

WILLIAM ALLISTER

RCCS D116327

*Experiences as a Prisoner-of-War, 1941-1945*

Interviewed by

Charles G. Roland, MD

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Oral History Archives

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William Allister:

In 1905 [my parents] were farming in Manitoba, before I was born. When I was born we lived in the small town of Benito, a small village. I don't know if you've ever heard of it?

Charles G. Roland, MD:

Yes I have. I've never been there but I've heard of it.

W.A.:

Great, nice to meet someone who has! We lived five years in Benito, where I was born, and then moved to Winnipeg. We lived in Winnipeg for three years and moved to Toronto. We lived there for three years. My father was a horse dealer. He bought horses, first horses and cattle, but then horses, from the farmers, and took carloads east, first to Winnipeg at the horse exchange there, and then moving farther east, gradually to Toronto.

Then, when I was 11 years old, we moved to Montreal. Montreal became my home town, where I got most of my education and the strongest influences.

C.G.R.:

What schooling did you have?

W.A.:

High school graduation in Montreal, and that was it. That was the extent of my formal education. Then I went into commercial art, in that department, and worked at that. Then I went from that into acting and became a professional actor when I was 19, and went to the States and acted there in repertory, and then came back in 1940.

It was just about a year before I was inducted into the army, conscription; in April 1941 I was conscripted for four months at the preliminary training. Then I volunteered in June and went to Debert, Nova Scotia, where we were training for the 4th Division to go over to Europe. Then we heard it was a special expedition. We were stuck in Debert, which is a bunch of huts in a mud field. It looked like the training was going on interminably. It was not at all romantic or dramatic. Not my idea of what I had signed up to do. I was expecting to get to Europe.

Then we got news overnight of this special mission. Destination unknown. But it was a special mission that was going overseas, and we'd be on embarkation leave immediately. All we had to do was pass the medical test, no questions asked. I went in and took my medical test and failed because of my eyesight. But I had wanted to get in very badly so I used a trick on the medical examiner, a trick I'd learned from a history teacher we'd had in high school.

We used to read his diary of World War I, of how he had bad eyesight and he wanted to go overseas, and he memorized the medical charts and that's how he passed -- and I remembered that. It stuck in my mind, unfortunately.

C.G.R.:

We all learn the wrong things in school!

W.A.:

Yes [laughter]; I thought I'd be just as clever. I wish he'd taught us history instead. But I memorized the memory

chart, and went back and passed A-1, "A" category, and was delighted. Within 24 hours I was on my way home for embarkation leave.

C.G.R.:

Had you done any writing at this time?

W.A.:

Well, I'd dabbled in writing; I'd written a few short stories for myself; nothing of any consequence though. In prison camp I continued to write, but my field was mainly philosophy, and I got into politics because that was the spirit of the times. Mainly I was a sort of a mountain-top philosopher and interested in developing myself in the fields of philosophy and literature. So I spent most of my time reading in those days.

C.G.R.:

Tell me, if you would, just a bit about the trip across the ocean and your first impressions of Hong Kong.

W.A.:

Didn't you get that from others?

C.G.R.:

Oh yes, but not your impressions.

W.A.:

Well, we got on the train and crossed Canada, embarked in Vancouver. Everything hush hush, very secretive.

I hadn't told my mother I was going overseas, because I didn't think she could stand the shock, especially the tension of whether I would get over there, make it to the other side. So I decided on a subterfuge: on the train I wrote about 12 letters,

imaginary letters, from some mythical military camp in Alberta that I was supposed to be stationed at. I made up this fantasy and I had 12 letters postmarked, say, three or four days apart, to cover the whole period of the passage across the ocean. When we got to Vancouver I buttonholed a cabby, gave him the envelopes and \$10, and asked him if he would send these to the address of a relative, and in the address I had the instructions to send these out from Alberta every three days or so. A very involved rigmarole but it worked, because somehow the cabby did do what he was told, he did deliver them, and they were sent out. My sister said, "These letters sounded very strange," because they were writing back to me asking me questions. I didn't answer any of these questions. They had a very weird tone to them, but she couldn't put her finger on it.

But anyway, once I arrived in Hong Kong I was able to cable that I had arrive safely and all was well, and the war would be taken of care of, since I was in Hong Kong; everything would be looked after nicely. Not to worry. I think the first letter I sent -- oh, I sent this cable, yes, and that went down with the "China Clipper," I think. So they never heard from me again. They got one telegram right after we arrived, and a letter I wrote, but it was too late by that time.

The trip across the ocean. Well, it was, as you probably know, a reconverted Australian passenger liner.

C.G.R.:

This was the Awatea?

W.A.:

The Awatea. Accommodation for 500 passengers and there were

2500. The officers commandeered about two-thirds of the ship's space, so the enlisted men were crammed into the rest. We were crammed down in the hold. I think we were third floor down, way down! Each level of the ship could be reached from the one down below by a single perpendicular ladder with room for one to pass through the hole. So in case of torpedo or anything like that, one can have quite a time with 500 men getting up, one at a time, through three flights of this. But everything was hush hush, and we were totally protected by secrecy. Except that the German radio announced our departure and the number of men and the regiments and time of leaving, and everything else.

C.G.R.:

I hadn't heard that before.

W.A.:

They were the only ones that had the information. They had three submarines in the Pacific. Apparently they were looking for us. Our redoubtable escort, Prince Robert, was so slow they couldn't even keep up with the slow Awatea. It would fall behind about 12, sometimes 15 miles behind. We'd have to stop and wait for them to catch up -- this was our protector. I knew what was going on because I was on duty on the bridge as Signals, and we were sending messages back and forth to the Prince Robert. So needless to say we weren't too reassured about the whole deal.

C.G.R.:

What about recollections of arriving in Hong Kong? Of course, you had traveled more than most of the people in the regiments, and you'd seen something of the United States. I know some of the people I've talked to had never been further

than their small town in Quebec, they told me. They landed in Hong Kong and it must have been quite a revelation.

W.A.:

Right. But though I'd lived in the States and I was a little more sophisticated, that didn't prepare me for the shock of Hong Kong. It was a real culture shock in every sense of the word -- all the sights, sounds, smells. Oh, I described it fully in my sequel to A Handful of Rice. It's much more autobiographical and I describe the arrival in Hong Kong, coming off the boat, walking through the streets, the sense of depression and all that.

C.G.R.:

Well, I won't ask you to repeat yourself then, I'll get it out of the book.

W.A.:

I don't think it would be useful for you anyway, in terms of what you're looking for.

C.G.R.:

Except that I can't do this in isolation.

W.A.:

Well, the stench was horrendous in the main. The lack of sanitation. And the first shock, of course, was dumping our garbage cans into the water and watching them scramble for it down below from a fishing boat. We first got a sense of how desperate and hungry they were. That was our first shock.

C.G.R.:

What is the name of your second book?

W.A.:

The Lunatic Binge. It wasn't published.

C.G.R.:

Oh, I see.

W.A.:

I had a manuscript, but I brought it out as a sequel afterwards, but the publishers didn't feel there would be enough interest on the part of the public. That was their commercial decision. They didn't think it would be commercially viable. I think they're full of hot air myself, because I think there's lots of interest. Certainly there is in the United States. They are scrambling to find books on World War 2.

C.G.R.:

Yes. The last decade or so there has been an explosion of interest, I would say.

W.A.:

Yes. I'm sure there is here in Canada, except that the publishers haven't caught up with it or aren't being made aware of it. However, that's another story.

C.G.R.:

Well, maybe we'd better leap ahead. I'll leave to your judgment what you think might be relevant about the actual war, for you, the three weeks or so.

W.A.:

Well, it was 18 days of continuous drama, practically. It was as though a year's battle in Europe could be concentrated into these 18 days, morning, noon, and night. I counted about eight or nine times which I should have died, but by a freak of



chance I was lucky. The people who weren't lucky, you can't interview. You can only talk to the lucky ones. However, I did survive. There were many escapes I had, and strange freaks of fate that just saved my life.

Physically, fear and terror are the main emotions and they effected me in terms of my stomach. My stomach was constantly turning over and I had continuous diarrhea and was unable to eat. Not that there was much to eat if I wanted to, but terror and fright were the main emotions also.

C.G.R.:

Well, let's get on to being a prisoner, and how this began for you. Did you go to North Point initially?

W.A.:

Well, the last day, when we'd surrendered on the 25th, we found some tap water. It was running. We had had no water. We had shaved in beer and there had been no water. And we had got to find some water. Of course, we didn't realize that it was totally contaminated, but we drank it because it was water, and I got a bad case of dysentery. I was up all night, running. In the morning we were getting ready for the march off to prison camp and the MO saw that I was in no shape. I could hardly walk, I was so weak. So he sent me up to Bowen Road Hospital, which was quite a walk in itself, because he asked me, since I was going up, whether I would take a trunk-load of medical supplies he'd have to leave behind, that they might be able to use at the hospital. So I said, "Yes." I carried this damn thing, with my weakness and my dysentery, and it was four miles -- uphill -- to the top. By the time I reached Bowen Road Hospital, I remember

that trip, trudging and sweating, up that hill!

I passed a coolie woman going the other way, going downhill. She had a great big load on her shoulders. She was bent over going down, I was bent over going up, and I thought, here we are in the same place, doing the same thing, whereas three weeks ago, I was looking down at these poor coolies, carrying these loads, and suddenly [I was] being reduced to that in very short order.

I got up to Bowen Road Hospital.

C.G.R.:

Who was your medical officer, do you remember?

W.A.:

I think he was British, at that time. The only treatment they had -- very handy for dysentery -- was starvation. It was very easy easy. So for four days they gave me nothing to eat, and then they gave me a little tea and tiny little bits of food. But they had no food, so everyone was on, sort of, quarter-rations anyway. But they gave me half of that, and I was starving; I was literally combing the surrounding houses for something to eat. Everything had been bombed out and stolen and the houses were empty. I remember getting into one bathroom, and there was a medicine cabinet. I opened the medicine cabinet and I noticed an empty bottle of Eno's fruit salts, and there was about a half an inch of powder at the bottom. That was something edible, so I picked that out and mixed it with some water and made myself a drink. It wasn't the best thing for dysentery, you know, but it was something to put into my stomach.

C.G.R.:

Kaopectate might have been more appropriate.

W.A.:

Yes. But I got over dysentery, and then one of them put us to work, the officers in charge, the British officers. They had commandeered whatever food there was and they were eating very well, but they weren't feeding the patients. Whatever little food was allotted to the patients was being stolen by the medical orderlies. They were called the RAMC; we nicknamed them, we called out the initials for "Rob All My Comrades," and we said that's what RAMC stood for. So we were getting virtually nothing. Then we complained. The commanding officer threatened to send us out to prison camp, back to prison camp, where he said everyone was starving.

I remember he put us to work repairing the hospital grounds when we could hardly walk. So we refused to work without any food; he lined us up and he said, "You have a choice: either you do what you're told, or I'll ship you out to prison camp." He had a big fat belly and was puffing on a pipe as he was delivering these orders, these threats. He thought he was intimidating us, and he told us these horrendous stories of how little they had down in the prison camp to eat. Then he said, "Now, let me see a show of hands how many want to go to prison camp instead of being here." So we all raised our hands. We couldn't think of anything more horrendous than what we were being put through. So he walked off in a high dudgeon; he said, "You're all leaving in the first draft tomorrow." Out we went to the prison camp -- and they were eating much much better than we were.

C.G.R.:

That doesn't say much for the medical profession, does it?

W.A.:

No. I don't think he was a medical officer. I think he was just the British officer in charge. No, our medical officers were pretty good. They did what they could. Captain Reid was the best. Of course, I didn't know the others. I didn't know [S. Martin] Banfill [HCM 27-83; RCAMC] or the others. [John] Crawford [HCM 6-83; RCAMC ZH2436] was all right at the time. I've heard a lot of complaints about his behavior since, but in prison camp I didn't hear anything bad about him, he was pretty good.

C.G.R.:

Were the Japanese in evidence at Bowen Road at this time?

W.A.:

No. We were all on our own.

C.G.R.:

They were presumably around somewhere, but not wandering through the wards or anything?

W.A.:

Right. Then we went down to North Point, and life went on. From that point on we were sleeping on cement in the huts. The huts had been stripped. I'm sure you've got a description of North Point.

C.G.R.:

Yes. You were at North Point till when? Did you go over to Sham Shui Po in October, or September?

W.A.:

Right.

C.G.R.:

I know about the start, of course, and know something of the chronology. Did you get better? Did the dysentery go away?

W.A.:

Well, I'd been through dysentery, but I had come down with a tropical fever when I first got to Hong Kong. I was only in Hong Kong for about a week, before I came down with this fever. First it was diagnosed as some kind of malaria. I was sent into a local hospital and kept there for a few days and my temperature went down. I was sent back, and then came back again, and then I was sent to Bowen Road. This was before the fighting started. As a matter of fact, when the war broke out I was at Bowen Road [Military] Hospital being treated for malaria. They said it was malaria, and to this day I don't know. Some called it jungle fever, tropical fever, malaria, some rare form of malaria. But the treatment given me -- I was in the malaria ward and I was treated for malaria.

But when the wounded started pouring into the hospital, they had no beds so they felt that since I was a light case of malaria, I was sent out. So the second day after the fighting started I went back to join my company. But that fever has stayed with me, recurrently, ever since. I still have it. When I get run down or tired, or in the wintertime when I close the doors and windows, and the oxygen content in my blood changes, I get feverish. I know how to handle it now, just rest. It lasts three or four days, and I had it all through prison camp --

whenever I get run down, periodically.

C.G.R.:

You must have been pretty ill all the time.

W.A.:

No.

C.G.R.:

With being run down?

W.A.:

Yes, true. Well, it didn't come that often -- every few months, I would say it went down. It was a very peculiar kind of thing, because when I was sick, I had no fever, and as soon as it would leave my temperature would rise dramatically. So I had to go out to work because there was no sign of fever when I was sick, and when I was well, on the last day when the fever showed up, I'd feel fine. Then I'd be kept in because I had a fever.

C.G.R.:

That is strange, yes.

W.A.:

Very strange, very odd.

One the worst beatings of my life, in all my prison experience, came because of that damn fever. A doctor sent me out, Captain Reid sent me out to work because he couldn't keep that many sick people in. He had to have his quota. So he sent me out to work. But he had some atabrine (he had very few medicines), so he gave me atabrine, hoping that would do something to help, but it made me a little deaf and I didn't hear an order that was shouted at me by my arch enemy, the corporal on guard, who hated me for various reasons that I won't go into now,

but this gave him the excuse that he was looking for, to administer this beating. He beat me and beat me and beat me, and made a public exhibition out of it in front of everyone. Then he took out his sword and threatened to cut my head off, just to try to get a reaction from me, besides other things. I can trace it all back to my not being able to hear that order he shouted at me, due to that fever.

C.G.R.:

Is this in Japan?

W.A.:

Yes, this was in Japan. That's jumping ahead.

C.G.R.:

Did you get diphtheria?

W.A.:

No. I had had diphtheria as a child in Winnipeg, and I remember I had a bad case. I was in quarantine, I think, for two months in a Winnipeg Hospital, when I was six years old. I had lots of injections. I think that's what might have immunized me. But like people all along, they can come down with diphtheria and I didn't get it.

C.G.R.:

How were people coping with this kind of life?

W.A.:

Incidentally, on the diphtheria, I don't know whether you know, going on record as saying this -- did you speak to some of the medical orderlies like, Sonny Veale?

C.G.R.:

I haven't spoken to him, no.

W.A.:

Who have you spoken to?

C.G.R.:

Well, the ones I've talked to are Ray Squires [HCM 21-83; HQ, "C" Force, K80593]....

W.A.:

I think he was a medical orderly at that time. Did he tell you about the distribution of serum during the diphtheria epidemic? How the officers were given 30,000 cc's and the enlisted men were given 3,000 cc's. Did he mention that?

C.G.R.:

I hadn't heard about that kind of distribution, no.

W.A.:

They had limited serum, so they said -- I think this was Crawford's decision -- to give it to the officers. Since the serum was so limited, the medical orderlies said they had to wait until the man was very, very sick before he got any serum. That even when we got serum we got one-tenth of the amount that the officers got, whom our officers were saving. Of course, I couldn't prove this with any sort of document.

C.G.R.:

No. I must say that I hadn't heard that particular part of the story, that there was a differential between what officer-patients and enlisted-men-patients received. I can tell you that still today, Dr. Banfill is obviously distraught at the fact that there was so little antitoxin, period; and that a decision had to be made on a given day when the antitoxin came in that people who



already were in the wards, sick with diphtheria, couldn't be given the antitoxin because there just wasn't enough. They could give it in small amounts to new cases, because in a new case the small amount would be effective -- so that part of it I've heard from several.....

W.A.:

Well, it may be a false story. I mean, it doesn't sound like Banfill.

C.G.R.:

No, I must say it doesn't.

W.A.:

It sounds like Crawford. I'll say that, because he was pretty tough. He didn't get too much respect from the men, going by his activities afterwards. But I wouldn't lay that at Banfill's door. So it may be just a false rumor. I remember the medical orderlies telling me that. At least I think I remember it, but my memory may be at fault. Certainly I couldn't document it.

C.G.R.:

Well, I add to that my store of things to be worried away at.

W.A.:

Anyway, in prison camp, I suppose you want to get down to the medical ailments.

C.G.R.:

Yes, yes.

W.A.:

At what point?

C.G.R.:

Specifically, things that you are familiar with, either from having had them yourself, or immediate contact.

W.A.:

Well, this was a medical bonanza. The first thing, the doctors there knew nothing about beriberi, because they obviously hadn't been much around about beriberi. Well, I got "electric feet," what we called electric feet. I noticed that the ones that had the most extreme cases were the ones that had the largest toes and hands, largest feet and hands. People with large toes seemed to get it most, because of something to do with how far the nerve went up into the toe. My best friend, Blackie Verreault [J. O. George Verreault, D116314], had an extreme case. He had very large hands and very large toes. I noticed that on several people that were the extreme cases, they all had the large protuberances. Blackie suffered most. This continued into Sham Shui Po, and in Sham Shui Po he went down, down, down. In a way he became a wraith. He was a very powerful man, physically. He became a wraith from the lack of sleep and the lack of appetite. And you know, I'm sure you've been told, that gradually it leads to insanity. They were put in the agony ward, when they reached the final stages, so they'd be out of sight and it wouldn't be too depressing. They used to just rock all day long, you know, rubbing their toes and massaging their toes, pulling their toes and rocking back and forth, till they went gradually mad. Blackie couldn't sleep; by about every three days he'd fall into a dead sleep in which he would just fall into

an almost unconscious state. In his sleep he would jump and groan from the jolts of the electric jolts. In his sleep his whole body would jump. Incidentally, I suppose Lucien [Brunet, HCM 40-85; HQ, "C" Force, C97583] told you about his own jumping antics, that he jumps now, he still jumps.

C.G.R.:

No.

W.A.:

No. Didn't he tell you that? That's odd. It's not the electric feet, it's his nervous system, but before he falls asleep, when he's in a semi-state, did he mention that?

C.G.R.:

Oh yes, yes he did, oh yes. And the noise he makes, something catches in his throat or upper chest and he sort of leaps. Yes, yes, he did, yes.

W.A.:

I do that occasionally, but not like he does. I said, "How many times do you jump?" and he said, "Oh, about 50." "Fifty!" I said, "What does your wife do?" He said, "Well, she's used to it, she just turns her back and goes to sleep. Leaves me leaping up and down" [laughter].

But when we got to...I saw what was happening and I had read up a little bit on nutrition and I saw that the diet -- the people were coming down with all kinds of these diseases, mainly because of a lack of any vitamins at all. I got the idea that -- you see, they kept a series of pigs. and they were giving pigs, pig swill, they were giving them red rice or brown rice -- they were giving it to the pigs. I knew enough to know that the rice

with the jackets on have all the vitamins in it, and if we could get that to eat it might cure a lot of our illnesses. So I went to the officers and asked that they could speak to the Japanese camp commandant and ask for a change of diet, because it would cost them even less to give us pig feed, instead of the moldy white rice that they were giving us. But health could be improved. But our camp commandant was a guy called Tokunaga, Colonel Tokunaga, referred to -- nicknamed -- "The Pig." He looked like a pig and he was a very rough customer. They took a dim view of my brilliant suggestion as to change of diet. Nobody wanted to bell the cat. But I was imbued, at this time, and I was all fired up with the cause of trying to get something done. So I said to hell with them, I'll try it myself.

So I waited one day when the daily parade was finished and the count done, at the prison camp at North Point, and Colonel Tokunaga and his aides were just finished and leaving the camp. I stationed myself in a place where I could intercept them, and I stepped in front of them and started bowing like mad. I bowed, and bowed, and bowed, and asked if I could have a word with the colonel. He asked the interpreter what the hell he wants, and what he's up to, and who is this nut. I talked fast and got in the message as quickly as I could. The way of reducing the camp rations and improving health, etc., etc., through getting pig feed. I thought he'd either kill me, or walk over me, or adopt the scheme, or something. But he just told them to get rid of this nut and walked right by me; it was all I could get of an audience. He wasn't the least bit interested in our health. He didn't care if we lived or died, as far as he was concerned.

C.G.R.:

That was the end of it.

W.A.:

That was the end of it, yes. I gave up on that.

C.G.R.:

I'm sure you were right. I don't think there's any question of it, really.

W.A.:

Yes, because when we got to Japan, down to brown rice, all the beriberi left in short order. Mind you, it still remains in a bit of a latent stage in all the prisoners. I guess [Walter] Jenkins [HCM 22-83; RCCS, K36026] told you that, did he? That most medical men who now examine us don't really believe that the beriberi remains. They feel that once it's out of your system, it's out. We know that it's there. Most prisoners know. Because I had wet beriberi and dry beriberi, the residue of it. I can tell just from looking at any part of my body. See the imprint of that, see the imprint of that [pressing his ankle]?

C.G.R.:

Yes.

W.A.:

That's just from this. You wouldn't find that on a normal leg. I can do that to my forehead or any part of my body; it's a form of wet beriberi that's always there. It's hard to prove, and they don't believe it. But Walter and most of the prisoners know that they have it.

C.G.R.:

I started to ask about how you see, or how you saw, reacting to imprisonment as a way of life? How did people cope? How did you cope?

W.A.:

Well, the people who were more intellectually inclined, who could theorize and who were used to thinking their way through, could cope a lot better. As a matter of fact, the people that could cope with the fighting, were the worst at coping with prison life. I couldn't cope with the fighting. I was away beyond my capabilities, experience, and everything else. I just disintegrated. But where I had some control over my activities, my thoughts, my actions, something I could grasp theoretically, I could sit down and think, and I thought it through.

I thought that the first year, our main enemy was depression, hunger, and boredom. So I went about planning to attack this as the enemy. I considered this the hidden enemy, to be combated through your intellect. I gave myself a mental task. I wrote almost every day in my journal; I kept a daily diary, recording all the reactions and events and thoughts of people all around me. Some people took up the study of languages. In North Point, before the work parties started, there was a lot of boredom.

Oh yes, and I started a library in North Point. I appointed myself a go-between. There was a sort of camp library, in which all the books in camp were focused in one place. I appointed myself as representative of our hut, and every day I made it a sort of a ritual to go around, to try to get everyone to read a book. I brought the books from the library and I tried to get

people involved in reading a book. I sort of kept lists and got them reading.

I also started nightly events, current events. Debates, entertainment, myself and another guy, Rene Charron [HQ, "C" Force, D114803], the two of us sat down and worked out nightly events so that there was something going on almost every night -- entertainment, or debate, or contest, or something like that to keep the minds occupied, a lecture. I invited people from all over camp, different officers who were developed in some direction, like in government, or any lecture that they could speak on, we had lectures. I also gave a class [in drawing], on being an artist. I made this open to anyone at camp. A lot of officers came over. I think it was once a week I gave an art class. Anything to keep the mind occupied.

C.G.R.:

At North Point.

W.A.:

Yes, that was up at North Point that it started -- late summer or something. Then the fun times were over. It was just work, work, work.

C.G.R.:

Yes, while you were on the phone I was thinking, as a follow-through on that, about theatricals. You were an actor; were you involved...?

W.A.:

Yes, we used to put on shows on Saturday night, and since I'd been in show biz and I was a comedian and a clown, I was called on a lot and did a lot of entertaining. We wrote some

skits, and sketches and I did the material that I was used to from my old days. I remember one time I caused a near riot. I was doing a comic interview. Do you remember a program called "Court of Human Relations?"

C.G.R.:

Vaguely, yes.

W.A.:

Yes, quite a way back. I got interviewing this old lady who was complaining that her husband beats her. I was doing this whole scene, and I was the old lady, and I was starting -- the comedy is, as she's describing the beating, what her husband does to her, she works herself up into a lather and she ends up describing the beating by shrieking and hollering and leaping and I started to shriek like mad. They called out the guards, they sent out an alarm from the guardhouse. They thought there was a prison riot. You know, "What's going on?" They called up the guards, and six bayonets came down onto the parade ground to quell the riot.

C.G.R.:

Does the name Sonny Castro mean anything to you?

W.A.:

I'm not sure.

C.G.R.:

I have some photographs that were taken of theatricals, I think after you'd gone to Japan, but at Sham Shui Po. Somebody had identified one of these people as somebody they remember as being called Sonny Castro.

W.A.:



I know there was one guy that was taking the name parts that I heard about. Guy...I forget the second name but I heard a lot about him. He was a very good comedian.

C.G.R.:

Well, this Castro apparently took a lot of the female parts.

W.A.:

Really.

C.G.R.:

Yes.

W.A.:

No, I didn't know that.

C.G.R.:

Tell me about sex, and the lack of sex, and things of that nature.

W.A.:

It affected different people different ways. Generally, sex vanished with the hunger. But this was mainly because, I think, we were Canadian. Because when we got into mixed camps, and the psyches were a little less, let's say, healthy, there were more distortions and more homosexuality. The last camp I was in in Tokyo had Americans, British, and Scots, and they were very different from the Canadians. Of course, there was better food there, we were working on food platforms and we could steal a lot of food. The prisoners -- we were emaciated, the Canadians and the Dutch, because we'd just arrived, but the Americans and British were fat. They'd been eating coconut, stealing coconut and rice and beans and all that, and were doing very well. And

sex was flourishing. So the men who looked most effeminate were most popular.

I remember working out on the rice platform carrying rice one day, and a very immaculate handsome British, a young British lance corporal came over to me, immaculately clean, washed and everything, and he offered himself to me for a ration of rice. I said, "Thank you very much but I like rice. [laughter] I would prefer the rice -- no insult intended. Please don't take me wrong, you're very nice but I'm afraid I'm a bit partial." But amongst the Americans there was quite a bit, and the British. But as I say, this was abnormal because it was a well-fed camp.

Amongst the Canadians at 3D there was a little, but very little. Is that what you wanted to find out?

C.G.R.:

Well, yes.

W.A.:

That's of interest, but I don't know whether it's of medical interest.

C.G.R.:

Yes, I think it is. My definition of medical is pretty broad.

W.A.:

Yes, psychological; actually, psychologically, men -- since there were no women in our lives -- the men started to take on feminine attributes. Men were looked at in terms of, it wasn't homosexuality as it is in our society. It was just a substitute for a woman. It was healthier in that sense.

C.G.R.:

Did you lose a lot of weight?

W.A.:

I thought I lost a lot of weight. I went down to 125. That was the weight I was at at 3D, I think. That was based on my diary. Now I'm 120, because I have a digestive illness and I have a lot of difficulty digesting food. It takes a long time to go through. I have a blockage -- the pyloric valve is in spasm, almost in constant spasm. It won't open up and the food will not, the stomach will not empty. So I've been 'scoped and x-rayed and analyzed trying to work my way out of it, but there doesn't seem to be a way. I've researched it on my own, and I find that it's connected with all the other POWs, because they all suffer from some nervous disability, only it takes different forms in different bodies. Some, it affects the heart, some it affects the emotions, some people have heavy depression, but in my case it's affected my internal organs in that the nerve endings feeding the organs aren't functioning at full capacity. So that my sphincters are working, say, at half-mast. They don't close tight, the muscle is not strong and the pylorus, and I think part of the upper intestines are weak; at first they discussed surgery, but I was examined by a top gastroenterologist at UBC, and a very good man. I wanted to kill him because he 'scoped me, and he half killed me when he 'scoped me. First of all he had a tremendous amount of trouble getting a 'scope down and it was because my throat seized up, went into spasm. When he saw what was happening with just the business of the 'scope, he said, "I wouldn't touch surgery if I were you because you

never could tell what would happen." So I gave up on surgery. So now I'm working on it through the mind, trying to cause total relaxation through meditation and other techniques. As an orthodox doctor you may take a dim view of meditation but you could call it autosuggestion.

C.G.R.:

I have no problem with that, with exotic approaches to things, but then as I told you before I haven't practiced in a long time. I'm not really a doctor any more.

W.A.:

Yes, so you have a longer view.

C.G.R.:

I hope so. What did you weight before the war?

W.A.:

Oh, gee, I would say about 145. That's guessing. Also I found my body shrank about an inch or an inch and a half. I was nearly 5' 9", 5' 8 1/2" or 9" when I went in, and when I came out I was 5' 7 1/2". I don't know whether I've gotten it back since, but I think I have.

C.G.R.:

I was going to ask that.

W.A.:

You've run across that, haven't you?

C.G.R.:

Yes.

W.A.:

Does it come back? Do the bones grow again.

C.G.R.:

I think it does partially. It depends a lot on the circumstances.

W.A.:

I haven't taken my height so....

C.G.R.:

No, it's not something one does every day, or even every year.

W.A.:

But I don't feel that small.

C.G.R.:

How about things like parasites, worms, bugs, lice.

W.A.:

Not to my knowledge. But I lived in Mexico and was subjected to some. Needles for tetanus was routine. As far as parasites I don't know of anything.

C.G.R.:

I gather everybody had lice at one time or another.

W.A.:

Oh yes -- there -- yes. I thought you meant now.

C.G.R.:

Oh no, sorry, no.

W.A.:

Parasites, no I didn't run across any that I can remember. But lice, yes. We had what we called sand fleas in 3D, and they used to go to the warm parts of the body. I suffered, being very sensitive to any form of itchiness, I suffered much more than normal. As a matter of fact, I couldn't sleep and I nearly went

mad because I'd be up all night scratching. They would gather, literally in hundreds, over my stomach. Finally I fought that by finding some mothballs. I found somebody with mothballs and I traded off my food to get them, because I was so desperate for sleep. To make it last I shaved it into powder and I put the powder against my skin, you know, and tied it on and went to sleep that way. It worked -- I could sleep with the burning, but I couldn't sleep with the biting.

C.G.R.:

And did it work?

W.A.:

Yes. As long as I could keep finding mothballs I could sleep. The problem was not to run out of mothballs.

C.G.R.:

What other kinds of medical things?

W.A.:

Medically speaking, they gave a prize once to one man -- you see, I kept experimenting with my diet. I felt that where the protein was coming from were the beans. We got a half ration of beans in the morning. I didn't think there was that much in the rice, although I realize now there is more than I thought in the brown rice. But I thought the main protein I was going to be getting was from the beans, so I traded off half my rice at night, when everyone was hungry, for their morning beans; then, anyone would trade anything for the future, to get full now, and I thought that it didn't make much sense to me to get full and go right to sleep, because we had to go to bed shortly after in the evening anyway, and you'd sleep right through the whole thing. I

felt the crucial time that I needed the food was in the morning, during the work period, after breakfast. So I always had a good breakfast. I traded my rice for a half-ration of beans, so I got two half-rations of beans in the morning with my half-ration of rice and that made a good solid breakfast to go to work.

I got a bottle of vitamin pills, cod liver oil pills. In all the four years of my imprisonment I got one parcel, one clothes parcel from my family got through, and in the clothes parcel I had two broadcloth shirts, officer's shirts, khaki, which was a very good cotton and very much in demand on the black market. Charlie, who was the number one black marketeer, he had his eye on those shirts. He kept asking me, "What do you want for it, what do you want for it -- money, cigarettes, or whatever?"

I said, "There's only one thing I want for it -- vitamins."

He said, "You're crazy. I can't get vitamins."

I said, "Well, that's up to you but that's the only thing I'm going to trade it for."

The other thing, I had planned everything I was doing in terms of survival. Everything was geared. I would sacrifice any comfort of the moment for this survival, because that was my single aim. Finally he was inquiring like mad amongst all the free men and the civilians and all his contacts and finally made it. He got hold of two great big bottles of cod liver oil pills. So, that saw me through a whole winter and helped me quite a bit. So he got his shirts and I got my cod liver oil.

C.G.R.:

Were you able to keep the cod liver oil from being stolen?

W.A.:

Oh, I had a strongbox with a lock on it. I'd keep my stuff there. In terms of health, I had hypoglycemia and I didn't know it at the time, but I suffered a lot from it. At a certain point in the morning all my food had been used up and I'd start to get the shakes and start to tremble. I thought this was a natural thing, just my way of being hungry. I'd get weak and I'd get dizzy; my head would be swimming, and I'd stagger through the rest of the morning until the next meal. I went through that almost every morning. I didn't know till afterwards, until I started finding out about hypoglycemia and what it was all about. I've suffered from it ever since. But once I knew, I researched it and I found out my control. So I'm on a heavy grain diet now. I'm a vegetarian, and I'm on a heavy grain diet, and I'm controlling my digestion as much as possible. Also I do a lot of exercise, workouts and walking. So health is almost an obsession, a preoccupation. Survival, the goal -- I want to live to be a hundred because I've got a lot of work to do, and this damn thing I have to solve some way or other, or at least try to get it under control. So I'm working on it.

C.G.R.:

Did you do any art work in the camp? Did you do sketches?

W.A.:

Yes, I did. I have some here that I did in prison camp in North Point. I did it with makeshift materials. Blackie, this man I keep referring to as Blackie, Blackie Verreault, he was the hero, the great man. He is the centerpiece of my novel [A Handful of Rice]. I was obsessed with him. He's dead now, but



he was one of these larger-than-life characters that stays in mind. Magnificent heroic man. And he was my best friend.

He stole canvas from the flaps of the tent in prison camp. The musicians had a tent in the center of the camp, they used to practice in. In the dead of night part of the tent disappeared, and he washed and scrubbed it down and nailed it down on a piece of board and I'd paint on it. He whittled fine sticks that I used for fine lines and he made a brush out of an old discarded shoe brush -- he took clumps of bristles and he wired them to the stick. So I used that for brushes, and for paint we swiped some oil from the crankcases of the Japanese ration trucks and it made do for olive tones, different kinds of olive tones -- thick and thin -- which I used for my painting, and got some good results. Then, when I got to Japan, I worked in the shipyards and the paint store, the paint department, we painted the sides of the boats.

The paint-master heard that I was an artist and we were called together. I think I mentioned it in my journal, the diary. Did I mention that? He [the Japanese paint-master] called me in and hired me to do painting for him; he bought me all the materials and paints that I needed. The best materials, and canvas, all the colors and brushes, and he hid me away from guards where they couldn't find me and had me paint for him, his subjects. So that was quite nice. It lasted for quite a while.

C.G.R.:

Very fortunate, yes.

W.A.:

Yes. It didn't last too long, though. The third painting

he wanted me to do was the surrender of Singapore. He had a photograph of the surrender of Singapore, which I wouldn't do, and we didn't agree on that. It ended up that he threw me out and that was the end of my painting career there with him. But it was nice while it lasted.

Oddly enough, I was hungrier doing that, doing nothing, than when I was working. I thought it would be easier, but it was harder, because sitting still the digestive process had no interference and just kept right on going. I was hungry so fast, my breakfast went right through me, whereas if you're working you're interrupting, you're flexing your stomach and you're interrupting your digestive process, and it's slowing it down, actually. I found out the hard way. But it was easier in the sense that I rested more.

I conducted my own slow-down campaign against the Japanese government, because I figured that one of the ways to survival is to avoid using up energy on the job, so I used as little as possible, and everything I did at a very slow speed. As a matter of fact they nicknamed me "Slow Moshon," that is, slow motion. On my paint locker they painted a turtle [laughter]. So they had my number, which was fine with me.

C.G.R.:

Yes.

W.A.:

So my contribution to the Japanese war effort wasn't too great.

C.G.R.:

Were you in the area of Tokyo, with the fire-bombing?

W.A.:

I sure was. The last six months of the war they shipped us to Tokyo, they broke up our camp and shipped us to Tokyo. This was a mixed camp of Americans, Dutch, and British, etc. This was in the heart [of the city], we watched all the fire-bombings. Fire was going on all around us and we saw some horrendous things. We watched the planes being shot down, and parachutes bailing out, mobs converging on the parachutists like a pack of wolves, and the constant air-raids. So we were sort of victimized both ways. In Hong Kong, when the Japanese had carte blanche in the air, they bombed the hell out of us there. We were at their mercy. Now, when the Americans had control of the air, they bombed the hell out of us in Tokyo. So we were always in the wrong place.

C.G.R.:

Does talking about this experience bother you? Is this going to bother you today, or give you nightmares tonight?

W.A.:

No, not at all. I enjoy reminiscing. Sometimes when I've told stories and get too intense I go to bed and dream. Sometimes have a nightmare. But rarely so, because I like to talk about it. I've got the whole thing out of my system, partially through writing, in which I examine the whole thing. So I've brought it all up front, it's not even in my subconscious. Psychologically, oddly enough, I don't regret the experience. I think people probably have told you what an enriching experience it was. I use it almost constantly in my

daily life. Whenever I have problems that seem insurmountable, depressing problems, I sit down -- I keep a daily journal, I make my entry every day of my thoughts. When I have a problem I present my problem to Will Allister, the POW in 3D, sitting on his flea-ridden bunk, half-starved and miserable, and I have a dialogue between the me of 65 and the me of 23.

The me of 23 listens to the problems of the me of 65 and he hears me out and he waits until I'm through and then he says, "Are you through? Now look, now hear this you bloody idiot, you don't know what problems are. Do you have food in your belly? Do you have food in your Frigidaire? Do you have a roof over your head? Do you know where your next meal is coming from? Do you have a family around? Do you have to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and work your ass off all day long? Do you get beaten every few days?"

I say, "No, I don't."

"Then what is your problem?"

And I say, "I don't have a problem."

So I use that all the time. There's no problem that can be big enough not to be solved, like anything to him. So it's been invaluable.

The one medical thing that a lot of us suffer from, you may have run across, is an anxiety syndrome. I've noticed it's become more intense lately; I didn't suffer from it earlier. Only in the last couple of years have I become aware of it. Tiny little worries, little unimportant details, worries, worries, worries, mount up, nag, nag, nag at me. Until I find I'm constantly anxious -- and anxious about nothing. Because when I

write down what these anxieties are, they're a whole bunch of nothing. I thought I was unique in that until I started comparing notes with other POWs and find what they've been through, describing exactly what I'm feeling. They all have the same thing. The nagging, nagging, sort of haunting weight of anxiety.

I don't like it. I've always been a very optimistic extrovert, and a very happy human being. Of course, I've a lot to be happy about because my life has been very fortunate in many ways. But still, that's always been my nature, and anxiety is not natural to me at all. So this is new.

I mean, I've sympathized with my comrades whom I've seen suffering from it. My friend Bob Warren [D109906], who lives over in Victoria, he has a very bad case. Years and years he's suffered from terrible depression and he became an alcoholic because of it. After all this depression and drinking, he tried to escape and he used to just sit and weep for hours, he was so depressed. And this fellow Tony Grimston [RCCS, "C" Force, K35476] I was telling you about, he also has it now. Bob has pulled himself out of it through strength of mind and meditation, mainly. Mainly through meditation. He went in for meditation in a big way, and achieved total mental control. He transformed himself completely. Now, his neurosis manifests itself in a different form, it affects his heart. He has a kind of fibrillation. But it starts up when he becomes active in some way; this is part of his nervous system. So everybody is affected in different ways.

Beriberi of the heart, I think, took most deaths of the

prisoners that came home. I know amongst the British, I remember reading about the Middlesex [Regiment], how so many died afterwards of that.

C.G.R.:

How did the war end for you?

W.A.:

We were in this Tokyo camp and we heard rumors. We were out on a job and we were sent in -- at noon, suddenly, on August the 15th -- and we heard rumors that there was an end to the war. Well, first we didn't know why we were sent in. We thought there was something up. Either they were going to move us or something special was happening and nobody knew what. The rumors started to come in that there was an end to the war. But we'd heard that so often before. This was old hat, and so we didn't believe it.

But then it became stronger. It started to come in in a new way from many, many sources and always the same thing. This man talked to his boss who had never lied to him before, and he said, "Yes, the war has ended." We'd heard that before too.

But then it came from here, from here, from here, and got stronger, and stronger, and stronger, and started to build up. It became a definite reality. By 2 o'clock it was sweeping the camp. I said to myself, "I have to find out. I have to know whether it's true or not." So I said, "I'm going to put it the test." I went outside the hut, and sat down on the bench outside the hut, and lit up a cigarette. No smoking was allowed outside the hut at any time. The guard on duty came by and he paused and I looked at him and he looked at me and I looked straight into his eyes, and I went like this. I figured if the war wasn't over

I was going to get it! [laughter]

C.G.R.:

You were going to know.

W.A.:

Yes. I was going to know once and for all. So I puffed and I blew out and I looked him straight in the eye and he looked me straight in the eye and he just kept on walking. And I said that's the only thing it could be; to bring on that behavior it must be the end. So the rumors got more and more intense. By 4 o'clock -- we had a way of squelching all rumors by sending our commanding officer, asking him, if it got very very serious, to go and ask the Japanese commandant to lay the rumor to rest, to see if it was true or false. This was an American officer. He would come back in and the habit was he'd go, "At ease," and the whole hut and everyone would be silent, and he'd say, "With regard to a certain rumor. It is not so." Then we'd go back to our activities and that would be the end of the rumor.

Well, in this case, he came out after the session, and he said, "At ease." There was a hush, deathly silence. And he said, "With regard to a certain rumor. It...is...so!" And pandemonium broke loose. I had said that at the end of the war I was going to climb up on the roof, at the top of the highest point on the roof at the camp, and I was going to crow like a rooster -- that is what I had promised to do. The time came, I didn't feel like anything. I felt very little. Certainly I didn't feel elated. I wanted to feel elated, but somehow I couldn't because I really didn't believe it. It seeped into our consciousness and I couldn't make the adjustment.

One man, a Newfie, who was a little bit mental, he went off his rocker. He came to me and he said, "It's not true, it's not true, it's not true."

I said, "It is true."

He said, "Do you really think it is?"

I said, "Yes, I really think it is."

He said, "It can't." He said, "It's a trick. It's a trick to throw us off. They're going to take us somewhere and they're going to kill us." He could not accept it. And whereas he kept on a fairly level all through prison camp, this sent him over the brink. He was really bonkers.

Then they couldn't find us for days. Things didn't change except that we didn't have the guards watching us closely. We could have as much rice as we wanted to eat. I couldn't eat any rice. For the first time in four years I couldn't touch rice. It had no effect on me at all. I ate cucumbers. We got as many cucumbers as we wanted and I ate tons of them. I ate cucumbers and cucumbers. I had a terrific craving for it and I couldn't touch the bloody rice.

Then they found us. I won't go into that. That's a long story, but by the 29th [of August, 1945] they spotted us by a plane from an aircraft carrier. They asked us what we needed and put GRUB, G-R-U-B, on top of the roof in big white letters, and they started dropping these 1000-pound drums filled with food in parachutes. You've heard about that, did you?

C.G.R.:

Well, yes.



W.A.:

They killed one woman and nearly killed some of us on the way to the hut. So finally we had to put a signal, "Stop," for God's sake!

C.G.R.:

"Less Grub."

W.A.:

It was ferocious. You didn't want to get killed by a barrel of food after all that.

C.G.R.:

Was there any meting out of retribution at this stage?

W.A.:

No. The guards disappeared immediately. They ran off. We couldn't find any of them.

When the Americans came in they were ready to kill. The American marines, when they came in to take us off. One American marine was looking for souvenirs. He wanted Japanese equipment. I said, "Well, I can take you over to where the guardhouse is. The guardhouse is where the guards are sleeping." So he said, "OK." He had a tommy-gun in his hand. We went into the quarters where they had a little cubbyhole there for sleeping. This was [Japanese] youngsters -- they changed the temporary guards every month. The regular guards had buggered off because they didn't want to get caught. But the temporary guards, they were harmless. They were sleeping in there and scared, terrified. They weren't there with their equipment or anything; the marine saw them and he said, he pointed his gun at them, and he said, "Did these guys give you trouble?" If I had said,

"Yes", he would have wiped them right out on the spot. I said, "No. They're harmless." He put his gun down and let them live. He just took a bunch of their equipment and I took a rifle and brought it home with me, a parachute, and all kinds of souvenirs, equipment. I have the helmet still, one of their helmets.

C.G.R.:

Anything else you can think of? I must say I'm run out of questions.

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# Hana-Saku Hana-Saku

Hopelessly outnumbered and ill-prepared,  
two Canadian battalions go down fighting the Japanese at Hong Kong

A.R. Byers (edit.), *The Canadians at War 1939/45* (Westmount: Readers Digest Assoc. Ltd., 1986).

For two years the army had been marshaling the bulk of its strength in Britain. For two years there had been rumors that Canadian soldiers were going into action in France, Norway, the Middle East, in an invasion for the liberation of Europe—almost anywhere but where action finally came.

When it came—briefly—in December 1941, it involved neither the liberation of Europe nor the four divisions mustered in Britain for that ultimate purpose. It involved the defense of an Asiatic outpost of the British Empire by two battalions that belonged to no division at all.

Hong Kong was a disaster. Ian Adams, in *Maclean's*, compared it to the Charge of Light Brigade, "an act of stupidity and folly" that sent inadequately trained and ill-equipped men to defend an island that was indefensible.

Britain requested the two infantry battalions in September 1941. This reinforcement of the Hong Kong garrison, said the British government, would "reassure Chiang Kai-shek as to our intention to hold the colony and have a great moral effect throughout the Far East."

Unmentioned was the view Winston Churchill had dictated to his Chief of Staff on January 7, when such a possibility was first broached: "This is all wrong. If Japan goes to war there is not the slightest chance of holding Hong Kong or relieving it. It is most unwise to increase the loss we shall suffer there. Instead of increasing the garrison, it ought to be reduced to a symbolic scale. We must avoid frittering away our resources on untenable positions. Japan will think long before declaring war on the British Empire, and whether there are two or six battalions at Hong Kong will make no difference to her choice. I wish we had fewer troops there, but to move any would be noticeable and dangerous."

Churchill was accurate in his appraisal of what would happen in the event of attack. And by late 1941, with Britain's for-

tunes at a low ebb, Japan was nearing the end of her long thinking. She had been ravaging China for years; she had made no secret of her dreams of ruling Asia, and more than Asia. She had joined Germany and Italy in the Triple Alliance. Her plans for conquering Hong Kong had in fact been laid as early as July 1940. The code word for attack was "*Hana-Saku, Hana-Saku*," literally "flowers abloom, flowers abloom." The three divisions that would answer it were massed within 30 miles of Hong Kong when the Canadians sailed.

Only nine days before the Canadian force did sail, the rabid militarist Gen. Hideki Tojo became Prime Minister of Japan. Lord Halifax, British ambassador in Washington, promptly warned London and Ottawa that this made war inevitable and that it would be absurd to commit more men to Hong Kong. He suggested Ottawa re-examine its policy. According to his war histories, Winston Churchill himself, in approving the request for Canadian troops, had "allowed myself to be drawn from" his position in January. But he had called for "a further assessment before the battalions sail." A day before departure, London told Ottawa war in the Far East was "unlikely at present."

Ottawa stuck with its decision. Lt. Gen. Maurice Pope, then Assistant Chief of the General Staff, says in *Soldiers and Politicians*: "I heard a member of the government say they had been actuated solely by two ideas: (a) it was unthinkable that Canada should seek to fill only the comfortable roles and (b) Britain was in a difficult spot and frankly seeking a helping hand. In these circumstances, any thought of refusing the request had never occurred to them."

It was hoped the Canadians would see only garrison duty. But the directives to their commanding officer also said they would "participate to the limit of your strength in the defense of the colony should the occasion arise."

The need for secrecy and speed was considered so vital that the entire expedition was whipped together in little more than two weeks. Its core was the two infantry battalions, both classified by army headquarters as "in need of refresher training or insufficiently trained and not recommended for operations." One was Quebec's Royal Rifles of Canada under Lt. Col. W. J. Home; it was just back from garrison duty in Newfoundland. The other was the Winnipeg Grenadiers under Lt. Col. J. L. R. Sutcliffe; it was just back from garrison duty in the West Indies. In addition, there was a brigade headquarters with a signals section and other specialists. The entire force of 1975 men was under Brig. J. K. Lawson.

They sailed from Vancouver the night of October 27, in the converted passenger ship *Awatea*. Her departure was secret. Her destination was unknown to most of those aboard. Her fate was to deliver the Canadians into one of the most tragic episodes of the country's war.

One of the Canadians was a signalman named William Allister. Now a Montreal writer and painter, he is the author of *A Handful of Rice*, a novel about Canadians captured at Hong Kong. Here is Allister's account of the expedition and the battle, based on his own diary, on interviews he made for CBC broadcasts and on material from official records:

... As a member of the headquarters signals section, I was among the hundreds who had assembled in Ottawa in an atmosphere of tense speculation. My diary reads:

"Left home for the last time. Couldn't tell them it was embarkation leave. Goodby's were hasty—which is best. Mom is sure I'll be back weekends. The notice said: 'You are wanted for special duties overseas.' Sounds important and frightening. But what the hell, anything official is always ominous. All kinds of rumors flying. Startling and exciting. Then we're told to pack and issued summer uniforms. We are



going in a day or so, and to a hot climate. Africa? Jamaica? Could be. More probably China. And I've never been farther west than Winnipeg. It's too fantastic! The

ot's jumping, crowds pouring in and all hush-hush."

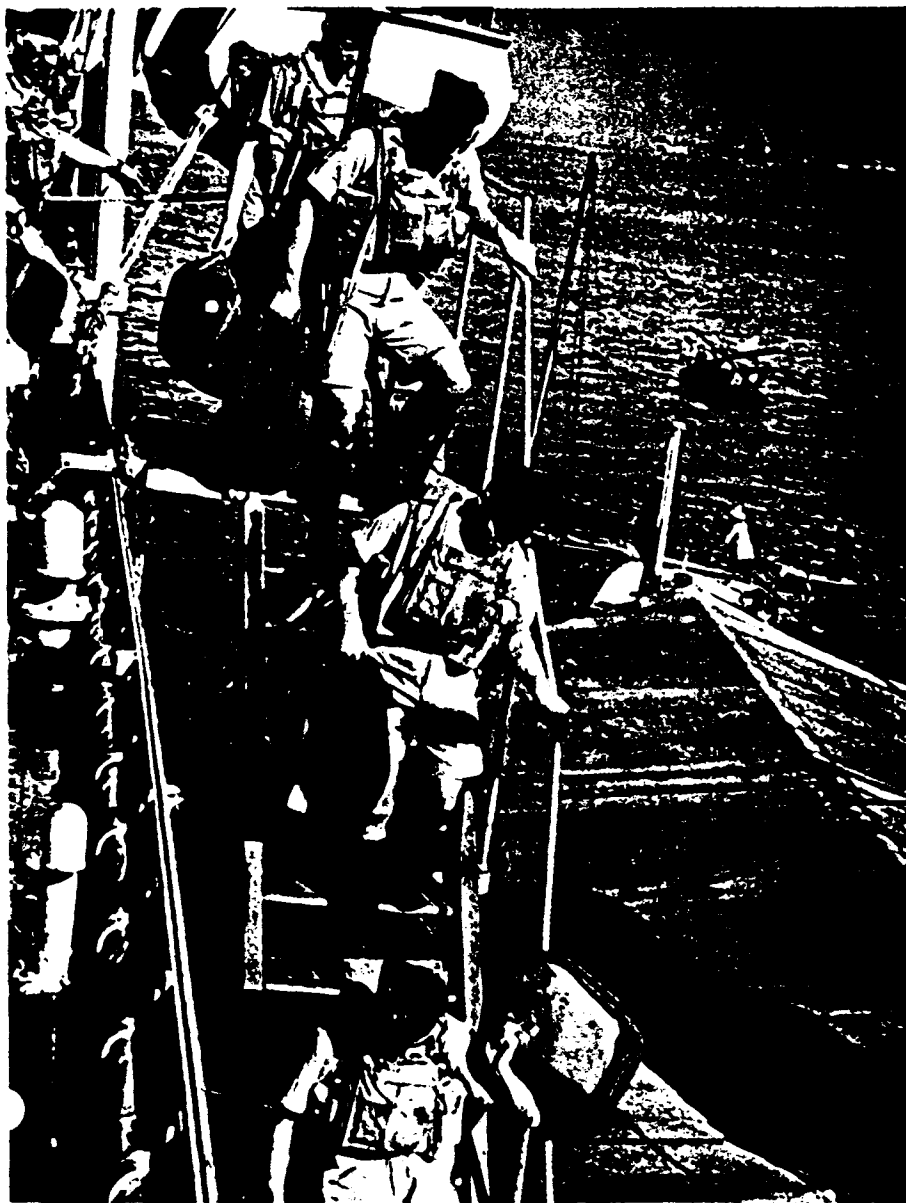
Within a few days we were speeding across the country. When we got aboard the *Awatea* in Vancouver, things began to go awry. Our vehicles were late; they came on another ship and never did reach us. There was immense confusion and no fanfare. The soldiers unwittingly began to echo Churchill's prophetic words that this was "all wrong." A sense of doom seemed to creep through our ranks. Resentments flared.

*Awatea* zigzagged across the Pacific to avoid submarines. It was anything but pleasant; nauseating conditions for the men, rumors of submarines, doubts of what lay ahead. Our lone escort, the armed merchant cruiser *Prince Robert*, often fell so far behind she was out of sight.

A few days out of Hong Kong we were told of our destination and that we should be ready for anything, even fighting our way ashore. A corporal: "I guess they felt Tojo's hoopla about conquering the world was grounds for suspicion. When I watched the briefing I said, 'My God, another Dunkirk!' And someone answered, 'No, fella, at Dunkirk they had somewhere to go.'"

My diary: "Before we landed on November 16 our brains were addled with precautions about everything from sexual diseases to the customs of Indian soldiers who would train with us. But how could anyone prepare green Canadian kids for the impact of the Orient? Our first shocker was seeing crowds following the ship in sampans, eating garbage we threw overboard. The waterfront stench made it almost impossible to breathe. It was an odor you could practically taste.

"On landing, we found that our main positions were on the island of Hong Kong but our barracks on the mainland nearby. We route-marched through Hong Kong's sister city of Kowloon to our barracks at



Canadian troops disembark at Hong Kong. Their main positions were on Hong Kong Island, their barracks on the mainland. Brig. J. K. Lawson (above) commanded the Canadian force.



Sham Shui Po. All the pomp and ceremony made us feel like an army of occupation amid the teeming Chinese. The filth, poverty and verminous atmosphere hung over us like a pall. I wanted to pull on gloves and a gas mask when I thought of the cholera, dysentery, malaria, typhoid, venereal disease around me. Barefooted old women bent low under huge loads while coolie bosses bellowed behind them. We saw filthy shops and slabs of meat black with flies; harmless beggars, their diseased legs half eaten away; white men in Panama hats riding rickshas right out of a Hollywood movie. Neon in Chinese. Nothing connected. Time seemed to be motionless. A weird sensation.

"Slept under mosquito netting like Clark Gable in *China Seas*, nearly eaten alive by bedbugs the first night. Hired a valet for 28 cents a week. He shines our shoes and buttons, presses our uniforms, gets an *amah* to do our laundry, makes our beds, runs errands, serves tea in bed. U.S. fags ten cents a deck. Beer ten cents a bottle. Bills stick out of our pockets. The beggars mob us—it's hard to walk. We get shaved in bed while we sleep—for five cents a week! What a time! Gals galore. Thousands of refugees fleeing ahead of the Japanese at Canton. Prostitution seems to be a national sport. But the girls are often just nice kids sold by their parents for about \$200 to keep the family alive."

Everything was dirt cheap. Servants waited on us hand-and-foot. There was a kind of hysteria in the air. Who could believe there were 50,000 to 60,000 sea-sick Japanese troops only 30 miles away? That spies were all around us in this colony of 1,500,000 people?

Posing as barbers, tailors, dentists, these Japanese spies and a Chinese fifth column were everywhere, even inside our barracks. Warehouses were leased by fifth columnists and used to construct foundations for heavy artillery. The popular barbershop in the Hong Kong Hotel was their intelligence headquarters and the top brass in the colony were among its clientele.

We did some training and got to know a bit about the countryside, but the three weeks we had were tragically inadequate for what lay ahead. The island of Hong Kong we had to defend was 29 square miles in area, a rugged, confusing mass of mountains, hills and valleys with almost no flat ground. It was only a half mile across to the mainland peninsula of Kowloon. Beyond that to the north lay more mountainous land called the New Territories, which stretched 30 miles to the border of China.

Information on the defenses was not reassuring. There were 36 guns, but the mobile artillery had none of the latest models. There were 20 early model anti-aircraft guns but no radar equipment. There were six old-fashioned RAF planes but no hope of more. Most naval units had been withdrawn, leaving only a few small vessels.

We stood alone. Still the Governor, Sir Mark Young, and the military commander, Maj. Gen. C. M. Maltby, appeared to believe Hong Kong could be defended. There was food for 130 days. The total defense force added up to fewer than 14,000, including nurses and civilian volunteers. Besides the Canadians, there were three regiments of the Royal Artillery containing many Indian troops, one Indian regiment with British officers from the Hong Kong

and Singapore artillery, two engineer companies, one British infantry battalion (Royal Scots), one British machine-gun battalion (Middlesex Regiment), two Indian infantry battalions (7th Rajput Regiment and 14th Punjab Regiment) and the Hong Kong Volunteer Defense Corps, a militia outfit.

My diary: "We were camping out in tents at Waterloo Road (cheery name), setting up signal offices, exploring the Chinese mansions, singing, laughing. We drove north into the New Territories and saw lots of pillboxes and gun emplacements, nice and solid-looking. It looked like a cinch that Japan wouldn't dare start a fight; she had her hands full with China. The boys were on a tourist spree, bringing back kimonos, dressing gowns, pajamas. Steaks at Jingles were two inches thick and a foot and a half long, all for two bucks. What a life."

"Nothing to worry about," I wrote home. "Those poor guys in England getting bombed and living on rations—and us living like kings. You can rest easy, Mother me dear, the war is thousands of miles from your darlin' boy." The letter went off on the China Clipper on December 8, and was shot down by the Japanese. Time had run out.

On the morning of December 8, Hong Kong time—December 7 in North America—some of us were shaving when we heard the air-raid sirens. We paid no attention. "The usual rehearsal," my diary says. "We heard this booming and figured it was artillery practice. Jenkins went out on the balcony to look at the harbor and saw planes swooping down. He came in very

surprised. 'They're dropping bombs,' he said. We just laughed. We nearly died laughing! The windows were blown in and we hit the deck. They were aiming at our building—they seemed to know where everyone was. We beat it out of the building. Ronny and Fairley were hit. Shrapnel was flying and Rutledge hollered for us to lie flat. We saw a Chinese coolie get his head blown off. At the camp gates there were about 50 dead Chinese piled up. We had the distinct impression that there was a war on."

The news of war filled the airwaves. Sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Much of the U.S. Pacific fleet wiped out. Emergency sessions of Parliament. Declarations of war by the United States, Canada, Britain. But we were in Hong Kong, isolated and far from home. Our two infantry battalions were already in their positions on the island and our signals section with the defenders of the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories.

The closer we looked the more impossible the situation seemed. The six tiny aircraft were bombed on the ground, giving the Japanese *carte blanche* in the air. And their planes could fly too low for anti-aircraft guns to take aim. The garrison was vastly outnumbered and outgunned. There was no hope of reinforcement. Britain's two great battleships, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, were sunk by aircraft off Malaya within a few days. The U.S. fleet had been crippled; the Chinese armies could offer no help. We found ourselves pawns in a huge power play, caught in the center of a hopeless, suicidal frontline position.

The enemy we faced was made up of tough veterans seasoned by years of war in China. Our Canadian force was deemed adequate only for garrison duty. You couldn't compare us to the trained Canadian divisions in England. Neither of our battalions had trained in anticipation of battle and to make matters worse, many reinforcements sent to the two infantry units were raw recruits or little better.

A private: "I had exactly 30 days' training. I learned how to left turn, how to right turn, how to salute—all the usual things. But I never fired a shot till I got to Hong Kong."

A corporal: "I taught one fellow how to load and discharge his rifle behind battalion headquarters in the hills. He was killed before he even got to fire it."



On December 10, as Japanese troops (below) pushed down the Malayan peninsula, off the coast Japanese aircraft destroyed the British battle cruiser *Repulse* and battleship *Prince of Wales* (left, just before sinking). Austin Willis recalls how the news was broadcast in Canada: "I was on duty in the booth in Toronto, feeding the CBC radio network. Lorne Greene rushed in and read the short tragic bulletin about the ships, with a staggering loss of life from drowning. I burst in right after with a commercial: 'Buy your son in the service a Bulova watch—they're watertight.' I sure remember that one—and the subsequent uproar too!"



A lieutenant: "Some of these soldiers were just too damn young. I remember one who was wounded—I suddenly realized that he was only a child of 16 or 17."

A private: "There was a case where the Japanese were attacking and these fellows were throwing hand grenades without knowing enough to pull out the pins." One furious British sergeant yelled: "What are y' tryin' to do—it 'im on the 'ead with it?"

The Japanese first sent thousands of shock troops pouring across the New Territories. They met one British and two Indian battalions to which our signals section was attached. So we might claim to be Canada's first soldiers to see action in the war. At first the advance outposts on the frontier held the attackers at bay, but they came on in waves all day and all night. There seemed no end to them.

My diary: "Wallie had to ride back and forth to the front lines. Said it's blood-curdling to hear the Japs' battlecries. They came charging right into the machine guns. Our men used their machine guns—the Lewis, the Bren, the Vickers—till the barrels were red-hot. The Japs went down like wheat and still they kept coming, climbing over hills of bodies. The pillboxes turned out to be deathtraps. The Japs climbed on the roofs and lobbed grenades down the air vents. Our guys set their guns up on the roofs after that and the hell with the pillboxes. The Indians loved it all. They'd hold their fingers down on the trigger and never stop, happy as hell. They wept when they were ordered to retreat."

The defenders fell back to their main defenses, the so-called Gin-Drinkers Line, a series of pillboxes stretching across the isthmus about five miles behind Kowloon. They were surprised to find the World War I tactic of holding one long line outmoded, surprised that the propaganda stereotype of the Japanese as myopic barbarians who couldn't see in the dark was fatally wrong. They proved to be excellent night fighters. On the 9th, the Japanese sealed the fate of the Gin-Drinkers Line.

D company of the Grenadiers was brought over from Hong Kong to help and saw action briefly on the 11th. By then the Royal Scots and Rajputs holding the front were fighting on nerve alone. The order came to retreat to Hong Kong. D company was ordered to cover the Royal Scots' withdrawal that night, while the 7th Rajputs were left to hold Devil's Peak Peninsula, a last mainland defense.

Withdrawal sounded fine on paper, but it reckoned without the chaos of half a million Kowloon citizens scrambling to escape across the half-mile of water. Panic and hysteria swept the waterfront. Fifth columnists fired at soldiers and civilians alike. Boats, sampans, junks, ferries, jammed with terrified refugees, were pounded by bombs and sprayed by machine guns. Mobs looted warehouses. Police fired into crowds. Soldiers destroyed vehicles and ammunition. Last-minute demolition squads blew up harbor installations. Our signals section were kept at our posts until the last day, the 12th, and then ordered to get away as best we could.

My diary: "We got our equipment on two trucks and went roaring through the streets, rifles cocked for snipers. Riotous confusion everywhere. The civilians had no arms. Families were split. An old lady stretched out a hand for help as we passed. We couldn't help. They all had to be left behind. Bombs falling everywhere. One blew a crater in front of us. We backed up and took a side street. People running everywhere. At the dock we had to carry the signal sets—they felt like pianos—through the mobs and load them on a boat. Ha—what boat? Bedlam. Everyone trying to get a boat—prices crazy. Every floating board under hire. Looters being shot all around us. One drunken police sergeant, giggling happily, was shooting at anyone, looter or not, as long as he was a coolie. Good clean fun. One guard at a warehouse was letting looters inside, then shooting them down.

"We took a ferry at gunpoint but its engine kept stalling. Just as we got into the water, planes dive-bombed us. The shore was lined with people with no way to cross. They knew what happened when the Japs took a city. One munitions boat blew up. We had no life belts and I couldn't swim.

"We finally made it across and got a truck to Victoria barracks, just in time to run into the worst shelling ever—we were next to a munitions depot they were trying to hit. We lay along the cement passage and each time I heard the split-second hiss I flung my hands over my helmet—silly reflex. One shell blew my helmet off and through the smoke I saw Blackie waving it on the end of his bayonet where it had landed."

A private: "The guys that had been beaten off Kowloon came back full of fear, with stories of horror—the Japs were

hanging people from lampposts and cutting throats and raping."

My diary: "We all lay down to sleep exhausted. But I couldn't sleep. We sat up and smoked and talked in low voices. Finally the question was asked: 'Do you think we'll ever get out of here alive?' Penny said, 'I don't think so.' And there was silence."

The island dug in. The Canadians were divided: the Royal Rifles went into an East Brigade with the Rajputs, under Brigadier Wallis; the Grenadiers, with our signals, the Punjabs and Royal Scots, into a West Brigade under Brigadier Lawson with headquarters at Wong Nei Chong Gap. The Middlesex machine guns were to

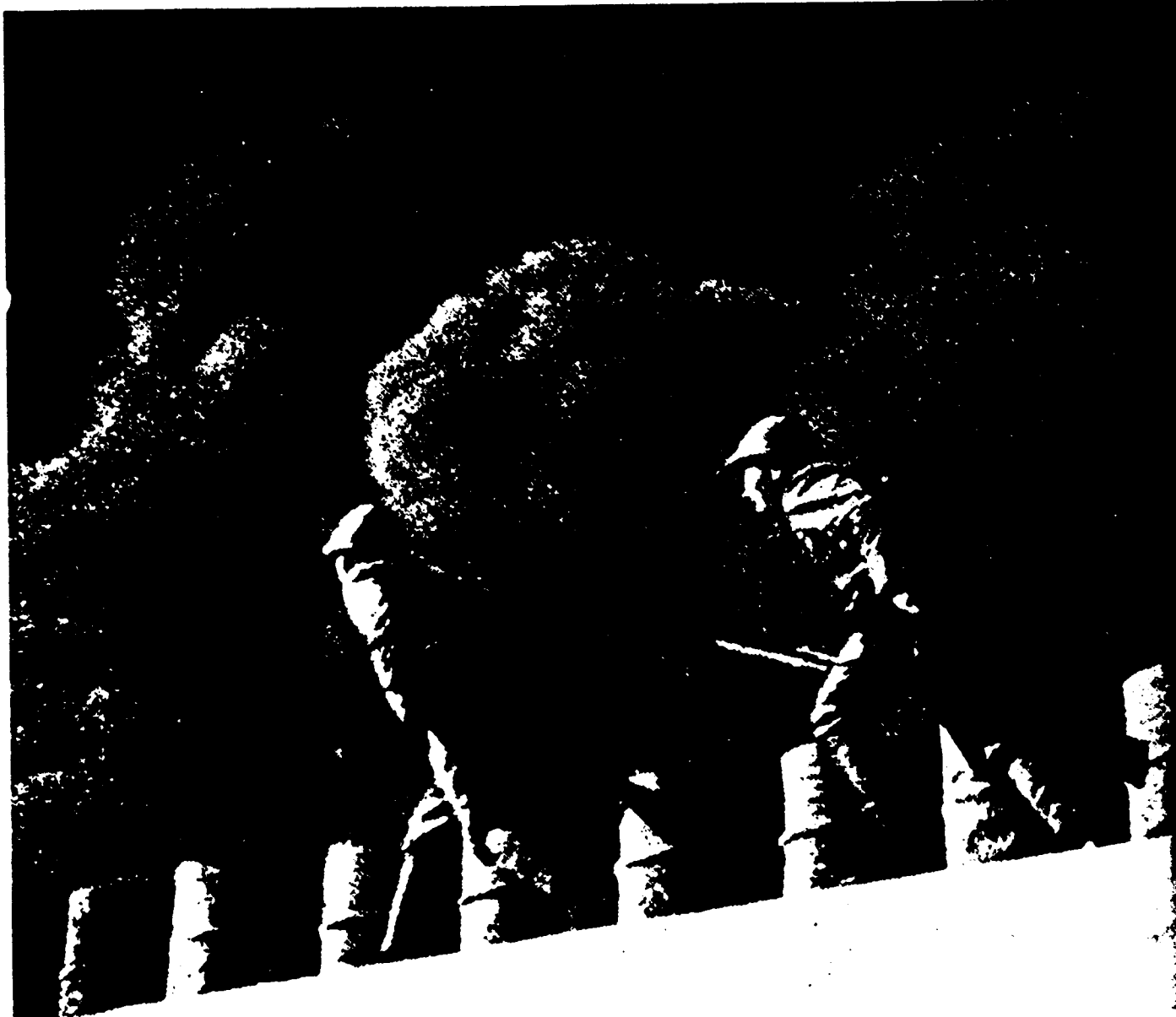
cover the coast from pillboxes. Morale was high among those who had not met the enemy. One battle-weary Royal Scot, listening to the Canadians merrily singing songs like "Silent Night," said: "The puir dafties. They think it's Christmas comin'. Gawd help us."

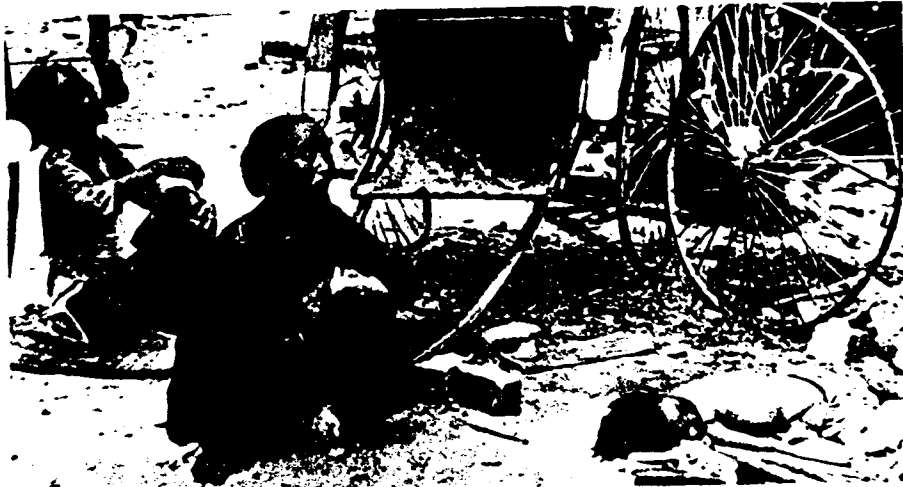
Japan's flag was hoisted over Kowloon by the 13th. A demand for surrender was refused. Planes and artillery began to pound the island. Fires were started, guns knocked out. Crowds ran to and fro in the streets or lined up for rice while bombs fell. On the night of the 15th, a landing was beaten off with a Royal Rifles platoon getting in the first shots. The enemy was behind schedule and impatient. On the

17th they again demanded surrender with a threat of indiscriminate bombardment. It was rejected. Time was important to both sides. Our orders were to fight to the last man.

The final, most important and tragic phase was about to begin. On the 18th a devastating barrage was leveled point-blank across the harbor against the north-east coast and the area leading up to Wong Nei Chong Gap.

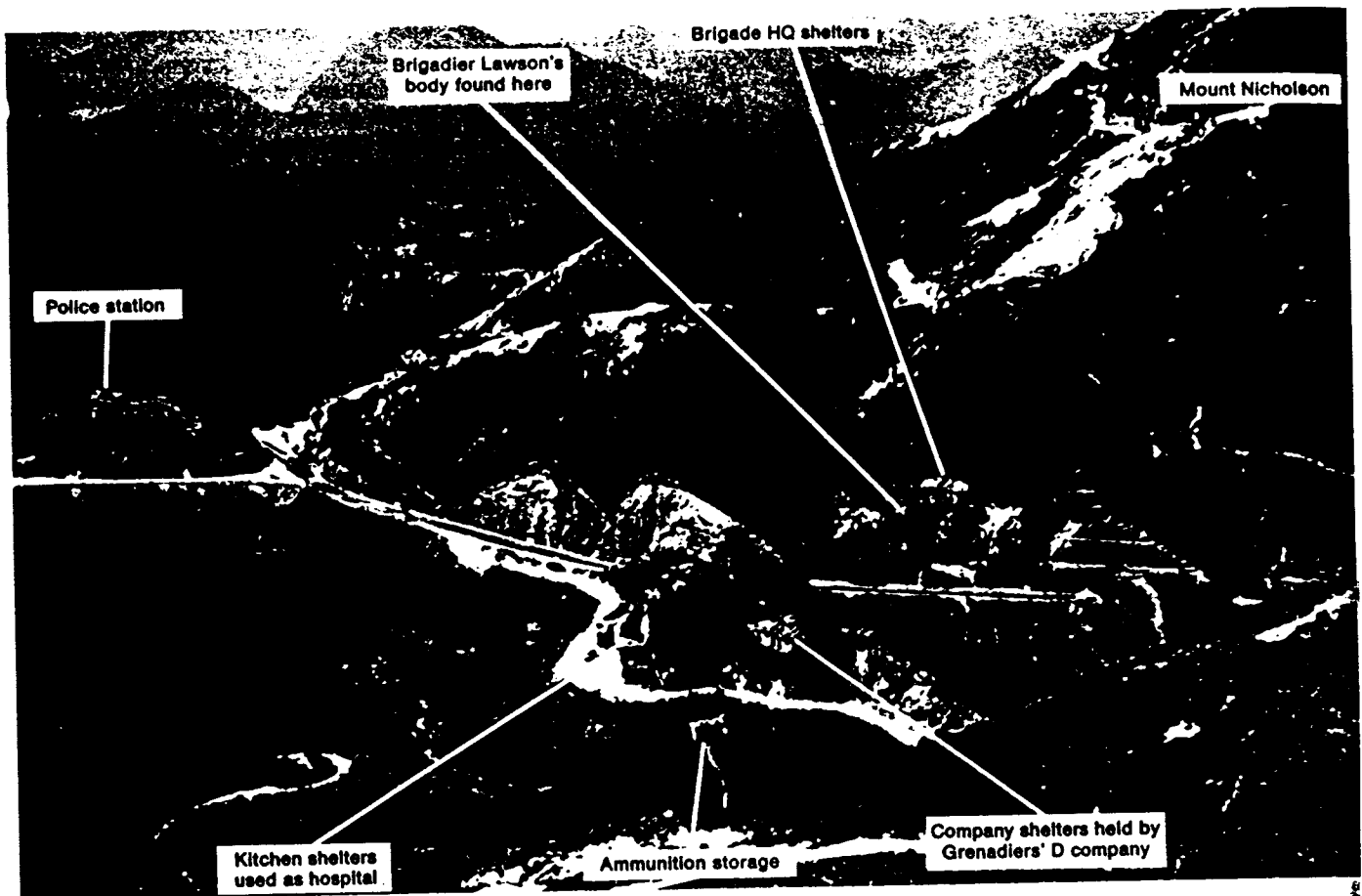
My diary: "We're shooting messages back and forth about landings. The shelling is murderous. We lie flat on the pillbox floor and count the booms when they go off and when they land. The second part's a cinch because they're landing on us. Fires





Casualties among civilians (left) were high as the Japanese struck south through Asia. The fall of Singapore on February 15, 1942, "is a sort of anthology of all that is worst in British military history," writes Peter Young in *World War 1939-45*. "It is a tale of complacency, unpreparedness and weakness, relieved only by isolated tactical successes and the firmness of a handful of units and individuals." Hong Kong (below, Japanese soldiers attack) was another disaster, "an act of stupidity and folly," wrote Ian Adams in *Maclean's*. He compared it to the Charge of the Light Brigade.





started down below in the oil dumps. Smoke obscuring the shore. Are they landing? How many? It this the night?"

It was the night. As soon as darkness fell, 7500 Japanese began crossing in small boats, ferries, homemade rafts, sampans; some even swam. They landed at several points on the north side of the island. The Rajputs and Middlesex manning the pill-boxes on the beaches took a heavy toll before they were overrun.

A Grenadier: "They came running ashore firing from the knee. They came in waves of 30 or 40 and there was no stopping them—the more we hit with artillery and machine guns, the faster they came."

Past theories haunted the situation. In the conviction that any attack must come from the south, from the sea, most of the island's guns faced the wrong direction. Was this merely a feint to cover a landing from the south? Wait till daybreak, some advised, then we'll clean them out.

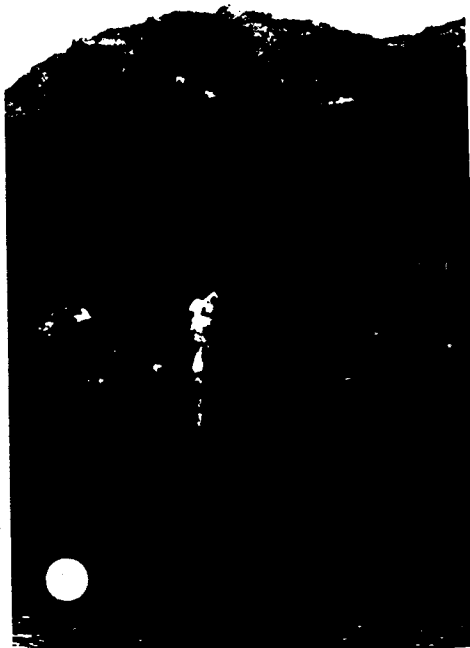
But the Japanese weren't waiting for daybreak. Noiseless in rubber shoes, they fanned out east, west and south. To try to plug a gap around Jardine's Lookout, a

company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers was thrown in. Its platoons were split up. One, under Lieutenant Birkett, was to cover the front from the Lookout's summit. Of their wild night in rain and darkness, Sgt. Tom Marsh recorded: "We had been told to stay where we were for the night and report at Wong Nei Chong Gap in the morning. We had settled down when orders came to occupy Jardine's Lookout, about a mile away. Lieutenant Birkett had a Volunteer, a militiaman, as a guide. Although we were unaware of it, the Japs had already passed our destination and we were walking right into the middle of them. We reached a pill-box occupied by Hong Kong Volunteers. They tried to dissuade Birkett from going on because the enemy were all around, but he decided to carry out orders."

They were soon pinned down by enemy fire. They answered with Bren and tommy guns. Mortar shells were bursting; bullets and chips of rock flying. Confusion was intensified by the darkness. Patrols criss-crossed. Lieutenant Corrigan and his men ran flush into the enemy. By the light of one bursting flash, Corrigan suddenly saw



Canadian soldiers fought and died and were captured in Wong Nei Chong Gap (left). Below: Japanese bombs fall on Hong Kong. "This Christmas of 1941," Stephen Leacock wrote in *New World Illustrated*, "may seem to us the most distressed, the most tragic of the ages—Christmas in a world of disaster never known before. But yet it's Christmas. And we ought to keep it so—the old, glad season of goodwill and kindness and forgiveness toward everybody. Notice, toward everybody—even toward Adolf Hitler. What? You say you'd rather boil him in oil. Oh, but, of course, I include that; boil him, and forgive him boiled."



a Japanese officer rushing at him, waving a sword. He caught the blow with one hand and with the other grabbed the sword, wrestled the officer to the ground and killed him.

Marsh: "Lieutenant Mitchell of A company made his way over to us and wanted to know what unit we were. He said he thought we were firing at his company. This was possible in the confusion but we didn't think so."

Meanwhile, to the east, the Royal Rifles were strung out along a 15-mile line from Lye Mun Passage south to the Stanley Peninsula. They were already exhausted from a round-the-clock alert. As the Japanese struck through the Rajputs, virtually wiping them out, they ran into the Rifles' C company, sent in to defend Sai Wan Hill under Maj. W. A. Bishop. The company drove the enemy off the slopes but could not take the crest. For three hours a savage seesaw battle raged till the Canadians were ordered back to avoid encirclement. At the same time, other Rifles were trying to prevent the Japanese from seizing 1700-foot Mount Parker or to evict them from positions they had reached. One entire Rifles platoon and two sections were trapped and either killed, wounded or captured.

When dawn came, the Japanese were on the summit of Mount Parker. The Rifles and what else was left of the East Brigade were ordered to withdraw south to occupy a line across the Stanley Peninsula in the vicinity of Stanley Mound, to concentrate for counterattacks. The Japanese soon cut them off from the Grenadiers and the rest of the West Brigade.

I had spent part of that first night at West Brigade headquarters at Wong Nei Chong Gap. My diary: "Our captain knew we'd be trapped. He left four men to keep communications going and told the rest of us to start hoofing it. Where to? Anywhere—any way. At first we took the sets but later gave up and smashed them. We stumbled through the dark and rain, challenged by nervous sentries, and got lost in the hills. Ended up in a wrecked car and tried to sleep till dawn. At the first gray light firing started all around us. Couldn't find any Canadians so we joined an English officer. Killed my first men. Three. I often wondered how I'd feel. I felt nothing. Just numb with fright. We were encircled and had to run in front of their machine guns to get away. I've never known such terror."

A private: "Everything got mixed up. You'd find yourself under a different officer. We didn't know where anyone was. We didn't know D company was supporting Brigade HQ from our left and when fire came from there we returned it. We were actually engaging our own men."

Marsh: "At one point I crawled toward two men to warn them to pull back with their Bren light machine gun. I laid on my stomach and called. H. yelled that S. was shot and helpless. I could hear S. pleading not to be left and his friend consoling him. Just then a Japanese officer jumped up, waving a sword and screaming 'Banzai! Banzai!' I shot. He spun and collapsed. We decided to try to get S. out. They were at the bottom of a six-foot drop. I unfastened my sling and passed my rifle down, and H. put S's belt through the sling. We waited till a burst of fire stopped and then H. heaved S. up and I pulled and dragged. He dropped behind a rock beside me amid a hail of bullets. H. threw the Bren up and followed. But getting S. up the rugged slope was the dangerous job. We turned him on his back. He was semiconscious and I didn't think his chances were good but H. was set on saving him. We dragged him by the shoulders, taking advantage of every bit of cover. We had just reached an open space and Corporal Darragh had crawled down to help when all hell broke loose. A machine gun had us in its sights. H. was killed. S's body was riddled. Darragh's hand was smashed. A bullet hit my leg and I dived back. I was shot in the head and lost consciousness."

When Marsh came to he found blood flowing from his mouth. He managed to bandage his head, then crawled up to Jardine's Lookout. "Several of the platoon lay dead or desperately wounded. Lieutenant Birkett was still on top of the pillbox manning a machine gun. By this time they had us under artillery fire. There was a terrific explosion, a direct hit. I blacked out again. I awoke in the afternoon to find a corporal lying across me, badly wounded. He motioned me to lie quiet. The Japs had wiped out all resistance and were bayoneting the wounded. I lost consciousness again and awoke to the drizzle of rain in the darkness. All was quiet. Only the dead remained. My left arm was broken. I could see bodies all around me. They had probably taken me for dead and not bothered to finish me."

Other Grenadiers were fighting desperately around the Lookout and Mount But-



ler. A platoon under Lieutenant French had stormed Mount Butler but had been driven back, its officer wounded and later killed. Then A company, under Maj. A. B. Gresham, was ordered to clear the two hills. It was split up and those under 42-year-old CSM. John R. Osborn reached Mount Butler, took the summit at bayonet point and held it for three hours. At last they were driven back toward Wong Nei Chong and, along with other elements of A company, were encircled.

A Grenadier: "Our ammunition was running low. Enemy fire was terrific. We did what we could with a couple of Brens and six or seven tommy guns. There were nine or ten of us in a huddle when I saw a grenade sailing over, high in the air. It landed next to Osborn. He'd thrown others out but there was no time to throw this one. Something had to be done instantly or several men would be killed. Osborn did it. He deliberately rolled over on top of the grenade and took the full charge."



To protect several of his countrymen caught in the battle for Hong Kong, CSM. John R. Osborn rolled on top of a grenade and died saving the lives of several other Winnipeg Grenadiers. He was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. The 17-day battle cost Canada 290 dead, 493 wounded. Nearly as many died later in prison camp as were killed in battle.

But no amount of bravery could save a hopeless situation. They were soon overrun. In the other group from A company Gresham and others were killed, the rest wounded or taken prisoners.

The enemy poured through Wong Nei Chong Gap. Brigadier Lawson's headquarters was cut off and he was trapped. An attempt to relieve him proved fruitless. As the enemy lobbed grenades down the air vents, bodies piled higher and higher in the pillboxes. One group of 12 decided to break out. Seven were cut down, but five reached cover and held off the attackers till nightfall. Then they crept through the enemy lines and rejoined their own forces. At 10 a.m. Brigadier Lawson telephoned General Maltby that his headquarters was surrounded and he was going outside to fight it out. He rushed out firing and was riddled by bullets.

The exhausted Rifles, to the east, were now the core of the force in the Stanley Peninsula. Only a few detachments of Middlesex and Volunteers were left to help them. In the days that followed, the Rifles fought under every conceivable disadvantage. The astonishing fact is that they not only clung to their positions so long, inflicting heavy losses, but actually were able to mount numerous counterattacks. In the few hand-to-hand fights that took place, the Japanese lost. After that, they relied on grenades and their deadly skill with mortars.

For the Rifles, each desperate battle meant more irreplaceable losses. Yet somehow they held on day after day. Food and water were cut off. Sub-units were broken up, slaughtered, captured.

A corporal: "When the Japs captured the island's reservoir the only water we had was in our bottles. Word came that Churchill expected us to fight to the last bullet and the last drop of water and I thought: 'This is me. I'm the guy he's talking about!'"

Nor was it any better where the Grenadiers fought. The Royal Scots had tried an unsuccessful counterattack on Wong Nei Chong Gap on the 19th with heavy losses. Still there was no thought of surrender.

The Grenadiers' D company was led by Captain Bowman who, someone said, "was so exhausted he was talking gibberish." Ordered to attack a Japanese strong-point on Mount Houston, Bowman was last seen charging them with a blazing tommy gun. Two more officers were wounded

and two platoons almost annihilated before the third managed to seize ground vitally needed by the enemy. Its men commanded the one north-south road across the island and stopped the enemy advance till December 22 when their shelter was finally smashed by shellfire. The survivors were taken prisoner. When the Japanese officer heard how few men had held them off, he slapped the Canadian officer for lying about their numbers.

While that fight was going on, headquarters company, with parts of C company, had obtained a foothold at the Gap, fighting under Maj. E. Hodgkinson, who was wounded. B company under Major Hook joined C company on the 20th, and that night in heavy rain and fog attacked Mount Nicholson. They were driven off, leaving 20 men and two officers on the slope. They renewed the attack at dawn. The casualties included all the officers, seven NCOs and 29 men.

My diary: "Finally caught up with my unit near Wan Chai Gap. Many of them had just been killed. From sheer inexperience, they had set up signal sets on the exposed side of a house and got a direct hit. My closest buddies. We got a ration of rum and went up to dig their graves. After two nightmarish days, the sight of their mangled bodies was too much and I cracked up."

As the fighting raged on, those who were taken prisoner were marched off, shot or left in exposed positions to be blown up by their own fire. The wounded were generally bayoneted.

Cpl. Bud Dicks: "They lined us against the wall and took our wallets, etc. I was trying to figure out which I preferred—to be shot or have my head cut off. They made a real drama of it. They put up a firing squad and the officer stood beside them with his sword ready to come down. To me it was like cutting an artery. Hope goes out of your whole being. You're limp. And then he stopped and all the time we could feel the bullets that didn't come. The officer took us to a cement ledge overlooking a cliff and lined us up again. He put his revolver in a sergeant's back and shot him. At that we threw ourselves over the cliff. They opened up on us from above. In falling I smashed my face on a rock and lost consciousness. When I woke I thought I was dying but I found out you don't die that easily."

Tom Marsh: "I was dizzy from head and

leg wounds and they flung me into a shed crammed with prisoners—whites, Chinese and Indians. Many were wounded or dead. The floor ran with blood. There was no room to lie down, no food, no water. Thirst for a wounded man is acute torture. A few tried to help but most sat huddled, waiting. A big gun was planted beside our building and I could hear our mortars trying to get its range. Then it came, a blinding flash, shrieks and moans. I owe my life to the fact that we were so closely packed."

Everywhere now the defenders were fighting with their backs to the wall, in shrinking positions. The colony rejected a third surrender demand even though 25,000 enemy troops were pouring across the island, and more stood behind them. The exhausted Allies tried to hold a last desperate line to the west to protect the towns of Victoria and Aberdeen with all their helpless civilians. Hospitals crammed with wounded threw themselves on the mercy of the invaders.

In the south, shortly before six o'clock Christmas morning, about 150 to 200 Japanese broke into the emergency hospital at St. Stephen's College and started to bayonet the wounded in their beds. Two doctors who tried to stop them were shot, then bayoneted repeatedly. Before the massacre ended 56 patients had been stabbed to death; three British nurses were murdered and their bodies mutilated. Four Chinese nurses were raped again and again.

A Canadian padre, Capt. James Barnett, was just preparing to administer Holy Communion when the Japanese stormed in. He was herded with 90 others into a room so small they could not all sit down. "A Japanese soldier came to the door and made us put up our hands and took my watch, my ring and some money," Barnett recalled later. "Another Japanese entered with a sack of ammunition and threw cartridges in our faces. A third later removed two riflemen. Immediately afterward we heard screams from the corridor outside. The men in the room asked me to tell the Christmas story and say some prayers. We all thought it was the end."

After the main force of Japanese left, some of the wounded survivors were taken to another hospital. A Canadian nurse: "Every time you heard footsteps you wondered: Is this it? Is it the Japs?"

Then the door opened and a Canadian lad was wheeled in on a stretcher. There was only a bit left of his arm. He'd been a patient at St. Stephen's when the Japs came in and he was bayoneted and bayoneted, always in the arm. They tried to destroy the nerve center. When he tried to crawl away they'd go after him. Then he played dead and they left him alone. But his arm had to be taken off. Next evening he said: "Sister, what can you give me for pain in an arm that isn't there?"

Marsh: "We were tied together in pairs with barbed wire around our wrists and around our throats. I staggered along with wounds in the head and knee and a broken arm. Japs were passing along a road above us. When they saw us they came bounding down the slope with fixed bayonets and obvious intentions. Their own officers beat them off with swords. Our march continued. Men were falling or being dragged by others. Those who couldn't go on were cut loose, dragged aside and bayoneted."

My diary: "Ernie was one of those we left behind at Wong Nei Chong. When they finally surrendered they were tied up with barbed wire and marched for what seemed an eternity. He couldn't make it because of his wounds. When at last he fell and couldn't rise a Jap orderly picked him up on his back and carried him the rest of the way."

Dicks: "When I came to after throwing myself over the cliff, my face was caked with blood. For two days I crawled toward Stanley where I thought our fellows were. I found it swarming with Japs. Hunger and thirst were killing me. I roamed the hills behind the Jap lines for four or five days. The last night I fell asleep in a ditch. When I woke a Jap was standing over me. He handed me some flowers and said: 'Peace. War over.'"

It was, for us. At 3:15 p.m. Christmas Day, General Maltby ordered a ceasefire. There was no point in continuing the slaughter. Mobs were rioting in the towns. There was no water. Communications had broken down. A few pockets of resistance continued, but for the rest the silence of defeat settled over the hills. We lay down our arms, some shocked, some relieved, some fearful of being killed or tortured. About four o'clock, a Japanese soldier put his head in the door of the room at St. Stephen's College where Captain Barnett and 90 others were held.

"Through sign language," said the padre, "he told us that we could all be friends now."

A Grenadier: "We watched the Union Jack come down and the Rising Sun go up. It was a very empty feeling."

The battle had lasted 17½ days. The Japanese had suffered 3000 casualties, roughly 1000 more than the defenders. We Canadians counted 290 men dead, 493 wounded. But for those of us who had survived, the worst was yet to come. We were to find that this was merely the first act in a long and terrible crucifixion.

We were packed into a Chinese refugee encampment on the island and later into barracks on the mainland. For months there were no accurate casualty lists for anxious families in Canada. For three years and eight months the indescribable ordeal of imprisonment continued, full of death, disease, beriberi, epidemics, starvation, brutality. Dragging our sick bodies to labor in the tropic heat at bayonet point, we were truly a legion of the condemned. Like slaves, 1184 of us were locked in the hold of a ship and sent to Japan to do forced labor in mines, shipyards, coal yards. We watched our comrades die or go mad, watched pride and manhood ground in the dust. Of the 1975 Canadians who sailed from Vancouver that October night in 1941, 555 never returned. Nearly half of this number died in prison camps.

At home, controversy raged over the Hong Kong affair. George Drew, Ontario Conservative leader, charged that the whole expedition was mismanaged and ill-prepared. A Royal Commission study by Chief Justice Sir Lyman Duff found a number of things to criticize but "no dereliction of duty on the part of the government or its military advisers." This was branded "whitewash" by the Opposition in Parliament and by others.

For CSM John Osborn there was a posthumous Victoria Cross. For the rest of us, a mixture of bitterness and pride, salted over the years by the knowledge that many are dying too young and that most of the remainder are in poor health from wounds or malnutrition diseases. But, in one sense, many of us feel strangely grateful for the experience. In the twin hells of action and imprisonment, we were able to discover the heights and depths of the human soul. . . .

WILLIAM ALLISTER

