

HONG KONG VETERANS' ASSOCIATION

QUEBEC-MARITIMES BRANCH

BANJO GOSSIP NEWSLETTER 5.4 BAMBOO TELEGRAPH

JUNE, 1998

Hello again. The end of another newsletter year for me. Right off the bat I'll talk about the reunion in Sherbrooke. Remember, it will take place on 13, 14, 15, 16, August at the Hotel le President. Everyone has received his (or her) information from Lucette Muir by now.

Shortly after the March newsletter came out I received a message from Derrill asking me to inform you that his role in the organization of the reunion was much smaller than I had given him credit for. Well, at the moment, it evidently is smaller, but his influence is still there, and I'm sure we will feel the effects of his leadership when we all assemble at Sherbrooke.

As for Lucette, she has taken her role very seriously, and is planning things that will make our meeting all the more enjoyable. She seems to have thought of everything, including the fact that we old crocks can't march very far. My understanding is that they are setting up a temporary cenotaph on the Hotel grounds, so that we will be spared a long time on our feet.

Of course, Ossie Clark, assisted by Charlie Gordon, is in charge of the operation and is in constant touch with Lucette.

That's enough bouquets for this time. I will have the honour of handing out more at the reunion.

- * STOP THE PRESS Since starting this I got a letter from Lucette asking me to insert a reminder. Here is her message which I repeat in its entirety:
- * DID YOU FORGET?
- * You are planning to attend the upcoming Hong Kong Veterans' Reunion in Sherbrooke August 13-16
- * If you have not confirmed your intentions with Lucette, please return all your completed forms in your pre-addressed envelope.
- * Thank you for your attention. Hope to see you at the Reunion.

She also adds that the hotel has assigned a total of 92 rooms for us.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

I remind you again that the annual general meeting will be held on FRIDAY morning, August 14. We have an important decision to make regarding the future of the Quebec-Maritimes Branch. Do we carry on as it is now organized, or do we reorganize along

the lines of the National Council. If the motion to reorganize, a notice of which has been accepted at last year's annual meeting, is defeated, we will have an election of officers for the next two years. In the meantime, Albert Russell is chairman of the nominating committee. Please contact him if you have nominations for any of the offices. His address is: 125 de Navarre, #105, St. Lambert, QC, J4S 1R5, tel. 514-671-6500.

BIOKI

Arnold Hunt reports that Raymond Murray has had a stroke and is convalescing at home. If you can, send him a get well card. According to reports, he has lost the use of one side of his body, and is unable to talk. P.O. Box 575, Chandler, QC, G0C 1K0. Laurie MacKay is also back in hospital, A card or phone call would help to cheer him up.

Leo Leblanc has been very ill for some time now. Please take note.

Leo Murphy is in hospital. A card to Leo would also help.

Lloyd (Tex) Cole is also under the weather. Please take note.

Bertha Barter, (Bob's wife) has been in and out of the hospital. If you have names to add to the sick list, please let me know.

LAST POST

EVEREST LAWRENCE on March 30 in North Vancouver. He was 74 years old.

DON VAN CLEEF of the Ontario Branch
GORDON HOLLINGSWORTH, Winnipeg Grenadiers, in California.

ANGUS McRITCHIE, Winnipeg Grenadiers, on May 30 in Winnipeg.

HOWARD WARD died in Smith's Falls, April 18. His ashes will be interred in Bury, Quebec, June 26

WILLIAM F. CLARKE (Capt., RRC) on June 2. Mail has also been returned from Mrs. John Shalala and Mrs. Betty Morse, marked "Deceased".

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

CORRECTION

In the December letter I reported that Dorothy Pollock had made a donation to the Branch in memory of Glenford Mann. That was not correct. The announcement should have read, "In memory of husband Kirk". Sorry, Dorothy.

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MORE

Still in connection with deaths in our ranks, I have a memo from Derrill Henderson, informing me of a series of articles on Japanese prisoners of war appearing in *The Ottawa Citizen* by columnist Dave Brown. He has titled the series "Canada's Shame", and hopes to put pressure on where it counts to get some action on the slave labour situation.

Derrill has been asked by Dave Brown to report *weekly* on the deaths of Hong Kong Veterans. Therefore, comrades, I will act as a sort of clearing house, if you will inform me immediately of any deaths you hear of. I am in frequent contact with Derrill and can relay the information to him quickly. My phone number again: 418-392-5838; e-mail: philed@globetrotter.qc.ca.

Moreover, if you are connected to the internet, you can read previous columns by Dave Brown at <http://www.ottawacitizen.com>.

ANGUS McRITCHIE

Angus, dead on May 30, was long-serving Secretary-Treasurer of the Manitoba Branch. He was probably not well known by members of the Q-M Branch, but to the Winnipeg Grenadiers, he was the link between the members of the Manitoba Branch. Angus' newsletter, published four times a year, kept the members informed of events and conditions that affected them.

I received Angus' newsletter on a regular basis, and while I didn't always agree with his editorial comments, I was always interested in reading the letter from front to back. He had announcements of upcoming events, reports of social affairs, and anything else of interest, and all of this sprinkled with jokes, puns, and witticisms.

His last letter was dated March, 1998.

He will be sorely missed in Winnipeg.

THE NULLAH

What better name for a ditch? The Webster Collegiate Dictionary defines "nullah" as a Hindi word meaning "gully or ravine".

In Sham Shui Po Camp we had nullahs. Sham Shui Po Camp was built on land reclaimed from the Hong Kong Harbour, and was as flat as the Winnipeg Airport. When the monsoon rains came, there had to be a way to drain off the water. The British, who had built the Camp, had installed nullahs, drains lined with concrete, shallow at the top end, but getting

progressively deeper until they emptied into the harbour. There was a water tap on the nullah, where we got water to wash our clothes or to use for cooking.

Of course, with so many men in the camp, and with so few ways to maintain sanitary conditions, the nullah had to be swabbed out every day.

Those of us who were able, were detailed to carry water and flush out the drain with the help of a home-made mop, a long pole with a rag tied on the end of it.

We had to be careful at the bottom end, because the electric fence was adjusted in such a way that nobody could escape from the camp by crawling out in the nullah.

Arguments used to rage back and forth as to the amount of electricity that flowed through the fence, from zero to a lethal amount. We soon found out. One the English guys, taking his turn in the swabbing chore, came too close to the wire and was electrocuted. Very careful after that!

DONATIONS

From the ladies: Mrs. Hazel Breakey, Mrs. Inez Kelso, Mrs. Celia Glendenning, Mrs. Elsie Stoddard, Mrs. Una Lapalme, Mrs. Dorothy Ross

And from the men: Lloyd Seaward, George Chenell, Westley Hamilton, Raymond Smith, Robert Dunlop, to help ice storm victims, L.T.S. (Bill) Doull, Donald Dainard, Kenneth Court, Glenford Gregoire, Walter Gray, William Bradley, Raymond Murray, John McGreevy, Morgan Davies, Bernard Castonguay, Fred Chapman, Eugene Bond .

In memorium:

From Grace Cyr in memory of husband Wilmer

From Ernestine Churchill in memory of husband George

From Ross Wood in memory of his brother Donald

MEMBERSHIP

Lawrence reports total dues paid-up for 1997-98 of 212 members. Once again, please check to see if you have a card dated 1998. If not, Lawrence would be overjoyed to receive \$15.00 from you at his address, 508 Thorncrest, Dorval, QC, H9P 2M6.

AWARD

We also hear of an award for animals which have performed heroic deeds during the war. Everyone has heard the story of how "Gander", our

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Newfoundland dog and regimental mascot was blown up by a Japanese hand grenade on the night of the Japanese landing at Lye Mun Gap. Our problem now is to find someone who saw Gander pick up the grenade, since most of the participants in that skirmish have gone to their reward. Reg Law says he saw Gander chase after the grenade, but cannot state definitely that he picked it up. Maybe Reg's testimony would be acceptable so that the award can be made. If you have information beyond rumour or second-hand stories, please get in touch with Derrill, (or me).

CORRESPONDENCE

Some interesting mail this time. Roger, our ex-National President (since reorganization) has sent me an interesting report of his study on how many of us are still taking nourishment. His figures, as of April 18, 1998, show a total of 362 Hong Kong Veterans still alive. The numbers can be broken down as follows: Royal Rifles: 196; Winnipeg Grenadiers: 145; Brigade HQ: 21.

By province, Roger's figures show the following: Nova Scotia, 7; New Brunswick, 31; Quebec, 73; Ontario, 89; Manitoba, 57; Saskatchewan, 8; Alberta, 22; British Columbia, 63; USA, 12. Total, 362.

Think of the money the government is saving by waiting us out!

From Norma Lawrence reporting the death of husband, Everest; from Lucette Muir, several letters concerning the reunion in August; from Barbara Strang; from Lionel Speller; from Ross Wood; from Earl McBeath, from John McGreevy; from Mrs. Alliston MacDonald; from Lloyd Doull from Lawrence Rattie, from Harold Englehart. (These last two, Branch business)

THE GARTER FOR AKIHITO

Did you hear that Queen Elizabeth is bestowing the Order of the Garter on Emperor Akihito? It has been in the news and Lionel Speller has sent me a clipping from *The Victoria Times-Colonist*, an article by Jim Hume, reporting on the coming visit of Akihito to London. The Japanese Labour Camps Survivors Association is planning five days of protest during the visit. One of their attempts to embarrass the Emperor is to line the procession route with their backs turned to the Queen and Akihito and whistle *Colonel Bogie*, the march that the bridge builders

whistled in the movie, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

I would love to be there to whistle along with the others.

According to reports, Prince Philip is not in favour of the award, having seen at first hand the condition of Prison Camp survivors as an officer on a Royal Navy ship that brought them home.

P.S. Since writing this the visit of Akihito has already taken place, but it is worth mention anyway.

KATE

Mort Irving died in Japan leaving his wife, Katherine to raise a young family. Kate, as she is known to her friends, moved to Quebec City and taught school until retirement.

Recently Kate celebrated her 90th birthday, sure and in fine style, too. They hired a band and Irish dancers, and 200 guests honoured her at Shannon, an Irish enclave not far from Quebec City.

Kate has always been a loyal supporter of the Quebec-Maritimes Branch, and a frequent attendee at annual reunions. She has been to Japan to visit her husband's grave.

Congratulations on your 90th, Kate. May you see many more!

EDGAR LABRECQUE

Lots of stories can be told about our stay in St. John's, Newfoundland, but one that sticks in my memory and still causes me to laugh when I think of it is this one which I'll tell you now. It concerns a fabulous character in the Royal Rifles by the name of Edgar Labrecque.

Edgar was from a little hamlet not far from New Richmond, which went by the nickname of "Little Montreal". What travelling he had done before he joined the army, I do not know, but he had an unending number of jokes and stories of all kinds. He had the art of storytelling and the sense of humour to set that off, sometimes crude, but always witty and entertaining.

Edgar was in "B" Company, I believe. He was in Botwood just before going to St. John's. He showed up on parade one day needing a haircut. Lieut. Woodside, quite a strict disciplinarian, told him to get a haircut. Sure enough, Edgar went on parade the next day with a new haircut, but it was not up to Woodside's standards. Woodside told him to get a

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real haircut.. The following day Edgar showed up with his scalp shaved clean.

About two weeks later the Regiment was moved to St. John's. Soon after that the good ladies of some benevolent organization sought to welcome us to the city by inviting us to afternoon tea at the Caribou Hut, the St. John's YMCA.

Imagine the scene. Dainty, sophisticated ladies, from the goodness of their hearts, attempting to entertain us, serving tea and cakes to a group of soldiers, fresh from the boondocks, for the most part illiterate, and certainly devoid of social graces.

The tinkling of the piano rendering such classics as "In an English Country Garden" soon bored the audience whose musical tastes ran more to the songs of Wilf Carter and Hank Snow. Someone shouted, "Labrecque, recite Jean-Baptiste Trudeau!" Now, Labrecque was good, nay, he was excellent, at reciting the poems of William Henry Drummond. He used to keep us amused with his renditions of "Leetle Bateese", "The Stovepipe Hole" and others.

After much catcalling and cries of "C'mon, Edgar!" he finally got up on the stage. He began by rubbing his cleanly clipped head and apologizing for his lack of hair. Then he said, "I'm not in the mood to recite Jean-Baptiste today but I'll tell you a story.

"When I was young our family was very poor. I had always wanted a bicycle, but my father could never afford it. One morning my father looked out the window and saw a bicycle by the side of the house. He said, 'Edgar, where did you get the bicycle?' I said, 'Last night I was out walking and this girl came up on a bicycle. She said, 'Hop on and I'll give you a ride'. We rode around for a while, and then we went into the park. We sat down on the grass and after a while we lay down on the grass. Then she took off her pants and said, 'Edgar, you can take anything you want.' The pants didn't fit, so I took the bicycle."

For a full minute you could have heard a pin drop. Then the laughter started and rolled until the rafters shook. Those poor ladies must have been scandalized, and as far as I know, none of us ignorant clods even bothered to thank them for their kindness.

In the prison camp, in the Jubilee Building in Sham Shui Po, which served as a diphtheria hospital, I shared a room with Edgar and some others for a while. He kept us amused with his recitations of Drummond's poems, and stories of his early days in

Little Montreal. His humour and his upbeat attitude no doubt helped me to forget my miseries, and helped me to survive until 1945.

Edgar died long ago.

MARITIMES-GASPESIAN BRANCH

This just in from Neil Darrach, President of the M-G Branch: The 1998 reunion will be held in Florenceville, NB, on September 4, 5, and 6, at the Florenceville RC Legion.

Registration (\$20.00) is scheduled for 2:00 pm on September 4. Social evening to follow. Cenotaph ceremony on Saturday at 2:00 pm. A banquet will be held that day at 5:00 pm.

Two local motels: Florenceville Motor Inn, Florenceville, NB, E0J 1K0 tel.(506) 392-6053, Beechwood Motel . Florenceville, NB, E0J 1K0 tel.(506)278-5241.

If you plan to attend, please contact Neil at RR #4. Centreville, NB, E0J 1H0.

CONCENTRATION CAMP

Recent news tells the story of 26 RCAF fliers shot down over Germany and placed in Buchenwald with Jewish internees. They were there for six months and were badly treated by their captors. Retribution paid by Germany after the war went to England, because Canada was considered a colony! Our lads did not receive any of it and were told to keep silent . It has only recently come to light, and the ex-airmen are demanding that they be recognized. Minister of Veterans' Affairs, Fred Mifflin, promises to look into it. We wish them luck. If they are successful in their claim, it may spill over into our demand for slave labour pay. Who knows.

GEMS

From Lawrence, (and Ann Landers)

Anyone who thinks he can do at 60 what he did at 20 didn't do much at 20.

Happiness is what happens when you get too busy to be miserable.

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

Philip