied patients were moved out to see it. "It's wonderful for the morale of the whole camp," White concluded.<sup>305</sup>

Lionel Hurd recalled that on Dominion Day 1943 "a splendid 3 act drama" titled *Here Comes Charlie* was performed with a cast largely composed of Canadian officers.<sup>306</sup> White was one of those officers who caught the acting bug and he made his debut the following year having a lead role in the play *Once in a Lifetime*, despite his claim to have "done no memory work since school days, years ago." The play was another success and propelled him to tackle a bigger challenge in 1945, a part in the skit *Ole Silver of the Range* which required him to memorize 150

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<sup>302</sup> Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 158.

<sup>303</sup> By this point the Canadians were in back in Sham Shui Po camp. They had returned to find the church largely destroyed, but the stage and walls were still intact, and this is where productions were mounted until the end of the war.

<sup>304</sup> Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 194.

<sup>305</sup> CWM, White Diary, May 21, 1943.

<sup>306</sup> Diary of Captain E. L. Hurd, quoted in Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 194.

lines of dialogue within a week.<sup>307</sup> The theatrical shows were not only good for providing desperately needed entertainment, but for those eager to participate, the task of memorizing dialogue would have been good for keeping one's mind and memory sharp, and the execution of a role on stage in front of a crowd would have been good for one's confidence. As with concerts, the plays became what Royal Rifles historian Grant Garneau called a "focal point in camp life." These forms of entertainment were something that the prisoners could look forward to. For those involved in the production and performance of the concerts and stage shows, it instilled a source of pride and accomplishment. According to Garneau, "even when conditions were at their worst the vicarious experience of watching a play somehow momentarily relieved the reality of the grim existence within the camp."<sup>308</sup> Historian Sears Eldredge has expanded on the idea, writing that for POWs:

Every show they put on, every piece of music played, song sung or laughter provoked, every glamorous female impersonator who dared to tease audiences with "her" sexuality, was understood not only as a momentary triumph over adversity but a temporary victory over their captors. During times of performance, they were fully human again – and free.<sup>309</sup>

Musical and theatrical entertainment, concluded Sears, played a key role in prisoner morale and survival. This was certainly true for the audiences in Hong Kong as evident by how frequently these forms of entertainment are mentioned in prisoner diaries, memoirs, and interviews. Concerts and plays were two of the dominant pastimes, but many smaller-scale diversions existed as well.

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<sup>307</sup> CWM, White Diary, February 24, 1944 and June 3, 1945.

<sup>308</sup> Garneau, *The Royal Rifles of Canada in Hong Kong 1941-1945*, 126.

<sup>309</sup> Sears Eldridge, "Wonder Bar: Music and Theatre as Strategies for Survival in a Second World War POW Hospital Camp," in *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire*, edited by Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum (New York: Routledge, 2012), 32.

Various other hobbies were practiced among the POW's. Georges Verreault started a choir to perform at church masses, while William Allister joined a choir of Russian expatriates who were members of the HKVDC. Allister could not speak Russian, but he felt that he could memorize the words well enough to add his voice to the ensemble. The words were not the point anyway, he argued, instead noting that "the spirit of the song made its own transcendent language." Allister accompanied the Russians as they toured the camp sick wards. "I felt this power as we sang," he remembered, "this joining of ourselves to the others and to these gaunt faces, this giving and receiving." Many of the prisoners' activities were empowering and propelled them to keep up the fight for survival. Verreault and Allister would later combine some



A sketch by James MacMillan. ©Matthew Schwarzkopf

different talents in a type of business venture. Allister, a capable artist, painted sunset landscapes that the two men sold for cigarettes.

Verreault provided the supplies, making the paint brushes and using pieces of an old tent he found in the garbage for the canvases.<sup>310</sup> Arthur

Squires and Thomas Forsyth did pencil sketches, as did James

MacMillan whose works were a mirror into his life as a prisoner of war. Among the many titled drawings that accompany his notes and diary are such pieces as "North Point Delousing Parade",

<sup>310</sup> Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 74; Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 88.

“Buns For Sale”, “Sea-Wall Latrine”, “Old Rifle North Point Kitchen”, and “Ration Square,” which depicts a group of men who are lining up to carry supplies from a truck into a building.<sup>311</sup>

MacMillan’s notes are varied and emblematic of a man who had a lot on his mind and a desire to keep busy. He kept track of his days as a prisoner and the pay he was due. He also kept a list of all the letters that he received while a prisoner and a list of all the books that he read during his captivity. In addition, MacMillan found it meaningful to write out several things that he had to remember to do after the war. Once home he had to pay “all back-insurance premiums” and pay off a bet that he had lost to Carl Olsson, a rifleman in MacMillan’s battalion.<sup>312</sup>

MacMillan intended to pay two of his mates for having cut his hair in camp, buy a pipe for another, and have dinner with two others at their homes once they returned to Quebec. He also sought to purchase a good address book and to “develop idea of a Friends Scrap Book with pictures, etc.”<sup>313</sup> Collison Blaver kept similar lists and notes. He recorded the books that he read in camp, the Red Cross supplies that he received, the deaths of his comrades, and wagers that he made in camp. For example, he bet Harry White a bottle of scotch that the war would be finished only after November 15, 1944. Next to the wager he wrote “won.” As with MacMillan, he made a checklist of “things to be done when I get home.” Blaver had ambitions to do things such as: pay off all mortgages and bills owing, try for a position near home “and get one!”, complete

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<sup>311</sup> CWM, Squires Diary, August 2, 1942; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for January 11, 1942; Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 271.3, James C. M. MacMillan, Poetry and Illustrations of POW James C. M. MacMillan, 1942-1945.

<sup>312</sup> The bet was likely over how soon the war would end or when the prisoners would be released as these were common speculations for gambling.

<sup>313</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 271.1, James C. M. MacMillan, Journals and Notes of POW James C. M. MacMillan, 1941-1945.



various chores at his properties, buy a Chevrolet Coupe or Buick, and take some radio and management classes.<sup>314</sup>

Other men also planned for their returns to Canada. Donald Geraghty compiled an address list of the new friends that he had made in camp, many of them Britons, so that he could keep in touch with them after the war. Thomas Forsyth wrote in his diary about Grenadier Edward Cole and how he drew “endless plans of the house he intends to build when he gets home.” He added that other men discussed the cost of starting up a farm.<sup>315</sup> All of these men were thinking ahead, planning for their futures lives because they believed that they would have them. They were motivated to survive and committed to making it home, and these notes and diary entries show that they anticipated having plenty to look forward to. Foreseeing a bright future made the dark present more bearable.

The varied and inventive pastimes partaken by the men of “C” Force indicate a desire to keep themselves occupied and to instill a sense of normalcy into the tediousness of camp life. They engaged in activities which exercised both their bodies and their minds. Most of these pursuits were done communally, thereby strengthening the bonds between soldiers and reaffirming their commitments to survive captivity together. They were productive and imaginative, enthusiastic about learning new things, and managed to have some fun even though their circumstances dictated that was likely the last thing that should have happened. And they thought about home and looked forward to getting there. Most of them would.

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<sup>314</sup> CWM, Blaver Diary, no date.

<sup>315</sup> CWM, Geraghty Diary, Pages 27, 28, and 29, no dates; LAC, Forsyth Fonds, diary entry for July 22, 1942.

## Conclusion

### In Memory, They All Survived

“But you must understand that our life was not altogether grim, at least not as grim as it was from the point of view of the sick. We had our lighter and happier moments, in which we forgot our misery and lived once more like civilized humans.”<sup>316</sup>

- Major John Crawford, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps

The second mission was about survival and most of the Canadian prisoners of war in Hong Kong, and Japan, completed that mission. Their war ended on August 15, 1945 when Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced to his people that the fighting had ceased. The next day Harry White wrote that they had secured a Chinese newspaper and had it translated. “At last the great news,” he exclaimed. “Hell of a feeling in one’s chest, kind of choked up, many tears in evidence.” Leonard Corrigan wrote on the 17th that prisoners poured out onto the main road and engaged in “a big sing-song.” The same day Kenneth Baird found it impossible to put his feelings into words, but his thoughts immediately turned to those who had been killed or had died.<sup>317</sup> On the 19th the chief Canadian and British medical officers, John Crawford and Leopold Ashton-Rose, were put in charge of the two remaining camps which housed soldiers. From the Japanese surrender it would be nearly four weeks until the arrival of Allied relieving forces and on September 16 Japanese forces in Hong Kong formally surrendered to the British Royal Navy.

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<sup>316</sup> Crawford, “A Medical Officer in Hong Kong,” 9.

<sup>317</sup> CWM, White Diary, August 16, 1945; Corrigan, *The Diary of Lieut. Leonard B. Corrigan*, 187; Baird, *Letters to Harvelyn*, 261.



Commander Peter MacRitchie of HMCS *Prince Robert* meeting with liberated Canadian prisoners of war at Sham Shui Po Camp, September 1945. ©Library and Archives Canada. MIKAN no. 3617924.

Once liberated, the former POWs boarded the Canadian armed merchant cruiser HMCS *Prince Robert*. The ship that had escorted the men's troopship on its journey to Hong Kong in 1941 was going to take them home four long years later. *Prince Robert* first called at Manila in the

Philippines where American medical personnel evaluated the men's health and cared for them.

After the voyage home across the Pacific Ocean, the POWs arrived in San Francisco or

Esquimalt, British Columbia where *Prince Robert* docked on October 20, 1945. Some had to be hospitalized or quarantined again, such as Francis Martyn who was still in a Vancouver hospital in November when he received a letter from his father that was dated October 14, 1945. The

First World War veteran of the Winnipeg Grenadiers wrote to his son, "I'm so darn proud of you I could shout it from the hilltops, you beat me by over two years in the Army (guess I'll never be able to live that one down ha ha), well you've certainly got what it takes to come through it."<sup>318</sup>

When they were healthy the men could begin the often very long train journey back to their hometowns. Philip Doddridge, for example, arrived in San Francisco from Manila, boarded a train to Seattle, took a ferry to Victoria, another ferry to the BC mainland, and, after five days of

<sup>318</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 6.15, Francis Dennis Ford Martyn, Fonds, 1941-1945, letter dated October 14, 1945.

waiting, a train to Montreal. In fact, it was more than three months after the war's end before the last Canadian returned home.<sup>319</sup> But they *would* make it home, and they were all with their families for Christmas 1945. They had much to celebrate that holiday season.

The members of "C" Force survived 1,330 days of captivity for several reasons. One predominant reason was the commitment of the medical staff. Dr. Crawford and his team performed their work in unimaginably difficult circumstances and it is largely due to their determined effort that more men did not die in the camps. But healthy bodies also need to be properly fed and many prisoners managed to eat just enough to survive. Through extra work, trade, or simply the generosity of their comrades, the men found ways to obtain extra sustenance. The carefully managed and widely shared Red Cross supplies made timely contributions to their health, as did produce from the communal gardens. Most of the Canadians held strong moral convictions about why they must survive. They had families that were relying on them to make it home. Letters from parents, wives, sons and daughters, and their own dreams for the future inspired the men to carry on. They had strong leadership in captivity and officers reminded them that they were still soldiers with responsibilities, and that they were still at war. Many did not need reminding. They worked together to alleviate boredom and instill a sense of normalcy in anything but normal conditions. Through it all they tried to keep their morale high and encouraged each other to do the same. Crucially, they did all of this together. It was kinship that led to Canadian survival in Hong Kong prisoner of war camps.

Men from all over Canada, and from many different walks of life, served with "C" Force. But the nature of their battle against the Japanese, and their subsequent imprisonment, did away

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<sup>319</sup> Greenfield, *The Damned*, 362.

with many of those divisions. In North Point and then Sham Shui Po most of the Canadians strove to create a shared camaraderie. Province of birth, religious background, social status, and education became unimportant as the men realized that, as prisoners of war, there was more that united them than separated them. Still, it was not entirely harmonious. There were cases of theft, there was resentment in the ranks, there were arguments, fights, and even suicides. But for the most part, being a prisoner of war in Hong Kong gave the men a shared goal of survival and that led to barriers being broken.

One of the most noteworthy examples was the relationship that developed between Georges Verreault and William Allister. Both were members of Brigade Headquarters and both were from Montreal, but their religious affiliations meant that their lives would be unlikely to intersect in 1940s Quebec. Verreault confessed in a June 1942 diary entry how this newfound friendship had caused him to re-evaluate a preconceived prejudice. “Strange! I used to despise Jews and now my best friend is a Jew,” he wrote. After a few months as prisoners, Verreault felt closer to Allister than he did to an old friend who was in Hong Kong with him. He even expressed how much he looked forward to meeting Allister’s family.<sup>320</sup> They mention each other frequently in their respective diary and memoir. The shared difficulties of their captivity had created an unusual partnership, and one that likely never would have occurred outside these circumstances. They helped each other survive. The POW experience in Hong Kong changed some people for the better.

In a captivity marked by so much suffering and death it seems incredible that anything positive could have been taken away from the experience, but some of the former POWs do try

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<sup>320</sup> Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan*, 83.

to remember the better times. Perhaps it is a coping mechanism for living with the memories. One of the most positive reflections came from Dr. John Crawford. This, at first, seems peculiar considering that Crawford surely witnessed more death and misery than the average prisoner. But in 1946 he insisted that, above all else, he remembered the friends that he had made: "There were lots of people who were worth knowing, people from many strange corners of the earth who had been caught in Hong Kong along with the rest of us. When one rubs shoulders with people like that, one loses some of one's corners, and learns what a cosmopolite really is." Crawford maintained that he did not regret the experience and that he had learned a lot from it, principally the concept of tolerance, which he believed "in itself is an education."<sup>321</sup> Leslie Canivet, his facial scars from the battle still clearly visible in his 1995 interview, remarked that he also tried to remember the happier times, believing that this was a normal reaction for someone who has been through a traumatic experience. When asked how he would sum up his life, Canivet responded: "Well I wouldn't change anything, except I would have preferred a better holiday in Hong Kong."<sup>322</sup> Tellingly, he does not lament that he was sent to Hong Kong, only that he wished the battlefield results had turned out differently.

Some were steadfast in their pride of having served their country, no matter the outcome. Corporal Alexander Henderson of the Winnipeg Grenadiers was more diplomatic than Canivet, and more serious: "I came out of it alive, anyway. I served my time as I had volunteered to do. We wound up over there, we did our bit, we made the best of it. You can't have any feelings of resentment or regret about that."<sup>323</sup> Royal Rifles Sergeant James MacMillan also reflected with a

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<sup>321</sup> Crawford, "A Medical Officer in Hong Kong," 9-10.

<sup>322</sup> CWM, Canivet Interview, 1995.

<sup>323</sup> Quoted in Dancocks, *In Enemy Hands*, 283-284.

degree of positivity, and humility, when asked in a 1996 interview how he felt about the war years:

I am pleased with myself for having served my country in a time of war. I volunteered to serve in the Canadian Army and chose which regiment to join, so I don't have any regrets with what transpired following enlistment...It is claimed it was a mistake to send my regiment to Hong Kong, and maybe it was, but mistakes of many kinds are made in time of war...Incarceration as a P.O.W was long and difficult but some other Allied troops became P.O.W.'s in other theatres as well...I survived the war and internment and I am thankful for that.<sup>324</sup>

Often the men did not allow acrimony to fester. They moved on. Philip Doddridge, the current (2018) president of the Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada, recalled that the time he spent in the prison camps gave him an opportunity to reflect on his life up to that point, and how he would change it when he got home. He went back to school and became a teacher.<sup>325</sup>

Doddridge, at 96 years of age, continues to be a voice for all Hong Kong veterans, living and deceased. Shortly after the men returned to Canada, various local associations were formed under the moniker "The Hong Kong Veterans Association." The veterans believed that their special circumstances called for their own distinct organization, and these local associations were amalgamated to create six regional branches of the renamed Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada (HKVAC). They would have much work to do. On September 8, 1951, Canada and 47 other nations signed The Treaty of San Francisco, also known as the Treaty of Peace with Japan. Article Sixteen concerned the allocation of compensation for prisoners of war and civilians who had suffered under the Japanese during the war. The article declared that Japan would pay the International Committee of the Red Cross which then had to distribute funds to the appropriate

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<sup>324</sup> Canadian War Museum Archives, 58A 1 271.2, James C. M. MacMillan, Postwar correspondence of POW James C. M. MacMillan, July 22, 1996.

<sup>325</sup> The Memory Project Veteran Stories, Philip Doddridge, <http://www.thememoryproject.com/stories/1396:philip-doddridge/>.

national agencies. The Canadian government reasoned that this article both granted sufficient reparations and negated its obligation to provide the former POWs with financial aid. The “C” Force veterans were justifiably outraged, but neither they, nor their organization gave up.

On August 20, 1965, the HKVAC ratified their constitution which outlined their principal aims and objectives: to assist all members in time of need, to maintain and improve the social welfare and friendship among members and dependants, and to promote legislation for the physical well-being of all members of all “C” Force or Allied personnel who were imprisoned by Japan between 1941 and 1945. Unsatisfied with the Canadian government’s response to the financial and medical burdens that they were suffering as a result of their long imprisonment, and disillusioned with the result of the San Francisco Treaty, the veterans decided that one final battle had to be fought: the battle for adequate compensation.

It was not until 1971 that the veterans were granted a 50 per cent pension for “undetermined disabilities.” In 1987, the veterans, in partnership with the War Amps of Canada, attempted to sue the Japanese government over the maltreatment that was meted out to their captives and the Japanese use of prisoners as slave labour. When Japan refused to provide compensation, the Canadian veterans took this demand to their own government. In 1998, the federal government paid 350 veterans and 400 widows the restitution that Japan was unwilling to pay. The payment amounted to approximately 18 dollars for each day the men were prisoners of the Japanese. Finally, in August 2001, the Canadian government announced that surviving members of “C” Force would receive a full disability pension and that veterans and widows from 1991 onwards would be party to the Veterans Independence Program.<sup>326</sup> This program aims to

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<sup>326</sup> Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, Our Roots - the Hong Kong Veterans' Association, <https://www.hkvca.ca/aboutus/hkvahist.php>.



help veterans remain in their homes, and in their communities, in a self-sufficient manner. It can also provide services such as housekeeping and in-home visits by health professionals. With these types of benefits established, the veterans and their families continued their fight to be remembered.

At the Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada national convention in 1993, a proposal was tabled to create a new organization that would see the children of “C” Force veterans take the mantle from their parents. The intention was to educate Canadians on the Battle of Hong Kong and ensure that it, and its veterans, did not become forgotten in Canada’s Second World War history. In 1995, this group was dubbed the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association and in 2001 it was merged with the original Hong Kong Veterans Association of Canada. The commemorative work is ongoing. On August 15, 2009, the Hong Kong Memorial Wall was unveiled at the corner of Sussex Drive and King Edward Avenue in Ottawa. The names of all 1,973 men and two women who served with “C” Force are engraved in the granite face. At the opening ceremony Philip Doddridge declared that “This is a permanent marker of our place in history.”<sup>327</sup> And every year since, on December 8, the anniversary of the Japanese attack, a solemn ceremony of remembrance is held at the site to reconfirm that place in history.

The veterans of “C” Force are also remembered with a special addition to the Pacific Star. This Second World War medal was awarded to those British and Commonwealth soldiers who were on active service in the Pacific Theatre of Operations between December 8, 1941, and September 2, 1945. The yellow copper six-pointed star is adorned with a Royal monogram and topped with a crown. The ribbon’s coloured stripes symbolize forests, beaches, and the Army,

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<sup>327</sup> Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, Creation and Evolution of HKVCA, <https://www.hkvca.ca/aboutus/hkvcahist.php>; Veterans Affairs Canada, Hong Kong Memorial Wall, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/national-inventory-canadian-memorials/details/7933/>.

Navy, and Air Force. To complement their Pacific Star, the Canadian government bestowed upon veterans a unique bar which is fastened around the base of the ribbon. Engraved with the words “Hong Kong” it denotes their involvement in the battle and recognizes them as a distinctive veterans’ group of Canada’s Second World War.

As of September 3, 2018, there were only 11 veterans of “C” Force still alive. Yet, when one understands what they went through, first in the battle and later as prisoners, it seems remarkable that any of them survived for decades, let alone that some lived to be over 90 years of age. Furthermore, freedom did not heal all wounds, and those who returned had to live with scars, both physical and emotional. Nearly every man who came back from the Far East had psychological problems associated with the years of brutality and undernourishment that they suffered while in captivity. Many of them would endure the effects for the rest of their lives. Dr. Charles Roland found that survivors returned with heavy emotional and physical complications, bringing home everything from nicotine addiction to intestinal parasites, and that the men “carried the seeds of restless dissatisfactions and dysfunctions that, for many, led to broken marriages, alcohol problems, difficulty in the workplace, and premature death.”<sup>328</sup> In fact, the subtitle of Dave McIntosh’s *Hell on Earth* is “aging faster, dying sooner,” and he presents a shocking statistic: of the 1,418 prisoners liberated in 1945, 143 of them had died by 1965, by 1987 only 758 remained alive.<sup>329</sup> Hong Kong veterans were indeed dying younger and in disproportionate numbers than any other Canadian veterans of the war.

However, when considering the nature of their captivity, this should not be surprising. Of the 290 Canadians deaths in Japanese prisoner of war camps, 256 were the direct result of

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<sup>328</sup> Roland, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, 327.

<sup>329</sup> McIntosh, *Hell on Earth*, 252-3.

disease, exacerbated or caused by malnutrition and the largely absent medical facilities. By contrast, in Europe only 29 of 380 Canadian prisoner deaths were from disease. The death rate for Canadian prisoners in Europe was around 7 per cent, while for those in the Pacific Theatre it was just above 17 per cent.<sup>330</sup> Yet the Canadian survival rate in the Pacific was still higher than all other Allied prisoners of the Japanese. Historian Gavan Daws calculated that the total death rate for the over 140,000 Allied POWs was 27 per cent. The American, British, and Australian rates were all higher than 30 per cent, while the Dutch rate was just under 20 per cent.<sup>331</sup> And, of the initial 1,684 Canadians taken prisoner at Hong Kong, 1,418 of them (or 84 per cent) completed the second mission and survived.

Despite many members of “C” Force aging faster and dying sooner, several of the soldiers discussed in this thesis went on to lead very long lives. Kenneth Cambon, Leonard Corrigan, Donald Geraghty, Ernie Hodgkinson, James Macmillan, and Arthur Squires all lived past 80, with the latter two both living to be 89. Leo Berard, Leslie Canivet, John Crawford, Frank Ebdon, Thomas Forsyth, Lionel Hurd, Lance Ross, and Harry White all lived to be over 90. Philip Doddridge, George MacDonell, and Douglas Rees are still alive at the time of writing. Many of them also lived full and productive lives. They would not let their captivity define them and, in some cases, they used their wartime experiences as a catalyst for how they would live their future lives. Rifleman Kenneth Cambon, who was the youngest member of “C” Force in Hong Kong, was so inspired by the work that he performed as an orderly at Bowen Road Hospital that he attended McGill University’s medical school and graduated as a physician in 1951. Leo Berard continued to serve with the Winnipeg Grenadiers after the Second World War,

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<sup>330</sup> Vance, *Objects of Concern*, 255-6.

<sup>331</sup> Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific*, 360.

working in Officer Training Schools and serving in the Korean War before retiring from the army in 1965. George MacDonell has been one of the most prominent and visible of the Hong Kong Veterans. After the war, he graduated from the University of Toronto, worked more than 30 years for General Electric, and served as a deputy minister in the Ontario Government from 1980 to 1985. He has written several works about his wartime experiences and has spoken widely to schools, groups, organizations, institutions, and at conferences to share his remarkable story. In 2005, at 83 years of age, he accompanied five other veterans on a pilgrimage to Sai Wan Commonwealth War Cemetery in Hong Kong, the resting place for 283 Canadians.

It was minus 14 degrees Celsius on the morning of December 8, 2018, and a light dusting of snow capped the memorial's peaks which symbolize Hong Kong's hilly terrain. But they still gathered, more than 50 people in all to honour "C" Force's veterans on the 77th anniversary of the Battle of Hong Kong. Family members and friends of veterans, and representatives from the federal government, Veterans Affairs Canada, the Legion, the War Amps, the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, and others all attended. Prayers were read, wreaths were laid, and tears were shed. "O Canada", God Save the Queen, and the Last Post were played. And this author, with no personal connection to "C" Force other than this thesis, found himself caught up in the emotion of it all. I will always remember.

This has been a work about survival, and it is only fitting that the final word be given to one of "C" Force's remaining survivors. When I met George MacDonell in Toronto in October 2016, he was 94 years old. I was immediately struck by how well he looked for his age. Here was a man who was wounded in the Battle of Hong Kong and lived through the brutal conditions of prisoner-of-war camps in both Hong Kong and Japan. Yet, MacDonell was still an imposing figure and moved feely about his apartment without assistance. He was quick to point out that

Hong Kong should not be remembered as a defeat but remembered instead for how the soldiers fought and behaved against inconceivable odds. I had wondered if another work on Canada's role in Hong Kong was necessary, but the meeting with MacDonell encouraged me that one more story needed to be told: the story of the second mission, a story of survival. MacDonell is proud to be one of the final representatives for his fallen comrades. And Canadians should be proud of him and all members of "C" Force. They lost one battle but won the more important second one.

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