

“C” Force - The Hong Kong Story

LIBERATION

The following account of a press conference held by Prime Minister Mackenzie King on August 15, 1945, as reported by The Ottawa Evening Citizen:

Hong Kong Boys Coming Home

The Hong Kong boys are coming home first. That's the news from Prime Minister Mackenzie King himself.

“They're free now” he exclaimed.

Talking to a hastily summoned press conference last night, Mr. King said:

“The thoughts of all of us turn toward the boys of Hong Kong.”

“Every effort will be made to bring them home at the earliest possible moment.”

“They're all free now; it is just a matter of getting them home.”

Asked how he knew they were free, Mr. King answered:

“It is part of the Potsdam Declaration; the Japanese have agreed to it, and we'll have them back just as quickly as we can.”

On August 30, 1945, the British Pacific Fleet, comprised of British, Canadian and Australian ships sailed into Hong Kong Harbour, The *HMCS Prince Robert* was the fifth of the 12 ships to enter Hong Kong. The “*Robert*” was the escort ship that took the Canadians to Hong Kong and was easily recognized by the freed Canadians, who began running to the dock to the newly tied up ship. There they were allowed on board and could remain all day. They were fed, received clothing and medical care, and enjoyed the thrill of being free. At night they had to return to the camp site, but were allowed to return to the ship the following day.



Canadian and British POWs awaiting liberation by the landing party from the *Prince Robert*, ca. August 30, 1945. – Photo credit, PO Jack Hawes, Canada Department of National Defence – Library and Archives Canada, PA-114811



Naval personnel from the *Prince Robert*, visiting liberated Canadian POWs at Shamshui Po Camp, Hong Kong, September 1945. – Photo credit, PO Jack Hawes, Canada Department of National Defence – Library and Archives Canada, PA-116808

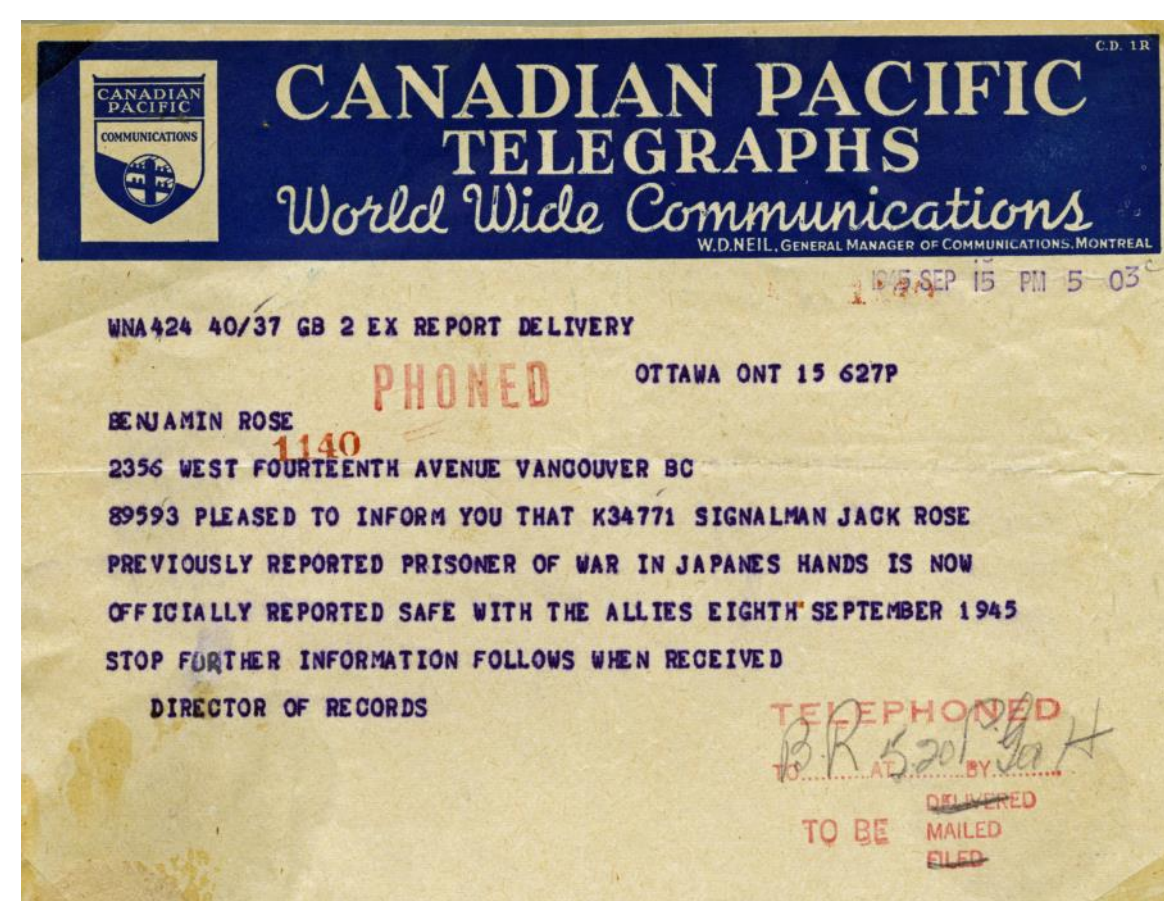


Japanese surrender ceremony at Government House, Hong Kong. Lt. Gen. Tanaka signs surrender document while Vice Admiral Fujita waits his turn. – Photo credit, PO Jack Hawes, Canada Department of National Defence – Library and Archives Canada, PA-147118

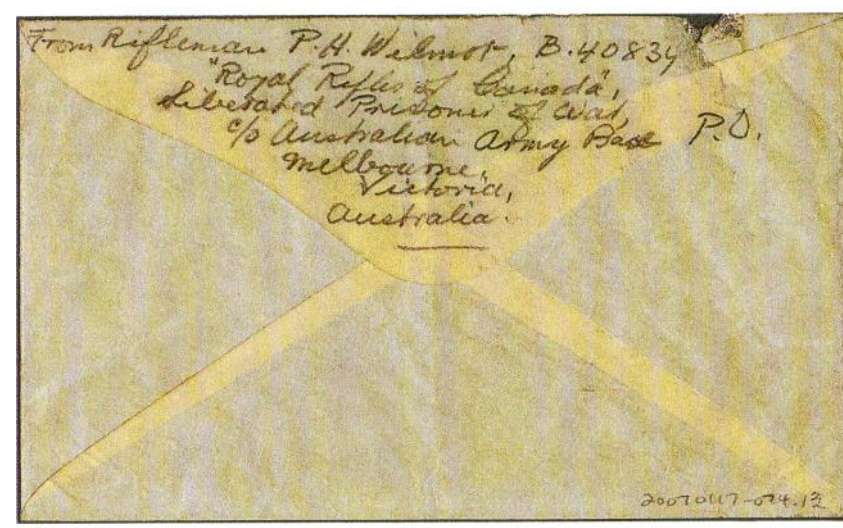
Hong Kong was officially handed over by the Japanese Imperial Army to the Royal Navy on August 30, 1945 with the final surrender taking place on September 16, 1945.

Telegram informing the Rose family that Signalman Jack Rose is now safe in allied hands Jack Rose was held at the Sendai POW camp in Japan.

– CWM 20120078-002 George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canada War Museum



One of the many priorities for the freed LPOWs was to establish a postal communication network for these ex-prisoners to communicate with their families. Fig. 8 shows the front and back of a September 3, 1945 cover written to his son in St. Catharines, Ontario by Rifleman Percy Wilmot of the Royal Rifles of Canada, while he was at Sham Shui Po Camp.



Cover from Rifleman Percy Wilmot, sent from Hong Kong to St. Catharines, Ontario, in which the return address states “c/o Australian Army Post Office, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia”. – CWM 20070117-074.13 George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canada War Museum

The contents of the letter enclosed in the envelope read as follows:

3/9/45

Dear Stanley:

Well Son here I am a free man again. It is still very hard to realize as yet. It gives one quite a shock to see the husky sailors and soldiers in camp again after looking at skin and bones walking or staggering around for three years and nine months. I am still in hospital but don't worry about me as I will soon be O.K. when I get some of “Mothers” good cooking into me, tell her I can eat anything now. I have eaten Shark, whale, octopus, seaweed, buffalo and weeds of all kinds, but of course we only got the above mentioned luxuries very, very rarely. Our diet mostly consisted of Rice and Greens, mostly water and sugar. I have lots to tell you when I see you.

Now how have you and “Mother” been Keepin. I do hope and pray you are both well, tell her to look after herself and also look after yourself as well. I have written “Mother” two letters since we were made free, I hope she gets them. Tell “Ede” Auntie Maude, Aunt Lisse and “Florence”, I received their letters and am writing to [unreadable] to Uncle Ernie. The relieving force consisted of “British” “Canadian” and “Australian” forces. One of the ships was the “Canadian” ship “Robert” which was our escort ship when we came out here. We are hoping to leave today on the “Empress of Australia”, we do not know where we are going but we hope it is back to dear old “Canada”. But some say it is Australia. Anyway our forwarding address is, name Number Regt: Liberated Prisoner of War, c/o Australian Army Post Office, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia...

The LPOWs were unaware that their new home for the next few weeks would be Manila, Philippines.

On August 26, 1945, Mackenzie King made public a message that was sent to General MacArthur in Manila to be relayed to the liberated Canadians. The message was as follows:

On behalf of the government and of all the people of Canada I extend to every one of you our deeply heartfelt greetings upon your regaining your freedom. We are rejoicing with you that the day is so near at hand when we shall welcome you home. Your friends and loved ones are counting the hours till your safe return.

Our hearts are filled with unbounded admiration and gratitude for the part you have all played in the defence of the world's liberties. All of you, members of Canada's armed forces, and civilians alike, have suffered greatly in the service of your country and the cause of freedom. You have been forced to endure untold hardships, indignities, and in some cases barbarous cruelties. We have known of your sufferings and in thought have shared them with you. The knowledge of what you were being called upon to endure increased our determination to spare no effort which might contribute, at the earliest hour possible, to final victory.

It has been a long and terrible ordeal for you all. But the end has come. Your long period of distress is over at least. All Canada now impatiently awaits your safe return to your homeland. Every possible measure is being taken to ensure your early repatriation and the restoration in fullest measure of your health, strength and peace of heart and mind. You cannot return too soon.



Photo taken of liberated prisoners of war at the former Sendai POW Camp. – Courtesy Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association



Liberated Canadians at Yokohama, awaiting transportation back to Canada via plane to San Francisco then train north to British Columbia. – Canada Dept. of National Defence – Library and Archives Canada – PA-114876



Photo taken at the hospital at the Shamshui Po Camp. – Canadian Army Photo, Courtesy Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association



Photo of liberation at the Ohashi Camp, Japan with notation to Victor Fehr of the Royal Rifles of Canada. – Courtesy Fehr family



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