

“Here, around the tennis court of the Deputy Commissioner, lie men who fought in the Battle of Kohima, in which they and their comrades finally halted the invasion of India by the forces of the Japanese in April, 1944.” (Plaque inside the memorial at Kohima.)

Hong Kong Veterans Association Quebec-Maritimes Branch

Banjo Gossip Newsletter 7.3

March, 2000

Hello again. I hope you have spent a pleasant winter so far. Spring is just around the corner, something we northerners always look forward to. The smart ones among us have migrated to warmer climes, but there is something about the winter that appeals to some of us.

The big news this time is, I suppose, Pilgrimage 2000. By this time you will have received all the information about it. However, there are a few bits of information which I can pass on. As of this date, March 5, there now 19 HK Vets who will be going.

Derrill also tells me that if the person accompanying the Vet has to withdraw, the cut-off date is October 1.

REUNION 2000

This year the reunion is being organized by the Commemorative Association, under the leadership of Reid Pollock. It will take place in Fredericton at the Fredericton Inn on the 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th of August. If you haven't already received the information and registration package you no doubt will very soon. Kenneth McGinn, Bob's son, and Marsha Law Hello, Reg's daughter will likely be assisting Reid. This will be the first reunion organized by the HKVCA, so we can look forward to something different.

MEMBERSHIP

Lawrence Rattie, who looked after the membership for so many years, has been

transferred to the Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue Veterans' Hospital.

Daughter Sheila says, ".....(he is) doing fine, for now. As you know, he has strength that nobody understands but you guys. He is getting very weak but his mind is OK. He talks about all of you often and said to say hi. "

Sheila, has kindly agreed to take over her father's responsibilities, both membership and control of donations. Until now, she has been receiving mail at her father's address, but now, she tells me, that they plan to sell the house. Therefore, please address all future mail having to do with membership and /or donations to: MRS. SHEILA RATTIE, 649 WESTWOOD AVENUE, DORVAL, QC, H9P 2M4.

NOTE: For historical purposes I'll not change the previous item. Since I wrote it, Lawrence has died and was buried in the Field of Honour in Pointe Claire, Quebec, on March 9, 2000. This may be the appropriate place to say something about him.

LAWRENCE RATTIE

I have been told that it would tax my best efforts to say the appropriate words to honour our Comrade, our friend, Lawrence. I agree. It is difficult to express the feeling of respect and comradeship that we all held for this man.

Lawrence was loved and respected by all who knew him. His dedication to his Hong Kong Comrades never wavered. He was loyal to the task of keeping his membership lists in order and found it hard to countenance laxity or indifference in others. He took delight in his service to his Comrades and in raising funds to assure the continuance of the Association he loved. His lifelong dedication and strong leadership have been the guiding light of the

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Association and have provided continuity through thick and thin.

His devoted care for his ailing wife, Colleen, over many years, is an example of the strength of this man. Although afflicted with a debilitating disease himself, he cared for her in a most loving and gentle manner until the day of her death.

His own demise came after a long and difficult struggle with cancer, and though he suffered intense pain, he never complained, always displaying a cheerful and optimistic attitude.

We will miss him. We will remember him.

DONATIONS

Sheila says that there may be more names than what appear on this list, and she will find them. If you have donated and your name does not appear here, please be patient. We'll come up with them sooner or later.

Donations from: Raymond Smith, Donald Geraghty, Peggy and Lloyd Doull, Bonnie Vincent, Thelma Misson, Raymond Murray, Rita Normand, Arnold Hunt.

IN MEMORIUM

From Maxwell Murray in memory of Leslie Stickles;

from Velma Nicholson in memory of husband Murray;

from Barbara Hardy in memory of husband Joe (Ralston)

from Paul and Irene Dallain in memory of Lucien Brunet.

LAST POST

Since the last newsletter we have lost the following comrades: LIONEL LECOUFFE, JOHN LEBELLE, JOHN GAUTHIER, of the Royal Rifles and DR. WINSTON R. CUNNINGHAM, of the Canadian Dental Corps. , LAWRENCE RATTIE , Royal Rifles, W.A. MCAULEY, Winnipeg

Grenadiers. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them.

SURVIVORS

Roger Cyr has done another survey of surviving HK Vets and has come up with a list of 303 as of January 14, 2000. We are distributed as follows, with adjustments made for the names listed above:

Nova Scotia, 6; New Brunswick, 21; Quebec, 55; Ontario, 75; Manitoba, 53; Saskatchewan, 6; Alberta, 19; British Columbia, 52, USA, 10.

That makes a total as of this writing , of 297. Frightening.

BIOKI

At this time I have word of some of our comrades who are having health difficulties. Don't we all? but some more so than others. I hear that Lionel Hurd is undergoing a bout with "shingles", not a pleasant experience. Charlie Brady fell, I am told, and fractured some bones, Jim Darrah suffered a stroke, and is recovering at home. Malcolm MacDonald is not well. Any others? We wish them all a speedy recovery

Congratulations to Dorothy Soper (George) on being awarded a Life Membership in Woodbine Heights Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Toronto. Dorothy is, I believe, a Past President of that Branch.

- **You will be interested to know that the Cost of Living Allowance has been set at 2.6045%.**

BAY CHALEUR MILITARY MUSEUM

Although this is a different file on my cluttered desk, I think it appropriate here to thank everyone for their generous reply to my letter of last November asking for financial help. It was heartwarming to get your replies and the many encouraging notes

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you sent. That small campaign realized a total of more than \$5000.00. Although we are still some distance from our goal, we have permission to use some of the space in Legion Branch #172 to display some of the artifacts until we can get a more permanent shelter for them. Thank you, comrades and friends. Receipts for donations have gone out and you should have received yours by now. At a regular monthly meeting of the committee yesterday, our treasurer reported a bank balance of \$20,000. Slowly but surely!

JOKES?

- If marriage were outlawed, only outlaws would have inlaws.
- One of life's mysteries is how a 2 pound box of chocolates can make you gain 5 pounds.
- Time is a great healer, but it is also a lousy beautician.

Real Pelletier, son of HK Vet Algee, sent me this gem: Emperor Joseph II: Your work is ingenious. It's quality work. And there are simply too many notes, that's all. Just cut a few and it will be perfect.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Which few did you have in mind, Majesty?

VIGNETTES OF LIFE IN NORTH POINT
In North Point Camp, before lack of protein weakened us, we used to play softball on the “parade square”.

On this particular day I was playing first base and Arlie Enright was playing short stop between first and second. The bases were loaded, none out. The ball came off the bat straight at Arlie. Hardly moving, he caught the ball in his left hand, tagged the runner from first as he passed him, stepped to second base and caught the second base runner trying to make it back. A triple play!

THE ROYAL RIFLES OF CANADA IN HONG KONG

We have had a number of requests for the book, which, as you know, is out of print, and all existing copies have been sold. Derrill has made enquiries at the request of the Executive Committee and has come up with some answers. Briefly, if we had 100 copies printed it would cost \$93.06 a copy to print. 250 copies would cost \$49.34. It would seem that 250 copies would be the safest choice if we were to go ahead. The opinion is that if we were to do so, we would have to pre-sell 200 copies. Therefore, if you would like to have another copy, or if you know of anyone who would, please let me know. There would be no profit in it for us but it would be another way to keep our image in the news. This is important, Comrades.

CORRESPONDENCE

Again I have received a lot of interesting mail. You may remember that at the bottom of the page in the December newsletter I included the quotation: “When you go home, tell them of us, and say for your tomorrow we gave our today.” I got a reaction from Roger Cyr, George MacDonell and Flash Clayton. They inform me that the inscription is on a memorial in Kohima on the Burma-India border where the British 12th Army stopped the Japanese.

I should quote George here, because he lays it out in detail. George writes:”It was here that the British 12 Army under General Slimm stopped the Japanese in a vicious battle that lasted over two weeks. Kohima was a hill station which barred the way on General Iguchi's troops who desperately wanted to capture it and enter India to gain access to Imphal, the Allied supply centre. ...Against attack after attack the British (and

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Indian) held and smashed the Japanese attacks. Both sides suffered heavily..... Kohima was the furthest penetration westward by the Japanese and marked the highwater mark in their campaign to subdue India.”

Flash quotes General Slimm as saying that the Japanese fought so hard that if they had been his troops he would have been proud of them .

Flash and Jessie are in Mississauga for the winter. They would appreciate a phone call at 905-279-7921. They miss no opportunity to take part in Legion parades or other ceremonies. Both dedicated veterans.

Other mail from: Brinky Murray, the Englehart family with thanks for being there at Harold's funeral, a Christmas card from Bonnie Vincent, greetings to all, a newsletter from Kate Irving, with a news clipping.

I have also received the December newsletter from the Alberta-Saskatchewan Branch and the Manitoba Branch letter for January-February-March, 2000.

GANDER

Everyone must have heard of the hero dog, Gander. The huge Newfoundland dog was adopted by the Royal Rifles when we were in Newfoundland, and became the Regimental mascot.

Gander was everyone's friend. He was given the honorary rank of Sergeant and was under the care of Ernie Levesque at first and then Freddie Kelly. Gander came back to Canada with us and when we shipped over to Hong Kong, Gander was there.

After the Japs effected a landing at Lye Mun, Gander was with the defending Royal Rifles. In a pitched battle , a Japanese hand grenade landed among our men. Gander picked it up and ran away with it. Of course he was killed.

Now, after all these years, an attempt is being made to get an animal hero medal for Gander. There was a British medal called the Dickin Medal, but apparently this award has been discontinued.

The Ralston-Purina Company sponsors an “Animal Hall of Fame” award for animal heroes. It may be possible with the help of Ottawa Citizen Columnist Dave Brown and retired McGill professor Howard Stutt, to get a medal for Gander. Need I mention that Derrill is also involved?

Dave Brown's column of December 24, 1999, tells the story of his act of bravery. He says, “Museum officials are taking a wait-and-see attitude. If the Gander story stirs enough interest, they'll consider a special place for a special dog. One way to show interest is to donate to the museum fund.”

What do you think? I think we should!

The address: Canadian War Museum, 350 Sussex Drive Ottawa, K1A 0M8.

REGINALD HALEY

A while back, while surfing the net, I came across a page sponsored by the Canadian POW/MIA Information Centre, in which there was a message from Heather Haley, granddaughter of Reg Haley who died in Japan. She wanted to know, among other things, if it would be possible to have his remains repatriated. She included an e-mail address, but when I tried to send her a message, I was informed that the address was not valid. I'll try again, but if anyone knows Heather and can supply me with her address, I would contact her and give her whatever information I can find.

THE AMERICAN CROWBAR CASE

In 1848, a man named Phineas Gage, was working on a railroad construction project in Vermont when an accidental explosion

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propelled an iron tamping rod over 3 feet long and over an inch in diameter, through his face and out through his skull. Nothing unusual, I suppose, except that Phineas survived and regained most of his faculties. At first it was believed that he had made a complete recovery, but later studies and observation showed that he had changed "from his original capable and responsible self into a man who was profane, fitful, and obstinate." He lived on and eventually died a natural death.

Just thought you'd like to know.

A REMINDER

This Soldier's Story by George MacDonell, is now ready for sale. If you haven't received your copy, it is available for \$20.00 plus \$4.00 for shipping, etc. Write to The Commemorative Association, Suite 164, 1 Stafford Road, Nepean, ON, K3H 1B9.

REMINISCENCE

I have a letter from an old friend who visited Hong Kong and toured battle sites and cemeteries. He writes, "I never heard you talk, Phil, about your experience in Hong Kong. Perhaps these are things that are best left unsaid, but I wondered how a 19 year old kid from the country felt on the trip over there, and then as a member of the force protecting the area, then the battles and the ensuing horror of the prison camp. I thought of you slaving away on the Kai Tak Airport, of the utter hopelessness you must have felt. What sustained you in the darkest hours? What news of home? What did your parents go through during this time? Was it worth it? Does it matter? Do you have the sense that anyone cares about it any more? Does your experience account for the way you were able to handle subsequent adversity?"

Perhaps. Although none of us would want to repeat the experience, there is no doubt that the trials of the prison camps shaped our characters and taught us to cope with hardship and distress.

A MOTHER'S LETTER

Among my assorted bits and pieces I have collected the following which may be of interest to you. I was printed in the Campbellton Graphic, now defunct, and bearing the following message:

(Editor's note-- The Graphic is indebted to Cpl. Kenneth M. Gaudin, member of the Royal Rifles of Canada, recently released from a Japanese prison camp, for the following poem which he brought with him through his imprisonment. Cpl. Gaudin believes that the poem was written by a fellow prisoner):

A MOTHER'S LETTER

You may write a thousand letters to the girl that you adore

And declare in every letter that you love her more and more.

You may praise her glowing beauty in a thousand glowing lines

And compare her eyes of azure with the brightest star that shines.

If you had the pen of Shakespeare you would use it every day

In composing written worship to a sweetheart far away.

But a letter far more welcome to an old and gentle breast

Is a letter to a mother from a son she loved the best.

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Youthful love is fierce and flaming when
you're writing to your love;
You will rave about devotion, swearing by
the stars above,
Knowing by the moon's white splendor to
the girl that you adore
Tis the one you'll ever cherish as no maid
was loved before.
You'll pen full many a promise on pages
white and dumb
That you never can live up to in the married
years to come.
But a letter far more precious, bring more
and sweeter bliss
Is the letter penned to mother from the lad
she longs to kiss.
She's the best friend you've had, no matter
what you say,
She'll always hear you calling, be it either
night or day.
Your dad may turn against you, your
brother, sister, too,
But you mother-- she'll stand by you, no
matter what you do.
Her dear old heart is thinking each night she
breathes a prayer
That God will bless her darling and be with
him everywhere.
Her heart grows more tender as her hair
turns to gray,
So, sit down, boys, and write her a line or
two today.
Regardless of its diction, its spelling or its
style
Although its composition may provoke a
critical smile,
She will read it very often, when the lights
are soft and low,
Seated in the same old corner where she
nursed you long ago.
In her old and trembling fingers it becomes a
work of art
Stained with tears of joy and gladness as she
breathes, “God bless his heart.”

Yes, a letter of all letters, boys, wherever
you may roam,
Is a letter to a mother from her dear son far
from home.

ADDRESSES

I have been told that my records show some
mis-spelling of some names. If your name is
mis-spelled on your mail from me, I would
appreciate it if you would let me know. My
return address is on the envelope, my phone
number is 418-392-5838, and my e-mail
address is : philed@globetrotter.qc.ca.

That will be all for this time. I enjoy getting
your letters and I will pass on whatever news
you wish to tell me. In the meantime, please
take good care of yourself. Be good to each
other and may God bless.

Philip