

Canada's C-Force in Hong Kong

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Introduction

79 years ago, during Hong Kong's darkest hours, about 2000 Canadian soldiers were also in Hong Kong fighting in the Battle of Hong Kong. This article is about the postal history of these soldiers. The politics and history of why these Canadian soldiers were in Hong Kong is beyond the scope of this article. Those who are interested in these topics can easily access the large amount of information on the web and many books on this subject. Specific to information about C-Force in Hong Kong, the writer highly recommends the readers to visit hkvca.ca (the website of Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association) to investigate further and especially to visit their reference library for further reading.

Postal History of C-Force in Hong Kong

The postal history of C-Force in Hong Kong is presented in the following order:

- Forerunner: as Y-Force in Jamaica
- Enroute to Hong Kong
- Arrival in Hong Kong
- Detained in Hong Kong
- Undelivered mail from Canada
- Notices to Families
- POW mail to Canada
- POW mail sent from Canada to Hong Kong and Japan
- Repatriation

Social Philately Treatment for C-Force

The writer strongly believes that the story of C-Force is best presented by a Social Philately treatment. Where possible, the writer has listed the C-Force member who sent the letter and the censor(s) of the letter, plus what we know from historical records about these soldiers.

Of special importance is the consideration that in Social Philately, the inclusion of ephemera in an exhibit is vital if it adds value to the story-line of the exhibit. In this article, important ephemera will be shown to illustrate how these will add much relevance to the story in these philatelic items.

Forerunners: As Y-Force in Jamaica

The Winnipeg Grenadiers WG was a long established Canadian Force that had been fighting in many wars. In their commemorative book that was dated December 1939 (Figure 1, book cover), it listed the many Battle Honours that the battalion had received. It included most of the famous WWI battles where Canadian Forces were involved in, like Passchendaele, Ypres, Somme, Vimy and Flanders.

After the start of the war in September 1939, the British Forces from the West Indies were recalled back to protect the British Isles.



Figure 1

In June 1940, WG arrived in Kingston, Jamaica to replace these British soldiers and to fulfil their work, such as being prison guards. They were referred to as the Y-Force.

Figure 2 is an OHMS cover written by Major George Trist WG and this was addressed to Captain Ian Morgan at National Defence of Canada office in Montreal from Kingston, Jamaica on December 23 1940. Trist was also one of the censors during the first Y-Force in Jamaica period, so he was able to self-censor this letter. It was very lucky that the letter (Figure 3) had survived and was included in the purchase. In the letter, Trist complained that Jamaican customs levied a heavy duty on cigarettes from Canada. These few lines were already underlined in red pen when purchased. Trist also mentioned that the censor hand-stamp that was issued to him while he was posted in Bermuda, might then have been used by the officer who had relieve him there.

In the December 1939 WG commemorative book, Trist was seen as the Company Commander of Company A. From the home page of HKVCA.ca website, if one then clicks on "Causality and POW list" under the

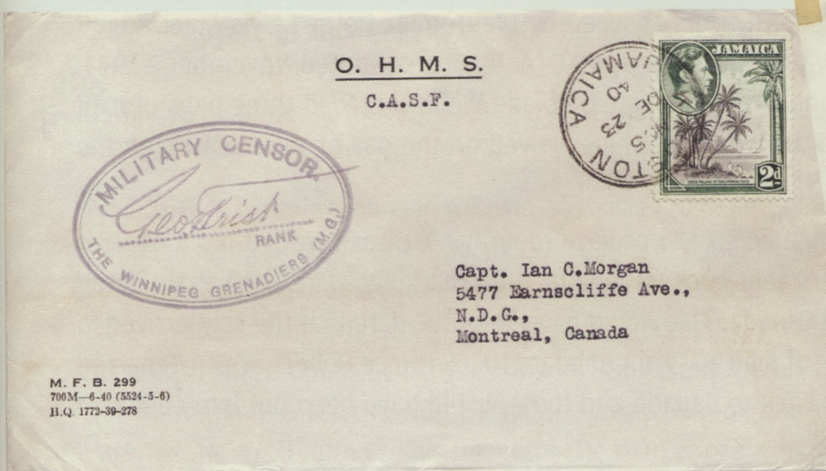


Figure 2

"History" heading, then types in a C-Force member's family name, one can access the history and a photo of this C-Force member. Listed for Major George Trist, like most other C-Force members who were captured after the end of the fight, he was put into three different POW camps. It also showed he was posted in HQ and was the second in command. Trist was one of those veterans who also fought in WWI as well as WWII, where he was awarded the WWI British War Medal as well as the Victory Medal. He lived a long happy life and passed away in 1977 and was buried in British Columbia.

What do we know about the receiver, Ian Morgan? By sheer coincidences, Ian Morgan was a philatelist and a specialist. He had written *Specialized Catalog of Canadian airmails* in 1930 and *Specialized Catalog of Canadian Airmail Stamps* in 1934. In 1950, he wrote *Army Postal Service in British North America*.

This first group of Y-Force ended their mission in Jamaica and arrived back in Winnipeg in September 1941.

Enroute to Hong Kong

Already stated above, the politics and history of why and how Canada sent two battalions to HK is beyond the scope of this article.

As a consequence of high level negotiation between Winston Churchill and Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, on October 27 1941, 1975 men of C-Force sailed from Vancouver on two ships. While most were on board on TSS Awatea, 150 were on board HMCS Prince Robert. These ships then reached Honolulu, Hawaii on November 2 and again in Manila, Philippines on November 15. Both of these stops were brief and they finally reached Hong Kong at 10 AM on November 16.

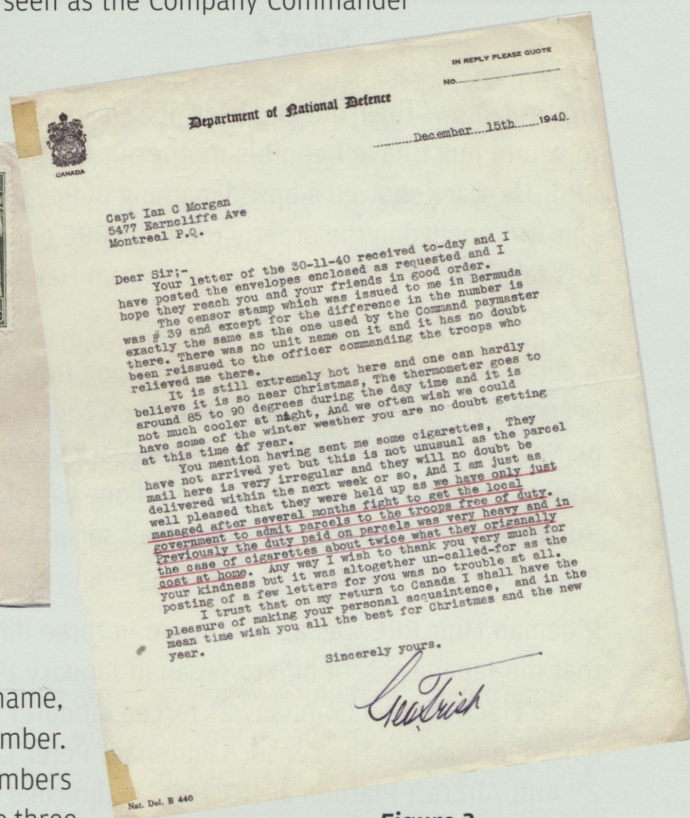


Figure 3



Figure 4

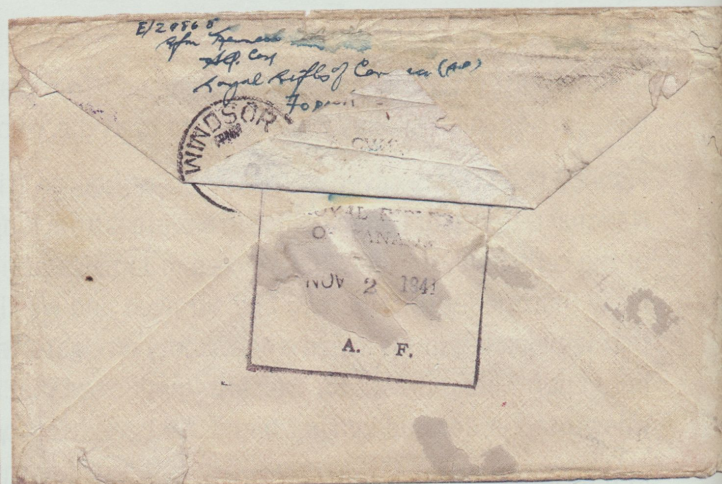


Figure 4 Back

Figure 4 shows the front and back of a cover written by Royal Rifles of Canada (RRC) Rifleman Kenneth Muir to whom must have been his mother in Quebec. It was censored by Lieutenant Peter Lewis MacDougall RRC. The back showed a boxed marking of Royal Rifles of Canada AC (Active Force) dated November 2 1941. This was applied in the orderly room for RRC onboard TSS Awatea. Roland Webb recorded three bags of mail was taken off the ships and was sent from Hawaii, when the ships arrived on the day of the marking on the cover, November 2.

A corresponding marking for the Winnipeg Grenadiers (WG) orderly room, which was a round marking, had been recorded also dated November 2 on covers sent back to Canada. Both markings were used again dated on November 15 on mail that were sent back to Canada. This would have been the date that the ship arrived in Manila. Roland Webb also recorded that one bag of mail was kept onboard HMCS Prince Robert, which departed Hong Kong on November 19, when it set sailed back to Canada and these would have been put into Canadian mail on arrival in Vancouver.

Rifleman Muir RRC was also interned in three different POW camps in Hong Kong. He was healthy enough that the Japanese sent him to Japan in January 1944 to work in Nippon Rolling Stock Company and then at Daido Electric Steel Company as forced labourer until the end of the war. He passed away in 1993 and was buried in Quebec. The censor Lieutenant Peter Lewis MacDougall RRC was the Platoon Commander of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Platoon at HQ. He was interned in four different HK POW camps until the end of the war. He passed away in 1973 in the UK and was buried back in Montreal.

Arrival in Hong Kong

Both ships carrying C-Force members arrived in Hong Kong at 10 AM on November 16 and the members were put into Sham Shui Po Camp on arrival. British Army Triangular Censor Markings were then assigned to each battalion and HQ. Censor marking number 136 was assigned to the Royal Rifles of Canada, 137 was assigned to the Winnipeg Grenadiers and 138 was assigned to C-Force Head Quarters (HQ). Worth mentioning that some WG members were stationed elsewhere on arrival. There existed C-Force member mail with either number 113 (Bowen Road Hospital) or number 120 (China Command HQ) Triangular Censor Markings, but these were exceptions.

Richard Whittington has been doing the census on C-Force mail as he is doing the broader census of all the British Army Triangular Censor Markings recorded used in Hong Kong. His census showed that the earliest record of C-Force mail sent from Hong Kong was four days after their arrival on November 20. Thank you Richard for allowing me to use his census data.

Figure 5 was postmarked on November 28 and was sent by Private Alfred Stanley Johnson WG and subsequently censored by Major K.G. Baird WG. On the back was a Passed by Censor 137 British Army Triangular Censor Marking, which was assigned to WG, but in vermilion ink. Richard Whittington had said that this was the only strike recorded by him in this ink color.



Figure 5

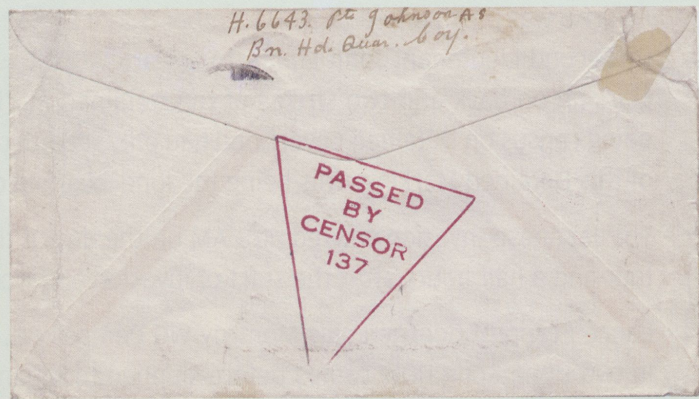


Figure 5 Back

The fact that the last eastbound surface transport that would carry mail to US and Canada departed the next day on November 29. So, this would have been carried on the last surface transport that would carry any C-Force surface mail out of Hong Kong. Richard Whittington's research showed that the Norwegian Klaveness Line steamer *Corneville* that departed from Hong Kong on November 29 carried the last surface mail to the USA. This also meant that C-Force members only had a window of 10 days, 20-29 November, to send surface mail back to Canada before the start of the war.

Private Alfred Stanley Johnson WG who was assigned to Battalion HQ Company was interned in two different POW camps in Hong Kong before repatriated back to Canada. He was wounded in battle and received a Mentioned-in-Dispatches (MiD) decoration after the war. There were no record when he passed away after returning to Canada. Major Kenneth George Baird WG was Company Commander of Company E and was assigned to HQ. He was in three different POW camps in Hong Kong before repatriation. He received a Volunteer Officers' Decoration (VD) after the war. He passed away in 1957 and was buried in Winnipeg. While Major Baird was interned, he wrote often to his daughter. He then wrote a book titled "Letters to Harvelyn".

Detained in Hong Kong

Those surface mail that was sent after November 30 or airmail after December would have been trapped in Hong Kong. These would become the famous "Detained Covers" where F.W. Webb had recorded 7 bags of mail found after the war and a boxed "Detained in Hong Kong by Japanese from December 1941 to September 1945" marking would have been applied on these. The fact that all Canadian mail were sent east bound would mean that this marking was applied in black ink. No C-Force Detained Covers have been recorded in purple ink. The earliest recorded date of an airmail Detained Cover from a C-Force member was December 1 written by Private William Rankin Maltman WG.

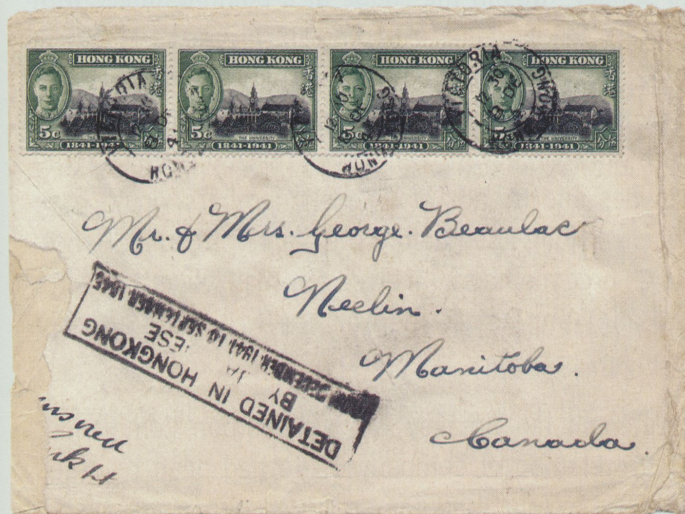


Figure 6

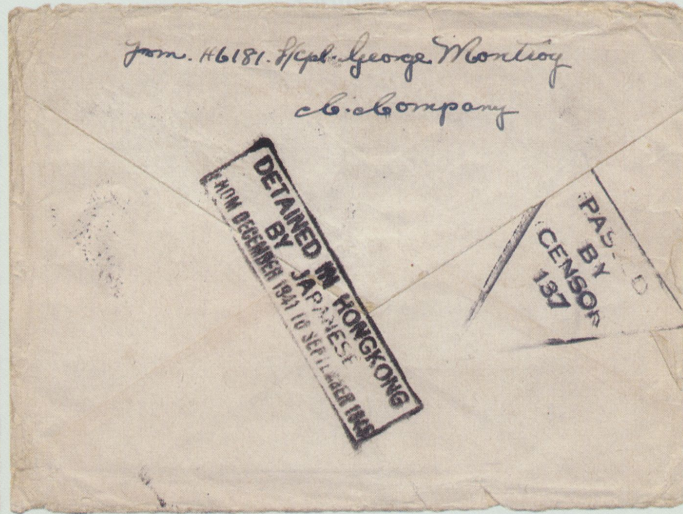


Figure 6 Back

Figure 6 was postmarked 12:30 December 8 sent by Lance Corporal George Louis Montroy WG and was censored by Second Lieutenant John Elphinstone Park WG with a Passed by Censor 137 British Army Triangular Censor Marking on back and two strikes of the Detained marking on both front and back. The writer had also been doing census on Detained Covers and had only recorded less than 10 Detained Covers with more than one strike of this Detained Marking. This being the lone example of the double strikes on a C-Force cover.

The Japanese Invasion started at 8 AM on the day of this cover, so this was postmarked in the GPO in Central four and a half hours after the start of invasion and would never made it out of Hong Kong until after the war.

Lance Corporal George Louis Montroy WG Company C, was wounded in action on Xmas day. He was interned in two Hong Kong POW camps before shipped to Japan, via Taiwan, in September 1943 to work at the Nippon Yakin Nickel Mine and Refinery. The manifest card of his repatriation from Japan to US, by US Navy via Alameda Naval Air Station (San Francisco/Oakland area), and then back to Winnipeg, is posted on his page at HKVCA.ca and readers are encouraged to visit it. One of his granddaughters also wrote a very moving description of Corporal Montroy after the war on the same webpage. He passed away in 1987 and was buried in Manitoba. Second Lieutenant John Elphinstone Park WG was Platoon Commander of 12th Platoon of Company B. He was recorded interned in two POW camps in Hong Kong. He passed away in 1993.

Undelivered mail from Canada

Figure 7 was sent from Mrs. Ian Breakey, wife of Lieutenant Ian Breakey WG, to her husband, care of The Royal Rifles of Canada's Canadian Army Overseas Office at National Defense Headquarters in Ottawa, but was redirected with writing in red to "Canadian Army Overseas", on October 30 from Quebec City. The back showed a November 3 receiver roller in Ottawa. Two strikes of "Return to Sender" markings plus a multi-line marking stating the

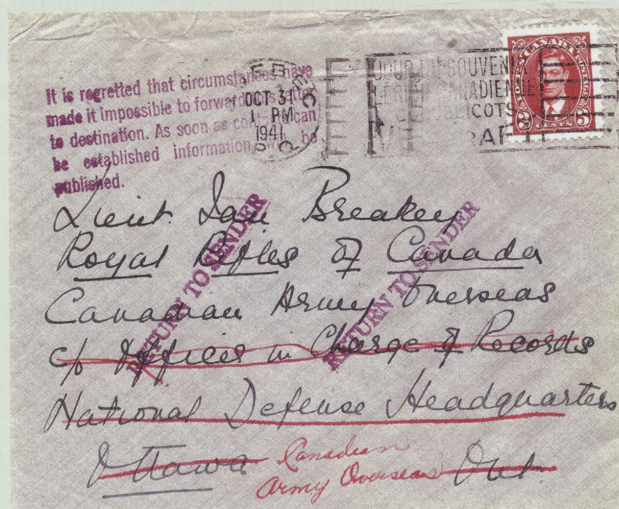


Figure 7



Figure 7 Back

reason: "It is regretted that circumstances have made it impossible to forward this letter to destination. As soon as contact can be established information will be published". A large circular Army Base P.O. Canada Letters dated April 7 1942 was also on the back. All these markings were in the same purple ink.

Ken Ellison had a similar cover (his collection had been sold) written by Mrs. Ian Breakey to the Lieutenant and was also returned. Ken had misread the originating cancel date as October 7, and had written on his exhibit page, from Quebec, when in fact, it was October 27. That cover had similar markings except the "Return to Sender" was in the shape of a pointing finger with "Return to" marking. It had a return date of March 17 1942. What these two covers had shown was the fact that, as early as October 27, coincidentally the departure date of C-Force from Vancouver, that no mail from the families and friends of C-Force members would have reached Hong Kong before the start of fighting. Hence, no C-Force members received any mail while they were in Hong Kong before the war. The writer has also not seen any of these.

Lieutenant Ian Breakey WG was Platoon Commander of 16th Platoon of Company D. He had been recorded interned in four POW Camps in Hong Kong. He passed away in 1994.

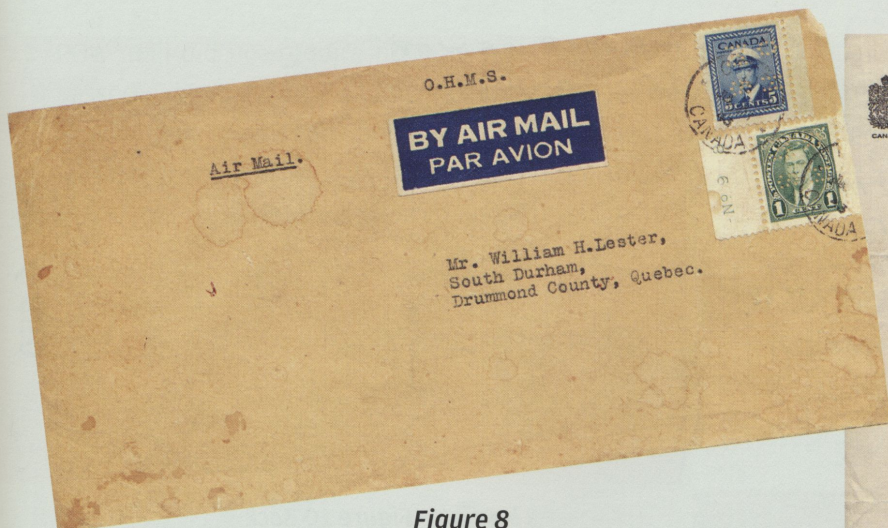


Figure 8

Notices to Families

How and when were families of C-Force notified of the condition of their love ones after the Japanese Invasion? The writer has such a collection for Rifleman Wilbert Lester RRC. *Figure 8* showed an OHMS cover sent by Canada's Department of National Defence to Wilbert's father, William Lester, in Quebec dated July 24 1943. *Figure 9* showed the letter dated July 20 and in it was a message that his son, Wilbert, according to International Red Cross, was transferred to a Tokyo Camp. What it did not say was it was a forced labour camp.

From the same correspondence was an earlier cover from the Royal Rifles of Canada (imprinted on corner) to Wilbert's father dated January 7 1942. The letter is now gone. The writer assumed/guessed that this would have been the first notification from RRC telling Wilbert's father that he had been in the Battle of Hong Kong and nothing more was known of him after the capitulation of Hong Kong.

A second item was a letter from the Department of National Defence, but without the cover, and was dated October 31 1942. The letter confirmed that, most likely for the first time, Wilbert was "officially listed as a POW". It also gave information about SS Gripsholm's second trip to exchange detained enemy civilians and that mail received addressed to POWs were already forwarded to this ship.

Rifleman Wilbert Ernest Lester RRC was listed as a Pioneer, 6th Admin Platoon at HQ Company. He was wounded in action on December 19. He was interned in three POW camps in Hong Kong before shipped to Tokyo in January 1943, where he was listed working at Nippon Steel Tube, Tsurumi Shipyards and then at Joban Coal Mining Company until repatriation. His manifest card showed that he was first shipped to San Francisco before being transferred back home to Quebec. He passed away in 2003 and was buried in Quebec.

Listed in the Appendix of Ken Ellison's book was some notices that were sent to WG members' families about their family member involved in the Battle of Hong Kong and paralleled the RRC examples mentioned above. Also shown on the HKVCA website are many different letters and notices from the Canadian military and government to family members.

POW mail to Canada

David Tett's survey of POW mail from Hong Kong POW camps showed the earliest recorded date of covers/cards from C-Force members was towards the end of April 1942. His records also showed that the early recorded items were all Hong Kong POW covers, while the Hong Kong POW cards were recorded later with the earliest of these cards recorded at the end of July 1942.

The imprinted Hong Kong POW "covers" such as the one in *Figure 10*, would have a letter written on imprinted HK POW stationery, like the blank one shown *Figure 11*, but the original letter in this cover had been lost.

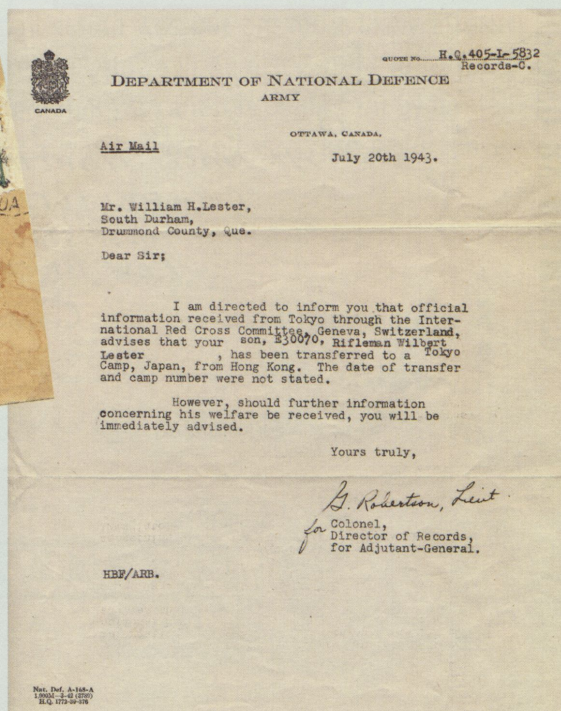


Figure 9

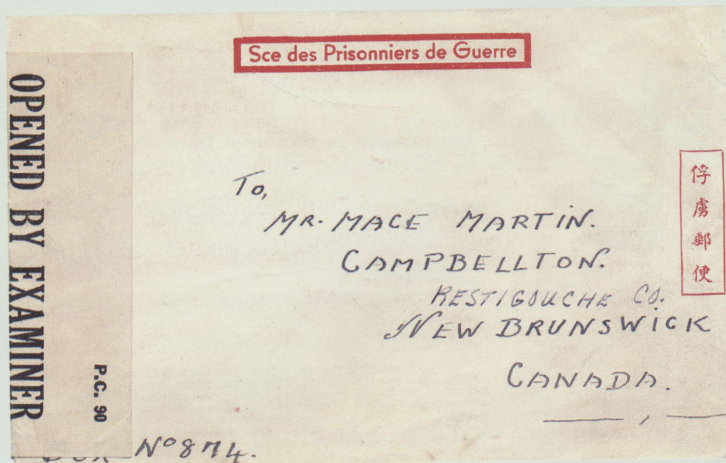


Figure 10

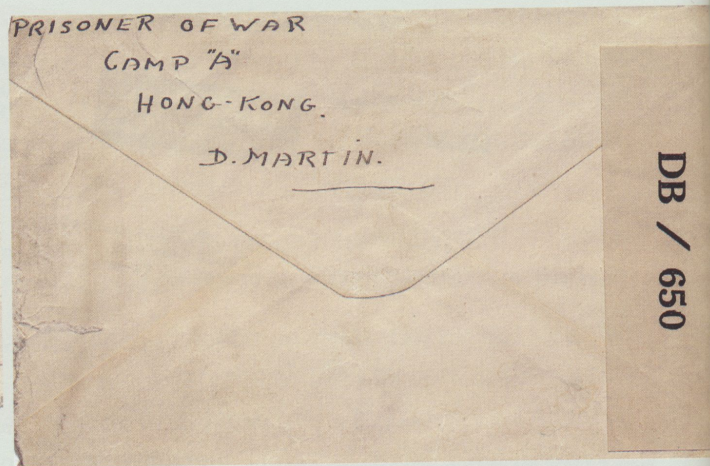


Figure 10 Back

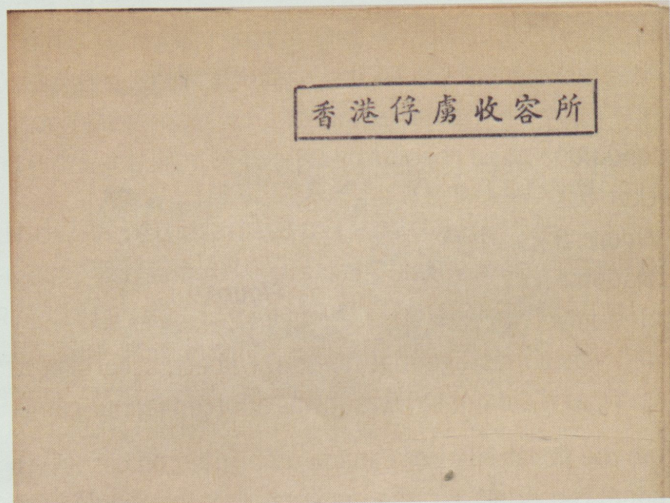


Figure 11

his “return address” was listed as Camp A or Argyll Camp. So this would add a new piece of information of his whereabouts that was previously unknown. When exactly was he placed in Argyll Camp when it seemed that there was a complete record of him first in the North Point Camp and then transferred directly to Sham Shui Po Camp? We may never know.

About 20 years ago, the writer had the good fortune of acquiring a correspondence and ephemera of Private Duncan Albert William Benton WG, A-Company. It included five POW postal stationery cards sent from Benton to his mother. Records showed that Benton had been interned at three Hong Kong POW camps, with the longest stay at the Sham Shui Po Camp from September 1942 onwards until repatriation. *Figure 12* was the most interesting of the five Hong Kong Military POW postal stationery cards Benton wrote to his mother. From the fonts of both the French and Japanese, a philatelist could then distinguish that these five cards were of two different card types. A third recorded type was not among these five. The Japanese censor, Hasegawa, placed his small oval stamp, or his “chop”, in the bottom of the box with wording: Hong Kong POW/censor, in two vertical lines on the left.

When the writer compared the handwriting of both sides of all five cards, the handwriting on the message side of this card was totally different as compared to all the nine other faces. Why was this? It was well known that at many POW camps, there were “scribes”, volunteers who had good hand writing, who would write for other camp internees as these scribes just had better handwriting and/or the sender was so sick that they could not write. Many years later, the writer acquired a cover when Benton was a Y-Force member in Jamaica. Although the address was written by a scribe again, Benton wrote “Airmail” on top left of the cover. The letter “L” was in the same wriggle with curved top to the left, as in the letter “ALL” on the message side of this card. As it was forbidden to write any dates on these POW cards and most did not have any postmark with dates, it was not easy for the writer to figure out the order in which these five cards were sent. The writer has recorded several more of the writing of this scribe on POW cards from Sham Shui Po Camp.

POW mail did not require postage sent anywhere. A 7-cents airmail stamp was put on, most likely after it passed examination by a Canadian censor in Ottawa and postmarked in Ottawa in August 2 1944 to forward to Winnipeg. Maybe the Canadian censor felt it was important enough that warrant this being sent by airmail and not just by ordinary mail. Even though this was not unique, it was nevertheless a rare occurrence. Tett's Volume 4, page 63, showed another example.



Figure 12

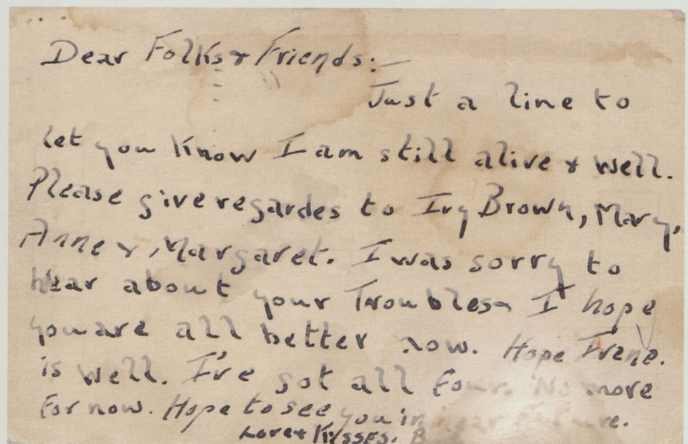


Figure 12 Back

The correspondence also included a dozen small-size photos typical of photo-finishing of the time. Figure 13 was Benton, most likely standing outside his home in Winnipeg, dressed in full active service gear, taken just before his departure to Hong Kong. Most of the other photos were from his service in Jamaica as a Y-Force member or when he was still at home in Winnipeg. The only photo of Benton in Hong Kong was Figure 14, where he could be seen as “the shadow” on lower left of the photo, while he was taking a photo of the iconic rickshaw puller. In this photo, in the shadow, the brim on his helmet, was identical to his photo in Winnipeg.



Figure 13



Figure 14

It also came with a set of four pencil-written half-sheets, presumably by Benton, of the WG Casualty List of the Battle of Hong Kong. Figure 15 was the front of sheet 1, where in order of rank, he had written those who were killed-in-action. The first eight names were officers who perished. It was then followed by the names enlisted man and onto the back. List 2 started with those who die in hospital, which included two officers and five enlisted men. This was followed by those who were missing-in-action and onto the back of the sheet. Missing-in-

action were those bodies not recovered or identified. From the many written accounts, the Japanese invaders did a lot of unmentionable deeds to the dead bodies. List 3 and 4 showed those died after Xmas Day in 1941, presumably in the Hong Kong POW camps.

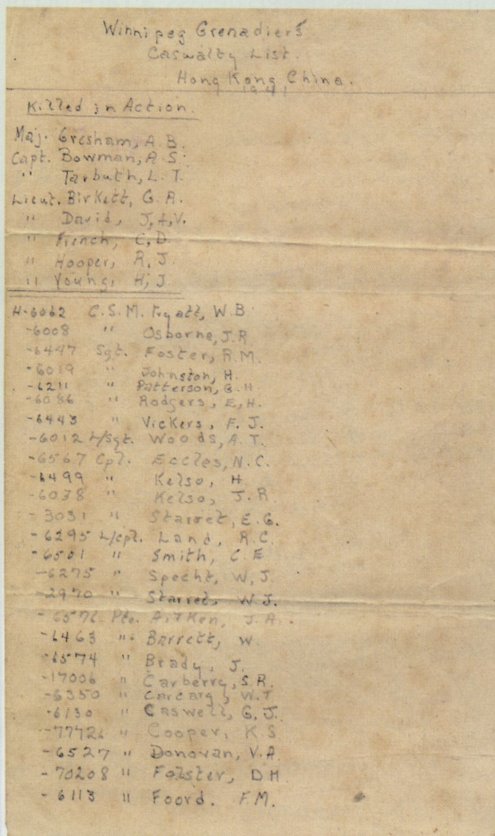


Figure 15



Figure 16

There is an official Casualty List kept by Colonel Home on a large record book for all members of WG. Images from each page of this record book is available on the HKVCA website. The writer has been thinking for many years why Benton kept this list. Besides the obvious reasons, did Benton work at the POW Camp's hospital? As such, he would be very close to those who died in the hospital after they were put into the camps and was able to record this with accuracy. Hospital is not the correct word for the POW Camp's medical facility. It should only be called a "sick-bay". The writer was able to acquire such a drawing. Figure 16 was a drawing by Ray Baxter of the Sick Bay at Sham Shui Po Camp, after-the-fact. Staff Sargent H. P. McNaughton WG described what the sick bay was like to Baxter who then had drawn this. It also had a short description of the facility plus a very-moving poem by McNaughton.

It would be incomplete if the writer did not include a cover that was sent from C-Force members that were sent to Japan to work as slaves or force labourers. Call it a prejudice, as the writer has much less interest in those covers/cards. From what had been recorded, items sent from POW Camps in Japan were much more plentiful than those in Hong Kong POW Camps. HKVCA's British Columbia Regional Director, Gerry Tuppert, had mentioned that a fellow HKVCA member told him that he still had over 100 items from his father's correspondence. These were covers/cards when his father was a POW moved from Hong Kong to a forced labour camp(s) in Japan.

Gerry Tuppert was very generous and had sent the writer this card that his father, Rifleman William Gerald Joseph Tuppert RRC, wrote to Gerry's grandmother, when he was moved to Japan and was working as a labourer there (Figure 17). The Japanese marking on the left of the card repeated that it was from the Sendai POW Camp. It had a whopping three different Japanese censor markings/chops, with two on the front and one on the back. Even though there was a definite place for a date to be typed in, it was purposely left blank. This was only one of the many different forms of POW cards that were recorded from C-Force members at the Japanese POW Camps as there were different printings of these depending on which camp they were interned at. In Hong Kong,

Rifleman William Tuppert was posted at HQ and listed belonging to the 3rd Mortar Platoon. He was interned in three POW Camps in Hong Kong before being shipped to work in a Japan Camp, as seen from this card. He passed away in 1996 and was buried in Quebec. The Tuppert family had a lot of input onto the HKVCA website.

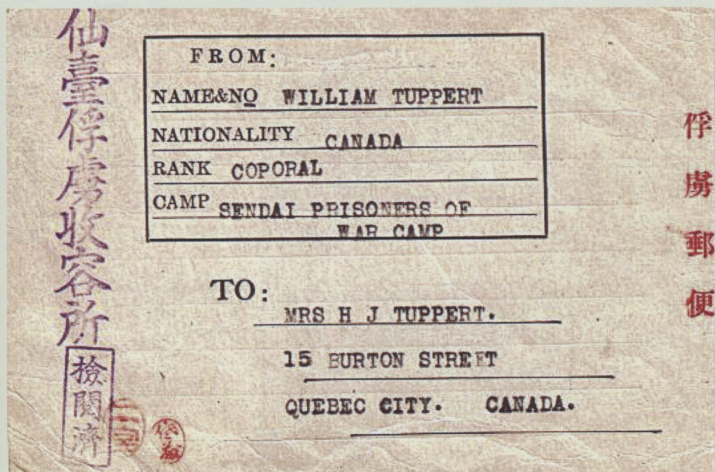


Figure 17

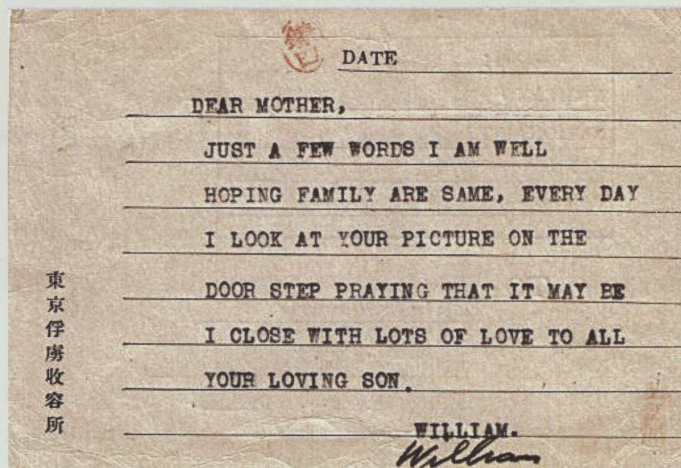


Figure 17 Back

The captors kept an index card of each POW especially to keep notes of when they were admitted to hospital. Figure 18 is the index card for Rifleman William Tuppert RRC from Sendai Camp. Thanks again to Gerry Tuppert for the use of this information here. It is the first time ever that the writer has seen one of these. This has to be very rare.

AM/12 Fu/9	登録番号 770. 仙台	仙	仙 II 25P 5-2B
收容所 Camp	香港 17年 1月 7日	No. 號	IV 25P 446
姓名 Name	TUPPERT, William G.J.	生年月日 Date of Birth	1921.12.30.
国籍 Nationality	カナダ	所属部隊 Unit	Royal Rifles of Canada
階級身分 Rank	Corporal 任長 A CPL	No.	E 22892
捕獲場所 Place of Capture	香港島防線陣地	捕獲年月日 Date of Capture	昭和 18 年 12 月 25 日
父ノ名 Father's Name	Herbert James	母ノ名 Mother's Name	Margaret
本籍地 Place of Origin	Quebec, Quebec Canada	職業 Occupation	寫真師
通報先 Destination of Report	Father: Sgt. H.J. Tuppert 16, Burton St. Quebec, Quebec Canada	特記事項 Remarks	

Figure 18

捕獲個 Other Informations
昭和 19 年 5 月 14 日 收容所へ移管又 (十四派遣所)
昭和 20 年 9 月 19 日 仙台 收容所へ移管又
追加補修
昭和二十年十一月四日第一分隊へ移入 下前
昭和二十年十二月十日 " " 附属
昭和二十年十一月十一日 入室 2377
昭和十九年二月十四日 退室
昭和十九年五月十三日 東京俘虜收容所へ移管状態
昭和二十年九月九日 昭本港 二於 千本軍アゴウツ大尉 二引渡

Figure 18 Back

POW mail sent from Canada to Hong Kong and Japan

Another correspondence that the writer had acquired about 20 years ago was for Signaller Lawrence Frederick Dowling RCCS (Royal Canadian Corps of Signals). He was listed as a signal operator and was working at Brigade HQ. Dowling was not sent to Japan and the only record, plus all other evidence, showed he was interned at Sham Shui Po Camp until repatriation.

Many did not know this, but besides the two large branches of WG and RRC, there was a much smaller contingent that made up the staff at C-Force's HQ. Besides RCCS members like Signaller Dowling, there were members from the Royal Canadian Medical Corps, three members from the Canadian Postal Corps, plus several more branches of the Canadian military or government.

Figure 19 was one of the four covers acquired by the writer that was addressed to Signaller Dowling while he was a POW. Postmarked in Toronto on September 8 1942, it reached Dowling on October 22 1944 who had

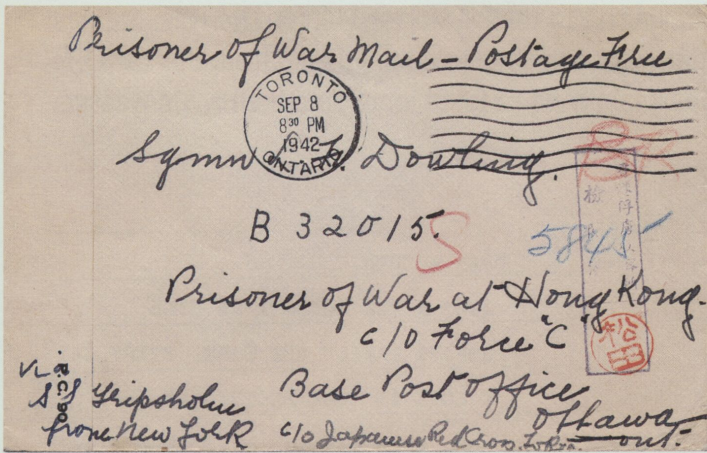


Figure 19

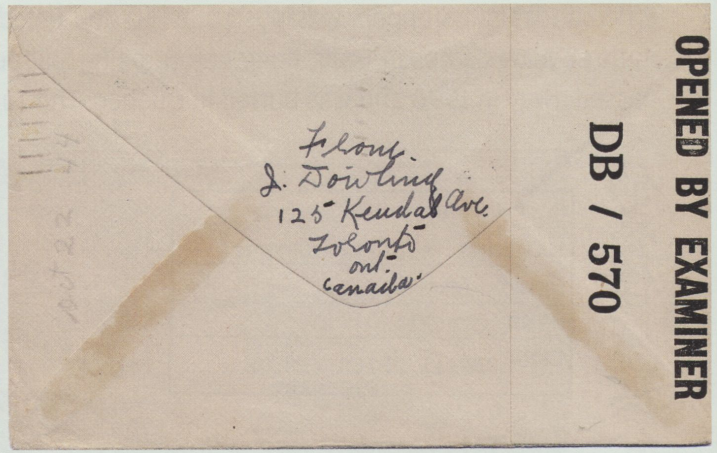


Figure 19 Back

written the date he received the letter in pencil on the back. It took over two years to reach Dowling. Figure 20 was the letter inside this cover written by Dowling's Aunt. Of importance was the fact that it had the endorsement on lower left "Via SS Gripsholm from New York". This was only one of the two occasions where detained enemy residents and mail plus parcels were exchanged between the Allies and Japan during the war years. This exchange happened in October 1943 at Mormugoa, Goa between SS Gripsholm and the Japanese Ship Tia Maru. The writer has recorded less than 5 C-Force covers that had this endorsement, even though a lot of mail, without this endorsement, must have been exchanged during these two exchanges by SS Gripsholm. There were two nurses that were sent to Hong Kong with C-Force in 1941 and they were taken out of Hong Kong and were among those detained enemy residents that were exchanged on this particular Gripsholm voyage.

Also of interest is the fact that "BR" in red pencil was written on the cover, but was then crossed off and a large S was written. The writer admitted to having tunnel vision and had wondered for years what BR stood for. It was RPSL IT Chairman, Mark Bailey, who helped the writer to solve this mystery. BR stood for Bowen Road Hospital (Camp). The writer already knew the large S was for Camp S or Sham Shui Po Camp where this letter was eventually directed to, but had only fixated on the camps that large numbers of Canadian POWs were interned and simply had forgotten to consider the other smaller camps where usually no C-Force members were interned. This brought out the fact that, at some point in time, and not in any records, Dowling was interned at the Bowen Road Hospital (Camp). Also of interest was the numbers 5845 in blue pencil. This was the number assigned to Dowling as a POW. The blue marking on the front was "Hong Kong POW Camp/Censor" with the Censor marking/chop of Matsuda on the bottom.

Included with the Dowling Correspondence was his hand-made small notebook (Figure 21, showing cover). Some would call this

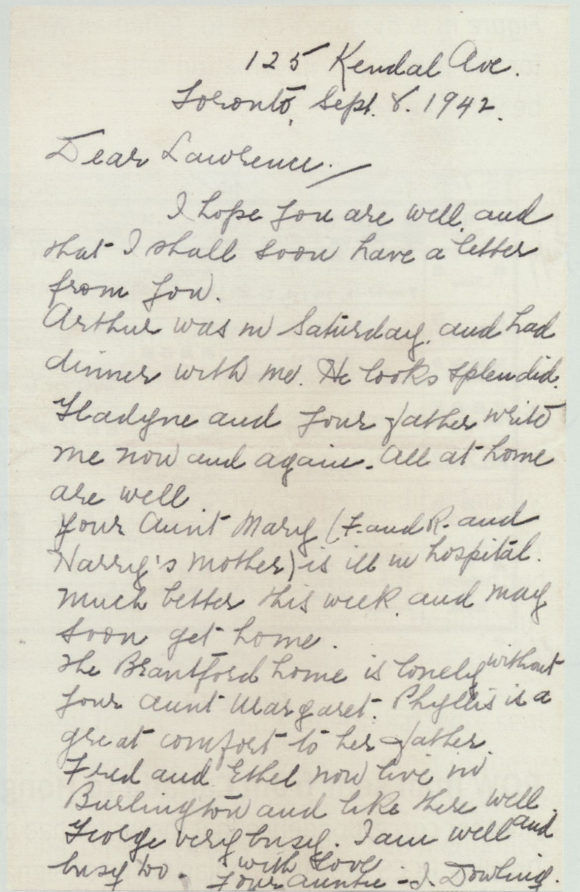


Figure 20

an autograph book as seen in *Figure 22*, and was made from Hong Kong POW camp stationery that was available to Dowling, as shown by the box marking on top right of *Figure 23*. It also included messages and drawings from other POWs like this on *Figure 24*. There were about 30-40 pages of writing in this notebook including names and addresses, not just of Canadian POWs, but also with other POWs. On the HKVDC website, it also showed at least five other notebooks, of which four were from RRC Officers.



Figure 21

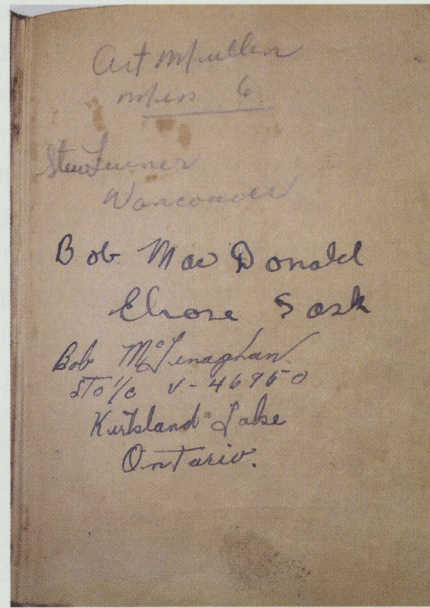


Figure 22

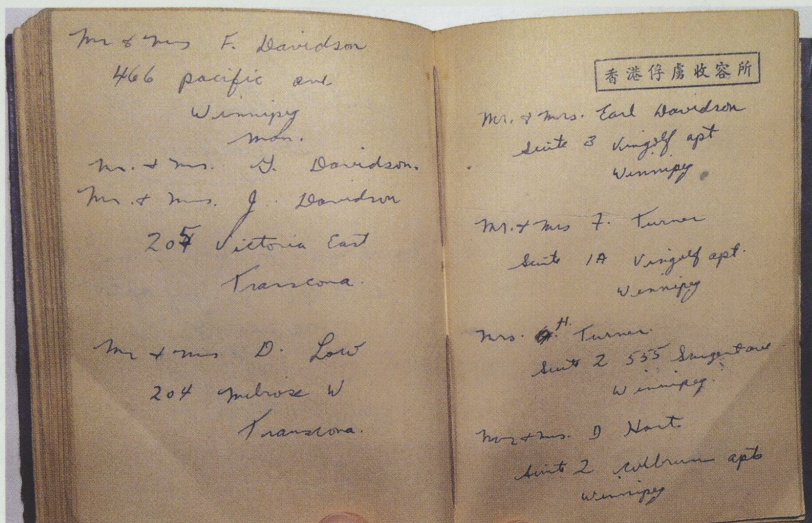


Figure 23

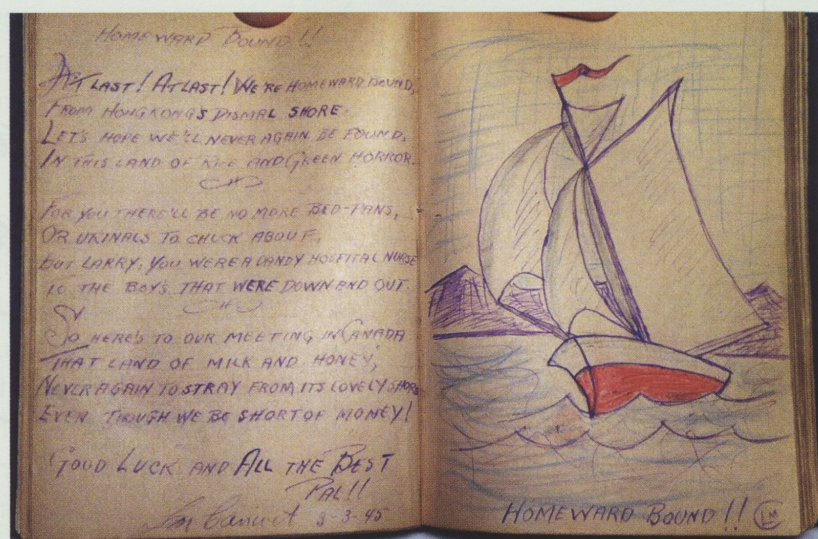


Figure 24

The Japanese captors selected healthy POWs from the Hong Kong Camps and in three different shipments sent roughly two thirds of all C-Force members to Japan to work as force or slave labourers in shipyards, mines and industries. The first of these POW transfers arrived in Japan in January 1943. Covers from families in Canada were then directed to these camps in Japan. *Figure 25* is a cover from Brighton, Ontario on July 28 1942 addressed to Rifleman William Harvey Gagne RRC. After censoring in Canada, shown by censor tape, it had a generic 3-character censor marking in red on front. Pencil writing on top edge, Prisoner of War Post, Camp 5(b). If the letter was directed to a Hong Kong POW Camp, it would usually receive a boxed marking stating it was Hong Kong POW Censor, so this was the first indication that this was not sent to a Hong Kong POW Camp, even though it was clearly written as "Taken Prisoner of War in Hong Kong" on front. The marking on the back further proved that this was indeed sent to a POW Camp in Japan, as it showed a Japanese date of "Showa 18th year 10th month 17th day", which was October 17 1943. It was scarce on arriving POW mail that a hand-stamped date marking was applied. Records showed Rifleman William Gagne RRC was interned in two Hong Kong POW Camps before he was moved to Japan in September 1943, first to Port of Niigata to work as a forced labourer moving foodstuff, then as a miner in a coal mine in Rinko and finally as a labourer at a foundry in Shintesta until repatriation. He passed away in June 1996.

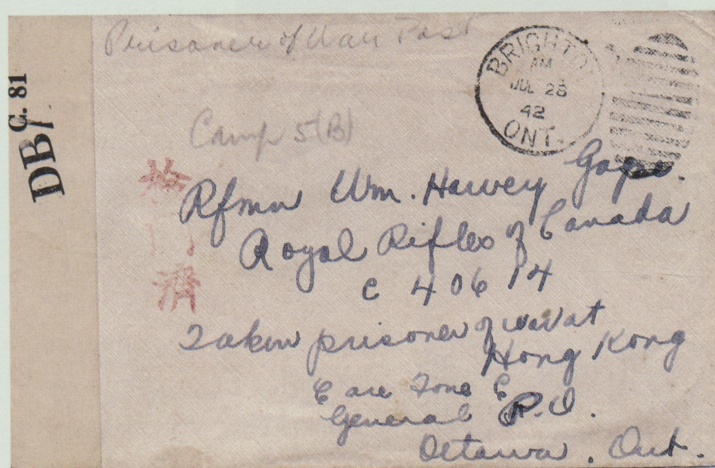


Figure 25

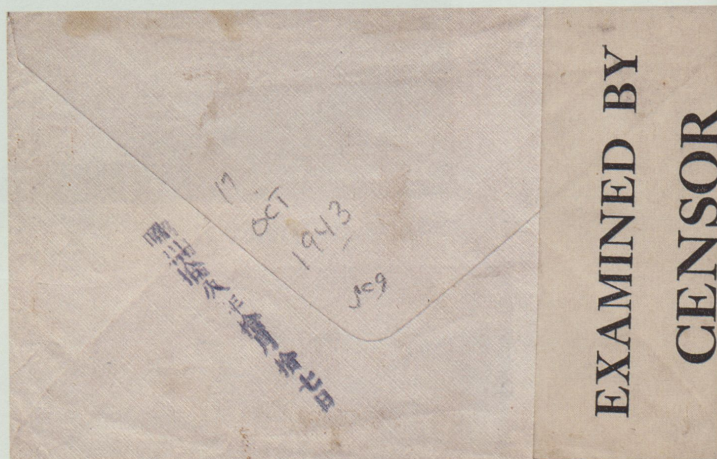


Figure 25 Back

Prime Minister Mackenzie King sent Xmas greetings in both 1943 and 1944 to C-Force POWs in Hong Kong and Japan. *Figure 26* is such a card from the Tuppert Collection. In the many accounts from POWs, the Japanese captors, in order to demoralize them, would dump mail received from Canada in front of the camps and burnt these. This, plus other pillaging of mail and parcels, both for mail going in and out of the camps, would explain why so few of these cards had survived, as well as other POW mail from Hong Kong or had arrived in POWs' hands.

Repatriation

After Japan surrendered, C-Force members in Hong Kong POW camps were notified by air-dropped flyers like the one in *Figure 27*. This flyer was from the Dowling Correspondence. Dowling recorded the exact time and date that he received this at Sham Shui Po Camp in pencil on lower left of the notice as August 18 1945 at 4:00 PM. At a later date he wrote over this in red ink. While one side was in English, the other side was in Japanese and had different wording as that was supposed to be a notice to the Japanese soldiers for them to surrender.

Families in Canada were issued air letters of which it was hand-stamped in red with "Mail for LPW"



Figure 26

(Liberated Prisoners of War), as these would be entitled to free postage, and were provided to the families for writing to their family member who had just been repatriated. *Figure 28* was one of the two “Mail for LPW” air letter that was sent to Dowling. Sent on September 24 1945 from St Catharines Ontario, there was an additional date stamp of October 1 1945. The last line of the address was Manila via Melbourne, but it was crossed out by blue pencil. This probably did not reach Manila, as Dowling, by that time, might have already travelled passed Manila on his way home to Canada. Exactly where and when this reached Dowling remained a mystery. Generally speaking, “Mail for LPW” air letters are scarce, but the writer believes that there are still a lot of these items in the possession of C-Force members’ families. Ellison’s book and HKVCA website showed more examples of these “Mail for LPW” air letters.

On the return of C-Force members, they were given a welcoming party at the train station(s) on their arrival in Winnipeg. *Figure 29* was a welcoming card from this party given to Dowling on his arrival to Winnipeg. *Figure 30* was another welcoming card from the William Tuppert collection. This was prepared by the City of Brandon, Manitoba, and presented to Tuppert on his arrival there. In the Tuppert collection was also the same welcoming card from Winnipeg. There is a third welcoming card from Victoria and is shown on HKVCA website.

In Closing

The writer does not want to leave the reader with a sense of loss after reading the C-Force chronicle of postal history. According to 1 of the 5 currently surviving members of C-Force member, Sergeant George S. MacDonell, RRC, at a presentation of C-Force history on December 8 2016 at the University of Toronto’s Robarts Library, he said that contemporary historian had found evidence that the fight put up by the defenders in the Battle of Hong Kong had significantly delayed the Japanese in their push southwards to other South Pacific Islands. So much so, this delay snowballed into giving the US forces enough time to recoup after Pearl Harbour and then put up a big fight at the Battle of Guadalcanal in August 1942, which was the turning point for the war in the Pacific. *Figure 31* was the writer with Sergeant MacDonell in 2016. Sergeant MacDonell has written these books on C-Force: *They Never Surrendered*, *One Soldier’s Story* and *A dog Named Gander*.

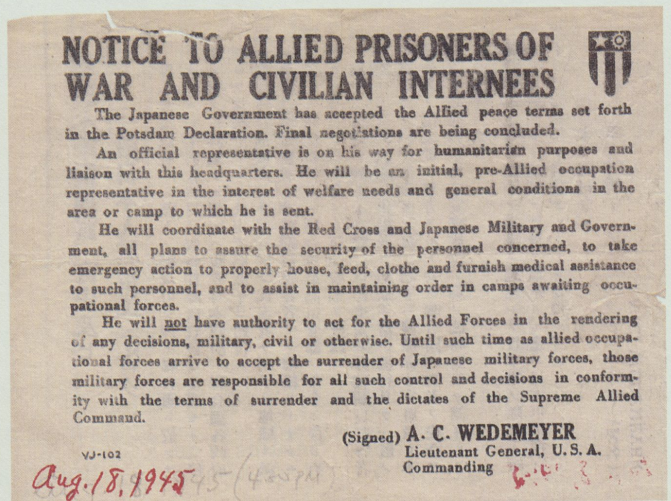


Figure 27

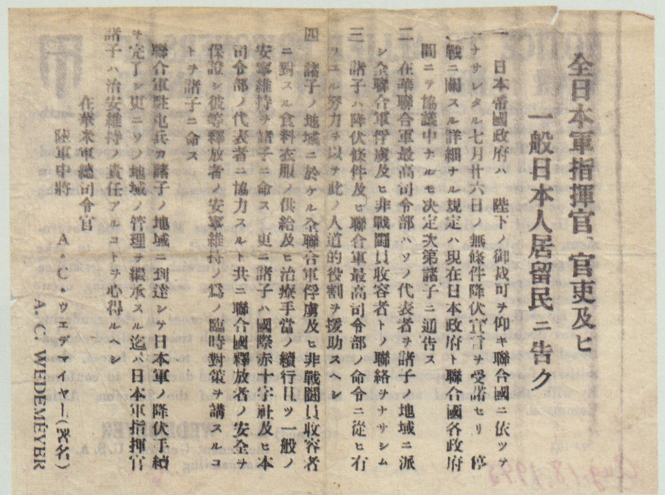


Figure 27 Back

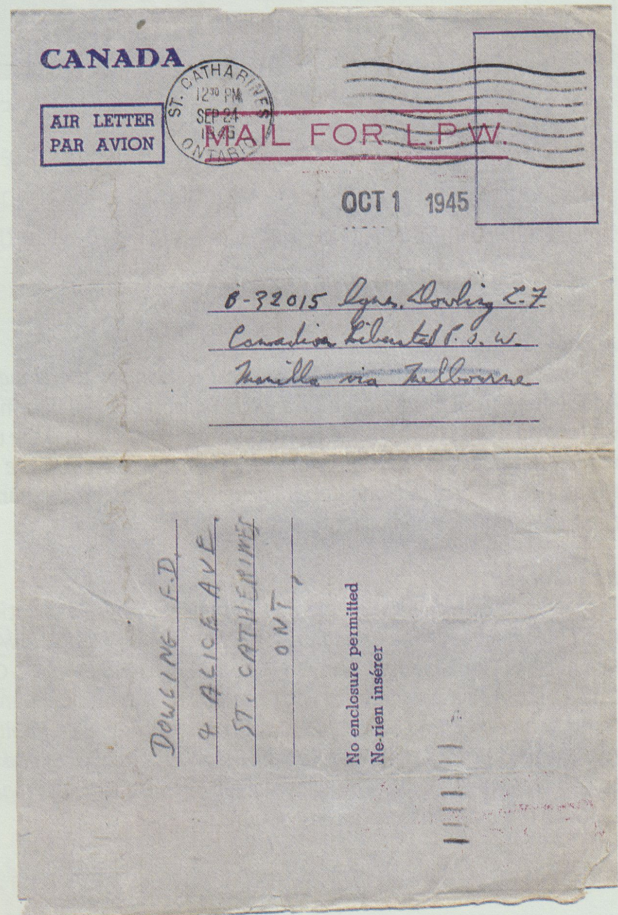


Figure 28

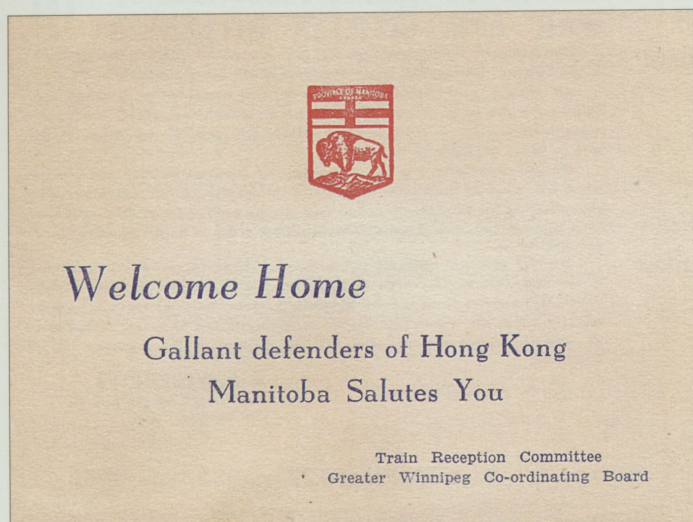


Figure 29



Figure 30

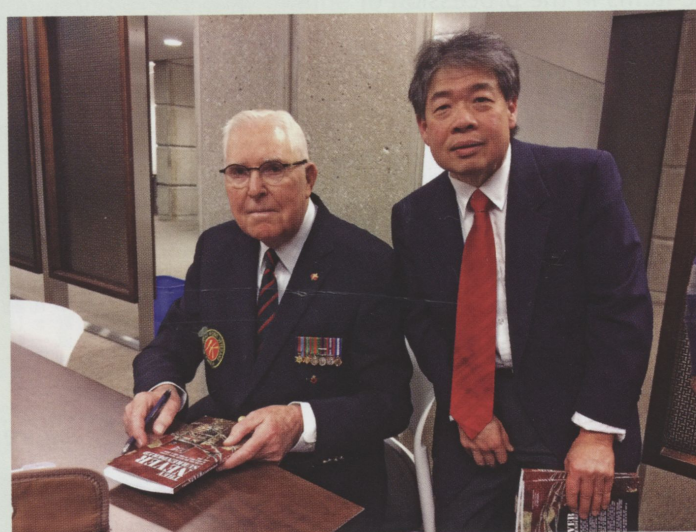


Figure 31

The writer hope that in this article, he has illustrated the importance in the use of ephemera in filling-in “the story” and social philately treatment is the ideal approach to use for philatelic exhibits such as the Canadian C-Force in Hong Kong. The writer also takes part in the commemoration of these gallant fighters and continues to tell their stories.

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