

Hong Kong Veterans' Association of Canada

Quebec-Maritimes Branch

December, 1996

Banjo Gossip Newsletter 4.2 Bamboo Telegraph

CHRISTMAS, 1996

Who would have thought that some of us lucky ones would have got this far? Although our numbers are thinning and those of us who are left are getting more and more decrepit, we still retain the old fighting spirit. I count myself very lucky when I attend the funerals of friends much younger and who have never, to my knowledge, suffered any hardships. As I have often mentioned, Christmas is a difficult time for me, when I think of the events of 55 years ago and the comrades I lost up to December 25, and the next 44 months. In spite of all that, I take this opportunity to wish you, one and all, the merriest of Christmas with family and friends, and the best of good health and good fortune in 1997.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING

The National Council of the Hong Kong Veterans' Association met in Winnipeg on October 23, 24, and finished up on October 25. The National Council meets once a year, at the National Convention, and on the year in between National Conventions, in Winnipeg. In Winnipeg because of its central location. The meeting is timed to coincide with the Manitoba Branch annual get-together, and it gives members of the council an opportunity to see old friends from other parts of Canada. As President of the Quebec-Maritimes Branch, and also as second vice-president of the Council, I attended the meetings. I was accompanied by Bob Barter, our Secretary of Quebec-Maritimes Branch.

The usual business was discussed along with a report from Derrill Henderson and Lora Wachtendorf on the progress of the Commemorative Association. Under their leadership and the enthusiastic support of the sons and daughters across Canada, the Association is flourishing. I think that we can be assured that the memory of Hong Kong will live for a long time in the minds of Canadians.

An important decision was reached regarding the Northern Saskatchewan-Alberta Branch. Because of dwindling numbers the Branch asked to be amalgamated with the Southern Saskatchewan-Alberta Branch, and this transaction was finalized at the meeting.

I sadly report that President of the Manitoba Branch, Frank Harding, who was gravely ill, and couldn't attend the meeting, has now passed away. Frank had been President of the Branch for a number of years, and was co-chairman of the latest pilgrimage to Hong Kong.

NATIONAL CONVENTION, 1997

Fred Mason of the Ontario Branch is chairman of the 1997 National Convention. At the meeting he reported that the Convention will take place at the Regal Constellation Hotel, 900 Dixon Road, Etobicoke, Toronto, M9W1J7, Hotel Direct (800) 268-4838 or (416) 675-1500. Guest Fax (416) 675-1737. 200 rooms are being held for Hong Kong Veterans until August 3, 1997. The room rates have been reduced to: Standard, \$85.00, Premium, \$90.00, and Suites \$105.00. All rooms are plus tax and parking is free. Along with this newsletter you will find forms pertaining to the Convention. One form is for Veterans or widows, and the other is for sons/daughters. Please make it easier for Fred by filling them out and returning them as soon as possible so that

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he can move along with his plans. He has to make commitments for services well in advance of the Convention date, so he has to have information on who is attending. Sounds reasonable. Please co-operate.

PERSONALITY

I started this feature some time back, but it has not appeared in the last couple of letters. I revive it now with mention of a personality who should have appeared on these pages long ago, none other than Roger Cyr.

ROGER CYR has been our National President for the past number of years, taking over after the passing of Ken Gaudin, and the caretaker presidency of John Stroud. Roger has represented his comrades efficiently whenever he was called upon. His contacts with senior civil servants, his expertise in negotiation, born of long years in personnel management, both in government and in the private sector, have fitted him for the leadership which he so ably displays on our behalf. Because he lives in Ottawa, he has the advantage of being close to the action. Although failing health has curtailed his activities to some extent, he is still there when he is needed. Our gains in recent years can largely be attributed to Roger's efforts.

BIOKI

I have a long list this time of members who are currently ill and whose illness has been reported to me. I'll start with Lawrence Rattie, who has had the usual old man's problem with some complications. I spoke with him recently and he is in good spirits and expecting more treatment at the Montreal General Hospital.

Bill MacWhirter's cancer has been arrested and he looks well. He has sold out his property in Florida and won't be going there this winter.

Chris Webb has been feeling down lately. If you live near him perhaps you could visit him.

Laurie MacKay is still soldiering on despite his cancer.

I haven't heard from Nap Leblanc for a while, but we know that he was seriously ill in Halifax after the reunion. News of his condition would be welcome.

Charlie Campbell gets out with wife Hazel in the car from time to time.

Richard Keays drives his car along with wife Nellie.

Henry Lyons and Isabel are pretty well after their ordeal. They have a new car to replace the one demolished in the accident.

Glenford Gregoire is at home and feeling not too badly, according to reports.

Ken Court remains in the extended care unit in the Campbellton Regional Hospital.

Albert Russell has undergone surgery for a double hernia.

Roger Cyr has had more surgery in Ottawa and is now on the mend at home. He is hard to keep down!

Since I started this, I have to report that Edwina, my wife is again in intensive care in the hospital. She is undergoing observation for heart problems again and I have my fingers crossed.

LAST POST

On October 21 I received a card from Bill Tuppert, telling me that he had cancer. Bill died on November 24.

John Killoran, who lived in Sarnia, died on October 8.

John Laing died in Halifax since our reunion there last summer.

In my last letter I neglected to mention that Walter Jenkins died in Victoria. Walter was one of the strengths of the BC Branch and a staunch supporter of Hong Kong Veterans in general.

Frank Harding, mentioned above, attended the dinner at the Manitoba Branch Reunion. He was in a wheelchair and attached to an oxygen bottle. He passed away shortly after the reunion.

We say goodbye also to John Fonseca of the HKVDC, Cliff Settee, Frank Christenson, and Bill Savage of the Manitoba Branch, Cliff Newcomb and Charlie Bamendine of BC Branch.

December 4 issue of the Sherbrooke Record reports the death of René Bédard of Sawyerville, Québec. Comrade René was 84.

Mike Thompson will be buried on December 12 in his native Campbellton. Mike was severely wounded in the battle and had a crippled arm as a result.

These are the deaths reported up until December 10.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

DONATION

Because of Lawrence's illness, I have nothing to report in this item, although I know that there have been some donations. They will be reported in due time. You can expect a full report in the next newsletter. Please note an error in my last letter. I reported a donation from Mrs. Barbara Harvey. That should read Barbara HARDY. Sorry about that, Barbara.

CORRESPONDENCE

Very few letters this time also. From Bill Tuppert, Lionel Hurd, Lionel Speller, Jean Killoran, Phyllis Salter, Harold Englehart. Kay and Glen Mann always send me a raft of material, newspaper clippings, jokes and riddles, too numerous to reproduce here but very enjoyable to read. They will come in handy some time. Christmas cards from Charlie and Cecile Thompson, Bonnie Vincent, Pat and Pierrette Poirier, Robert Champagne, Kay and Lionel Hurd, Lo and Roger Cyr, Vivian and Derrill Henderson. Because I have to get this ready and in the mail before Christmas, this report does not go beyond today's date, December 10.

MILESTONES

Our local weekly newspaper, SPEC, recently printed a picture and a report of the 50th wedding anniversary of HK Vet Bruce and Rena Cadoret. Rena is the daughter of HK Vet Irvine Doody.

The Cadorets live in Napanee, Ontario.

Are there any others? Please let me know.

VIDEO-VIDEO-VIDEO

The Comemorative Committee is planning to make a video (English and French versions) of interviews with Hong Kong Vets. If you are interested in putting in your two cents worth, that is, if you would like to be interviewed, please let me or Derrill Henderson know soon. If you are shy (like me) and don't feel like being seen on tape, think of what it might mean to your children and grandchildren after you're gone. Taping will be done in March.

TRIVIA

Schoolboy howlers

The general direction of the Alps is up.

Unleaven bread is bread made without any ingredients.

A virgin forest is a forest in which the hand of man has never set foot.

Acrimony is what a man gives his divorced wife.

From the Comic Dictionary

Accoustic--An instrument used in shooting pool.

Adult-- A person who has stopped growing at both ends and started growing in the middle.

Advertising--A technique that makes you think you've longed all your life for something you've never heard of before.

Anatomy-- Something that everybody has but it looks better on a girl.

And finally, some burning wit from the Old Farmer's Almanac of 1856:

Wit is brushwood, judgement is timber: the former makes the brightest flame, but the latter makes the most lasting heat.

PORK STEW

A long time ago I penned the tale which I am about to bore you with, in the hope that someday I would write a book, and include this in one of the chapters. As the years progress, that prospect looks less and less promising, so I will relate it to you now.

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In the year of 1943, perhaps, someone had conned the Japs into giving us a little pig to raise. Don't ask me where the extra food came from to feed the pig, because we had little enough for ourselves. However, the plan was to kill the animal at Christmas time and cook him for our Christmas dinner. You can imagine how a little pig could feed probably 2000 starving prisoners! The long-awaited meal finally arrived, and I can remember looking down into a glorious pork stew in my mess tin. It was one and one quarter inches deep, no lean meat, but bits of rind with a few bristles, floating around in a greyish, oily liquid. I had saved some salt, and carefully picked all the little balls of mud out of it. I fully intended to enjoy this meal.

Well, I did. Like everyone else I sat on the edge of my bed and silently savoured this delicious stew. Then, like everyone else, I scrubbed out my dish with sand and water, hung it up over my bed, and crawled in and went to sleep.

During the night I awoke with an uneasy, urgent feeling, and before long I realized that a system accustomed for so long to a diet of rice and boiled greens, would most likely react violently to a sudden dose of "fat" food.

I got to my feet, slipped on my wooden clogs and my old KD jacket, and set out with all muscles clenched. Now, we had a curfew in the camp. After dark, no one was allowed outside of the huts, but the Jap quarter guards recognized certain emergencies, and they used to allow us to go to the latrines if necessary. This particular night it was really dark, so dark that I couldn't see anything when I stepped outside. It was also cold; I would guess near 40 degrees, which is pretty cold when all you have on is a fandochi and a cotton army jacket.

The darkness didn't bother me. I knew the way to the latrine, about 250 steps away, and I knew that I had to cross over the cement floor of a burnt-out building, and just beyond, between that and the showers, there was a sweet potato patch. Fifty paces beyond the showers lay the object of my journey.

I had hardly taken ten steps when something hard and cold caught me across the throat, and I heard "KURA!" Those Japs moved as silently as mice on their rubber soled sneakers. My clenched muscles faltered a little, but I recovered before much was lost, and answered "Benjoe". Benjoe means "latrine", and should never be confused with any stringed instrument, especially if you are in a hurry.

After a few more "kuras" from the guard and "benjoe, bioki, dommy, dommy" from me, I was allowed to move on. I crossed the old cement floor safely and headed for the potato patch, a little faster now, because I had lost precious time with the guard, and my needs were becoming more pressing. Suddenly, my wooden clogs struck something unfamiliar, and I realized that the owner of the potatoes had chosen that day to dig them up. My muscles failed me again, but again I was able to recover enough to make the rest of the trip worthwhile. I decided that the best thing to do was to make a detour around the patch rather than risk stumbling through the middle.

I went by the showers at a fast clip and headed into the home stretch. Only 40 or 50 yards to go! By the time I reached the door of the latrine I was breathing a sigh of relief.

The latrine, you'll probably remember, was a long, narrow building, with about twelve or fifteen stalls, each about three feet wide, on each side of an aisle that ran the full length. Each stall had a supporting bar, and under the bar was placed the honey bucket. All of the stalls were not in use, and the practice was to remove the buckets daily, dump them out, wash the floor on that side and place the buckets on the other side. The next day the latrine detail would reverse the process. The vacant stalls would be barred off with a strand of barbed wire, leaving only the operating stalls open. This arrangement was further complicated by the fact that not all of the stalls were in use,

only about six of them. Three or four stalls on each end of each row were permanently barred off, so that only five or six on each side were in regular use.

In my anxiety, as I turned into the pitch-black interior of the latrine, I bolted immediately for what I thought was the side in use for that day. I ran into a strand of barbed wire, and realized my mistake, but not before I suffered another minor mishap in my fandochi. I turned to the other side, sure at last that I would be able to enjoy a release from my torture. To my consternation, I again ran into another strand of wire. My weakened muscles were no longer able to cope, and I soon had evidence that I might as well have given up in the first place and saved myself a long and harrowing trip.

Only then did I begin to understand why I hadn't been able to find an open stall. I just hadn't gone far enough into the latrine and had bounced back and forth between the stalls that were permanently barred off. At any rate, the job was done, and there was no use sitting down in the dark to think about what might have been..

I still had a problem, of course. I couldn't go back to bed in the condition in which I found myself, so I started the uncomfortable walk back to the showers. Showering in cold water in 40 degree temperature, in the dark, in a building with no windows, is even less comfortable. In the interest of conserving body heat, I showered only the parts where the need was greatest, no mean feat, in the dark, with no soap, and only an old army jacket to dry myself with.

STOP THE PRESS!!!

This is the news of at least the decade! Arnold Ross, our First Vice-President, is about to be married! The lucky girl is Laura Snow, whom he has been courting for several years now. I don't have any details as to time and place, but I presume that it is to be soon. Arnold has received just about every honour and award that his many affiliations could bestow on him, from the Legion MSM and Palm Leaf to the Hong Kong Veterans Merit Award, and from the Rotary Club Paul Harris Fellowship to the 125th Canadian Anniversary Medal. Nobody deserves a fine lady like Laura more than Arnold does. We wish them all the happiness that life can provide.

CLAIM FOR SLAVE LABOUR

Under the "Opinions" headline in December 3 Sherbrooke Record, and I'm sure you've read it in other papers as well, there is a letter from our Patron, Clifford Chadderton, carrying the torch once more in defence of our claim. In his letter, Comrade Chadderton outlines briefly our difficulties at the hands of the Japanese, and asks for support from the population in general. The suggestion is to ask the Canadian Government to pay \$18.00 a day to the survivors, and then petition the Japanese to reimburse. "The cost would be \$20,349,000 or \$23,940 to each veteran or widow."

He stresses the importance of contacting your MP to voice your opinion to add clout to the presentation by our representatives to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Let's do it. We have nothing to lose and plenty to gain!

NEWS FROM OTHER BRANCHES

Lionel Speller has put out a letter in October and another in November. Nice going, Lionel. I haven't received one from John Stroud lately, but one is due from him any time now. * Angus McRitchie's last bulletin was dated August. I'm sure he has his hands full now since the passing of President Frank. No news yet as to who will take over the responsibility of the Manitoba Branch.

* Yesterday John Stroud's letter came, along with some newspaper clippings. Douglas Fisher in the Toronto Sun, reports the publication of a book by Dave McIntosh, "Hell on Earth", subtitled, "Aging Faster, Dying Sooner: Canadian Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II (McGraw-Hill Ryerson) It is highly recommended reading.

DUES

Because of Lawrence's illness, I haven't received a recent report on dues paid. However, if you haven't paid for 1996-97, (check your wallet for a membership card), please send \$15.00 to Lawrence Rattie, 508 Thorncrest, Dorval, QC, H9P 2M6.

TRIVIA

I have a book called "The Book of Lists". It contains all sorts of lists from Elizabeth Taylor's husbands to Hitler's generals. The following is a list of Henny Youngman's 10 favourite one-liners:

1. Take my wife--please.
2. My grandson, 22 years old, keeps complaining about headaches. I've told him 1000 times, "Larry, when you get out of bed, it's feet first."
3. My grandson was so ugly when he was born that the doctor slapped his mother.
4. I once wanted to become an atheist, but I gave up. They have no holidays.
5. A doctor gave a man 6 months to live. He couldn't pay his bill, so he gave him another 6 months.
7. I made a killing in the stock market. I shot my broker.
8. When I go to Israel in Milton Berle's honour, I will have a tree uprooted.
9. My wife is a light eater. As soon as it is light, she starts eating.
10. I said to my wife, "Where do you want to go for your anniversary?" She said, "I want to go somewhere I've never been before." I said, "Try the kitchen."

That's all for now, friends. Be good to each other, and may God bless.

Philip