

Canadian POWs in Hong Kong

After Japan's victory at Hong Kong, the Japanese took almost 1,700 Canadian prisoners. The Canadian contingent surrendered on Christmas Day 1941. The Japanese rounded up Canadian POWs into two camps: Sham Shui Po, which had been the Canadians' original camp when they arrived in Hong Kong, and North Point, which had originally been a camp for Chinese refugees. The Japanese were harsh captors right from the start.

Those POWs who survived suffered through the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of the Japanese camps. The conditions at North Point camp were scarcely better due to the appalling overcrowding. Food and disease became main threats to survival in the Hong Kong POW camps.

Rice composed almost 90 per cent of the Canadian POWs' diet. Fish, whale, or dolphin meat were sometimes used to augment POWs' rations. For the most part, the POWs' food was woefully inadequate in quantity, unappetizing in appearance and taste, and lacking in nutrition.

Of Canada's 1,700 Hong Kong POWs, only 1,428 survived the Japanese POW camps and made it home to Canada. The issue of compensation for these prisoners has never been resolved. The brutality meted out by the Japanese to Allied prisoners of war was such that even more than half a century after the war most ex-POWs express a deep hatred and an almost complete unwillingness to forgive the Japanese. This

bitterness is in good part due to the lack of public contrition or even recognition by the Japanese government and public for the grievous treatment inflicted on our prisoners. But ex-POWs of all Allied countries are also bitter about the failure of their own governments to pursue aggressively the Japanese government for compensation and formal acknowledgement for the subhuman treatment inflicted on their soldiers. (excerpted from the official website of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment Museum - www.lermuseum.org)

You may or may not be familiar with the story of

the Canadian POWs in Hong Kong, but one of our own members has more than a passing knowledge of the subject. Frank Simmons, an Ordinary member of Branch 238, is the son of one of those Prisoners of War. Gordon Simmons, of the Royal Rifles of Canada, returned to Canadian soil after three and a half years as a prisoner of the Japanese, weighing a mere ninety-two pounds. He was placed in the care of a hospital in Quebec, during which time he provided an affidavit in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Gordon Simmons died in 1946, never recovering from his ordeal as a POW. His youngest son, Frank, was only six years old.

Read now part of Gordon Simmons' affidavit, acquired by his family from the National Archives in Ottawa.



Following a horrific three-and-a-half year internment in a Japanese POW camp in Hong Kong, Gordon Simmons arrived home, to be met by his wife and youngest son Frank, who is seen here looking at the train.

(photo courtesy of Frank Simmons)

AFFIDAVIT

CANADA)
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC)
TO WIT:)

(In the matter of Canadian
(Prisoners of War at Hong Kong
(and Vicinity.

I, Gordon SIMMONS, E/30682, of the City of Bathurst, in the Province of New Brunswick, residing in Bathurst, N.B., a rifleman in the Canadian Army, make oath and say:-

1. In civil life, I am a labourer.
2. I was a rifleman in the Royal Rifles of Canada and took part in the defence of Hong Kong. The day of the surrender, on the 25th of December, 1941, I was fighting on the hills near "Mount Parker". I was with Major Young. We did not know the War was over until the 28th of December, 1941. Chinese people then told us that the war was over. We took a boat and went right through the City of Hong Kong, where we surrendered to Japanese Headquarters.
3. On arrival there, Japanese soldiers took our watches and valuables in our possession. They took a watch and a ring from me. We remained in Hong Kong a couple of hours and then the Japanese soldiers took us down to North Point.
4. On arrival there, we noticed that the Camp and huts were in a terrible condition. There were tin cans and all sorts of garbage laying around the huts and the huts were very damaged. There were no windows, no doors, the roofs were leaking; there was no running water and the sanitary arrangements were nil. The hut I was in was a small hut. I have not any idea of the approximate size of that hut, but I know we were very crowded. We were about forty men living there. There were no beds in that hut and we had to make some with boards found in the surroundings. I did not have any blanket for the first two or three months. In North Point and Sham Shui Po, we were given soap on two or three occasions, but we were not given any in Japan. To my knowledge, we were never given any disinfectant during my whole period of internment.
5. The cooking facilities were nil in North Point. We had to use empty barrels, cut them in two and use that as stove. The Japanese did not give us anything to improve that situation.
6. For the last two months (February and March, 1942), all I got as food was rice; I

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got around one pound per day. That rice was dirty, full of rat dirt, worms and dust. In December, 1941 and January, 1942, I got some green vegetables besides rice.

7. I did not go to Camp Hospital in North Point. I do not know in what condition was the hospital.

8. While in North Point, I have seen Japanese guards attacking Chinese civilians very often. I saw unknown Japanese guards beating Chinese civilians without any reason, with rifle butts. In February, 1942, I have seen one Chinese civilian being shot to death by a Japanese guard without any reason. I cannot remember the name of the Japanese Camp Commandant at that time.

9. I do not remember of any beating in North Point. About three weeks before my transfer to Sham Shui Po, I was forced to work on Kai-Tak Airport. I worked there from around the beginning of March, 1942, until my transfer to Japan in December, 1942. Our work there consisted in enlarging the airport. I was forced to move a hill, i.e. fill hand cars with earth and push these cars down below. This work was dangerous and many of my friends (names forgotten) were injured by these cars. There were no brakes on some of these cars and we could not stop them when they were going down. After that, we had to push the empty cars up the hill; we were five men on each car. This was a hard job. I also had to lay concrete to make a runway. We had to leave the Camp at 0700 hours and were allowed to come back at 1800 hours if the work was done. We were given a certain amount of work to do and the Japanese were keeping us on the work until it was done.

10. We were not given any extra food to do that work. I have seen many of my friends being beaten with fists by Japanese guards on Kai-Tak Airport, but I cannot give details on that, this happened too frequently to be noted. I was beaten quite a few times by guards because they considered I was not doing enough work. We were not given any shoes to work. I had to use a piece of wood and attached it under my feet. This was the only footwear we had.

11. In March, 1942, I went to Sham Shui Po. I remained there until December, 1943. The huts were as damaged, as dirty as in North Point. There were bedbugs and flies of all sorts in both camps. There too, like in North Point, I had to sleep on the cement floor. We were not given any blanket there either. In my hut in Sham Shui Po, we were about 70 men. That hut was a little larger than in North Point, but we still were very crowded.

(end of excerpt)