

**"I'D LIKE TO SEE
ALL JAPAN UNDER SEA"**

52 Grenadiers Reach Vancouver

By PETER INGLIS

(Special to The Winnipeg Tribune)

VANCOUVER, Sept. 25 — Fifty-two veterans of the Winnipeg Grenadiers who stepped Monday afternoon from the train which had brought them from San Francisco into a riot of blaring bands, welcoming committees and cheering citizens here find Canada is all they had dreamed of during almost four years of Japanese captivity except for one thing.

They detect a trace of a "let's not be beastly to the Japs" attitude on the part of the public, and it worries them.

What most of them think about the future treatment of Japan is best summed up by a Winnipegger who asks to remain anonymous because he doesn't want his family to know how much captivity has changed him:

"The only further news I want out of Japan is that there's been one hell of a big earthquake and the whole place has gone under the sea."

He and the other Grenadiers maintain that the Japanese are simply not people in the white man's sense of the word. In support of their argument they quote not only the incredible scorn for human life and the cruelty they all personally experienced, but the utter inconsistency of much that they saw done by the Japanese.

They have a host of almost unbelievable stories to back up their thesis.

There's, for instance, the episode of the singing lesson, as recounted by Pte. James Furey of Sidney, Man.; for the first 18 months after their capture at Hong Kong they were kept in a former Japanese barracks nearby.

"The commandant told us we had to learn Japanese and obey orders given in Japanese. We had to. It was that or nothing, so we picked it up fast. We can all talk Japanese of a sort.

"So then one night he asked if there were any Canadians who could sing. We knew it meant grief so nobody volunteered.

"He insisted, so the sergeant-major picked out four men and told them to volunteer.

"They were handed a song sheet written in Japanese spelled out into English characters and an old cracked record of the tune and told they had a day to learn it.

"They practised away in every spare moment. The next day the commandant made them stand up in front of everybody and sing. Every time they got a note wrong he would beat them with his sword. One man was beaten unconscious."

And then there is the treatment for malnutrition and its resultant sores, as officially ordered by the Japanese army and practised on the Japanese themselves as well as the Canadians.

Here is the story as pieced together by Sgt. Thomas Marsn of St. Vital, and others:

When a man came down with malnutrition, the Japanese medical officers would place piles of powder on nine ritualistically chosen spots on his body. Some of the Winnipeggers claimed the powder was sulphur, others said it was a holy concoction.

The powder was then lit, it burned slowly and the victim writhed in agony. This treatment was repeated 21 times, whereupon the man was declared "cured" of his malnutrition—except for permanent scars and in some cases gangrenous wounds that killed him.

Some of the repatriates claimed Canadian medical officers were forced at the threat of death to administer this treatment.

The Grenadiers managed to laugh in retrospect at these two stories.

The stories at which they do not laugh—the torture which has burned most deeply into them—was what they actually watched done to parcels and letters from home destined for them.

They watched the Japanese open Red Cross parcels, eat part of the contents and feed the rest to the pigs. "The pigs were better fed than we were."

They were given forms on which to write home. One of them happened one day into the Japanese orderly room and saw these letters, which they had been writing weekly for a year past, all neatly stacked up in a corner, unsorted. They watched the Japanese burn incoming mail rather than bother sorting it.

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As for the Japanese disregard for human life, they report cases of Japanese officers kicking off the heads of passing Chinese for no other reason than to show how sharp their swords were.

Japanese inconsistency shows up again in another story of the early days at Hong Kong.

There Canadians were dying by scores from diphtheria, and the Japanese high command apparently sent down word to the prison authorities that the death rate must be cut.

To the camp commandant ordered all the Canadian medical orderlies to parade in front of him, abused them for neglecting their fellow soldiers (when they had been risking their lives nursing them without serum or disinfectant of any sort), then beat them all with his sword.

Then he called on any man who maintained he had no shirked his duty to step forward. Every man stepped forward.

The commandant grew livid and threatened to beat anybody who repeated the claim. He asked the question again and again every man stepped forward.

With the commandant almost in a paroxysm, the Canadian in charge of the medical orderlies ordered them not to move when the question was asked a third time.

One man didn't hear him, and stepped forward alone.

"We just looked at him and thought, 'poor guy, you've had it.' So the Jap patted him on the back and said, 'You are a brave man' and gave him a deck of cigarettes."

Cigarettes were themselves a mild instrument of torture. In some camps the Winnipeggers received three a day, in some one a day—thin, unpalatable Japanese cigarettes. The guards would taunt them by smoking only half an inch of cigarette, then grinding the rest into the ground with their heels.

But the Canadians had their revenge when American Superfortresses came over to drop supplies.

"It fairly rained cigarettes. Cartons of them were dropping all over the place. By then the Japs' own supplies had run out. We would stand there and puff and puff and puff, and they'd be watching us goggle-eyed."

Not all their stories have such a happy ending. Four Winnipeggers, Sgt. John Payne, Lt. Cpl. Bezrowski and Ptes. Percy Ellis and Johnny Adams, escaped from the Hong Kong prison. Their fellows have never heard of them since, but they suffered for the escape.

A week later the Japanese announced two more men were missing. They made the Grenadiers stand at attention all day in the sun. Many of the men were still suffering from wounds.

All were starving and some had temperatures as high as 104 degrees.

In the evening the Japs dismissed the parade, remarking quite casually that everybody was accounted for and it had been a clerical error.

When Japan's surrender came, the Grenadiers were at Sendai, in the north of Japan, working in coal mines.

They stayed there for some time, having liberated themselves, bartering off Japanese equipment to the neighboring farmers for chickens.

Then still unescorted, they took a train to Yokohama. At Yokohama station they saw their first American and their first white woman.

Sgt. Marsh tells the story:

"I looked out of the train window and saw an American soldier. I just jumped right through the window and pounded him on the back. When he finally managed to get his cap straightened I found he was a captain.

"Up ahead of me the boys were pushing to get off the station platform, but something was holding back the head of the line.

"I pushed my way forward to see what was happening.

"It was a beautiful blonde WAC. She was giving out cigarettes and chewing gum, and she couldn't understand why the boys wouldn't speak to her.

"They just stood there, a little way from her, with their mouths open, they were scared stiff."

The final word on the joys of liberation comes from Pte. John D. Pollock of Winnipeg:

"When they took us on the battleship Iowa in Tokyo I ate 10 eggs for breakfast, and 10 pieces of toast, and more bacon than I can remember."

He and the others had at various times eaten grasshoppers, snails, limpets, snakes, dog-meat, pumpkin tops and a fantastic variety of other supposed foods.

Which is why it is not a good idea to complain of Canada's present "terrible" meat rationing in their hearing.

Here are some of the remarks of other Grenadiers in the draft:

Pte. George H. Morgan, of Kenora: "You cannot say how it feels to be getting home. There aren't any words to express it."

Pte. Morgan told of the death of Lt. Rusty Young, one-time Winnipeg radio announcer, at Hong Kong.

"He used to announce that, Hi, Ho Silver program. That's what he was shouting when he died."

Pte. John D. Pollock's homecoming is a tragic one. In San Francisco, he had a phone call from his mother, who lives on Alverstone st., Winnipeg, saying his father had died. I guess I walked about 20 blocks that night," he said.

Pte. R. Daisell, 733 McGee st., Winnipeg: "Before Hong Kong I weighed 150 pounds. I was down to 95 in Japan. I've put on 15 or 20 pounds since we left camp. I'd like to say the Americans really gave us a treat right through."

Pte. George E. Stoddell, Winnipeg: "It's pretty hard to believe we are going home. The Japs should be turned over to the Russians, especially the Chinese."

Sgt. Albert Cox, and Lt. Cpl. Alfred Cox, of Winnipeg, who are brothers: "We really can't describe how we feel." Both are wearing U.S. army jackets.

Marine corps trousers and navy shoes. Sgt. Cox hopes to go back to his old job with the Fort Garry Motor body works. His brother has no plans yet.

From San Francisco, they phoned their mother, Mrs. Alice Cox, of 608 Balmoral st., and "she just couldn't believe it was really us."

Pte. Gordon A. Cole, 508 Church ave., Winnipeg: "I don't know what to say. I'm just dying to get home. Anything to get home."

Cpl. Alexander Henderson, 162 MacIntosh ave., Winnipeg: "Right now it's all happened so fast, we can't believe it. When we get nearer Winnipeg we will work up some excitement."

Pte. Fred A. Mack, 625 Anderson ave., Winnipeg: "It's like the end of a long nightmare. You can't really tell if it was a dream or not."

Pte. Kenneth McClelland, 819 Dundas st., Winnipeg: "I don't know what I'm going to do, when I am discharged. You see, I am still pretty young. I'm only 29. I think there was one fellow younger than me in the outfit."

Pte. Charles J. Birch, 395 Banerman ave., Winnipeg: "I was down to 130 pounds, 57 pounds underweight. I'm just under now." He wanted to know if Ernie Kline still worked for The Tribune.

But it was a Vancouver soldier who really summed up what the men feel: "We're just like Rip Van Winkle."