

Poetic Pastimes

By Ken Cambon, R.R.C.

Written in North Point Camp, Hong Kong

“My Chum”

May 15, 1942

No matter what I live through yet,
There's one good man I'll ne'er forget.
For even though I'm a useless bum,
I had a man for my best chum.

He never used to boast or brag,
You'd never hear him kick and nag.
And when I'd feel like a worn out sop,
He'd say, “Come on kid, keep it up.”

He never took the time to think
Before he'd give you smoke or drink.
For even though it stripped him bare,
He was always willing to help and share.

He'd sometimes speak of his far-away home,
How after this he'd never roam.
But alas! He'll never, never more
See his fond Canadian shore.

For, while attempting one fatal day,
To drive the Nipponese away,
He was hit all over by enemy fire
While we were making the Nip retire.

He knew very well his end was near,
Yet he didn't have a bit of fear.
He had guts, for all he did
Was say with a smile, “So long ol' kid”.

So, no matter what I pass through yet,
There's one good man I'll ne'er forget.
For even though I'm a useless bum
I had a man for my best chum.

Dedicated to Ken's best pal, “Joe Delaney”, killed in action December 22, 1941.

"In Vain"

May 16, 1942

*When I gaze upon the surrounding hills,
Blossoming dales, mid countless rills,
I think of the men who there remain,
And wonder if they've been lost in vain.
For my heart is stung right to the core,
By the useless, unfair toll of war.*

*Where is the storybook's glamour and glory
Among those bodies so mangled and gory?
Where is the romance in the blowing to hell
Of countless men by a screaming shell?
Why be so primitive, savage, and wild
As to aim cruel bombs at woman and child?*

*It's all very well for bands to play
And cheer the departing soldier away.
It's nice for all, a flag to wave,
For the man who's leaving, his country to save.
On returning I wonder who'll up to him dart
And give him a hand, to get a fresh start.*

*For victory in war, the soldier pays dear,
He hands out his life to a fat profiteer,
Who, while the soldier takes all the hell,
Sits back, safely, at home in his shell.
And when it's all over and hard to find jobs
The soldiers are bums, the fat men are snobs.*

*Were it not for these scoundrels alone,
Wars would almost be unknown.
For, in their scheming, grasping way,
They bring war closer, each passing day.
And yet, I'm sure there's not a score
Of common men, who'd welcome war.*

*When the storm calms, there's no more foam,
At last we return to our native home.
I wonder if all these lessons we've learned,
Will just be discarded, laughed at and spurned.
That's why I can't help but think with disdain,
"Have all these men just died in vain?"*

“A Rifleman’s Lament”

While attending the concert, last Saturday
night,
I noticed a sign which attracted my sight.
For on some brown paper, initialed in
chrome,
Were the words, “Five Smokes, If You
Write A Poem”.

Here’s my chance to show the world,
And let my colours be unfurled.
For now I’ll show you why I feel
I’m getting a raw and dirty deal.

Have you ever, in all your life,
Seen such men who’d cause such strife,
As the lowdown, thieving, bunch of crooks
Who call themselves the North Point
Cooks?

They sell our dates, they sell our bread,
When, from hunger, I’m nearly dead.
And, in the midst of the groans of the
dying,
The cooks stand calmly, pork-chops frying.

They gallop down the fried pork steaks,
They simply devour the brown pancakes.
Eating so much makes the cooks so groggy
It’s not much wonder the rice is soggy.

They say they really bake the flour,
But turn out something pale and sour.
May the Gods of Heaven strike them dead
For they have the nerve to call it bread.
Then there’s the ones who dish the food
out.

I should love to give them a damned good
clout.

For it’s very plain for all to see
They save the smallest, just for me.

Sergeant Wood dishes out the rice,
May his hairy chest be covered with lice,
For he beats and batters the innocent
food,
Then hauls out the ladle half full – I’m
jewed.

No wonder, in North Point, a man loses
hope,
For the buns are served by MacAuly and
Pope.
They juggle the big buns around in the pot
And hand me a crumb – they deserve to be
shot.

I wonder just what cruel god of fates
Has started Hawkes dishing out the dates.
For you ought to hear my moans and
groans,
When he hands me nought, but a cup of
stones.

But what really drives me quite insane
Is that insignificant little Shane.
He gives me a thimbleful of tea,
That wouldn’t satisfy a flea.

Don’t you fell sorry for this little boy?
How would you like to bring him some
joy?

So, putting aside these putrid jokes,
How about handing over five smokes?

Written for a regular Saturday night concert.

“Dominion Day”

July 1, 1942

*On July First, Eighteen Sixty-Seven,
A nation was born, that to me is heaven.
A country created, true and free,
Made by our fathers, for you and me.*

*A land of glorious, wide open spaces,
Filled with happy, smiling faces.
A country where one really lives his life
Unbothered by ignorant fighting and strife.*

*There you can eat as much as you please
Without ever worrying of fatal disease.
There is a country where one isn't shot
Merely because he said as he thought.*

*In summer, countless foodstuffs grow.
Change, in winter, to fields of snow.
Where sporting people, who bear no hate,
Are happily skiing, or having a skate.*

*Oh! My heart is one continual burn
So much for my native land I yearn.
Oh! For my country, so true, so free,
Yes, Canada's the only place for me.*

*So let's, if we ever do get back,
Never again let our feelings get slack.
But, through our work, our leisure, our play,
Make every day, a Dominion Day.*

"The Tragedy"

June 4, 1942

*Here I've a sad and tragic tale,
To hear it makes me weep and wail.
An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,
This story's about the folly of youth.*

*In Valcartier, one sunny, September day,
A few new men were sent our way.
Among them a youngster in a soldier suit
Who soon became known as Jimmy
Recruit.*

*It was very easy to be seen
That he wasn't more than a bare sixteen.
And the army, at first, he did really enjoy,
Which is natural for any normal boy.*

*Jimmy, of course, soon took to beer.
Of whiskey and gin he had no fear,
And he used to make his insides hum
With the deadly stink of "Noofie Rum".**

*As I said, at first, all went very well
Then, everything seemed to go to hell.
For, all pleasures and joy, the boy forsook
And his face wore a worried and haggard
look.*

*His features, so young, began to age.
He began to look like a pensive sage.
One could tell by the cringing look of him
That something was badly worrying Jim.*

*I sought for all this, a reason to find,
As I saw he had something desperate on
his mind.
I knew that unless I stopped him in time*

*He, perhaps, might commit a horrible
crime.*

*Then one night, just after "Lights Out",
When there wasn't a measly soul about,
I saw young Jimmy slip out of bed,
No doubt with a desperate idea in his
head.*

*He slipped into the deserted washroom,
Whisking over the floor like a broom.
Then, taking care so as not to be seen,
I witnessed, from my corner, an
alarming scene.*

*There was Jimmy with a desperate look
Just like one reads about in a book.
His face was lined with furrows of care,
'Twas a tragic scene I could scarcely
bear.*

*In his hand was a sharp and deadly
razor,
His face was red as a Communist
blazer.
As this sight I began to sweat and
shiver.
For his hand began that fatal quiver.*

*Like a horse that leaps to jump a moat
He brought, with a slash, the blade to
his throat.*

*I sprang from my corner too late to
save,
For Jimmy, at last – had begun to
shave.*

Written for a regular Saturday night concert.

**Noofie Rum – a home brew rum encountered in Newfoundland.*

“Bewilderment”

June 25, 1942

*Are we as Shelley would have us believe?
Just as the flower and budding leaf?
For after, from the earth we've nourished
And, like nature's flowers, we've flourished,
Are we just to be tramped underfoot
To be turned to lowly dust and soot?*

*But is it anymore right or true
To believe just as the Christians do?
For it's hard to have faith in a God one can't see,
Or in theories that seem narrow-minded to me.
With churches of bloaters, who gossip and thieve,
It's no wonder I find it hard to believe.*

*Sometimes I think Shelley's nearer the right,
For at least his beliefs are within our sight.
His theories don't run by commercial scale,
But lie, in beauty, on hill and dale.
Yet surely, at death, we don't cease to exist,
Something remains besides the mere grist.*

*You see how my thoughts sway to and fro,
Wondering whatever way to go.
Cloudy doubts besmirch each side
Myself, I just cannot decide,
For my mind is still in the plastic state
Awaiting the moulding hand of fate.*

“Ambition”

June 24, 1942

*How I'd love to doze all day
And bathe in sunshine, warm and gay.
Lying in peace, flat on my back
Leaving everything go slack.
Drinking delicious Gordon's gin,
Throwing chunks of ice-cubes in.*

*And I'd say while growing fat,
“Bring me this”, or “Bring me that.”
My slightest whim would be servant's command,
Even to eat, they'd give me a hand.
Maybe you think I'm a little lazy?
If you do, I think you're just plumb crazy.*

*Around me I'd have those baskets of wicker,
Just chock full of the best of liquor.
I'd take my drinks real brave and bold,
And drink till I'm real flat and cold.
And everytime I pull out a cork,
I'd curse the man that invented work.*

*So, when I get out of this prison camp,
I won't let my spirits get meek or damp.
I'll spend every cent and sell everything,
And, just for awhile, I'll live like a king.
And when it's all gone, I'll turn a new leaf,
Yes, by Judas, I'll live on relief.*