

"CANADA CAN BE PROUD OF THEM"

Prisoners Recall Brave Battle for Hong Kong

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YOKOHAMA, Sept. 4—(CP).—Canada can well be proud of the gallantry displayed by her Hong Kong contingent which fought against the Japanese until they overwhelmed that British crown colony on a black Christmas day in 1941.

That is the conclusion reached from first-hand reports I received from men of the Hong Kong force liberated from Japanese prison camps after 3½ years of confinement. The Dominion can be proud of the behavior of her soldiers—the 1,985 men from the Winnipeg Grenadiers, the Royal Rifles of Canada and a brigade headquarters—and particularly of the officers, proudly praised by the men.

Some 200 of the prisoners who were in Japanese camps are in Allied hands and it was from them I learned of the last days of the gallant defense against overwhelming odds. The group interviewed included 15 Canadian soldiers, one merchant seaman and nine French-

Canadian Roman Catholic brothers. All are in reasonable health.

Liberated members of the Grenadiers reported that according to a check made by their officers, 136 Grenadiers had been killed in action and a little more than 200 died in a diphtheria and dysentery epidemic.

Liberated prisoners said a company of the Grenadiers had been deployed to positions on Kowloon on the Chinese mainland opposite Hong Kong. Fighting had started by daylight, the Japanese enjoying support from the air and heavy and small arms fire.

Eventually the Canadians had to withdraw and two days later were evacuated to Hong Kong proper, leaving a small rearguard to

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cover their withdrawal. Most of the rearguard was killed or taken prisoner but a few managed to swim across to the island.

The Hong Kong garrison made its last stand on Stanley peninsula while a handful held out in Hong Kong jail. They went without water for three days and had little ammunition left, but figured they could have held another two days, when the governor capitulated.

Some refused to lay down their arms and continued fighting till noon, Dec. 26, when a senior officer under Japanese escort, bearing a white flag, ordered them to cease fire.

Many Shipped to Japan

The condition of the prisons at Hong Kong was considered better than those in Japan to which the majority of the Canadians subsequently were moved. They were transported in heavily-overcrowded ships below hatches.

The majority of prisoners I visited today came from Niigata, Shinagawa and Omori. Conditions varied at the different camps. Niigata was called the hell-hole of Japan. Prisoners were forced to do heavy manual labor in the shipyards every day. Breakfast as a rule consisted of two boiled potatoes, lunch of stewed carrot tops and watery vegetables and soup. There was no break for supper which consisted of a handful of mixed red rice and barley.

One man I talked to was required to swing a heavy sledgehammer all day, breaking scrap iron. The prisoners were frequently kicked and slapped by civilian dock workers.

One of the sick men with whom I talked told me of how he had contracted tuberculosis sleeping on the floor. As a punishment he had been forced to stand at attention in the cold for three hours while a Japanese guard threw a bucket of cold water over him every half hour.

He was later sent to hospital camp where Japanese doctors experimented with his case. They collapsed one lung, but later allowed it to fill up again.

He was instructed by regimental authorities not to permit the Japanese to carry out further experiments, but said he was afraid not to submit to them.

He was required to work all the time he was in the hospital, cleaning urinals and toilets, and his weight dropped from 160 pounds to 105.

Three tubercular survivors with whom I spoke now are buoyed up by the hope that they may recover their health in a Canadian sanitarium.

Six men from Winnipeg, whom I talked to, said that the Grenadiers had killed 1,100 Japanese when a mass attack by the Japanese through a gap in the Canadian lines was repulsed by machine-gun fire.

At first, after their capture, officers were allowed to remain with their men and care for them. According to all accounts, discipline of the Canadians remained at the highest level. But on Aug. 15, 1943, the officers above the rank of captains were kept at Argyle camp in Hong Kong, while the majority of the men were sent to Niigata and other camps in Japan.

Harsh Treatment

The men were subjected to punishment for any minor infractions, even for torn clothing, though needles and thread were not allowed them to make repairs. In several cases men were court-martialed and locked up for attempting to steal garden stuffs to supplement their rations.

On the other hand, guards frequently encouraged the men to steal salt from government railway cars for which they traded news or extra food.

Despite weather conditions, Canadians were forced to go without boots for several hours daily, and except at Omori camp, the prison commandants were brutal.

At Omori, the men said they were fairly well treated and men-

tioned the names of Sgts. Hitt and Kano, Sgt.-Major Ogori and Lieut. Morogishi, whom they called Gentleman Jim. Few men in any of the camps said they received more than two or three Red Cross parcels in the past few years.

Many of the men reported that their last mail from home was received more than a year ago.

Along with the Canadians I saw Monday, there were hundreds of British and American prisoners of war. It was a treat to see the fine care and treatment they were getting aboard the hospital ship.

Canadian prisoners of war will move homewards in three ways:

Those with lung trouble and unable to fly, as well as those who are seriously ill will remain aboard the hospital ship and sail to a United States port on their way home.

Those requiring only a few weeks of special feeding and care prior to traveling, will be sent to hospitals in the Marianas islands. All the remaining men will be sent by ship to the main reception camp at Manila for processing and to receive clothing before being shipped home. These men will return either by air or surface shipping.

On the basis of an ordinary private earning \$1.50 a day and no trades pay such a man in the Hong Kong force would have approximately \$2,050 in back pay coming to him. For many of the Hong Kong force who were specialists drawing trades pay, in most cases an extra 50 cents a day, their back pay will be correspondingly higher.

In addition, members of the Hong Kong force will be eligible for all the government's discharge payments, such as one month's pay and allowances and a war service gratuity of \$15.00 for every 30 days' service overseas.