

*The War—Hong Kong*

ing sufficient additional men to bring the force up to full strength, there would be available for the "first reinforcements" group a total of 138 to 148 men out of the force of 1,885 who had received less than sixteen weeks' training. An inquiry is being made fully into the circumstances under which these men were accepted and action will be taken in accordance with the facts found.

4. Equipment and transportation of the Canadian force. As I have stated, the war office's request for a Canadian force to reinforce the Hong Kong garrison was received here on September 19, and the Canadian government's concurrence was telegraphed to London on September 29. An acknowledgment from London was received on October 1 and this was followed on October 9 by a message dealing with the actual military arrangements and requirements.

Our military authorities were thus authorized to proceed with their arrangements on October 9. A troopship provided by the Admiralty and naval escort were to be available to us at Vancouver between October 20 and 31. The sailing date finally decided upon was October 27, which meant that the movement of troops from eastern Canada had to be under way not later than October 23. There was thus a period of about fourteen days—from October 9 to 23—in which to complete all necessary preparations, and action had to be taken accordingly with the greatest urgency and secrecy.

Provision of equipment and stores for the force was a question which received careful study, in consultation with the war office, as to the scale of provision required for the Hong Kong duties. There was some temporary doubt as to whether complete mechanical transport should be taken. As a result of a war office message received on October 11 it was decided that this would be done.

The mechanized transport for the whole force amounted to 212 vehicles, including universal carriers, and these could not be accommodated on the troopship provided by the admiralty. It was therefore necessary to secure a freighter, which was obtained through the British ministry of war transport.

The freighter reached Vancouver on October 28 and sailed, with the mechanical transport aboard, on November 4. She was a slow ship, capable of 8½ knots. When the sudden Japanese attack came on December 7 she was nearing the Philippine islands, and on December 12 reached Manila, where she remained under direction of United States naval authorities. I am not at liberty to give further information regarding this ship beyond saying that she could not, and did not, reach Hong Kong.

[Mr. Ralston.]

As far as we have been able to ascertain up to the present, the freighter which we secured for arrival at Vancouver on October 28 was the earliest ship we could obtain, and with this ship it was physically impossible to have had the 212 vehicles of our forces' mechanical transport reach Hong Kong before hostilities began on December 7.

The possibility of accommodating any of these vehicles on the troopship which carried the force itself was considered. After completing calculations of space requirements for troops and equipment it was thought that there might be space on the troopship for perhaps 20 vehicles out of a total of 212. These were sent forward by rail, but did not reach Vancouver before the troopship sailed. Brigadier Lawson, en route to Hong Kong, expressed disappointment that some of the mechanical transport was not aboard. My information is that it might have been possible, if they had arrived in time, to have put fourteen vehicles on the troopship. Whether these fourteen vehicles would have been any real help is a point of speculation to which none of us can know the answer.

The troopship sailed from Vancouver, as planned, on October 27. This ship carried the force of 1,985 officers and men and full equipment of weapons and supplies on the scale decided upon in consultation with the war office. The weapons included rifles, Bren guns, Thompson submachine guns and 2" and 3" mortars. The reserve equipment carried was calculated to make the force self-sufficient for a period of 12 months.

Arrangements were completed with the war office in regard to the provision of the balance of anti-tank rifles, which at that time could not be supplied from Canada. Anti-tank ammunition and mortar ammunition was also to be made available by the British authorities after arrival at Hong Kong.

The troopship reached Hong Kong on November 16, after a voyage of about 20 days. Three weeks later, on Sunday, December 7, Japan suddenly and without warning struck in the Pacific.

The events of December 7 at Pearl Harbour and the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* a few days later completely changed the strategic position not only in the China sea but in the whole far eastern region. Japan in a few hours attained a command of the far eastern waters that was, and may be for some time, difficult to challenge. The dispatch of assistance to Hong Kong was no longer a feasible operation of war. Much less was there even a fleeting opportunity to repeat the miracle of Dunkirk.

The Japanese by these events became free to attack by land, sea and air, and the only