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## Review of "The Endless Battle: The Fall of Hong Kong and Canadian POWs in Imperial Japan" by Andy Flanagan

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Andy Flanagan. *The Endless Battle: The Fall of Hong Kong and Canadian POWs in Imperial Japan*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 2017. Pp. 210.

*The Endless Battle: The Fall of Hong Kong and Canadian POWs in Imperial Japan* is the story of New Brunswicker Andrew (nicknamed Ando) Flanagan's service with the Royal Rifles of Canada during the Second World War. It is not a monograph on the experience of all Canadians who fought in the far-off British Crown colony and the cruel treatment they received at the hands of their Japanese captors. It is Ando's personal story told in a narrative format with direct quotes from Ando himself provided throughout the book. This account relies heavily on a journal he kept during his captivity and an interview given later in life. This interview was conducted by his son, who is also the author of this work. As the subject of this work and the author share the same name, this creates some confusion for the reader until it is stated that Flanagan is known as Andy. Little analysis is provided by Flanagan in telling his father's story. Few other sources are used outside those referenced in the introductory chapter and no bibliography or citations are provided in the book.

A short introductory chapter details how war came to Hong Kong in 1941 and why Canadian troops were sent to reinforce the garrison of the colony. Flanagan follows Ando's story from his childhood in Jacquet River, New Brunswick, to his enlistment in the summer of 1940, his training, and journey to the Far East. The fighting in Hong Kong is a small part of the narrative as the battle was short. The years Ando spent in Japanese captivity in both Hong Kong and Japan make up most of the work. Ando's story is told through humorous anecdotes, heartbreaking recollections of the deaths of his comrades, and stories of sheer survival.

Flanagan never claims that his work is academic in nature, but this does not excuse some of his more glaring mistakes, both historical and stylistic. He falls for some of the more pervasive myths that surround the Battle of Hong Kong and the events that followed. He claims that the battle "is arguably the last untold story of the Second World War" (p. 11). This is simply untrue. The battle itself has been covered at length. Official military reports and histories were released to the public in the 1940s and civilian works began to appear in the 1950s. Books on the years the garrison spent as prisoners of war (POWs) were not released as early as accounts of the battle,

with the first ones published in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> The story of the Battle of Hong Kong has been told many times before this account, including memoirs from numerous other veterans. Ando's story, however, was untold until the publication of this book and thus this work is of immense value to our understanding of the Battle of Hong Kong and the years the garrison spent in Japanese captivity.

There are also stylistic mistakes that interrupt the flow of the narrative. In describing a Japanese ship that Ando worked on in Japan, a full website address is provided to link to information of the ship's sinking. There is no problem in providing this information in itself but its inclusion should have been in an endnote to facilitate the flow of the narrative. Aside from these few errors, this work does justice to Ando's story.

The poor treatment of Ando and his fellow POWs makes up, rightfully so, a large portion of the narrative. The brutality of individual Japanese guards left its mark on Ando and the other POWs. The actions of Kanao Inouye, known by the prisoners as the "Kamloops Kid" or "Slap Happy," were particularly violent and cruel. Inouye was born in Kamloops, British Columbia to Japanese immigrant parents. He returned to Japan for school, where he was when war broke out, and became an interpreter for the Japanese Imperial Army. Several POWs died because of the beatings they took from Inouye. Ando remembered his own run-in with the Kamloops Kid. Inouye wanted an apology from him for how Inouye was treated as a child in Canada and beat him when he refused. Ando could do nothing in retaliation. Inouye was tried for treason against Canada after the war and was hung in Hong Kong in 1947.

Yet, the story of Ando's battle and military service are not all depressing recollections of the horrors he faced but includes the humour and activities of daily life. When the Royal Rifles were stationed in St. John's, Newfoundland, for example, they were invited to tea by the women volunteers at the YMCA. The soldiers were invited to provide entertainment during the event. A crude joke was told by

<sup>1</sup> Some examples of books that provide a wider account of the Canadian POW experience in Hong Kong and Japan are Brereton Greenhous, *'C' Force to Hong Kong: A Canadian Catastrophe* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1977); Charles G. Roland, *Night's Journey into Day: Prisoners of War in Hong Kong and Japan, 1941-1945* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001); and Nathan Greenfield, *The Damned: The Canadians at the Battle of Hong Kong and the POW Experience, 1941-45* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2010).

one soldier, much to the shock of the volunteers who abruptly ended the show. Ando fondly remembered his time in St. John's and that he "had more fun in those few weeks than at any other time" (p. 36). Another anecdote supports the argument that the Canadian troops who were sent to Hong Kong were not fully trained, albeit presented in a lighthearted way. Ando recollected being ordered to check a mortar and having no idea what to do. In order to check the weapon, he fired it and nearly hit the officer who gave the order. He was not asked to check a mortar again. Ando also made numerous humorous observations throughout the war. For Christmas 1943, the POWs received a message from Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. Ando noted that some of the troops used it to roll tobacco and he wondered if they might be Conservatives. While Ando may not have intended humour with this retelling, it nevertheless demonstrates that humour could be found while the POWs were struggling under Japanese captivity.

Flanagan makes it clear that when the garrison became POWs, it did not mean they completely stopped trying to fight the Japanese. Acts of sabotage are detailed as one way they fought back against their captors. When Ando worked on an airfield at Hong Kong, he recalled that when a large Japanese plane landed on it for the first time it crashed due to the poor construction of the airfield which was purposefully done by the POWs. There was fear that the POWs would be punished but the Japanese engineer in charge of the project was executed. Clearly, cruelty was not solely directed at the POWs by the Imperial Japanese Army. Sabotage was also carried out in Japan after Ando was moved there to work on merchant ships. After surviving the squalid conditions of "Hell Ships," he noted that "throughout our stay at the shipyard we figured out how to keep fighting for home" (p. 91). Sabotage was directed at slowing the pace of construction and damaging rivets so the ship would come apart at sea. Resistance to the Japanese allowed the POWs to have some agency over their lives and to continue the fight. Flanagan relies only on Ando's account of the motivations behind the sabotage. If other sources were consulted on this topic, they are not referenced in the book. Regardless, this is a glaring omission by Flanagan.

The most striking part of Ando's story is the difficulties he faced upon returning from the Far East. There are frequent references to his post-war drinking habits. Upon returning from Japan he especially needed beer to fall asleep. He would wake up in the middle of the

night screaming in Japanese and whisky made his nightmares worse, so he avoided it. The nightmares of his fallen comrades being tortured by his captors were mentioned multiple times. Alcohol appears to have been his coping mechanism. Post-traumatic stress disorder is not identified by the author but Ando's account shows signs that he suffered from it. No other works are referenced on the topic of post-war soldier readjustment which is another flaw of this book. The Battle of Hong Kong was truly endless for Ando as he suffered from his war service until the end of his life in 1993.

This work has material that can be used by the serious scholar while providing a gripping story for the casual reader of military history. The telling of Ando's story adds to our understanding of the Battle of Hong Kong and the years of captivity. A new perspective allows for another source to be referenced when researching the events of this period. This work is rather short and can be quickly read but this does not detract from its value. Ando's struggles upon his return home bring to light the true costs of war and what those who survive it have to struggle with once the war is over.

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