

Time dims not the achievements of the brave,
but their worth shines steadfast from the grave.

(Plaque on Sir Arthur Currie Memorial Gymnasium, McGill)

Hong Kong Veterans Association Quebec-Maritimes Branch

Banjo Gossip Newsletter 8.2
Bamboo Telegraph
December 2000

Hello Comrades and friends.

Much to write about this time, starting with the National Council meeting in Winnipeg and the Manitoba Branch Reunion dinner-dance.

Secretary Bob Barter and I attended the two day meeting at the Holiday Inn Airport West, and stayed for the dinner-dance on Saturday evening.

The meeting, chaired by President Harry Atkinson, centered mainly around the proposed merger of the HKVA and the HKVCA in Winnipeg in August of next year.

There are many important decisions to be made before the merger becomes final, and the HK Veteran members of the Quebec-Maritimes Branch will be receiving more news about that in the new year.

Faye Lavell, Director, National Service Bureau of the War Amps attended the Friday meeting and explained the work of her office in obtaining attendance allowance and exceptional incapacity allowance.

The main spring of the Manitoba reunion was, as usual, Juliette Lafortune, daughter of Marcel, who has all the energy and drive required to organize and run such a successful party.

GANDER

Twenty Hong Kong Veterans attended a very moving ceremony in Ottawa on October 27. It was to attend the posthumous award of the Dicken Medal to our dog Gander.

To provide a very sketchy background, let me just say for the information of those who do not know the story, Gander was the RRC mascot who picked up a Japanese grenade and ran off, thus saving the lives of some of the defenders at Lye Mun.

The Dicken Medal is awarded for acts of bravery by animals in battle, by the Peoples' Dispensary for Sick Animals in England.

In the case of Gander, a few dedicated persons working in the Canadian War Museum, researched and uncovered the whole story of Gander, and were instrumental in the final decision to give the medal to the memory of the dog.

I listed the names of HK Vets attending, from memory after I got back from Ottawa. I'll print them here, and if I have forgotten anyone, please forgive.

Ken Ewing, Al Babin, Pat Poirier, Paul Dallain, Ossie Clark, Dempsey Syvret, George MacDonell, Ray Smith, Bob Olscamp, Vic Bujold, Roger Cyr, Harry Atkinson, Bob Clayton, Fred Chapman, Reg Law, Fred Kelly, Henry Lyons, Bob Barter, Arnold Ross, Phil Doddridge.

The ceremony took place at the official residence of Sir Andrew and Lady Sarah Burns, British High Commissioner, and the presentation was made by Sir Rolland Guy who travelled from England for that purpose. Fred Kelly was the official recipient, having been the keeper of the dog until his death, and the medal was handed over to the manager of the Canadian War Museum to be displayed along with the citation. Very moving, very gratifying. Another chapter closed.

George MacDonell has written a detailed account of the event. I'm sure he would agree to circulating it to whomever wished to read it. If you wish to have a copy, let me know and I'll clear it with George, and send you a photocopy.

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ELECTRIC FEET

The horrors of "electric feet" seem to have returned, at least to Fred Chapman. Fred was planning to go on the pilgrimage to Japan and Hong Kong, but had to withdraw because of severe pain in his feet, akin to that old scourge of the prison camps. His doctor prescribed a new drug called "gabapentin", which reduces the pain. God forbid that more of us should develop "sore feet" again, but if you do, perhaps you should ask your doctor about gabapentin. This information comes from Fred through Derrill. Thanks.

INFORMATION REQUESTED

Cpl Alger Collins, E30129, Royal Rifles of Canada, was killed at Stone Hill on December 23, 1941. His brother, Gordon, is anxious to know more about Alger, and would like to hear from anyone who knew his brother. If you knew Alger Collins, or know anything about the circumstances surrounding his death, please get in touch with: Gordon Collins, Apt. 3, 1803 Park Avenue, London, ON, N5W 2J6, tel. 519-453-1056, fax: 519-453-7133. I'm sure he would be grateful.

PS. While in Hong Kong this month I obtained a rubbing of his name on the Monument at Sai Wan Cemetery. I'll send it to his brother.

LAST POST

Since the last newsletter, I sadly report the passing of the following Comrades:

J.M. (Jack) Blaquiére, RRC

Royce (Bud) Sweet, RRC

Bernard Castonguay, RRC

Lloyd (Tex) Cole, RRC

Clarence Burgess, RCOC

Harry Hladych, WG

Joseph (John) Miller, WG

Adam Schnell, WG

James Moar, WG.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

ANOTHER POEM FROM LIONEL

God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways,
All our lives through;
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain;

But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love... Lionel Speller

PILGRIMAGE: HONG KONG/JAPAN

Veterans Affairs Canada and the many devoted members of VAC staff headed by John Zarecki, did a fantastic job of organizing and conducting what was a most interesting pilgrimage. You can find it all on the Veterans Affairs web site at www.vac.acc.gc.ca. The computer experts did a great job in sending back home detailed accounts of the pilgrimage, including photos as well as Real Audio and Real Video.

For me, and for all of us HK Vets, it was an emotional journey back in time. We visited many of the battlefields and memorial sites. I was especially grateful to locate the spot where "D" Company of the RRC was headquartered and the spot where I, for one, first encountered Japanese soldiers. The sites where the prison camps were located in Hong Kong and Kowloon, of course, have now become occupied by high rise buildings, and are not recognizable at all.

Cenotaph: from the Greek "kenos" + "taphos", meaning "empty tomb"

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Ceremonies were held at Sai Wan Hill, Sai Wan War cemetery, Stanley Military Cemetery, Lawson's Bunker at Wong Nei Chong Gap, and Jardine's Lookout on Mt. Butler. Plaques were unveiled at Sai Wan Hill, at Wong Nei Chong Gap, and at Jardine's Lookout.

There are many changes since 1941, and even since I was last there in 1994.

Four of us, Larry Stebbe, Don MacPherson, Flash Clayton, and myself were honoured to visit the Canadian International School of Hong Kong and to speak to groups of the students. Larry and I spoke to a Grade 10 and 11 class. Flash and Don spoke to a Grade Six. We had to field some tough questions, especially from the boys, who, I think, expected a "Rambo" attitude from us. They may have been disappointed.

After the session they gave us a couple of gifts, a wrist watch with school logo on the face and a pack of Christmas cards, each one with a different student's name and autograph. A nice touch.

In Yokohama we visited the British Commonwealth War Cemetery where 137 Canadians are buried. For me, for some reason, the visit to this cemetery was the most emotional of all. When I stood before the grave markers of guys I used to know, many memories came back to wet my cheeks; Joe Furey, Les Sauson, Reg Haley, to name a few. We remember them.

Harry, our president, assisted Senator Molgat and Mr. Edwards, the Canadian Ambassador to Japan, in planting a maple tree.

THE DOUGLASTOWN HISTORICAL REVIEW

Al White, who has family connections in Douglastown, Quebec, singlehandedly publishes a quarterly magazine which he calls The Douglastown Historical Review.

It is, of course, focused on events related to Douglastown, and for this reason perhaps will be of more interest to Gaspeians wherever they may be found. However, issue #4, Fall/Winter 2000, dwells almost entirely on the Royal Rifles of Canada, their history and their record as a military unit.

The publication can be had for one dollar plus postage from: Al White, Box 20027, 1395 Lawrence Ave. W. Toronto, ON, M6L 3C8. I recommend it highly.

THIS SOLDIER'S STORY

George MacDonell's book has been receiving praise from all quarters. An informal discussion with a member of the Canadian Consulate in Hong Kong indicates that they may sponsor a translation of the book into French. Although this idea is only in the suggestion stage at the moment, it promises a wider circulation of the book and a wider base of readership.

Sales at home have been very good with some circulation to schools in Canada.

I have sent a copy to the Canadian International School in Hong Kong, with a suggestion(a subtle one, I hope) that we could supply the books in quantity if they think it would be a useful teaching tool. The school seems to have an unlimited budget, so I wouldn't be surprised if they ordered a few copies.

DONATIONS

Under the watchful eye of Marcel, donations, membership dues, and changes of address are being registered. Donations this time are from: Yolande Ross, Louise Coleman, Dorothy Davidson, Irene Firlotte, Helen Cole, Dr. Stanley Banfill, Bonny Vincent, Helen Webb, Robert MacNaughton, John Smith, Arthur Roberts.

Lawrence Ross in memory of brothers Raymond and Leo;

Doris Carr in memory of husband Murray;

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