

Homecoming an Unreal Miracle

Grenadiers Reunited On North Bound Train

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(Special to The Winnipeg Tribune)

ON A NORTH-BOUND TRAIN IN OREGON, Oct. 4—This is the story of a train ride—the story of a 19-car special carrying 360 Canadians home after four years of Hell.

Outside the window the pleasant valley of mid-Oregon are rolling back, but to Signalman Walter Jenkins, a Victoria man, the scenery "still looks like a moving picture." And he speaks for all of them. They are remembering Shamsupiro camp at Hong Kong; Sendait, Niigata, Tehrumeh, Ohashi, Kaimishi, Kawasaki, Shinagawa, Oyama in Japan. They are names that run back and forth through the 16 sleepers, the two diners, the Canadian hospital car that make up this train.

Everywhere there are voices asking "What happened to Atkinson?"; "What camp were you guys in?"; voices explaining "Well, for Pete's sake, Bill, we heard at Niigata that you'd been killed."

Last night was reunion night. On this train are two shiploads of repatriates. The first docked at San Francisco on Tuesday, the second Wednesday. One lot is made up of men who were shifted to the camps in Japan. All evening men were searching through the cars, meeting friends they had not seen since the two groups were separated at Hong Kong more than two years ago. But to all of them this home coming is still an unreal miracle.

Says Sgt. Gordon McLellan of Winnipeg: "I still don't believe it when I walk down a street. I keep expecting a Jap to pop up and stop me."

When this train pulls out of Oakland pier station Wednesday evening it passed alongside a troop train carrying U.S. Japanese soldiers. The Japanese waved gaily from the windows. The Canadians became very quiet. They did not wave.

Box cars parked on sidings along the way intrigue these Canadians. Sgt. Bob Manchester, Winnipeg, and two of the other men want to get out and try pushing the cars, to see how they compare with the smaller Japanese variety. They pushed plenty of box cars at the Niigata camp.

Passing houses fascinated them. "Look, real houses, not made of paper," they shout.

So do automobiles. The 1941 and 1942 models stopped at crossings waiting for the train to go by are "are these slick new cars" to them.

They have a lot of catching up to do. They ask endless questions about Canada, about what a civilian suit will cost them, about what the Canadian Army did in Europe and what casualties it suffered; what the R.C.A.F.'s Lancasters and Mosquitos look like; and, very shyly, what the people at home think of the fight they put up at Hong Kong.

Pte. John McPherson of Roseisle, Man., is in the hospital car with his arm in a cast. It, plus an ankle and a rib, was broken in an accident in the shipyard boiler shop at Kawasake, between Yokohama and Tokyo, where the Japanese put him to work. There he managed to drill a lot of crooked holes and break a lot of drills and enjoyed doing it, even if cost him beatings for "clumsiness."

L/Cpl. Paul Mondor, a Saskatchewan man in the Winnipeg Grenadiers, is also in the hospital car with good cause to dislike the Japanese. He has a strained heart and suspected tuberculosis, the results of diphtheria at Hong Kong, followed by starvation and overwork in the surface mine slave camp at Oyama near Osaka.

"It was pretty tough there," he says, "with the Nips stealing most of our food. What little Red Cross supplies came through, we got perhaps a fifth of them." As for the future treatment of the Japanese, he would like to see them "get the same rations we got. The meat was mostly animal guts and we were real glad when they came in. We used to catch a few frogs and roast them whole."

Capt. D. A. Golden, 548 Burrows ave., Winnipeg, has just paused on his way through the car and asked to be remembered to friends on The Tribune. Capt. Golden is adjutant of the Winnipeg Grenadiers. Capt. Uriah Laite, of Vancouver, the Grenadiers' chaplain.

is working up and down the length of the train renewing acquaintances with men he has not seen since they were moved from Hong Kong to Japan.

Before dawn Friday this train will be in Seattle and the repats will take ship to Victoria, bound for Gordon Head camp, where they will be paid, medically examined and re-uniformed before they leave for home on 42 days' leave. In the meantime, their comfort is being looked after by Stuart L. Hewer, of Vancouver, assistant commissioner of the Canadian Red Cross B.C. division who distributes Canadian cigaretets and fruit and arranges for the men to send telegrams home.

And for humor there is the dining car steward who made a little speech at the first meal last night regretting the absence of fish-head soup and rice from the menu. But nobody laughed very much. Memories of that diet are still too fresh.