



**SUPPLY
LINE**

Percy Wilmot

Canadian Army

Percy was 49 when he enlisted in the Royal Rifles of Canada. He was a Japanese prisoner of war in Hong Kong, and was lucky to make it home.



Snapshot of Rifleman Percy H. Wilmot.
George Metcalf Archival Collection
Canadian War Museum 20070117-032 (cropped)

Life Before the War

Percy Wilmot was born in London, England, in 1891. He emigrated to Canada, enlisting when the First World War broke out in 1914. Health problems prevented him from going overseas.

A machinist by trade, he served in the **militia** in peacetime. In 1940, at 49, he enlisted in the Royal Rifles of Canada. The St. Catharines, Ontario resident had a wife, Agnes, and two children. His son, Stanley, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Prisoner of War in Hong Kong

In 1941, Canada sent 1,975 troops to help defend the British colony of Hong Kong from possible Japanese attack. These troops were from the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Royal Rifles of Canada. Percy volunteered to go, arriving there with the Royal Rifles in November.

The Canadians had only been in Hong Kong a few weeks when the Japanese attacked on 8 December 1941. By 25 December 1941, the battle was over, and Hong Kong had fallen. 290 Canadians were killed, and 493 were wounded. The survivors became prisoners-of-war.

Percy was among the Canadian troops taken prisoner. He had been seriously injured during the battle, suffering many wounds, including a shattered elbow.

Percy spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. His health collapsed under the prison camp's appalling conditions. In addition to his wounds, he suffered from illness and malnourishment. He also contracted dysentery and malaria, and suffered from jaundice and eye problems. He had a heart attack while in captivity.

Remarkably, despite his age and poor health, Percy survived. His camp was liberated in September 1945. It was, he wrote to his son, "a shock to see the husky sailors and soldiers in camp again after looking at skin and bones walking or staggering around for three years and nine months."

Against the odds, Percy was one of some 1,400 Canadian troops to make it back to Canada from Hong Kong.

The Lasting Impact of War

Percy needed a long time to recover following his release. He was first treated at an American military hospital in the Philippines, then at

Canadian hospitals in Victoria, British Columbia, and Toronto, Ontario. He suffered poor health for the rest of his life, and died in 1967.

Vocabulary

Militia

A term often used to refer to army units of volunteers recruited from local communities. In 1939 Canada, the term officially referred to what would soon be formally renamed the Canadian Army. The Permanent Active Militia was made up of a small number of full-time military personnel. The larger Non-Permanent Active Militia was made up of part-time volunteers.