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The Fall of Hong Kong: The Condon Report

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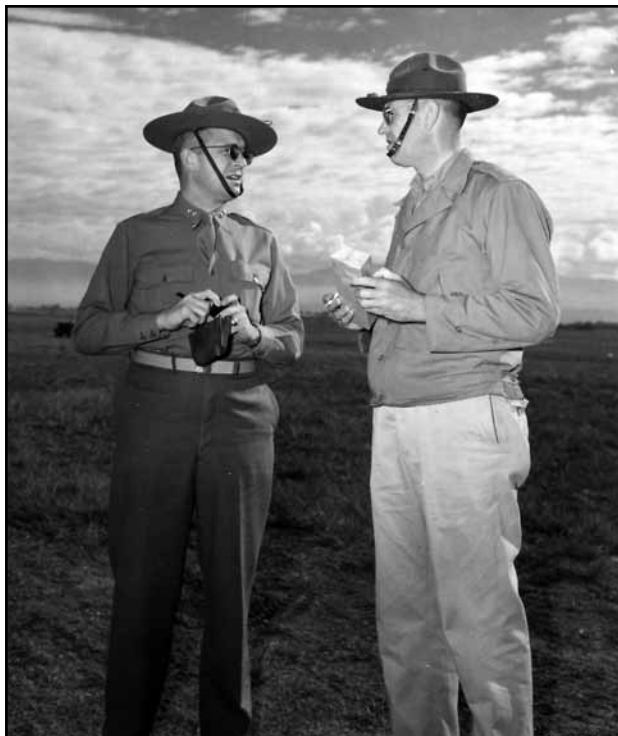
The Fall of Hong Kong

The Condon Report

edited by David Macri

During the battle of Hong Kong several US Army officers participated in events and were subsequently held by the Japanese army after the surrender of the colony on 25 December 1941. One of these was Major Reynolds Condon, an artillery officer who was serving as an assistant military attaché. Major Condon was released along with other diplomatic personnel in mid 1942 and he presumably returned to the United States via Brazil aboard the Swedish registered SS *Gripsholm*, but details on his journey remain uncertain.¹ On 11 August 1942, Major Condon submitted a report to US Army Military Intelligence on the British defence of Hong Kong. His scathing criticism is often incorrect in the details and is strongly influenced by personal bias. He also fails to recognize that Far Eastern defences were inadequate in part because of previous American indifference, and his comments on the higher direction of Allied strategy in southern China are not completely accurate. Nevertheless, his report, especially the latter half, helps shed some light on aspects of the battle for which he was an eyewitness, and when Condon focuses on matters of which he had direct personal involvement he provides additional useful information on some

Abstract: David Macri recently defended his PhD thesis “Hong Kong in the Sino-Japanese War: The Logistics of Collective Security in South China, 1935-1941” at the University of Hong Kong. The thesis raises new and important questions about the strategic background to the events of late 1941. Dr. Macri is also interested in operational and tactical issues and this report from the US National Archives is of special interest to Canadians. The author, Major Reynolds Condon, was an American assistant military attaché in Hong Kong who witnessed the battle before being released back to the US. His report, while not always factually correct, helps shed some light on aspects of the battle for which he was an eyewitness.



significant actions and personalities. Given the circumstances of Hong Kong's isolation as well as the overall combat effectiveness of Allied forces in general at that time, his account can be considered unbalanced. His views are sometimes emblematic of the contemptuous attitudes often exhibited towards Chinese and British officers by Americans who later served under General Joseph Stilwell in the China-Burma-India command. Whether views such as those expressed were formed because of defeats at places like Hong Kong or were already established amongst American military officers is difficult to assess fully, but it is useful to remember that untried United States

Army forces also performed poorly during their initiation to combat in a variety of different theatres. Condon's report is still significant, however, as it gives a third party account of the battle that has hitherto gone unnoticed. It is reproduced below.

Colonel Reynolds Condon (right) was an American assistant military attaché in Hong Kong when the colony was attacked by Japan in December 1941. Condon was released with other diplomatic personnel in mid-1942 and subsequently wrote a scathing report on the British defence of the colony. He is pictured here talking to Major-General Frank Merrill in China in 1944.

THE FALL OF HONGKONG

In view of the nature of this report no copies will be distributed or shown to any of our co-belligerents.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIVISION W.D.G.S.

Military Attaché Report China

Subject: Fall of Hongkong

From: Assistant Military Attaché Hongkong

Report No.: Special Report No. 1

Date: August 20, 1942

Source and degree of reliability: Personal observation of U.S. Army Officers.

Summary

Hongkong was attacked on December 8, 1941 by an estimated 2 Japanese divisions, 48 pieces of artillery, 20 planes. It capitulated December 25, 1941. Due to a combination of defeatism, lethargy, complacency, and stupidity, no resistance worthy of the name was offered by the British.

The undersigned was serving in the Hongkong office of the Military Attaché to China at the time of the Japanese attack on the Colony, December 8, 1941. With me at the time were Major R.A. Grussendorf, Military Attache for Air, and Captain William M. Clarkson, Adjutant of the American Military Mission to China, both in Hongkong for medical treatment. During the fighting we visited and served with as many organizations as time, physical condition and other duties permitted. These officers are each submitting an individual report, Major Grussendorf's including the subject of air operations. Their verbal statements to me were of great value in forming a picture fitting in with that which I observed myself.

Major Stuart Wood, F.A., stationed in Hongkong, was invaluable in obtaining information on the defense plans. He was in Manila undergoing surgical treatment

when the attack came so was not present during the battle.

Since it was quite impossible to save any notes, certain statements made are undoubtedly incorrect in detail; as a picture they are accurate.

Many stories were heard of good and intelligent fighting in unvisited sectors. While the reports may have been correct, it is believed the outcome of these engagements justifies the conclusion that the fighting was everywhere about the same as that observed.

Practically everything stated about the British is derogatory in the extreme. This is regrettable, but it is what we observed. It is firmly believed that had the teachings of our service schools been energetically put into practice Hongkong would have been held indefinitely against the comparatively light attack delivered.

If it appears that the undersigned exceeded his authority in meddling in the affairs of the British Army, it can only be said that as the senior American officer present I felt it my duty to use every effort to keep them fighting as long as possible.

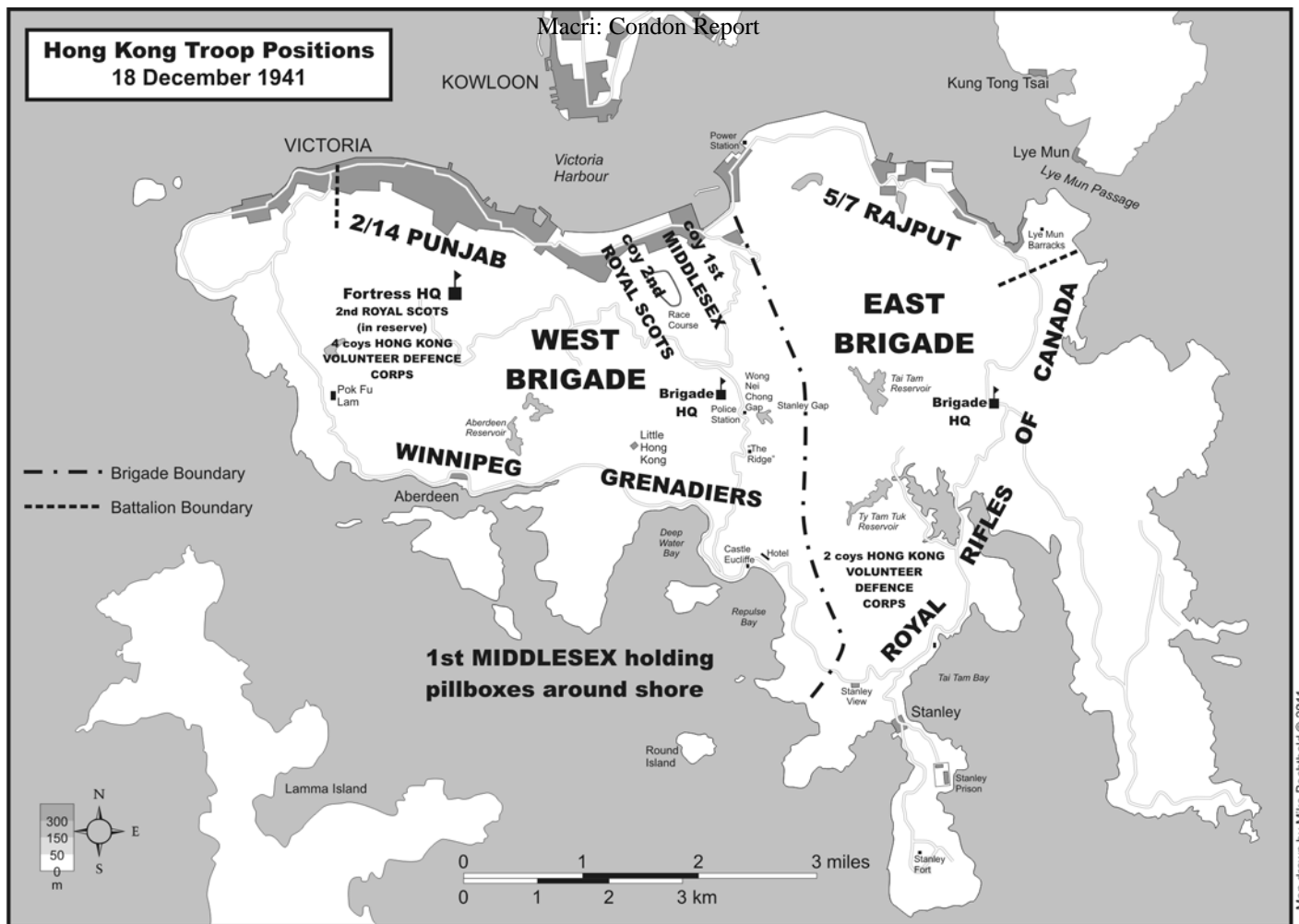
In my opinion, the chief reason for the rapid fall of Hongkong was lack of the aggressive spirit, bred from a knowledge by all ranks that the Colony could not be

held. From this basic attitude of mind it was an easy step into slipshod training, careless and faulty planning, which in turn led to disaster.

1. Plan

The staff officers with whom from time to time Major Wood and I discussed the defense plan stated that they were authorized to reveal any information we asked for. In practice, a question was replied to in such a roundabout fashion that frequently it was not answered at all. One thing was definite: the mainland would be held for three months, the island an additional three.

The means were as reported to the Military Intelligence Division shortly prior to the outbreak of war and were, according to a faulty memory, about as follows: Navy, seven motor torpedo boats (other ships were to leave when hostilities started), several hundred dockyard workers: Air Force, four obsolete unarmed ships, no airfield suitable for fast pursuits: Army, six battalions of infantry (two Canadian, two Indian, one Scotch, one English), artillery sufficient to man nine 9.2" guns, eight 6" howitzers, eleven 4.5" mountain howitzers, eight 18 pounders, six or eight 4.5" AA guns and a few AA guns of



Map drawn by Mike Bechtold © 2011

lesser calibre, one battalion of engineers, detachments of signals, ordnance etc., - a total of some 9,000 regulars. The Hongkong volunteer force, about 3,000, largely composed of Europeans, trained as infantry or artillery for about two years. Foodstuffs were ample. Pointed questions about ammunition were answered by, "I think we have plenty, you know," or "A goodish bit I believe."

The method to be employed was passive, consisting of a rapid withdrawal to the line of hills stretching across the Kowloon peninsula. When forced to evacuate, withdrawal would be made to the island. The Kowloon line consisted of concrete pillboxes. A few days before the war I still saw no barbed wire, except on the beaches, and no entrenchments. The infantry consisted of three battalions (Scots on the left, two Indian battalions in the center and right) supported by 4.5" howitzers manned by the Hongkong-

Singapore artillery (Chinese and Indian, officered mostly by whites).

The island of Hongkong likewise was defended by pillboxes near the shoreline. The shoreline was wired, but wire nowhere was in sufficient abundance. There were no entrenchments. Pillboxes were equipped with two to six machineguns, many of them light Brens. There was a considerable number of small but excellent searchlights. About ten antitank guns and the eight 18-pounder field pieces were in position on the shore. The Middlesex battalion manned the pillboxes from the north to the southeast and the few on Aberdeen Island. They were supported by one Canadian battalion. The other Canadian battalion had the southeast sector. From east to north the shoreline was lightly held by the Volunteers; this sector was to be taken over by the Indians on withdrawal.

Defense against aircraft was necessarily largely passive. Antiaircraft guns were all located on Hongkong, sited to protect the triangle: Navy yards at Hongkong and Aberdeen, West Point. Tunnels had been dug for an estimated one-sixth of the population. Dispersal areas in the hills (stocked with foodstuffs and materials to construct light shelters) had been designated but not reported to the people. Air raid practices had been held frequently, wardens of various kinds seemed to be well instructed and to know their duties. Practice blackouts were good.

Comments

At the time of taking up my duties in Hongkong about October 1, 1941, I was amazed at the carefree attitude of the officers of the garrison. A gradually increasing knowledge of the state of the defense filled me with consternation which

was shared by Major Stuart Wood, F.A., and Captain Hudson, USN, Commanding the South China Patrol. Captain Hudson, for the Navy, Major Wood and myself, for the Army, tried our best to point out to the Commanding General by means of conversations with his staff officers what we could not consider basic errors. For the Army, these were:

A. The defense was not organized in depth. Behind the line of pillboxes there were no fortifications other than a few concrete OP's, practically unarmed. We considered this the most grievous error, especially aggravated since the lines were not made continuous by trenches. The British stated they did not have sufficient men to man the fixed defenses and still have proper supports and reserves; they did not agree with our contention that the fewer the troops the more mobile should be the defense.

B. The disposition of the Middlesex, with its Canadian support, was extremely faulty. Each battalion should have been assigned its sector. This met with agreement, though nothing was done.

C. The 18-pounders should not have been in position. The guns were World War field pieces, the best weapon against landing craft the British had. Positions taken could not cover the entire shoreline. We believed these guns should have been held in readiness. With suitably selected positions, two guns could have been in action in any part of the island in a maximum of five minutes, and the eight pieces in about thirty. Guns remained where they were, largely in the west and south.

D. When the garrison was reinforced with Canadians, vital time was wasted in sending troops to their battle stations. The Canadians arrived on November 16th and were disembarked in Kowloon. Their one period of five days in the field was spent in Kowloon. The Scots and one battalion

of the Indians remained at their old posts on the island. The reason for the delay in taking up their proper positions was given as lack of barrack space, though how that entered was not clear. The British apparently did not consider a thorough knowledge of the ground to be of much importance.

(Note: The move was started December 5th and was not completed until the night of December 7-8th)

E. The plan for immediate withdrawal to the Kowloon line gave up an excellent chance to harass the advancing enemy, slow down his advance, and cause casualties with little loss to us. It also gave up the chance of making contact with local Chinese guerrilla units.

F. The one airfield was inadequate but could have been promptly enlarged sufficiently to take care of fifty pursuit ships by razing a few blocks of dwelling houses. This the British thought was too costly. As the event turned out, it probably made no difference due to shortage of planes.

G. Not enough use was made of Chinese manpower. Our contention was that Chinese could be trained in a short time to man pillboxes and artillery pieces and to act as labor troops, thus releasing a number of trained good troops for reserves. After much discussion the British did commence the organization of a Chinese machine gun battalion. Enlistments were opened about the middle of November for the first cadre of fifty men. There were over 600 volunteers the first day.

H. There was no proper liaison with the Chinese Kwangtung forces and no proper scheme for operating in the Japanese rear. The only plans were to send a liaison officer to Chinese headquarters and from one to three commandos from Burma, after the war should have started. We wanted

the British to send a large liaison unit, equipped with radio, as soon as possible. We wanted officers from Hongkong to travel in unoccupied Kwangtung, make contact with local commanders, and so be available and equipped to serve as advisers in operations against the Japanese rear. We especially wanted a plan of concerted Sino-British action, even hoping the Chinese could be induced to make a surprise attack on the airfield at Canton. The military representative in Hongkong of Generalissimo Chiang was anxious to obtain British aid and to cooperate along the above lines. These ideas were still under advisement on December 8th.

I. While the foreign population was well instructed about air raids (almost all of them had specific duties in the ARP), the Chinese population was largely uninstructed. Assignments were not made to the inadequate dugouts. Those who could not be accommodated were not assigned dispersal areas or routes to reach them. We suggested that at least one person from each house be actually taken to the proper dispersal area; that definite assignments to shelters be made. The reply was that it would disrupt business for a day and that the Chinese when frightened always run for the hills anyway.

2. Outbreak of Hostilities

About 5:30 a.m., December 8th, there was a clash with Japanese patrols at the Kowloon border. A raid of nine dive bombers on the Kai-tek airfield at 7:55 a.m. destroyed one clipper at her moorings, six CNAC ships and the four army planes on the ground.

3. December 8 – 10

These days were largely dominated by confusion. Fighting was in progress in Kowloon, the withdrawal going according

to plan. Planned demolitions were reported being carried out 100%. The end of the period saw the Kowloon line manned, everything presumably in order.

Air raids were light but frequent. At first everyone who could took cover in the dugouts and stone buildings; in a day or so most people went about their business unless ordered into cover by an air raid warden; within a short time it was realized that the sirens were doing more damage than the enemy and they were seldom sounded thereafter.

Few if any of the Chinese went to the dispersal areas, leaving those of us who had seen the slaughter of civilians at Chungking and Chengtu uneasy at the thought of what havoc just a few bombers might at any moment create in the overcrowded tenements of West Point or Wanchai.

The stores were thronged with officers. Some were hurriedly buying uniforms as they did not have the proper kit. Some were buying provisions, toilet articles, etc., for their families as uniformed personnel took precedence in being served. Everybody was busy in buying essentials.

Visits were made to the Intelligence Section in its old offices in the Naval Dockyard. Information was meagre in the extreme. They didn't know what units were attacking or how many, and did not seem to care. When the sirens went we all trooped out of the wooden building and stood about the yard gossiping until the all clear sounded. There was no unseemly haste in moving the office to its battle station in the colossal air-conditioned

headquarters dugout known as the Battle Box. Visits to the front were delayed owing to difficulties in obtaining the requisite passes.

4. December 11 – 13

On December 11th it was announced that Kowloon could no longer be held and would be evacuated that day. Unfortunately the order included the police force, leaving the inhabitants at the mercy of Chinese looters. So many stories were heard of the ensuing reign of terror that there must have been considerable pillage.

About this time the Japanese emplaced a battery of 360 mm howitzers within range of Hongkong and fired counterbattery and interdiction fires.

On December 12th it was revealed that one battalion of Indians, with a few 4.5" howitzers, were still on the mainland at Devil's Peak. They were evacuated that night across the eastern channel without loss.

The general opinion of the military at this time seemed to be that the situation was not too bad. The collapse of resistance in Kowloon was attributed to the fall of the one pillbox; considered to be

an unlucky break with no particular blame attached to anyone. The withdrawal had been beautifully carried out with almost no loss.

By time the physical strain on military personnel was becoming increasingly evident. From the outbreak of hostilities key personnel had remained at their posts day and night taking almost no sleep, keeping awake on whiskey and tea. At Headquarters gossip seemed to be the order of the day, punctuated by interminable telephone conversations in which the personal element outweighed the official by three to one.

The police force was mobilized into the army but was, I believe, never used in the fighting.

Confusion in the city lessened somewhat as the various administrations and boards became slightly more efficient.

Air raids continued without causing much damage or excitement amongst the populace. The enemy brought up more long range guns but did not heavily bombard the city.

5. December 14 – 19

These days were marked by inaction on our part while the enemy brought up

A squadron of Kawasaki Ki-32 "Mary" aircraft enroute to bomb Hong Kong, December 1941.



US National Archives and Records Administration
(NARA) M1733 Photo 16.



NARA M1733 Photo 15.

Japanese troops march into Kowloon, 15 December 1941.

means for a final assault. The Japanese brought up more artillery, to an estimated 48 pieces of 6" or greater calibre. However, they contended themselves with a minimum of shelling, still counterbattery and road interdiction. Counterbattery on our part was greatly hampered due to lack of sound ranging equipment. Flash ranging telescopes were eventually set up but were of little use as enemy guns were well behind the crest and there was no inter-communication between flash stations. The British seemed perfectly satisfied with sending over 10 or 20 rounds of 6" shells in the general direction of a battery firing; when the battery ceased firing it was announced as "silenced." As far as I know we fired not a round of interdiction fire.

The Japanese set up trench mortars on the Kowloon waterfront from which positions we could plainly see them

working their mortars, shelling downtown Hongkong. The mortar bomb had a thin shell case, a super-quick fuse. Due to the very fine fragmentation, little damage was caused except to morale. I was informed that we could not fire on these targets with 18-pounders because we had no time shell or shrapnel, the short range making percussion shell nearly valueless on the hard-surfaced waterfront. I was informed that the 4.5" howitzers could not reach the target (this information was certainly false). To the best of my observation not even long range machine gun fire was turned on the at first exposed Japanese.

On the night of December 18-19 the Japanese effected a landing on North Point. How this happened I do not know, but from conversations with numerous people construct it as follows: A single motor driven fishing boat containing an officer and twenty men simply chugged up

to the shore and disembarked unopposed. They proceeded inland rapidly, the first body to report them being a police patrol. A ferry service was immediately instituted, operated all night and the next day. Fire was not brought to bear on these boats though they were harried in one or two attacks by motor torpedo boats. By noon of the 19th a force of possible 2,000 men, equipped to include trench mortars, had been landed. They had advanced to Wongneicheong Gap, successfully cutting the main road of communication between the northern and southern parts of the island, leaving only the western coast road (partially dominated by fire) as communication between the two halves of the garrison.

A general counterattack was ordered for 3:30 p.m., December 19th, but this was a dismal failure.

6. December 20 – 25

A continuation of the picture of lack of resolve and inefficiency, defeatism penetrated all ranks. There was no desire to go out after the enemy. Physical condition of the troops became steadily worse while that of the officers improved slightly, as they began to see the necessity of sleep.

The British never properly organized any position. Isolated groups took up position without mortars, machine guns, or artillery support. They did not entrench. They had no communication with their higher commanders or with each other. Supply even of food and ammunition was the worry of the smallest unit commanders, none ever being sent forward automatically.

In the city the water supply had failed due to bursting of exposed mains. This was not as serious as might be imagined since the population promptly reopened long unused wells as well as making use of several running streams.

Intermingling of units had reached what must surely have been the acme of confusion. Commanders everywhere took and used whatever men they could, not only making no attempt to return them to their proper units but actually forbidding them to return.

About noon December 25th a conference down to include battalion commanders was called. The decision to surrender unconditionally was undoubtedly the only one to make under the existing conditions. Surrender was made by individual units from about three to five o'clock.

7. Casualties

It is most difficult to arrive at any reasonable estimate of casualties. British units were so inextricably mixed, and their administration so bad, that not even headquarters had any idea of the losses.

Though most observers with whom I have talked put the figures much higher, it is my guess that casualties in killed and wounded did not exceed 3,000 for the Japanese and 2,000 for the British. Civilian casualties during the fighting probably did not exceed 500.

8. Leadership

In an attempt to show how faulty was the leadership it is believed not amiss to discuss in detail some of my dealings with certain high ranking officers. Not all of the officers with whom I came in contact showed up in the same light as the following four, but in general all ranks displayed the same military ignorance.

A. Commanding Officer of the Western Group, Royal Artillery.

I reported to this major for duty about 10: p.m. the night of December 11th at his OP at Wanchai Gap. His command consisted of four 6" and four 4.5" howitzers. I found him literally bent double with lumbago. He dosed himself liberally with whiskey. At short intervals he groaned with pain. He stated he had not slept for three days; could not trust his orderly to awaken him for telephone calls. No fires were scheduled. To my query as to why the two enemy supply roads were not being interdicted he replied that he didn't know but presumed there must be some reason. For the time my duties were to merely stay awake and call him if the phone rang. I was supplied with the folder of orders and instructions for the artillery, to improve my time; he laboriously climbed into the high bunk hung on the wall. All night long, as soon as the telephone rang, he climbed down to talk, although the majority of calls could have been answered by me. He did not follow the obvious course of lying down on the map table, from which position he could talk over the wall telephone without

much effort. The conversations were largely personal, including inquiries as to the well-being of the caller and mutual friends. Each call lasted several minutes. Then he would groan and say, "This bloody administration, administration all the time!" Not a round was fired by eight the next morning. At this time a captain, to be his executive, reported and I was relieved until dusk.

At 4:00 p.m. I found he was in much better physical condition. As I entered he and his executive were trying to think of what corrections to consider in plotting the direction of a battery recently fired upon. The battery plotted out in the bay. They were elated at having fired twenty rounds of 6" and silenced the battery.

A few days later I was acting as observer in an OP overlooking Aberdeen. Just at dawn three motor torpedo boats came in from patrol and tied up beside one such boat already at the dock. I telephoned this major with somewhat of the following conversation:

"Sir, there are four motor torpedo boats tied up beam to beam at Aberdeen."

"What's that old fellow? I say, how are you making out? Is your food coming out alright? What's this I hear about your sending in three signalmen, that's their post, you know, what?"

"I have no damned use for the signalmen and they had better get to work digging pits for your guns there at the Gap. How about those boats?"

"Well, what about them?"

"The Japs will get them."

"Well, old fellow, that really is sort of a naval show you know. Not our business at all really. Hope you got your breakfast all right. If there is anything I can do for you let me know. Cheerio, old chap."

The first plane over at 8:00 a.m. sank the four boats with one bomb.

B. The Chief of Royal Artillery. On the morning of December 12th

I spent two hours trying to find this Brigadier, eventually locating him at his living quarters. He was standing holding a necktie while his Chinese boy was packing trunks and suitcases. He apparently did not recognize me so I told him who I was, stated that I had been with his Western Group Commander the night before, and asked to see him on matters I considered urgent. He replied courteously that he would be glad to have a talk with me, but he was very busy. Could I wait for him in the Battle Box? After over an hour of waiting he still had not appeared.

About December 15th I again called on this gentleman at his office in the Battle Box. We discussed fires; I pointed out that Hongkong was falling while his guns were cold, suggested that his counterbattery was probably completely ineffective, requested him to fire instead on ships still floating in the harbor, the Standard Oil tanks, and interdiction on the two supply roads. He replied that he had no sound locator apparatus to spot the Japanese batteries, and couldn't we

supply it to him? I said there was probably one chance in a thousand that Manila had some out-dated equipment that could be flown over. If I radioed to find out about that he would cease counterbattery and interdict the roads by which the shells were being brought up? He agreed. I sent a radio to General MacArthur asking if it was possible that he had any such equipment. I was not later in position to observe if the roads were interdicted.

On December 19th I called on the Brigadier at his position in the Battle Box. He did not deny a report I had heard that the Japanese were bringing troops across the channel in small boats and were not being fired upon. I asked why 18-pounders were not being rushed to the scene, to which he replied, "Sir, the guns are at their posts!"

C. The Commanding General. He spent almost his entire time in the Battle Box. He may have visited the troops but I did not hear of it. He did not sleep for the first three days and very little thereafter.

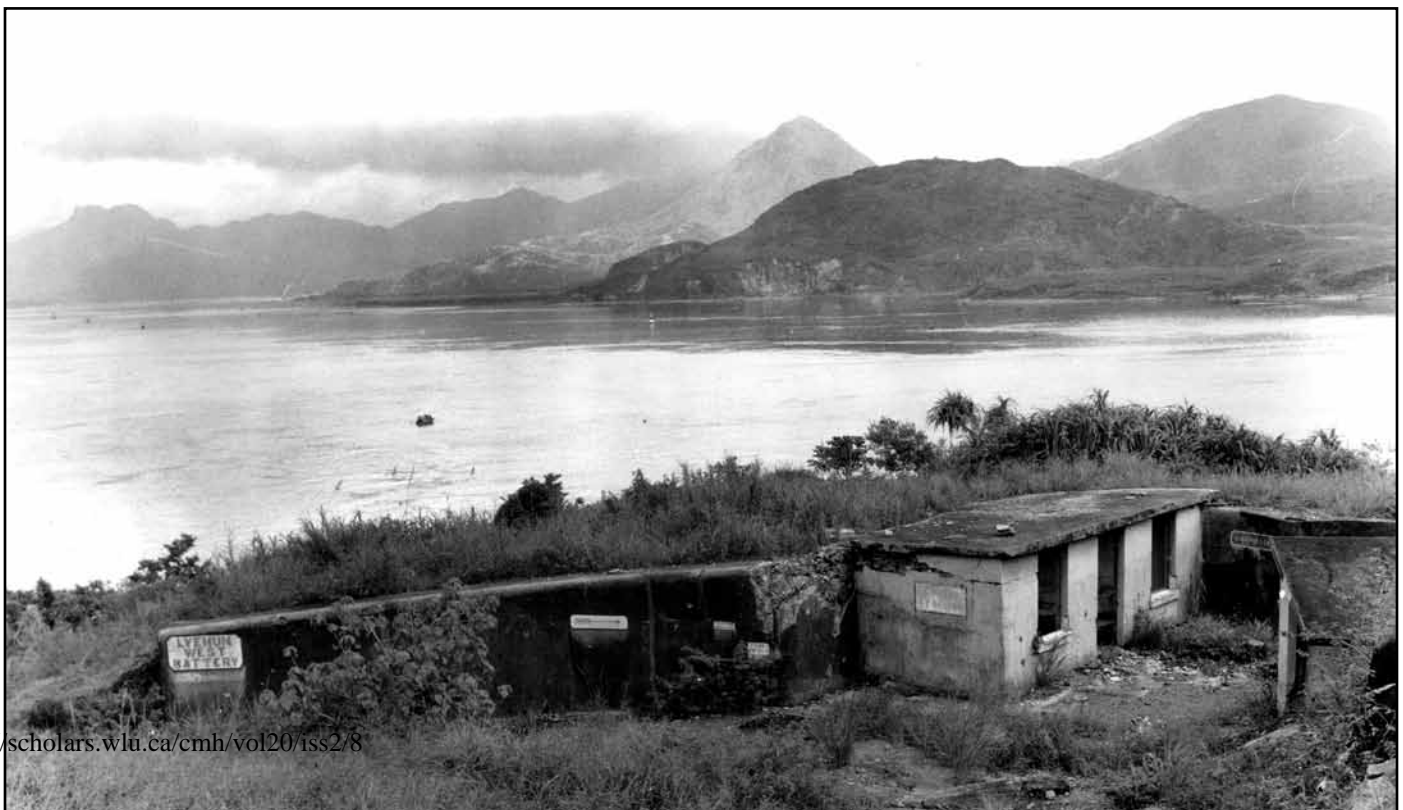
On December 12th he seemed dazed from fatigue. He questioned me about conditions and seemed anxious to hear my views. I felt constrained to report as follows:

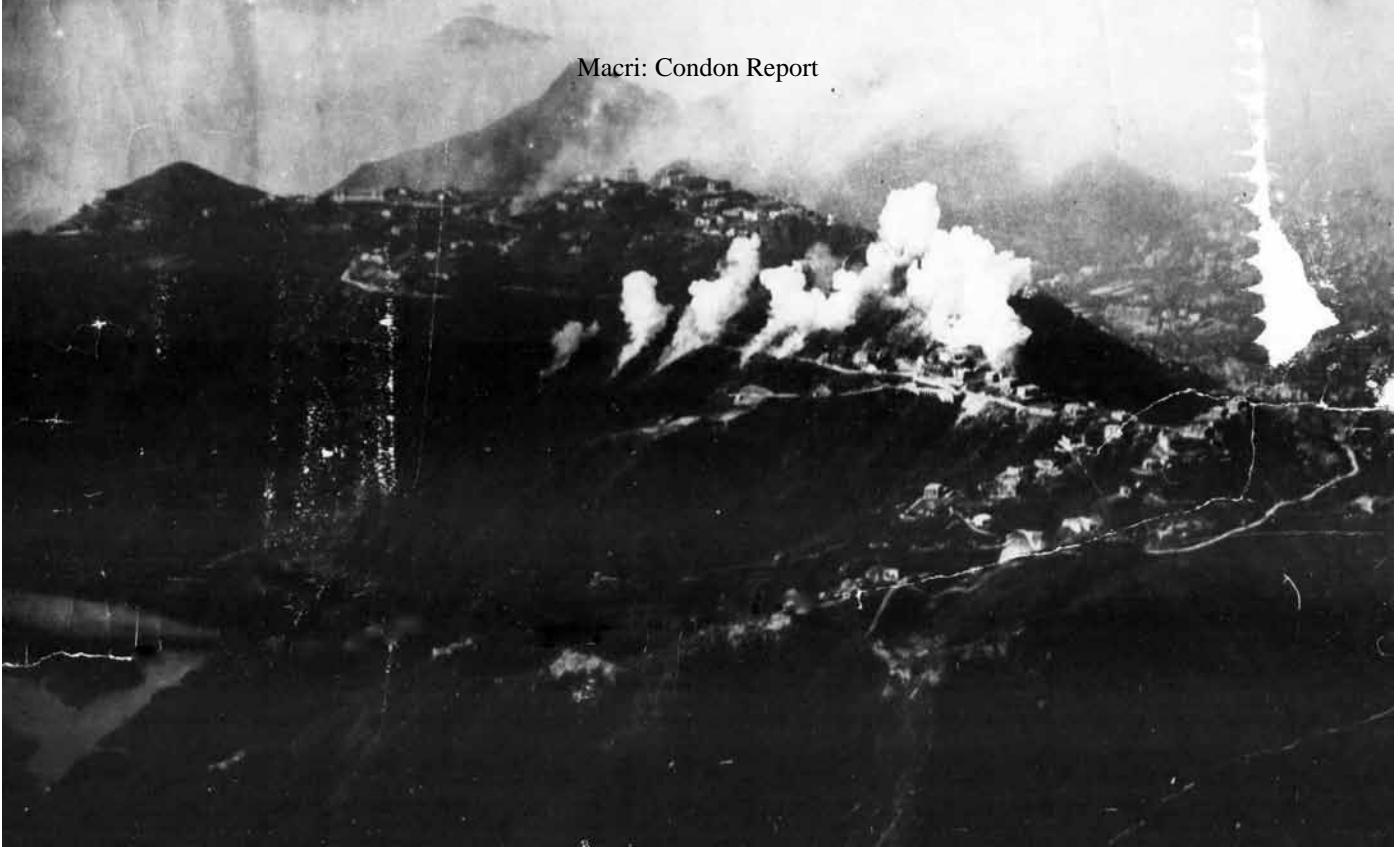
(1) His artillery was being very badly handled, and recommended that he either take over the functions himself or appoint a competent chief. He replied that he was not an artilleryman, that the Brigadier seemed sure of his ground, and that he had nobody else for the post.

(2) Of all targets, the Standard Oil tanks with their thousands of gallons of gasoline stood out as the easiest and most promising. He was surprised that they had not been demolished. (The tanks were never fired upon.)

(3) The men, and to a great extent the officers, were terrifically impressed with the fact that the Japanese had control of the air, we had nothing. I pointed out that actually the Japanese were making little use of this superiority, that bombers were causing comparatively small damage, that reconnaissance planes were seldom seen

The remains of the Lye Mun Battery as they appeared in 1945. The narrows of the Lye Mun Passage were one of the routes used by the Japanese to reach the island.





This Japanese photograph shows the bombing of Victoria, 19 December 1941.

over the troop positions. I felt he should point this out to the command to offset to some degree the general loss of morale. He was interested, but said the men would find it out for themselves. They never did.

(4) Officers did little to bolster the morale of the men. They were largely interested in their own affairs, let the men look after themselves, did not call men to task when they made discouraged statements in their presence. He was apparently startled, stated he would see to a remedy at once. I heard of no action taken.

(5) Officers and men were destroying their own effectiveness due to unnecessary loss of sleep. It is believed a directive was issued to correct this but it was not widely disseminated.

D. Lieutenant Colonel of the Winnipeg Fusiliers. The colonel commanding this battalion had broken under the strain of battle and had been hospitalized, leaving the lieutenant-colonel in command.

On the night of December 24-25 he permitted a great deal of drinking in his CP dugout. He and the major who commanded the right of his line indulged in a several hours' long bitter argument over the proper method of representing troop positions on a map. It was continuing when I left at 1:00 a.m.

The morning of December 25th a staff officer of the commanding general visited the dugout to give orders for a counterattack that afternoon. The Lieutenant Colonel replied, "I'll tell you, sir, that I will not again order my troops out unprotected against mechanized forces, and you can tell that to anyone who wants to know!" The staff officer seemed embarrassed, took no action as far as I know. (Note: The only "mechanized forces" employed were the Bren machine gun carriers of the British.)

9. Incidents

In the belief that the detailed reporting of certain personally observed happenings

leads to a better understanding of events than can general observations, the following incidents are added to those reported in the previous paragraph. They add little to this report, serving only as background.

A. On December 11th great difficulty was experienced in locating an artillery C.P. The C.P. was in a little ravine and neither the sentinel on duty at the ravine entrance nor any member of the adjacent road block guard (which it was necessary to pass) knew of its existence. Upon being informed of this the officer in command at the dugout took no corrective action.

B. At dawn December 12th it was discovered that two artillery supply trucks were parked in a level space near a group of CP's. There was great excitement lest the trucks expose the position of the CP. I was assigned to guide the trucks to the artillery supply headquarters. On the way we passed twenty loose pack mules, partially packed; a short while later saw an Indian detachment of an artillery

pack train proceeding in our direction. They had neither officers nor orders. I sent men back for the loose animals, then took trucks and train to the supply station. The British captain in command of the station seemed at a loss as to what to do with them.

C. The afternoon of December 13th I saw two 4.5" howitzer in position in the center of a large level lawn. Guns were spaced at twelve yards. Camouflage consisted only of nets improperly stretched. There was no digging. Ammunition was neatly stacked outside the nets. Gun crews were resting on the porch of the house. In response to questions, the Gun Position Officer informed me that he could not occupy any of the several natural howitzer positions in the immediate vicinity as this was the position surveyed. He stated that proper fortification would be accomplished that night. After the surrender I again saw this position. Pits were geometric four yards square, one foot deep; removed earth had been placed in a parapet two feet high on three sides; there were no personnel trenches.

D. The night of December 13th I spent at an OP overlooking Hongkong harbor. The Lieutenant in charge and I had difficulty in locating the concrete OP, then found the view of the shoreline was blocked by a house in our immediate front. We moved to the veranda of the house. Wire was extended very slowly and routed badly. No map was available (except the one I carried) although target designation was normally by coordinates. This Lieutenant was to have instructed me in British artillery methods, but it developed that he knew less about them than I did.

E. On December 15th I was instructed to be at 9:00 a.m. at a point near an OP where a car was to pick me up. The car arrived at 12:30 p.m., the British sergeant

driver stating that he had been unable to find the place.

F. On December 15th I relieved a lieutenant at a concrete OP overlooking Aberdeen. The OP was 8' square, so designed that one watcher had to alternate between the two ports in order to observe the entire sector. There was no map. No provision was made for blackout, other than laboriously closing the steel shutters. Furniture was one cot and one small table. Personnel (Indian) was one Battery Commander's Assistant (non-commissioned officer trained as observer) and three signalmen. These men with their equipment literally filled the dugout, their loud talking never ceased. Since the telephone wires were deeply buried there was no possible use for the signalmen so at dusk I had them report to their adjutant, informing him by telephone. He was most reluctant to take them. At dawn an Indian lieutenant came to relieve me. The orders were that the two officers would stand alternate reliefs of 24 hours; the BCA presumably never being relieved (this was actually being carried out in other OP's). The BCA had been on duty for four days. I established reliefs to include the BCA of 24 hours on, 12 hours off. During three days only three meals were sent up, but the distinction between British and Indian rations was not forgotten.

G. On December 19th at about 2:30 p.m. the commander of the Winnipeg Fusiliers received telephone orders for a general counterattack at 3:30 p.m. First objective was Wongneicheong Gap, thence east about a mile, thence north about a mile to a certain hill. Scots would be on the left. That was all there was of the order.

The commander, his adjutant and a major then discussed who was available for the attack, units being referred to by the names of their commanders.

As a name was thought of that officer was summoned to headquarters by telephone, sometimes told to bring his men, sometimes not. It was agreed that eight platoons were available. The major, who was present when the orders were received, was to lead the attack. No supplementary orders were issued.

At 3:30 p.m. only two provisional platoons, with one Bren gun carrier, were assembled. Included in the troops were about ten engineers and twenty Scots, a few dockyard workers. Each platoon had one officer.

No arrangements were made for communication, supply, artillery or mortar support. Each platoon carried one Bren gun in addition to the one in the single carrier. No medical personnel was present.

The path or secondary road to Wongneicheong Gap was perhaps a mile and a half long. After leaving the picket in the vicinity of Canadian headquarters there was not a single defending soldier between there and the Gap. At a gap about half way we ran into interdiction mortar fire at the rate of shell every fifteen seconds. By timing and dispatching his men in groups, the major traversed this spot with only one man wounded. Shortly thereafter one platoon was detached and sent over the crest of the mountain to attack the Gap. It was later disclosed that it had not yet reached the crest when darkness fell, at which time it returned to the CP.

The Major, with the other platoon, followed the path around the mountain. With the Bren gun carrier in the lead, we proceeded cautiously around each nose, reconnoitring the next stretch of road, through which we then ran. Around one such nose we could see a road beyond Wongneicheong Gap, stretching uphill directly away from us. The range was

about 600 yards. For a space of some 200 yards the road was black with Japanese infantry resting. The two Brens were put in position off the road. My suggestion was not to open fire unless the target moved, to send back the carrier to report the target, ask for artillery fire, and bring us more firepower, in the meantime to put our riflemen behind the crest so they could quickly establish a firing line on signal. The decision was to open fire immediately with the two machine guns. One gunner could not identify the target and did not fire. The other fired in bursts of five rounds, by the third or fourth of which the target had dissolved. There was no return fire.

We advanced to the next nose which, somewhat detached from the mountain, formed a ridge about 300 yards long. It ran north and south with its crest only 100 yards west of Wongneicheong Gap. The path by which we had arrived ran thirty feet below the crest. Both north and south the ground fell away steeply from the divide. Looking down from the north end we could see considerably below us at a distance of 200 yards the headquarters dugouts of in one of which the Canadian Brigadier had been killed the night before. At the point where the path rounded the southern end of the crest there was a shallow artificial cave which contained a quantity of abandoned material, including machine guns with ammunition, mortars without ammunition. There was no telephone instrument to connect to the line there. A few dead and two wounded British soldiers were found.

Three hundred yards to the south, but out of our reach, was a private house in which a British post was still holding out with one or more Vickers machine guns. Whenever the Japanese tried to cross the concrete road through the Gap they got a burst of fire in the flank. It was probably

that one group of brave men that had prevented the Japanese from advancing all the way to Wanchai Gap in the West and Repulse Bay in the south within a day after the landing

Dominating the opposite side of the Gap was a stone house, a police station, held by the Japanese.

Darkness was coming on. The Major had not heard from his detached platoon, his other six to follow, or the Scots. His men were tired and hungry, many had not eaten that day. After having just seen enemy troops outnumbering him three or four to one he decided to wait for reinforcements. We could hear the Japanese entrenching and talking on the hillside facing us, but in the gathering dusk could see nothing of them. A CP was designated on the path. While the Lieutenant posted local security detachments the Major went on reconnaissance from which he failed to return.

About 9:00 p.m. some 150 Scots arrived. They were obsessed with the idea of going to the headquarters dugouts to the north. I guided them part way and returned to the CP. Another platoon of Canadians had arrived, with four officers, including a major. They decided to storm the police station at once. If there were any orders given, I didn't hear them. The officers simply walked off, followed by as many men as felt the urge, and took the station with grenades and rifle fire. The Major and two other officers were killed in this attack. A strong detachment, with the surviving officer, was left at the building, the remainder withdrawn to the shelter of the ridge.

I slept at the CP for several hours. When I awakened the Lieutenant of the 1st platoon was not in evidence, nor had he left word of his whereabouts. I went out to inspect the pickets. The northern

one, posted by me in an antiaircraft machine gun pit, had disappeared. Their machine gun was in the pit, as was also a Japanese rifle. The center picket I could not locate. The personnel of the southern picket was found on the path well behind their post. The sergeant left in charge stated he thought there was no more use for the picket. I ordered him back immediately with the three Bren guns then available, with orders to support the police station by fire when it was attacked. Before having an opportunity to post other security detachments, I heard a great babble of voices from a road below us to the south. Going to investigate I met the Lieutenant of the 1st Platoon and several officers of the Scots. The noise was made by the Scots who had gone to the HQ dugouts, rested, then marched up the concrete road between us and the police station and were in a compact mass in a hollow below. They claimed they had been fired upon from the police station. Shouting brought out that it was indeed again in Japanese hands. As no one had heard the sound of fighting they must have been careless and been completely surprised.

The Scots wanted to attack at once, before daylight. They could not be persuaded to send a message back and let the artillery blow up the house for them. They requested that I give them one minute of fire from the Brens to cover their advance. The Lieutenant of the 1st Platoon was sent to collect his men and post them to protect our left flank. I went to the one picket, found them so lax that two Japanese with grenades were discovered less than twenty yards from the three machine guns. The guns were grouped closely together in a position with no field of fire. When moving them I found that in the group of fourteen men only one was a machine gunner, only two others had ever

fired a machine gun. Our preparation was duly fired but was not very effective, one gunner sending every shot over the roof of the building.

The Scots made little use of grenades, though they came within grenade distance of the police station. The attack was repulsed with, I believe, two officers killed, two wounded. Losses in men (as in the case of the Canadian attack) were comparatively light.

As dawn broke the Scots decided to take over the ridge. I sent all my remaining men, 26, into the cave previously mentioned. The senior sergeant was carefully instructed to hold all the men there until my return, to find the Lieutenant and instruct him to assemble his men at the same place. I got the Bren gun carrier and returned to the Canadian CP. The carrier was sent to the cookhouse for rations and tea while I made my report. The CO had not previously had a single report of this action. He instructed me to bring all Canadians back for a rest, did not agree that they could rest where they were while remaining in a position to support the Scots if needed. My request for medical assistance could apparently not be complied with, nor could I be provided with morphine. Laying a telephone wire was for some reason not considered feasible.

At the cookhouse the NCO in charge refused to issue rations or make tea until I threatened him.

On the return to Wongneicheong Gap we passed several wounded men making their way to the rear. At one point we were hailed from the woods by a lieutenant of engineers who had a detachment with him. He wanted to know if he was needed at Wongneicheong Gap, said he had no orders. I told him he was badly needed. We were sniped at from the mountainside above us. When we arrived, one hour

after having left it, the cave was empty except for a badly wounded sailor. No one was in sight at the CP or the ridge. I went up the ridge, found a number of Scots lying down, well scattered. They directed me to their lieutenant, also lying down and too tired to rise. He could tell me nothing of the Canadians. He didn't want any rations or tea; the men had rations and were too tired to walk to the tea. He did not want any ammunition. He ignored my suggestion that at least a guide be posted on the road. In the hearing of a number of his men he told me things were terrible, himself and the men exhausted.

The wounded sailor had died. The road back was deserted, the engineer detachment having disappeared, as had the walking wounded, some of whom we saw dead by the roadside.

At the Canadian CP I could not convince the commanding officer of the desirability of immediately reinforcing and holding the ridge and clearing out snipers in its rear. The ridge was a strong natural position, blocking advance to the west while dominating the roads from north and south, and seemed to me especially advantageous as an artillery forward OP.

H. Before dawn December 21st I was sent to report to the engineers at their headquarters in their private house in the vicinity of Wanchai Gap. When I reported to the Colonel commanding he was supervising the issue of rum, a half tumbler per man. He said a platoon was being sent out under a lieutenant to relieve a detachment on the southern crest of Mt. Cameron, and he requested me to join them. As again no map but mine was available I acted as guide.

The ascent of the steep mountain was exceedingly laborious; the men could not keep up with even the slow strength-saving pace set by me. It was necessary to halt for a rest every fifty yards.

Arriving at the position we found it deserted. Some abandoned equipment, including several rifles, was lying about. Prompt visual reconnaissance disclosed no Japanese troops in sight. The location was excellent for an artillery OP as all roads and trails to the west and south of Wongneicheong Gap were covered in part. The only pair of field glasses was a poor one carried by me. We could plainly see the house in which was located our headquarters, but a suggestion to establish a visual signalling station was vetoed.

It was decided to divide the command to cover the two routes of possible attack. Men were held on the reverse slope with a minimum of observers forward.

During the day my men were required to be separated and to be quiet, with the result that they were asleep when not on duty and were quite rested at night. The Lieutenant did not follow that policy. During the morning the peak of the mountain was shelled from Kowloon, the overs falling close to the Lieutenant's group. The bulk of this was withdrawn to dead space near my position, without casualty. The Lieutenant was quite worried over making contact with Canadians supposed to be on our left and took almost his entire unit on an expedition to make it. He returned, successful, after three hours of difficult crawling and climbing to his original position. The net result was merely to tire further his men since the half mile gap remained open.

Many of the men had brought beer, a few water. It was all consumed by noon. No rations were carried. By nightfall the Lieutenant expressed, in the hearing of some men, his dissatisfaction with the situation. He sent a runner with a verbal message to request (a) that the platoon be relieved as it was exhausted, (b) that rations, water and rum be sent up. No



NARA 342-FH-3A02644-54567AC

This photograph was taken during an American B-24 raid on Hong Kong in late 1944. The image is taken looking northward and shows the southern part of the Hong Kong mainland and the northern part of the island. A great cloud of smoke can be seen rising from the Kowloon docks. Across from Kowloon is the city of Victoria. In the bottom right corner is the Lye Mun Passage. The mountainous nature of the colony is clearly shown here.

reply was received; the runner did not return. In the hearing of the men he said we were all too tired to put up much of a fight.

After dark we moved to the forward slopes where we could well cover the three important draws. We had no entrenching tools so did not improve the natural position.

During the day and night there was no enemy activity in our vicinity. What little activity we had observed in the distance during the daytime was not reported, even though the runner had been sent at dusk.

At dawn my relief was up. I returned to the engineer CP with two runners. The Colonel was astonished that rations had not been sent up but did not seem to know whom to blame. The two runners

were returned heavily laden. I brought up the question of an OP, suitable observing instruments, a visual station, telephone wire, and entrenching. He said he would think about it, asked me if I would conduct the relief up that afternoon.

The relieving platoon was commanded by a captain. Again we took no entrenching tools, signal flags or lights. Few grenades were carried; we would

take over the grenades there (the fifty were considered to be quite a number) as well as the two submachine guns. A large jug of rum was carried. We arrived at the position just before dark, again found it deserted, with more abandoned equipment and rifles in evidence. Rum was issued, the posts then manned as before. At dawn the Captain asserted he had no orders to man the position after daylight and withdrew the platoon. The Colonel displayed no perturbation at thus giving up a position which had not even been attacked.

I. About December 23rd the Governor visited the Canadian CP at Wanchai Gap. He made quite a speech, telling the officers of the importance of Hongkong and why it must be held to the last ounce of fighting power. They were entirely unimpressed and upon his departure made disparaging remarks.

J. About 2:00 a.m., December 25th, a British Lieutenant of engineers reported to the Colonel of the Scots. He was directed to put his detachment in position about 300 yards from the CP, defending a trail from the south. When he expressed ignorance of the trail (although shown him on the map) a sergeant major was designated as his guide.

About 4:00 a.m. I took a patrol of Scots down this trail with instructions to proceed some two miles and return, driving back any enemy patrols encountered.

Arriving at the position presumably occupied by the engineers I found it vacant and sent back a runner to find out if the detachment had been ordered withdrawn. We proceeded down the path a half mile when we heard a body of men making their way up a dry watercourse below us. The patrol was in a beautiful position to drop grenades on them. Just in time, we found it was the engineer detachment, still with its guide. They had been lost, had covered in a roundabout

route over five miles, and were well tired out. I showed the Lieutenant his position.

K. On the morning of December 25th the Japanese made the most intensive bombardment of the battle, using planes, guns and mortars against the British positions. Casualties were not heavy but the moral effect was considerable. From about 8:00 the Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the Canadians started receiving telephone calls from the Major with whom he had had the alcoholic argument the night before. The Major was in a key pillbox near Aberdeen and was being heavily attacked. He was very concerned about his badly wounded and insisted that an ambulance be sent (obviously impossible) to take them out. Some time during the morning he capitulated.

L. About noon December 25th the CO of the Scots said he had just received orders to go out with all personnel and defend the headquarters position to the last man. With security detachments on the hills above, the ravine could have been made hard to take. We abandoned it, climbed the steep ravine and took refuge in a private house and its yard near the crest of a hill. The Canadians occupied one slightly below us. The Colonel was at this time was called to a conference, to which he departed alone.

Left in the house were his adjutant and a young Canadian officer so drunk he could scarcely stand up, and perhaps eighty men with Scots predominating. The men drank freely until the liquor ran out.

Dive bombers were dropping large phosphorous bombs in the general area, setting fire to a few houses and starting brush fires. Artillery from Kowloon was bombarding house after house near us but fortunately did not register on the one we were in nor that of the Canadians. Many mortar shells fell in and around us without causing more than

minor casualties, perhaps three or four men killed or seriously wounded. Men commenced to leave singly, in pairs and threes, over an exposed path to the west; the adjutant made no effort to stop them. No attempt was made to fight back.

At 3:00 p.m. the Colonel returned, ordered the white flag raised.

10. Comments on the British

While comments have been freely indulged in throughout this report it is believed the following two points may have been insufficiently stressed:

1. The individual courage shown by officers and men was amazing in view of their low morale. The officers especially went forward to their deaths without hesitancy although they had in their hearts no hope of success.

2. Destruction of valuable property was poorly carried out. The enemy captured large quantities of oil, arms, and munitions. It is probable that even some of the 9.2" seacoast guns were taken undamaged and still with a considerable supply of ammunition.

11. Comments on the Japanese

1. Tactics of the Japanese seemed suited to the situation. On the occasion of landing at North Point, they advanced through difficult terrain with startling speed. Their quick exploitation of this landing was probably the outstanding feat of the battle. For the remainder of the time their advance was made cautiously, consolidating the ground as they went. They maintained light pressure on the British by means of small patrols, infiltrating through the British lines for short distances. British positions were located, probably by a combination of patrols, aerial and terrestrial observation, and were then mortared. The prompt withdrawal of the British was followed by methodical occupation by the Japanese.

2. The moral effect of the Air Corps in forcing the decision was great. The actual contribution was minor by comparison. Chief bombing targets were antiaircraft guns and emplaced artillery. I saw no bombing or machine gunning of troops in the open. The value of their aerial reconnaissance is unknown; they apparently employed no special planes for the purpose but relied on their pursuits and dive bombers for reports. In conjunction with artillery fire, great damage was done gun positions, but which factor was the more important is problematical.

3. Artillery fire was very light considering the number of guns available. This could no doubt be attributed to the difficulty of ammunition supply. There were stories of very accurate shooting but the firing which I personally observed was inaccurate, dispersion was great both in range and deflection. Interdiction firing was usually one round a minute, evenly spaced; on at least one occasion the rounds were erratically spaced. Key roads were not interdicted constantly but were rather harassed for perhaps one hour, then let alone for several hours. During the off periods vehicles could proceed in full view of the enemy without drawing fire.

4. As indicated above, the infantry placed chief reliance on their light mortars. Machine guns were little used, rifles were used only at point blank range, a condition seldom met with. Patrolling was effective, especially at night, showing the result of long training. Their skill in camouflage was remarkable; this was undoubtedly a considerable factor in their success.

5. Discipline of the troops as observed after the capture was good. There was little drunkenness. The usual tendency to arrogance towards the conquered was observed. Looting by individuals is believed to have been on a minor scale. Many atrocities were undoubtedly

committed (I saw one Chinese being beaten to death) but there was no general rape of the city.

12. Lessons

The battle was a demonstration in blood of the correctness of military thought in the United States. Lessons to be drawn are believed obvious. Two points had such an influence on the outcome of the fighting that they are deemed of sufficient importance to mention again:

1. During maneuvers all ranks should be trained to take as much sleep as the situation allows. There is a natural tendency to remain unnecessarily "on the job" without rest, leading promptly to great reduction of the mental powers and later to physical collapse.

2. Men must be taught to overcome their natural fear of airplanes so that they may not be overly frightened by the roar of a few dive bombers.

13. Hongkong Under the Japanese

The first thing immediately apparent after the fall of the Colony was the unreadiness of the Japanese to govern it. There was great confusion caused by a reported fight for power between the civil, military, and gendarmerie authorities. Orders were issued and countermanded, regulations made and changed or not enforced. Currency values, water, electricity, rental rates, business permits, and transportation were a few of the questions remaining unsolved on June 30th.

Immediately after the surrender shipping filled the harbor, engaged in the wholesale looting of the city. Estimates of up to one hundred shiploads, largely of foodstuffs and metals, were taken out the first month. Thereafter looting proceeded on a gradually diminishing scale. It was still in progress on June 30th. Looting of foodstuffs was exceedingly serious to the

population as the Colony produces almost nothing.

Urged by the Japanese, perhaps half of the Chinese population returned to their villages in the provinces. Portuguese likewise returned to Macao. Citizens of belligerent or unfriendly countries were interned. Citizens of truly neutral countries received very summary treatment; some were imprisoned, their businesses all but confiscated outright.

No reports were received of any extensive fortifications, although there were rumors that the airport was being enlarged.

As of June 30th, the Colony was a picture of desolation and despair, with food the primary thought of all strata of the population. Many deaths have occurred from starvation, with many more to come. Medicine stocks are very low, with no prospects of alleviation.

The Chinese may not have loved their English masters, but it is a certainty that having seen the "New Order" at work they would welcome back the old with open arms.²

Editor's postscript

Condon's report says a great deal but one of its most important aspects is how it expresses the prejudices held by some American officers against their new allies.

Condon had direct personal involvement in the course of the Battle of Hong Kong and that makes his report useful, especially in his description of events at the Wong Nei Chong Gap and his interaction with some of the garrison's officers, but partly because of his own restricted field of view as a combatant on the ground as well as the colony's relative isolation from outside events, comments on matters outside of his own personal experience tend

to skew the report. His assertion, for example, that the Japanese did not commit armour to the battle is contradicted by Company Sergeant-Major George MacDonell. While the fight for Wong Nei Chong Gap was winding down the sergeant-major and a platoon of the Royal Rifles of Canada destroyed a light AFV with Molotov cocktails along the eastern side of the island near Red Hill. Major-General P. Montague, in command of the Canadian Military Headquarters in London, also reported the presence of Japanese light AFVs during the battle.³ More significantly, comments about the absence of coordinated Allied strategic planning for south China are similarly contradicted by officers who served with Detachment 204.⁴ Coordinated plans were discussed in Chungking on 9 December 1941 for example, by Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek, British Military Mission

commander Major-General Lance Dennys, and the head of the US Military Mission, Brigadier-General John Magruder, in Chungking.⁵ Plans were also discussed in Washington prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War.⁶

Following his release from captivity, Major Condon was eventually promoted to colonel and he went on to serve in Y Force under the command of Brigadier-General Frank Dorn at Kunming.⁷

12299, reel T-17901, file 3/Cdn Ops OS/1, memorandum, 3 February 1942.

4. Hong Kong University (HKU) B.A.A.G. Series, volume II, "Capture, Escape and the Early B.A.A.G.," Mission 204 War Diary, 8 December 1941.
5. NARA, RG 407, entry 360, box 736, file 400.3295 4-14-41 sec. 2, telegram no.90 by Magruder, 9 December 1941.
6. LAC RG 25, vol.2920, file 2670-A-40C-1; telegram no.2132 by Massey, and "Hong Kong as Vital Bastion," *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 November 1941.
7. NARA, RG 111-SC, new series box 412, Army Signal Corps photo no.241604, 23 October 1944.

Notes

1. US National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), RG 165, entry 360, box 736, newspaper clipping, 11 August 1942.
2. NARA, RG 165, entry 77 NM 84, box 1738, File Islands, Hong Kong, report by Condon, 20 August 1942.
3. CSM George MacDonell, interview by the author, 16 August 2006. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 24, volume

David Macri is a graduate of York University (BA) and Wilfrid Laurier University (MA) and recently completed his PhD at Hong Kong University. He, like so many other young historians, was greatly influenced by participation in the Canadian Battlefields Foundation Study Tour.

Dear Sir,

My article on "CH-147D Chinook Nose Art in Afghanistan" was published in *Canadian Military History* 20, no.1 (Winter 2011) while I was on another deployment into Kandahar and the Forward Operating Bases to collect Op KEEPSAKE material prior to the change in the mission from that of combat to training the Afghan military. This trip allowed me to gather additional information on the Chinook nose art. In his introductory notes the editor-in-chief, Roger Sarty lamented that the Vargas-style nose art has fallen out of vogue. Roger will be pleased to see that "Miss Behavin'," an image in the Vargas style, has recently been added to the stable of Chinook nose art. (See back cover) Although not nearly as revealing as the artwork which adorned No.6 Group RCAF bombers during the war, this newest example of Chinook nose art does exemplify



the pleasant curves of the female form which in this case is accented with red hair and a low-cut form fitting red dress.

During my recent trip into theatre, I not only had a ride on "2 for Hooking" but I discovered that the Canadian artwork was a modification of the artwork which was originally on the helicopter when it was received from the U.S. Army. Unfortunately in May 2011 "2 For Hooking" was lost in a crash in which four persons were injured. The nose art from this helicopter may eventually be recovered and returned to a museum in Canada.

WO Ed Storey
CEFCOM HQ – War Diarist