

“C” Force - The Hong Kong Story

LIBERATION

On the day after the second atomic bomb was dropped at Nagasaki, Japan on August 9, 1945, Japan agreed to the Potsdam Conference terms of unconditional surrender. On August 15, the Japanese Emperor Hirohito broadcast to the Japanese people the news of Japan’s surrender, with the end of hostilities and formal surrender ceremonies to take place on September 2 in Tokyo Bay aboard the American battleship *USS Missouri*.

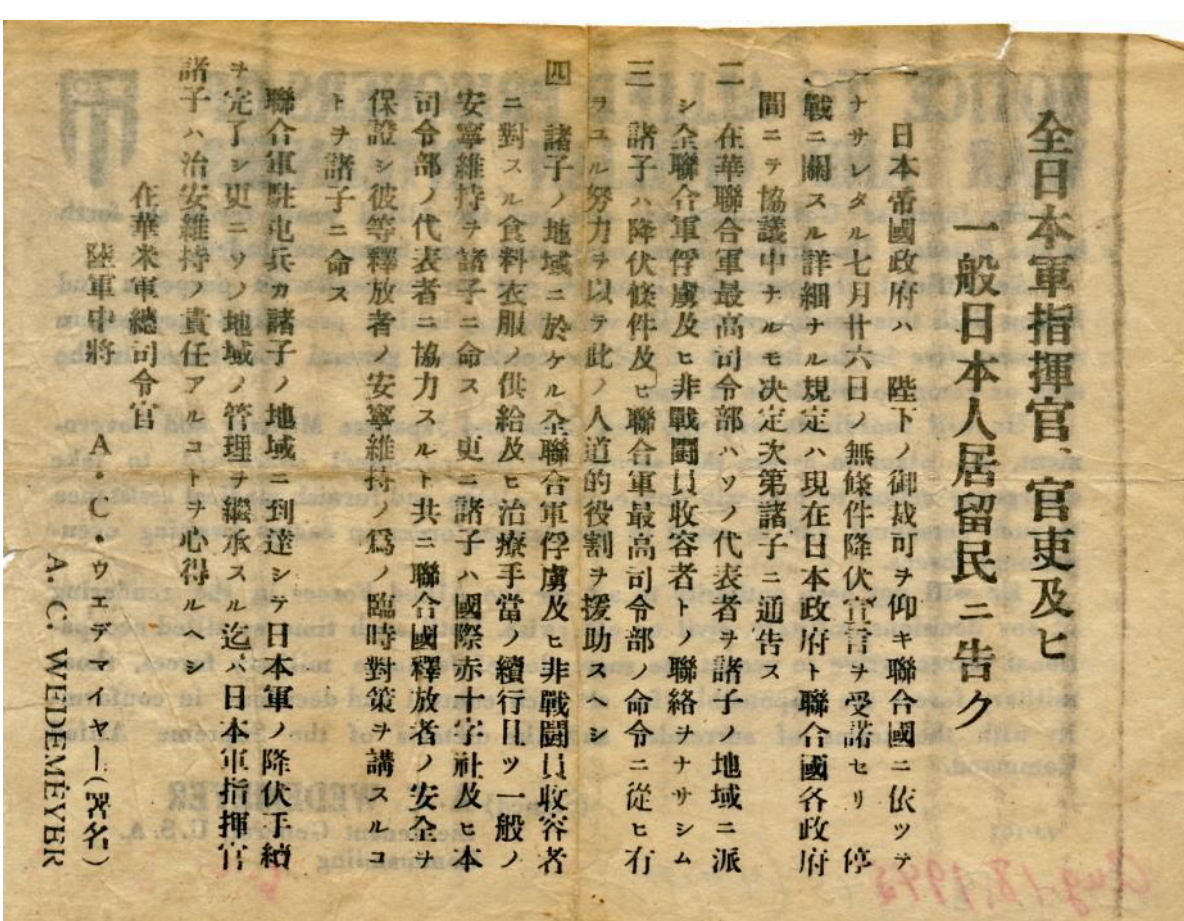
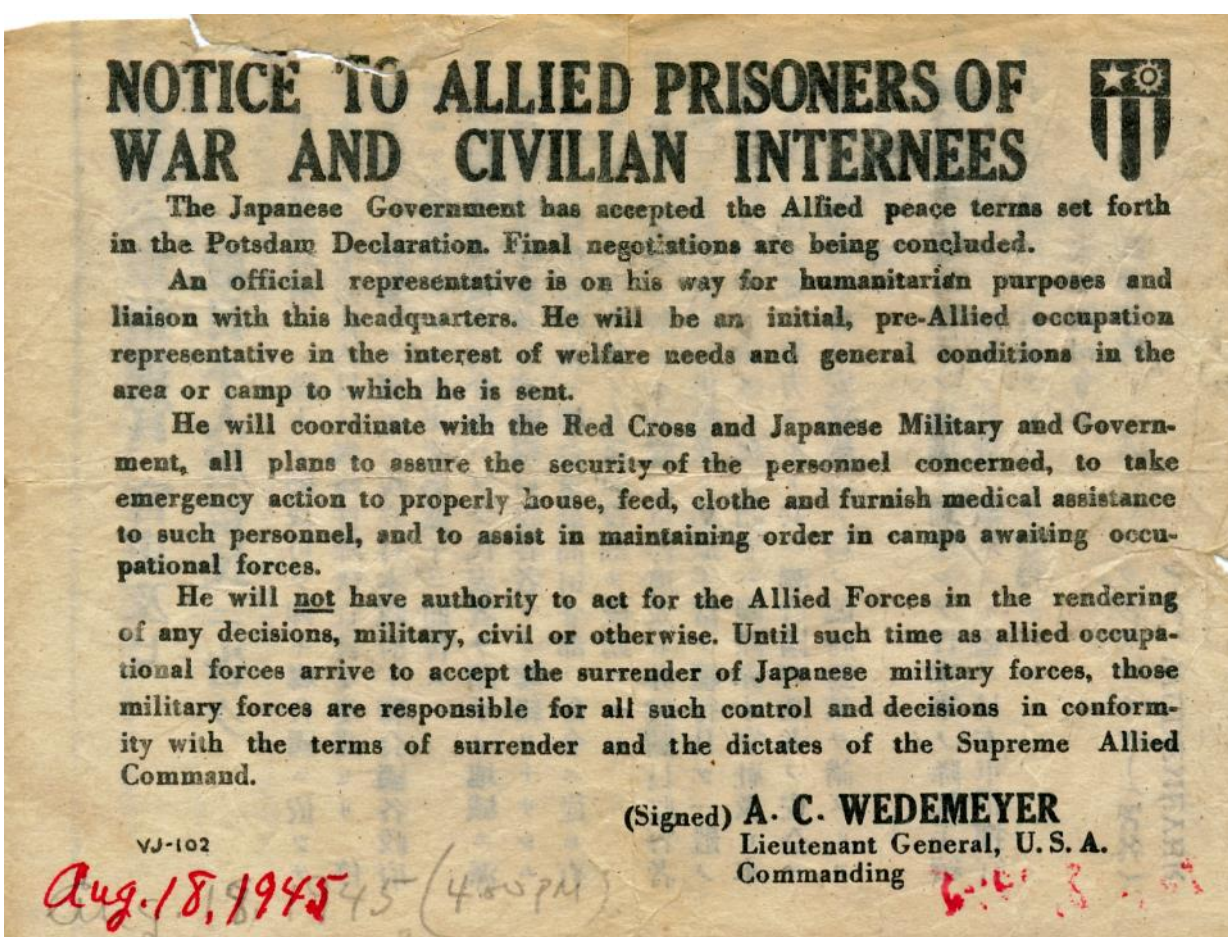
The front page of the August 15, 1945 issue of the *Winnipeg Free Press* says it all, (Fig. 1). Winnipeg was the home of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, whose survivors were taken Prisoner of War at Hong Kong. Note the Winnipeg Grenadiers crest on the top left of the newspaper page. On page 11 of this issue, the Free Press published the following:

Canadian Prisoners May Go to Manila

Manila, Aug. 15 (CP Cable) - *There is a chance that many and possibly all the surviving Canadian prisoners of war in Japanese hands—captives since the fall of Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1941—will be brought to Manila upon their liberation...*

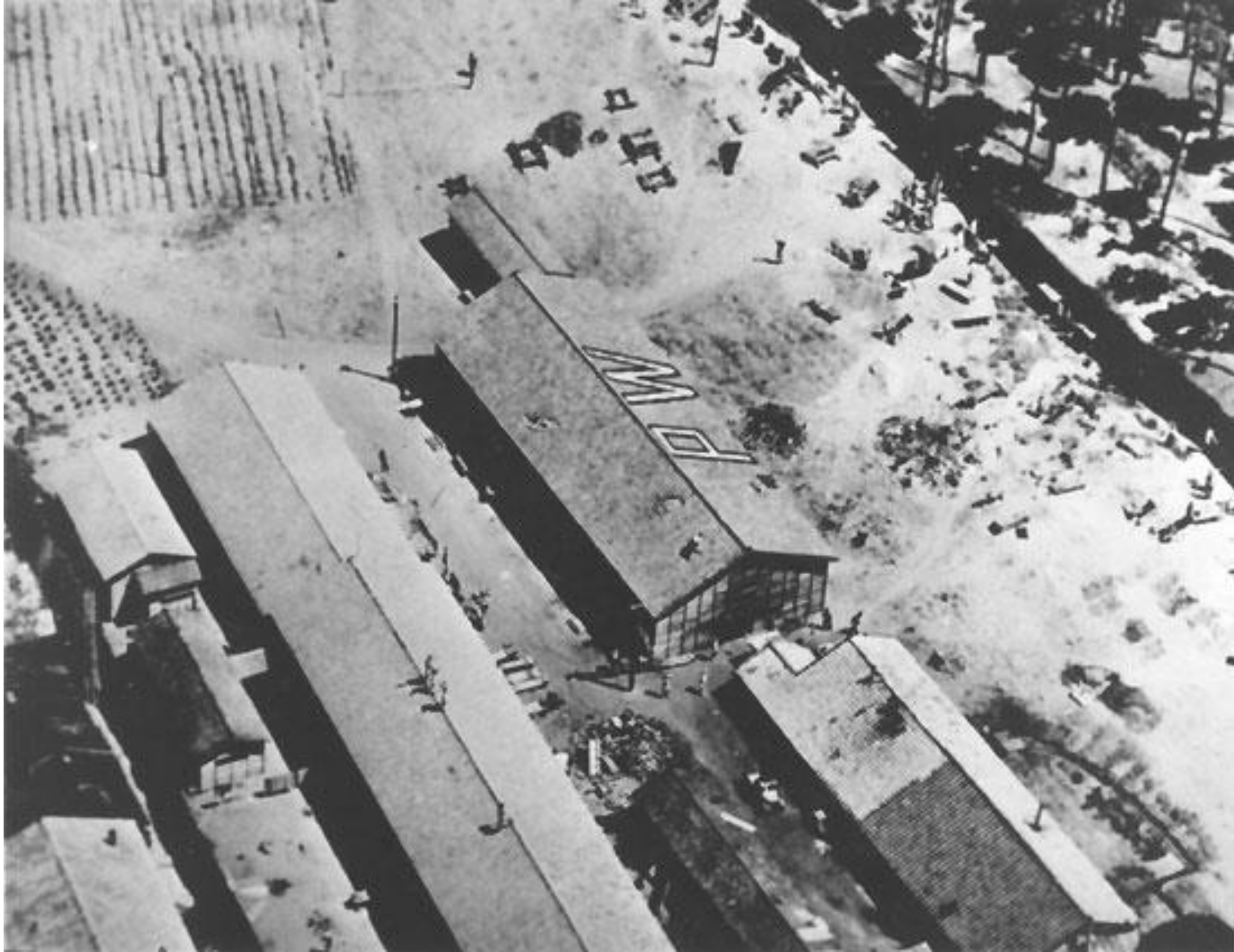
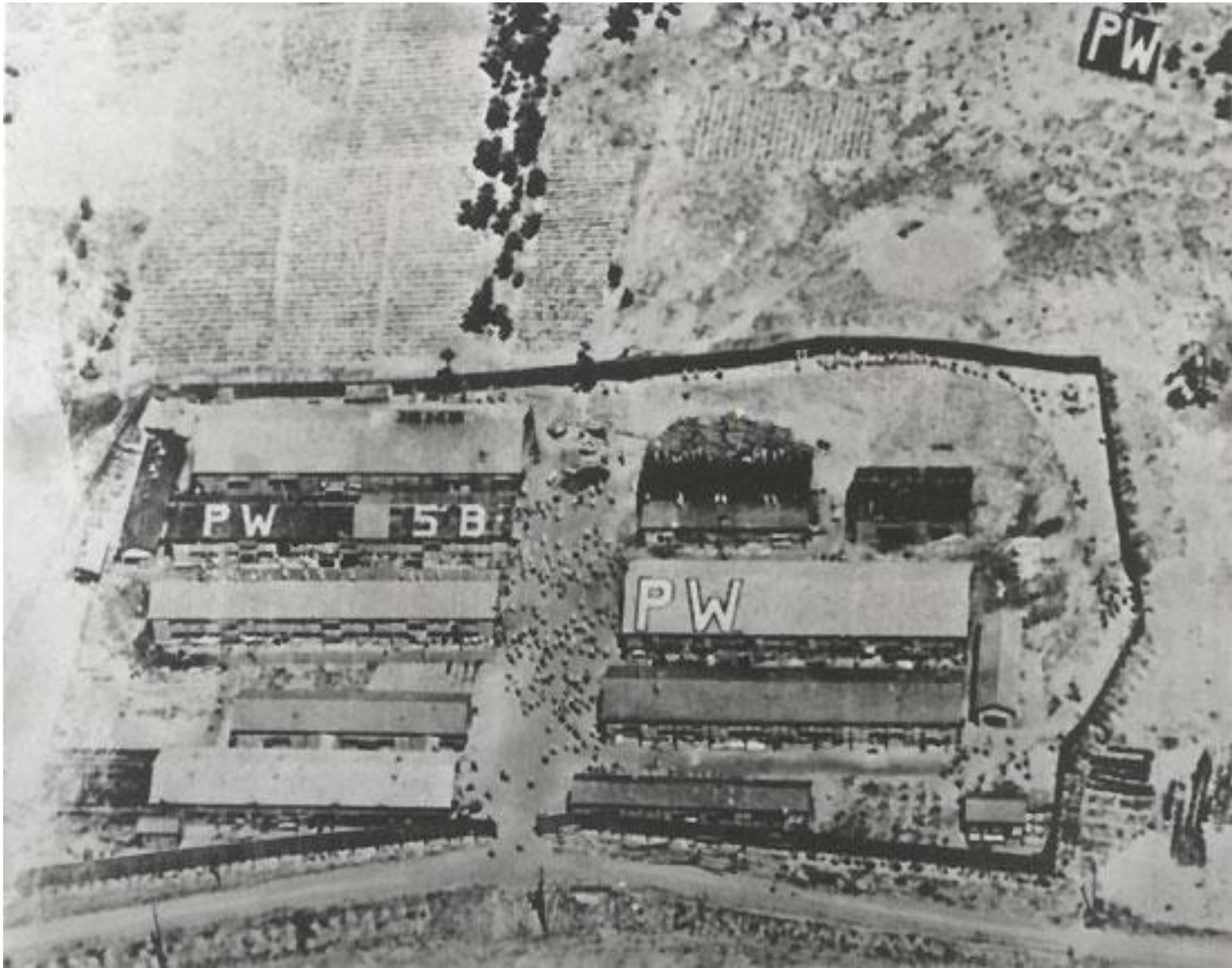
With the conditions of the surrender accepted, American war planes began flying over Japanese and former Japanese territories looking for POW camps. When these camps were sighted, locations were noted and food, clothing and medicines were parachuted to the POWs. A leaflet (Fig. 2) was dropped from the war planes, which informed the former allied POWs that the war was over and that arrangements for their freedom were being prepared. The leaflet was printed on two sides, one in English and the other in Japanese. The leaflet illustrated was dropped on the Sham Shui Po POW camp in Hong Kong and was retained by Signalman Larry Dowling, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, who was imprisoned there. Note the date and time: Aug. 18, 1945 (4.00 PM).

Leaflet informing allied POWs about the Japanese surrender and that representatives were being dispatched as quickly as possible to the camp sites. – *Larry Dowling correspondence, courtesy of Sam Chiu.*



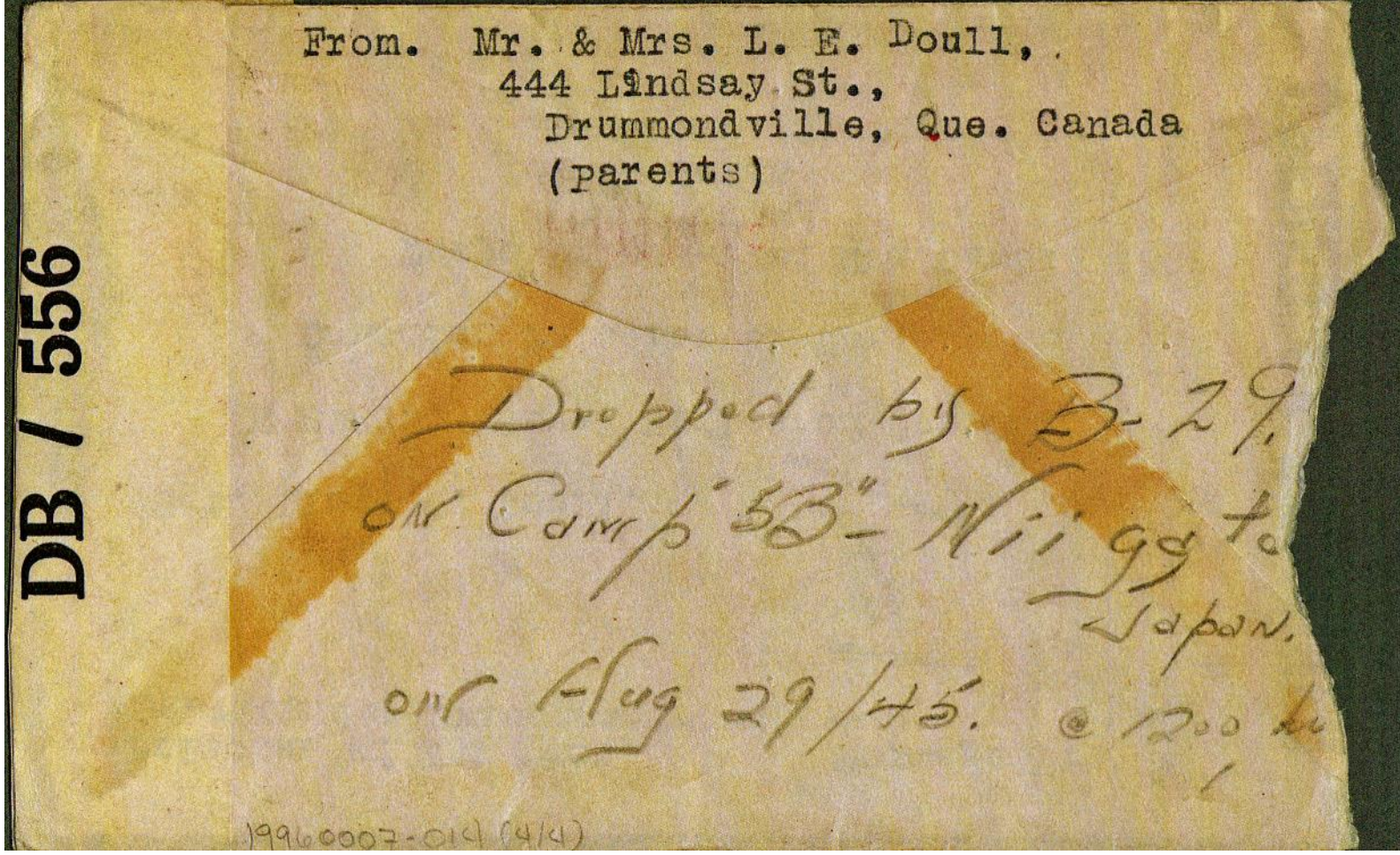
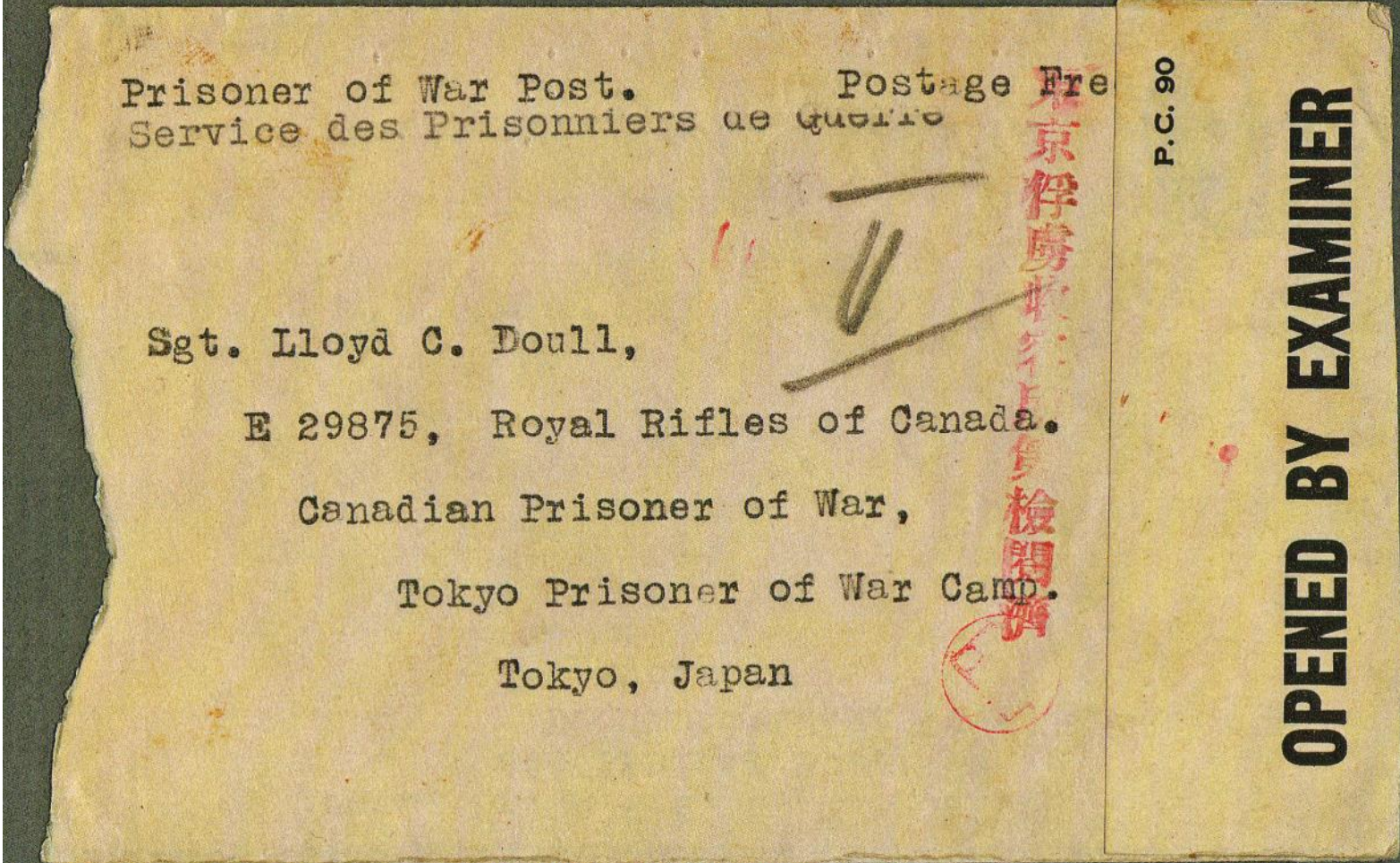
Front page of the August 15, 1945 issue of the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

Planes from American aircraft carriers would fly over the country side looking for POW camps when sighted their locations were noted and emergency flights where dropping 50 gallon drums with supplies for the camp. Two photos of the camps are shown in which “PW” has been printed on the roof. Note one of the photos shows holes in the roof, this is what happens when the barrels are dropped by the plane, they land anywhere.



Aerial photos of Camp 5B after a parachute drop. Note the holes in the roof tops made by the crashing barrels. – *Courtesy China Marines*

The Japanese were notorious for not forwarding the mail to the POWs, the Americans found a large warehouse stored with incoming POW and when the recipients could be located at a camp they would deliver mail in 50 gallon drums, a letter delivered this way is shown, in which Sgt. Doull had written on the back “Dropped by B-29 on Camp “5B” Niggto [Niigata] Japan on August 29, 1945 @ 1200 hrs.” – *CWM 19960007-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canada War Museum*



On August 16, 1945 the Canadian High Commissioner in Canberra, Australia sent a coded message to Ottawa informing them of the sailing on August 15 for Hong Kong of *HMCS Prince Robert*, with supplies for the Canadian prisoners.

FROM: THE ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR CAN. DA. IN AUSTRALIA.
TO: THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, OTTAWA.
SUBJECT: IMMEDIATE
CIPHER - C.T.F.
NO. 402
CANBERRA, August 17th, 1945.
No. 402. August 17th. Reference to your telegram No. 374 of August 16th and my telegram No. 400 of August 16th.
Following for Davis from Piek, Begins:
Canadian prisoners of war in Hong Kong.
1. Before learning of "Prince Robert" I was in touch with Dr. Newman Morris, who said that Australian Red Cross Society would be glad to help us in every way and could furnish all supplies needed and Red Cross workers to carry out your proposal. Again this morning he told me that Australian Red Cross was anxious to co-operate especially as it owed a lot to Canada.
2. A Royal Navy ship is now being prepared in Sydney for departure to Hong Kong about Tuesday, August 21st, with urgently needed supplies.
3. Doctor Morris says that Red Cross in London and Washington are being informed of what is being done here. He has asked American Red Cross to advise Canada.
4. Morris seems confident that there will be no lack of essential supplies or personnel for this relief and repatriation work but Noble gathered impression from British Fleet Headquarters that there would have to be some careful allocation of limited stocks of certain supplies which are immediately available.
5. No doubt consideration has been given in Ottawa to sending of Canadian repatriation officers to Hong Kong and elsewhere regardless of whether they go on Canadian ships. Noble says that Royal Navy is arranging to send group of about 50 men of various services by plane to Hong Kong via Manila leaving Sydney August 18th or 19th to look after mainly prisoners of war. A Canadian would be able to go with this group.
6. Please let me know if there is anything else we can do at this stage. Ends.

With the surrender of Japan on August 15, the priorities were freeing and tending to the needs of the former POWs such as for medical and health issues, communicating with their families, clothing and feeding, and ultimately the process of bringing them home. All of the liberated Canadians from Hong Kong and the healthy ones from Japan were taken to Manila. Those from Japan who required medical assistance were taken to Guam.



Photo of Ordinary Seaman Ernest Weir receiving an extra rum ration during Victory-over-Japan celebrations aboard the *Prince Robert*, which is leaving Sydney, Australia, August 16, 1945. – *Photo credit, PO Jack Hawes, Canada Department of National Defence – Library and Archives Canada, PA-166428.*

Decoded Canadian transmission regarding the sailing of *HMCS Prince Robert* to Hong Kong. – *Library and Archives Canada, RG12, Vol. 1086,*

MANILA PREPARES WELCOME FOR 1,000 CANUCK PRISONERS

Manila, Aug. 23—(CP)—Approximately 1,000 Canadians will be among the 32,000 Allied prisoners of war evacuated from Japanese camps to the Philippines.
The evacuation of both prisoners and internees will be carried out as quickly as possible by the American recovered personnel division replacement command, the American Red Cross and occupation forces entering Japan.
The initial case of Canadians who eventually will come to the 5th American replacement depot near Manila, will be in the hands of the Australian section at general headquarters.
Canadian groups are enroute from Canada to relieve the Australians. In the meantime, Col. Richard Malone, Canadian public relations officer, is maintaining liaison with the Australians in connection with arrangements for evacuated prisoners and Col. Moore Cosgrave, Canadian military attaché at Canberra, Australia, is due in a day or two to handle the work of preparing for the prisoners' arrivals until Canadian teams headed by Lt-Col. M. W. MacNulty, of Sherbrooke, Que., arrive.
It is not yet known if the 300-odd Canadians in the Hong Kong area will also be evacuated to Manila. However, arrangements for them will be supervised by Brig. Kay, Canadian military attaché at Chungking.
Recovered personnel units which will accompany occupation forces will make lists of liberated prisoners before their evacuation and cable them to the war department at Washington. It is presumed this service will apply to Canadians.
Messages to next of kin will be accepted immediately.
Once prisoners have been evacuated to the Philippines by air and water transport they will find specially converted replacement depots specially equipped with every convenience. There will be 24-hour Red Cross service, registration under a central filing system, message centre service, information centers, canteens and recreation centres. Messages from relatives will be delivered.
During the trip to the Philippines the prisoners will have medical supplies, food and clothing available, which will be taken to Japan by the occupation forces.

Article from the *Toronto Star* giving details of the Canadian repatriation teams proceeding to the 5th Replacement Depot at Manila. *Toronto Star*, August 23, 1945.



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