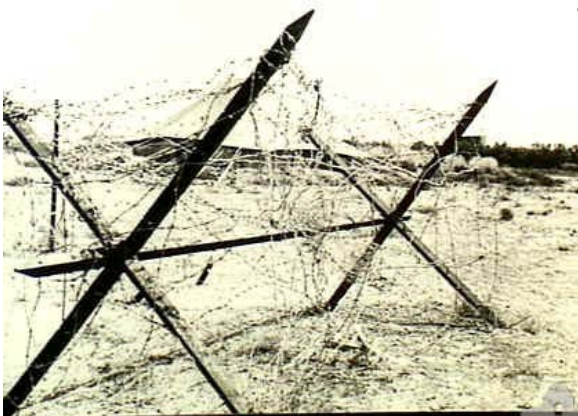




A GUIDE TO PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS WORLD WAR II

Excerpts/Pictures are taken from:
 Michael A. Palmer. The Dark Side of the Sun. 2005
 Merrily Weisbord and Marilyn Simonds Mohr. The Valour and the Horror. 1991.
 Canadian ALPHA. The Search for Global Citizenship: The Violation of Human Rights in Asia, 1931-1945
www.hkvca.ca
www.vac-acc.gc.ca



東俘 105 1600

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 收容所 Camp | 東京 東京 13 24 | 番 號 No. | 東俘 V343 |
| 姓 名 Name | BELL, William S. ベッル ウィリアム | 生 年 月 日 Date of Birth | 1917.3.12 |
| 國 籍 Nationality | 加 | 所 屬 部 隊 Unit | No. H-5336 Winnipeg Grenadiers |
| 階 級 身 分 Rank | Private 兵 卒 | 捕 獲 年 月 日 Date of Capture | 昭和 16 年 10 月 19 日 |
| 捕 獲 場 所 Place of Capture | 香港島防線陣地 | 父 の 名 Father's Name | William |
| 母 親 之 名 Mother's Name | William | 母 親 之 名 Mother's Name | Rachel |
| 本 籍 地 Place of Origin | Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. | 職 業 Occupation | 苦 働 者 |
| 通 報 先 Destination of Report | Mrs. Rachel Bell, 296 Gunnell Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. | 特 記 事 項 Remarks | |

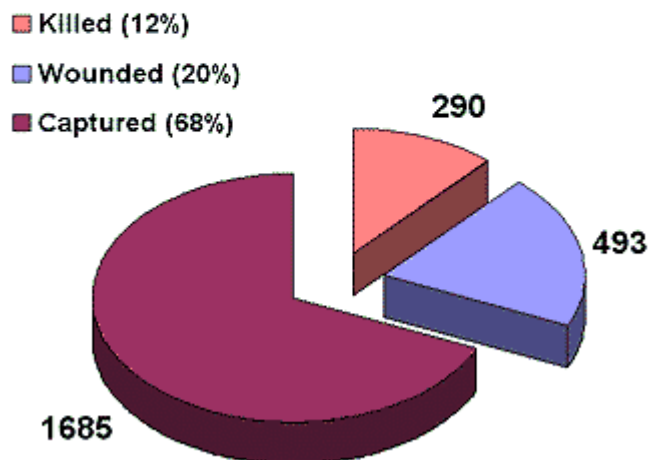
THE BATTLE OF HONG KONG

Canada's soldiers would see their first major combat experience in the Second World War not against Hitler's armies in Europe but against the expansionist Japanese in the Pacific. In late 1941, the Canadian government honoured a British request to send two battalions of infantry and a brigade headquarters to bolster the defences of Hong Kong by dispatching the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers. The battle for Hong Kong, a British Crown Colony, would turn out to be a debacle.

Strategically and tactically, Hong Kong was a difficult territory to defend. Moreover, the Canadians were still waiting for vehicles and other supplies before the battle began. The Japanese attackers overwhelmed the defenders. Although the 1,975 Canadian troops fought bravely, by Christmas Day 1941, they and the 12,000 valiant British and Indian troops had lost the battle. The entire Canadian force had been killed, wounded, or captured. The Canadian prisoners had to endure the appalling treatment at the hands of Japanese soldiers. A substantial portion of the Canadian contingent perished in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. At war's end, only 1,428 POWs from the battle returned to Canada.

Numbers of Casualties -- Killed, Wounded, and Captured -- at the Battle of Hong Kong, December 1941.

(All 1975 soldiers were either killed or captured. All wounded soldiers were captured.)



PRISONERS OF WAR CAMPS

Upon capture, Canadian soldiers imprisoned in camps, those captured in Hong Kong in late 1941 would suffer as POW'S for nearly four years. Two such camps where Canadians were imprisoned were: Sham Shui Po Prison Camp on the mainland, near Kowloon and North Point Camp in Northern Hong Kong.

The Canadians were forced to endure conditions that could rightly be described as horrific and horrendous. Exhausted from battle, many wounded, they were hoping for the best. What they faced was unknown, but the Geneva Conventions that set out humane rules for the treatment of prisoners gave them some cause for hope. Three and a half years of brutal captivity proved just how illusory those hopes were.

Excerpt regarding the conditions of North Point Camp:

North Point was originally a camp on the outskirts of the city, built to house 300 refugees from China. It was badly damaged during the battle, and several of the huts were burned to the ground. The others had been looted of anything that survived the shelling. To further sweeten the pot, the Japanese had quartered their horses and mules there. It was a mess! A stinking mess! To compound all this, one end of the camp had originally been a dump; the shelling had uncovered all the old garbage, which turned it into a paradise for flies. The other end was littered with dead bodies of Chinese civilians and Japanese pack animals who had been killed by the defenders.

The first month was tough as chaos reigned. There was no water in the camp. It had to be brought in by truck and the delivery of any food was unpredictable. We had nothing to eat for the first two days, and the situation looked grim.

Accommodation was no better, as at first we had all the British and Indian troops as well as the Canadians. We were packed about 200 men into a hut designed to hold perhaps 30 refugees. There was no glass in the windows and in some huts large holes in the roof. Most of us had no blankets and the concrete floor was no Beauty Rest Mattress. Hong Kong can be damp and surprisingly cold at that time of the year.



Circle: Sham Shui Po Camp
Square: North Point Camp

THE GENEVA CONVENTION AND BUSHIDO

The Geneva Convention was signed in July 1929 by 47 nations that dictated that a Prisoner of War “must at all times be humanely treated.” This document spelled out the rights of the captive and captor. A prisoner’s food, clothing and shelter were to be equal to that of the captor’s own troops.

The Japanese violated the Geneva Convention with impunity. Although Japan had signed the Geneva Convention in 1929, after the bombing of Pearl Harbour announced that it would comply with the terms *mutatis mutandis* meaning, “necessary changes have been made,” in other words hardly complying at all.

The violation of the convention largely stems from the national and political ideology and attitude that the Japanese had about their own fighters and the projection of these ideas on their prisoners.

Bushido or “way of the warrior” refers to an ancient rule of conduct of a soldier’s behaviour on the battlefield. It was above all, a code of honour and shame. Under this code surrendering was considered shameful and this belief influenced the Japanese handling of their captives. By allowing themselves to be captured, these men – in the Japanese view – merited only contempt.

The Japanese saw their captives as cowards and were punished by starvation diets, brutally hard work and physical abuse.



Photo: Canadian POWs in a Japanese POW camp. VAC Photo

THE CONDITIONS

The conditions in which the Canadian Prisoners of War lived in were inhumane. The camps were, in short, a living hell. The casualty rate was high. While 290 soldiers had died in battle or had been executed by the Japanese, almost the same number died in the POW camps. In total, 554 soldiers of the 1,975 soldiers who originally sailed to Hong Kong were buried or cremated in the Far East.

Camps were surrounded by barbed wire fence about seven feet high, later, at North Point Camp an electric fence was installed about eighteen inches outside the barbed wire fence. The buildings were made of wood siding with windows built over concrete floors, at North Point, the wooden huts were one hundred and twenty feet long by eighteen feet wide. The buildings were usually drafty, filthy and infested with lice, bed bugs and flies.

Here are some conditions at North Point Camp (excerpts from Dark Side of the Sun):

Latrines (Toilets):

“Latrine Facilities were at first non-existent. Sanitary arrangements had been greatly damaged during the battle and most of the material of value had been looted by the Chinese. Shell fire had broken the water mains and for about one month, there was no running water available. The camp was bordered by the saw wall and this was used as an open latrine [hanging their behinds over a sea wall] until sufficient repairs could be made. For several weeks a number of Chinese bodies were carried in and out with the tide, adding to the dismal setting. At no time during the operation of this camp were the latrine facilities sufficient.”

Sleeping Quarters:

“The prisoners found themselves crowded with a minimum of 125 to as many as 200 men per hut. The fortunate had one blanket while many were without covering. The bunks were pushed together in pairs, and in this way seven could seep in the floor space otherwise occupied by three – two on the top bunk, there below and two on the floor.”

At Sham Shui Po: The men often slept on concrete floors. *“When I went to sleep at night, I put all my clothes on and wrapped myself in the gas cape and lay down on the cement floor, and used my boots as a pillow. There was no protection from the wind and rain as all the windows and doors were missing; we had to stay in the spot assigned to us.”*

Mr. Castonguay describes conditions at North Point, a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp:

“We were piled up one on top of the other. Four or five stack high. That was no fun. And we had bed bugs, lice, and fleas, lots of fleas but especially bedbugs. And ants, many ants that bite. And body was you know really bit, bitten all over. Scratchy, it was awful.”

Kitchen Facilities:

"The first few days were hectic as the Japanese were not able to supply the camp with sufficient food or with fuel to cook what was available. The Japanese supplied the forces with several rice 'kongs' (large kettles) and some mouldy rice."

Flies, Lice, Fleas, Parasites and Bedbugs:

In addition to the crowded and uncomfortable sleeping conditions, the POW's also had to contend with the millions of bugs:

"The flies swarm through every man's recollections. One veteran had the smothering nauseating sensation of almost breathing flies. They settled on every forkful of food before it could reach the mouth. Men spent their days swatting flies. At night, when flies swarmed in the millions on the rafters of the roofs of the huts, parties would climb up, squash black thick layers of them and scrape the mess into buckets, but all efforts made not the slightest difference."

The bedbugs were especially hated:

"The men were unable to sleep because the bedbugs would bite all night, and in the morning one would look like a person with measles."

The camp was infected when the prisoners arrived and the complete lack of facilities necessary for personal hygiene and primitive sleeping arrangements resulted in a situation that many POW's found most distressing. All attempts to eliminate the vermin were completely unsuccessful:

"Had no sleep before reveille at 0600 and used a whole box of matches to burn them [bedbugs] off. As soon as the bed was clear and I lay down, they would start again."



BRUTALITIES

Very few of the Japanese guards' spoke English and internees were forced to learn Japanese in order to understand commands they were given. Failure to comply with instructions would merit a beating. *Tenko* was the name given to the daily roll-call and prisoners had to call out their prisoner number in Japanese. Canadian Prisoners of War were exposed to Japanese brutality day in and day out; these could include savage beatings to cuts in already meagre rations.

As Private Don Nelson of the Winnipeg Grenadiers explained, the Japanese were harsh captors right from the start:

"They were pretty rough on us. They tied our hands together with barbed wire. A lot of boys that fell and couldn't walk because they were wounded so badly, they were cut loose and bayoneted right there."

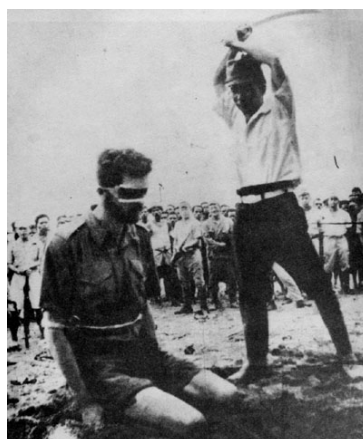
Other examples of Japanese brutality:

"The tied up one of our men at the guard house behind a post with wire. They tied his hands behind his back and they poured water on him. Kept pouring water on him. Every time they changed shifts, as they went past him, they would belt him as he was tied to that post"

Canadian Prisoners of War would often trade for commodities such as sugar with civilians at the fence line. Cigarettes were a very important commodity for POW's. The cigarette was the principal item for barter and exchange: *"One cig buys a bun, two or three a stew."*

Japanese brutalities weren't solely aimed at the Canadian Prisoners of War but Chinese civilians as well:

"At Sham Shiu Po Camp it was not uncommon for the Chinese Civilians to come over to the camp fence perimeters to try and sell items to the POW's. The Chinese they would run over with news-wrapped parcels, and they say 'Suga-Suga, one dolla' We'd give them one Hong Kong dollar for it and they'd have grab the dollar and run back because the Japanese would start after them. Then this one day, the Japanese guards caught a Chinese and they made him kneel down and an officer cut his head off with a sword."



FOOD AND RATIONS

For many Prisoners of War, food was a subject that quickly became an obsession. It was often the main topic of conversation as men tried to remember specific meals of the past, favourite restaurants, and recipes. This concern about food reflected the lack of it in POW camps. The food in Japanese POW camps was usually bad. It was almost always unavailable in large enough quantities for western eaters, and was usually of inferior quality – most of time it was little but filthy rice.

“Hunger is a constant discomfort that never lets up – it is with you every waking moment, and the only relief form it is to have a full stomach which never happened.”

Problems Associated with POW Rations:

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Food Adjustment: | From a western diet to a rice-based diet |
| Cultural Adjustment: | POW cooks had to learn to prepare Japanese meals |
| Overcooked Food: | Often a necessity to prevent parasitic infections |
| Logistic Problems: | Not enough fuel or large cooking vessels |
| Rice Bust: | Meals of only rice |
| Caloric Intake: | Rations were based on the size of a Japanese man, who was usually smaller then a westerner |
| Sickness Rations: | Japanese regulation dictated that a sick POW deserved less food then a working POW |

“The food situation at Sham Shui Po was bad from the start, and with the exception of a few cases of short term improvement, remained about the same for throughout the duration of the imprisonment. At first the rations for each man included about a pound of rice and half a pound of vegetables a day, and seven ounces of sugar and less then a pound of peanut oil a month. The rice was of inferior quality and almost always infested with worms. Often it was swept up from warehouse floors and had to be soaked to make the matchsticks, paper and other rubbish float to the top of the water. The Japanese left it up to the imagination and efforts of the prisoners to cook, and, in many cases capture their own food.”

Mr. Castonguay describes the food at North Point, a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp:

At the beginning, it was a shock to us. Because we had to eat what was had been left in the storage for many years. I saw myself a hunk of beef stamped 1908 on it. And rice was coming in. The bags were all wet and there were more worms than kernel of rice. And the cooks were cooking those in order that we could eat. Awful. We were starved and our health went down. And we start having all kinds of diseases. My eyesight started to go. And we had dysentery, all kinds of disease. Pneumonia, you name it. And no medication.

In summary, the diet was thought to provide from about 600-2,000 calories daily and contained little animal proteins and few fats. Working men need twice that amount. As a result there were large weight losses and prisoners lost most of their resistance to disease and fatigue.

DISEASE AND SICKNESS

Inadequate nutrition in combination with hard physical labour took its toll on the Canadian Prisoner's of War. Disease and sickness were rampant throughout the prison camps.

Dysentery, thyroid problems, diphtheria, malnutrition, ulcers, cholera, wet beri-beri, and dry beri-beri (hot feet) infected all but a small handful. Drugs that might have alleviated some of the suffering and saved lives were stolen by camp commanders and sold on the black market. Some prisoners were tortured and others executed.

Dysentery: also known as the bloody flux is an infection of the digestive system and intestinal inflammation characterized by abdominal pain and intense diarrhea with bloody, mucous feces. Dysentery is caused by the ingestion of food or water containing micro-organisms which cause significant inflammation of the intestinal lining

Beri-Beri: originally from a Sinhalese phrase meaning "I cannot, I cannot" Beriberi is caused by a lack of thiamine. It is common in people whose diet consists mainly of polished white rice. Wet beri-beri: affects the heart, while dry beri-beri can cause paralysis and swelling.

Mr. Castonguay describes the beri-beri at North Point, a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp:

"Oh yeah, Beri-beri, electric feet and lack of vitamins. The legs were swollen, the belly, the guts was swollen, the face. We had lips swollen and crack in the corners, bleeding very often. And it was very miserable. All of it because lack of vitamins. Sometimes we had the visit of a Japanese doctor but he was not doing very much."

Pellagra: is a vitamin deficiency disease caused by dietary lack of niacin and protein and is characterized by red lesions on the skin, dementia, diarrhea and sensitivity to sunlight

Cholera: is an intestinal disease caused by contaminated water and food resulted in muscle and stomach cramps, vomiting, fever and diarrhea.

Diphtheria: is a respiratory disease characterized by a sore throat, low grade fever and the eventual growth of a membrane over the larynx. It is a highly contagious disease.



WORK

For the military prisoners of the Japanese the general principal was that they were to work. They set their captors to work – in mines, on the docks and at railroads, and constructing an airport – all in direct violation of the rules regarding the treatment of prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention. Conditions at the work sites often included brutal harassment

From North Point Camp: *“After Mid-June, were sent to work on at the Kai Tak Airport, at first the work parties were small (100) and the work required was not strenuous. By mid-July, the Japanese were demanding work parties of approximately 400 men which were difficult to supply due to increasing sickness. By September 1942, the Japanese decided to complete an extension of the Kai Tak Airport and the prisoners were required to level the ground, and mix and pour concrete for the runways.”*

The POW's would often get up at 4 am, have breakfast of rice, work all day with perhaps a bun at noon and return anywhere from 6 pm to as late as 10 pm at night.

Some Canadian POW's were sent to Omaine Camp in Kyushu Japan where they worked as slave labourers in coal mines:

“The state of the mines was frightful and frightening, the work dangerous and exhausting. Shafts were constructed to accommodate the smaller Japanese bodies. Therefore the POW's had to stoop constantly and painfully.”

Other Canadian POW's were sent to Japan to work as slave labourers in Japanese shipyards:

“In a giant shipyard near Tokyo, many of the vessels for Japan's war fleet were built and launched – and still are today – by the same corporation that operated during the war, NKK Nipon Ko Kon, a flourishing Japanese multinational. Bob Clayton worked here for over a year.

Those that suffered the worst conditions and hardship while Japanese prisoners of war, were those that were sent to build the Burma-Thailand railway. Prisoners of war and Asian labourers worked side by side to build the 260 mile railroad by hand. They were expected to work from dawn to dusk, ten days on and one day off, moving earth, building bridges, blasting through mountains and laying track.

Nipon Ko Kan and its founder, Morosiro Shiaichi, made millions of dollars profiting from the Japanese war effort, partly from using Canadian prisoners as slave laborers. In similar circumstances, German corporations have paid billions of dollars in compensation to wartime workers. Japanese companies are being pressed by Canada's veterans for compensation, but refuse even to discuss the issue.

ESCAPE?

It was not uncommon for the men to talk about escaping during those long days of camp life. However, escape carried hazardous risks and many ignored the whole idea and set themselves the task of surviving as POW's. Those who attempted escape would be executed in front of other prisoners. In some camps the Japanese also executed ten other prisoners as well. Even if an escape was successful, retaliation would increase the misery of those left behind. Escape attempts from Japanese camps were rare.

Problems associated with escape:

Skin color and height: A Caucasian Male would stand out in the Asian countryside

Local Contacts: The Canadians had not been in Hong Kong long enough to establish any contacts with the local people. Blending in was too difficult

Deadly Consequences: The Japanese had made it clear that execution was a certainty if escape was attempted



Sai Wan Bay War Cemetery, Hong Kong, where 283 soldiers of the Canadian Army are buried, including 107 who are unidentified.

PASSING THE TIME

Despite the horrendous conditions at North Point and Sham Shui Po Camps, many men would gradually occupy themselves with the following activities:

Books:

Brought into North Point Camp by the foraging parties of the first few days, the books were kept in a room on one of the huts, considered to become the camp library.

Mending and Handicrafts:

Much time was spent doing essential household duties including mending clothes, constructing shelves and doing odd jobs around camp. Old socks were unravelled to be re-knit, sweaters, clogs, sandals, and cribbage boards were also created. These handicrafts lessened when the men were later required to participate in work parties for the Japanese.

Sports:

“During the first few months of captivity, an active sports program was initiated with substantial participation including softball, soccer and cricket.” The sports program was later abandoned as the men began to lose strength due to diet, sickness and hard labour. Card games later became popular, especially bridge.

Church Services:

Successful attempts were made at holding church services. *“For three weeks, Captain James Barnett was the only Chaplain in the camp [North Point]. We had no building for our services or hymn books.”* Another important service performed by the Chaplain included visiting the camp hospital daily and offering comfort to the sick and distressed.

The Red Cross:

On December 21, 1942, the Red Cross was permitted to visit Sham Shui Po Camp for the first time, its assessment was neutral. The Japanese read all reports by the Red Cross and any negative reports could deny Red Cross entry in the future.

The Japanese also rarely permitted the Red Cross parcels to be delivered to the POW's. Most were stockpiled by the Japanese for their own use. *“I was told by different people – including the Japanese – that there were warehouses full of our parcels.”* Many POW's would only see about five or six parcels throughout the whole duration of their imprisonment. George Palmer only received one parcel in four years.

Letters:

Many POW's found the most distressing thing of their imprisonment was the slowness of postal communications between themselves and their families. In Hong Kong, a small percentage of POW's were given permission to send letters home beginning in May of 1942, however, it took a long time for letters to reach family members – rarely sooner than a year.

LIBERATION

The defence of Hong Kong was a brutal chapter in Canada's military history. Of the almost 2,000 Canadians who sailed to Hong Kong in late 1941, more than 550 would never see Canada again. Many would die in the fierce combat of December 1941. Others would perish in the grinding conditions of the Japanese prison camps throughout the rest of the war. With the formal surrender of Japan on August 15, 1945, many of those who did survive would return home with their health broken and their lives shortened by their experiences, forever shaken by their experiences and the extreme hardships they endured. They had to cope with a sense of guilt that they had survived and their friends had not. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) did not exist as a term back then.

The experiences of the Canadians in Hong Kong serve as a lasting reminder of the high price of war and the incredible effort and sacrifice that Canadians and the Allies would put forth to eventually triumph in the Second World War. In December of 1998, after considerable pressure and lobbying, the Canadian government granted compensation of \$24,000 to each surviving Hong Kong POW or POW's widow, after the Japanese refusal to do so.

"It was the Happiest day of my life. The Japanese could not believe it. We prisoners were wild with excitement. They have promised to feed us until we are taken away from this horrible place."

"The first food drop was by American planes dropping oil barrels full of food welded together on a regular sized parachute. They made the drop on the mine head and a lot of it came down too hard – they hit rails and broke up. We salvaged most of it but it got pretty messed up. Fruit cocktail – meat – sugar – so when we ate it, it was like three meals in one..."

"The men would often share their food with the local populace who were starving just as much as they were: 'The Japanese women and kids thought much of Canadians because we gave them chocolate, candies and gum ... they were starving too..."



Canadian POW's just after being liberated with the fall of Japan. Many were too weak to walk and it was many months until they were healthy, again.



National Archives of Canada (PA-115236, photo by Louis Jacques).
 Captain Stanley M. Banfill Returns Home from the Far East, Montreal, Quebec, 13 October 1945.