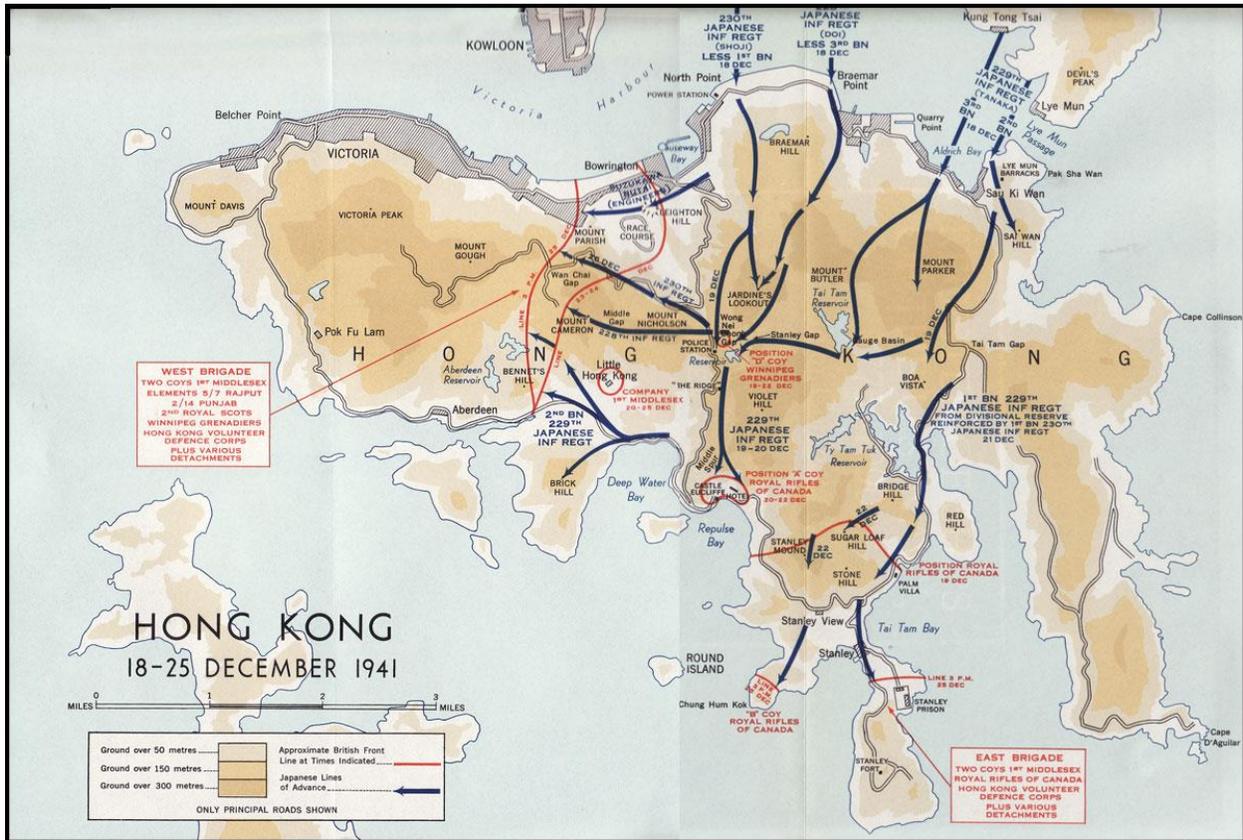




# Battle of Hong Kong



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## Timeline

- 3 Sep 1941 Canadian Lieutenant-General Arthur Grasett MC, DSO (1888-1971), the former General Officer Commanding in Hong Kong, suggested to the Chiefs of Staff in London, England, United Kingdom that with the addition of two or more battalions, the colony's garrison would be strong enough to resist, for an extensive period, any Japanese siege. He further affirmed that Canada might be prepared to provide the battalions.
- 25 Oct 1941 A Canadian brigade under the command of Brigadier John Lawson MC sailed from Vancouver, Canada to reinforce the garrison on Hong Kong.
- 8 Dec 1941 Japanese forces invaded the British colony of Hong Kong. Within less than two days the defenders would be forced to retreat to Hong Kong island itself.
- 9 Dec 1941 Japanese troops breached a western segment of the British Gin Drinker's Line, which stretched from the Gin Drinker's Bay (Zuijiu Wan) in the west to the White Sands Bay (Baisha Wan).
- 10 Dec 1941 British troops withdraw onto Hong Kong island after the defensive Gin Drinker's Line collapsed.
- 11 Dec 1941 The men of "D" company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers become the first Canadian Army troops to engage in combat in the Second World War. After five days of fighting, Kowloon and the mainland fell to the Japanese. Maltby splits his island forces into two brigades, one encompassing the **Royal Rifles of Canada**, under the overall command of British Brigadier C. Wallis, (**East Brigade**), and the other, including the **Winnipeg Grenadiers**, under the overall command of Brigadier Lawson from Canada, (**West Brigade**).
- 13 Dec 1941 The last British troops in Kowloon on the mainland were evacuated onto Hong Kong island.
- 14 Dec 1941 The British authorities at Hong Kong refused the Japanese demand for surrender three times between 13 -17 Dec 1941.
- 15 Dec 1941 The Japanese artillery and aerial bombardment on the northern coast of Hong Kong island begins. All permanent gun emplacements, bunkers, pillboxes, and allied artillery gun positions shelled.
- 16 Dec 1941 Japanese continued to bombard the northern shore of Hong Kong island by artillery and aircraft. All known allied defensive positions, observation posts, and lines of communications suppressed.
- 17 Dec 1941 The Japanese artillery and aerial bombardment on the northern coast of Hong Kong island, which began on 15 Dec 1941, ceased at 1130 hours. At 1430 hours, Governor of Hong Kong Sir Mark Young rejects the last

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Japanese demand for surrender. The bombardment resumes.

18 Dec 1941 All oil refineries on the northern coast of Hong Kong island burned with thick black smoke, while 3,500 Japanese troops crossed the Lye Mun Channel to establish a beachhead at 2200 hours. Two hours later, another force of 4,000 would follow. The Japanese main effort is the key terrain between **Jardine`s Lookout** and the **Wong Nei Chong gap**. Unfortunately for the defenders, this main axis of advance is exactly along the **East / West Brigade boundary**. The 5/7 Rajput in the East conduct an aggressive fighting withdrawal, suffering many casualties. East Brigade is being out flanked, forcing a withdrawal to the South.

19 Dec 1941 The second day of fighting on the island, the troops of "A" company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers had dug themselves into defensive positions following a retreat from the high ground of Mount Butler. Having surrounded the Winnipeggers, the Japanese began lobbing grenades into the Canadian positions. Company Sergeant-Major John Osborn picked up several live grenades and threw them back at the enemy. When one fell where Osborn could not return it in time, he shouted a warning to his men and then threw himself on the bomb to smother the explosion. He was killed instantly, but he saved the lives of several soldiers, who would soon be taken prisoner when the Japanese rushed the Canadian position. **Osborn was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross**, the British Empire's highest award for wartime valour, and the first Canadian VC in the Second World War.

The same day, Brigadier Lawson's **West Brigade** headquarters became surrounded by attackers at the **Wong Nei Chong gap** (a strategic pass where a main road cut through the centre of the island). With Japanese soldiers firing almost point-blank into his bunker, Lawson along with many of his staff were quickly killed.

Just after midnight, the Royal Rifles C Company area around Lye Mun, was facing a night assault. With the company, was the **Regimental Mascot Sgt. Gander**. During the close combat action, Gander picked up a grenade which had landed close to the troops with his mouth and tore off with it. The grenade exploded and Gander was killed, but in doing so he had saved the lives of the seven soldiers. **Gander was posthumously awarded the Dickin Medal for Gallantry** by The People's Dispensary For Sick Animals (essentially the Victoria Cross for animals).

20 Dec 1941 After holding off the Japanese troops at Wong Nai Chung Gap in central Hong Kong island for a day, Canadian and colonial Chinese troops begin falling back suffering heavy casualties.

21 Dec 1941 While Canadian and colonial Chinese troops completed the withdrawal from Wong Nai Chung Gap in central Hong Kong island, civil order begins to crumble as panic built up rapidly.

23 Dec 1941 Allied troops in Hong Kong withdrew to the final line, "The Ridge", at the Stanley Peninsula.

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- 24 Dec 1941 Japanese troops penetrated the final Allied defensive line, "The Ridge", at the Stanley Peninsula on Hong Kong island. At St. Stephen's College Emergency Hospital, 56 wounded soldiers, doctors, and nurses were bayoneted while a number of female civilians were raped.
- 25 Dec 1941 With ammunition in short supply and the defending soldiers in desperate shape, "D" company of the Royal Rifles was ordered to retake lost ground at the south end of the island in the vicinity of the Stanley cemetery. Attacking with bayonets, the Royal Rifles succeeded in taking the position at a cost of 26 men killed and 75 wounded. Hours later, the exhausted survivors learned that the colony had surrendered. The British Governor of Hong Kong Sir Mark Young and Commander of British Forces in Hong Kong General Maltby ordered the surrender of the colony at 1515 hours, 25 Dec 41, which was signed shortly after at the Japanese field headquarters at the Peninsula Hong Kong hotel by Young.
- 26 Dec 1941 General Takashi Sakai, commander of Hong Kong Operation, paraded through Victoria, Hong Kong with the troops of the Japanese 38th Infantry Division.
- 5 Mar 1942 The British government announced that, according to information shared with the United Kingdom by the Japanese government, there were 5,072 British, 1,689 Canadian, 3,829 Indian, and 357 men of other nationalities currently under captivity in Hong Kong as prisoners of war.

## CANADIAN CASUALTY COUNT

Of the 1,975 Canadians sent to Hong Kong, 290 were killed and 493 wounded during the battle and its immediate aftermath. Another 264 Canadians died as prisoners of war, while 1,418 survivors returned to Canada.

The 554 Canadians who died in Hong Kong and in prisoner camps afterwards are remembered today by a memorial to all of Hong Kong's defenders at the Sai Wan Bay War Cemetery there. This and the Stanley Military Cemetery in Hong Kong also hold the individual graves of 303 Canadian soldiers, 108 of whom are unidentified. Another 137 Canadians, most of who died as prisoners of war, are buried at the British Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohama, Japan.

## **WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**