

THE WESTERN TORCH

**Hong Kong Veterans' Commemorative Association
British Columbia Region
March, 2005**

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Regional Director's Report

We haven't had a BC HKVCA Newsletter out to you for quite some time. I hope you don't think that the lack of a newsletter meant there was a period of inactivity. Far from it, our BC Region has been extremely busy.

Our BC veterans and commemorative members have been involved in local, National and even International events. We've continued to participate in Remembrance Day and Christmas Day ceremonies throughout the Province. We've held our Spring Luncheons in Victoria and Vancouver and are in the midst of planning our next ones. We organized the 2003 National Convention in Victoria. Three of our veterans participated in a Town Hall Meeting hosted by Peter Mansbridge on CBC television. Another veteran has been involved in a documentary that you will read about later on in this newsletter. In January of 2005, three of our veterans and their companions met with Prime Minister Paul Martin in Hong Kong to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation.

I believe we have done ourselves proud in British Columbia. As you read through the articles in this newsletter you will discover that it's not just in BC that we have these wonderful people but they are all across Canada as well. You will read about some amazing plans being made by a group of school children in Ontario. Soon you will receive your registration kits for our National Convention to be held in Ottawa. All of these events take many, many dedicated people.

We are all honoured to be a part of an Organization that has such dedicated individuals so willing to be of service.

On Wednesday, February 23rd, I was invited by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) in Victoria to attend a Client Liaison Committee meeting on behalf of the HKVCA. There were representatives from many of the local Legions and other Veterans Associations, the RCMP as well as CFB Esquimalt. As I'm sure you're aware, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has declared 2005 the "Year of the Veteran". The VAC objectives are – Provide an opportunity for remembrance – Mark 60th Anniversary of the end of WWII – Encourage communities to organize memorial activities – Give young people a chance to learn – Commemorate military anniversaries throughout Canada. At the meeting we were advised that there are many commemorative events planned all across the country during 2005. Please keep your eyes and ears open and participate in the events that will be in your area.

We hope to see many of you at the Luncheons in Victoria and Vancouver and at the National Convention in Ottawa in August.

Until we meet again, take very good care of each other.

A la prochaine,
Linda Stewart
BC Regional Director

Treasurer and Membership Report:

I would like to express greetings to all Hong Kong veterans, widows, HKVCA members, family and friends. As I sat down to write this, I found myself reflecting on what a beautiful day it was on the south coast. It is only March 9 and it was 21 degrees Celsius in the Fraser Canyon, warmer than south Florida! The flowers are blooming, the trees are budding, and the days are getting longer. The warm summer breezes are almost upon us.

This year is shaping up to be a busy one in the HKVCA. I hope to see many of you at the National Convention in Ottawa this August. The Ontario Region is hard at work, and with the help of VAC, the 60th anniversary commemoration in our nation's capital will be one to remember. On the local scene, we have the upcoming luncheons in Victoria and Vancouver. I have come to look forward to our spring luncheons when we get together, break bread, and reacquaint with our HK Family. I hope to see you there!

I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't send a gentle reminder to those of you who have not as yet renewed their memberships for 2004 and 2005. We have lots of new membership cards and decals waiting to be sent out. You will feel a lot better once you have mailed your dues, your new card is in your wallet, and your shiny new decal is displayed proudly. Thank you to those that have already done so. Let's keep the mail lady busy!

It was nice to receive applications recently from two new members, **Bernice Dupuis** and **David Reynolds**. Bernice lives in Langley, and her father was **James Burnett Mann, RRC**. David lives in Surrey, and his father was **Reginald Henry James (Reg) McFee, WG**. Welcome!

We received a nice letter and phone call from **George E. Roylance** in Richmond. **George** is 92 years young and served with the **HKVDC** in the Battle of Hong Kong. **George** sends his regards to everyone.

Don and Pearl MacPherson have been in touch with a nice letter and a subsequent phone call. They are looking forward to Ottawa and the spring luncheon in Vancouver. **Don** participates in the documentary "Victory 1945", which will air on the History Channel on May 7.

It's always nice to hear from **Will and Mona Allister**. **Will** is still spending time in his art studio creating those wonderful paintings. **Will** recently donated some prints to help raise money for the Ontario students who are making a pilgrimage to Hong Kong in November. We hope to see **Will** and **Mona** at the Vancouver luncheon.

A month or so ago I stopped at the Maple Ridge Legion on a Saturday afternoon and had the pleasure of sharing a beer and some good conversation with **Claude Corbett**. **Claude** is living in the Legion Towers in Maple Ridge. I'll have to try and make it down to see **Claude** more often.

Lionel Speller has been in the hospital for awhile, and we all send him our best wishes. Even though he is not at home right now, **Ida** is still looking after him every day. Their son and daughter, **Ross** and **Carol**, have been to Victoria visiting with Mom and Dad. **Ross** is from Kamloops, and **Carol** lives in Medford, Oregon.

Dick Maze sent us a nice letter and donation. **Dick** and his wife **Ann** live in Vancouver and we hope to see them at the luncheon in June.

We received another nice letter and a phone call from **Walter and Jean Gray**. They are doing well and still enjoying their walks together.

Many thanks for the lovely card from **Jean McKnight**. Jean sent a donation in loving memory of her late husband, **Gerald McKnight**. Jean lives in Surrey, and we send her our best.

Harry Gyselman (WG) recently moved from Winnipeg to Comox. I guess the lure of beautiful Vancouver Island was just too much after those long Manitoba winters! Please extend a warm welcome to Harry.

Bill and Rhona Muir send their best regards from Courtnay. Just like clockwork there is always a letter and donation from **Bill** this time of year.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my parents, **Bill and Claire Doull**, for their continued support for the HKVCA as well as their son. I look forward to being in Ottawa this summer with my family.

Many thanks to **Aubrey Flegg**, **Larry Stebbe**, and **John Lowe** for all that they have shared with me recently. Thanks also to **Gerry Gerrard** who is a pillar for the HK vets and always stays in touch.

Thank you very much to everyone else who has made contact recently. Your letters and phone calls help to keep the HKVCA on a strong path. Best regards to those that are not feeling well. Please know that our thoughts are with you. Until next time, please take good care of each other.

Warm regards,
Murray Doull, Secretary-Treasurer, BC Region



In Memoriam

We regret to inform you of the following Hong Kong veterans, family members and friends who have passed away. Our sincere condolences to the families and friends of the following veterans:

Duncan A. Benton, WG, passed away Jan. 1, 2003
Raymond Druin, RRC, passed away Feb. 7, 2003
Elved G. Thomas, WG, passed away Feb. 14, 2004
Alton Jewers, RRC, passed away Feb. 21, 2004
Sidney Vale, WG, passed away Feb. 26, 2004
Lt. John McGreevy, RRC, passed away March 25, 2004
Lt. Elmer Denison, RRC, passed away April 13, 2004
Ernest W. Roberts, WG, passed away May 4, 2004
Ernest Ladds, RRC, passed away Aug. 23, 2004
Eldon MacWhirter, RRC, passed away Oct. 7, 2004
Air Commodore Leonard J. Birchall, retired, passed away Sept. 10, 2004
Capt. Harry White, WG, passed away Oct. 28, 2004
John F. Webb, RRC, passed away Oct. 9, 2004
J.C. (Chris) Webb, RRC, passed away Oct. 12, 2004
David Martin, WG, passed away Nov. 16, 2004
Gerald Pentland, RRC, passed away Nov. 30, 2004
Richard J. Grant, RRC, passed away Dec. 25, 2004
Arthur Wright, WG, passed away Dec. 29, 2004
Sgt. Lloyd C. Doull, RRC, passed away Jan. 10, 2005
Garfield W. Lowe, WG, passed away Jan. 16, 2005
John D. Pollock, WG, passed away Jan. 20, 2005
Edward (Chic) Query, WG, passed away Jan. 25, 2005
Melbourne Carter, RRC, passed away Feb. 18, 2005

*“They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old.
 Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.
 At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.”*

The following deaths have occurred within the greater Hong Kong family:

William J. Barnes, HKVCA, passed away Feb. 22, 2003
Mrs. Janis Mayville, HKVCA, passed away April 9, 2003
Mr. Robert (Bob) Mayville, HKVCA, passed away July 24, 2003
Glenn Mayville, HKVCA, passed away April 16, 2004
Dorothy McGrath, widow of John McGrath, RRC, passed away Feb. 12, 2004
Dorothy Lockhart, widow of Maurice Lockhart, RRC, passed away June 20, 2004
Beth Agerbak, widow of Knud Agerbak, WG, passed away Aug. 30, 2004
John C. Breen, HKVDC, passed away Dec. 3, 2004
Margaret (Peggy) Doull, passed away Dec. 14, 2004
Stockwell Day Sr., HKVCA, passed away Feb. 6, 2005

Our thoughts and prayers are extended to all the families and friends. We share in your grief.

Donations to the British Columbia HKVCA

The BC Branch has not sent out an official newsletter for some time. There has been considerable correspondence in other forms. The newsletter has been the traditional means for us to thank those who have made donations. Without the generosity of these people it would be difficult to carry on financially. Due to the length of time since the last publication the list is now long. However, we feel it is important to recognize and thank all the donors, and we encourage others to follow their lead. Many of the names mentioned below have donated more than once. We are truly grateful for your generosity.

Helen Thompson, widow
Claire Doull, HKVCA
Abe Peters, WG
Elizabeth Whitfield, widow
Richard Johnson, WG
Ernie Barnes, HKVCA
Don and Pearl MacPherson, WG and wife
Elizabeth Murphy, widow
Aubrey Flegg, WG
Bill Muir, WG
Rita Burton, widow
Eleanor Naylor, widow
Evelyn Varcoe, widow
Claude Corbett, WG
Dorothy Sauson, widow
Richard Maze, WG
Hong Kong Vets of BC
Sandra Doull, HKVCA
Evelyn Pink, HKVCA
Tanya and Layne Pennington, HKVCA
Sally Laite, HKVCA
Mary Jewers, widow
Y'vonne D'Amours, widow

Bill Doull, RRC
Gerry Gerrard, RCCS
Darren Lowe, HKVCA
Harold Heath, RRC
Carlos Roza Pereira, HKVDC (deceased)
Jean McKnight, widow
George Roylance, HKVDC
Connie Martin, widow
John Pollock, WG (deceased)
Bob Mayville, HKVCA (deceased)
Alberta Rafferty, widow
Florence Weibe, widow
Danny Muir, HKVCA
Catherine Penny, widow
Robert Olscamp, RRC
Sharon Planidin, HKVDC
Walter and Jean Gray, RRC and wife
Gwen Day, HKVCA
Jan Solecki, HKVDC
Ken and Eileen Cambon, RRC and wife
Bev and Eric Campbell, HKVCA
Mona Zane, widow
Yvonne Whiting, HKVCA

The "C" Force Memorial Project

The establishment of a memorial to the men and women of "C" Force, the Canadian Army Brigade that fought at the Battle of Hong Kong has been in the back of minds of veterans, family members and friends for years. At the Victoria 2003 Convention of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, a motion was passed authorizing a study to be carried out and recommendations put forward for such a memorial. The motion had set the criteria for the type of memorial to be established.

a. to determine the focus of the Memorial as desired by the HKVA membership.

- *strictly military presentation*
- *to include the historical aspect*
- *to give individuals recognition, etc.*

b. to seek alternative designs and potential locations, and

c. to prepare a feasibility report on the choicest options.

The motion is very restrictive, based on "to include the historical aspect" and to "give individual recognition". These two criteria presented a challenge to the committee as to what was the best design for such a memorial. It was apparent that a traditional memorial such as a statue or cairn would not meet the criteria. A statue or cairn presents a great many difficulties for telling the historical aspect. The story of "C" Force is too big and complex for a statue or cairn type structure. The other draw back for a statue or cairn was the requirement for individual recognition. Canadian tradition allows only those that were killed in action,

missing in action, and who died as prisoners of war to be placed on statues or cairns. Therefore the inclusion of all 1977 individuals of "C" Force could not be placed on a statue or cairn. The committee concluded the best memorial to meet all the criteria would be an Interpretative Centre.

The location for the memorial presented many difficulties for a number of reasons. The reasons that weighed heavily on the committee's final decision were:

- a. *timeline for completion (target for completion is set for summer 2007).*
- b. *cost*
- c. *availability of land, and*
- d. *public awareness*

Initially the HKVA proposed erecting two statue-type monuments, one in the Quebec Eastern Townships area (home area for the Royal Rifles of Canada) and one in Winnipeg (home of the Winnipeg Grenadiers). The Royal Rifles group stated that they would not support the erection of a monument in Quebec. Their recommendation was a monument in Ottawa.

Many members of the HKVA and the HKVCA suggested Ottawa as the place to erect a "C" Force Memorial. The committee investigated this suggestion based on the above criteria. At first glance Ottawa would appear to be an ideal location. It is the capital of the country. The National War Memorial, the War Museum, and many other places of national importance attract many visitors annually. The committee contacted people responsible for the National Capital Region providing information on the type of structure being considered and asking questions related to the above reasons. The response received was that Ottawa would not be an ideal location for the memorial. Public awareness and potential for visitors to the memorial would be extremely low. Attractions such as The House of Parliament, The War Museum, The National Art Gallery, The Museum of Man and Civilization draw thousands of tourists each year and would take away from any "C" Force Memorial located there. The cost of the project would be considerably higher because of various permits, purchase of land and generally doing business in the region. The National Capital Commission restricts the use of suitable land in the region. The type of memorial being proposed would present additional difficulties because of parking requiring additional land. Because of the bureaucratic procedures for such a project the

timeline would be lengthened considerably resulting in an undesirable delay if a reasonable number of veterans were to participate in the opening of the memorial. Because of the above reasons the committee rejected Ottawa as a location for the memorial.

Because the original suggestion from the HKVA was for a memorial in Quebec and Manitoba, the committee investigated locations in Manitoba, primarily in Winnipeg. Other reasons for considering Winnipeg were that one of the largest contingents (853 personnel) came from Winnipeg and the surrounding area. Winnipeg is also the geographic centre of Canada and is easily accessible from all parts of the country. Land is available adjacent to the largest military cemetery in Canada that contains the largest number of "C" Force members in a group outside of Sai Wan and Yokohama Cemeteries. There also are potential partnerships with other local veterans' organizations, Regimental Associations, and the City of Winnipeg in the development of the grounds and interpretative centre reducing the cost and increasing the potential for public awareness.

Brookside Cemetery was chosen as the optimum development site because it had land available. The proposed land is adjacent to one of Canada's oldest and largest military cemeteries. This would compliment both the military cemetery as well as a memorial. The site is close to the centre of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg International Airport. The quality of the existing site features can be incorporated to compliment the centre. There is water, vegetation and room for expansion at the chosen site. Future development with foot paths along Oman's Creek for all season activities would bring potential visitors to the centre.

This is the first installment on the establishment of a "C" Force Memorial. I would recommend visiting the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association Monument Discussion Group website (www.hkvca.ca) for more details. In the next newsletter a description of the Memorial /Interpretative Centre will be given. Also at the Convention this summer, people will be given a presentation on the project as well as have access to various databases such as details of each soldier from the time they left their home base. This database will become an integral part of the project when complete.

Vince Lopata, CD-Secretary
HKVA "C" Force Memorial Project

PROFILE OF A HONG KONG VETERAN

This part of the newsletter allows us to share with you a brief history of one of our Hong Kong veterans. Mr. John Joseph Lowe agreed to be interviewed and what follows is his profile.

Mr. John Joseph Lowe, Royal Rifles of Canada.



John was born in Montreal on May 1, 1922. His proud parents were James Alexander Lowe and Ann McAllister Lowe. John's mother's maiden name was Harkins.

John had five brothers and two sisters. John's mother died when John was very young and his father worked out of town on the railroad. It was the time of the Great Depression, and the family struggled to maintain. John subsequently was brought up by the Lady's Benevolent Society in Montreal.

John initially went to school at King George School. He received his high school education at Westmount Secondary in Montreal.

All of the Lowe brothers, except for the last born (who was too young), enlisted early in WWII. John joined the Royal Rifles of Canada on September 3, 1940. He trained in Val Cartier Quebec, Sussex New Brunswick, and Gander, Botwood and St John's Newfoundland. One of John's brothers, James Lowe, was living in Winnipeg at the time and enlisted with the Winnipeg Grenadiers. Tom Lowe and Ernest Lowe enlisted with the 48th Highlanders of the Black Watch in Montreal. James was killed in the Battle of Hong Kong and is buried at Sai Wan War Cemetery in Hong Kong. Tom was killed in the liberation of Holland. Ernest fought his way into Germany and John spent 44 months as a POW. Of the 4 Lowe brothers who went overseas, only John and Ernest returned. In the photo above, John is signing the Memorial Book at Sai Wan War Cemetery on January 22, 2005 in front of the Memorial Wall which bears James Lowe's name.

When John shipped out of Vancouver in 1941 on the Awatea, he was a proud member of 17 Platoon, D company, Royal Rifles of Canada. As part of "C" Force, he was one of the first Canadians to engage the enemy in WWII. John was nineteen years old when he was captured. He spent his 20th birthday as a POW. After 64 years he still remembers vividly the battle of Hong Kong. John was incarcerated in three camps. These were North Point, Shamshuipo, and Camp #9 Ormina coal mine in Kawasaki.

Like all the Canadian soldiers from "C" Force who returned home from hell in the POW camps, John struggled both physically and mentally. His will remained strong however and he felt that if "I could make it through those camps, I can make it through anything."

After the war was over, John became a mechanic in his home town of Montreal. He soon felt the need to wander and headed out to British Columbia in 1946. He never returned to Montreal to live. He settled in Vancouver for awhile as a mechanic for the city. He then moved on to Vancouver Island where he worked maintaining heavy equipment for a logging company in Campbell River. John eventually returned to Vancouver and opened his own mechanical shop until he retired in 1985.

John and his wonderful wife Florence currently reside in White Rock, BC. They have one son and one daughter. A sparkle comes to their eyes when they talk about their 3 grandchildren and their 3 great grandchildren.

Editor's note: I had the pleasure of recently accompanying John to Hong Kong. He has a truly amazing memory of what took place over 60 years ago. It was an honor and a privilege to be able to share some of those memories with him. John and Florence enjoy trips down to the US and they love their bingo!

The Royal Canadian Corps of Signals (RCCS)

Often when we hear about “C” Force, people are referring to the Royal Rifles of Canada or the Winnipeg Grenadiers. A key component of the Canadian HK vets that went overseas was the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. A good number of those men were from Vancouver Island, and one of those men was Gerry Gerard. Gerry and his wife Ev live in Victoria and what follows is an account as told by Gerry.

“The duties of the RCCS were to provide communications between all units and top command posts. This was done by using telephones, wireless radios, dispatch riders, runners, flags, Morse code and semaphore. In the Reserves, I even learned to use the sun with an instrument called a heliograph.

We had linemen to supply and maintain overland cables, switchboard operators, dispatch riders on motor bikes, and wireless operators. Our duties were to travel with the fighting units. Normally we would have our equipment mounted on trucks, but in Hong Kong we were delivered to our destination and given a good luck wave. We soon learned that once we hit the airwaves, we became targets of the bombers so we would find a spot a little distance from the unit so as not to draw attention to them. At least we didn’t have to hide a truck, but we had to carry all our gear when moving back. Twice we were caught behind the lines and lost all our equipment, so we had to find our way back to headquarters then set out again.

I found it interesting reading Major Bailey’s diary. I was in the same area on Christmas Day, 1941. I reported back only to be sent out for the last stand. There were no more communications by then, just fight to the end. About an hour later came the order to surrender. I had no food and spent the night in the telephone company warehouse trying to catch some sleep on a coil of cables.

In the beginning, the Signal Corps didn’t move to the island of HK with the

others, so we got caught in the first bombing raid. I was operating a temporary wireless and watched the bombs fall. One of them hit our building about 75 yards away, and some of them hit the harbor. Within an hour some of us were sent to join the allied troops on the mainland. Three of us were with the Royal Scots, and others were with the Rajputs and Punjabs. We were some of the first Canadians in action, and I would like to thank the company of Winnipeg Grenadiers who helped us evacuate.

There are a couple of items of interest to note. Three of us belonged to the 5th Heavy Battery in Victoria and were qualified on the 12 pounder and 6 inch guns (same as our escort vessel the Prince Robert), as well as signalmen. Due to a shortage of signalers on the coastal defense of Canada, we were transferred to the RCCS. During the trip to HK we performed the visual signals between our ship and the escort vessels.

After the Prince Robert dropped us off in HK we wondered what happened to her. Well, she sailed back to Canada, first stopping in Hawaii. Shortly after she left Hawaii, Pearl Harbor was attacked. The Prince Robert was called back to search for survivors of a torpedoed freighter but found none. Unknown to them at the time, they were within 500 miles of the Japanese fleet.

After arriving back in Canada, her big guns were removed and the ship was refitted for aircraft defense. The Robert then joined the British fleet in the South Seas and the Indian Ocean. Shortly before the Japanese surrender, this fleet was heading to HK to retake it. The surrender came a few days before they got there so the fleet was dispersed to various other areas. The Prince Robert proceeded to HK where the crew did an excellent job of organizing the policing duties.”

Editors note: Many thanks to Gerry for sharing this historical information with us. It is important to know about the important role played by the Signal Corps in the Battle of HK.

HKVCA luncheons in Victoria and Vancouver

We are pleased to supply you with details for the upcoming luncheons in Victoria and Vancouver. These luncheons are for all Hong Kong veterans, widows of HK vets, and HKVCA members in British Columbia. If you know any out of province HK vets, widows, or members that may be able to attend, please advise us. We would love to have them. These events will provide an excellent opportunity to meet both new and old friends. We sincerely hope that you will be able to attend the luncheon that is closest to you. These luncheons have become an annual tradition in BC, and the company is always excellent!

Victoria Luncheon:

Date: Saturday, May 28, 2005

Location: Traveller's Inn (old Imperial Inn), 1961 Douglas St., Victoria (entrance is off Discovery)

Time: Meet at 12:00PM to 12:30PM. Luncheon will be at 1:00PM

Hotel Reservations: Phone toll free: 1-888-877-9444
Local phone#: (250) 953-1000

Contact: Please contact Linda Stewart no later than May 22, 2005 if you plan on attending the Victoria luncheon. It is important that we have accurate numbers for the caterer. You can phone Linda at (250) 380-3720, or you can e-mail Linda at lindaontheisland@shaw.ca

Vancouver Luncheon:

Date: Saturday, June 4, 2005

Location: Ramada Hotel and Suites Metrotown, 3484 Kingsway, Vancouver

Time: Anytime after 11:00AM in the Collingwood Room. Lunch will be at 1:00PM

Hotel Reservations: To receive the special room rate please contact Esther from Tuesday to Saturday between the hours of 7:00AM and 3:00PM. You can reach Esther by phoning toll free at 1-888-228-2111 or locally at 604-433-8255. Please mention to Esther that you are attending the Hong Kong Veterans' luncheon on June 4.

Contact: Please contact Murray Doull no later than May 29, 2005 if you plan on attending the Vancouver luncheon. It is important that we have accurate numbers for the caterer. You can phone Murray at 604-465-0579, or you can e-mail me at mdoull@shaw.ca

The costs for these luncheons will be covered by the BC Region of the HKVCA. Any donation that you can offer to assist us with expenditures would be greatly appreciated. We look forward to hearing from you. These are important events for the Hong Kong Family in our Region. Please help us to make them a success.



A message from the Ontario Region:

The purpose of this message is to ask for your feedback on a possible trip to Hong Kong later this year. Many of the HKVCA had hoped that a government funded pilgrimage to Hong Kong would take place towards the end of the year. However, as you may be aware, our HK vets were given a choice by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)

of either a pilgrimage, or having the funds that VAC would have spent on a pilgrimage applied towards our National Convention in Ottawa. The Vet's choice, primarily due to health and related concerns over travel, was to have VAC apply the funds to the National Convention. Therefore, no government funded pilgrimage will take place.

Nonetheless, several of our members, both Vet and non Vet have asked about whether a trip to

Hong Kong is still a possibility. There appears to be interest in somehow marking the 60th anniversary of the Vets' release from the prison camps and doing so in Hong Kong. This would be an excellent opportunity for family members to actually see where their relatives were killed or captured, to visit the graves of those left behind, and to hold a service to commemorate the battle and imprisonment.

Such a trip would have to be self funded, as no funding would be provided by VAC. We are looking into the possibility of organizing a trip. But in order to negotiate with a travel agent we need an indication of how many people would be interested in making the trip. We also need feedback on the itinerary to help plan the event.

Would you please respond to the e-mail indicating whether you would be interested in such a trip, and if so, how many from your family would go? Of course, this is entirely non binding. We are only looking for approximate numbers at the moment. We would like to hear from both vets and non Vets.

Here is a little information to help you:

- Expected cost per person: approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000.
- Includes airfare, hotel, breakfast and dinner daily, ground transportation and tour guides in Hong Kong
- Approximate duration: 10 days (including travel days).
- Date: approximately Nov. 30 to Dec. 9, 2005. Dates are chosen to overlap with Canadian commemorative ceremony to be held at Sai Wan Cemetery on Dec. 4 and anniversary of commencement of the Battle of Hong Kong.

We would also like to have any suggestions you may have regarding the itinerary. For example, should a trip to Japan be included?

Please reply as soon as possible to Mike Babin at msbabin@sympatico.ca or to Carol Hadley at PO Box 381 Winnipeg, MB, R3C 2H6. Thanks in advance for your feedback.

The Memorial Capsule Project

In November, 2005, up to 200 students, teachers and family members from Port Perry High School, Courtice Secondary, Oshawa's Msgr. Paul

Dwyer High School, Whitby's Sinclair and collegiate and Father Leo Austin High School will be traveling to Hong Kong, not only to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the release of Canadian soldiers from Japanese prison camps at the end of WWII – but to change history. We want to encourage students from across Canada to bring attention to this little known chapter of Canadian history. Our students will be creating a “We Remember Hong Kong Memorial Capsule” that will be enshrined at the Sai Wan Cemetery in Hong Kong. The Memorial Capsule Project is being spearheaded by Nancy Hamer Strahl of Port Perry High School.

Port Perry High School invites other schools to be part of the “Memorial Capsule Project”. We are inviting students to adopt a Hong Kong veteran and write a commemorative piece to show your thanks for all the veterans who sacrificed so much 60 years ago on our behalf in Hong Kong. We will be inserting your commemorative pieces into our Memorial Capsule. The Capsule will be buried at the Sai Wan Cemetery in Hong Kong on behalf of all Canadian school children.

Have your students become involved. Find a veteran; he may or may not be alive today. Contact the HK vet, their family or visit a website and learn as much as possible about them. Write a short story, a biography, make a documentary video, write a song, a letter, a poem, or create an artistic piece. Potentially thousands of stories could be brought to Hong Kong commemorating the Hong Kong veterans' courageous and valiant contributions during WWII. Our submission deadline is November 1st, 2005.

We are opening our Memorial Capsule project to the community at large by asking schools across Canada to embark upon this journey with us. Participation would be greatly appreciated. Our goal is to honor those who fought in Hong Kong by telling their stories and allowing them to live on through us, the younger generation. For further information you can visit the student web page at www.pilgrimage.ca or you can contact Nancy directly at:

Nancy Hamer Strahl

Pilgrimage to Hong Kong Memorial Capsule
Coordinator

Phone: (905) 985-7337

Fax: (905) 985-8323

E-mail: hamerstrahl_nancy@durham.edu.on.ca

Memorial Services in Hong Kong, January 2005.

In early December 2004, The HKVCA was contacted by The Canadian Consulate in Hong Kong. They informed us that the Prime Minister of Canada planned on being in Hong Kong briefly on January 22 and 23, 2005. They informed us that the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Deputy Minister, and other dignitaries would be present to participate in Memorial Services at Sai Wan War cemetery and Stanley Military Cemetery.

On very short notice they were hoping that a few Hong Kong veterans would be able to attend the Memorial Services. We mailed out letters to the BC HK vets in mid December to find out if there was any interest. Four veterans came forward, but unfortunately Veterans Affairs could only fund three vets and their caregivers. The first three vets to express interest were chosen. The three HK vets that traveled back to Hong Kong on the year marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the survivors of "C" Force from POW camps were Aubrey Flegg (WG), Larry Stebbe (WG), and John Lowe (RRC).

To ensure the well being of the HK vets, Veteran's Affairs required a caregiver for each of them. Betty Waldenberger was Aubrey's caregiver, Larry's caregiver was his son Wayne Stebbe, and I (Murray Doull) had the privilege of accompanying John Lowe. Ironically, John was in 17 platoon, "D" Coy, Royal Rifles, with Bill Doull my father. John has an excellent memory, and I was very fortunate to learn a great deal from him as we shared time together and became close friends.

There were a few snags we had to initially overcome to get the three vets and their caregivers overseas. Aubrey, Betty, Larry and Wayne flew out of Vancouver on Wednesday, January 19/05 at 12:45 PM for Hong Kong. Due to the 16 hour time differential, they arrived in HK on Thursday night shortly after 8:00 PM. The flight was approximately 14.5 hours.

We had difficulty getting Aubrey and Betty to the airport in Vancouver on time because of the extreme inclement weather in the interior. Mountain passes were closed and the airports shut down. We managed to get them on a flight out of Kelowna at 6:00 AM Wednesday morning. Unfortunately they were quite exhausted by the time they reached Hong Kong, however they soon recovered and were quite active.

Wayne flew out from Winnipeg to meet his father. Larry traveled to Vancouver from Victoria. Wayne's flight was the first one out of Winnipeg that day because of the bad weather back east. His flight was delayed, but he arrived in time. I met Larry at his hotel with the plane tickets.

John Lowe and I flew out of Vancouver to HK at 1:45 PM on Thursday, January 20/05. We arrived in Hong Kong on Friday night at approximately 9:00 PM. Due to problems obtaining John's birth certificate from Quebec, we didn't receive his passport until about 40 hours before our flight. That was just a little too close for comfort! John and I traveled a day later because flights were very full due to the trade show in HK and the pending Chinese New Year.

We were all met at the airport by Edwina Wong and Tom Ryan from the Canadian Consulate in HK along with Doug Clorey, Director General of Veterans Affairs Canada. We were then escorted from the airport on Lantau Island to the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in downtown HK on what was deemed the "veterans bus" for the duration of our visit.



On Friday morning, Aubrey and Larry and their caregivers attended breakfast at the hotel with the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Albina Guarnieri), Deputy Minister (Jack Stagg), the Director General (Doug Clorey), and Consulate staff. Following breakfast the group traveled to the Canadian International School in Aberdeen. Here the HK vets talked to the students and participated in a Q/A period in the middle school classroom. The Minister addressed the student body in the school auditorium. The Canadian delegation then went for lunch and a tour and returned to the Mandarin oriental around 2:30 PM. John and I arrived in Hong Kong at about 9:00 PM that evening. After a full day for Edwina, Tom, and Doug, they were still at the airport to greet us. Their hospitality and consideration towards all of us was the very best it could have been for our entire visit.



Saturday morning we all met with Doug Clorey, Roger Galloway (MP for Sarnia and advocate for all veterans), and Consulate staff for breakfast at the hotel. We departed from the hotel in the veterans bus at 9:30 AM accompanied by the Minister and her staff, Consulate staff, Ken Sorfleet (Canadian Defense Attaché), and Roger Galloway to visit Sai Wan War Cemetery. We visited the Canadian gravesites and chatted as we walked through the cemetery. John Lowe's brother, James Lowe, was killed in the Battle of Hong Kong. It was an emotional moment when we found his name on the Memorial Wall. His grave is unmarked, but we know it is in row 26. The HK vets talked extensively with the Minister and Deputy Minister. There were lots of photo opportunities. You can view many photos from the trip and memorial Services in the Photo Gallery at our website at www.hkvca.ca



We left for Stanley Military Cemetery shortly after 11:00AM. We held a memorial ceremony at Stanley. It was a beautiful warm sunny morning. The Minister, Albina Guarnieri, laid a wreath for all of Canada. Each of the HK vets laid a wreath in memory of their fallen comrades. I had the privilege of laying a wreath on behalf of the Commemorative Association. John Lowe read the Act of Remembrance. Following the ceremony we visited the Canadian gravesites which were all marked with our flag. We spent time walking through the cemetery, paying our respects. Some of the Canadians from "C" Force who lost their lives during the Battle of Hong Kong and are buried in Stanley were only teenagers when they made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and freedom. It was a very emotional experience for all of us.



We returned to the hotel at approximately 12:20 PM, just in time to freshen up for the luncheon hosted by the Minister of Veterans Affairs in the East/West Room at the Mandarin Oriental. There were approximately 40 invited guests at the luncheon. These guests included Arthur Gomes, Dr. Raymond Mok, Maximo Cheng (all HKVDC), Jack Edwards (British Army POW), Gerry Campbell (Consul General) and others. The Minister paid a long and wonderful tribute to the Hong Kong Veterans of Canada. We were all very moved by her words. Her speech meant a great deal to the three HK vets in attendance. The HK vets and their caretakers were presented with Canadian jackets. We wore these proudly for the duration of our trip. The vets were also presented with hard cover copies of

Tony Banham's new book titled "Not the Slightest Chance". We enjoyed an exotic lunch and wonderful conversation with all in attendance.



thoroughly enjoyed themselves. When the reception was over, the six Canucks retired to the “Captains Bar” for reflection and a nightcap. Everywhere the vets went they had a following of well wishers and supporters. A weary lot hit the sheets about midnight after a very busy day with many memories to fall asleep with.



The next morning (Sunday, January 23) we all met for breakfast at the hotel. We were joined by the Minister and her staff, Consulate staff, MP's and others. We departed in a large motorcade for Sai Wan War Cemetery at 10:00 AM. It was a beautiful sunny day and the temperature reached 23 degrees Celsius by noon. Hundreds were in attendance. The Prime Minister and his wife arrived and greeted the HK vets who were assembled at the top of the cemetery. With the piper leading the way the official party proceeded down the lengthy stairs at Sai Wan to the waiting crowd assembled around the Stone of Remembrance where the service took place. The PM assisted Aubrey down the long flight of stairs. Sheila Martin took Betty's arm and walked with her.



It was a very moving service. The Prime Minister once again made a moving tribute to the sacrifices made by the HK vets of Canada for their country. Aubrey Flegg then spoke some words on behalf of all the HK vets. Larry Stebbe read The Act of Remembrance in English, and the Minister (Albina) read it in French. Protestant and Catholic ministers said prayers. The Last Post and reveille were played by the piper. Two minutes of silence were observed. Over 30 wreaths were laid at the service starting with the PM, the Minister, and the three HK vets. I had the privilege of following the HK vets on behalf of the Commemorative Association. I will never forget how I felt at that moment. While we were laying the wreaths, The Canadian International School Choir sang “Amazing Grace”. There were very few dry eyes at Sai Wan Cemetery that morning.



Following the service, the Prime Minister and Mrs. Martin spent time walking through the cemetery talking to the HK vets. The PM and his wife then departed and the press swarmed the vets. After about 15 minutes we told the press that was enough and we assisted the vets to the top of the hill where they were greeted by several members of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defense Corps who presented them with books. Due to the heat we were sure to keep the vets hydrated. The HK vets were very stalwart and excellent representatives for all the HK vets of Canada. We were all very proud of them. We were then swept away in limousines back to the Mandarin. We were having a late lunch in one of the restaurants at the hotel when the PM and Mrs. Martin

came in and sat at the next table. Before doing so, they greeted us and chatted. The conversation continued across the tables. The PM's security staff didn't know what to do when the PM and Aubrey were hugging each other! A very good time was had by all (except maybe the PM's security staff!).



Saturday evening there was a farewell gathering for Paul and Sheila Martin in the Connaught Room at the Mandarin. Once again the PM praised the HK vets and spent considerable time with the three vets in attendance before he left. The PM and Mrs. Martin were only in Hong Kong for about 24 hours, and most of that time was focused around the Sai Wan Ceremony and the HK vets. My hat goes off to him for this. Once again the food was splendid and the company was wonderful. The HK vets were front and center and were excellent representatives for their comrades. The Canucks hit the sheets around midnight with trunks full of memories and a smile on our faces. Sleep came very quickly.

After breakfast on Monday, the Minister of Veterans Affairs and her party left to catch their plane back to Canada. The Canadian Consul, Pierre Cousineau along with Dylan Kirk from the Consulate escorted us on the veteran's bus to meet Tony Banham. We picked up Tony on some little side street in HK. Following introductions, Tony took us on a battlefield tour. Tony has researched the Battle of Hong Kong extensively, and we were very fortunate to have this British historian escort us to many historic sites. We visited sites around Aberdeen and Won Chai Gap. We visited Brigadier Larson's bunker, and the area where James Lowe (John's brother) lost his life. We also visited The Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defense. This was one of the main locations where the Japanese landed in 1941. This is where John received his first taste of battle which lasted to until the very end at the historic battle at Stanley Cemetery where so many of our HK vets fought so fiercely and so many lost their young lives.

Tony is most certainly a very good friend of the HK vets and we are very thankful for his research and knowledge of the events that took place in December, 1941. The story of the Battle of Hong Kong is detailed in Tony's book "Not the Slightest Chance". We followed the tour with lunch at the Boathouse Restaurant in Stanley Village. After lunch the Consul and Tony departed and Dylan took us through Stanley Market. This became a place where the Canucks learned the knack of bartering with the locals for the best price for souvenirs. Our red Canadian jackets brought many questions from both the locals and tourists.



We returned to the hotel for supper and an earlier to bed than we were accustomed to so far. We were all pretty exhausted from the pace of the last three days in Hong Kong. We were all in bed asleep at an early hour. Tuesday found the six of us waking up to a free day. We gathered for breakfast and talked about what we wanted to do. It was a quick and unanimous decision. We headed back to Stanley Market and another lunch at the Boathouse Restaurant. I must admit, I never realized that shopping could be so much fun. We returned to the hotel around suppertime. Aubrey and Betty decided to stay at the Mandarin. Larry and Wayne, and John and I headed out to the Peking Garden for supper. Chopsticks were the utensils that were provided, and Larry said to John, “You are not very good with those damn things considering you had

four years of practice way back when”. John replied, “Well I guess that’s because I didn’t have any food to practice with!” We all had a good laugh and the rest of the patrons must have been wondering what was so funny. It sure wasn’t funny sixty years ago, but it’s good that the vets can joke about it now. After leaving the Peking Garden, we strolled through some of the side streets in Hong Kong. We stopped at a sidewalk bar in Tim Tam Alley and enjoyed a beer while watching the sites and taking in the smells of the local eateries. We returned to the hotel for a good night’s sleep.

Wednesday saw Aubrey and Betty and Larry and Wayne depart Hong Kong for Vancouver. John and I bid them farewell, then Dylan Kirk took John and me on the Star Ferry over to Kowloon. We browsed around and had lunch at a quaint little restaurant where the food was traditional Mandarin and very tasty. We visited the famous Alexandra Hotel in downtown Kowloon. John remembers the allied troops had orders to leave the hotel intact in 1941, but the Japanese brought their horses, wagons, and artillery into the main entrance and destroyed the hotel afterwards. The hotel has been rebuilt since the Second World War. After seeing the sites and partaking in a little more shopping, John and I returned to the Mandarin for a quiet supper and a good night’s sleep. We were missing our departed companions.

Thursday, John and I slept in and went for a later breakfast. We did some more shopping and strolling in downtown Hong Kong. We packed our suitcases in the afternoon in preparation for our Friday departure back to Vancouver. We once again enjoyed a quiet supper together, some good conversation, and went to bed at a reasonable hour to rest up for our flight.

Tom Ryan saw us off to the airport and safely on our way. We just missed saying goodbye to Edwina Wong from the Consulate. Edwina had very thoughtfully given Tom a gift for us. She made sure that all six Canucks left Hong Kong with a photo album full of memories and a CD of the Memorial Service at Sai Wan Cemetery. John and I left HK at 1:20PM on January 28, and arrived in Vancouver at 9:40AM the same day! Hong Kong is 16 hours ahead of us.

I can’t say enough about how well we were treated by the Canadian Consul Staff, Edwina, Tom, Dylan, Pierre, and Gerry. The Minister of Veterans Affairs and her staff were exceptional. The Prime Minister, Paul Martin and his wife Sheila, were very gracious and warm. The HK veterans received the respect they so much deserve. We had the privilege of paying our respects to the Canadians of “C” Force who lay overseas.

“WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”