MEMORIES

Of a Japanese P.O.W. Camp...

1939-1945 DON MACPHERSON......



My hometown is Miniota, Manitoba, a small town of approximately 200 people in a farming community 25 miles north of Virden.

When England declared war on Germany, I was 19 years old and as a 3rd generation Canadian of Scottish ancestry, I felt it was my duty to enlist. However it was harvest time and I was working for my Dad driving a truck, delivering gas and oil plus hauling grain. This was hard but enjoyable work and was to stand me in good stead in the ordeal to come. When Canada declared war on September 10, I was sure it would be all over before I could enlist.

Wilf Barrett (my sister, Marie's husband), Wilf Middleton, Merv Carleton and myself made an eventful entrance to Winnipeg. The fathers of my three companions were all section foremen on the railroad and they had also worked on the R.R. so knew all the engineers. We left Miniota on the flyer transferring later to a freight train – we rode on top, stopped for coffee along the way and the engineer would give us a toot of the whistle when the train was ready to pull out! When we arrived in Winnipeg we got off the train at one of the overpasses before arriving at the station. Unknown to us, the army were guarding the overpasses to prevent sabotage. As we jumped off we were met by soldiers who told us to halt. Wilf Middleton ignored the command and rifles were pointed at him so we knew they were serious. We were taken to a Captain to whom we made our explanation that we had come in to join their stupid army but if this was the way they were going to treat us we would go back home. So he let us go. Actually we had planned to join the Air Force but on our way to their office we passed a Winnipeg Grenadiers recruiting office and a smooth talking Sgt. Major

convinced us this was the outfit for us. They weren't going to take Merv as he was shorter than their required height but when we threatened to all leave, they agreed to take him. This was on September 18 and began an era which would influence the rest of my life. Also, little did I know that of the six men from the Miniota district who went to Hong Kong, Wilf Barrett, Percy Iles, Mickey Granger, Jack Iverach, Norm Walker and myself that I would be the only one to return.



We trained in Winnipeg at Minto and Fort Osborne Barracks until May 1940. We were then sent to Jamaica to do garrison duty guarding German and political prisoners. We spent 16 months there enjoying life but wishing we were in action. While there, I played tennis, hardball and did a little boxing. The local people were good to us inviting us to their homes to play tennis. At this time I didn't drink any alcohol so I would go out with the guys at night and drink orange squash and make sure that they all got back to camp O.K. I celebrated my 21st birthday while in Jamaica by going to a movie by myself at a beautiful outdoor theatre called the Carib.



In the late summer we came back to Canada, spent a month on leave there and entrained for Vancouver where we boarded the Awaica. While on board ship I was made a Corporal. We stopped overnight at Pearl Harbor but were not allowed to leave the ship. There was a Jap freighter alongside us at the dock. We found out after we left Pearl that we were headed for Hong Kong arriving there November 16. On arrival, we marched to Sham Shui Po camp on the Kowloon side. For a few cents you could get a Chinese to carry all your gear. It must have looked pretty foolish to see two regiments of soldiers marching and all these Chinese carrying their gear. However the officers didn't let that last long!

The camp was large and comfortable. It was great to go across on the ferry to the Hong Kong side in the evening. We used to go to the bowling alley and there would be at least a dozen beautiful Chinese prostitutes outside. They would come up to us and say, "Good time, one dollar?" some of the younger ones would say "first time, five dollars." And to think we still went bowling!

One day I was in Hong Kong when I saw about six Canadian soldiers in the middle of one of the main streets. They were having a race down the street. The funny thing about it was that they were pulling rickshaws and the coolies were sitting in the rickshaws scared out of their minds!

On December 8, I was coming out of the barracks in the morning and looked up at some planes that were flying overhead and saw one drop a bomb on the officer's mess. It sure gave us a scare and everyone started running around not knowing what to do. Soon after that, B Company, to which I was assigned, was taken over to the Hong Kong side. We were stationed in pill boxes on Mount Nicholson and were there for sometime before we saw our first action.

The Japs had taken a police station on Mount Nicholson Road and we were ordered to retake it. We first went up at dusk and ran right into a Jap patrol. A bayonet fight ensued and several of our boys were killed. We then went back about half a mile and waited till morning. It rained hard all night and all I was wearing were undershorts and coveralls. It was so cold I dug a hole in the sand, got in and pulled the sand in around me but it didn't help much. About 4 a.m., Sgt. Major Fryatt called me down the line to a small building and handed me a large glass of rum. I thanked him and told him that I didn't drink. He said "Drink it, that's and order." So I did and I never warmed up so fast in my life.

Under the command of Major Hook and with Lieut. Rusty Young, who had been a sports announcer in Winnipeg, and Sgt. Major Fryatt, our platoon of 30 men moved up the road again in the morning. We got to a bend in the road and the St. Major called Sgt. Woods up and told him to take a man and set up a machine gun at the corner. Woods and Pte. Meads ran to the corner where they started to set up the gun when the Japs opened up with

a machine gun and killed them both. Cpl. Norm Eccles and another private were then sent up and they were both killed. Fryatt then called me and I thought "Oh Oh", here she goes. But he told me to take my section up the side of the hill to see what could be seen from there, which I did. When we got up there, we could see hundreds of Japs sitting there just waiting. We spotted their machine gun and Merv Carleton cleaned that out while the rest of us were firing at the Japs. After a while, we got word to come down and I had just got down and jumped off the road so my head was about level with the road when I told Pte. Cooper who was standing against the wall to get off the road and they opened up with another machine gun and killed him, Lieut. Young and St. Major Fryatt, all in one burst. We were ordered to fall back.

I waited for the machine gun to stop, and then I jumped up on the road and started to run. I caught up with Major Hook who had been hit in the leg. I helped him back to a field dressing station. I remember Chester Budd going down the road holding his stomach with both hands and the blood oozing out between his fingers. I thought he'd never make it, but he did.

From there we went into a trench near the Gap with Lieut. Corrigan in charge. The first night he took some men down the hill to see if there were any Japs around and there were and a hand to hand fight ensued. Corrigan fought with a Jap officer who had a sword and Corrigan a revolver. He had his hand so badly cut that he could barely fire his revolver.

At one point a field phone was brought in and as the fellow who installed it stood up to leave, he was shot.



On the evening of December 24th, we could see the Japs going up one side of a hill and one of our companys going up the other. We were about six hundred yards away but we fired at them and were able to drive the Japs back. I guess that made them mad as they attacked our position at 5 a.m. December 25. We were able to hold them with small arms fire and a lot of hand grenades. I remember Rod Zane going down later that morning and picking up some of our own grenades with the pins still in them. Later that morning, my brother in law, Wilf Barrett was in the trench beside me when the Japs hit us with a two inch mortar. One landed between us and a piece of shrapnel hit Wilf in the head killing him instantly.

The island surrendered that Christmas day, 1941. My first reaction was relief as we were completely exhausted from lack of sleep. We were told to go to the Peak and not to destroy our weapons but we smashed them over a railing anyway. At the Peak, we were all in a big group and the Japs had machine guns all around us. I was sure that they were going to open up on us but they didn't. We were there for two or three days before we were marched down to North Camp which had been one of our old camps on the Hong Kong side. We were later taken back to our old camp on the Kowloon side, Sham Shui Po. The Chinese had gone in and stripped the huts removing the floors, windows and frames and light fixtures. Nothing was left but bare cement walls and floors. We were given one blanket and we had to sleep on the floor which caused big sores on our hips and shoulders. We had nothing to eat out of so I dug around in a garbage heap and found a jam can which I washed out the best I could and I used that for two years until I went to Japan. It was pretty rusty by that time! We were given one spoon each, no knives or forks, though some of the fellows had them hidden in their gear. Periodically the Japs would make a camp wide search for knives. They would go through everything and God help you if they found one. Maybe a week or so later they would search for forks and might see half a dozen knives but would ignore them as they were looking for forks. We found this very amusing.

We had very little to eat, mainly rice and not too much of that. It was dirty and had a lot of white worms in it. It was a hard life.

For several months I had the job twice a day of measuring out the rice to each prisoner in our hut, about 30 of us. It was hard to do as each man watched like a hawk to see that no one got more than the other. Finally I had had enough and when I was told to report for work one day I refused. The Sgt. said he would put me on report – in prison camp! – if I didn't do the job. I said fine and went to tear off my stripes and the whole sleeve came away!

We would sell our watches – that is the ones the Japs hadn't already taken – to the Jap guards for cigarettes. They loved gold watches. With the cigarettes we could go down to the sea wall and trade with the Chinese for anything they had to trade like cookies and sugar. One day a Chinese said he had a bag of sugar to trade so I threw over the cigarettes he asked for and he threw me the bag and we both ran before the Japs could catch us. When I opened the bag, there was about an inch of sugar and the rest was sand! Sometimes the Japs would catch these Chinese and would usually bayonet them. I remember one time this happened and the guard took the cookies the Chinese had and threw them over into our compound. It was a pitiful sight to see hundreds of men fighting and clawing in the dirt for those cookies while the guard stood by and laughed.



It didn't matter how hard you tried not to talk about food – it always came up. We would get together and vow that we wouldn't discuss food. Two minutes later we would be back on the subject. Everyone made up recipes and talked about the dinners their wives and mothers used to make. A recipe I made up was to take a whole bologna, hollow it out, fill it with all sorts of things and bake it. I often wonder what happened to all those recipes.

One day in the summer of '42, I was really hungry so I tried to think of some way to get food. I saw a lot of starlings flying around. I was able to get hold of box about the size of the old apple boxes. I got a small stick with a long string attached and propped the edge of the box up with the stick. I then took a little of my rice (which was hard to do) and sprinkled it under and near the box. I sat inside the hut watching that box for two days and not one bird went under the box.

About the same time, a Jap officer came into the hut with a half a dozen guards and said something in Japanese. I didn't know what he said so I just shrugged. He took out his sword and let me have it across the back. Fortunately for me, he turned the blade sideways and just knocked me flying. I thought I was a goner that time.

The whole camp was actually starving to death. Many prisoners and civilians in Hong Kong did starve to death during the first year. I went from 170 pounds to 103. Many were worse off than I.

We had one interpreter in our camp in Hong Kong who was nicknamed the Kamloops Kid. He was a Canadian born in Kamloops and had attended UBC. He would come up and talk to a group of POWs and then would say, "You used to call me a little yellow bastard when I was at school" and with that he would take a swing at the nearest man and walk away. He ended up killing some British officers and was tried after the war and hanged. There were

quite a few interpreters in different camps who had been educated in Britain, the States and Canada and they were usually a mean lot.

In August 1943 I was sent to Japan on a small ship. There were about 500 of us in two holds. There wasn't room to lie down so we had to sleep sitting up. It was terribly hot and we had no toilet facilities. They would lower a bucket of rice to us twice a day. We were down there twenty days in all and only twice were we brought up on deck and hosed down with water. While we were on deck the Jap guards would take a tin of meat and vegetables from OUR Red Cross parcels, stick their bayonets in, drink the gravy and throw the rest overboard.

When we finally got to Japan, we were put on trains and taken to different camps. There were about 300 of us, mostly Canadian and British that were sent to the camp, Ovama.... a real hell hole.

When we first got there, we were lined up and told that from now on we would have to number off in Japanese. They went down the line and told each man what his number was. Then they would start to number off. If you missed your number, you got hit across the back with a wooden word. Then they would move everyone around so you had a different number. I never learned anything so fast in my life!

Half the camp worked in the coal mine and the rest of us worked at a surface nickel mine which was about ten miles from camp. We would leave camp before sunup, march about half a mile to the railway and be put on cattle cars to go to the mine. It would be dark when we got back to camp at night and that was usually seven days a week. If you got too sick or too weak to work then you were put on half rations and that would be the end of you.

I worked at the nickel mine where we had to fill so many ore cars per day. Two men worked together and had to fill a car with about a ton of nickel ore. We had picks and shovels and if a guard saw you not working, he would hit you across the back with his wooden sword, which they all carried. When we had all the cars filled we would push them out on the main line and hook them all together to make the run downhill to where they were dumped. The cars had a long hand brake at the back so on the way down you would stand on the back of your load and pull back on the brake quite often. When we came to a curve, instead of braking, we would all jump off wrecking the cars and also the track. The Japs would jump up and down and holler but never seemed to realize that we did it on purpose. We would spend days cleaning up the mess but that was all part of it.

The Japs had a whole warehouse of our Red Cross parcels but refused to let us have them. In nearly four years we were given three and a half parcels per man.

They would start weeks ahead promising that if we would increase our loads per day for so many days, they would give us a parcel. Being so hungry everyone would work as hard as possible. When the day came to get the parcel we would come into camp at night and Jap Sgt. would make us run around the compound singing God Save the King. The fellows would be dropping all over the place but that didn't matter to them. Sometimes we would get one parcel between two or four men. But from that day on they expected us to keep that quota of ore up and that was impossible so we didn't fall for that again.

Hunger dominated our lives. Our stomachs were actually gnawing day and night for nearly four years. Thank goodness few people in this country know what real hunger is.

One day they told us we were going to have a very special meal. We went to the mess hall – if you could call it that – they had a large pot – over 100 gallons – filled with small fish like sardines. It smelled great – we filled up whatever we ate out of with this fish stew. I found it so strong that I couldn't eat it. But some of the men forced it down and a few minutes later they all turned a deep red and were very ill. They took that stew away pretty quick as sick men can't work!

We suffered from Beriberi, Pellagra, Dysentery and Diarrhea. We never had any solid food other than rice. The beriberi would cause us to swell up like balloons. Sometimes they would do a paracentesis (inserting a needle into the abdomen) and would take off basins and basins of fluid. Our feet would burn from the beriberi. It was a terrible pain. We would sit at night in the winter with our feet in cold water trying to get some relief. One time the Jap medical Sgt. said he was going to cure the hot feet. He put little caps of metal filled with some kind of salt on each toe and lit them. All it did was to blister each toe. They called the Yito treatment. I never heard of it being tried in any other camp.

Hundreds of prisoners including myself lost part of their eyesight through lack of vitamins. Mine started to go in September'42.

In Japan, the food was bad, the treatment was bad and the living conditions were bad. One of the worst things for me was not having any toilet paper. I remember one night having diarrhea so bad that I had to go to the toilet 14 times and nothing but water eliminated. Each time I had to go I had to ask permission of the Jap guard and bow to him. You had to carry a rag with you and wash it out.

The drinking water in camp was terrible. The well was just crawling with maggots. We had to boil the water before we could use it. We lost a lot of good men in that camp from starvation and disease.

The Japs had gardens just outside our camp in Oyama and about every ten days or so a few of us were kept in camp to clean out the toilets which was used to fertilize these gardens. We used long handled ladles to fill up large wooden buckets. The effluent was mostly water. Once the bucket was full, we put a flat piece of bamboo through the handle and two men would carry this out to a pit or holding tank which was about 10 or 12 feet deep with the back and both sides walled in to the roof and in front a cement wall about three feet high. We would dump the bucket over this wall. One day it was raining hard and the tank was pretty full. The two fellows in front of us went up to empty their bucket and one of them, Jack Speed of the British army, slipped and fell head first into this mess. When he came up, he was on the far side so had to swim over so we could pull him out. The Japs laughed so hard some of them fell in the mud. I will admit though, they took him in and had him washed and disinfected.

There were a lot of beatings for little or no reason. One day I was told to clean out all the drains in camp. These were round holes through cement wall and gutters. They gave me a long bamboo pole to clean them. I cleaned them all but one which the pole just wouldn't go through. I told the interpreter and he told the Sgt. and he said that if he had to clean that one I would be in for it. So I went out and tried again but the pole wouldn't go through so I told him so. He came out and cut the pole at an angle as the other end of the drain was a slit opening which of course he knew about. So he took me into the office with a couple of guards and beat me up. I just had to stand there and let him hit me. He would knock me down and I would get up and he would knock me down again. This went on until he got tired and quit.

The men used to steal potatoes or anything they could find in the gardens that we passed on the way to and from camp. On our return to camp we were searched and if they found anything you were made to stand for hours holding it out at arm's length. Every time you dropped your arm, they would belt you with a wooden sword.

We could tell that the war had taken a turn as there were more and more B-29 bombers going over. One day I was in camp for some reason, the rest had gone to work and just as I came out of the hut I heard someone say "Good Morning". I thought it was one of our guys and when I turned around I was surprised to see one of the outside guards. They were changed every ten days or so. He asked me where I was from and told me that he had lived in B.C. He told me that President Roosevelt had died and that the war was going against them . This was a big lift for us as we could not get news of any kind

ORDER TO KILL ALL THE POWS

- Translation -

Main Page Taiwan Documents About Us

The following translation was found in File 2015, designated as Document No. 2710, certified as Exhibit "O" in Doc. No. 2687. The date indicated, "1 August xxxx" appears to have the year lined out with a pen. The year appears to be 1944 in the original typing. The number "2015" is penciled in the upper right corner. No other marks were noted on the sheet. [NARA, RG 238 Box 2015]

Special Note: In RG 238 Box 2012 is a request "for suggestions on how to dispose of all internees."

Document No. 2701 Page 1 (Certified as Exhibit "O" in Do. No. 2687)

From the Journal of the Taiwan POW Camp H.Q. in Taihoku, entry 1 August 19xx

- 1. (Entries about money, promotions of Formosans at Branch camps, including promotion of Yo Yu-teku to 1st C1 Keibiin 5 entries)
- 2. The following answer about the extreme measures for POW's was sent To the Chief of Staff of the 11th Unit (Formosa POW Security No. 10)
- 3. "Under the present situation if there were a mere explosion or fire a shelter for the time being could be had in nearby buildings such as the school, a warehouse, or the like. However, at such time as the situation became urgent and it be extremely important, the POW's will be concentrated and confined in their present location and under heavy guard the preparation for the final disposition will be made.

The time and method of the disposition are as follows:

(1) The Time.

Although the basic aim is to act under superior orders, Individual disposition may be made in the following circumstances:

- (a) When an uprising of large numbers cannot be suppressed without the use of firearms.
- (b) When escapees from the camp may turn into a hostile Fighting force.
- (2) The Methods
- (a) Whether they are destroyed individually or in groups, or however it is done, with mass bombing, poisonous smoke, poisons, drowning, decapitation, or what, dispose of them as the situation dictates.
- (b) In any case it is the aim not to allow the escape of a single one, to amilhilate [sic] them all, and not to leave any traces.
- (3) To: The Commanding General The Commanding General of Military Police

Reported matters conferred on with the 11th Unit, the Kiirun Fortified Area H.Q., and each prefecture concerning the extreme security in Taiwan POW Camps."

3. (The next entry concerns the will of a deceased POW)

When the war ended, the Camp Commandant called a parade and said that the war was over and now we were all friends again. He then had a large pig delivered to the gate and let it go in the compound. I don't think that pig had time to squeal before it was in the pot. It made a wonderful soup but most of us didn't get much meat.

One Jap Sgt. went up to the American quarters which was on the second floor of a hut to say goodbye. A couple of days earlier he had hit one of them and had broken his arm. When he reached the second floor they saw him coming and got behind him. He saw them moving in on him and he jumped right through a window and landed on his feet and the last anyone saw of him was him going through the main gate at full speed.

One day three American fighter planes came over, flew very low and dropped packages of canned coffee, cream and sugar wrapped in women's underwear! They also dropped a note telling us that the war was over and that they would be back in three days with B-17s to drop fifty gallon drums of food, clothing and medical supplies. They said to have everyone out of the huts as some of the parachutes might not open. They had to drop the stuff right on our camp because of its location. When they came it was a sight that no one in that camp could ever forget. All those parachutes coming down, red, white and blue. Some didn't open and smashed the huts to bits but I don't recall anyone being hurt.

Our stomachs were so shrivelled up but we had all this food and no one to tell us not to eat too much. I ate 32 of those large Hershey bars and 11 large cans of peaches in two days! I just ate and threw up and ate and threw up!

We were there for sometime before they could send a train in for us. Then the day came. What a day just to leave that place. We got back to Yokohama where they put us through a delousing process and gave us some clean clothes to wear.

We were sent into this large room where dozens of American women were taking down statements. I stood at the door and listened to them talk. It was so strange to hear women's voices as we hadn't seen any for nearly four years. There I met and shook hands with General Douglas MacArthur.

I was then put on a ship called the Hyde and after a day or so, transferred to the battleship Indiana. They sure treated us royally all the time we were on that ship. As each man came aboard, a sailor stepped forward and he looked after you all the time you were there. The fellow I got had friends in the galley and all through the night they would bring me up eggnogs. When it was time to transfer to the Rescue, an American hospital ship, I asked

where my few possessions were which I had had in an old gunny sack. They told me they were on deck. When I got up there, I found a brand new leather suitcase. They were a great bunch of fellows. We landed at San Francisco and waited there until Canadian Pullman cars were sent down for us.

There were about twenty of us supposed to be bed patients. There was a head nurse in charge of us. Everything was going along fine until we stopped at a little town in Oregon and Red Grant and myself got off to get some ice cream from a store across the street from the railroad station . We got the ice cream and when we came out of the store we saw the end of the train as it pulled out. We ran over to the station and a young girl who was driving a taxi asked us if we had missed the train. We said we had and she said to jump in and she would catch it, then she asked us to come back with her as there was a dance in town that night but we said we couldn't. When we got on board that head nurse sure gave us heck.

When we arrived in Vancouver, I was met at the station by my uncle Alex Duff – I can still see him standing there waiting for the train to stop.



We were taken to Shaughnessy Barracks which was on Little Mountain - which is now Queen Elizabeth Park. The first night there we wanted to go downtown. We asked the nurse in charge – a different one - if we could and she said it was against the rules, opened the window and said, "Be back by 7 am...."

The next day the Padre came and took me down to the Adjutant's office. They asked me my name, rank and a lot more information. Apparently they had me down as dying at sea on the way home and had sent a telegram to my parents to that effect. Luckily I had phoned

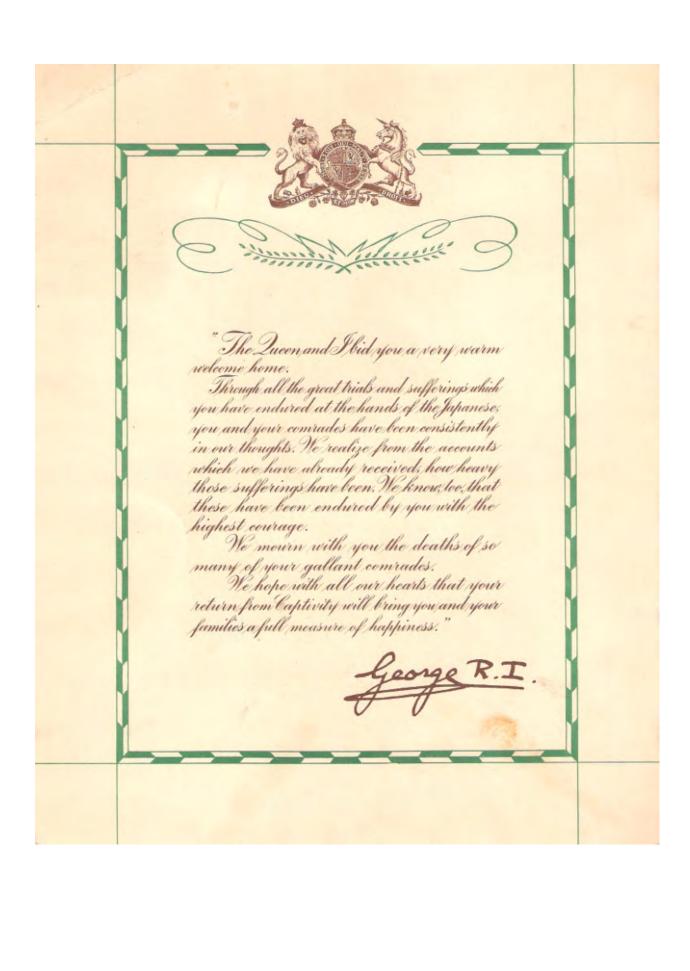
my Mother the night before so she knew better. We stayed in Vancouver for two weeks and then were put on the train to go home. The same nurse was in charge and when she saw me she said, "Oh no, not you again!" Before the war, my parents were living in Miniota but they had moved to Winnipeg during the war. When we got near to Brandon the nurse came and told me that I would be getting off there as it was the nearest stop to Miniota. I told her that my family had moved and I wanted to go to Winnipeg. She said that I had to get off at Brandon and I told her that I wasn't. When we arrived at Brandon, I was lying on my bunk with no intention of getting off but she wired ahead and two M.P.s came on board – took me away in the Bun Wagon! When we got to the hospital I demanded to see the head doctor and when I told him about it he had me put on the next train to Winnipeg which arrived as soon as the one I had been on previously. When I was discharged from the Army, I discovered that I had been made a Sergeant on December 23, 1941. There had been no record ever made of me losing my stripes in camp. We sure had a party with the back pay.

I can remember going to the Safeway and seeing all that food and listening to the people complain about going short of sugar, coffee and other things. Little did they know!

The war took its toll at home too. My father suffered two strokes during the war and a final one shortly after I returned and he died.

Our fellows all suffer from various ailments which are directly related to the lack proper nourishment and medical treatment which we endured.

"May our future generations never know the Horrors which we suffered"!



WAITING

By Peter MacPherson

The call came for an Army to go and fight the foe, I said, "My boy, I need you, but I'm glad you want to go."

He phoned his pals, and a couple of gals, and said "I'm on my way,

Please put up my hockey stick, I might use it again someday."

I drove them to the station; from there they took the train.

We each had a prayer in our heart they would return again

They sailed away to Jamaica, were there for quite awhile,

Then came home on leave and everyone wore a smile.

But all too soon the leave was up; again we had to part,

That was the time that bothered us, and wrung each loved one's heart.

It was "Good-bye Dad and Mother. Good-bye kids and all.

If I don't see you at Christmas, perhaps I will in the fall"

By rather a strange coincidence, it was on Christmas Day

We heard Hong Kong had fallen and our boys were there to stay.

We listened to the radio, met the postman at the gate.

Months and months slipped by - every night we sat up late.

At last the news from Ottawa – the list of prisoners is here,

So watch the mail for the letter you've waited for a year."

Then came a special Delivery, it was a letter from our son.

"Love to everyone at home, we four all safe but one."

Then our daughter received a blow -"Sorry your husband had to go."

The King and Queen sent a message of sympathy, you know.

"His actions were fine, but he was killed on the line,

We are sure you will miss him until the end of time."

So before this war is over, and the Japs are driven hard,

I hope the powers that be will choose me for a guard.

I would love to go and fight them, get them all some way.

But..."Vengeance is Mine" saith the Lord....

"AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING, WE SHALL REMEMBER THEM!"



Cliff Chadderton

Don MacPherson

Smokey Smith