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FEATURE

Brigadier J. K. Lawson's Diary

October to December 1941

TYLER WENTZELL

Abstract: This article contextualises and reproduces the diary kept by Brigadier J. K. Lawson during his command of C Force at the Battle of Hong Kong. The diary covers events from Lawson's departure from Ottawa by rail on 23 October 1941 until his death in battle on 19 December. Allied soldiers hid Lawson's diary and other effects from Japanese guards during four long years of imprisonment and had them delivered to his widow after the war.

BRIGADIER JOHN KELBURNE LAWSON commanded Canada's contribution to the Hong Kong garrison (C Force) from 15 October 1941 until his death on 19 December. He was a decorated veteran of the First World War, the first Canadian graduate of the staff college in Quetta and one of only a handful of Canadians with experience at the British War Office's Directorate of Staff Duties. On the outbreak of the Second World War, he was a major serving as General Staff Officer 1—essentially, the chief of staff—at Military District 2's Toronto headquarters and one of only forty-eight serving staff college graduates in Canada.¹ He would have deployed to England with the 1st Canadian Infantry Division had he not fallen ill with a kidney stone. Upon his recovery, he was promoted to colonel and posted to Ottawa as the Director of Military Training and Staff

¹ John A. MacDonald, "In Search of Veritable: Training the Canadian Army Staff Officer, 1899-1945" (MA Thesis, Royal Military College of Canada, 1994), 97.



Col. Lawson in the fall of 1940. [Library and Archives Canada PA-501269]

Duties.² When the British requested a Canadian contribution to the Hong Kong garrison, Lawson was among the very few Canadians with staff training, knowledge of the British and British Indian Armies, the strategic perspective afforded by his time at the War Office and not already committed to Canada's forces in the United Kingdom.

The British government formally requested that Canada provide two infantry battalions for Hong Kong on 19 September 1941. Lawson's Directorate of Military Training and Staff Duties had evaluated the battalions under consideration—the Royal Rifles of Canada (RRC) and the Winnipeg Grenadiers—as being “not suitable” for deployment due to their long service in garrison duties in the West Indies and Newfoundland and their requirement for further training. But the battalions' experience in garrison duties arguably made them well-suited for what was expected to be much the same in Hong Kong. Hostilities with Japan were not yet considered imminent. Chief of the General Staff (CGS) General H. D. G. Crerar selected the battalions for the operation on 9 October.³

Three weeks after requesting the battalions, the British further asked that Canada provide a brigade headquarters. Lieutenant-General Kenneth Stuart, acting CGS, immediately recommended Lawson as its commander. General Crerar and Minister of National Defence James Layton Ralston approved Stuart's recommendation.⁴ They appointed Lawson as the commander of C Force on 15 October 1941 and promoted him to brigadier.⁵

The days after Lawson's appointment were a whirlwind. Lawson first had to disentangle himself from his busy work running the Canadian training establishment and hand it over to Colonel John Carl Murchie then take command of the 1,973 personnel of C Force. The constituent elements of the force were still spread across the country, from the signallers in Debert, Nova Scotia to the Winnipeg

² See Tyler Wentzell, “Brigadier J. K. Lawson and Command of ‘C’ Force at Hong Kong,” *Canadian Military History* 20, 2 (2011): 14–26.

³ Sir Lyman P. Duff, *Report on the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Crown Colony of Hong Kong* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1942), 13–34. See also Paul Dickson, “Crerar and the Decision to Garrison Hong Kong,” *Canadian Military History* 3, 1 (1994): 97–110; and Terry Copp, “The Decision to Reinforce Hong Kong: September 1941,” *Canadian Military History* 20, 2 (2011): 3–13.

⁴ Duff, *Report on the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Crown Colony of Hong Kong*, 48.

⁵ Service Files of the Second World War – War Dead, 1939-1947, John Kelburne Lawson, RG 24, volume 30553, Library and Archives Canada [LAC].

Grenadiers in Manitoba. Simply getting this force to the west coast, let alone Hong Kong—the 1917-19 Siberia expedition being the only other Pacific deployment of Canadian forces up to that point—was a huge undertaking. Fortunately, by virtue of Canada's Permanent Force having been so small during the interwar years, Lawson already knew some of the key officers. For instance, Colonel Patrick Hennessy, his chief of staff and logistics planner for the deployment, worked with Lawson at National Defence Headquarters and Lieutenant-Colonel William James Home, commander of the RRC, was originally from Lawson's regiment, the Royal Canadian Regiment. Lawson and Home had variously been stationed together in both London, Ontario and Toronto.⁶

Within eight days of Lawson's appointment, he bid farewell to his wife, Augusta Hawkesworth (née Wilson), and his two young sons, Arthur John and Michael Ivan. Lawson and the other members of C Force departed by rail without fanfare. Their destination was kept secret, known only to the headquarters and the battalion commanders. The public only learned of Canada's first contribution to the theatre after the Canadians safely arrived in Hong Kong. Lawson told the newspapers, knowing full-well of the training deficiencies he had to remedy, "We are ready for anything that might occur."⁷

Lawson's diary entries, reproduced below, are based on a certified true copy made by Major G. W. L. Nicholson of the Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) on 13 March 1946. It is reproduced with the permission of DHH and the Lawson family.

October 1941

Thursday 23

Left Ottawa 2000 hrs in train with half RRC [Royal Rifles of Canada].

Friday 24

Cold wind & some snow. Wrote G.⁸

⁶ Service Files of the Second World War – War Dead, 1939-1947, John Kelburne Lawson, RG 24, volume 30553, LAC; and author's telephone interviews with Michael Ivan Lawson and John Arthur Lawson, 18 January 2011.

⁷ "Hong Kong Force 'Set for Anything'," *Toronto Daily Star*, 17 November 1941.

⁸ "G." likely refers to his wife Augusta – sometimes spoken as "Gusta."

Saturday 25

Graham & Archie Hurd⁹ at Winnipeg Sta. [station] Band to take men for march.

Catch up with first train. Lyndon¹⁰ changes train.

Melville¹¹ collects souvenirs. Saskatoon in p.m.

Sunday 26

Prairie sunrise.¹² Edmonton-Jasper-Mt. Robson.

Special order [presumably by Lawson, providing more detail as to C Force's task, although not yet its destination] cheered by the men.

Monday 27

Arr [arrived] Vancouver 0930 hrs. Alec-Buston-Purvis & Co visited Capt of Robert (Hart).¹³ Sailing orders changed from 6 to 9. Some men go off, but return when ordered. Later another attempt, but stopped by offrs [officers] and N.C.Os [non-commissioned officers].

Tuesday 28

Much work to get men's meals better. Issue Trg [training] Order. At Vic[toria] in a.m. Put out just before noon. Cool, slight motion, first casualties from seasickness.¹⁴

⁹ These were perhaps relations of Captain Edmund Lionel Hurd, quartermaster of the RRC, but this is merely speculation.

¹⁰ Major Charles Augustus Lyndon of Alberta was a Royal Canadian Armoured Corps officer serving as brigade major. He was killed in a friendly fire incident on 22 December 1941.

¹¹ Private David Shearer Melville was part of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps contingent in the brigade headquarters. Born in Scotland, he joined the Canadian Active Service Force just two months before departing for Hong Kong. He was killed on 19 December 1941.

¹² Lawson may have felt some nostalgia for "prairie sunrises," as he came to Canada in 1914 and first worked for the Hudson's Bay Company in Edmonton. He enlisted in the 101st Regiment (Edmonton Fusiliers) in August 1914 and later served as a Permanent Force staff officer in Edmonton and Calgary during the interwar years.

¹³ Sir Robert Hart had served as a British consular official in Canton, near Hong Kong, and in the customs service of China's imperial civil service. Hart died in 1911. It appears here that a member of his staff had retired to Vancouver. Presumably, the delegation in question went to speak to an expert on the region. However, it is unclear who the members of this delegation were. There is no one on the C Force nominal roll with the name Buston or Purvis. No one in C Force had the name 'Alec,' although twenty-eight members had the name Alexander or Alexandre.

¹⁴ C Force set sail onboard the HMT *Awatea*, a British troop ship, and the HMCS *Prince Robert*, an armed Canadian merchant cruiser commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy just one month earlier. The bulk of the troops were aboard the *Awatea*, but a small contingent travelled on the *Prince Robert*.

6 ∴ *Brigadier J.K. Lawson's Diary*

Wednesday 29

Easy roll. Pay parade takes all a.m. and part of p.m. A little trg commenced, but have to put on pressure.

First movie -- Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers.

Thursday 30

Time back 1 hrs during night. Gentle swell. Sick up to 40, mostly seasick.

Getting warm.

Training getting under way.

Men sleep on deck.

A.A. L.M.Gs. [anti-aircraft light machine guns] mounted.

Friday 31

1 man died -- Heart and Sea.¹⁵

Trg Wpg Gren [Winnipeg Grenadiers] going well but RR of C still sticky. Drawing Drill from hold.

November 1941

Saturday 1

Go into drill.

Started PT [physical training] for older offr.

Sunday 2

Up 0700 Honolulu.

Dock by 1040 for oil & water.

Mr. Wallace - Consul.

Mr. Dawson (CPR) Vice-Consul.

Jap ship next dock, TAIYO MU [Maru].¹⁶

Hula Hula girls.

1st Lecture on Hong Kong.

¹⁵ Private David Morris Schrage of the RRC died from a heart attack on 31 October 1941. Schrage was born in Poland and enlisted in the Canadian Active Service Force in Toronto just four months before his death. He was buried at sea.

¹⁶ The *Taiyo Maru* was subsequently discovered to have had three Imperial Japanese Navy officers onboard, disguised as civilians, who conducted reconnaissance in support of the planned attack on Pearl Harbour.

Monday 3

PT continued. Message from [HMCS] P[rince].R[obert]. re shouting "See you in Manila" while in Honolulu. Only possible source of leakage P.R.'s. message in clear of Sat. asking Awatea re oil [indecipherable] there. Replied accordingly.

Tuesday 4

Rather more of a roll.

Crawford¹⁷ gives excellent lecture on sanitation in tropics.

Wednesday 5

Rolling - calmer by evening.

Get slight kink at PT.

"Swiss Family Robinson" in movies.

Thursday 6

Meridian Day.¹⁸

Iris (?) Non [the meaning of this line is unclear].

Friday 7

Inoculated.

Calm.

Lecture - People and Religion.

Saturday 8

US sub sighted during night.

Carried out gun firing in a.m.

Lecture - Jap Army.

Sunday 9

Ch [church] service with RR.

Very warm.

¹⁷ Major John Neilson Brown Crawford, a physician serving in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, survived the battle. Despite the challenging circumstances of providing healthcare to his fellow prisoners of war in the years that followed, Crawford distinguished himself for his devotion to duty, especially during a diphtheria outbreak in 1942. After the war, Crawford was made a Member of The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

¹⁸ This refers to the date on which the HMT *Awatea* crossed the International Date Line.

8 ∴ *Brigadier J.K. Lawson's Diary*

Lazy day -- torn muscle still annoying.

Monday 10

Drafted report to CGS.

Resume PT.

“News” says war in fortnight. Hope our transport arrives.¹⁹

Tuesday 11

Armistice Day. 2 min [silence].

Have senior offrs for drink before dinner.

“Old Soldiers Never Die” as we go to mess -- big hand.

Pictures - [indecipherable]

Lecture Force “C” [indecipherable]

Very hot.

Wednesday 12

Following wind - v hot.

Worst yet as we approach Manila.

Winston C[hurchill] says UK will declare war if Japs do so against US.

Wish he would let us get to Hong Kong first.

Thursday 13

Sight land 1500 hrs.

Mindanao Channel dense foliage - beaches - [indecipherable]

Concert in p.m. [indecipherable] throughout ship.

[indecipherable]

Friday 14

Dock Manila 0930 hrs.

[HMS] Danae - addnl [additional] escort.

Rec [received] message from Hong Kong.

¹⁹ Lawson had hoped that some of C Force's 212 vehicles would arrive in time to accompany them onboard the *Awatea*. Lawson recorded elsewhere that despite his “repeated representations at National Defence Headquarters” regarding the importance of departing with at least some of these vehicles, none arrived in time. The *Awatea* sailed with “two holds practically empty.” The vehicles shipped later and did not arrive in time to be used in the battle. Duff, *Report on the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Crown Colony of Hong Kong*, 52–61; and C. P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, Volume 1: *Six Years of War, The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), 448–49.



Brigadier Lawson meets with Hong Kong governor Sir Mark Young on 16 November 1941.
[Library and Archives Canada C-049740]

US subs and other war craft.

Air Force. Very hot.

Left 1600 hrs. Blue-grey sea. [indecipherable] - yellow, green & red sails.

Last of lectures.

Saturday 15

Choppy. Pack made for landing.

Ship changes course during night to avoid Jap cruisers.

Sunday 16

Arr Hong Kong. Met by Govr (Sir Mark Young), Major Genl [Charles] Maltby, [indecipherable]

Bands for troops to march to barracks.

Put up at Peninsular Hotel.

Major Hedgecoe,²⁰ 1 Mx [Middlesex], attd. [attended] Lyndon to Hospital.

²⁰ Major Sidney Frank Hedgecoe was the second in command of the Middlesex Regiment. He survived the battle, captured on Christmas Day 1941, as well as his time as a prisoner of war.

Appointed to comd [command] H.Q. Bde [brigade] [indecipherable].

Monday 17

Unloading until 0500 hrs. Many offrs from China Comd liaising with opposite numbers. Telephone being put in Bde office.

GOC [General Officer Commanding, i.e. Maltby] over & has quick look around. Cable from CGS.

[indecipherable] round Island in p.m. with GOC. Tea at Flagstaff Ho. [hotel]

[indecipherable] Def. Sch. [Defence Scheme] in evg [evening].

Tuesday 18

To Island with COs [Commanding Officers] and recce positions.

See Lyndon in hospital. Signed book at Govt Ho. [Government House] Recced Bde HQ, Bn HQs [brigade headquarters and battalion headquarters] & some pill boxes. Call on 1 Mx. Dinner with Hedgecoe. Doughty²¹ and Hennessy.²² [indecipherable] joins party later.

Wednesday 19

Bns still far from unpacked.

Stores chaotic. Tell 2 Ech [Echelon] to keep away from Bde in order to give S.C. [Service Corps] a chance.

Hotel early for reading.

Thursday 20

To HQ Adm [indecipherable]

²¹ Doughty is possibly a short-form, nickname or misspelling/transcription error referring to Honorary Captain Francis J. Deloughery of the chaplain service. Deloughery's reminiscences of the period before the battle include one mention of a dinner with Lawson and Hennessey, but that particular dinner took place on 27 November 1941. Deloughery survived the battle and his period of detention in the POW camps.

²² Colonel Patrick Hennessy, of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps and the brigade's chief of staff, was born in Cork, Ireland. He served in the British Army in South Africa. He immigrated to Canada shortly before the First World War, served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force with distinction (receiving a Distinguished Service Order, a Military Cross, the French *Croix de Guerre* and a Mention in Dispatches) and continued with the Permanent Force in the interwar years. Hennessy was killed on 20 December 1941, the day after Lawson.

Battle HQ G1 [staff officer responsible for personnel] Newnham.²³

Wallace to lunch.

COs confer p.m.

Arrange transfer of Bde HQ.²⁴ Engage A.L. Wong \$.35.²⁵

Friday 21 to Sunday 30

[No entries]

December 1941

Monday 1

[No entry]

Tuesday 2

Diamond Wedding Sir Robt Ho Tung.²⁶

GOC's dinner. Lt Col Simpson²⁷ arrives.

Liaison from W.O. [War Office]

²³ Colonel Lanceray A. Newnham was a veteran of the First World War, serving in the British Army and as a staff officer in the New Zealand Division, receiving the Military Cross. He was captured during the Battle of Hong Kong. He was executed by a Japanese firing squad on 18 December 1943 for his role in planning a mass escape. He did not divulge the details of the plan despite torture and was awarded a posthumous George Cross.

²⁴ Lawson takes command of what became the Island Brigade, consisting of most of C Force and the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, a machine gun battalion defending the network of pillboxes around the island. The remainder of the garrison (the 5/7 Rajputs, 2/14 Punjabs, Royal Scots and the Canadian signals section) were stationed on the mainland under the command of Brigadier Cedric Wallis. When it became clear that Lawson would not simply command C Force as a brigade, but potentially a mixed force including British, Indian and Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, the British granted him a commission in the Gloucestershire Regiment and authorisation under the British Visiting Forces Act such that he could lawfully command the forces available in different combinations. Canadian Military Headquarters, "Report No. 163: Canadian Participation in the Defence of Hong Kong, December, 1941," November 1946, 19, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH).

²⁵ Lawson engaged A. L. Wong as a servant.

²⁶ Sir Robert Ho Tung Bosman, of mixed Dutch and Chinese background, was a prominent businessman in Hong Kong. The celebration was the sixtieth wedding anniversary of his marriage to Margaret Mak, sometimes MacLean.

²⁷ This was likely Colonel John Thomas Simpson of the Royal Army Medical Corps. Simpson survived the battle.

12 ∴ *Brigadier J.K. Lawson's Diary*

Wednesday 3

Tour of frontier with GOC -- see Japs.²⁸
Bazaar.
Peppers' sister-in-law²⁹ at dinner.

Thursday 4 to Wednesday 10

[No entries]³⁰

Thursday 11

Withdrawal from Mainland.
D Coy W.G. returns.
Many reports in evg.
Shooting at P.B. [pillbox] 15. A.R.P. [air raid precautions] Wardens at P.B. 20. Fire on hill near 20.
Parachutists at LHK [Little Hong Kong, or Aberdeen Village].³¹ Wind up generally.

Friday 12

Find I am in comd of all tps [troops] in Island. Quite impossible with staff and facilities available.³²
I go to Fortress HQ for discussion. Arrangements made for E & W comds [East and West Brigade commands].
Much activity evg as result of dynamite ferry being fired on and blown up. Also comms with GREEN³³ is gone.
Decision to withdraw from Devil's Peak [on the mainland].

²⁸ Lawson accompanied Maltby on a tour of the Gin Drinkers Line positions on the mainland, held by the Royal Scots.

²⁹ Brigadier A. Peppers was a staff officer in Maltby's headquarters. Peppers survived the battle.

³⁰ Lawson makes no entries during the Japanese attack on the Gin Drinkers Line on 8 December and its collapse. D Company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, Lawson's reserve, deployed to the mainland to reinforce the Mainland Brigade, withdrawing on 11 December.

³¹ This note speaks to the fog of war and the inadequacy of intelligence regarding Japanese plans and capabilities. There is no evidence of Japanese use of parachutists during the battle.

³² Lawson's headquarters was quickly strained as he received and took temporary command of the depleted and disorganised units withdrawing from the mainland.

³³ "Green" was likely Signaller Hymie Greenberg, one of the signallers sent with the Mainland Brigade. Greenberg was killed on 19 December 1941.

Saturday 13

Withdrawal from Devil's Peak completed.

Visited D Bn and Lie Mun Coy [of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps].

Japs send envoy calling for surrender.

Civilians cross from Kowloon.

Sunday 14

Shelling & bombing increased.

[HMCS] *Thracian* sinks ships. Comms disrupted. Trip to HQ at night.

See *Thracian's* stunt.³⁴

Returned 0300 hrs 15.

Monday 15

Bright sunny day.

Japs bombed Aberdeen & Shelled NE sector throughout day.

RS [Royal Scots] come under W Inf Bde.³⁵ Enemy war ships reported SW.

Searchlight on Aberdeen fm [from] Lamma [Island].³⁶

Tuesday 16

Bombing ABERDEEN. One MTB [motor torpedo boat] lost. Considerable shelling. Very fine clear day for arty [artillery] observation. Watch dive bombing from Mess at lunch.

Wednesday 17

"Hate" [enemy fire] against NW PBs [northwest pillboxes] 0200 hrs. Mortars.

³⁴ The HMS *Thracian* was the sole destroyer supporting the garrison, which Lawson saw in action on at least this one occasion. Two days later, the ship ran aground. Although it was recovered and limped back to Aberdeen, the damage was sufficiently extensive that the ship was deliberately scuttled the next day. The crew fought as infantry during the battle. Despite these efforts, the ship was subsequently recovered and used by the Imperial Japanese Navy.

³⁵ Lawson's West Brigade consisted of the Canadian signals section, the Winnipeg Grenadiers, the 2/14 Punjabs, a company of machine gunners from the Middlesex Regiment (those defending the pillboxes in his area of operations) and the much-depleted Royal Scots.

³⁶ Japanese forces had landed on Lamma Island, to the southwest of Hong Kong Island, and installed searchlights affording them observation of Aberdeen and its port facilities by day and night.

Jap envoys come over 12 noon and say that as all mil installations have been destroyed, no use going on fighting. Govr told them to go back and destroy some more. Peace until 1500 hrs.

Extended [indecipherable] 1630. Nothing much after that.

Thursday 18

Quiet night.

APC [Asiatic Petroleum Company] Oil at NP [North Point] set on fire. Planes took advantage of smoke as cover for dive bombing. Shells passing over W.N.C. [Wong Nai Chung Gap, the location of Lawson's West Brigade headquarters]

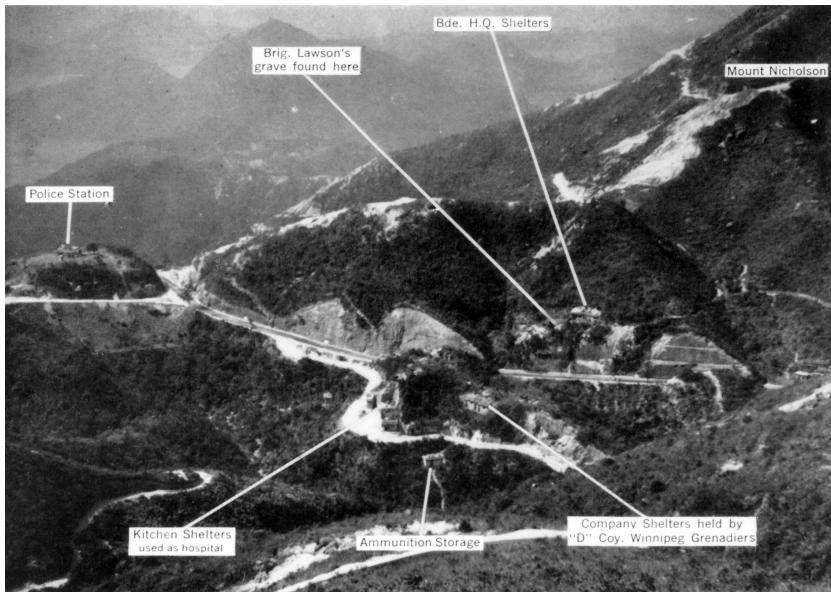
Lawson's diary entry on the evening of Thursday, 18 December was his last. On that "quiet night," three Japanese infantry regiments crossed the narrows and landed on the shoreline in the East Brigade's area of responsibility. These forces moved rapidly inland, bypassing defended positions and seizing high ground in the centre of the island, including Mount Parker and Mount Butler (also in the East Brigade's area of responsibility). Lawson sent A Company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers to retake Mount Butler. They seized their objective in a bayonet charge and put up a determined resistance against Japanese counterattacks. Company Sergeant-Major John Robert Osborne threw himself onto a grenade during this defence. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.³⁷

By dawn, the Japanese had re-taken Mount Butler and pushed their forces further inland. Japanese soldiers soon held Jardine's Lookout, the high feature dominating Lawson's headquarters, and a police station south of their position along the main road. Lawson decided to move his headquarters to the planned secondary position near Mount Nicholson, but time had run out.³⁸ Lawson radioed Maltby at 10 a.m., stating that his headquarters was taking direct fire and he was "going outside to fight it out."³⁹ For Lawson, the war was over.

³⁷ *The London Gazette (Supplement)*, 29 March 1946.

³⁸ Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, Volume 1, 480–81.

³⁹ Major-General C. M. Maltby, "Operations in Hong Kong from 8th to 25th December, 1941," Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 20 January 1948, 63.



A postwar photo of the battle area where Lawson was killed on 19 December 1941. The photograph was taken from the approximate location of Japanese troops on Jardine's Lookout. [C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War Vol. I Years of War*]

At the war crimes trials after the war, Japanese General Takeo Ito testified that Lawson had died with great courage. He had ordered that Lawson be buried where he fell, near his bunker, with full honours. Ito said that he had personally prayed at Lawson's gravesite. He stated, "the Canadian officer must indeed have been a valiant man in sacrificing himself in action."⁴⁰ This respect did not translate to the living. Lawson's surviving Canadian, British, Hong Kong and Indian comrades suffered terribly under the brutal conditions of the Japanese prisoner of war camps. Incredibly, despite the privations of this detention, some of Lawson's personal effects, including this diary, all found their way back to Canada at war's end and into the hands of Lawson's widow. The incredible dedication to hiding these items for four long years was surely a dual action: one of respect of Lawson and one of defiance against their Japanese captors.

⁴⁰ Patrick Brode, *Casual Slaughters and Accidental Judgments: Canadian War Crimes Prosecutions, 1944-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 164. Lawson's body was subsequently reinterred at the Sai Wan War Cemetery, where it lies today.

The specifics of each item's journey are unclear, but a letter from Subedar Abdul-Hakim Khan of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps to Major-General Maltby provides the best accounting of the route taken by Lawson's cap. Khan explained to Maltby that Captain Mateen Ansari of the 5/7 Rajput Regiment had found the cap on Lawson's body—although he had not known the Canadian brigadier's name—and kept it hidden during his imprisonment. Ansari and Khan had become confidants during their efforts to counter Japanese recruiting work for the collaborationist Indian National Army. When Ansari and Khan were both held in the Ma Tau Chung Camp as POWs, Ansari told Khan, "My earnest desire was that I shall give this cap to the bevered [sic] family of the Brigadier on my safe arrival to India but under the present circumstances my life is very doubtful. I have a sincere hope of you being a right person for the task entrusted shall discharge this duty after my death. May God save you from the hands of the enemy who is very tyrant to perform this sacred cause."⁴¹ The Japanese executed Ansari on 29 October 1943. He was posthumously awarded the George Cross for his resistance to the Japanese.⁴²

Khan held on to the cap for two more years and carried it with him when he returned to his home in Budaun at the end of the war.⁴³ Six months after his letter to Maltby, the cap made its way to the Department of National Defence's Estates Branch who mailed it on to Lawson's widow.⁴⁴ Lawson's diary, medals, dog tags and a silver identification bracelet followed a similar route. They gave the family something by which to remember the man, the father and the husband. Unfortunately, the cap and the diary were lost in a fire years later.⁴⁵ Lawson's medals, and the Memorial Cross awarded to Augusta Lawson, are now on permanent display at the Royal Canadian Military Institute in Toronto. A certified

⁴¹ Subedar Abdul-Hakim Khan to Major-General Charles Maltby, 25 October 1945, 593-D16, Hong Kong, DHH.

⁴² *The London Gazette (Supplement)*, 16 April 1946.

⁴³ Subedar Abdul-Hakim Khan to Major-General Charles Maltby, 25 October 1945, 593-D16, Hong Kong, DHH.

⁴⁴ Colonel L. M. Firth to Mrs. J. K. Lawson, 17 April 1946, 593-D16, Hong Kong, DHH.

⁴⁵ Author's telephone interviews with Michael Ivan Lawson and John Arthur Lawson, 18 January 2011. See also Craig S. Smith, "A Doomed Battle for Hong Kong, With Only Medals Left 75 Years Later," *New York Times*, 23 December 2016.

true copy of Lawson's diary remains in the Directorate of History and Heritage's files today.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tyler Wentzell is a military historian, legal scholar and infantry officer. He has a law degree from the University of Toronto, a Master of Arts in War Studies from the Royal Military College and is completing a doctoral degree in law at the University of Toronto. His first book, *Not for King or Country: Edward Cecil-Smith, the Communist Party of Canada, and the Spanish Civil War* is in print with the University of Toronto Press.