

Ralph MacLean's Story

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I was a part of the Headquarters Company of the Royal Rifles at only 19 years of age. My group was not meant to be a fighting company, but things change correct? The original tasks of my company was to carry ammunition, and to just be sent here and there to help out with whatever needed to be done. I was sent to the south of the island with around 10 people. We were meant to be a lookout for enemies, but none were forthcoming in this direction. All of the action was occurring on the Chinese-side of the island. That means that until the 18th, I have had no action in the war.

That all changed. Along with 8 or 10 men, I was sent to take up post across a bay at Stanley Village. We arrived during the night, it must have been anywhere from midnight till two o' clock. We were in a very dangerous position, and although I would not say it out loud, I was scared. We could not see in this pitch black, suffocating darkness, I had no idea of the terrain or where I was, and there was little to no shelter. To top it all off, a Japanese Scout Party walked by us, and although we could not give up our position by firing, we did manage to throw a few grenades. The night was a long one, as we waited for the light of day.

~ Ralph MacLean

December 25, 1941

This is the day I became a Prisoner of War, the last day of my freedom, but I, and the rest of my group, was just too exhausted to resist. Here's how it all began...

In the morning, we found that we had absolutely no cover, and tried to salvage safety in scrub-brush. We were on the side of a hill, but little did we know that overtop of that hill was a large Japanese force. The enemy covered an entire mountainside! Their firing rang out all around us, and all we had to defend ourselves with was our rifles, in which the bullets kicked up dirt all around us. Our officer did not know what to do, he ordered us to find better shelter, and that it was every man for himself.

Along with a group of four men, I ran for a nearby cliff. We jumped over the cliff, falling a few feet before we hit a small ledge. Whilst saving ourselves from going down any further, we had lost our

rifles. We were now sitting ducks, awaiting our fate on the small ledge.

A voice rang out from a microphone. "The Island has surrendered, I give you a safe passage to cross the valley to my post," a Japanese Officer declared in perfect english. The four of us looked at each other on the ridge and realized what little option we had, so we followed orders. We had practically 17 days of hardly any food and sleep. We were too exhausted to fight, too exhausted to do anything except go towards this Japanese Officer. We were marched to the Happy Valley Race Track, where we were all tied together. On the way we passed many of our own pillboxes, and to our dismay saw soldiers tied up, and then murdered. This brought a thought up to my mind. I just did not know whether I was lucky or not. Whether death may have been the preferred option. I did not know what will happen from here, but I knew it would not be a pleasant experience.

~ Ralph MacLean

December 27, 1941

Yesterday we were brought to where the Indian Troops had been made prisoner. From there we journeyed on to North Point. This was originally made to hold Chinese Refugees, but the Japanese were turning it into a POW camp. We soon found that the place was infested with bedbugs, lice and flees. I knew the Japanese were meant to keep us alive.

Some of the people were discussing how we would be liberated soon and had great hopes. But I know these hopes were false. From the way the Japanese have been treating us, I know this experience will be utmost unpleasant, and will drag on for a while.

Now I can just look back on what I' ve done, what I' ve tried to do in this war. This battle was brutally unfair. We had less experienced troops, placed in an unknown mountainous terrain, without our equipment. This battle was doomed from the start. We tried hard, we did not want to go down without a fight, we are Canadians after all. Too bad our exhaustion took over, too bad we had no support, too bad I am now a prisoner.

~ Ralph MacLean

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