GLOBE AND MAIL

# Japs Fed Canadians Food Rejected by Pigs

NOV 11 '45

211-001-002

Canadians captured at Hong Kong ate food that pigs refused to touch, Rev. Uriha Laite, an army chaplain who survived 44 months in a Japanese prison camp, recounted yesterday at St. Paul's United Church, Avenue Rd.

Mr. Laite, who was an honorary captain in the chaplain service, was captured with the Winnipeg Grenadiers at the fall of Hong Kong, Christmas Day, 1941. Preaching to a large congregation at the morning service, he wore the bright ribbon of the Military Cross awarded him for his gallantry during the seige and after.

For three days and four nights immediately before the Japs captured Hong Kong, he was with a small body of men who were cut off from the other defenders. During this time, he attended 37 wounded officers and men whose only protection was a flimsy shelter. "They would say to me, 'Padre, fix my hand,' or, 'Tie my bandage,' or, 'Sit and talk to me,'" he recalled, "but there was never a mumur of complaint from them. They went into the fight untried troops on Dec. 18, but overnight they proved themselves."

**Were Refused Medicine**

After capture everything seemed to be against the Canadian and British troops, Mr. Laite said. "The food was awful from the beginning," he continued. "We got rice in the morning, rice at noon and rice at night.

"It was rice that the rats had run through and had left their droppings. Sometimes there were worms in it. We used to pick the worms out until one day one fellow held up a worm two inches long and said, 'Here's some proteins,' and ate it. After that we ate it worms and all. We figured it didn't make any difference because the rice was steamed and the worms with it when it was cooked."

Commandant of the prison camp was a Col. Tokinaga, who brought some pigs into the camp. The pigs refused to eat the food that the Canadians had to live on. The diet was rice, chrysanthemum leaves, and sweet potato tops. "No wonder the men died," Mr. Laite said. "One man who was 210 pounds when he was captured, weighed 93 pounds at the end. There was an English boy there who weighed 135 pounds when he entered the camp. He was weighed two days before he died and his weight was 44 pounds."

At the time Hong Kong fell, Mr. Laite continued, there were $5,000,000 worth of medicines on the island, but the prisoners could not get as much as an aspirin from the Japanese. "Later on, officers were allowed to draw some pay," he said, "and they pooled it in an amenities fund. Then through the kindness, the charity, if you like, of a Japanese guard, we were able to buy some medicines in the Chinese black market.

"When we were captured, the Japs said that in three months they would break our spirits. But they never did. At the end of 44 months, they said, 'We can't understand why you have such spirit, why you can still laugh and joke'."



Rev. Uriah Laite

**Gave Eggs to Sick**

Of 70 parcels sent to his group, only seven were received. "But everything we did get was shared," he said. "If one man got a cigaret, five or six would share it. Toward the end we got some eggs and we were supposed to draw lots for them. I never drew. Men who had starved and had never seen anything like an egg for years gave their eggs to the sick."

What had sustained the men Mr. Laite said, was the spirit of comradeship among them. He continued: "Since I have come home after 44 months of hell and have listened to the bickering and muttering of men and women over small, minute things, I have sometimes been almost tempted to cry for the prison camp again. We hear men broadcasting hate, animosity and envy over the air in this Canada of ours. No wonder I sometimes feel that the concentration camp had greater comradeship and Christian spirit. We must start at home, each of us, and get out of our hearts and our lives, especially our church life, everything contrary to the spirit of Christ."

At the Hong Kong camp, he said, men who were without faith at the start found Christian faith in prison. Himself he had conducted a religious service every evening. Every Sunday he had gone to the men in hospital. "The weakest man in camp," he said, "were those who had an anti-Christian, anti-God attitude. As one man said, they fell like a custard pie. That was because they had no firm foundation to build on. Theirs was a foundation of sand and it gave away."

At his religious services communion was received in the form of rice, bread and water. Over 100 men had asked to join the church on profession of faith. He told of going to the so-called "agony room" where sick men suffered the tortures of the damned. "I was there as one boy died," he said. "There he was dying, in degradation and poverty yet faith shone in his eyes. I asked him if he had faith and he said, 'Don't worry about me, Padre, my faith is alright.'"

**Got Aid from Japs**

He met a Christian Japanese, a Mr. Watanabe, who had studied in the United States and was a Lutheran minister. "I only met him once," Mr. Laite said, "and he advanced to me with his hand outstretched and said, 'I am a Christian minister.'"

"He contravened all the orders of his superior officers and got us food in Hong Kong. He talked to the men of the futility of war. I was told later that almost everything extra we got, right from the start was due to him. Later on his family was wiped out in a raid on Japan by one of our bombers, but the food still came and he was the same with us. I wonder how many of us right in this church would have acted as he did.

"Do you wonder when I say that I came back without any bitterness and that our men have no bitterness? Mr. Watanabe, like Christ in the story of the fishermen on Galilee, stood on the shore and brought the light to us.

"I sometimes wonder why I was spared. I think it was that I should try and break down these barriers of creed, race and color and with the help of Christ, to write His name across the sky and make His will succeed. Nationalism is not enough. Our civilization is not enough. Sentiment is not enough. All must be fused in Christ and follow His will."

Mr. Laite is now pastor of Henderson-Jubilee United Church, New Westminester, B.C. He is touring eastern cities under the auspices of the United Church Crusade for Christ. On Friday night Mr. Laite will speak at College St. United Church, Bathurst and College Sts.

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