RONALD HUGH CLARICOATES

Experiences as a Prisoner-of-War, World War 2

Interviewed by

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Oral History Archives

Hannah Chair for the History of Medicine

McMaster University

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Charles G. Roland, M.D.:

Now Mr. Claircoates, could we begin by your giving me your full name, your birthplace and birthdate.

Ronald Claricoates:

Ronald Hugh Claircoates.

C.G.R.:

And you were born where?

R.C.:

Leicester, England

C.G.R.:

And the date.

R.C.:

October 20th, 1921.

C.G.R.:

And your parents' names?

R.C.:

Robert. I forget my mother's name. Well, we can look that up later.

C.G.R.:

Sure, it doesn't matter.

R.C.:

Lilly May.

C.G.R.:

Were you raised in England? Did the family come to Canada?

R.C.:

No, I was orphaned at 5 years of age, and my brother and I went to a home in London, and then we were transferred from there to a home in Lincoln. I stayed there until I came to Canada in 1937.

C.G.R.:

Thirty-seven. So you were 16 when you came here?

R.C.:

About that, yes.

C.G.R.:

And what did you come to Canada to do? Why did you come to Canada?

R.C.:

Well, adventure. I worked on a farm for three years, and then I joined the armed forces August 4th, 1940.

C.G.R.:

And what part of the forces did you join?

R.C.:

The army. [infantry].

C.G.R.:

And did you join a particular regiment?

R.C.:

The Royal Rifles of Canada.

C.G.R.:

You went right into the Royal Rifles.

R.C.:

Yes, at Quebec City.

C.G.R.:

Were you farming near Quebec City, is that why you went into the Rifles?

R.C.:

Windsor Mills, Quebec.

C.G.R.:

And tell me just a little bit about what you did with the Rifles, where they went. I think they went to Newfoundland, didn't they?

R.C.:

Yes. I joined August '40 and we went to Valcartier -- I was in No. 4 platoon, which was called the Bren-gun Carrier Platoon -- we went by boat from Sidney to Botwood, Newfoundland, being as I was in headquarters company; headquarters company always stayed at Botwood. That winter we did training and guard duty, etc. And then in May '41, we went from Botwood to St. John's, Newfoundland. We practically did the same thing there, except I was approached -- they were expecting to get radios, or wireless, as they called it, on these Bren-gun carriers -- to take a course in St. John's in the event that they got these machines and they'd have somebody that knows something about them. Then we left St. John's for Quebec City in August, 1941. We went from Quebec City down to Saint John, New Brunswick, on an exercise in anticipation of going overseas. There were rumours that we'd be going overseas. And then in November we got our orders to go from Quebec to Vancouver to go overseas, still not knowing yet where we were going. We boarded ship, Australian ship [the Awatea], in Vancouver and sailed from there to Hong Kong.

C.G.R.:

Now I know later (this is leaping ahead) but I know that you did work in the hospital there. Had you had any training that would be appropriate to working in a hospital? Any first-aid, or...?

R.C.:

Well, just the ordinary first-aid that the army gave, that's all.

C.G.R.:

That everybody got. Yes, but nothing special? No.

Okay, tell me a little bit about the trip across, and Hong Kong, your first impressions, things like that.

R.C.:

Well the trip across, we were on the big ship, the Awatea, and one company

R.C. cont'd....

(C Company) were on the destroyer [Prince Robert] escorting us. We left Vancouver and went down to Hawaii. They wouldn't let us get off the boat in Hawaii because the Americans still weren't in the war. We left Hawaii that night and then went non-stop from there to Hong Kong. We landed in Hong Kong -- no, prior to landing in Hong Kong, they were throwing all the garbage out of the fan-tail and the sampans, came around and were picking it up. And we were told you wouldn't even drink the water from a tap, but here were these local inhabitants, you know, and they were just picking it up literally and putting it in the boats.

C.G.R.:

Getting some of their food supply.

R.C.:

Some of them were eating it. So anyway, we landed in Kowloon there. They got us off the boat and they marched us from there to the barracks, Sham Shui Po camp. Oh, while we were going over there were 15 of us out of the 35 that had taken this course, signals course, that were transferred to signal platoon to fill up the vacancies that they had. So then I went from No. 4 platoon to No. 1 platoon.

Anyway, we landed in Hong Kong and most of us had a duty, like a telephone duty, signing in the officers and taking any calls, like, in the orderly room -- messages pertaining to the unit. And two days prior to the outbreak of hostilities, they moved us all out to the island, and I was at Tai Tam Gap, and there's where I first saw my first switchboard. I don't know if you remember the old switchboards or not, but the little flap came down and the light came on, you put a plug in. So I did 8 hours on that and you had to do a stand-to prior to dark or a stand-to prior to dawn, and then you had your sleep. When you weren't on duty, you poked around with [moved] ammunition or something like that. And then, of course, hostilities broke out after two days.

C.G.R.:

Excuse me. Before we get into that, did you get any leave in this short time? Were you in to Kowloon, in to Victoria, to investigate the cities?

R.C.:

Well, if you weren't on duty, you know, you could, you're on the mainland, so you have to take the ferry to go over to the island. Oh yes, you had your time off in that respect.

C.G.R.:

And what were the cities like? What are your recollections?

R.C.:

Well, it was cities similar to Canada at the time; of course there were lots more people than there would be in Canada, you see. The percentage of people are a higher rate. But other than that, what I noticed was that if you got on a bus, the Europeans got on the front and the Chinese had to get on the back. This was the thing, same as on the ferry, there was a certain place for the Europeans where....

C.G.R.:

It was all segregated.

R.C.:

Oh yes, which I found it [peculiar], because I treat all people the same.

C.G.R.:

Was that true in places like bars and things where the soldiers would go?

R.C.:

Yes, pretty well, I think, yes. Although the middle and upper class Chinese would be in the bars, you know, if you're in them. Time was so short, eh, from when we got off until December 7th when it started, or December the 8th. We were on the other side of the date line.

C.G.R.:

Well fine, go ahead then.

R.C.:

So anyway, during the war we just retired. I went back to my old platoon and grabbed a Bren-gun, like you have one member, who's a Bren-gun and you have a No. 2 who carried the ammo, etc. and the spare barrel. And, you know, wherever we were needed they just put us, till we got down to Stanley, and there was only about 200 of us left and they shelled us all day, Christmas Day. They were trying to knock out our 9.2 gun, which was on tracks, and then they came in with planes and they were trying to bomb us and what not. We were just in a big hanger. So that afternoon, just before dark, somebody got the order and we all had to go down this road going out of Stanley, and they were still firing at us and dropping mortars and what not. And then we went up all on this hill and I was telephone orderly to Captain Price, Charlie Price (he's dead now). And then about 2 o'clock the next morning, Boxing Day, came over the phone that we had to surrender, so I gave the call to Charlie and he vouched for it and he says, "Yes, we've got to go down the hill, turn in our weapons, and go back to Stanley again."

So we were there for about two days and then the Japanese came and got us. They marched us from there to North Point prison camp, a matter of about 7 miles, with our wounded, the ones that, well, they said were able to walk. So we helped them as best we could. We all made it to prison camp.

C.G.R.:

You hadn't been wounded at all?

R.C.:

No. All I got was a little thing here from either a stone or a piece of shrapnel, just a scratch like. So we all lined up and, of course, they marched us. It wasn't like Bataan, it wasn't too forced a march. I think most of the guys made it. So then they put us into prison camp.

C.G.R.:

Had there been any evidence of brutality at this stage. You know, beating people up?

R.C.:

Well, they'd nudge you along, that's all. But I don't think they -- like I say, I was pretty well up front, so I don't know what went on behind. I guess there was three or four hundred because they were still bringing people in that they'd rounded up in the hills. I just forget how many there were, but there was quite a line-up of us.

So they put all the Canadians in North Point prison camp and they left us there for one or two days. And then, of course, they came in and they started lining us up, taking roll calls and different things. Then the work party started. And we worked on Kai Tak airport. You left fairly early in the morning because you had to catch a ferry, go over there. You worked 10 hours a day, you worked 55 minutes on the hour, and you had half an hour for dinner. Well, at first, you know, we were in pretty good shape.

C.G.R.:

How soon did the work start after the surrender? Weeks? Months?

R.C.:

I just forget. It was in the spring, because, see, we were taken in December, so I think it was in March or April. The weather would be warm by then. I just forget.

Then we heard a rumour that they were shipping the British out to Japan, from Sham Shui Po, and of course we would all be moved after awhile to Sham Shui Po. The work party went on for quite awhile, I think till about June or July. I just forget now when they moved us over. And the officers too, they moved the officers over there too, to Sham Shui Po. So when we got to Sham Shui Po there didn't seem to be that many people there, so they put us all in the same huts as we were in, pretty well, in North Point -- no windows. The windows were all blown out anyway. It was kind of sacks piled up just to stop, actually, the rain coming right in on you.

So then we'd heard about diphtheria breaking out before the British left,

R.C. cont'd....

because when we went over there, I think it was October that it was raging, everybody seemed to be coming down with it. So I said to myself, "Well, if I'm going to get it, I might as well work amongst it." So Ray [Squires] and I, we started together, working nights.

C.G.R.:

Were you asked to do this? Ordered to do it?

R.C.:

No, no. Just volunteered. Well Ray, I think, knew John Crawford because he was in Brigade, eh. So I asked Ray and he said, "Sure." He said, "We can use any guy." So I said, "Well, might as well just catch it. If I catch it, I'll catch it whether I'm working with it or not."

So anyway, we had patients all over the place. The Popes died, two brothers, and there were other people that died. So anyway, then they moved us all into this one building, what they called the Jubilee Building, to isolate us, I guess. And there was four floors in there and Ray asked me if I wanted to run the night shift. He said, "It'll give you two stripes. You'll have four guys helping you." So I said, "Sure. I might as well." So I'd go on at 10 o'clock at night and I'd be finished at 8 o'clock in the morning. And I used to have one man with me and we used to be on what we called the agony ward, any patient that we figured wouldn't make it through the night, he was put in there. Some made it and some didn't. If they made it, well then they took them out.

Anyway, we had five die on us in 24 hours. So I just laid my head down, having a sleep, when they said, "The Japs want all the orderlies." So I figured, "Oh, I guess they're going to give us a medal or something." So we all went out, they lined us all up and the doctor, Dr. Seito, through an interpreter said, "You're letting your patients die." Because he got heck from higher up and he just passed it down, sort of. He rambled on and rambled on. So then he said, "Any of you that think you are still helping you're buddies, take a step forward." Well, we all

R.C. cont'd....

took a step forward. So he came down with the old leather thong and he said, "Now, anybody that still thinks." Of course, one guy stepped forward, Les Varley. So the doctor said, "Anyone that still thinks they're helping their friends, step forward and we'll cut your head off." I figured this guy is nuts. So anyway, Les said afterwards he never heard him right but he stepped forward anyway. So they made him kneel down and the doctor got his sword out, and then Dr. Crawford intercepted and he spoke to the interpreter. Anyway, they praised Varley, which they generally do; if you're brafe, they realise brafery. So they put him back in the lineup. Anyway they let us all go.

C.G.R.:

Excuse me. When you say he went down with he leather thong, you mean he was hitting people?

R.C.:

Oh yes. He hit all of us, and Dr. Crawford, because Dr. Crawford stepped forward too. I guess Banfill and Gray were still on duty. So anyway, I still went back to work and I think I worked from about November to February or March, and then they moved us out of Jubilee Building.

C.G.R.:

Would that be November '42 till March '43? Right.

R.C.:

By then, of course the Americans were coming over with the spotter planes, eh, and we'd see them at night and what not. So anyway, then they put us in another segretated part, right near where the officers were. So I kept working, you know. We were doing what we could. We had no hardly any medical supplies -- aspirin, atabrin, bandages and what not -- but nothing, unless the doctors got it. But we had nothing. All we'd do, if a patient got worse, we'd just fetch the doctor and he'd do what he could.

R.C. cont'd....

Well then we had a Major Ashton-Rose and he was an Indian doctor. He was in charge of both Crawford and Banfill and all the Canadian doctors. So they threw all the orderlies out of the hospital. Unfortunately for me, I just hit this work party where we had to cover all these drums of gasoline.

C.G.R.:

Excuse me. Why did they throw all the orderlies out?

R.C.:

I don't know. We heard different rumours--that Ashton-Rose said that they didn't need them, they were going to put the British in. I don't think there was anything to do with, you know, that we weren't doing our job because the diptheria was over, we were still losing people. And they threw the doctors out too, I believe. Maybe John told you this, I don't know. I'm pretty sure they threw them out too. And Ashton-Rose, he was running the whole show. Now I don't think he was sympathetic to the Japanese, he was, you know, just maybe doing what he was told to do.

So anyway, I hit this work party and they moved 30 or 40 of us right out of the camp. I just forget now where we stayed. I think it was Bowen Road, we stayed at some building in Bowen Road. And then we had to walk from there down to this place where this gasoline was being dumped off trucks. We had to take it off in these 45-gallon drums, that's pretty goddarn heavy and we were fairly weak then. It was 10 hours a day and we got a little extra rations, maybe a cup-full of rice extra. We worked at that for about 30 days, then we finished it and then we went back to Sham Shui Po and they took us back in the hospital. So then I pretty well worked in the hospital from then until I got back to Vancouver.

Now what found in the hospitals with some of the patients was the Indian boys from out west, when they got sick they really got sick.

C.G.R.:

North American Indians, not Indian Indians.

R.C.:

Oh no, no, because they were all gone, those [East Indian] fellow.

C.G.R.:

I just wanted to be sure.

R.C.:

See, the ordinary [East] Indian, like the Indian army, the Japanese didn't think they were against them. They were forced by the British to fight them and they let them all go after a while. But I found the North American Indian, I think they don't get immune from disease like we do because, you know, in cities you're more in contact with it.

Some of the boys seemed to go off their head. I don't know why, because the one down here in Extendicare, Harry, he was my patient. He was hit by the rifle butt during the war, so you know there was a reason for that. But they'd be all right one day and the next day we practically had to tie them down. You know, they'd be all right and then all of a sudden they'd just go. Now one fellow he only weighed about (he was a Winnipeger), he weighed about 60 lbs when I put him on the boat and I figured I'd never see him again. But we were in Edmonton I saw him, and the fellow's just the same as I. So, you know, it's remarkable the recovery that some of them made.

C.G.R.:

Now was this ward you were on, this last one, was this mostly patients who were psychotic or psychiatric kinds of patients?

R.C.:

We separated them. Like one fellow, he'd be eating his dinner and a Japanese guard would come in the door and he'd just throw knife and fork right at him, and the Jap would get right out. And I'd say, "Now look, you're going to get us into trouble." Now with me or any of the orderlies he wouldn't do anything. He was

R.C. cont'd....

as sublime as I am. Now the Portuguese, now we had some Portuguese from Macao, now they took sickness pretty hard. We had one fellow that developed a bed sore on his coccyx bone and it was big; you could see the bone and everything. We had a heck of a time to get him healed up. What we did, we put a hole in the mattress where the pressure would be on that [ulcer], and that's the only way we were able to -- of course we had to keep moving him, too. See all in all, the Japanese seemed to be scared of the hospital. Then you never knew when they would be around to watch you, although they wouldn't stay too long.

C.G.R.:

Now this Dr. Seito, did he do any doctoring in the hospital?

R.C.:

Oh no. Not that I know of.

C.G.R.:

This was all British and Canadian.

R.C.:

Now John or Captain Banfill or any of them could tell you. I don't think I saw him in the hospital -- well, he might have come around for an inspection. (Now, like I say, I might not have been on duty.) But to my recollection, no, he just gave the orders and that was it.

C.G.R.:

And were there any Japanese who helped at all? Other Japanese doctors, Japanese orderlies, any....?

R.C.:

Not that I know of.

C.G.R.:

Nothing. Totally run by the prisoners?

R.C.:

Yes. See, it was run by Ashton-Rose, and John Crawford, they were both the

R.C. cont'd....

same rank, of course (although Ashton-Rose told the Japanese he was senior because he'd been a Britisher.) and our two doctors.

C.G.R.:

Let me go back, if I can, to the diphtheria hospital. You were on the diphtheria ward, specifically, for a while at least?

R.C.:

Yes.

C.G.R.:

Tell me, exactly what kinds of things would you do? What would you spend your time doing between 10:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.?

R.C.:

Well, we would just try and put them at ease, you know. Like on the floor where I was, if you heard a patient moaning you'd just go up and say, "What's wrong", you know, and try and put him more at ease, talk to him and what not. If any of the other boys on the floor they'd call me and say, "Oh, so-an-so he had a heart attack," or, "so-an-so he's putting his feet in the water." We had what we call "hot feet", right. And for awhile we were letting them put them in the water and then orders came out that with the shock of the cold water, it would affect the heart and maybe give them a heart attack. So they tried to do away with it. So what we used to do, we'd try and warm the water up a bit. I don't know if Banfill or any of them knew about it, but [we did it] because these guys, they were just in pain. Well, by midnight or 1 o'clock things would be relatively quiet unless you had a death. And then, of course, if you had a death you had to prepare them for burial the next day.

C.G.R.:

And what did that entail?

R.C.:

Well, you had to get them out of the bed, put them in a blanket, straighten

R.C. cont'd....

the limbs, fasten the chin, tie the arms to the side, plug the rectum, tie the feet, and then just do them up.

C.G.R.:

Sew up the blanket?

R.C.:

No, no. Just tie it up. Then of course -- I don't know what happened after -- I know we had three out in the hall one night, we were sleeping amongst them. But, you know, you grabbed a snatch of sleep when you could. You see, it was a very good idea, by having this one ward where you'd have two people and, you know, one could snatch a few winks of sleep and the other guy would listen.

C.G.R.:

How large was the ward? How many patients would there have been?

R.C.:

Oh, it was a fairly big room, as big a room as this because they were quarters for the British, so big as an apartment, maybe a wee bit smaller. There was a door to each one.

C.G.R.:

Were there bunks?

R.C.:

Oh no. They were pretty well laying on the floor or a makeshift bed with sacking. Oh no, there were no hospital beds or anything like that.

C.G.R.:

So what would there have been? Ten people? Twenty people?

R.C.:

Oh no, we'd only have three or four. It all depends how many they expected to [die] -- oh no, there was lots of room.

C.G.R.:

Now this is the "agony ward" you're talking about.

R.C.:

Yes. Now, when we moved over, there was enough room to get between the beds, for an orderly to get between the beds.

C.G.R.:

What kinds of diphtheria were seen there? Was it all throat diphtheria?

R.C.:

It was all throat as far as I was concerned, that we saw. But see, soon after I started it pretty well abated, and then the other stuff was coming in -- pellagra, malnutrition, and hot feet, pains in the hands.

C.G.R.:

So perhaps you missed the worst of the diphtheria, did you?

R.C.:

Yes, I think I did.

C.G.R.:

It sort of peaked by then.

R.C.:

Pretty well, yes.

C.G.R.:

You didn't get diphtheria?

R.C.:

No.

C.G.R.:

Were you ever inoculated for it, I mean back in Canada?

R.C.:

I might have been in England, but I'm not sure.

C.G.R.:

You weren't while you were in the army?

R.C.:

No. I could have been a carrier too. This was all pretty well new to me.

R.C. cont'd....

But I really liked working in the hospital. I think we did out part.

C.G.R.:

Were they doing, for the diphtheria patients, were they opening the throat at all?

R.C.:

The doctors could have been but I don't think we were allowed to create a trachea like.

C.G.R.:

Tracheostomy.

R.C.:

I don't know if John or Banfill....

C.G.R.:

But you didn't see patients in your wards who had openings into the throat?

R.C.:

No, I didn't.

C.G.R.:

So it couldn't have been done very often, if it was done, I guess.

R.C.:

I think once that mucus got in the throat, I don't think it takes too long unless you have an antibiotic, or whatever it is, they inject into you to break that up. So these guys would just choke to death, you might say, which we didn't think there was any need for. They said they didn't have the serum, I don't know. Somebody must have known.

C.G.R.:

How was your health all this time?

R.C.:

Well I, you see I was orphaned at 5 and I think this helped me. A lot of these boys were torn away from their families. We noticed that the bigger

R.C. cont'd....

fellows took it harder than a short fellow like me. But, you know, they missed mamma and papa, and with me I've always been on my own. But healthwise, well, I got dysentery and I got chronic diarrhea. I didn't have hot feet. My hands, you know, they kind of burned a bit, and I got malaria -- no, what the hech do they call that other thing there -- you get an awful headache for about two days, high fever.

C.G.R.:

Is that the dingy fever [dengue]?

R.C.:

Dingy fever, yes. Now they said if you got dingy fever you wouldn't get malaria. Well, in my case it might have been right because I didn't get malaria.

C.G.R.:

When you had dysentery, what did you do for it? Did the doctors do anything? Did you see doctors, I mean did you have it bad enough that you saw anybody?

R.C.:

No, it just had to pass and that was it. I don't remember getting anything. I don't think they had -- it was just you got it...

C.G.R.:

Did you lose a lot of weight?

R.C.:

Oh yes. I have a picture of myself there. I went down to about (not as much as some) but to 85-90 lbs.

C.G.R.:

And what was your normal weight?

R.C.:

Around 119 lbs., 125 lbs.

C.G.R.:

Tell me what the food was like? What your recollections of sort of an average daily diet?

R.C.:

Well, it was all the same -- a pound of rice or less, cooked, after the Japanese took their portion out, greens, and they did bring in meat once in a while, which would be in the rice or in the greens. Well, it was barley, actually,it wasn't rice, which was fortunate for us. That's about all. Then they let us grow our own gardens and we used to get a little bit out of them. But I think the hardest part was when we were first taken prisoner and, you know, the rations were getting lower and lower and lower, until you got down to a pound of rice cooked. Like in the morning it was rice gruel, something like a porridge, thin porridge; at noon you'd get, oh maybe, a cup of rice or a cup and a half of rice and your greens, and of course at night you'd get the same thing. Well then they made bread out of some rice, if they had a surplus they'd make bread, but this meant they were saving it from your ordinary ration -- or barley, I should say. And as the war progressed and after the Americans took the Philippines, things were really hard because we were cut off; so were the Japanese. Other than that, you know, you just hope you make it today and you make it [to] tomorrow.

C.G.R.:

How was morale?

R.C.:

In the hospital, I think it was fairly high. You know, these fellows they didn't have to work, although they'd come in and tell John [Crawford] or Banfill they wanted so many men, so we'd have to pick out the ones we thought, you know, could make it.

C.G.R.:

The ones that were the least sick.

R.C.:

Yes. Well, there were none the least sick because they were sick and you didn't know whether [after] a 10-hour day working they'd come back. So you know, I don't think it was even up to a doctor to diagnose whether you could go out and I could go out, because you didn't know what kind of work party it was -- whether you'd be digging tunnels or handling gas or working on the (well they finished the airport, I guess). But other than that, I don't know.

C.G.R.:

How were you orphaned?

R.C.:

Well, my mother left my father, I think. There were four of us -- two boys and two girls -- and my uncle took the two girls to work on the farm. My Dad said take the two boys and he said, "No, I'll take the two girls. They could learn and work on a farm." So we were put in a home. I don't think it hurt me at all.

C.G.R.:

It toughened you early.

R.C.:

It toughened me real early, I'll tell you [laughter]. I just went to see this doctor the other day and he said, "You had your nose broken at one time." And I said, "I don't remember that, but I most likely did."

C.G.R.:

What were the special occasions like in the camp? How did you celebrate Christmas? Did you celebrate Christmas? Things like that. Do you have any particular memories?

R.C.:

Well, we got the Red Cross parcels I think in '43 or '44 -- I most likely got it in my diary there some place -- but then it was pretty good. What we did, we pretty well pooled all our resources, you see, and then we'd celebrate when

R.C. cont'd....

we felt like it, like somebody's birthday or Christmas or Easter. But generally at night, if you weren't working, we had a place we used to walk. You could only walk in twos. They wouldn't let any of us congregate more than two -- because they had plans of re-educating people, learning Japanese or learning French, diffrent things,but then they squashed it. They said, "No, only two can congregate," so that was all put out. So actually you weren't able to better yourself in that respect.

C.G.R.:

This was the Japanese had plans for a while, or within the camp?

R.C.:

No, we did and they said, no way. When they brought it to the authorities they said no way. So we walked in twos. If you walked three they'd come up and there would be a little slapping done, so it was just two and you'd walk round and round for a couple of hours. You just talked. They did form an orchestra and they did have plays, which were very good, they'd maybe hold one a month. And they did allow church.

C.G.R.:

Ray loaned me his diary and I was just reading in that about a birthday party and he mentioned you and I think two others were there, and I forget what the feast consisted of -- it wasn't much of a feast, but I think he saved some cocoa he had, or something.

R.C.:

I have the card that one of them made for me. We had a very good friend, he was a Brit -- Johnny Sayers -- whether he ever mentioned him or not?

C.G.R.:

Yes, I think I've heard the name.

R.C.:

A little short guy, I'd like to meet Johnny again. I thought he might be

R.C. cont'd....

down to the reunion, but he is quite a versatile fellow, Johnny. He used to knit, he'd knit by the hour when he could get wool. Other than that -- now one thing I did notice on these plays, the officers were always up front and of course they all left a place for the Japanese because they all sit cross-legged anyway so they wouldn't be sitting on chairs, and of course we were all to the back. These plays, they were, I think they were a morale booster.

C.G.R.:

And the men played the women's parts and the men's parts?

R.C.:

Oh yes, yes. Well, I just met a friend of mine from New Brunswick and I have a picture of him dressed up as a girl and you wouldn't even know it that he was a man.

C.G.R.:

What about sex? Was sex a problem? Was the lack of sex a problem? Did people talk about it a lot? Think about it a lot?

R.C.:

Well, I think there were some that went a little gay, but as far as I was concerned. Well, I was too busy anyway. When you worked 10 hours a day, you just want to try and get your head down for a few hours, although you would be kind of half awake and half asleep at night. But there was some of that going on but I wouldn't want to say who they were, and you hear rumours too.

C.G.R.:

But you think ther was some homosexuality?

R.C.:

Oh yes.

C.G.R.:

Are you sure of it? As I said, I'm not interested in names, but I'm interested in the phenomenon if it happened.

R.C.:

Oh, I'm pretty sure it was going on. You maybe have been told by somebody else it was anyway. But I'm pretty sure it was.

C.G.R.:

Well, yes, I'm trying to fit bits of evidence and information together. It would be kind of surprising if it didn't, with hundreds of men thrown together for years at a time.

R.C.:

Well the thing is, you never knew where you would be, you know. You might be in Sham Shui Po -- like I was put on three drafts and I went through everything on the three drafts and then I was pulled out.

C.G.R.:

I was going to ask you about those drafts.

R.C.:

Whether John Crawford pulled me out, or Banfill, or who.

C.G.R.:

Tell me a bit about some of these people, your impressions and so on, like John Crawford?

R.C.:

Oh, John was good. He stuck by his men. I remember the time the Red Cross parcels came in and John got a carton of cigarettes (of course they had been opened), so the Jap went to take a package out and John says, "Hey, they're mine," took it and took off. The Jap didn't say anything.

Captain Banfill was very good and Captain Gray -- like I say, I worked nights quite a bit of the time and when I came in on days, I just forget who in that particular hut that I was in. I wasn't the only orderly then. There were two or three of us, and each patient, we were told what was to be done for them, if anything could be done. Other than that, I think everybody in the hospital did what they could to alleviate the suffering of the guys with what they had. Now if a person

R.C. cont'd....

was going to be operated on for anything, I guess Major Ashton-Rose and Major Crawford they'd do it. I wasn't in the operating room or anything.

C.G.R.:

But there was an operating room.

R.C.:

Well there might have been, of sorts. I don't know why I never went in. I just didn't have any reason to go in it, or I was too busy, I don't know. Because when you're off, you just get together and talk and say, "Well, the war's going to be over tomorrow and we're all going to be out of this mess," you know. But actually I think, you see, the Americans were going to take Hong Kong, well they were going to move us out but then they went around, they went up to Iwo Jima, so I think if most of us had realised that, I don't think we would have lived, but this kind of came gradually, because we were down to -- if they hadn't dropped the [atom] bombs, I doubt if we would have made it because we were in bad shape at the end.

C.G.R.:

So you couldn't have gone a lot longer?

R.C.:

I don't think we could have gone much longer, another winter. A big percentage of us, see, we lost a hundred and...which would be 25%, eh.

C.G.R.:

So roughly 250 in the war and about 250 in the camp.

R.C.:

About that, I have the figures somewhere; which is a high percentage, I think.

C.G.R.:

It sure is. Is that from the Rifles?

R.C.:

No, this is the whole -- see, we lost 75 in Japan. Now the British did worse

than that with the first shipment out. I don't know how many made it to Japan, but there weren't too many.

C.G.R.:

Did you know Dr. [John] Reid?

R.C.:

Yes. He was a dentist, wasn't he?

C.G.R.:

No. He was the one doctor who went to Japan. In fact, I think the only officer who went to Japan.

R.C.:

He could have been, yes. But like I say, I didn't know, I knew Dr. Banfill because he was our medical doctor in the Rifles. But I seem to remember, yes. You see, we were pretty busy in the diphtheria when that draft left, and I think they were pulling them out from where they could. There were around three or four hundred that left.

C.G.R.:

Yes. I guess that was the group went to Niigata -- Walt Jenkins and others.

R.C.:

Yes. They had a pretty rough time those fellows.

C.G.R.:

As you look back at this, how do you feel about this? How do you feel about the Japanese?

R.C.:

Well, I don't know. You have kind of different feelings about it, eh. At the time you had no use for them, but then you think, well, the generation today -- well, if you'd mention it to them they'd say, "Well, it couldn't be. We are a peaceful, loving nation today." There were things that I don't think -- I think, myself, a doctor should do whatever he could. Now even if Dr. Seito said to John

R.C. cont'd....

Crawford, "Now look" (and to Major Ashton-Rose), "I've done everything I can and I can't get any serum for the boys." I dont' know what he said to them. Now whether he said, "No, you're not getting a thing. We're riding high, we're going to take the States, we're going to take Canda, we're going to take Germany, we're going to take the whole world." I don't know what happened to Seito either. We tried to get him but we couldn't find him. But we had news for him anyway.

Now Colonel Toganogo [?], who was the commandant, he only got life, and I've got a picture of him there, it's French. And the "Kamloops Kid", I don't know what happened to him, the sergeant.

C.G.R.:

I've heard about him, yes.

R.C.:

He's the one that said, "They called me slant-eyes when I went to school." And he said, "Slant-eyes is here over you fellows." But I think even if he [Seito] couldn't have done, even being arrogant, he could have said as a medical doctor and I suppose they take the oath same as other doctors, "Well, we've done everything we can. We're sorry." And even when they lined us up, they threatened to cut one fellow's head off, I think that was just arrogance, myself. Plus he got it from the higher ups and there was no reason for this. So somebody was thinking. But even after they dropped the second bomb, like the British, we had mostly British officers in with our Canadian officers, when they took over the camp, which I think was kind of dangerous because Hong Kong was completely cut off. All they had to do was come in and shoot us down with machine guns. They must have known what they were doing. So they ordered them all out, out of the camp to guard us on the outside, that's when we went out and foraged for what we could.

C.G.R.:

As an experience, was it all bad? Were there good parts of it?

R.C.:

No. There's no good parts in the camp, no. Because you were frustrated. You might have a fairly good day today (and I'm just talking from my own experience), might have a very good day today but then you wonder what's going to happen tomorrow. You know, you may come around the corner and a Japanese guard come along and you have to salute him, and you might forget to salute him, well, you know, he could brain you, he could do anything to you. But I'm sure that (and I think Ray [Squires] will tell you) we do feel proud that we did what we did for the boys.

C.G.R.:

So you should, I would think.

R.C.:

Well, you know, there are other guys that did good things too.

C.G.R.:

Have you done anything since the war with this medical experience? Have you had any jobs?

R.C.:

No. When I came back I was in Quebec and I went to McGill to see if I should, you know, pursue and become a doctor. I was talking to a professor there and he said, "You haven't got your high school." I only went to Grade 9, so he said, "That'd be kind of hard on you." Then he said, "You've got to go through university." He said, "You're better to take a business course or something like that," which I did. And I think I feel better for it because we've got a few people who have gone to university and they've gone through drinking. So I think the pressure is too much. Although sometimes I have misgivings, because I do like school. But I went to O'Sullivan's Business College in Sherbrooke, Quebec and took bookkeeping, and I rejoined the army.

C.G.R.:

And did you stay in the army?

R.C.:

Yes, I stayed in 25 years.

C.G.R.:

Ah, I didn't realise that.

R.C.:

And then they put me out. Yes, they put you out after a certain age or on a medical....

C.G.R.:

Have you had any after-affects of this time in Hong Kong that you can put a finger on?

R.C.:

Well, I still have this diarrhea, they called it chronic diarrhea in the camp, and I couldn't pinpoint it, so I went into the hospital in '65 and a Dr. Valberg, he was my doctor. And I kept telling him it was apples or roughage, like lettuce, and greens, and cabbage and things like that. So I was in about a month and they came up that I didn't tolerate the lactose in milk; he said that they found out that some veterans had incurred this overseas. So anyway, I can't drink milk at all now. I might steal a little bit of cream once in a while. Say, if I take three cups or four cups, it would go right through me.

C.G.R.:

But if you stay off it, has that fixed it?

R.C.:

Yes. Well, sometimes. And then of course this avitaminosis came out, as you most likely know. And they gave us all 50% pension on that.

C.G.R.:

How about mentally, psychologically? Does it bother you? Do you have dreams or nightmares?

R.C.:

Oh yes. Of course I'm doing entirely different from what I did.

C.G.R.:

You're what, I'm sorry.

R.C.:

I'm doing entirely different to what I did and I'm thinking, "Well, I was here before in my dream, and it's going to be a little different this time." Oh yes, I have quite vivid dreams on that. I think we all do.

C.G.R.:

Often?

R.C.:

No. And I can't -- it's not that I'm feeling down or anything like that.

C.G.R.:

But they're still happening?

R.C.:

Oh yes.

C.G.R.:

Once a week? Once a month: Once a year?

R.C.:

Oh, I may have three or four a year. Now, some of the boys are in my dreams and some of them aren't.

C.G.R.:

Is there anything more that you can think of about the hospital experience itself? Things that you did, things that you saw.

R.C.:

Well, we had one fellow go beserk. I don't know if you remember the old iron beds they used to put them in, to restrain them? Well, we had one of those over there and we had to put him in that. We had to keep him for a while. He didn't hurt himself, but then they shipped him out to Bowen Road Hospital. Like I say, you know, it's just the humdrum thing. Actually, we were more like a nurse -- you know, making beds, just trying to keep the guys comfortable and

R.C. cont'd....

talking to them. And some of them would ask you for a pill and you'd just have to tell them, "Well, no, you're not on it. You know we're rationed. If you've got a headache, just lay your head down and sleep it off," or something. We treated them all the same. If we had an officer it made no difference, because John Crawford and Dr. Banfill said, "We've got to treat them all the same." He said, "We're going to run out of stuff."

C.G.R.:

Overall, the officers pretty decent people?

R.C.:

Oh yes.

C.G.R.:

No bad apples in particular?

R.C.:

No. See, they segregated them after a while from us.

C.G.R.:

How about the British? How were they?

R.C.:

Well, we didn't get to know the British too well. But I think the British they were more in the know that we were. They knew they [the Japanese] couldn't be held, whereas the crazy Canadians say, "We're not going to give up till they get our backs to the water," which they did. Because the British, they were playing soccer; because they took the brunt of it along the front year between China and, well, Kowloon and mainland China.

C.G.R.:

The Gin Drinkers' Line.

R.C.:

Yes, and they just doubled back. So I mean they pretty well knew what was going on. It was general retirement you might say. You don't say retreat today,

R.C. cont'd....

you say a general retirement -- he retires to a better position.

But like I say, I don't know whether Ray knew any more than the rest of us did. I'm sure that John Crawford and Dr. Banfill would have meetings and speak about different things, but we just do the best we could.

C.G.R.:

Well that's great.

R.C.:

About three days after we were taken prisoner, at North Point, I was on a burial party. I don't know whether anybody else has told you this or not, so really I don't know whether it should be printed or not, but we came upon six of our fellows that were tied with their hands behind their backs, with barbed wire, and they had been bayoneted. Now I'm trying to find a fellow that was with me, so if you do hear of a fellow I'd appreciate his name and write him just to verify that, you know, what I saw was true. And I said to myself from then on, "I'm not going to help these fellows at all, whether I'm behind barbed wire or not." And we wouldn't,because like even when I worked in the tunnels, we'd take the odd pit prop out, because soil settles at night, and they'd have one or two accidents. Because they used to inspect our work. And they'd be a long ways in, 1,000 feet, 2,000 feet, and of course we'd be lined up and they'd give us a little set-to, you know, a mistake was made.

But I asked when I was down there in Quebec but nobody seemed to -- there were three or four of us, I know.

C.G.R.:

Were these members of the Rifles?

R.C.:

Oh yes.

C.G.R.:

[Members of] your regiment, who were bayoneted?

R.C.:

Yes. We had heard of this of coruse but we didn't take any prisoners. Well in fact, one Jap asked me, he said, "Where's our prisoners." I said, "We haven't got any for you." We started killing them the same as -- maybe not the right thing to do, but...Then Captain Banfill had told you about the orderlies that were killed up on the hill there, except for himself.

C.G.R.:

And he was supposed to have been and they kept telling him, "Tomorrow we'll kill you, tomorrow we'll kill you." Fortunately, tomorrow didn't come.

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From diary of R. Claricoates:

"Sept. 14th, 1942. Had a headache and fever. T.101 disease is dengue fever. Got treatment and told to rest in my bed for 4 or 5 days.

Oct. 3rd, 1942. Donald died of dip. at 11 o'clock this morning, things are pretty grave.

April 15th, 1942. Went into Hospital with Bac. Dysentery discharged April 20th.

Feb. 1944. Admitted to Hospital with Ascarisis Lumbigodi [sic] discharged March 4th, 1944.

Dec. 27th. Admitted to Hospital with diarrhea discharged Jan. 14th, 1945."

The Whig-Standard / A CLOSER LOOK

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REMEMBRANCE DAY: Kingston hero recalls his years in prisoner-of-war camps

By LYNN JONES
Whig-Standard Staff Writer

WHEN THE ATOM BOMB dropped on Hiroshima, Aug. 6, 1945, Allied prisoners of war in the Pacific sank to their knees and thanked God for deliverance from a captivity that had been marked by some of the most inhuman and bestial treatment ever handed out to prisoners of war.

One of those was Ron Claricoates, who had been a prisoner of the Japanese since the day Hong Kong fell in December, 1941.

His reaction on hearing the news of the Hiroshima bombing?

"Great, just great," he said. "I didn't know at the time it was an atom bomb, only that it was the most powerful bomb dropped up to that point. My fellow prisoners and I knew then the war was coming to an end and our joy knew no bounds."

The war for Claricoates and others incarcerated in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps couldn't come to an end soon enough. For the three-and-a-half years he had been held prisoner, Claricoates had been subjected to the most brutal and callous treatment ever devised by other human beings — all in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention dealing with the treatment of prisoners of war, a convention the Japanese refused to honor.

It was an incarceration marked by frequent beatings, humiliations, long and arduous labor and deliberate starvation. Sickness, disease and ultimate death were every-day occurrences. The Japanese refused help, medicine or comfort to the prisoners, many of them suffering from the effects of beriberi, malaria, dysentery, diphtheria and pellagra.

It all began for Claricoates in October, 1941, when, as a member of the Royal Rifles of Canada, the 1,000-man regiment sailed for Hong Kong as a garrison regiment.

"To all intents and purposes," he said, "we were going to Hong Kong to bolster two British regiments — the Middlesex and the Royal Scots. Security was tight and we knew nothing of what lay ahead."

The two British regiments remained on the mainland of China, while the Canadian regiments set-

The ultimatum to surrender was ignored on the advice of the commanding British general. At this, the Japanese began its bombardment by long-range shelling and air attacks. With little resistance from the beleagured island, the Japanese invaded Hong Kong, landing first at Lymun Gap, on the northern tip of the island, engaging C company of the Royal Rifles of Canada. The fighting was intense and the officer commanding C company stated the Japanese attack had been repulsed and radioed British headquarters for permission to "drive the invaders into the sea."

The reply warned the company not to do so because the operation could very well be a trap. The Japanese poured more troops and equipment into the area.

Meanwhile, Claricoates shut down his switchboard at Tiatam Gap and hurried back to his old platoon — No. 4. On joining it, the order was given to occupy a hill near Palm Villa, which came under intense Japanese fire, lasting all through that night. It was to no avail. The following day, the Japanese concentrated mortar fire to dislodge the Canadians.

"We took our wounded and the few weapons available," Claricoates said, "and made for Palm Villa to set up some sort of defence. There was a lot of confusion and sleep was possible only in brief snatches. A night later, we sneaked out of the area and made for St. Stephen's Hospital. This was about the only place left we could find to defend. We dug slit trenches and that night, a fairly quiet one, we managed to catch up on our sleep."

The next morning, Claricoates and his colleagues set off for Stanley Peninsula, arriving there on Christmas Day. They were housed in a big steel building but there was no respite from Japanese bombardments and air attacks which lasted all day.

What Claricoates and his colleagues learned a few days later put a damper on all thoughts of Christmas cheer.

"We learned that back at St. Stephen's hospital the Japanese had overrun the area, killed all the medical orderlies who had been bivouacked behind the hospital and repeatedly raped and then killed, all

Ron Claricoates was awarded the OBE for his work in a Japanese hospital

"We marched back to the barracks," Claricoates said, "to await the arrival of the Japanese, who had given us 24 hours to surrender."

No one likes an order to surrender and Claricoates and his colleagues were no exception, but they were weary, exhausted and demoralized.

were counted and at any given time, a prisoner could be called in front of his captors, searched, humiliated and degraded.

It was March, 1942 and the Japanese needed work parties. Claricoates was detailed to go with a burial party to Kiatak airport.

"On our arrival we met a group of Canadian prisoners, shackled and with their hands and feet tied

ficer made me a corporal and put me in charge of the patients, all Canadians."

Claricoates worked the night shift. It was a distressing job, with patients dying daily from lack of serum. Five died in one 24-hour period.

A short time later, Claricoates, sound asleep following his shift, was awakened by a Japanese medical officer who said he wanted to see all the Canadian medical staff.

"We lined up with our senior medical officer, Maj. John Crawford (now a retired brigadier-general) and through an interpreter we were told the Japanese considered we were letting prisoners deliberately die. We replied this was not so, but couldn't do anything because of the lack of medical supplies. With that, the Japanese doctor lashed Maj. Crawford across the face with a rubber hose."

THE JAPANESE doctor, visibly angered, then asked anyone who said he wasn't guilty of letting patients die to take one step forward.

"We all stepped forward," Claricoates said, "and he then lashed all of us across the face with his rubber hose."

The Japanese doctor repeated his demand, adding that this time that anyone who did step forward would be beheaded.

"Unfortunately," Claricoates added, "one of our orderlies, Leslie Varley, of Toronto, didn't quite understand the order and stepped forward on his own. The Japanese doctor ordered him to kneel and drew his sword ready to deliver the blow."

Varley was saved by the intervention of Maj. Crawford who pleaded for the orderly's life. Much later, Varley and Claricoates were to be decorated for their work at the hospital — Varley, the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal) and Claricoates, mentioned in dispatches.

Some time later, the Japanese fired the hospital orderlies and moved them back to their huts. The officers and men were segregated and the men put to work covering an ammunition dump with bamboo

three drafts that would have put him in Japan. Fortunately, the moves never materialized. Then came the news of the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima. The prisoners knew their days of captivity were coming to an end.

"Some time later we heard over our secret radio that the war was over. When our officers were told, they immediately marched over to the Japanese camp commandant to tell him so. The officers also insisted that their captors were to place themselves the other side of the fence, that food and clothing were to be brought in immediately and that the camp commandant would be personally responsible for the safety of the prisoners."

The subdued Japanese complied and Claricoates and the others found things greatly improved for the next few weeks. At the end of that period the men were driven to the nearest port where the Prince Robert, a converted Canadian Pacific freighter, was docked. The men were invited on board, given a shot of rum and allowed to visit Kowloon.

"Those of us who were fit enough went into the city, with one thought in mind — to get the Japanese doctor who had ill-treated us. We never did find him and it was lucky we didn't. There is no doubt in my mind he would have been killed if he had been found."

Those of the prisoners who were too ill to be sent home were put on a ship for Australia. Claricoates was sent to Manila where he stayed for two weeks and then sailed by troopship for Victoria, B.C. He was discharged medically unfit in February, 1947, due to treatment at the hands of the Japanese, but rejoined the Canadian Army Pay Corps five years later.

A native of England, he came to Canada in August, 1937, from an orphanage in Lincoln, England, to work on a farm in Windsor Mills, Quebec, until the time he joined the Royal Rifles of Canada during wartime.

HE CAME to Kingston in 1953 for a 15-week basic training course and returned again in 1956 as a bookkeeper at the Staff College, where

dysentery, diphtheria and pellagra.

It all began f[illegible] aricoates in October, 1941, w[illegible] as a member of the Royal Rifles of Canada, the 1,000-man regiment sailed for Hong Kong as a garrison regiment.

"To all intents and purposes," he said, "we were going to Hong Kong to bolster two British regiments — the Middlesex and the Royal Scots. Security was tight and we knew nothing of what lay ahead."

The two British regiments remained on the mainland of China, while the Canadian regiments settled in at Hong Kong.

"There were constant rumors that a Japanese invasion was imminent," he said. "I was in a signals platoon when the news came through the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States and Japan were at war."

In next to no time, the Canadian troops found the Japanese facing them from the mainland across the narrow strip of water. The British troops had already been driven off the mainland and retreated to Hong Kong. Sensing their superiority, the commanding general of the Japanese invasion troops issued an ultimatum to the island forces to surrender.

"We were completely beleagured," Claricoates recalls. "We had no air support and no naval support. There were 10,000 of us, including the two British regiments and militia units, against 50,000 Japanese, who incidentally, were supported with all the necessary instruments of war. To the west of us on the island were the Winnipeg Grenadiers."

[illegible] arriving there on Christmas Day. They were housed in a big steel building but there was no respite from Japanese bombardments and air attacks which lasted all day.

What Claricoates and his colleagues learned a few days later put a damper on all thoughts of Christmas cheer.

"We learned that back at St. Stephen's hospital the Japanese had overrun the area, killed all the medical orderlies who had been bivouacked behind the hospital and repeatedly raped and then killed, all of the Canadian nurses. We also learned that some of the patients — Canadian and British — had been tortured. Some had had their eyes gouged and then thrown back in a heap among the other patients and left without any medical attention. We got this information from a British soldier who had been a patient at the hospital and managed to escape."

On Boxing Day, Claricoates and his platoon took their last position on a hill outside Stanley Barracks. It was the beginning of the end for them.

"As we were taking up our positions on the hill, we came under shell fire. We immediately dug in, but at two o'clock on the morning of Boxing Day we received word that the governor of the island, Sir Mark Young, was asking us to surrender as the city of Victoria had been without water for three days."

Realizing the hopelessness of the situation, the commanding officer, Maj.-Gen. Maltby, gave the order to lay down arms and surrender.

Ron Claricoates was awarded the OBE for his work in a Japanese hospital

"We marched back to the barracks," Claricoates said, "to await the arrival of the Japanese, who had given us 24 hours to surrender."

No one likes an order to surrender and Claricoates and his colleagues were no exception, but they were weary, exhausted and demoralized.

"In a way we were relieved it was over. Our lives had been spared. We were dog-tired and hungry, but our spirits were high. We had done a good job in defending for 18 days, never thinking of surrender, because we had been told the Japanese had no intention of taking prisoners. At that point we didn't give much thought to our future."

IT'S FORTUNATE for Claricoates that he didn't know what the future held. It was to be a future that made the past few months seem like a picnic.

"The Japanese marched us from Stanley Peninusla, with our wounded, to North Point refugee camp, a distance of seven miles," he said. If anyone lagged behind, he was immediately beaten. In addition, we were constantly spat on and jeered by the civilian population."

Arriving at their camp, they were herded into 25 H-huts, swelling the population already there to about 1,500. Each day the prisoners were counted and at any given time, a prisoner could be called in front of his captors, searched, humiliated and degraded.

It was March, 1942 and the Japanese needed work parties. Claricoates was detailed to go with a burial party to Kiatak airport.

"On our arrival we met a group of Canadian prisoners, shackled and with their hands and feet tied behind their backs with barbed wire," he said. "Some lay dead, having been bayoneted by the Japanese. Our instructions were, following the burial of the dead, to fill in shell holes on the airport. Our only equipment was a bamboo pole with a basket in the centre. Two men were assigned each pole, others to handle shovels."

The work schedule was a hard one, and long — 10 hours a day, with only a five-minute break each hour and half an hour for dinner. The men were awakened each day at 5 a.m. and taken from their camp to the airport by ship. The pay? Ten sen a day and an extra bowl of sweet rice. This work detail lasted for seven months before the Canadians, along with some British prisoners, were ordered to Kowloon for a new work program.

"Immediately we got to Kowloon," Claricoates said, "diphtheria broke out among the prisoners. The Japanese were looking for medical volunteers to work in the hospital. I volunteered to do what I could to help my fellowman. Our medical officer drew his sword ready to deliver the blow."

Varley was saved by the intervention of Maj. Crawford who pleaded for the orderly's life. Much later, Varley and Claricoates were to be decorated for their work at the hospital — Varley, the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal) and Claricoates, mentioned in dispatches.

Some time later, the Japanese fired the hospital orderlies and moved them back to their huts. The officers and men were segregated and the men put to work covering an ammunition dump with bamboo for camouflage. This work lasted for one month and during that time Claricoates lost 25 pounds in weight due to the severity of the work and malnutrition. Then it was back into the hospital again, a frustrating job which entailed nothing more than comforting the sick and burying the dead. Medical supplies were practically non-existent.

If there was any comforting news, it was the fact that the prisoners learned the Americans had recaptured the Phillipines and that American air force raids on Japanese-held territory were increasing. However, food was still a starvation diet.

"Our ration was supposed to be one pound of rice a day," Claricoates said, "cooked with seaweed, but by the time the Japanese had taken their share of it, there was very little left, but our spirits were soaring with news heard clandestinely by a Dutch prisoner who had fashioned a crystal radio and had concealed it in his mess tin."

The good news was soon tempered by the fact that on three occasions Claricoates was placed on [illegible]ed medically unfit in February, 1947 due to treatment at the hands of [illegible]panese, but rejoined the Canad[illegible] Army Pay Corps five years later.

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One of the mementoes of his prisoner of war days which he treasures is the book, *Shadow Lights of Shamshuipo* by Staff-sergeant Harry McNaughton, inscribed with a personal message from the author.

Claricoates also tells with pride the fact that all of the medical orderlies who served with him at the Japanese hospital were jointly awarded the OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire). The medal is worn by Sgt. R.A. Kerr, of Winnipeg, who was the chief orderly at the time the award was made.

Claricoates has voluminous notes, pictures, maps and drawings relating to his prisoner of war days. He is using them to publish, some time in the near future, a book of his exploits.

Canadian doctor wrote In Flanders Fields after close friend was killed in battle of Ypres

By JAY MYERS/The Canadian Press

TORONTO

WAR DOES strange things to the minds of those who experience it first-hand. Some become deranged, losing ouch with reality; some become nraged, performing unexpected icts of bravery; others turn inward or solace, finding a new meaning religion.

And one man put pen to paper nd, in 20 minutes, wrote one of the ost famous poems in the English nguage on the ravages of the irst World War. His name was ohn McCrae; the poem, In Flanrs Fields.

Born of Scottish immigrant parnts in Guelph, Ont., he was the unger of two brothers. His family me and birthplace on Water reet is preserved as a national historic site and a light burns in his memory in the adjacent McCrae Memorial Gardens.

His father, Capt. David McCrae, who commanded the Ontario Field Battery, owned a woollen mill in Guelph which employed 250 people and was a prominent figure in the town's growth.

John received his early education at Guelph and obtained an honors degree in biology and a medical degree by 1898, with a gold medal and scholarships in physiology and pathology.

He served as a resident physician at Johns Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore where the renowned Canadian, William Osler, was professor of medicine. Returning to Canada, McCrae became a fellow in pathology at McGill University and assistant pathologist at Montreal General Hospital.

During his university days, several of McCrae's poems were published in the University of Toronto newspaper *The Varsity, The Spectator, Canadian Magazine* and the *University Magazine* at McGill.

In Montreal he joined the Pen and Pencil Club, an organization of Canadian writers and artists whose members included Stephen Leacock and Andrew Macphail, a physician who edited the *University Magazine* and later became the editor of a book of McCrae's poems.

In 1899 McCrae enlisted as a lieutenant in the Canadian Field Artillery for duty in the South African War, during which time he wrote *The Unconquered Dead*. When the war ended, he returned to his pathology and poetry.

He joined the First Canadian Contingent at the outbreak of the First World War, becoming a major and First Brigade Artillery surgeon, and was stationed in Flanders during the spring of 1915.

His dressing station was located on the banks of the Ypres Canal within sight of the village of Ypres. As each day passed, he witnessed the increasing number of crosses being erected in the Canadian cemetery.

On May 2, 1915, McCrae's close friend Alexis Helmer was killed during the Second Battle of Ypres. The following morning another friend, Brigade Sgt. Maj. Cyril Allinson, saw McCrae sitting on the step of an ambulance with a pad of paper on his knees, writing.

For five minutes McCrae continued to write. Then he gave his friend the writing pad.

"His face was very tired but calm as he wrote," Allinson recalled. "He looked around from time to time, his eyes straying to Helmer's grave. The poem was almost an exact description of the scene in front of us both."

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our places; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing fly,
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If you break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

The poem was published in Punch magazine on Dec. 8 the same year. McCrae was not given a byline but authorship was credited to him in the annual index, although his name was spelled "McCree."

A year after McCrae's death from pneumonia in Boulogne, France, in 1918, less than seven months before his 43rd birthday, Andrew Macphail included the poem in a book of his works called *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems*.

McCrae never knew the full impact of his poem. In Flanders Fields was recited for the first time as part of the official Armistice Day program on Nov. 11, 1918. Since then, it has become part of Remembrance Day ceremonies throughout Canada.

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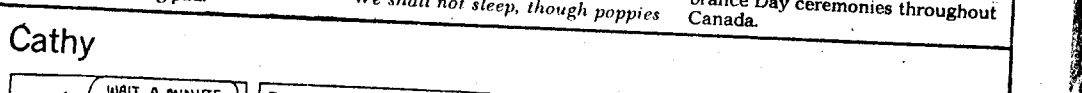


The Whig-Standard / A CLOSER LOOK

KINGSTON, ONTARIO, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1981 PAGE 5

REMEMBRANCE DAY: Kingston hero recalls his years in prisoner-of-war camps

By LYNN JONES
Whig-Standard Staff Writer

WHEN THE ATOM BOMB dropped on Hiroshima, Aug. 6, 1945, Allied prisoners of war in the Pacific sank to their knees and thanked God for deliverance from a captivity that had been marked by some of the most inhuman and bestial treatment ever handed out to prisoners of war.

One of those was Ron Claricoates, who had been a prisoner of the Japanese since the day Hong Kong fell in December, 1941.

His reaction on hearing the news of the Hiroshima bombing?

"Great, just great," he said. "I didn't know at the time it was an atom bomb, only that it was the most powerful bomb dropped up to that point. My fellow prisoners and I knew then the war was coming to an end and our joy knew no bounds."

The war for Claricoates and others incarcerated in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps couldn't come to an end soon enough. For the three-and-a-half years he had been held prisoner, Claricoates had been subjected to the most brutal and callous treatment ever devised by other human beings — all in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention dealing with the treatment of prisoners of war, a convention the Japanese refused to honor.

It was an incarceration marked by frequent beatings, humiliations, long and arduous labor and deliberate starvation. Sickness, disease and ultimate death were every-day occurrences. The Japanese refused help, medicine or comfort to the prisoners, many of them suffering from the effects of beriberi, malaria, dysentery, diphtheria and pellagra.

It all began for Claricoates in October, 1941, when, as a member of the Royal Rifles of Canada, the 1,000-man regiment sailed for Hong Kong as a garrison regiment.

"To all intents and purposes," he said, "we were going to Hong Kong to bolster two British regiments — the Middlesex and the Royal Scots. Security was tight and we knew nothing of what lay ahead."

The two British regiments remained on the mainland of China,

The ultimatum to surrender was ignored on the advice of the commanding British general. At this, the Japanese began its bombardment by long-range shelling and air attacks. With little resistance from the beleagured island, the Japanese invaded Hong Kong, landing first at Lymun Gap, on the northern tip of the island, engaging C company of the Royal Rifles of Canada. The fighting was intense and the officer commanding C company stated the Japanese attack had been repulsed and radioed British headquarters for permission to "drive the invaders into the sea."

The reply warned the company not to do so because the operation could very well be a trap. The Japanese poured more troops and equipment into the area.

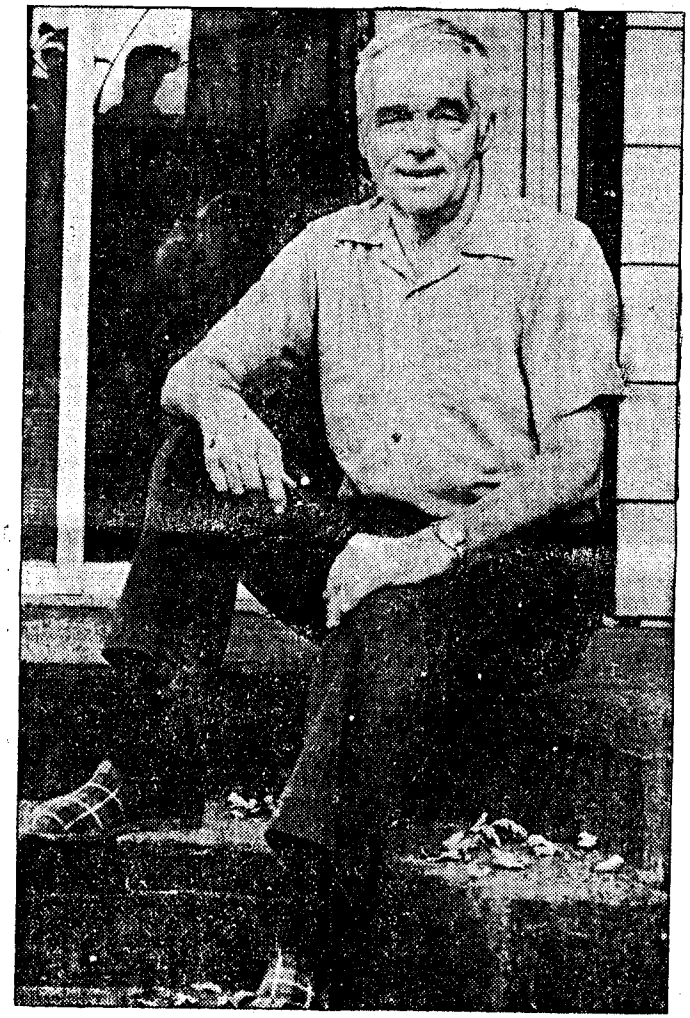
Meanwhile, Claricoates shut down his switchboard at Tiatam Gap and hurried back to his old platoon — No. 4. On joining it, the order was given to occupy a hill near Palm Villa, which came under intense Japanese fire, lasting all through that night. It was to no avail. The following day, the Japanese concentrated mortar fire to dislodge the Canadians.

"We took our wounded and the few weapons available," Claricoates said, "and made for Palm Villa to set up some sort of defence. There was a lot of confusion and sleep was possible only in brief snatches. A night later, we sneaked out of the area and made for St. Stephen's Hospital. This was about the only place left we could find to defend. We dug slit trenches and that night, a fairly quiet one, we managed to catch up on our sleep."

The next morning, Claricoates and his colleagues set off for Stanley Peninsula, arriving there on Christmas Day. They were housed in a big steel building but there was no respite from Japanese bombardments and air attacks which lasted all day.

What Claricoates and his colleagues learned a few days later put a damper on all thoughts of Christmas cheer.

"We learned that back at St. Stephen's hospital the Japanese had overrun the area, killed all the medical orderlies who had been bivouacked behind the hospital and re-



Ron Claricoates was awarded the OBE for his work in a Japanese hospital

"We marched back to the barracks," Claricoates said, "to await the arrival of the Japanese, who had given us 24 hours to surrender."

No one likes an order to surrender and Claricoates and his colleagues were no exception, but they were weary, exhausted and demoralized.

were counted and at any given time, a prisoner could be called in front of his captors, searched, humiliated and degraded.

It was March, 1942 and the Japanese needed work parties. Claricoates was detailed to go with a burial party to Kiatak airport.

"On our arrival we met a group of Canadian prisoners, shackled

ficer made me a corporal and put me in charge of the patients, all Canadians."

Claricoates worked the night shift. It was a distressing job, with patients dying daily from lack of serum. Five died in one 24-hour period.

A short time later, Claricoates, sound asleep following his shift, was awakened by a Japanese medical officer who said he wanted to see all the Canadian medical staff.

"We lined up with our senior medical officer, Maj. John Crawford (now a retired brigadier-general) and through an interpreter we were told the Japanese considered we were letting prisoners deliberately die. We replied this was not so, but couldn't do anything because of the lack of medical supplies. With that, the Japanese doctor lashed Maj. Crawford across the face with a rubber hose."

THE JAPANESE doctor, visibly angered, then asked anyone who said he wasn't guilty of letting patients die to take one step forward.

"We all stepped forward," Claricoates said, "and he then lashed all of us across the face with his rubber hose."

The Japanese doctor repeated his demand, adding that this time that anyone who did step forward would be beheaded.

"Unfortunately," Claricoates added, "one of our orderlies, Leslie Varley, of Toronto, didn't quite understand the order and stepped forward on his own. The Japanese doctor ordered him to kneel and drew his sword ready to deliver the blow."

Varley was saved by the intervention of Maj. Crawford who pleaded for the orderly's life. Much later, Varley and Claricoates were to be decorated for their work at the hospital — Varley, the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal) and Claricoates, mentioned in dispatches.

Some time later, the Japanese fired the hospital orderlies and moved them back to their huts. The officers and men were segregated and the men put to work covering

three drafts that would have put him in Japan. Fortunately, the moves never materialized. Then came the news of the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima. The prisoners knew their days of captivity were coming to an end.

"Some time later we heard over our secret radio that the war was over. When our officers were told, they immediately marched over to the Japanese camp commandant to tell him so. The officers also insisted that their captors were to place themselves the other side of the fence, that food and clothing were to be brought in immediately and that the camp commandant would be personally responsible for the safety of the prisoners."

The subdued Japanese complied and Claricoates and the others found things greatly improved for the next few weeks. At the end of that period the men were driven to the nearest port where the Prince Robert, a converted Canadian Pacific freighter, was docked. The men were invited on board, given a shot of rum and allowed to visit Kowloon.

"Those of us who were fit enough went into the city, with one thought in mind — to get the Japanese doctor who had ill-treated us. We never did find him and it was lucky we didn't. There is no doubt in my mind he would have been killed if he had been found."

Those of the prisoners who were too ill to be sent home were put on a ship for Australia. Claricoates was sent to Manila where he stayed for two weeks and then sailed by troopship for Victoria, B.C. He was discharged medically unfit in February, 1947, due to treatment at the hands of the Japanese, but rejoined the Canadian Army Pay Corps five years later.

A native of England, he came to Canada in August, 1937, from an orphanage in Lincoln, England, to work on a farm in Windsor Mills, Quebec, until the time he joined the Royal Rifles of Canada during wartime.

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The two British regiments remained on the mainland of China, while the Canadian regiments settled in at Hong Kong.

"There were constant rumors that a Japanese invasion was imminent," he said. "I was in a signals platoon when the news came through the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States and Japan were at war."

In next to no time, the Canadian troops found the Japanese facing them from the mainland across the narrow strip of water. The British troops had already been driven off the mainland and retreated to Hong Kong. Sensing their superiority, the commanding general of the Japanese invasion troops issued an ultimatum to the island forces to surrender.

"We were completely beleagured," Claricoates recalls. "We had no air support and no naval support. There were 10,000 of us, including the two British regiments and militia units, against 50,000 Japanese, who incidentally, were supported with all the necessary instruments of war. To the west of us on the island were the Winnipeg Grenadiers."

arriving there on Christmas Day. They were housed in a big steel building but there was no respite from Japanese bombardments and air attacks which lasted all day.

What Claricoates and his colleagues learned a few days later put a damper on all thoughts of Christmas cheer.

"We learned that back at St. Stephen's hospital the Japanese had overrun the area, killed all the medical orderlies who had been bivouacked behind the hospital and repeatedly raped and then killed, all of the Canadian nurses. We also learned that some of the patients — Canadian and British — had been tortured. Some had had their eyes gouged and then thrown back in a heap among the other patients and left without any medical attention. We got this information from a British soldier who had been a patient at the hospital and managed to escape."

On Boxing Day, Claricoates and his platoon took their last position on a hill outside Stanley Barracks. It was the beginning of the end for them.

"As we were taking up our positions on the hill, we came under shell fire. We immediately dug in, but at two o'clock on the morning of Boxing Day we received word that the governor of the island, Sir Mark Young, was asking us to surrender as the city of Victoria had been without water for three days."

Realizing the hopelessness of the situation, the commanding officer, Maj.-Gen. Maltby, gave the order to lay down arms and surrender.

Ron Claricoates was awarded the OBE for his work in a Japanese hospital

"We marched back to the barracks," Claricoates said, "to await the arrival of the Japanese, who had given us 24 hours to surrender."

No one likes an order to surrender and Claricoates and his colleagues were no exception, but they were weary, exhausted and demoralized.

"In a way we were relieved it was over. Our lives had been spared. We were dog-tired and hungry, but our spirits were high. We had done a good job in defending for 18 days, never thinking of surrender, because we had been told the Japanese had no intention of taking prisoners. At that point we didn't give much thought to our future."

IT'S FORTUNATE for Claricoates that he didn't know what the future held. It was to be a future that made the past few months seem like a picnic.

"The Japanese marched us from Stanley Peninusla, with our wounded, to North Point refugee camp, a distance of seven miles," he said. If anyone lagged behind, he was immediately beaten. In addition, we were constantly spat on and jeered by the civilian population."

Arriving at their camp, they were herded into 25 H-huts, swelling the population already there to about 1,500. Each day the prisoners were counted and at any given time, a prisoner could be called in front of his captors, searched, humiliated and degraded.

It was March, 1942 and the Japanese needed work parties. Claricoates was detailed to go with a burial party to Kiatak airport.

"On our arrival we met a group of Canadian prisoners, shackled and with their hands and feet tied behind their backs with barbed wire," he said. "Some lay dead, having been bayoneted by the Japanese. Our instructions were, following the burial of the dead, to fill in shell holes on the airport. Our only equipment was a bamboo pole with a basket in the centre. Two men were assigned each pole, others to handle shovels."

The work schedule was a hard one, and long — 10 hours a day, with only a five-minute break each hour and half an hour for dinner. The men were awakened each day at 5 a.m. and taken from their camp to the airport by ship. The pay? Ten sen a day and an extra bowl of sweet rice. This work detail lasted for seven months before the Canadians, along with some British prisoners, were ordered to Kowloon for a new work program.

"Immediately we got to Kowloon," Claricoates said, "diphtheria broke out among the prisoners. The Japanese were looking for medical volunteers to work in the hospital. I volunteered to do what I could to help my fellowman. Our medical officer drew his sword ready to deliver the blow."

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Some time later, the Japanese fired the hospital orderlies and moved them back to their huts. The officers and men were segregated and the men put to work covering an ammunition dump with bamboo for camouflage. This work lasted for one month and during that time Claricoates lost 25 pounds in weight due to the severity of the work and malnutrition. Then it was back into the hospital again, a frustrating job which entailed nothing more than comforting the sick and burying the dead. Medical supplies were practically non-existent.

If there was any comforting news, it was the fact that the prisoners learned the Americans had recaptured the Phillipines and that American air force raids on Japanese-held territory were increasing. However, food was still a starvation diet.

"Our ration was supposed to be one pound of rice a day," Claricoates said, "cooked with seaweed, but by the time the Japanese had taken their share of it, there was very little left, but our spirits were soaring with news heard clandestinely by a Dutch prisoner who had fashioned a crystal radio and had concealed it in his mess tin."

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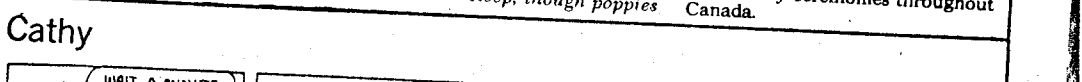

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