



MERCHANT NAVY COMMEMORATIVE THEME PROJECT (MNCTP)



NEWS RELEASE

**TODAY MARKS THE
80TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE BATTLE OF HONG KONG**

DECEMBER 8, 2021

OTTAWA, Today – Mr. Stéphane Ouellette, President and Chief Executive Officer, Merchant Navy Commemorative Theme Project (MNCTP), thanked Veterans of the Battle of Hong Kong for their sacrifices and contributions in defending our freedoms and systems of democracy.

On December 8, 1941, on the same morning that Pearl Harbor was bombed, the Empire of Japan launched an attack on Hong Kong (a then British Colony) in Southern China. In addition to Pearl Harbor and Hong Kong, Northern Malaya, the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island were also invaded during December 1941.

The Battle of Hong Kong lasted for 17 perilous days and nights with no relief or rest. "C" Force to Hong Kong (the military designation for the Canadian contingent), was the first Canadian unit to see action in the Second World War. These brave defenders fought with fierce tenacity. All this despite the facts that: they were without Air, Naval, and Artillery support; they were hopelessly outnumbered by battle experienced Japanese divisions; and, they did not receive reinforcements or additional supplies.

CSM John Osborn, the first Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross in the Second World War, was picking-up several grenades, and was rapidly tossing them back to the enemy. When a grenade fell in a location where CSM Osborn was unable to retrieve it in time, he shouted a warning as he shoved one man aside, throwing himself on the grenade, which exploded and killed him instantly. When the battle finally ended, the remaining soldiers were placed in a Prison of War (POW) camp for nearly 4 years. During this time, POWs were forced to work as slave labourers, subjected to daily torture and starvation.



CMS John Osborn enjoying a few moments of levity with two of his boys, Gerald (l.) and George (r.), around the time of his unit's mobilization in September 1939.

When victory of the War in the Pacific was achieved on August 14, 1945, several months passed before our Canadian soldiers were able to begin the long journey home. Many were subsequently hospitalized for durations ranging from weeks to years, often suffering from lifelong physical and psychological disabilities, and many regrettably died young.

Approximately 290 Canadian soldiers perished and 500 were wounded during the Battle of Hong Kong, and 264 died in POW camps. Of the 1,975 Canadians that served in Hong Kong, more than 1,050 were either killed or wounded. With over a 50% casualty rate, these Canadian soldiers suffered one of the highest losses of all Canadian theatres of action during the Second World War. These statistics do not include losses experienced by Chinese and Indian soldiers, accounting for 35% of the entire fighting force. In addition, contemporary research on the Battle of Hong Kong, for instance, focuses predominantly on Canadian and British military history, and overlooks the contributions of nations such as China and India. China was the first country to enter what was to become the Second World War, and was an ally to the United States and the British Empire from shortly after Pearl Harbor in 1941, to the Japanese surrender in 1945. China's overall losses during the Second World War included over 14 million people. Up to 100 million became refugees during the 1937 to 1945 conflict with Japan.



(Left to Right) Canadian WWII Veteran Mr. George MacDonell, His Excellency Luo Zhaohui, Ambassador, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, and the Honourable Senator Joseph A. Day attending the 70th Anniversary of the Victory Against Fascism and Japanese Aggression, held at the Hong Kong Memorial Wall, Ottawa, on June 19, 2015.

Associated Links

- [Canada in Hong Kong: From 1941 to 1945, Our Forgotten Heroes – 80th Anniversary of the Defence of Hong Kong | YouTube](#)
- [Warrant Officer Class II John Robert Osborn | Canadian Virtual War Memorial | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)
- [Impressions of Hong Kong – Heroes Remember – Testimonials | Veterans Affairs Canada](#)
- [Heritage Minutes: Osborn of Hong Kong | Historica Canada | YouTube](#)
- [Defence of Hong Kong Monument | Government of Canada](#)
- [Canadians captured in Hong Kong receive compensation | CBC Digital Archives | December 11, 1998](#)
- [Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association Website](#)

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