

"C" Force - The Hong Kong Story

Nursing Sisters

Kay Christie

Katherine (Kay) Georgina Christie was born at Little Current on Manitoulin Island on July 10, 1911. Growing up in Toronto, and graduating from Riverdale Collegiate, she was too young to enter nursing school so she took a business course and worked as a secretary. When her age permitted she took her training as a nurse at Toronto Western Hospital. With World War II already taking place in Europe, Kay had realized nurses would be needed and on November 27, 1940 she joined the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and was given the rank of Lieutenant. In October of 1941, Kay had volunteered for a top secret-semi-tropical duty and sailed with "C" Force to Hong Kong.

Miss Christie passed away on February 7, 1994 due to Lou Gehrig's disease, in the veteran's wing at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre.



Anna Waters

Anna May waters was born at Strathroy, Ontario on January 21, 1903. In September of 1911, Anna with her parents and three brothers moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba where she attended Lord Roberts and Kelvin Schools, and in 1927 graduated as a registered nurse from the Winnipeg General Hospital. Her nursing career began at the Ninette Sanatorium in December 1927, where she nursed tuberculosis patients until April 1929. May was appointed to the nursing service of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, in May of 1940, and in October 1941 she left Canada for Hong Kong. May was presented with a medal, the Royal Red Cross 2nd class, on April 6, 1944. From September of 1944 to August 1946, May was part of the staff aboard the Canadian navy hospital ship TSS Letitia, and was reunited with some of her fellow POWs at Hawaii.

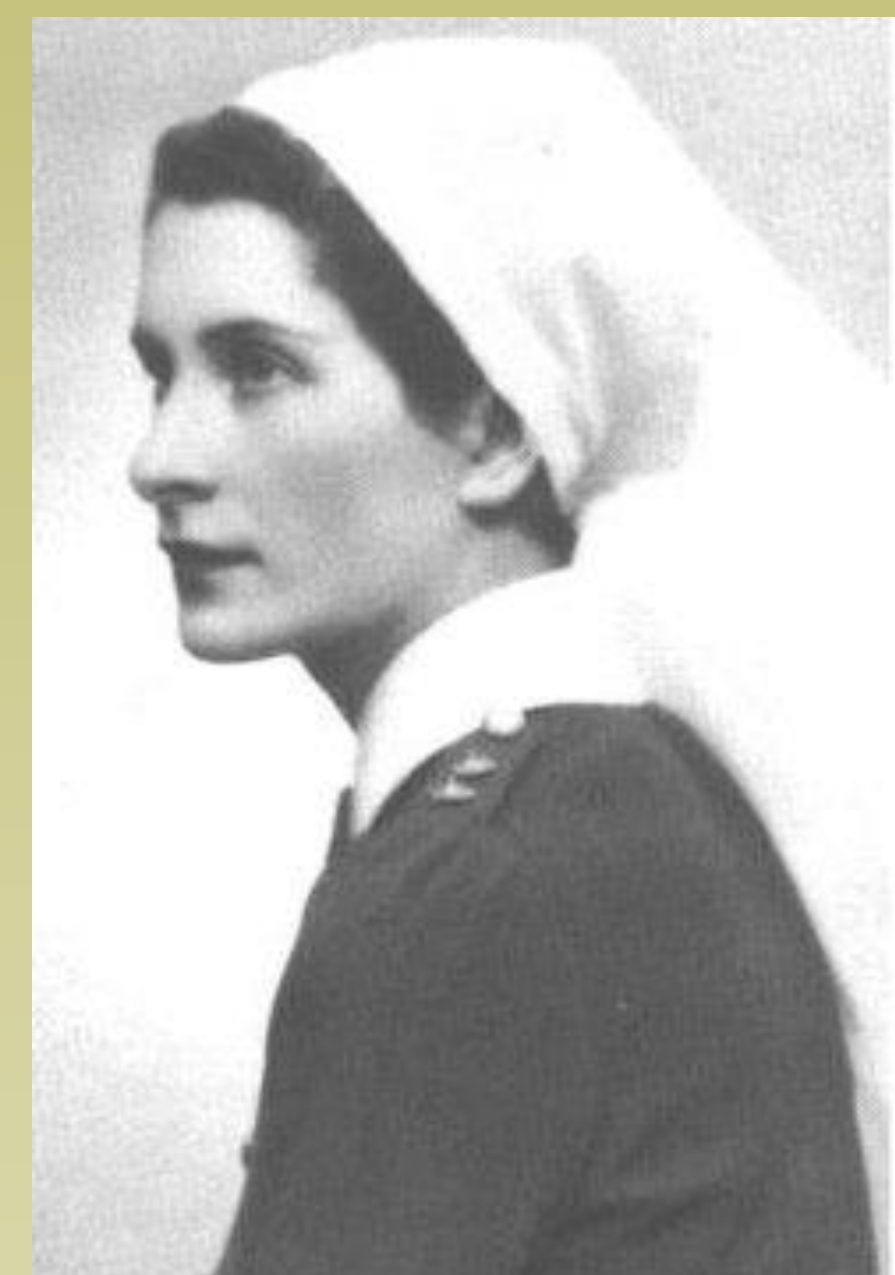
Anna May Waters passed away at long Beach, California, on December 8, 1987.

Both of these women while being held as POWs had seen many atrocities that were committed by Japanese soldiers against fellow nurses, prisoners as well as civilians. The memory of these atrocities remained with both women throughout their lifetime and their lives were never the same as it was pre-war, Both women never married.

Associate, Royal Red Cross Citation

Canada Gazette dated 10 June 1944 (No. 10, Vol. 78)

Nursing Sister Christie displayed outstanding devotion to duty in the Military Hospital at Hong Kong for eight months during the siege and capture of that island. After serving at Toronto Military Hospital from November 1940 until October 1941, without knowing her destination, she unhesitatingly volunteered for duty in a tropical climate and proceeded with the Hong Kong Expeditionary Force. After being a prisoner of war at Hong Kong for eighteen months, Nursing Sister Christie has since returned to Canada. She is at present posted to No. 2 Casualty Retraining Centre where she has recently been appointed as Nursing Sister in Charge. Her cheerfulness and attention to duty following her trying experiences impress all who come in contact with her. — Courtesy Hong Kong Veteran's Commemorative Association



Kay Christie, Nursing Sister Member of 'C' Force sent to the Battle of Hong Kong 1941, POW from 1941 - 1943

Newspaper photo of Kay Christie. — Courtesy Hong Kong Veteran's Commemorative Association



Royal Red Cross Medal 2nd class.

Photo of Anna May Waters. — Courtesy Hong Kong Veteran's Commemorative Association



Photo of John Robert Osborn. — Courtesy Library and Archives Canada, PA-037483 — Photo, Canada Dept. of National Defence

Their Story

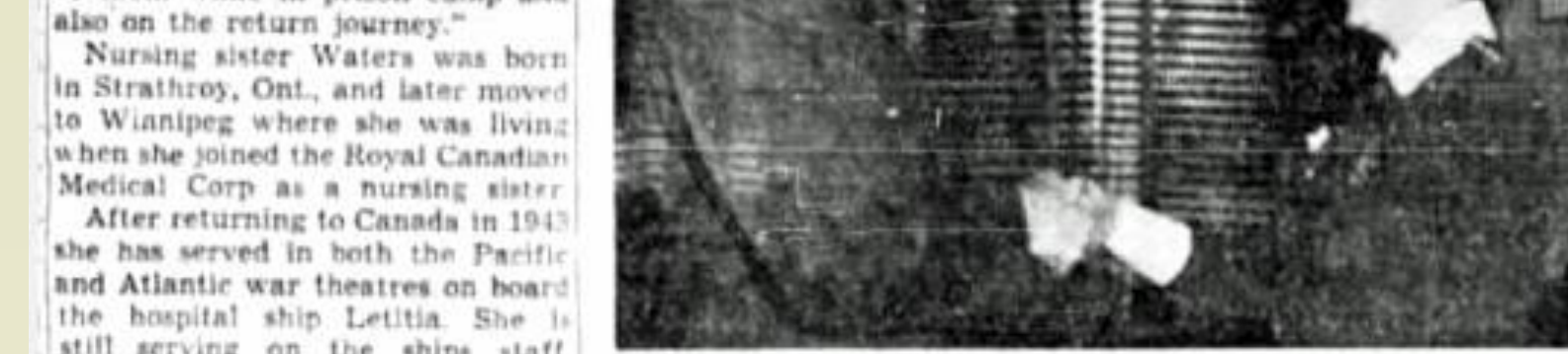
With the surrender of the Hong Kong garrison on December 25, 1941, the two nursing sisters Kay Christie and Anna Waters became prisoners of war and were held at the British Military Hospital which was designated as Prisoner of War Camp A. With the surrender Kay and Anna had the dubious distinction of being the first Canadian nursing sisters to be prisoners of war.

Eight months after the surrender, the Japanese moved the two nursing sisters to a civilian internment camp on Stanley Peninsula. They remained at the internment camp under the harshest of conditions and in the middle of 1943 they had learned that the Canadian government had negotiated to have all of the Canadian civilian internees in the Far East repatriated along with American civilians. Kay and Anna left Stanley Camp on September 23, 1943, on a Japanese ship the Teia Maru which was built to carry 400 cabin passengers, the civilian internees on board totaled over 1500. After four weeks the Teia Maru arrived at Goa, Portuguese India where an exchange was made with an equal number of Japanese civilians from allied countries which arrived aboard the Swedish vessel Gripsholm. Six weeks later, on December 2, 1943, the Gripsholm arrived at New York where the Canadians were placed on buses which took them to a special train which went to Montreal.

Royal Red Cross Presented To N.S. Anna May Waters

LEUT. N.S. Anna May Waters, of Winnipeg and London, Ont., was presented with the Royal Red Cross, 2nd Class at an investiture at Headquarters M.D. 4 April 5. The medal was presented on behalf of His Majesty the King, by Brig. J. C. Stewart, District Officer commanding Military District No. 6.

N.S. Waters citation is as follows: "N.S. Waters was appointed to the nursing service in May 1940. While serving at Hong Kong in December 1941 she was taken prisoner by the Japanese and held prisoner from December 25, 1941 until December 2, 1943. She was repatriated to Canada. Other reports, who later spoke very highly of her work in the internment camp and also on the return journey. Nursing sister Waters was born in Strathroy, Ont., and later moved to Winnipeg where she was living when she joined the Royal Canadian Medical Corp as a nursing sister. After returning to Canada in 1943 she was served in both the Pacific and Atlantic war theatres on board the hospital ship Letitia. She will arrive on the ship staff."



Kay Christie with her father at Bonaventure Station, Montreal after her trip home

Shower Held For Miss Betty Bywater

In honor of Miss Betty Bywater, a bride elect of early May, Mrs. Robert Williams entertained at a spontaneous shower Friday evening at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Lash Holmes, Queenston St. (Guests numbered 25.)



LEUT. Nursing Sister Anna May Waters, R.C.M.C., is pictured receiving the Royal Red Cross, second class, from Brigadier King's Birthday Honor List in J. C. Stewart, District Officer commanding M.D. 4, 1944.

John Robert Osborn, VC

John Robert Osborn was born at Foulton, Norfolk, England on January 2, 1899 and was killed in action on December 19, 1941. Osborn came to Canada in 1920 after serving in World War I with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. When he came to Canada he first settled in Saskatchewan and later Winnipeg.

Osborn was 42 years old, a Warrant Officer Second Class, holding an appointment as Company Sergeant-Major (CSM) for A Company in the 1st Battalion, The Winnipeg Grenadiers. With a battle taking place at Mount Butler, John Osborn lost his life and was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

His citation appeared in *The London Gazette*, April 2, 1946, and reads as follows:

At Hong Kong on the morning of 19th December 1941 a Company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers to which Company Sergeant-Major Osborn belonged became divided during an attack on Mount Butler, a hill rising steeply above sea level. A part of the Company led by Company Sergeant-Major Osborn captured the hill at the point of the bayonet and held it for three hours when, owing to the superior numbers of the enemy and to fire from an unprotected flank, the position became untenable. Company Sergeant-Major Osborn and a small group covered the withdrawal and when their turn came to fall

back, Osborn single-handedly engaged the enemy while the remainder successfully rejoined the Company. Company Sergeant-Major Osborn had to run the gauntlet of heavy rifle fire and machine gun fire. With no consideration for his own safety he assisted and directed stragglers to the new Company position exposing himself to heavy enemy fire to cover their retirement. Whenever danger threatened he was there to encourage his men.

During the afternoon the Company was cut off from the Battalion and completely surrounded by the enemy who were able to approach within grenade throwing distance of the slight depression which the Company was holding. Several enemy grenades were thrown which Company Sergeant-Major Osborn picked up and threw back. The enemy threw a grenade which landed in a position where it was impossible to pick it up and return it in time. Shouting a warning to his comrades this gallant Warrant Officer threw himself on the grenade which exploded killing him instantly. His self-sacrifice undoubtedly saved the lives of many others.

Company Sergeant-Major Osborn was an inspiring example to all throughout the defense which he assisted so magnificently in maintaining against an overwhelming enemy force for over right and a half hours and in his death he displayed the highest quality of heroism and self-sacrifice.

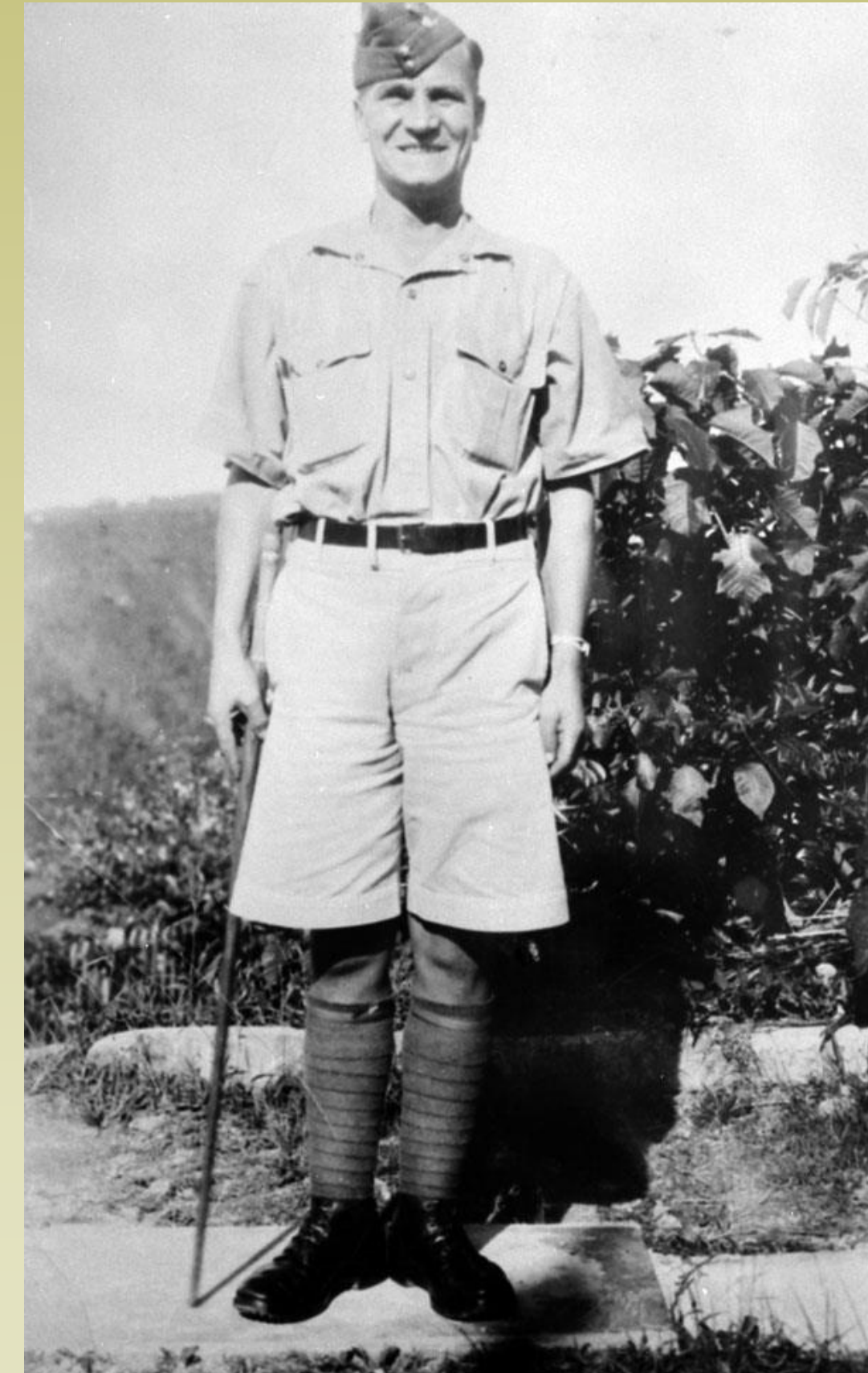


Photo of John Robert Osborn. — Courtesy Library and Archives Canada, PA-037483 — Photo, Canada Dept. of National Defence



Medals which were awarded to the family of John Robert Osborn, Victoria Cross Medal, British War Medal, Victory Medal, 1939-45 Star, Pacific Star, Defence Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp for overseas service and the War Medal



Victoria Cross medal which was awarded to John Robert Osborn posthumously. - Photo, Courtesy Canada War Museum

Sergeant Gander

Gander, a Newfoundland dog, initially was a family pet named Pal, which had accidentally scratched a child's face with his paw. The family was concerned that Pal may have to be put down and had asked if the Royal Rifles of Canada, who were stationed at Gander International Airport, in Newfoundland at the time, if they would like the dog. The soldiers quickly renamed him Gander and "promoted" him to sergeant and he was now the regimental mascot and travelled to Hong Kong with them.

During the battle of Hong Kong, Sergeant Gander fought gallantly with the RRC and on several occasions and had stopped the enemy's advance and protected wounded troops. On the third occasion, unfortunately he was not so lucky, Gander picked up a thrown Japanese grenade and rushed with it toward the enemy, dying in the ensuing explosion, but saving the lives of several wounded Canadian soldiers. With efforts by the Canada War Museum, the Hong Kong Veterans Association, and the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) awarded Gander the Dickin Medal on October 27, 2000, the first such award since 1949. The Dickin Medal is often referred to as the equivalent of the Victoria Cross for animals. The citation reads:

For saving the lives of Canadian infantrymen during the Battle of Lye Mun on Hong Kong Island in December 1941. On three documented occasions, Gander, the Newfoundland mascot of The Royal Rifles of Canada, engaged the enemy as his regiment joined The Winnipeg Grenadiers, members of Battalion Headquarters "C" Force and other Commonwealth troops in their courageous defence of the island. Twice Gander's attacks halted the enemy's advance and protected groups of wounded soldiers. In a final act of bravery, the war dog was killed in action gathering a grenade. Without Gander's intervention, many more lives would have been lost in the assault.



The PDSA Dickin Medal is a large bronze medallion inscribed with the words "For Gallantry" and "We Also Serve", all within a laurel wreath. The ribbon is striped green, dark brown and sky blue representing water, earth and air which is to symbolize the navy, land and air forces.

An example of the medal which would have been presented to Sgt. Gander posthumously.



Members of the Royal Rifles of Canada with their mascot "Gander" en route to Hong Kong. - Canada Dept. of National Defence, Courtesy Library and Archives Canada, PA-116791



A bronze statue of Sgt. Gander at the Gander Heritage Memorial Park in Gander Newfoundland, was named in his honour.



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