

# "C" Force - The Hong Kong Story

## THE CALL TO ARMS\*

On September 10, 1941, an invitation by telegram was sent from the Government of the United Kingdom to the Government of Canada to send reinforcements to Hong Kong. General Crerar, the Chief of the General Staff in a communication to the Minister of Defense had recommended that the Royal Rifles of Canada (RRC) from Quebec and the Winnipeg Grenadiers (WG) should be designated for this assignment. In his communication he had stated, "that the units selected should be efficient, well-trained battalions, capable of upholding the credit of the Dominion in any circumstances." He also added, "both" battalions designated "are units of proven efficiency."

On October 9, 1941, the two battalions were warned to be ready for service and that a ship had been provided by the British Government and was to set sail by the end of the month. Both regiments were under strength and it was decided that volunteers were needed for "overseas service", "Military District No. 2 based in Toronto was to secure volunteers needed for the Royal Rifles of Canada, and Military District No. 10 based in Winnipeg was to secure volunteers for the Winnipeg Grenadiers." The call for volunteers went beyond Military Districts No. 2 and 10. The Royal Rifles of Canada had secured volunteers from the area of south and central Ontario to the east coast of Canada, while the Winnipeg Grenadiers had secured volunteers from northern Ontario to the West coast of Canada. With the addition of the volunteers, "C" Force, (the official designation of the regiments) had reached the strength of 2 infantry regiments.

The United Kingdom originally requested two battalions to join four Imperial and Indian battalions already stationed in Hong Kong. An additional request was made to Canada on October 11, 1941 to supply a headquarters force made up of approximately 80 officers and men. At the request of the British, Canada was able to produce a headquarters company which consisted of 97 men and they sailed with the WG and RRC on October 27, 1941.

The British had secured the troopship *Awatea* for the transport of the soldiers to Hong Kong. The *Awatea* transported the troops with the equipment to follow on another vessel at a later date. The *Awatea* sailed from Vancouver on October 27, with *HMCS Prince Robert* (a commercial vessel commandeered for service in the RCN as an armed merchant cruiser) as the escort ship. With stops at Hawaii and Manila, "C" Force arrived at Hong Kong on November 17, 1941.

On October 4, the *Don Jose*, an American freighter sailed from Vancouver with vehicles and cargo for the Canadian contingent which went to Hong Kong. The *Don Jose* arrived at Manila in the Philippines on December 12, with the Japanese forces already attacking the U.S. The U.S. Army was given permission to seize the equipment and use it for their own use.

\*\*Report on the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Crown Colony of Hong Kong, by Right Hon. Sir Lyman P. Duff, G.C.M.G., Royal Commissioner, King's Printer 1942.



## History of the Royal Rifles of Canada



The history of the Royal Rifles of Canada (RRC) began on February 28, 1862 at Quebec City when "The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Volunteer Militia Rifles, Canada" was authorized to be formed. It was further redesignated into different names on the following dates:

- 8th or Stadacona Volunteer Militia Rifles – March 28, 1862
- 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Rifles – April 6, 1877
- 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment Royal Rifles – May 8, 1900
- The Royal Rifles of Canada – March 29, 1920
- 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, The Royal Rifles of Canada – November 7, 1940
- The Royal Rifles of Canada – June 1, 1945
- Amalgamated with Les Voltigeurs de Quebec – February 22, 1965

On November 1, 1966 these two regiments ceased to be amalgamated and the regiment was reduced to nil strength and transferred to the Supplementary Order of Battle.

The Royal Rifles of Canada were mobilized on July 8, 1940, at Quebec, before this date the regiment was a reserve unit in the Non-Permanent Active Militia. The unit later trained in the Quebec area and at Sussex, N.B. The battalion went to Newfoundland in November and December 1940 where they became part of the Newfoundland garrison. They returned to Canada in August and in September of 1941 took up coastal defence duties at Saint John, N.B., where they remained until October 9, 1941 when they returned home to prepare for Hong Kong.

On October 27, 1941 the RRC embarked for Hong Kong where they became POW's with the surrender on December 25, 1941. On January 10, 1942, the unit was reconstituted and served Canada in a home defence role as part of the Vancouver Defences of Pacific Command. On January 2, 1945, the RRC embarked for the United Kingdom where it was disbanded on January 10, 1945 and was to provide reinforcements to the Canadian army in Europe.



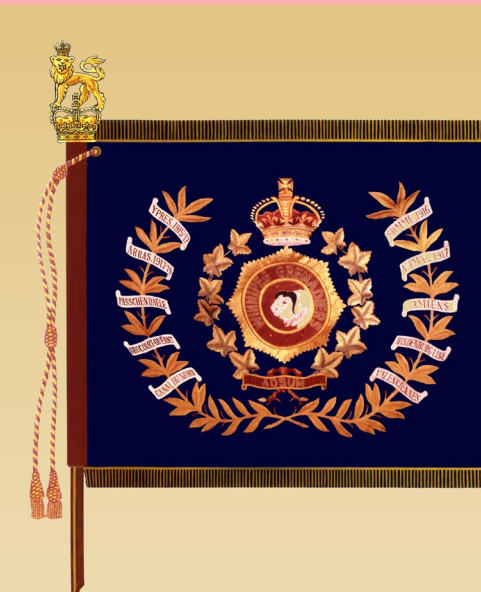
1st Battalion of the Royal Rifles of Canada with their mascot "Gander", who was killed in the battle of Hong Kong.



Photo of the members of the RRC gathering at the Valcartier train station for their travel to the west coast.  
- Courtesy Library and Archives Canada, PA-116794



## History of the Winnipeg Grenadiers



Grenadiers on the march in Winnipeg – Courtesy Hong Kong Veteran's Commemorative Association – William Bell's Story



Grenadiers on parade – Courtesy Hong Kong Veteran's Commemorative Association – William Bell's Story

On April 1, 1908, at Morden, Manitoba the Winnipeg Grenadiers (WG) were formed as a reserve force regiment, known as the 100<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Lineage occurred as follows:

- 100<sup>th</sup> Winnipeg Grenadiers – May 2, 1910
- The Winnipeg Grenadiers - March 12, 1920
- Amalgamated with the 10<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Battalion, GMGC and redesignated The Winnipeg Grenadiers (Machine Gun) – November 16, 1936
- 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, The Winnipeg Grenadiers (Machine Gun) – November 7, 1940
- 2<sup>nd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, The Winnipeg Grenadiers – March 15, 1941
- The Winnipeg Grenadiers – January 28, 1946

On February 28, 1965 it was reduced to nil strength and transferred to the Supplementary Order of Battle.

On September 1, 1939, the Winnipeg Grenadiers were mobilized as a machine gun battalion at Winnipeg. Prior to this mobilization the Grenadiers were a reserve unit in the Non-Permanent Active Militia. In the autumn and winter of 1939-40 the unit trained in Winnipeg, and from May 1940 to October 1941 it was assigned to garrison duties in Jamaica and Bermuda. On October 27, 1941 the regiment embarked for Hong Kong and surrendered on December 25, 1941.

On January 10, 1942 the unit was reconstituted where it served as home defence role as part of the Prince Rupert Defences, 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division and took part in the Kiska, Alaska as a component of the 13<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Group, serving from August 16, 1934 to December 22. The WG embarked for the United Kingdom on May 25, 1944 and on November 1 it was absorbed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Training Battalion, CASF. On July 5, 1945, the unit was converted and redesignated No. 10 Canadian Repatriation Depot, Type "T". On January 28, 1946 the depot was disbanded.



Winnipeg Grenadier with HK patch – Courtesy (Alt) History Inc.



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