



Liberated from Niigata prison camp, PTE. LEONARD MULVANEY (left), today was looking for his twin brother, Tom (right), who was also taken prisoner with the Grenadiers at Hong Kong.

Sights of America Bewilder Grenadiers

By PETER INGLIS
(Special to The Winnipeg Tribune)

PORTLAND, Ore., Sept. 14.—Ten Canadian soldiers passed through Portland Thursday night, bound for homes which six weeks ago they doubted in their hearts they would ever see again, still not quite convinced they are free men, on free soil.

The ten are the first Canadian prisoners of war to return from Japan—the home coming vanguard of the remnants of two regiments which wrote their names in history in the first days of the Pacific war at Hong Kong.

Three of them are from the Winnipeg Grenadiers: Private Harold Atkinson, Private E. B. Arseneau and Private Ernest Buck. All three enlisted in Winnipeg.

The other seven are from the Royal Rifles of Canada: Cpl. J. C. Campbell, Elmvalle, Ont.; Cpl. Mel. Carter, Toronto; L/Cpl. J. M. Blacquire, Nauwigewauk, N.B.; Rifleman Floyd Babcock, Broadlands, Que.; Rifleman Alfred Priard, Gaspé, Que.; Rifleman Bert Comeau, Barochois, Que.; Rifleman John Baskin, Blacklands, N.B.

Last week they were in Japan. All of them but one were in the prison camp at Niigata, a name which will long be remembered in infamy. Cpl. Carter was at another camp a mile and a half away.

What happened to them in those camps they are not allowed to say.

To every question about their treatment they answer with the shy politeness of men not quite used to being from among their fellows and with the quietness of men who have learned patience through agony—they never raise their voices.

"Sorry, but we are under strict orders."

The most they will say is, "Yes, it was pretty rugged."

But a trace of what happened at Niigata is apparent without words.

It is in the yellowness of skin not quite hidden by tan; in flesh which has only within days ceased to be emaciated; in the eyes—especially in the eyes. They look at the world only tentatively still, then focus quickly inward again. They are men dreaming, still a little afraid they will wake and find themselves back behind wire.

Cpl. Campbell, tall and rangy: "Being free? I'm not quite used to it yet."

Cpl. Carter, short and red-moustached, wearing for a makeshift cap badge what looks suspiciously like a major's crown: "It's still pretty hard to put into words what it means to be free."

Pte. Buck: "I can hardly believe yet that I'm free."

They roll the word on their lips. They are savoring it still almost as much as they did, that first day, back around Aug. 2, when they glimpsed freedom for the first time.

Cpl. Campbell tells the story: "We were really free for three or four days before we were taken over by the Americans. We were left more or less on our own."

(They do not say—"the Japs" or "the Nips" or "the Japanese left us on our own." They never mention the Japanese.)

"The Americans dropped food and clothing to us by plane.

"These uniforms we are wearing (U.S. summer issue, with no markings, except for hoarded Canadian badges on a couple of the caps), were dropped to us by Superforts.

"Then, on the 5th, just a single American major came up, alone. After that we were taken over by the U.S. marines and taken to Tokyo.

"The Natz flew us to Oakland. "The Natz have been very good to us. We have had wonderful treatment from the Americans."

(He paused as they all shook hands in farewell with the U.S. military police sergeant who had ridden the train with them to Portland.)

"The Americans can't do enough for any of us. They have gone out of their way and really treated us like kings."

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BACK TO AMERICA

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Try and slip in a question about Niigata. At once the polite smile. "I'm sorry, we've been obligated not to talk about that."

They only know of one Vancouver man at Niigata; Howie Naylor.

As for their plans when they get home, they have non—except Private Buck, who is going to "sleep for a while." For all of them, getting home is a sufficient end in itself.

Thursday they had watched from train windows the Siskiyou mountains, which are free men's mountains as well as beautiful, and the valleys of mid-Oregon which are free men's valleys as well as rich farm land.

Thursday evening between trains they walked out of Portland's old red brick Union station in a tight group, never raising their voices among the boisterous crowds of homecoming servicemen. They clustered for a minute near a taxi, then thought better of it and started walking up town, stopping very carefully at cross streets, finding wonders in the windows of cheap stores—free men.