

"GET OUT . . . I'LL HOLD THEM OFF"

Capt. Birkett Waited Alone for Japs and Death

By GORDON ROOT

(Tribune Far East Correspondent)

MANILA, Sept. 13 — "Those of you who can move get out of here. I'll hold them off as long as I can."

In a pill box on top of a hill at Hong Kong on Dec. 19, 1941, Capt. George Birkett of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, sacrificed his life so that members of his platoon could escape from the advancing Japanese.

Today a member of the platoon, Pte. Leonard Mulvaney, of Winnipeg, who arrived at the repatriation centre Wednesday from a prison camp in Japan, described the officer's heroism.

Wounded in the leg and hip as the platoon pushed up an enemy-held slope, Birkett steadfastly refused medical attention and continued to direct his men.

When they reached the top of the hill they found a pill box there unoccupied, and the platoon commander ordered the wounded men moved inside.

"As we were climbing the slope I noticed he was hit," said Mulvaney. "I went over to him and offered to treat him but he only told me to look after the other men.



CAPT. GEORGE BIRKETT
*Sacrificed himself to save
Grenadiers*

"Later when we were entering the pill box I saw blood running down his trousers and again offered to help him but he refused to take the time and climbed up on

the lookout on top of the pill box.

"Two shells burst near the lookout and the Japs started to move in on us.

"Get out of here while you can," said Capt. Birkett. "I'll hold them off."

"The last we saw of him he was kneeling on top of the pill box with two Bren guns in front of him waiting for the Nips," Mulvaney said.

"We never did hear from him again, but I can't see how he could have come out alive."

Before the battle started, continued Mulvaney, the men had considered Capt. Birkett too regimental and there was considerable complaint about his spit-and-polish soldiering, but after the battle at the top of the hill the 12 men out of a platoon of 30 who escaped were convinced he was a real soldier.

The eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Allan Birkett, 196 Glenwood Crescent, Capt. Birkett was listed as killed in action early in January, 1943. His widow and two small daughters live in Vancouver.

He was born in Winnipeg and was secretary-treasurer of the Northern Shirt Co., before he enlisted with the Grenadiers.

He was one of the earliest members of the Winnipeg Rowing club. At one time, he was a member of the Royal Bank staff in Winnipeg.