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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Rehabilitation and Hong Kong Prisoners of War

MARK OSBORNE HUMPHRIES
& LYNDSEY ROSENTHAL

ELSEWHERE IN THIS issue, Tony Banham reviews the literature on the Canadian contingent to Hong Kong, or ‘C’ Force, which included the men of the Royal Rifles and the Winnipeg Grenadiers. Their horrific experiences in captivity have been well documented, as he notes, and attempts were made to follow-up with veterans in the post-war period to determine the extent to which malnutrition, torture, and mental suffering affected their postwar lives. Here we present the results of one of the first studies conducted for the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1951.

When c force arrived to garrison Hong Kong on 16 November 1941, many of the 1,975 Canadians were not battle ready, many having just finished basic training while others were still only part way through.¹ The Canadians were, of course, only on the island for a few short weeks when the Japanese invaded on 8 December 1941; after eighteen days of fierce fighting that claimed the lives of 290 Canadian troops, Major-General Matlby’s forces surrendered.² The 1,418 surviving members of ‘C’ Force spent the duration of the war in Japanese prisoner of war camps where they endured starvation, routine beatings, forced labour and poor living conditions that lead

¹ Breton Grenhou, *“C” Force to Hong Kong: A Canadian Catastrophe, 1941-1945*, (Ottawa: Canadian Museum War, 1997): 25.

² Tim Cook, *The Necessary War: Canadians Fighting the Second World War, 1939-1945*, (Toronto: Penguin House, 2014): 80-86.



Unidentified Canadian officer (possibly Col. McKenna) being helped aboard HMCS *Prince Robert*, Hong Kong, 29 September 1945. [Library and Archives Canada PA1664261]

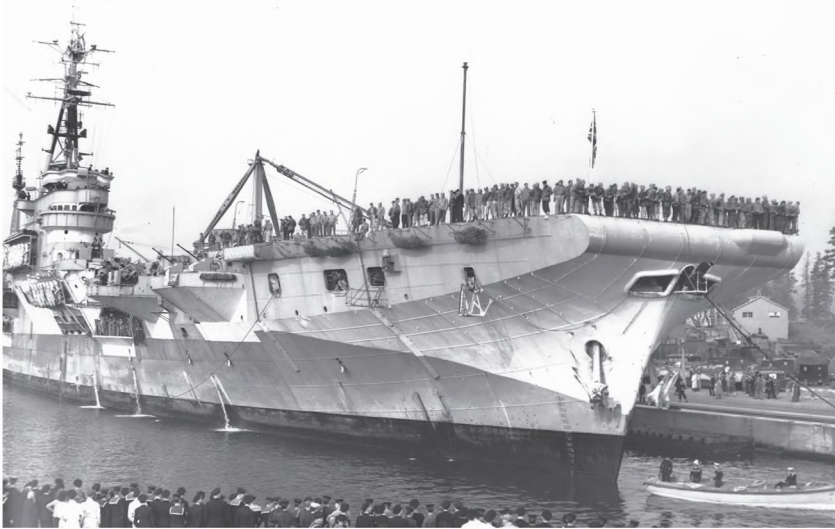
to widespread disease.³ In the words of Tim Cook, “the treatment of the Canadians in Japanese hands was far worse than it was for those soldiers, sailors, and airmen who fell into the clutches of the Nazis.”⁴ What effect did these experiences have on their postwar lives?

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, although there was no formal term for what would today be called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), there was a general understanding that war had a lasting effect on soldier’s lives. In the aftermath of the Great War, veterans lobby groups in Canada and England highlighted the suffering of former soldiers which doctors often called ‘burn-out’.⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, the official view at the War Office and in Ottawa was that some forms of post-deployment illness were acquired, usually

³ Tony Banham, *Not the Slightest Chance: The Defence of Hong Kong, 1941* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), Dave McIntosh, *Hell on Earth: Aging Faster, Dying Sooner Canadian Prisoners of the Japanese During World War II*, (Whitby: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1997), Charles Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day: Prisoners of War in Hong Kong and Japan, 1941–1945* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 2001).

⁴ Cook, *The Necessary War*, p.91.

⁵ Terry Copp and Mark Humphries, *Combat Stress in the 20th: The Commonwealth Perspective*, (Kingston: Canadian Defense Academy Press, 2010), 88-91.



Arrival of HMS *Glory* carrying Canadian Personnel liberated from Japanese POW camps, Esquimalt, BC, 26 October 1945. [Library and Archives Canada PA116786]

through organic lesions to the central nervous system, while others were congenital, caused by hereditary 'defects' often related to the general concept of the 'nervous constitution.' Despite the restrictive nature of pension policy in the interwar years, the number of pensions for shell shock and related conditions continued to rise through to the outbreak of the Second World War.⁶

In the aftermath of that conflict, pension officials were unsure what types of unique problems might be faced by POWs, especially those who had endured brutal treatment in Japanese prison camps. Reprinted here from the Laurier Military History Archive, are some of the first attempts to address these questions. In a review of Department of Veterans Affairs pension files conducted in 1951, officials found that the rehabilitation rate of the Hong Kong veterans was 92.7%, similar to the 'normal' rates for all other veterans (93.3%). Rehabilitation was, though, narrowly defined by metrics which measured post-war versus prewar employment rates. The assumption was that if a veteran was employed and no-longer in receipt of a pension, he had been successfully reintegrated into civilian society. The problem, of course, with these types of aggregate studies and

⁶ Copp and Humphries, *Combat Stress*, 88.

economic measurements is that they ignore the complexities of re-establishment and re-adjustment. While the main benchmark for the DVA was steady employment, these figures ignore other important qualitative factors such as familial and personal problems which many veterans later reported.⁷

As part of a larger archival project, the Laurier Military History Archive will soon begin publishing the stories of First World War veterans on its website, many of which challenge the assumptions embedding in this type of DVA reporting.

DOCUMENT ONE

INTRA-DEPARTMENT CORRESPONDENCE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ottawa, March 28, 1951

To: Senior Treatment Medical Officers.

Subject: Special Arrangements for Examination and Treatment
for Hong Kong Prisoners of War.

File No. 3-53 (DGTS)

Treatment Instruction Letter 7-1951

(1) There is a growing amount of medical evidence that the deficient diet upon which the Hong Kong Prisoners of War lived for so long has produced an organic lesion of the central nervous system. This lesion, in the advanced stages, may be detected clinically. However, many of these prisoners of war present symptoms which are not accompanied by any demonstrable organic signs. It is still probable that these symptoms have an organic basis, even though it cannot be shown clinically.

(2) In order that there be complete fairness in dealing with this group of veterans, the following points will be observed scrupulously:

⁷ Ibid, 373-390 and Grant Garneau, *The 1st Battalion of the Royal Rifles of Canada: The Record of a Canadian Infantry Battalion in the Far East, 1941-1945*, (Canada: Hong Kong Veterans' Association of Canada, 1980).



Winnipeg Grenadier POW displaying a Japanese flag after his release from prison, 1945. [Library and Archives Canada PA116786]

(a) Any Hong Kong Prisoner of War Presenting himself at a D.V.A. treatment institution must be examined by a doctor who will determine whether he should be admitted for observation, or treatment, or not. The veteran shall be given every benefit of the doubt and any symptoms or conditions which he may present that might possibly be related to his P.O.W. experiences would entitle him to admission for observation and treatment. If the veteran so desires, he may write the S.T.M.O. of the district in which he resides requesting an appointment with the appropriate Treatment doctor.

(b) He will be admitted under Class 8(d) if he has not entitlement under Class 1A. He will be entitled to the benefits of Clause 19 whereby he can receive travelling expenses and loss of wages up to \$7.50 a day while he is under treatment.

(3) While it is true and quite understandably true that beside the existence of the probably organic lesion of the central nervous system, there is an emotional factor present in many of these veterans, this should not be the focal point for investigation, counselling, and treatment. It

should be understood that probably veterans who suffered for years from diets markedly deficient in vitamins have an organic lesion; it is felt that while the veteran is in hospital under investigation, that aspect of his investigation and treatment should be stressed rather than immediately putting him on the neuropsychiatric service.

[signed]

W.P. Warner, M.B.,
Director General Treatment Services.

P.R.24177

D.V.A. 123 150M-6-50 Req. 136

DOCUMENT TWO

Ottawa, April 9th, 1951

TO: Deputy Minister,
Department of Veterans Affairs

Attention: Maj. Gen. E. L. M. Burns

SUBJECT: Hong Kong P.O.W. Casualty Welfare Registrants.

There were 1,418 Canadians who had been taken prisoner of war released at the termination of hostilities in 1945. Of these one died in Japan and one died on board ship returning to Canada.

Of the total returning to Canada records maintained indicate that 1,162 have been granted pensions under the Pension Act; 10 have been granted War Veterans' Allowances; 1,277 have received treatment (not necessarily service connected) and 666 received assistance under the allowances section or the Veterans' Rehabilitation Act.

Generally speaking, it is believed reasonable to assume that, particularly in the case of pensioners, any veteran who had difficulty in becoming re-established, was registered as a casualty registrant. Of the 1,416 Hong long veterans, 601 have been registered with the Casualty Welfare Division.

Of the 601 registrants, 147 are still active cases who are currently under service by the division. 80 of these cases are in temporary employment - 46 in better circumstances than their pre-war condition;

25 in approximately the same condition and 9 in circumstances not as favourable as pre-war - 47 of the cases are unemployed - 4 in training and 16 presently hospitalized. Of the total of 147 there are 143 pensioners.

The following tables provide additional data concerning the 9 temporarily employed in "worse" conditions and the 47 unemployed.

Cases where the veteran is employed and yet an active case are normally those, remaining on registry during a waiting period between obtaining employment and closure of the case to ensure that satisfactory rehabilitation can be achieved in that particular employment.

Temporarily Employed - Worse

DISTRICT	Pre-War Occ.	Pre-War Income	Post-war Occ.	Post-War Income	% Pension
Hf.	Peddler - Fish	\$15 p.w.	Peddler	\$15 p.w.	25
St. (VLS S.H.)	Trucker	\$20 p.w.	Seasonal Labour	\$24 p.w.	55
Wi	Clerk - Delivery Boy	\$22 p.w.	Canteen Op.	\$18 p.w.	100
	Painter	\$28.50 p.w.	Hosp. Orderly	\$35 p.w.	60
	Shoe Shiner	\$16 p.w.	Canteen Op.	\$18 p.w.	100
	Telegraph Messenger	18 p.w.	Canteen Op.	\$18 p.w.	100
	Landscape Gardener	\$25 p.w.	Elevator Op.	\$28.50 p.w.	60
	Musician	\$45 p.w.	Packer	\$25 p.w.	100
Ed	Sales Clerk	\$18 p.w.	Fur Farmer	Rent of House	100

Presently Unemployed

District	Pre-war Occ.	Pre-war Income	% Pension
Hf	Miner	\$30 p.w.	100
	Unemployed	Nil	10
Hx	Asst. Baker	\$15 p.w.	50
	Miner (coal)	\$46 p.w.	100
	Stevedore	\$20 p.w.	40
	Labourer	\$15 p.w.	70
	Woodsman	\$15 p.w.	100
	Saw Operator	\$20 p.w.	100
	Trucker	\$18 p.w.	20
	Farm hand	\$10 p.w.	100
St	Woodsman	\$20 p.w.	30
	Bottle washer	\$18 p.w.	65
	Unemployed	-	30
	Clerk	\$10 p.w.	34
	Labourer	\$15 p.w.	15
	Cookee	\$15 p.w.	20
	Farm hand	\$10 p.w.	35
	Labourer	\$15 p.w.	100
	Unemployed	-	25
	Unemployed	-	40
Qn	Hotel Clerk	\$25 p.w.	100
	Farm hand	not stated	75
	Farmer	\$20 p.w.	100
	Mechanic	\$25 p.w.	100
Mo	Trucker	\$18 p.w.	100
	Labourer	not known	15
	Trucker	\$25 p.w.	90
Kn	Trucker	\$32 p.w.	100
	Student	-	100
To	Clerk	\$34 p.w.	100
	Unemployed	-	100
	Stock Clerk	\$15 p.w.	35
Hm	Trucker	\$20 p.w.	100
Lo	Trucker	\$20 p.w.	100
NB	Farm hand	\$15 p.w.	100
	Farm hand	\$15 p.w.	60
	Fisherman	\$20 p.w.	100
	Log-grader	\$20 p.w.	100
	Farmer	not stated	40
Wi	Trucker	\$25 p.w.	90
	Baker	\$27.50 p.w.	30
	Unemployed	-	100
	Unemployed	-	20
	Fisherman	\$20 p.w.	65
	Labourer	\$12 p.w.	100
He	Farm hand	\$12 p.w.	100
Va	Trucker	\$25 p.w.	50
	Clerk	\$25 p.w.	100

After all possible service has been provided for a registrant cases are closed and records of such cases are available. Should a veteran experience further difficulty and seek advice from the Department, the case is re-opened; it is, therefore, considered that in all closed cases the veterans are probably in a position at least as favourable as that at the time of closure. On this basis an analysis of the closed cases should provide a reasonable indication of the status of the group. There are 454 closed cases who are ex-prisoners of war from Hong-Kong.

An effort has been made to compare the status of the veteran at the time of closure with his status at the time of enlistment. Several factors are involved since financial return is not the only measure, for example, a pre-war labourer who at the time of closure is an apprentice typewriter mechanic may be temporarily be receiving less money that he did as a labourer but is still considered to be "better off". In many cases where the registrant was reinstated he is considered as "status unchanged".

STATUS OF HONG-KONG GROUP COMPARED WITH SAMPLE OF ALL REGISTRANTS – CLOSED CASES

Pension Income is not considered in this comparison of pre-war, post-war status:

	Hong-Kong Group	Sample of All Closed Cases
In Better Circumstances than at enlistment	0.416	0.421
Circumstances Unchanged	0.406	0.361
In Worse Circumstances	0.156	0.218
Unclassified	0.022	-

The sample of all closed cases is based on a survey made in November, 1950, and was prepared on the basis of a 5% sample in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver and a 10% sample in all other districts.

The 15.6% of the Hong-Kong Group who are shown as being in "worse circumstances" is actually made up of 71 cases. An analysis of these cases shows the following:

Rehabilitation not feasible	18 cases	17 at 100% pension and 1 at 90%
Veteran unco-operative	4 cases	2 at 100%; 1 at 54%; and 1 at 25%
Closed on War Veterans' Allowances	3 cases	1 at 40%; 1 at 20%; and 1 at 15%.
Contact Lost	2 cases	1 at 20%; 1 at 15%

In the majority of the remaining 44 cases the present income plus the pension would make the veterans better off financially than pre-war:

Pre-war Occupation	Post-war Occupation	% Pension
Labourers - 2	Odd-jobs	60
	Retired	95
Grain Buyer	C.N.I.B. Worker	80
Farmer	Labourer	50
Electrician	Trucker	43
Carpenters - 3	Caretaker - 2	75; 30
	Serviceman	100
Captenters Helpers - 2	Upholster (part-time)	80
	Fur Cleaner	80
Fisherman	Odd-jobs	100
Cooks - 3	C.N.I.B. worker	100
	Labourers - 2	35; 30
Burner - Acetylene	Roller Operator	30
Light-house keeper	Labourer	40
House repair service (self)	Grounds keeper	20
Candy-maker	Maintenance Man	40
Reporter	Handyman	30
Salesman	Watchman	30
Service Station Attendant	Waiter	100
Fire patrol	Cleaner	15
Machine Operator	Trim Sawyer	20
Stave miller	Farm hand	Nil
Trucker - 3	Retired	100
	Janitor - 2	90; 50
Miner - 2	Chauffeur	30
	Janitor	100
Rigger - construction	Caretaker	100
Furnaceman	Handyman	100
Clerk - 4	C.N.I.B. Worker - 2	100; 100
	Janitor	60
	Messenger	100
Mechanic	Watchman	80
Steam Fitter	Janitor	100
Rivit Catcher	Elevator Operator	55
Chainman	Odd-jobs	100
Painter	Janitor	40
Restaurant Owner	Farm worker	100

In the overall closure of cases the results of Casualty Welfare Service show little variation between the small (9454) Hong-Kong Group and the total (26,000) closures:

	Hong-Kong Group	All Closures
Rehabilitated	0.927	0.933
Not Rehabilitated	0.073	0.067

The group closed as not rehabilitated is slightly higher in the Hong-Kong Group but this is mainly due to a greater percentage of deaths prior to closure:

Not Rehabilitated	Hong-Kong Group	All Closures
Rehabilitation not feasible	0.042	0.0403
Unco-operative attitude	0.0088	0.0135
Deceased while active cases	0.0111	0.0045
Lost contact, etc.	0.011	0.0082
TOTAL	0.0729	0.0665

The groups closed as rehabilitated show to major variations:

(a) The ex-Hong-Kong veteran group shows a higher percentage who are self-employed. This may be because of the nature of the economy in the areas in which the majority of the group live; it is interesting to note that 60% of the Hong-Kong self-employed group are farmers and fisherman.

(b) The proportion closed as W.V.A. recipients is much lower than in the overall. No doubt this is because the overall figures contain many W.W.I. veterans and because of age coupled with disability W.V.A. is the logical closure.

Rehabilitated	Hong-Kong Group	All Closures
Employed	0.59	0.5986
Employed - Civil Service	0.119	0.1463
Employed - self	0.2045	0.143
Home Industry	0.0022	0.0015
Closed on W.V.A.	0.0066	0.0333
Retired or other	0.0044	0.0108
	0.9267	0.9335

On the whole, the comparison shows that there is little difference in the results which have been achieved in rehabilitating the Hong-Kong group compared with the overall group. The extent to which registrants have been rehabilitated is considered to show that the co-operation which has existed between the veterans and the Department has been very effective.

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