

Foreword

When war broke out in 1939, I had just started to practice law in the city of Quebec and was to be married a year later. I had no military training - except as a cadet in the Bishop's College School Cadet Corps (famous for its service during the late 19th C. Fenian raids) and at the Université de Laval C.O.T.C where I had taken a course. It was shortly thereafter that I decided to enlist. I joined up simply because I felt it was up to me to do my bit against Hitler, and not because of any zest for military life. I enlisted in the Royal Rifles rather because it was a Quebec City regiment and a lot of its officers (especially the ones who had just joined) were personal friends.

Recollections of My Hong Kong Experiences During World War II

(By C. Douglas Johnston, Lieutenant, Royal Rifles of Canada)

After a year's guard duty in Newfoundland, my regiment, the Royal Rifles of Canada, found itself in August of 1941 back at Valcartier Camp (near Quebec City) from whence it had started out. Then in September, the regiment was sent to Saint John, New Brunswick for another tour of guard duty expected to last through the winter. But within two weeks, we received orders to return to Valcartier Camp... And so there was much speculation amongst us as to what all the rush was about and as to where we were to be sent; and the only clues were that we were outfitted with summer drill clothes and given various vaccinations of a tropical nature - which certainly suggested we were going to a warm climate rather than to Western Europe.

However, none of us suspected that our destination was Hong Kong, which makes the following two incidents amusing. On the troop train going west, we stopped at Jasper in Alberta and as the train pulled out of the station, a young lady waved good-bye and called out: "Have a good time in Hong Kong!". Then after leaving Vancouver, we headed for Hawaii and when we docked in Honolulu (at Pearl Harbour, I assume), who should be in the next berth but a Japanese merchant ship with rows of Japanese sailors grinning at us and observing our Canadian uniforms. *Well, so much for the secrecy supposed to surround our troop movement to the Far East!*

We arrived in Hong Kong on November 16th and went directly to Sham Shui Po barracks which is located on the mainland Kowloon. The huts for the men were made of cement, and the more senior officers were billeted in rooms around a courtyard with the officers' mess forming one side thereof. The junior

officers, like myself, were, in fact, luckier and billeted in the 'Jubilee Building', an apartment building adjacent to the camp. This was also a concrete structure, of some four or five storeys with private suites consisting of a bedroom, living room, kitchenette, bathroom, and servant's quarters. Indeed, the servant's room was not wasted as the officers' 'batmen' were forthwith returned to regimental duty for training - and Chinese servants hired in their places. Each of the Chinese applicants had to undergo a stiff medical examination by our regimental Medical Officer and many were turned down, the principal diseases disqualifying them being tuberculosis and V.D.

Venereal diseases were indeed rife in Hong Kong and, I understand, quite a few of our men contracted some form or other thereof during the short time before we became prisoners. How many did contract it, I have no idea other than rumour, but I would say not very many because no one was missing from my platoon for this reason when war broke out on December 8th. Our men enjoyed their brief period of freedom in Hong Kong to the full - women and liquor were plentiful and cheap - and they had much more money than the "limey" soldiers who were extremely jealous of them. Some of the men, I am told, even rented rooms downtown and set up Chinese girls there to await them each evening after regimental duties were over.

The officers also enjoyed their time of freedom although I do not believe that any, bachelors included, set up establishments similar to those of the men. As a cigar smoker, I personally was delighted to find that you could buy a box of 25 of the best Manila cigars for HK\$5 (about CA\$1.25). Hong Kong was, of course, a free port and lots of other things were cheap, and despite the war, there was no apparent shortage of good brands of liquor and wine.

The local Hong Kong residents were extremely hospitable; and for example, in my own case, twice when another Canadian officer and I were sitting in the evening at a table in the Hong Kong Hotel (affectionately called "The Grips" by local socialites), we received invitations to join them at their tables. Indeed, this was no one-off affair as they invariably followed up in the next few days with invitations to such places as the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club and the Club at Shek-O. I was 'Messing Officer'* for the battalion at this time, which excused me from all other duties and so was able to take advantage of most of these extra-curricular invitations.

*('Messing Officer' was a new post necessitated by the fact there was no Canadian Army Service Corps present in H.K. and consequently we were attached to the British Army for rations. Under this system, I was allocated money each month to buy rations for our regiment. I could only buy a limited amount of beef from the RASC so was forced to turn to the NAAFI for other meats, and this once or twice almost caused a riot in the men's mess hall! I was very green at the job and feel sure it was due to all the messing records being destroyed because of the bombings and surrender that I escaped a court martial - for having grievously overspent my rations allotment)!

The weather is typically beautiful in Hong Kong during November - but the enjoyment of these halcyon days was soon to be interrupted by the outbreak of hostilities. However, the local residents had lived through so many crises or rumours of impending invasions that they had become very blasé and would dismiss these with shrugs of their shoulders as merely another "flap." But I had not been there long enough to be blasé. And an incident that occurred while I was dining in the Hong Kong Hotel on Saturday evening, December 6th certainly seemed ominous to me. At around 10.00 p.m., a Chinese bellboy moved through the dining room carrying a placard which read: "Captains and crews of all British and allied vessels in the harbour are to report immediately to their ships." Nobody else in the dining room seemed to worry about this warning at all. But the truth of the matter is that 90% of all shipping in the harbour had left by the Monday morning when war broke out - and eventually got safely to Australia.*

*(The fact that not all allied shipping got away from H.K. before the outbreak of hostilities was brought home to us when we arrived at North Point, the location of our first imprisonment camp. This camp was on the waterfront and there were two fairly large freighters that had been sunk close by. As the Japanese were expert salvagers, we very soon watched with interest their skill at re-floating these ships).

As for myself, the actual outbreak of hostilities caught me by surprise despite my Saturday night warning - or the fact that the unit was moved the following day to take up positions on Hong Kong Island. When the unit made this move on the Sunday afternoon, I, as Messing Officer, stayed behind in Sham Shui Po to clean up the camp. As I walked carefreely back to my Jubilee Building quarters at around 5 p.m. that evening, I was stopped and asked by a **very** senior British officer in a chauffeur driven car with headquarters flag whether our regiment had moved out. I thought this was a very stupid question from someone with obviously much better sources of information than a lowly lieutenant such as myself who just happened to be passing, so I simply replied, "I have no idea".

I passed a quiet night, undisturbed except for one large but unexplained bang that woke me up at about 3 a.m. The next morning, I thought I heard the usual 8 a.m. siren from Kai Tak Airport that was my daily signal to go over to the mess for breakfast. But just as I got to the mess, I met the Padre - and we heard planes. The Padre looked up and said: "Look, they're dropping pamphlets" - *but it was bombs they were dropping – even if they were only 50 pound ones!* And the next moment we were all looking for what cover we could find. That was how I discovered that the war had started...

In fact, it had actually started at about 3 a.m. in the New Territories of Hong Kong but I was only informed by being bombed at 8 a.m.! Lucky that I was only advised so late! Otherwise I might have arisen and been elsewhere when the bombing started, such as in my Messing Office, or having breakfast in the Officers' Mess (both of which received hits from bombs) or at the corner of the Jubilee Building where I later found a dead Chinese. The Jubilee Building itself was also hit and I never saw my gong (or Chinese batman) again. That was certainly no 8 a.m. siren from the airport that I had heard. And I suppose the big bang at 3 a.m. was meant to announce the war had begun!

Around mid-morning on the Monday, the unit rear-guard - except for the Quartermaster's staff - was transferred to Hong Kong Island by Star Ferry - which eventually found the right debarkation place after several false stops. During the next week, I continued as Messing Officer and thus had a chance to familiarize myself with the locations of the regiment's various sub-units. I did not really perform any useful function during that time as the CQM's of the several regiments were quite capable of delivering the rations to the right places without any supervision from me.

I soon returned to 'A' Company duty and found myself stationed at a place called "Windy Gap". This was on a hill overlooking a village called Shek-O and controlled the entrance to D'Aguilar Point - where some of our medium-sized heavy artillery was located. Our quarters were in a small concrete building built into the side of a hill and adjacent to a pillbox that covered the Shek-O valley as well as the road leading to D'Aguilar. Another small detachment of our men was stationed on the top of a small mountain between Windy Gap and the fortress.

One day when I was supervising my platoon during training exercises near the pillbox, the military commander of Hong Kong, General Maltby approached. He asked me why we were not occupying the pillbox - to which I simply replied that I did not like the pillbox defences. He said: "I agree with you" and moved on. There were quite a few of these pillboxes included in the Island defences and they were very exposed to attacks by both air and artillery; they were real death traps when the ground around them was lost to the enemy!

While I was stationed at Windy Gap - and since I was a lawyer by profession - I was called on by headquarters to act as defence for a Canadian soldier who was charged with being AWOL (away without leave) while on a pass to Victoria. During the court martial which took place in a semi-underground sort of air raid shelter adjacent to fortress headquarters (which was itself completely underground), the area was bombed several times - and the court spent a considerable part of the time under the table! The defendant was convicted (his defence that he could not find his way back to his unit due to the blackout not being accepted) but he was sent back to his unit instead of being sentenced immediately. What his sentence was I never did hear and neither did he, since apparently like the records of my Rations Officer tour of duty, all the records of the court martial were lost around the time of the surrender of the Island.

When the court martial was finished, I had the chance to go to the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank branch where I had a small account and drew out a few hundred dollars. The teller suggested I withdraw all my money - but I decided against this - and he proved smarter than me as the balance in my account remained there for four more years! (When the war was over and I returned home, I suddenly remembered this account and although I had no records of the balance or account number, I wrote to the HSBC. And much to my surprise and the great credit of the bank, within three weeks I received a letter enclosing a cheque covering my claim).

Nothing much else of any importance happened to me until the Japanese landed on Hong Kong Island a week later. Prior to the landing, indeed at Windy Gap we had seen practically nothing to indicate there was a war on other than the occasional sight of a distant airplane which might (or might not) have been one of our own. We had been given absolutely no information as to how the war was going. (In fact, even during the week of my active participation in the battle prior to the surrender, I was completely unaware as to how matters were

proceeding since I was given no information relating thereto but merely instructions and orders to do this or that or go here or there).

The Japanese landed on Hong Kong Island on the night of December 18th/19th and at once proceeded to the mountains, advancing quickly toward the centre of the island to cut it in two at Wong Nai Chong Gap. They seemed to have good maps and knowledge of the various mountain paths but their principal or favourite routes were along the water catchments*.

*(There were no rivers on Hong Kong Island which was completely dependent for its water supply upon several large reservoirs. One of these was filled up in the rainy season by rain caught in a series of cement drains located across the Island about one-half to two-thirds of the way up the mountain. These "catchments" were about three feet wide and deep, and in the dry season, which it now was, could be used for walking considerable distances almost as quickly as if you were on a road. This means of moving around was used to great advantage by the Japanese; they also had a great psychological advantage over the defenders who found themselves always fighting an enemy with the advantage of the higher ground).

I do not think that any tanks were used in the battle. The Japanese didn't need them and we didn't have any. In any event, the mountainous nature of the terrain was not at all suited for this form of warfare. On the morning of the 19th December (the day after the landing), 'A' Company moved out of Windy Gap across Tai Tam Tuk (a reservoir) in a westerly direction. But we saw no action that day and spent the night in the rain by the side of the road on Stone Hill. The next day we proceeded towards Repulse Bay. As we caught our first view of the Repulse Bay Hotel, we were also able to see a large body of Japanese soldiers proceeding along the catchment behind the hotel. Indeed, a raiding party of Japanese had already managed to infiltrate the hotel garage - and a piece of field artillery had to be rushed up to dislodge them.

We then proceeded to the hotel, which was inhabited by a large number of women and children (mostly European) who had taken refuge there from the fighting. The Repulse Bay Hotel was a large luxury hotel of considerable standing; it was now to be put in an anomalous position vis-à-vis the Japanese because, in spite of the fact that it housed a large number of non-combatants, it was to be for the next few days the headquarters of our forces, including 'A' Company. It is to the credit of the Japanese that they did not take advantage of our military presence there as an excuse to shell the hotel. Or a more cynical reason for their failure to do so during this period could have been reluctance to

damage a large, important building which they were quite sure of eventually capturing intact).

*(It is sad indeed to now note - in 1983 - that the Repulse Bay Hotel, once a magnificent low-slung edifice set within spacious and elegant gardens, has just been torn down and is to be replaced by condominiums. Editor's note: In fact, there was such an outcry by many Hong Kong residents and others that a replica of the hotel was built a few years later and the planned 'condos' never saw the light of day).

That afternoon we went out on patrol to the west of the hotel. We saw no action although we had to lie low for awhile as we were between two parties of Japanese on the side of a mountain. We passed an uneventful night at the hotel. The next afternoon, my No. 8 platoon and the No. 9 platoon were ordered to advance up the road to the Police Station at Wong Nai Chong Gap where the Japanese were trying to cut the road. This we did, seeing plenty of signs of where the Japanese had been, but no Japanese themselves. We eventually reached a large concrete building called "The Ridge" which was about half a mile away (and was the headquarters of the Royal Ordinance Corps). Here we found a group of rather shaken officers from various branches of the Imperial Army (and also, I think, Navy) including signallers and Service Corps personnel who had been attacked and shelled several times in the last twelve or so hours.

It was almost dark when I received a telephone call from the Brigadier commanding the West Brigade. As there was concern that the lines might be tapped, the Brigadier and I carried on our conversation in French that not even a Frenchman would have understood! In any event, the gist of our conversation was that, in order to try to relieve the pressure on the Wong Nai Chong Road, our two platoons should try to cut the catchment along Middle Spur (at the back of the Repulse Bay Hotel) which the Japanese were using as a principal route to reinforce their troops in the area. And since it was dark it was decided to evacuate the superfluous personnel from "The Ridge" and add them to our numbers as we marched toward the catchment.

Nothing transpired until our column marching southward along the W.N.C. road was ambushed close to a house called "Overbays". This was at the junction of the road leading from Deep Water Bay to Repulse Bay. Several of our men were wounded and unfortunately our two platoons became separated. So I decided to take cover with my platoon and the bulk of "The Ridge" evacuees at "Overbays". Due to the reduced number of our fighting force, it now seemed

unlikely that I would be able to carry out my instructions to cut the catchment. This decision proved correct as early next morning during a reconnaissance, I saw about 100 Japanese proceeding from the W.N.C. road up the hill towards the Middle Spur catchment.

It was now December 21st and we spent an uncomfortable day at “Overbays” under sniper fire. After dark, we were evacuated towards the Repulse Bay Hotel as it had been decided that all military personnel in the area, and more specifically in the hotel, were to be transferred that night eastward towards Stanley Fort. This was carried out but only with moderate success as quite a few Canadians who were not in the immediate hotel vicinity did not make it - and were captured and later executed by their captors. Our advance on the 20th from Repulse Bay to “The Ridge” must have been, I believe, the farthest forward that any East Brigade troops advanced towards the West Brigade area after the Japanese advance to the W.N.C. road: from then on, it was just a question of withdrawing further back each day.

On December 22nd, we spent the day patrolling the road between Stanley View and Stanley Mound, and on the 23rd found ourselves in trenches behind Stanley Village. Water was getting scarce and we were glad to get the chance to fill our water bottles from a water cart that was making the rounds. Just after dark on the evening of the 24th, we withdrew to Stanley Fort where we spent the next eighteen hours resting and regrouping.

On Christmas Day at 5 p.m., we were ordered to take up positions on the side of the mountain above and facing Stanley Village (which had fallen to the Japanese that morning after heavy fighting) and in which some of the other R.K.C. companies played a prominent part. As we were marching down the road to take up our new positions, we came under shellfire, and several of my men were wounded or killed, and the rest scattered. I myself was slightly wounded in the shoulder but managed without difficulty to get up the hill to where our new positions were; however, when I got there, I only had 2 men with me instead of the 25 or so that I was supposed to have. So consequently I tried to persuade the detachment of Hong Kong Volunteers (that we were relieving) to stay on the line until I could get reinforcements. But they would have none of it and retired, thus leaving me to hold some hundred yards of front line with just two men! Little did I realize at the time that this had been Hong

Kong's last line of defence. And had the enemy attacked, it would undoubtedly have been my last night on earth...

It was only later that we found out that Hong Kong had surrendered at 3 p.m. that afternoon. Through a breakdown in communications, Stanley Fort could not be notified officially until an automobile with two staff officers could be sent there from army headquarters in Victoria. By the time this automobile arrived at Stanley Village, around 9 p.m., it was, of course, dark. I remember seeing it with its lights making its way slowly towards the Fort. I could also hear shouts and shots from the village so I knew that something important was up. Shortly thereafter a runner was sent to advise me that the war was finished for us and that I should return to the Fort. I was mentally exhausted since I had had practically no sleep for a week and my first reaction was one of great relief that now I would, at least, be able to have a good night's sleep.

For the next three or four days, the Japanese left us alone at Stanley Fort, although undoubtedly the telephone lines were very busy between Japanese authorities and our Brigade headquarters. The only instructions that I recall receiving were all weapons must be collected and piled away. These few days by ourselves were peaceful ones but did give us time to wonder about what the future might hold for us. It also gave us time to catch up on the news of our comrades, most of whom we had not seen for several weeks. During the week of fighting, when we were all exhausted and had a lot on our minds, the scraps of news that you heard, even when they involved the death of a brother officer who was a close friend, did not really sink in. But now that the fighting was over and we had rested, the sad news about our companions struck with full force and was very depressing.

This peaceful existence could not go on indefinitely. It was therefore no surprise when word came through that we were to 'fall in' at 9 a.m. next morning with what belongings we could carry - for a move, of which the destination was not disclosed. So at the designated hour, we 'fell in'. A squad of about fifty Japanese soldiers and a couple of officers arrived, and about an hour later we marched off in column. I do not remember very much about that march, which was about ten or eleven miles, although I was in good physical condition and found it easy. I do recall that whenever we passed through an inhabited district, the streets on both sides were invariably lined with Chinese of all ages waving tiny Japanese flags; this had obviously been carefully orchestrated by the Japanese and did

not indicate any great show of enthusiasm on the part of the participants, the crowds being quite quiet and expressionless. Eventually we reached our destination and new home at about 4 p.m.: a former camp for refugees (from the Canton area) at North Point. The camp was filthy and in a state of extreme disrepair, having been both looted and shelled during the recent fighting.

For the first couple of weeks there was a shortage of water and the only latrine available was over the seawall into the sea - which was the boundary for one side of the camp. Flies were there in their millions and thrived and feasted on unburied bodies abounding in the vicinity of the camp, and on the bodies or body parts which floated by intermittently. The prisoners incarcerated here comprised mostly our Royal Rifles regiment, Navy personnel (whose headquarters was the naval dockyard in nearby Victoria) and a variety of others from units in the east end of the Island at the time of the surrender. There was also the crew of a Dutch submarine which had been captured somewhere around the East Indies. These were remarkable men for within a week of their arrival at the camp, they had published a newspaper in English, and within a few days, the officers, except for the junior lieutenant, had all escaped via the sea wall.

These Dutch men were also the ones who some 2 or 3 years later operated a clandestine radio in camp when it had become very dangerous to do so. The Japanese did not distinguish between transmitters and receivers and would treat those found using either one in the same brutal fashion. In any event, the Dutch had a radio operator amongst them who operated a radio for awhile after we moved from North Point to the camp on the mainland at Sham Shui Po. The news they received was given a very restricted circulation for obvious reasons, but I was lucky enough to be a chess partner of one of the Dutch crew and he used to give me the current news during our games together. The junior officer (who had been left behind when the senior officers escaped) was for some reason mistrusted by those operating the radio and was not given any news by them; and this caused a certain friction between myself and the young Dutch officer as he sensed that I was getting the news.

Eventually the radio was discovered and all hell broke loose. The whole camp was immediately called out on parade. The Dutch, who occupied a hut adjacent to the one used for church services, had very cleverly hidden the radio under a table used as an altar. And I can tell you, the Padrés looked very drawn during the parade until it became obvious that the Dutch were responsible. Which of

the Dutch were actually punished, I am not sure and it would have been most unjust if the junior officer had been. But those punished were very lucky as the Japanese camp commandant, Sgt. Major Honda (of whom more later) treated it as an internal matter and meted out the punishment himself, probably by kicking and slapping the culprits around. It would have been quite a different matter had it been reported to the Japanese Gendarmerie who would most certainly have sent the guilty to trial and they might never have been seen again.

The whole question of news received by us while we were prisoners is an interesting one. After the radio was discovered under the altar, there was no more radio in camp until the end of the war. During our first nine months at North Point, there was no radio. The only news we got was through contact with the sentries, some of whom used to trade food and cigarettes in return for watches, rings, gold fillings or other articles of value; or from other prisoners who had been transferred to the camp from Bowen Road Hospital or Sham Shui Po. The news obtained this way was, by the very nature of its source, very sketchy and unsatisfactory.

After we were transferred to Sham Shui Po camp (which I believe was around September, 1942), there was, in addition to a radio which functioned sporadically, two other main sources of information: i) A considerable number of men from the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps were actually “nationals” of countries other than the U.K and its allies, and had wives, relatives or friends who were not interned and were permitted, once a week, to bring parcels containing food or personal necessities to the camp gate for delivery to the appropriate prisoner; and ii) From time to time and sometimes daily for an extended period, the Japanese allowed a few copies of the local English newspaper to be delivered to the camp. (This service was often interrupted for periods as a form of punishment for the whole camp, such as when a New Zealand POW escaped in 1944 or 1945). This newspaper was not so much censored as written and edited by persons friendly and entirely committed to the Japanese line of propaganda.

Fortunately it was easy to read between the lines: thus when the Americans were leapfrogging up the Pacific Islands towards Japan in 1944, you would read there had been a naval engagement at “X” at which the Americans had lost seven aircraft carriers; and then a couple of weeks later you would read that there had been another naval engagement at “Y” at which they had lost another six or seven carriers, and so on at “Z” a few weeks later. But, on looking at the map,

you would see that “Y” was 1,000 miles closer to Japan than “X”, and “Z” another 1,000 miles closer again than “Y”. Similarly, on the Russian front, the Russians would have fantastic losses (particularly of tanks) every day, but each day upon consulting the map, you would see that these losses always occurred closer to Germany.

We had neither newspaper nor radio at the time the “A” bomb was dropped on Japan. But good news was in the air at the time, reinforced by such things as Colonel Toganawa (the Japanese officer in charge of all prisoners in Hong Kong) sending in a consignment of high class toilet paper; and the sight of the guards being paraded to listen to a broadcast from the Emperor and then eventually the sudden disappearance from camp of these same guards (who were Taiwanese).

There was a big change in personnel at North Point later in the winter of 1942 when the Winnipeg Grenadiers and other Canadian prisoners at Sham Shui Po were transferred there in exchange for naval and other assorted personnel of the Imperial contingent. (It was at this time, too, I believe, that an Officers Camp was set up at Argyll Street on the Kowloon side. Nearly all officers were transferred there except the Canadian ones who remained with their men until later in 1943 (?) at which time the more senior ones were transferred to Argyll Street. The Indian officers (other than certain ones) and soldiers of the Rajput and Punjabi regiments, however, had been segregated in a separate camp very early on and had a very hard time especially those who refused to renounce allegiance to the British Crown and enrol in the so-called Independent Indian Army created by the Japanese.

From the time that the Grenadiers joined us at North Point, we continued as an all Canadian POW Camp until the move to Sham Shui Po in the autumn when North Point was closed. I believe that room was made for us at Sham Shui Po by the departure of the first draft of prisoners - composed entirely of the Imperials - to Japan. When we arrived there, we found ourselves occupying the very same area and buildings as when we had first arrived in Hong Kong. However, the camp was subsequently decreased in area several times as further drafts of POWs departed periodically for Japan.

The first building to be closed off at the camp through this attrition was the Jubilee Building (where I had had my original quarters with my Chinese batman) and after that, various other areas and huts were gradually closed and wired off. Eventually, after the last draft to Japan, nobody remained at Sham Shui Po except those men in the poorest of health, and a few medical personnel and junior officers (including the Canadian ones). The camp was then divided in two, with these men occupying one half and the officers (who had been moved from Argyll Street) occupying the other half, with plenty of barbed wire in between.

After our imprisonment, the matter of food was always uppermost in everyone's mind. There was no problem for the first few weeks at North Point as we were lucky enough to include amongst our fellow prisoners the commanding officer of the Royal Army Service Corps - and this officer knew exactly where all the auxiliary ration dumps were located on the Island. Consequently, this colonel was able to lead a ration party aboard a guarded truck to these ration dumps and bring back to the camp tons of tinned and packaged dry foodstuffs, such as tinned sausages and oatmeal, well suited to a European type diet. This Utopia of food soon came to an end and we were informed that not only would we be on rations supplied by the Japanese army in future but all the surplus of food accumulated during the past few weeks would be removed from camp.

From that point until liberation, our daily ration would consist basically of three meals a day of rice, the evening meal garnished with some vegetable such as potato tops, with an occasional tiny portion of dried fish (usually bad), all washed down by lukewarm cups of tea, of which beverage there always seemed to be a superfluity. There was also a small ration of sugar for individual consumption and peanut oil for cooking. At first, the Canadian cooks did not know how to cook rice and served up our rations wet and soggy. But eventually the Dutch cooks - who had been stationed in Indonesia - came to the rescue and showed our cooks how to prepare fluffy (not soggy) rice!

There were indeed a few extraordinary variations in our daily meal. A small pig pen adjacent to Sham Shui Po camp which was used to impress visiting Red Cross officials was supposed to be used to feed the prisoners but was instead for the enjoyment of the Japanese officers. On perhaps as few as two occasions, a small pig was killed and its carcass used to supplement our evening rice ration - and you can well imagine how much of the pig each one of 2000-3000

prisoners would have got. On another bizarre occasion, we were served a small portion of pheasant with our evening rice. This did not herald an improvement to our daily ration. Rather one of the cold storage plants in Victoria could no longer be operated due to a coal shortage and the frozen carcasses therein, including the pheasants, had to be disposed of on the double in some fashion or another!

The change from a European to an Oriental diet was to have both short- and longer-term effects on our systems. In my own case, I developed a form of gastritis within about six months which I suffered in silence and without seeking help from the M.O.; it eventually went away after a couple of months. However, the longer term effects of living on an unaccustomed diet of practically nothing but polished rice began to be felt by all about a year after the change in diet and took the form of trouble with our eyes and with the nerves in our legs. These symptoms were diagnosed by the Medical Officers as beriberi or pellagra, and caused by avitaminosis. The beriberi was either 'wet' or 'dry'; the wet form resulted in severe swelling of the ankle and face but was quite easily and quickly cured by injections of thiamine or Vitamin B1. The dry form, on the other hand, was much more painful and serious; and for those of us who had it (which was nearly all of us), it was never really cured, although with the passage of time, the painful neuritis of the feet eventually turned into numbness. Insofar as the eyes were concerned, I found that, after a year and a half of captivity, I was nearly blind. (For instance, if I was watching lawn bowling, I could not see the balls at the other end, only a blur). I was lucky, however, since with the proper treatment given just in time, my eyesight came back and is now, in fact, just about normal for someone of my age.

But a lot of other prisoners were not so lucky and were left with permanent or chronic visual disability. "Pellagra" symptoms consisted principally of sore tongues and numbness, the latter occasionally at the top of the head. But this was not as prevalent in Hong Kong and responded satisfactorily to treatment by Vitamin B. Avitaminosis was not a 'killer' for the POW's and it is likely none died from it directly. But it was the cause of a tremendous amount of discomfort and suffering in the prison camp and it is probable that 90% of all living Hong Kong ex-POWs still suffer from the aftermath symptoms of the disease, such as blurred vision and more especially leg trouble (i.e. numbness in the feet and elsewhere in the legs; and weak or non-existent ankle reflexes).

Nonetheless, avitaminosis certainly contributed substantially to weakening our bodies in their fight against other diseases prevalent in the camp from time to time, namely diphtheria, dysentery and malaria; and it would undoubtedly have become a killer when it reached its peak about 14 months later had not a large supply of bulk Vitamins (particularly 'B' & 'C') arrived in Hong Kong and been distributed to us by our captors. Prior to this, the Japanese had been unable or unwilling to supply us with any vitamins.

After the arrival of the bulk medical supplies, I was to receive injections of thiamine or Vitamin B1 every second day for the rest of my time as a POW (and have since my return home to Canada been taking daily doses, probably as have most other Japanese POW's). After our return home, there was initially a tendency by doctors to treat nearly all complaints of illnesses as largely psychiatric. But this attitude has gradually changed since advances in medicine have shown the effects of avitaminosis.

At the time of the diphtheria epidemic (during the winter of 1942, I believe) which was apparently transmitted by work parties of our men returning to camp from Kai Tak airport, the Japanese supplied us with no antitoxin - even though a completely insufficient amount was obtained "over the fence" (i.e. through clandestine means). Diphtheria was the cause of a great number of deaths, and I well remember, over a period of several weeks watching the daily funeral parties go by sometimes carrying as many as five coffins. And our soldiers from the Magdalen Islands - where the local population had never been exposed to diphtheria - dropped like flies. None of us were inoculated against the disease and those lucky enough to get inoculated after contracting it only received one-tenth of the prescribed dosage.

There was a tendency by the Japanese medical personnel - who were probably receiving hell from their own superiors - to blame the excessive number of POW deaths on our medical staff, and more particularly on the orderlies. I vividly remember one day seeing the orderlies paraded before the Japanese Medical Officer, Lt. Saito. After a brief harangue, he said to them, "All those who think they are doing their jobs properly, step forward" (or words to that effect). When everybody stepped forward, he harangued them again even more violently for a few minutes and repeated the invitation to step forward. This time, though, obviously intimidated, only about five orderlies stepped forward. Thereupon, an enraged Saito drew his sword and invited the five to again step forward. One

of them, a Corporal Varley did so - and I really thought he was going to be killed. However, Saito eventually simmered down and I don't believe that the orderlies actually suffered any further abuse.

The Japanese medical staff showed a complete lack of interest in our condition at all times. Even when selecting men for the labour draft to Japan, the medical examination of these men appeared to be merely to turn over their eyelids and disqualify only those who might have anaemia. It did not matter that they might look like skeletons, they still went on the draft if they passed the anaemia test!

On another occasion, the Japanese paraded the entire camp and gave everyone inoculations for dysentery - which did not appear to diminish the number of cases of the disease. In fact, our M.O.'s were quite sure that no such inoculation existed anyway. After diphtheria, dysentery was the big 'killer', either the bacillary or the less prevalent but more lethal amoebic kind - and death from this was most often the result of a body weakened by malnutrition.

Another disease that caused a few deaths was malaria though by the third year of imprisonment everyone had pretty well somehow acquired a mosquito net. But mosquito nets were a mixed blessing, as while they protected to some degree from mosquitoes, they also acted as havens for bed bugs (which were one of the constant and greatest of all trials we had to bear).

While at North Point camp, I do not remember hearing about bed bugs. (There were, however, several cases of lice which was likely due to the shortage of soap and water for the washing of clothes, as it's not a dirty body which attracts or breeds lice but rather the prolonged dirtiness of clothes). But the story at Sham Shui Po was a different one. When we arrived there, most officers managed to scrounge some kind of bed. But there were few beds in the men's huts and most had to sleep on the bare cement floors. Only by continuous complaining to the Japanese authorities were the men eventually supplied with lumber to construct platforms in their huts for sleeping purposes.

Unfortunately, a short time thereafter, the bedbugs descended upon the huts. They concealed themselves effectively during daytime in the cracks of the wood and the seams of the mosquito netting, emerging in full fury after we had gone

to bed to crawl over and bite any exposed flesh; the hotter the weather (unlike lice which preferred the cooler weather), the more vicious their attacks. And the younger and more recently hatched the bugs, the more fiery their attentions. They also had a very unpleasant odour (rather like the taste of a Lac St. Jean blueberry with one of their local bugs in it). There seemed to be absolutely no way to get rid of these monsters until it was discovered that by placing a trail of sugar leading to the bed posts, you could lure red ants from their nests into the beds and they would then penetrate every tiny crevice, turn the many-times larger bedbugs onto their backs, cut off their legs and carry them away to their larders; and the bedbug eggs which appeared to be a special delicacy were also removed! This was not a permanent fix as the bedbugs eventually returned but it gave a couple of months respite...

With regard to the subject of bedbugs, it took almost as long to get permission from the Japanese to remove the wooden platforms in the men's huts as it had taken to acquire the wood used in their construction. The officers' beds were mainly of wood and also overrun by bugs; these beasts even hid themselves in the few iron beds that existed. They were real sticklers, these bedbugs and I even found some in my bed at home two years after the war! Shortly before their discovery, I had been in my bedroom examining some papers and clothes brought back from Hong Kong - and they had undoubtedly been hiding dormant there all that time.

The Canadian medical staff were real heroes. They spent longer and longer days at sick parades and looking after their patients as the camp gradually became sicker and sicker. Unfortunately, there was little medicine and few instruments to use in curing the sick. (But as an example of how skilled they were, they once removed an appendix from a sick man during a blackout using penknives as instruments and flashlights to see with). Their task did become considerably easier after the delivery of bulk Red Cross medical supplies in 1943, and when numbers had shrunk in the camp due to the departure of the majority of men through successive drafts to Japan.

The two Canadian dental officers had been lucky enough to salvage most of their equipment and initially we had good dental service once the electricity was turned on - until materials for fillings and painkillers began to run out. This shortage of supplies was not helped by the fact that the dentists were very popular with the Japanese guards who apparently had no dental service of their

own and used to have gold stashed away in their teeth where it would be safe until such time as they would be sent home. Where they got the gold is a partial mystery, but I do know that some came from two wisdom teeth fillings which I had traded for food. The guards were traders at heart. They got very little pay and were always on the lookout for a deal with the prisoners. For the most part, they were extremely honest in their dealings and it was only on very rare occasions that one who had been given something to sell by a prisoner would simply disappear and never be seen again.

Anyone who has read the book “King Rat”, which is about a POW camp in Malaya, will know how important a rôle the prisoners who traded with the guards played. While it is true that there was nobody in the POW camps in Hong Kong who could begin to rival “King Rat” in power, there were several of the traders who usually quite legitimately did very well for themselves by charging commissions in their dealings. You might ask what did the POWS have to trade with after the first year of captivity, but it was surprising what was still crossing the fence on its way out after three years of imprisonment - watches, rings, cuff links, cigarette cases and gold fillings. In my case, I had somehow managed to preserve my officer’s serge uniform*. It was actually on the trading block in August 1945 as the war was coming to an end. It did not go, however, and I surprised everybody by coming home in it when all the others were in makeshift uniforms (mostly given to them in Manila or Japan by the Americans). Trading with the guards was not without its dangers, however, as great for - or even greater for - the guards than it was for the prisoners, as the Japanese Gendarmerie was always on the lookout for these ‘across-the-fence’ activities. Thus on one occasion, a number of jerkins (apron

*(Editor’s Note: Our father’s uniform, still in pristine condition, is on display since about 2010 in the Chaleur Bay Military Museum in New Richmond, Gaspé, Quebec).

like garments with thermal qualities worn over the tunic) were stolen from the Army Service Corps and discovered in the possession of two of the guards. As a result, the whole camp was paraded, and the two Japanese culprits obliged to pass along the whole line of POW’s in an effort to identify from whom they had bought them. I can tell you that, even though I was not guilty, it was a very nasty feeling to have these two fellows look you straight in the eyes as they went by! You know the saying “all Orientals look the same to a white man”; well, it shot through my mind at that moment that perhaps also, “all white men look alike to an Oriental” and that consequently these two miscreants might just as easily ‘finger’ me as anyone else.

With regard to mail, we were permitted after about six months to write a 25-word letter about once a month. These letters did not arrive home until at least a year later, if ever. When I had left Canada, I left behind a code showing most of the places to which we might be sent (including Hong Kong). But as my knapsack containing my copy of the code had been lost during the fighting, I was wary about ever using the code for fear it might be in Japanese hands. As an example of the uncertainty of my own correspondence reaching its destination, I had written four or five letters to my wife, and then I also wrote one to my parents and one to my grandmother. You can well imagine how my wife felt when my grandmother was the first to receive a letter from me; and I hardly think that this priority delivery to my grandmother was due to the great respect that the Japanese show towards their ancestors... As to incoming mail, none was received until about a year and a half after the surrender and then only in very small quantities. I was one of the first to receive a letter and thereafter occasionally received a few others, but there were some prisoners who received none at all during the entire four years of captivity; one Canadian officer who had received no letters later told me that his wife had actually written to him at every opportunity.

The subject of Red Cross food parcels is also of interest. It is my understanding that POW's in Germany received these parcels at least once a month during their captivity, but in our case, we only received three or four each during the entire four years, the first one being received only about eighteen months after internment. Only very occasionally did the additional food contained in these parcels really supplement our diet in toto, but it added at least some variety to the monotonous fare. And admittedly, the Red Cross medical supplies received during the winter of 1943 were of considerably more value than a monthly supply of food parcels would ever have been.

Insofar as personal and cigarette parcels are concerned, these were delivered only once to the camp, in the autumn, I think, of 1943. Again, some prisoners were lucky, and some were not; some did not receive anything - while in my case, I received a personal parcel and about 8000 cigarettes. I cannot remember everything that was in my personal parcel, but it had been very well thought out. I especially remember how delighted I was to receive two packs of playing cards and a pair of pyjamas. By this time you can imagine in what state the cards originally brought into camp were and, of course, pyjamas were non-existent.

It had always been possible to get cigarettes of a sort (the Chinese kind which were of a very poor quality) provided, of course, you could pay for them as there was no such thing as a ration of cigarettes issued at any time by the authorities. But these cigarettes were especially important for their 'trading' value. (i.e. their value in obtaining additional food). I received equal amounts of both 'Black Cats' and 'Sweet Caporals' and both brands - especially the 'Black Cats' - became very potent traders. The market in Hong Kong (including the Japanese officers) was apparently starved for good cigarettes. At the time, it could be said that the outgoing currency was Canadian cigarettes, and the incoming currency was duck eggs. Indeed, our cigarettes were so popular for trading that, at their peak, a package of 25 'Black Cats' could be traded for perhaps 20 duck eggs, and 25 'Sweet Caporals' for perhaps 15 duck eggs.

Of course, I did not keep the 8,000 cigarettes for myself. (I was particularly pleased that, when I picked up the cigarettes at the camp office, and the Japanese interpreter suggested that I ought to give some of the best brand to him, I inferred that the 'Sweet Caporals' - which I did give to him - were the best). I actually presented about 4000 to a pool set up for those POW's who had not received any cigarettes and another 2000 to friends among the limeys and Hong Kong Volunteers, keeping the rest for myself and the officer with whom I messed (who had been rather unlucky in the bonanza). We did not even smoke one of the Canadian cigarettes ourselves but traded them all, mostly for duck eggs and, in my case, for the cheaper Chinese cigarettes.

There is no question but that the arrival of the Canadian cigarettes and the consequent influx of duck eggs into the camp was a very great boon to our health. Even the Chinese cigarettes were a very precious commodity - and the actual currency for trading deals within the camp. There were indeed some of our POW's who preferred to smoke than eat and would trade some of their rations for cigarettes. Some would even hang around the guards waiting for them to throw away their cigarette butts for rolling into cheap fags for their own consumption. I myself was a rather heavy smoker, and while I never exchanged any of my rations for cigarettes (which I could easily have done as I never felt hungry for the kind of rations we had), I occasionally traded other personal things - a gold filling on one occasion - for cigarettes. Furthermore, when night guard duty around the huts performed by the POW's themselves was introduced, I was always prepared to do someone else's turn of duty in return for cigarettes. There were strict rules concerning the blackout, but I sometimes

had a clandestine smoke during guard duty. It now makes me shiver to think what might have happened had I ever been caught...

These trading practices lead me to the subject of 'inflation' in Hong Kong in general and in the POW camp in particular during our four years of imprisonment. One of the first things the Japanese did when they took over Hong Kong was to call in all Hong Kong dollars and other foreign currencies (the possession of which thereupon became illegal and subject to very stiff penalties). The Japanese military yen then became the only legal tender. When the Japanese began to pay the POW officers (in accordance with the Geneva Convention - to which they adhered only when it suited their purposes), I had already disposed of the HK\$200 or so which I had brought with me to the North Point camp.; consequently, a lieutenant's pay of about 75(?) military yen would have been a great help - if its purchasing power about four months after the surrender had not already greatly diminished. The Canadian authorities at North Point had been agitating for some time for the Japanese to supply the camp with some sort of canteen. The Japanese finally acquiesced, timing the arrival of the canteen's 'compradore' (buyer) with the first pay made to the officers. What the compradore produced was not very impressive, mostly cigarettes, matches, soap, some tins of bully beef (the latter obviously looted or otherwise "procured" from the Service Corps' emergency ration dumps located around the Island) and numerous little parcels of sickly sweets covered with flies. At this stage, you could buy matches for perhaps a single yen and a tin of bully beef for about 15 yen. In the end, we made few purchases, and so after two or three visits to the camp, the canteen was discontinued.

I cannot accurately recall the monthly rates of pay of the several ranks of officers, but would venture that a Lt. Colonel received about 300 military yen, a major 175 yen, a captain 125 yen and lieutenants 75 yen (and these rates were supposed to correspond to those paid to their own officers by the Japanese). Ironically, later on, around the middle of 1943, our pay was proportionately reduced across the board by about 25% as a contribution to the Japanese war effort (of all things) to which apparently all Japanese soldiers also had to contribute. This tax for the war effort would, under normal circumstances, have been quite a blow except that by that time inflation had already drastically reduced the 'purchasing power' of the military yen to such an extent that a lieutenant's monthly pay of 75 yen (less 25%) would only have bought a box of matches. I have no idea how the Japanese soldiers survived on their pay, except

that they must have had a better canteen with cheaper prices. And also, I understand, they could upon return to Japan exchange the military yen saved for ordinary yen - which would itself have suffered from inflation, but probably no more than the currency of any country that had been at war for several years.

Apparently, the senior officers (both Canadian and Imperial) set up a fund - while the military yen still had some value. Into it they deposited part of their monthly pay, and from which other ranks could borrow or which could be used to buy certain scarce supplies for the camp (such as essential medical supplies), it being understood that the sums put into this fund would be reimbursed after the war. However, I do not believe that any such reimbursement happened as no proper accounting system had been put into place.

I am not aware whether any of the men who went on labour drafts to Japan with a few military yen were able to exchange these for ordinary yen when they reached Japan, but I think that it would have been difficult to do it officially.

As a result of poor rations and different sicknesses suffered during four years of captivity, we were all very thin by the end of it. I myself went down from my normal weight of 165 lbs. to 116 lbs. But in my case, however, quite a lot of the weight loss was due to something else not yet mentioned... read further! After the camp guards had disappeared and we had taken over control of Sham Shui Po ourselves, who should appear almost immediately at the camp gates but a bunch of compradores anxious to sell everything under the sun to the poor POW's? (This was on credit too - and only to be paid for after we got back to Canada). Items included many brands of British hard liquor, such as 'Gordon's Dry Gin' and 'Dewar's Scotch'; I myself bought a bottle of the gin and had two or three small drinks, only to feel a couple of hours later that I was going to die. This feeling was only relieved when I became violently sick at my stomach. And what should I pull out of my throat but a 6-inch tapeworm, apparently not at all happy at being taken off its customary diet of rice for a gin one! Fortunately tapeworms are quite easy to get rid of - and I only had one of them, so there was no question of eggs involved.

I should also add that even before the compradores arrived at the camp gate with their gin and other goodies, another Chinese gentleman arrived looking for me - my Hong Kong tailor who had made a summer drill suit for me which he had

delivered but not been paid for: but fortunately he too, like the compradores, was willing to wait a little longer until we got home for payment.

I do not think that the possibility (or as strict army types would put it) ‘the duty’ of escaping was ever much on the minds of the ordinary Canadian POWs. Four (none from the Royal Rifles) did actually escape from North Point around mid-1942 and were subsequently captured and executed. The day this escape was discovered, the Japanese informed our senior officers that each POW must sign a paper promising not to try to escape. After considerable discussion amongst themselves, the senior officers advised us to sign such a paper as it had no legal effect since it was signed under duress. While we were deciding whether or not to comply, the whole camp was paraded before Col. Togunawa, who stood on a table and addressed us through a Japanese interpreter who said if we did not sign it would be ‘munity’! Normally such a mistake in pronunciation would have been greeted by a roar of laughter from the men, but this time you could have heard a pin drop. In any case, we eventually all signed – except for one rifleman, of whom his pals said he was so contrary that had he been ordered not to sign, he would have signed! This ‘non-signer’ was taken out of the camp by the guards and we all wondered what dreadful fate would befall him: however, he was apparently not treated too badly, had a change of heart and was brought back to the camp several hours later none the worse for wear.

However, an Imperial Officer, Major Boxer (who knew the Japanese well and spoke their language fluently) was not so lucky. He refused to sign, feeling that he would ‘lose face’ if he did and the Japanese would not respect him - and consequently spent several months in prison at Stanley Village. Another time while at North Point, several prisoners escaped from Sham Shui Po and as a result, the whole camp was kept on parade in the rain from about 10 p.m. until 10 a.m. the following morning, a very uncomfortable experience.

There was apparently a ‘general escape’ plan, known only by a few senior officers and kept under wraps until such time as there might be an invasion of Hong Kong or an attempt to rescue the POWs by the Allies. I do not know how good this plan was but hate to think what an awful massacre would have occurred if it had ever been put into effect.

Relations between the POWs, and the camp guards and their commandant varied from time to time in accordance with the nature and character of the personnel concerned. Our first camp commandant, Lt. Watta, was always smiling and bowing, even when he was giving drastic orders. But he is more famous for being the officer in command of the POW's aboard the "Lisbon Maru" when it was torpedoed en route to Japan, and for having refused to open the hatches so the prisoners could escape from drowning... The next and final camp commandant whom we had for most of our time at Sham Shui Po was a real gentleman and did what he could to make the POWs lives more endurable (e.g. his handling of the aforementioned discovery of the radio). His name was Honda and he was only a Sgt. Major or Warrant Officer, which shows how much authority the Japanese could place in the hands of an N.C.O. His conduct had been so good, indeed, that after the war was over, the POWs saw to it that he was given a room at the prestigious Peninsula Hotel, to be out of harm's way.

This was quite unlike the treatment handed out to Imperial Camp Commander, Major Boone, whom the prisoners threw into jail after the war, and who was later court-martialled for having collaborated with the enemy. The much hated Boone used to act more like the Japanese than the Japanese themselves, shaving his head and bowing and scraping all over the place; his conduct was particularly odious during occasional camp inspections or searches carried out by the Japanese where he would often draw their attention to something illegal or amiss which they had overlooked. Boone's assistants, Sgt. Tovee and Private Bevan were equally obnoxious and were always snooping around looking for contraventions of the rules to report to their master. They were, I understand, also court-martialled after the war, but apparently got off on the grounds that they were acting on the orders of their superior officer, said Boone. He was apparently also acquitted but was financially ruined by the high legal costs involved.

The types of guards varied considerably. For instance, at one time in North Point we were guarded by a group of soldiers from an elite Japanese regiment which had just been in active service against the Chinese and had suffered heavy casualties. These guards were tall and rather aloof - and we had been warned by our captors to stay out of their way. But at least on one occasion (which I remember well because my hut was next to the guardhouse), they strung up some offending Chinese passerby from the ceiling by the wrists, tortured him

from time to time with lighted cigarettes and eventually took him away and shot him.

During the last few years of captivity, our guards at Sham Shui Po were Formosans. They were primarily interested in trading with us and once the war was over, they immediately disappeared, apparently first changing their uniforms for civilian Chinese dress. There was also a guard who was a mean corporal nicknamed 'Four Eyes' on account of the big thick spectacles he wore: it was necessary for any POW passing the guards or the guardhouse to salute the N.C.O. in charge - as he was on duty representing the Emperor. Several times 'Four Eyes' beat up any prisoners who failed to salute or salute properly when passing him; also, during any epidemic of contagious diseases, all POWs (including the guards) were supposed to wear small cotton masks over their mouths and noses to prevent the disease spreading. On one occasion, the Canadian officers were having lunch outside one of the huts and, in order to be able to eat properly, were not wearing their masks. Along came 'Four Eyes' in a threatening mood, shouting and making passes with his bayonet at some of the officers. At first we could not figure out what was the cause of his anger but eventually it dawned on us why, so we calmed him down by simply wearing our masks until he went away.

These Formosan guards were on duty one stormy night and when they had finished their tour of duty, the New Zealand POW escaped by simply walking out of the camp behind them (or so I am told)!

I personally managed to always keep a low profile in respect of the guards and consequently, through luck perhaps, was never either touched or searched. Whenever there was a big move either from camp to camp or even within the camp, there was always the fear of a search. Items such as the radio had to be very carefully hidden in transit; it had to be completely dismantled into its smallest components which were then distributed among numerous individuals. However, I do not believe that any important item was ever found.

There was one Japanese interpreter attached to the guards who was always snooping around at night and making things unpleasant for the prisoners, especially the Canadians. He was known as "the Kamloops Kid" and this was because he was a Canadian citizen who had lived in Kamloops (British Columbia). But he just happened to be in Japan when broke out and enlisted (or

was drafted) into the Japanese army. He was very tough with the POWs in the early days when everything was going well for the Japanese and their allies, but became considerably softer when things started to go badly for the Japanese and he could see 'the writing on the wall'. Once when someone in one of the huts called out at night: "Stop the noise or that cocksucking Kamloops Kid will be on your tail", and there came the reply: "Yes, the Kamloops Kid is here, so stop the noise", there was a frightened silence, but fortunately no further action from the Kamloops Kid. After the war, he was, I believe, tried for treason and executed.

Each day in camp tended to be a carbon copy of the day before. So time hung very heavy indeed, especially when we were at North Point where there were not enough books and the camp area was restricted. Some effort was made to play softball, but this petered out due to a lack of equipment and loss of energy due to diet. The few attempts to organise concerts were on a very limited scale. Insofar as the officers were concerned, the principal pastimes were sleeping, cards and chess, in that order. I myself managed to spend several months reading through the English dictionary and copying down every word that I didn't know. The card games played were mostly bridge and cribbage, but we also indulged in piquet and gin rummy.

Yet chess was the best form of opium, as you could become so completely immersed that you were unconscious of the passage of time. And when we arrived at Sham Shui Po and joined up with the Hong Kong Volunteers, chess took on an even greater importance. We were a real League of Nations with practically every nationality under the sun. There were Turks, Austrians, Romanians, Norwegians, White and Red Russians, Scandinavians, Portuguese and so on to infinity with 90% who had played chess to some degree before becoming prisoners. Many tournaments were soon organized and one of our Canadian officers actually became champion of the camp!

The Chinese members of the Volunteers had all been released by the Japanese, but the Portuguese (most of who were partly Chinese or Indonesian, and sometimes referred to as 'Macanese' because of their connection with nearby Macau) were imprisoned; and only one, to my knowledge, was pure Portuguese. The POWs who had actually lived in Hong Kong and were in Victoria at the time of the surrender had had time before reporting for imprisonment, to return to their homes and pick up all kinds of belongings which were to be extremely

useful in the next four years, not only to themselves, but also to their fellow prisoners. Their principal acquisitions were books; and so when we arrived at Sham Shui Po, we found an excellent library in operation with at least one book for each prisoner. These books were kept in good condition by very capable book binders whose work, when you consider the lack of materials, was almost professional. Of course, you could not always get the book you wanted right away (some being more popular than others) but you hardly ever had to wait more than six weeks for a particular book.

The camp at Sham Shui Po had much better facilities and equipment than that of North Point; there was even a hall which could be used for concerts and a considerable number of band instruments. As a result, concerts and musical shows were performed at intervals. There were also among the Hong Kong Volunteers and the British officers a large number of well-educated and, in some cases, distinguished professionals such as teachers, professors, lawyers, journalists, architects, engineers, etc., and some of these men gave up their time to lead discussions or teach classes in the several subjects in which they were adept. Classes were also held in several languages, but I contented myself with learning a little Spanish and German grammar and vocabulary from textbooks. I found the Spanish reasonably easy but I soon gave up German on account of its difficult script and strange sentence construction.

Another pastime in which (principally) officers took part was tending the camp vegetable garden. There had been no room for a garden at North Point but at Sham Shui Po, there was a large vacant area adjacent to the camp (about 1/3 of the size of the camp itself) wired off for the prisoners to grow vegetables. The principal crops grown were tomatoes, lettuce and sweet potatoes. The climate was so moderate that three crops of tomatoes could be grown in a year (except during December through February). The Japanese were initially very slack about supplying seeds and I believe it is true, incredible as it may seem, that the first tomato seeds used in the camp were obtained from a tin of stewed tomatoes (which in manufacturing must have been heated to a very high temperature). For fertilizer, of course, we used the human excrement from the latrines in the camp and this was reinforced by manure from the pig farm.

I personally had a couple of private plots inside Sham Shui Po camp - between the huts - where I tried to grow tomatoes but without too much success. This was partly because they did not receive enough sun there, partly because the

only kind of fertilizer was our own 'aged' urine (which was a source of constant friction between ourselves and those whose window overlooked the tin of aging urine) and partly because it was almost impossible to protect the ripening fruit from pilferers.

The other ranks of POWs had little time for gardening as the healthiest of them had to go out on 'work parties' every day. The officers were not obliged to join these but it was decided that they should take turns accompanying work parties to support the men in case a crisis should arise.

Although the men did not have to really slave during these daily 'work parties' outside the camp (the principal site being Kai Tak airport where the Japanese were extending the runways), it made a very long day for them: from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and often in extremely hot weather. Each group of men would be given a task and when they had finished, they could then quit for the rest of the day. The Portuguese and other Hong Kong Volunteers (most of whom were recipients of parcels from their friends and families outside the camp) were in better condition than the Canadians and often finished their assigned tasks by noon while the Canadians would have to go on working all afternoon.

There were, however, two work parties organized in Hong Kong that did not conform to the norm. The first one was sent to the race track at Victoria for a week to dig up the grounds and turn them into a vegetable garden – and this project was preceded by a lot of hullabaloo from the Japanese as to what a good time those who worked there would have. However, the project turned out to be a nightmare as the prisoners were required to work very hard to the beat of a drum and under constant supervision by the guards. As a result, they were all exhausted when they returned to camp. The other unusual work party went to the New Territories for a week under the command of Sgt. Major Honda, the camp commandant. One of the Canadian officers who accompanied this mission told me that he actually enjoyed himself, partly because of the interesting conversations he had with Honda in the evenings after the work was finished.

In addition to the outside work parties, there were also work fatigues within the camp carrying out such duties as cleaning the latrines and transporting the fertilizers to the garden, working as cooks or their assistants and cleaning the camp. (In this latter job, a 'free' Frenchman in the H.K. Volunteers was unlucky

enough to die from electrocution when he was cleaning a drain and touched a live wire). The officers also continued to employ batmen whose only job really was to wash their clothes.

Outside of working in the garden, the daily routine of the officers was pretty constant and monotonous: roll call at 8 a.m., then breakfast, then waiting around for lunch at noon, then another wait until roll call at 5 p.m., then dinner and waiting around for lights out. There were only occasional events to cause any excitement in the camp, most of them minor, such as the arrival of mail or Red Cross parcels. The only major ones that come to mind were connected with two allied bombing raids. The first took place during the winter of 1943 (I think), quite close to the Sham Shui Po camp when two planes made low level attacks on some nearby oil storage tanks, setting some on fire which lasted for a couple of days; and the second happened quite late in 1944 (?) when an American aircraft carrier (the “Hornet” or the “Wasp”, I think) dive bombed shipping in Hong Kong harbour for several hours. The bombers appeared to use our camp as a sighting aid and came screaming over at a fairly low altitude before attacking targets in the harbour. A good number of our POWs spent a large part of the day under their beds, although no damage was done to the camp or apparently to any of the planes. As well, often on clear days, we used to spot a small single plane extremely high above Sham Shui Po, apparently on a scouting mission for the allies but which the Japanese never bothered to drive away.

After parade in the morning at Sham Shui Po, we used to have about 15 minutes of Physical Training to the music of the prisoners’ band. This was their idea but the Japanese never bothered about how we carried out these exercises. Some days the roll call parade was considerably longer than expected, such as the morning after the New Zealander had escaped and we were kept out on the parade ground in the blazing sun until late afternoon, ostensibly while the guards searched the camp but obviously as a form of collective punishment.

There were also occasionally incidents at roll calls that were unusual (including the identification parade by the guards involved in the Jerkin theft). I recall two in particular, one amusing, one not so funny. One afternoon during roll call when I was next to an officer with a loose false tooth, he overreacted when he came to number off and spat the tooth out with such force that it hit the Japanese on the tunic! Fortunately, the Japanese did not treat the matter as *lèse-majesté*

(as some might have done) and merely laughed and moved on. But on another occasion, the adjutant had apparently made a mistake in compiling the numbers on parade and the Japanese interpreter (not the Kamloops Kid this time) was so furious that he knocked him down and kicked him on the kneecap, causing him great pain at the time and to limp for several days afterwards.

Another time during morning roll call at North Point camp after daily work parties had departed, I found one man to be missing among the group of POWs for which I was responsible. Had someone escaped or was it simply a mix-up in numbers? If the former, should I cover it up and report 'all men present' to the Adjutant and hope that the Japanese would not notice when they made their own count? In any event, I decided to report the discrepancy to the Adjutant who in turn reported it to the Japanese. As a result, we were all kept out on parade until the Japanese could check by telephone with the guards in charge of that day's working party who found, in due course, that they had an extra man on board. I was considerably relieved and so apparently were the Japanese because they did nothing more about it and no one was punished. And believe it or not, the man missing from parade had been so disappointed not to be selected for the work party that morning that he had decided to go anyway. This kind of attitude among the POW's very quickly disappeared once the novelty of work parties wore off, but in this particular case it must have pleased the Japanese.

The weather in Hong Kong could be best described as sub-tropical, similar to the West Indies and Central America. It was never very cold, temperatures never went below 40°F.; and there was never any question of freezing or a frost. Nonetheless we were poorly equipped with clothes and blankets to cope with the lower temperatures of December through February. October and November were rather pleasant months but as of May until August, it was very humid with temperatures during the day of around 90° F. and dropping to about 70° F at night. The huts at North Point were made of weed and as such, were considerably warmer during the day than those at Sham Shui Po which were of cement; but conversely, at night they cooled off more quickly.

In neither camp were there any real windows, most having been looted or damaged during the fighting and not repaired afterwards except in a makeshift way with sacks and boards. This lack of proper windows would have been very serious in a typhoon since its winds would have been able to easily penetrate

the huts and blow their roofs off, weakening the walls and probably causing them to collapse. (There had been a typhoon in Hong Kong a few years before with winds so strong that the instrument used to record typhoons - which had clocked winds up to 165 mph - could not record its top winds). The typhoon season is roughly from the middle of July until the end of September (which is the worst month). We were lucky to never experience a full typhoon, the highest was a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10. Sometimes during the summer, we would get torrential rains for about half an hour which would rapidly lower the temperature by as much as 20° (i.e. from 90° to 70°). However, this respite from the heat was short-lived and half an hour later, the temperature would be right up to 90° again with an accompanying big increase in the humidity.

The clothes we wore varied with the temperature. For instance, at the end of January, we tended to wear all the clothes we had when we went to bed. But in the hot months we would wear nothing but a 'fandouchy' or loincloth (which covered principally your private parts), a pair of sandals and a pair of dark glasses (if you were lucky enough to own some as I was, having received a pair in my personal parcel). For roll call, we had to wear at least shorts, shirt and sandals. (There were very few pairs of boots or shoes left in the camp by the middle of 1943; and leftover leather from worn-out shoes and boots was part of the material used by the flourishing industry making sandals in the camp).

Just after the surrender and around the time when we first saw the dilapidated condition of the camp at North Point, the morale of the Canadian troops was very low and there was a tendency to resent any kind of discipline; each man just wanted to go his own way and be left alone to brood. I certainly felt that way, but I must have realized even then in the back of my mind - as I now fully do - that our senior officers had to enforce some form of discipline in camp or the Japanese would take over and impose a much stricter regime.

But internal rules and regulations were kept to a minimum and, of course, no regimental or military training was carried out. Shaving and haircuts were made obligatory though on a reduced scale and no Canadian POW was permitted to grow a beard. The Canadian barbershop at Sham Shui Po was well organised with a head barber and two assistants (all of whom were excused from work parties). They were paid a small amount per month by each officer for a couple of shaves per week and an occasional haircut; the other ranks (who received no pay, of course) were barbered free of charge.

The NCO's supervised the men's meals but apart from roll calls or work party duty, officers did not bother the men and had a minimum of official contact with them. In fact, I do not ever remember during four years of captivity inspecting the men's sleeping quarters. I do remember a man being charged with a minor offence for protesting too strenuously supposed favouritism by an NCO serving a meal; the punishment was simply a reprimand, which I am quite sure never appeared on the culprit's documents after the war. There were certainly plenty of arguments but hardly ever any physical fights between the POW's.

I do, however, remember one actual exchange of blows between two officers who had never liked one another and who had been forced to live together in congested quarters for several months. Perhaps I should explain here that the Winnipeg Grenadiers were an urban western regiment, and the Royal Rifles were a rural eastern one, and there was no great love lost between both officers and men. (However, the junior officers of the Rifles got along well with the only group of their Grenadier counterparts to have been recruited from Saskatchewan and Alberta). The Grenadiers also resented the so-called banking barons from St. James Street in Montreal and Bay Street in Toronto for having gypped them for years, as most westerners seem to feel even today. Fortunately this feeling of mutual antipathy did not spill over into any actual violence, both sides being content to play it passively by merely staying apart and not mixing.

The only real row that occurred between the Grenadiers and the Rifles took place in the early days of captivity at North Point and was over regimental cooking utensils, of which the latter had many and the former few. But the matter was settled quite quickly and effectively when the Rifles simply transferred some of their utensils to the Grenadiers. Another source of friction between the two regiments occurred when the more senior officers were transferred to Argyll Street and a captain of the Rifles was left in charge of all Canadians remaining at Sham Shui Po. But this never really got past the stage of angry mutterings by some of the Grenadier captains behind the back of the Rifles captain.

Strangely enough there were practically no mental breakdowns (I can only think of one such case from the Royal Rifles toward the end of captivity) during the whole period of incarceration. After the first few weeks of captivity, most of us

managed to adjust our way of thinking from worrying about when we would ever get home or what might happen to us at the hands of the Japanese if an attempt was made to free us - to trying to live each day at a time and make the best of it. We all had dreams, of course, and my most persistent dream (which still haunts me from time to time) was that we were back home either merely on leave from the POW camp and had to go back, or else that we had been recruited again and were being sent to Hong Kong for a second time.

There were some eternal optimists among us - who became fewer with the passage of time - but who expected to see Chiang Kai Shek riding down the road from the mountains on a white horse at the head of a Chinese army to set us free. Though generally speaking, most of us were quite relaxed and living from day to day. A few were so relaxed, I'm told, that they had breakdowns after the war because they actually missed the daily POW routine with its almost complete lack of responsibility. Most managed to maintain their good humour even in the midst of all the petty irritations and displayed muted heroism by merely enduring and surviving. This was true 'in spades' (to a very high degree) in respect of those sent on working parties to Japan, where the irritations were by no means petty but amounted to gross maltreatment.

Whether due to the deficiency of our diet, or to the absolute futility of thinking about such a subject, all talk of women or sex was tacitly taboo in camp. As for homosexuality, the one case of which I heard was of a pervert caught loose in the showers who was attended to by his peers (the other men) and never surfaced again.

I do not know about the Imperials nor the Hong Kong Volunteers, but among the Canadian POW's, religion seems to have played a very minor role during captivity, and attendance at church services was minimal. Insofar as the padres were concerned, they did little during the week that could not be done better by the Auxiliary Services Officers.

For the most part, the POW's did not lose their senses of humour. But it must be said these became greatly inverted into joking mostly about small things that occurred within the camp's boundaries and neglected the wider fields of humour. This only became apparent to me when we met up with our first relief parties. Something that we, as POW's would think uproariously funny, would

leave those who had been out in the world throughout the war not even mildly amused. The truth is that, while none of us was actually insane, we were all quite “stir crazy”. This lack of contact with the outside world for such a long time (undoubtedly the cause of our peculiar senses of humour) was something of which I felt the effect many years after the war and from time to time still do. Thus having missed hearing about so many important things that occurred between Christmas 1941 and October 1945, including the deaths of friends and other matters relating to them, we have never really caught up on these - and even to this day are still hearing about them.

As to my memory of events in the prison camps, it is still very clear as to what happened in the first year of captivity and also from shortly after my Canadian cigarettes arrived (around autumn of 1943) until the end of the war, but there is a definite hiatus in between these periods. This gap in my memory covers about two years and I have only very hazy recollections how we passed this time; this is probably due to the cumulative effect on our physiques of the poor diet (although our health certainly did improve after the camp received the bulk medical supplies from the Red Cross in early 1943). But it is also undoubtedly also due to the fact that every day was so much like the previous one and very few events occurred at all during this period interesting enough to make an impression. That my memory was better during the last year of captivity is due, in part, to my consumption of a good number of duck eggs from the sale of Canadian cigarettes. Also to the fact that it was just prior to this that the rest of the Canadian Junior officers, including myself, were transferred to the general officers camp (which had become a wired off part of Sham Shui Po camp) and the additional mental stimulation that this brought about.

In conclusion, I must address the great deal of public debate there has been in Canada both immediately after we were taken prisoner and from time to time since the conclusion of the war - as to whether an only partially trained force of Canadian soldiers such as ours should have been sent to Hong Kong at all.

There has even been a book published quite recently about the Canadians in Hong Kong based almost entirely on the theme that we should have not been sent there partly because we were insufficiently trained and partly because Hong Kong was, in fact, not capable of being defended - and we were therefore merely human sacrifices. This book relates anything that happened to us there, both during the fighting and afterwards, merely as subsidiary incidentals to the

principal theme of the author and to prove this point. I disagree entirely with this theme and consider that it was contrived in the first place merely as a political “ploy” to embarrass the government. At the time that we were sent to Hong Kong, the British were in dire straits and confronted all over the world by powerful enemies. They had no allies other than the struggling Russians, and with their manpower and resources stretched thin, it certainly must have been of some small help to them for the Canadians to relieve some of their soldiers in Hong Kong for duty elsewhere on the more active fronts. In addition, not only had the Canadian “brass” been agitating with the British to let our soldiers take a more active part in the war, but our own senior officers had been continually engaged “pulling strings” in Ottawa to have our unit taken off guard duty in Canada and sent to a more active front.

Insofar as the argument that Hong Kong was not defensible against an attack by the Japanese, this is undoubtedly true (and I myself have seen “why”). But at the time that we were sent there, there did not seem to be any very good reason to consider that any Japanese attack on Hong Kong was either imminent or foreseeable in the near future. And there did indeed seem to be a very strong possibility that we were merely exchanging guard duty in Canada for a more exotic setting but at the same time helping out the British. My opinion on this subject, I fully believe, is shared by the great majority of all the Canadians still alive who took part in the Hong Kong (erroneously called) débâcle. I do not believe that they harbour any feelings of resentment towards the Canadian government for having sent them to the British colony. In spite of the hardships suffered, both in the fighting and POW camps in Hong Kong and afterwards through resulting poor health, I believe that most of us who were recruited from the rather impoverished Gaspé and Bonaventure areas of Quebec and northern New Brunswick consider the Hong Kong experience to be the greatest event in our lives and our principal emotion on looking back is one of pride for volunteering to go there and managing to survive. As proof of this is the great number of ex-POW’s who have made the pilgrimage back to Hong Kong since the war, some more than once.

Unfortunately, although I bear absolutely no resentment against anyone for having been sent to Hong Kong, I do not regard it as a great event in my life, but rather as a long boring experience which took four years from the prime of my life just as I was beginning to get established in my law practice and raising a family. In any event, if the Canadian government bears some responsibility

for having sent us to Hong Kong, it treated us very generously after we returned home, even if it was a bit slow in getting down to business at first and had to be prodded into action by continued lobbying. In this respect, it gave me great pleasure indeed, at a convention of Hong Kong POWs that I attended in Quebec City in the fall of 1983 to see how prosperous all the participants looked with nearly all of them retired and apparently living comfortably on their pensions.