

Pte. Campbell Arrived Early-- His Mother Late

By JAMES C. ANDERSON

The boy was John Campbell, third Winnipeg Grenader to return home to Winnipeg.

He stood in the middle of a crowd in the C.P.R. depot relatives' waiting room, Tuesday evening.

He had a slow way of smiling and a quiet way of speaking. A tiny blond mustache struggled for existence on his upper lip. He looked well.

On his shoulders were bright new red and white flashes of the Grenadiers.

On his face was a stunned and bewildered expression.

His mother was not at the station to meet him.

The crowd around him consisted of men and women of the Grenadiers' Women's Auxiliary, the train reception committee, the Canadian Legion, the Provost Corps, and men of the Grenadiers' reserve battalion.

Pte. John Campbell's eyes searched the crowd. This was the moment he had waited and prayed for since December, 1941.

Someone said in an aside: "His mother isn't here."

A burly military policeman said, "God, what a tough break!"

A woman's voice said, "She'll be here. You're early. But we're here. Welcome back."

Pte. John Campbell turned his eyes on her, on the others clustered around him. He smiled his slow smile, said quietly:

"Yes, I know. Thank you. It is a wonderful feeling to be back."

The semi-quiet which had hung over the crowd was chased away by a babble of voices. People started explaining what had happened. John had been scheduled to arrive at 7.45. Instead, he arrived about 7.10.

The army had made arrangements to have his mother, Mrs. Wilford Campbell, ste. 15, Adanac apts., at the depot at 7.15 exactly.

A woman said: "I know Mrs. Campbell. I'm going to phone her."

Then suddenly, Mrs. Campbell was there. "Here she is. She's here now." The words started with those near the door, swept from lip to lip. Everyone moved back from Pte. John Campbell, left him stand-

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ing alone at the far side of the room.

A slight woman, with grey hair, glasses and a veil, was walking across the room. Pte. John Campbell turned and saw her. He stood perfectly still.

Every other motion and sound in the room was suspended. Only two people were really alive, were really there. The others were intruders, and knew it.

Mrs. Campbell walked slowly. Her body moved like a sleep walker's. All the feeling was concentrated in her face, in her eyes.

She was a mother, quietly and simply, welcoming her son.

There were no cries of joy or remarks from the boy or the mother when they met. They simply looked into each other's eyes. Then his arms went around her.

They kissed. It was not a "peck" or the brush of lips, but a kiss.

Two reserve Grenadiers moved two chairs to the window for them. They sat down, facing each other, his hands in hers.

They sat like that for a long time, oblivious to those watching them. And no one had the courage to intrude. Not until the reunion was complete.

Mrs. Campbell broke the spell herself. She became conscious of the crowd. She turned and looked at everyone. She smiled.

People clustered around; shook hands, asked questions. Most questions were about other Grenadiers, still over there, or now on their way back.

There was Mrs. M. Bowes, 185 Balmoral st., whose son, David, was killed in Hong Kong; Mrs. R. Morrow, North Kildonan, whose son, Cpl. Desmond, is now returning; Mrs. Trist, wife of Lt.-Col. George Trist, of the Grenadiers.

There were many others, all eager for news of loved ones. All

anxious to merely touch someone who had seen them recently.

You could tell that by the way they clung to Pte. Campbell's hand; the way they clung to the hands of the other Winnipeg Grenadiers and Royal Rifles men who passed through the station Tuesday.

It was like a bond between them.

Someone said to Mrs. Campbell: "What are you going to do tonight? Where are you going?"

She smiled. "Where do you think? Home."

No other question was asked.

To a Tribune reporter, Mrs. Campbell said: "I've been all alone for the last six years. This is a wonderful feeling. No, my husband is dead. I've two sons. The other is in England."

In between replying to questions that were flung at him from every side, Pte. John Campbell told of a few of his experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese.

"You know what the other fellows have told you," he said, "well, it was like that. Just like that. It was tough.

"I was in Sendai camp. Sure, lots of us got beat up. Slapping was just an everyday occurrence.

"Yes, we had to work hard. Some days we thought we'd just not live. It was, well . . ." he grinned . . . "you can't know how nice it is to be home."

That was how the other Winnipeg Grenadiers and Royal Rifle men from Eastern Canada felt.

Pte. Arseneau, of Fort Frances, was so excited that little beads of sweat formed over his face. "I was in Niigata," he said. "Brother, you'll never know what that was like."

Rfn. J. F. Aumont, Barrie, Ont., was the first of the repatriated prisoners to arrive in Winnipeg Tuesday. His wish was to ride once again in "just an ordinary passenger car."

Hon. Major W. Askey, of All Saints' church, offered his, and Rfn. Aumont rode down Portage ave. Major Askey, padre with the Grenadiers in Jamaica, was on hand to meet all the men returning and ask after old friends.

Other Royal Rifle men passing through, Tuesday, were W. Pappas, Jack Beebe, G. A. Shaw, Alfred Arseneault, L. T. S. Doull, S. G. Allison.

Arseneault said: "I was an orderly in our hospital. Major Crawford was in charge and Capt. Reid worked with him.

"It was pretty terrible. The men were dying by the scores. We didn't have any serum. Nothing. All we had to give 'em was hot water."

Shaw had a patch over his right eye. "No, not from getting beat up, just not enough to eat. Left it weak," he said.

"The other boys will soon be coming back," these men replied to questions. "Don't know how long it'll take them, but they'll probably come by boat. Took us a month going over, but it won't take them that long."