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1863, Hawaii to Victoria (illustrated in Fred Gregory's "Hawaii Foreign Mail to 1870")
From Bob and Dale Forster's *Incoming Mail to Colonial
British Columbia & Vancouver Island* (pg 13)

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They Came Home via the Philippines

Continued from PHSC Journal 171

By Gene M. Labiuk

Canadian LPOWs

Here is a brief report from the September 4, 1945 issue of the *Globe and Mail*.⁵

Yokohama Sept. 3 by Col. R. S. Malone,

...Prisoners are being moved by various means toward Manila, some by plane and others by ship. Men requiring medical attention are assigned to hospital ships while others are sent to Manila-bound transports.

The September 5, 1945 issue of *The Hamilton Spectator*⁵ contained these two articles:

ATTACHE SPEEDS RETURN OF MEN FROM HONG KONG

Hong Kong, Sept. 5. (CP Cable) . . .

...Some on Hospital Ship

Twenty-six Canadians who were liberated in hospital at the time of liberation were taken aboard the hospital ship Oxfordshire which is to sail shortly for Melbourne. Last Sunday morning a second hospital ship, the former New Zealand passenger vessel Mauganui, drew into harbour...

...Land at Manila

New York, Sept. 5. - (AP) - The British hospital ship Oxfordshire, carrying 319 men and women from the Japanese internment camp at Hong Kong arrived at Manila today, a C.B.S. broadcast from the Philippines capital said. All were hospital cases among them 18 amputation cases.

On September 5, 1945, the British hospital ship HMHS *Oxfordshire* arrived at Manila with the first 319 LPOWs and civilian internees from Hong Kong. Those aboard included British, Canadians, South Africans, Austra-

lians, Indians, Norwegians and one American. About 116 were taken from the ship and were transferred to local replacement depots. Fig. 31 shows members of the Winnipeg Grenadiers aboard the *Oxfordshire* at Manila.

Fig. 32 shows Sgt. R. J. Routledge of the Winnipeg Grenadiers aboard the British hospital ship at Manila. Sgt. Routledge was sentenced by the Japanese to 15 years imprisonment for passing information from his Hong Kong camp to a clandestine British group.

On September 9, the first group of Canadians arrived at Manila from Japan by plane. These Canadians were freed at the port of Yokohama. Those freed at Yokohama who were hospital cases went directly to the United States via Guam. Throughout the day, loaded plane after loaded plane landed at Clark Field and Nicholls Field, at the rate of one every 10 minutes. At the 5th Replacement Depot, the first Canadians entered while American engineers were still working on the facilities. As they got settled, each Canadian was given a 12-page booklet entitled *To All Canadian Liberated Prisoners of War and Merchant Seamen in the Far East* that was issued by the Inter-Service Committee on Prisoners of War (see Fig. 33). This booklet explains current situations and gives information needed for procedures upon arrival back in Canada. Fig. 34 shows Canadian liberated POWs outside a tent at the 5th Replacement Depot near Manila.¹⁸

Here are excerpts from a newspaper article in the September 11, 1945 *Niagara Falls Evening Review*.¹⁹



Figure 31. A group of liberated Winnipeg Grenadiers aboard the British hospital ship HMHS Oxfordshire at Manila. Left to right, they are Pte. Duncan Benton, Winnipeg; Pte. Edward Morisseau, Pine Falls; Pte. John St. Onge, St. Boniface; Pte. S. E. Koughnett, Winnipeg; and Pte. J. E. James, Lac du Bonnett. Sitting is Pte. I. Sanderson of West Selkirk. – Canadian Army photo from *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, September 24, 1945.



Figure 32. Sgt. R. J. Routledge of the Winnipeg Grenadiers (above) was liberated from prison at Canton, China. He is shown here aboard the British hospital ship Oxfordshire at Manila. He had not received a letter since he left Canada. – *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, September 24, 1945.

Prisoners Want Jobs

By WILLIAM STEWART

(Can. Press War Correspondent)

MANILA (CP Cable). For many a Canadian released from Japanese prison camps after being captured at Hong Kong Christmas Day 1941, there's a job here they'd like – bossing a Japanese working party. One of the first things noted by the prisoners after arriving here yesterday

Caption Figure 33. [Show front page of booklet] Booklet given to Canadian LPOWs upon arrival in Manila. – CWM 20070117-095.4 George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canada War Museum.

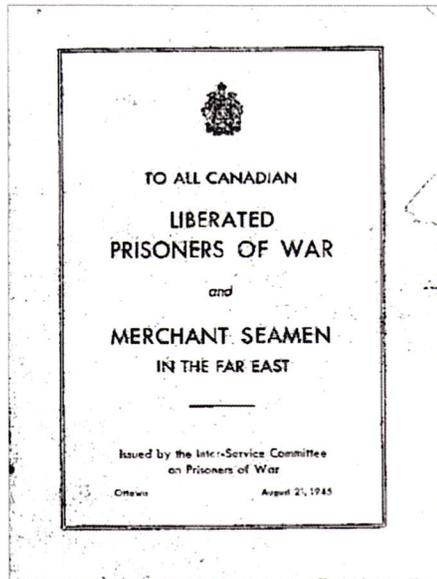




Figure 34. Photo of Canadian liberated POWs outside a tent at the 5th Replacement Depot. – Courtesy of LCMSDS.¹⁸



Figure 35. Photo of a Japanese work party cleaning up. – Courtesy Public Archives Canada PA-179573.

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from camps in Japan, where food was slim and work tough, was the healthy-looking Japanese working party which was treated leniently. These Canadians assured their officers they wouldn't ill-treat or shoot the Japanese but they would make sure the "put in a good day's work..."

Fig. 35 shows a Japanese work party cleaning up the area after the construction of the facilities for the LPOWs. Note the PW painted on the back of their jackets.

Lt.-Col. W. M. McA'Nulty delivered this message to the men:

We consider it an honour to have been selected to receive you on your release and dispatch you on your way home. Our main purpose is to get you back to Canada to your loved ones and friends just as quickly as humanly possible.

This is a mere staging camp, the first home on your way home. We have tried to organize it for you as a very temporary home. It can and naturally will be a poor substitute but we will provide for you some of the amenities and food of which you so long have been deprived.

An article in the *Regina Leader Post*, September 10, 1945, reads in part as follows:

**First Canadians reach Manila
by COL. R. S. MALONE**

Manila, Sept. 10 (CP Cable). The first group of Canadian prisoners liberated from Japanese camps was received Sunday at No. 5 United States replacement depot outside Manila. The Canadian section of the camp now has been organized to handle the majority of liberated Canadians who are not hospital cases.

I watched the first group of men captured at Hong Kong in 1941 climb off trucks to be greeted by Capt. Harold Gra-

ham of Owen Sound, Ont., and a sergeant-major. There were no parades, but the men were shown directly to their tents where installation of wooden floors and electric lights was completed just in time Saturday.

On each bed were duffle-bags from the Red Cross for everyone, containing razor, soap, tooth brush, writing materials, clean underwear, towels and other comforts. While some of the men dashed for their first shower baths, others made for the mess hall where a noon meal was awaiting them.

The men were dressed in a weird assortment of clothes given them on shipboard, including blue jeans and American sailors hats. Some had retained remnants of the old Canadian uniforms with which they went to Hong Kong in 1941, the old-style wedge cap and the old-style Canadian haversack. Many carried Japanese rifles as souvenirs...

Waiting for the prisoners was the first batch of air mail letters from their families at home and the first news summary from Canada, wirelessly direct to Manila today.

The *Empress of Australia* left Hong Kong on September 11 and arrived in Manila on September 13. The headlines in *The Toronto Globe and Mail*, September 14, 1945,⁵ stated:

**Freed Canadians Arrive at Manila
From Hong Kong**

Manila, Sept. 13 (CP). The big gray Canadian liner Empress of Australia docked at a battered pier tonight with her 1,815 liberated war prisoners and internees joining a welcoming United States band in singing "God Save the King" and "O, Canada."...

Passengers included 337 Canadians captured at Hong Kong in 1941, the last of that nationality there...

...Nine hundred passengers disembarked here, including 150 litter cases. There were four Royal Artillery officers...

The September 14, 1945 issue of the *Niagara Falls Evening Review*¹⁹ contains the following story:

Canadians At Manila

By William Stewart

Canadian Press War Correspondent

MANILA (CP Cable) – The entire group of Canadian prisoners from the Shamshuipo camp at Hong Kong, moved into the reception depot here yesterday where the Canadian flag was raised by Capt. Harold Graham of Toronto, a member of the reception staff.

The group of more than 300 prisoners, headed by Lt.-Col. William J. Home of Quebec, all looked refreshed despite the intensely hot trip to Manila aboard the *Empress of Australia*. They are in high spirits as they greeted acquaintances who had been in camps in Japan.

A self-contained Canadian area has been established at the depot, which is under American administration, and all Canadian officers and other ranks will remain together until they are processed and set out for home, perhaps in small groups.

British and Australian air letter forms were provided to the LPOWs aboard the *Empress of Australia*. At Manila, either the U.S. Army or the Australian Army handled the mail from this vessel. Fig. 36 shows a British air letter form written aboard the *HMTS Empress of Australia*, by a Canadian Captain G. C. Gray Jr. The letter was written on September 12, franked with a 6¢ U.S. air mail stamp, and postmarked U.S. ARMY POSTAL SERVICE / SEP / 18 / 1945 / 22. The 22 refers to 22nd Base Post Office located

at Fort McKinley near Manila. The letter reached Port Rowan, Ontario on September 30. The *Empress of Australia* arrived at Manila on September 13, 1945. This cover was transported by either the ATC or NATS to San Francisco and then by commercial air to Canada. Under the adhesive are the words "ON ACTIVE SERVICE". If this was handled by the Australians, no postage was needed.

Fig. 37 shows an Australian air letter to Canada, written on September 15 aboard the *Empress of Australia*, also stamped with 6¢ U.S. Air mail postage. It also travelled through the U.S. military postal service to North America. The letter was post marked on September 18 upon its arrival at Manila.

On September 10, 1945, while on board the *Empress of Australia* awaiting departure, Rifleman Percy Wilmot wrote this British air letter to his wife (Fig. 38). Written on it in pencil is "Liberated U.K. P.W. / On Active Service". Its postmarks are: the Aust. Army P.O. / 243, 15 SE 45, also "PASSED FREE / OF POSTAGE" in black and the date stamp, No. 2 AUST. BASE P.O. / F, which was used at Melbourne. This routing to Melbourne indicates the letter traveled to Canada by the RAFTC (Ferry Command). The return address on the back is "H.Q. 3 Aust. Pwar Recep Group Aust."

The contents of Wilmot's letter are as follows:

*On Board His Majesty's
Troopship "Empress of Australia"
10/9/45*

Dearest Agnes

At last we have left our prison camp and are embarked on board ship.

We came on board yesterday afternoon and this morning we left Victoria and went around to the other side of "Hong Kong" to "Stanley" Fort to pick up the women and children and other internees, we have just

Figure 36. British air letter form written by a Canadian aboard the Empress of Australia. It travelled to North America through the U.S. military postal service. – Courtesy of the Ken Ellison Collection²⁰

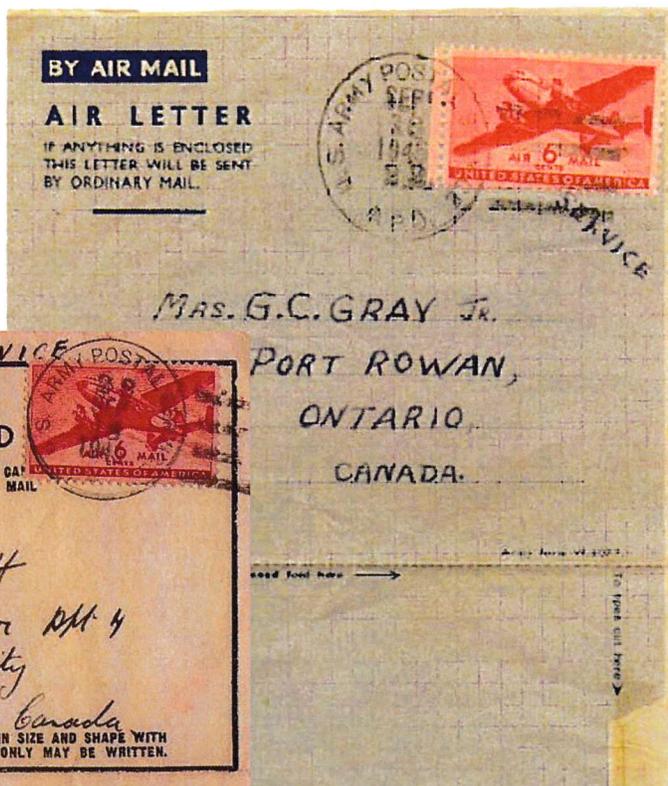
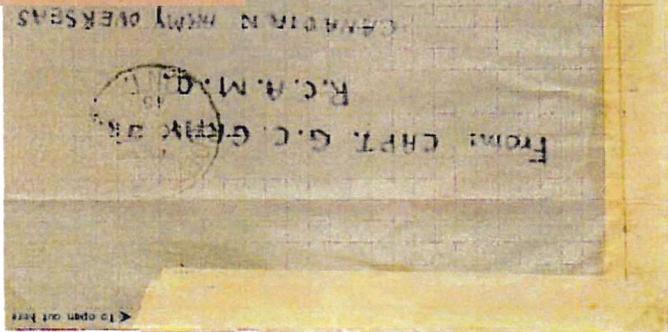


Figure 37. Letter written by a Canadian aboard the Empress of Australia. It travelled east through the U.S. military postal service. – Courtesy of Gray Scrimgeour.



had our supper and they are bringing them on now. We are going from here to "Manilla", where we get off the ship again we do not know where we will go from there, I don't think it will be Australia...

Fig. 39 shows Canadian LPOWs who had just arrived at Manila displaying a captured Japanese flag.

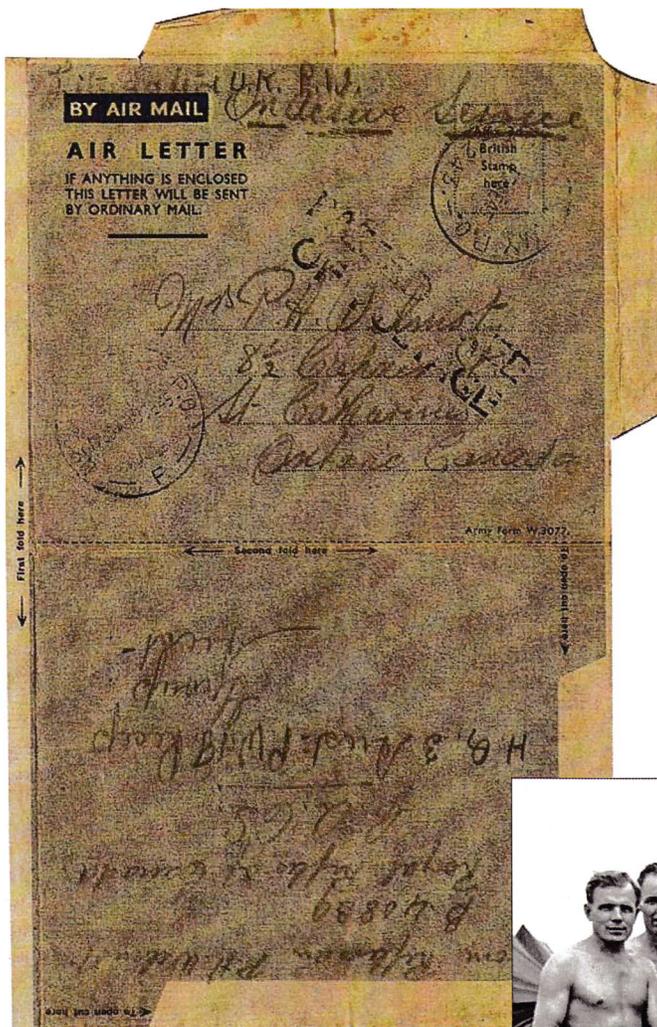


Figure 38. Letter written by Percy Wilmot aboard the *Empress of Australia* and postally handled by the Australian Army. – CWM 20070117-074 George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canada War Museum.

According to the September 17, 1945 issue of the *Niagara Falls Evening Review*,¹⁹ a group of Canadians had come from Japan to Manila:

***Canadians Escaped
By William Stewart
Canadian Press War Correspondent***

MANILA (CP Cable) – Three Canadians have arrived in Manila after a day's flight and a three-day train ride from a prison camp near Kawasaki, on Japan's Kyushu Island where, with some 160 other Canadians captured at Hong Kong Christmas Day, 1941, they have been working in coal mines since 1943.

The three, including L. Cpl. John MacPherson of Wolfville, N.S., and two riflemen whose names may not be released until



Figure 39. Canadian LPOWs who had just arrived at Manila. – Library and Archives Canada, PA-137745.

next-of-kin have been notified, arrived as more than 300 liberated Canadians were expected to leave here tomorrow on their homeward journey by sea.

This group excludes 80 hospital cases who will receive medical care until a Canadian hospital ship arrives to pick them up and 32 other Canadians, among the first to reach here from Japanese camps, awaiting air passage to the United States and Canada.

The, September 21, 1945 issue of the *Niagara Falls Evening Review*¹⁹ has the following news:

Nearly All Canadians Move Out
By William Stewart
Canadian Press War Correspondent

TOKYO (CP Cable) All but possibly small and isolated groups of Canadian prisoners have been evacuated. Lt-Col. M. W. McAnulty en route to Guam and Manila.

During the last few days the bulk of Canadians liberated in the Japanese home islands have been placed aboard ships and planes and evacuated, Lt-Col. M. W. McAnulty of Sherbrooke, Que., head of the Canadian Far Eastern reception group, has returned to Manila to complete the job of speeding the liberated men to their homes in Canada.

Fig. 40 shows a newspaper article from the Canadian repatriation team that accounts for the LPOWs liberated from Hong Kong and Japan as well as other Canadians captured by the Japanese.

The Canadian Red Cross made arrangements with the American Red Cross for the transmission of telegrams to the Canadian LPOWs in the Far East, according to this story in the August 17, 1945 issue of the *Niagara Falls Evening Review*.¹⁹

Message Prisoners'

A letter from the Canadian Red Cross Society has been sent to all presidents of branch societies, to the effect that it has been arranged through the Canadian government departments concerned to collect from the next of kin and close relatives in Canada, of prisoners of war and civilian internees in the Far

Caption Figure 40. [Show newspaper clipping] Newspaper article with news from the Canadian repatriation team accounting for the number of LPOWs in Hong Kong and Japan. - *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 4, 1945.



East, short messages to be transmitted to the prisoners and internees upon their liberation and assembly at a reception centre in the Pacific zone.

These messages must be in Washington D.C., by Aug. 25th for transmission through American Red Cross Channels.

Forms are available through the local Red Cross secretaries and all who are interested should apply to local Red Cross secretaries for the forms. Only through these forms can the messages be sent.

Family members of the Canadians could send telegrams through Ottawa when the LPOWs arrived in Manila. The government also sent telegrams when they had information about LPOWs. Fig. 41 shows a telegram informing a family of a liberated POW.

Fig. 42 shows a telegram from Chaplain Barnett to his wife in Quebec to say that he is well and safe, having arrived in Manila.

The receiving of a telegram of the status of one's loved one was big news. In a lot of instances, this news was shared with fellow citizens in the towns and cities by the news media. Local newspapers would print the announcement, as in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Calder of Hamilton who received such a telegram that was reported in an article in *The Hamilton Spectator* on September 24:⁵

Freed From Japs Hamilton Man Safe

...a telegram received from the director of records, Ottawa, reads: Pleased to inform you that B46619 Rfm. Vincent Calder, previously reported prisoner of war in Japanese hands reported safe in Manila, 21st of September. Condition is good and information follows when received...

The *Ottawa Evening Citizen* reported on October 9, 1945 that Lt. Peter MacDougall of the Royal Rifles of Canada, cabled his wife

to let her know "that he has now reached Manila and hopes to be on his way home soon". His first cable after Japan's surrender was sent from Macao "to say he was safe".

The September 22, 194 issue of the *Lindsay Daily Post* reported that the Nugent family had received the following cable from Manila:

Lt. Nugent Safe, Well In Manila

...The word comes in the form of a cable dated at Manila, and which was received by the family here Friday night. He wires in part "Hope to see you soon. I am well and fit. 'Bill'.

The McKay family of Lindsay, Ontario received a telegram from the Director of Records, Ottawa that was reported in the *Lindsay Daily Post*, on October 4, 1945:

LEARNS HUSBAND AT MANILA ON FIRST LAP OF TRIP HOME...

Ottawa, October 3, 92029 C40618 Rfm. Andrew John McKay has now arrived Manila 1 October, 1945. Director of Records.

Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Squadron Leader Leonard J. Birchall, who was shot down off the coast of Ceylon on April 4, 1942 and taken to Japan as a POW, arrived at Manila on September 10. The RCAF command in Ottawa sent his wife a telegram on September 12, which reads as follows:²¹

Ottawa Ont Sept 12/45 129 pm

Mrs. L. J. Birchall. Care Mr H. M. Loran Annapolis Royal

P1417 pleased to advise official confirmation has been received which states your husband@ seven seven five Wing Commander Leonard Joseph Birchall, D.F.C. has been released and is safe in Manila September Tenth. His condition good. There is no further information. Any further news will be telegraphed to you immediately.

RCAF Casualty Office.



Figure 41. Copy of telegram from Ottawa informing the family of a Canadian that he is now safe in allied hands. – CWM 20120078-005 George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canada War Museum

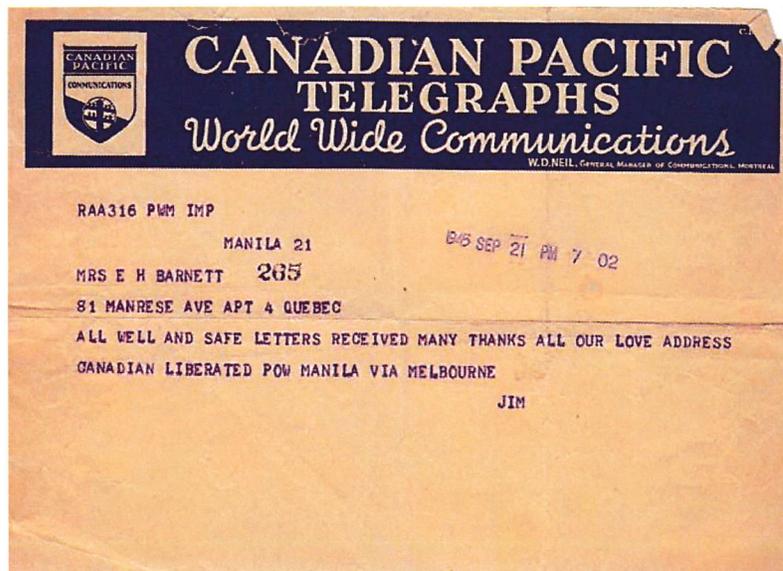


Figure 42. Telegram from Chaplain Barnett now in Manila to his family. – Courtesy of Gray Scrimgeour



Figure 43. Lt. Col. M. W. McA'Nulty (left) talking to Sq/L Birchall (right).¹⁴

Fig. 43 shows a photo of Lt. Col. M. W. McA'Nulty, who was in charge of the CRLG in Manila, talking to Sq/L Birchall.

[Ed Note: On April 4, 1942, RCAF Sq/L Birchall and his crew were shot down approximately 350 miles off the coast of Ceylon. They were able to get one message off to report that a Japanese attack force was sighted and heading for Ceylon. This attack force comprised of five aircraft carriers, four battleships, cruisers, destroyers, supply ships, transports and tankers. As soon as this message was sent, their Catalina reconnaissance plane was shot down, three of the crew perished in the sea. Birchall and the others were picked up, beaten and later taken to Japan as POWs. Canadian and British military authorities had presumed that all crew had perished. In 1943 an American POW, through a letter, had asked his mother to notify Birchall's wife in St. John, New Brunswick that he was alive and a POW in Japan. Japanese authorities never notified the International Red Cross or the Swedish and Swiss delegates that Birchall and his remaining crew were POWs. Upon receiving word that they were alive, Canada promoted Birchall to Wing Commander and he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). He was deemed the "Savior of Ceylon" as it was believed that the size of this Japanese attack force would have destroyed the

British fleet and air bases and created a second Pearl Harbor at Ceylon.]

The first letters to LPOW's in Manila from Canada left Ottawa on August 29 – flown there by the RCAF. Following is a newspaper article in the *St. Catharines Standard* on August 29, 1945:¹²

Letters to Hong Kong Prisoners

Ottawa, Aug. 29 (BUP). A dramatic delivery of letters from home is coming for members of the Quebec Rifles who were captured by the Japanese at Hong Kong, it was learned here yesterday.

Relatives and friends of the prisoners recently were canvassed and letters were written to the men so that they could get direct messages from their loved ones as soon as possible after their liberation. The letters will be the first delivered to the men without Japanese interference since Christmas 1940, when the Quebec Rifles, after a hopeless but gallant struggle, were taken prisoner by the Japs. The letters were flown to this city from Quebec by Corinne Kearnan, former lieutenant in charge of CWAC recruiting in Quebec military district (M.D. 5) and two hours later left by RCAF plane for the Pacific in charge Capt. Guy Gauvreau.

The first Canadians from Japan arrived in Manila at the 29th Replacement Depot on September 8 according to a September 8, 1944 article in *The Hamilton Spectator*,⁵ which states:

Manila Sept. 8... A group of Canadians now at No. 29 Replacement Depot here have received their first mail dated mid-August and written on the blue air-mail forms which get the speediest delivery. Men who are hospital cases read their letters over and over and could hardly believe they were true...

These Canadians came to Manila on

a ship with American LPOWs to the 29th Replacement Depot and were later transported to the 5th Replacement Depot. The 29th Replacement Depot was the main repatriation camp for American LPOWs as well as some Dutch.

In the excerpt above “written on blue air mail forms”, in Canada, family members of LPOWs received a letter from Colonel Ellis, Director of Repatriation, with the following contents:²²

Since our last letter arrangements have been made for further special air mail service to our liberated prisoners of war in the Far East. Enclosed with this letter are six air letter forms endorsed as mail for Liberated Prisoners of War (Mail for LPW).

This is your supply for the time being to enable letters to be sent to the prisoner in whom you are interested from yourself and from other close relatives and friends of the prisoner. It is entirely at your discretion if you wish to allot some of these forms to others instead of using them yourself.

As the air mail facilities are heavily loaded and the number of letters that may be sent is strictly limited you are requested to see that these letters are spread over the next four weeks. No restriction is placed on the length of the letter. No enclosures are permitted.

Only the enclosed forms bearing the stamp “Mail for LPW” will be accepted. These may be mailed free of postage if mailed in Canada. If mailed elsewhere than in Canada, the air mail postage required by the country concerned should first be placed on the envelope in order to bring it to Canada.

These letters will be flown to Manila and handed to the prisoner at the earliest moment. The name and address of the sender is to be shown on the back of the

air letter form above the notation “No enclosures permitted”. The letter should be addressed showing the prisoner’s:

*Regimental number (if applicable) Rank,
Full Name, Unit,
Canadian LPW
7th Base Post Office
c/o Canadian postal Headquarters,
Ottawa, Ontario.*

The letter should be sealed prior to mailing.

Fig. 44 shows the special hand stamp with MAIL FOR L.P.W. in red between two bars.

Fig. 45 shows the air letter form that was mailed in Canada and sent to Captain Gordon C. Gray, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, Canadian LPW, 7th Base Post Office, c/o Canadian Postal Corps Headquarters, Ottawa, Canada. The letter was sent and postmarked from Toronto on September 11. It was received in Ottawa on September 12, as indicated by the single-line date stamp. Mail to and from Canadian LPOWs was docketed in Ottawa prior to being dispatched. Mail address to the 7th Base Post Office was sent to Manila in a closed bag, via U.S. postal and military service. This letter was written prior to Captain Gray’s arrival in Manila, penciled on the back an arrival date of “20/9/45” (September 20, 1945). The form was hand stamped in black: PRISONER OF WAR MAIL / POSTAGE FREE in sans serif type.

Prior to the issue of the blue air letter forms, the Canadian Red Cross prepared special air letter forms as stated in the *Globe and Mail*, on August 16, 1945⁵ as follows:

Air Letter Forms Prepared to Contact Far East Prisoners,

Ottawa. Aug. 15 (CP) The Canadian Red Cross has prepared special letter forms for next of kin to communicate with prisoners of war and civilian internees formerly held by the Japanese and the first batch will



Figure 44. Handstamp in red used on Liberated POW envelopes given to families in Canada. – Courtesy of the Ken Ellison Collection²⁰

go to the Far East by Aug. 25, the External Affairs Department announced today.

The air letter forms will carry 50 words and have space for replies and may be obtained from Canadian Red Cross offices.

The first batch will be flown to the Orient by the United States Army Air Force's Transport Command and after its delivery, Canada will make her own arrangements for communications with Canadians formerly held by the Japanese and made up mostly of prisoners taken at Hong Kong.

In addressing the air letters, the External Affairs Department said the last-known address of the former prisoner, either the camp or the district should be used...

As noted above "last known address of the former prisoner, either the camp or the district should be used". This pertained to all mail for freed Canadians. Mail from Canada for the LPOWs was brought to Manila for sorting. This also included mail for those at Guam.

With the introduction of these special letter forms, at the Vancouver Red Cross office, four volunteer typists were kept busy the first day typing messages from Canadian family members. Fig. 46 shows one of these special letter forms made by the Canadian Red Cross. Its message reads:

*Dearest Percy
Greetings and Love. Anxiously awaiting
your return.
Agnes*

*Rfmm. Percy Horace Wilmot,
Royal Rifles of Canada
Reg. #B-40839
London, England, Nov. 18th 1891*

This special letter form would have gone in the first dispatch to Manila by the Canadian Red Cross on August 25. Fig. 47 shows a photo from the *Winnipeg Free Press* of a mother and daughter writing a note to her husband/father on one of these special Canadian Red Cross letter forms.

The Canadian Red Cross Society
RED CROSS ENQUIRY BUREAU

130 QUEEN STREET  OTTAWA, CANADA

MESSAGE TO LIBERATED PERSONNEL IN THE FAR EAST

NAME OF SENDER Mrs. Percy Horace Wilmot,
in Canada

ADDRESS 6 1/2 Capner St., St. Catharines, Ont., Canada.

RELATIONSHIP Wife

Dearest Percy:-
Greetings and Love. Anxiously
awaiting your return.

AGNES.

313

ADDRESSEE

NAME Rfmm. Percy Horace Wilmot, B3

Unit or other particulars Royal Rifles of Canada

Identifying data Reg. #B-40839

Birthplace and date of birth London, England, Nov. 18th, 1891

Addressee may reply on reverse side.

Figure 46. Special letter form prepared by the Canadian Red Cross. – CWM 20070117-074 George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canada War Museum.