

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

“My Precious Inner Sanctum Remains Untouched, Untrammelled Through War & Famine”

William Allister’s Prisoner of War Diary

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Abstract: This article explores the Second World War prisoner of war diary kept by William Allister, who served with C Force, the Canadian formation sent to garrison the British colony of Hong Kong in late 1941. After the Japanese victory on 25 December 1941, Allister and his fellow survivors endured several years of brutality, malnutrition and disease in the prison camps. In the face of nearly unbelievable hardship, Allister kept a detailed diary and created works of art that provide new insight into the shattering effects of his wartime imprisonment. Allister’s story is included in the Canadian War Museum exhibition Forever Changed – Stories From the Second World War (2020).

Cet article porte sur le journal tenu par William Allister alors qu’il était prisonnier de guerre pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Allister servait au sein de la force « C », la formation canadienne envoyée pour tenir garnison dans la colonie britannique de Hong Kong à la fin de 1941. Après la victoire japonaise, le 25 décembre 1941, ses compagnons survivants et lui ont été brutalisés et affaiblis par la maladie et la malnutrition pendant plusieurs années dans des camps. Face à des épreuves à peine imaginables, Allister a tenu un journal détaillé et créé des œuvres d’art qui apportent une perspective nouvelle sur les répercussions, bouleversantes, de son emprisonnement en temps de guerre. L’exposition Vies transformées — Récits de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (2020) du Musée canadien de la guerre raconte ce qu’il a vécu.

WILLIAM ALLISTER was among the 1,975 Canadians who served with C Force, a small Canadian battle group ordered to defend the doomed British colony of Hong Kong in late 1941. From 8 December 1941, they fought valiantly against the Japanese forces that attacked the British-led garrison, engaging in a fighting retreat and many battles until the survivors surrendered on Christmas Day.

The losses were heavy for the Canadians: 290 killed and 483 wounded. The survivors faced four bitter years of starvation, mistreatment and beatings in Japanese prisoner of war camps. William Allister was one of them.

William Allister was born in Benito, Manitoba on 5 October 1919 to Ukrainian Jewish parents, but moved to Montreal in his youth. At Baron Byng High School, he showed promise as an actor and an artist. “Growing up in the hectic and colourful Montreal of the Thirties,” he said, “I was swept up in the stormy winds of art, politics and racial conflict.”¹ After graduation in 1936, he toured with a repertory company, performing comedy sketches and more serious drama pieces. Some of his work was broadcast on CBC Radio, but the war interrupted his burgeoning career and he felt compelled to enlist in 1941.

After cheating to pass an eye exam, the twenty-two-year-old served in the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. He suffered through basic training, but he persevered and was posted to C Force. Allister had wanted to fight Hitler and the Nazis and like many of his fellow soldiers he found it perplexing to be posted to guard duty in the Pacific. But when the Battle of Hong Kong erupted on 8 December 1941, he and his comrades found themselves fighting for their lives. “Outgunned, vastly outnumbered, and not a hope in hell of any help,” he was later to write.² After two weeks of terror, chaos and killing, the Allied garrison surrendered.³

¹ Tom Hawthorn, “William Allister, PoW and painter (1919-2008),” *Globe and Mail*, 29 November 2008.

² William Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1989), 18.

³ For more on the battle, see 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); Carl Vincent, *No Reason Why: The Canadian Hong Kong Tragedy* (Stittsville: Canada’s Wings, 1981); and Brereton Greenhous, “C” Force to Hong Kong: A Canadian Catastrophe, 1941-1945 (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997). On the historiography, see Galen Perras, “Defeat Still Cries Aloud for Explanation: Explaining C Force’s Dispatch to Hong Kong,” *Canadian Military Journal* 11, 4 (Autumn 2011): 37-47.



'43 *Self Portrait* (reproduction). Drawn by William Allister in 1943. Graphite on paper. [Canadian War Museum 20120037-005_24]

The Canadians were roughly herded up at bayonet point, with some of the wounded Allied soldiers executed by frenzied Japanese soldiers. Stripped of their personal belongings and weapons, the Canadians were sent to a prisoner of war camp at North Point in Hong Kong.⁴ Behind a high-wired fence, and living in vermin-infested huts, the prisoners struggled to survive. The starvation diet reduced them physically, with men horrified at having to pick maggots from their rotten rice and, later, when starving, eating them. The boredom, ennui, fear and lassitude pushed men to the brink of mental collapse. After months of insufficient diet, with few vegetables, fruit or protein, the prisoners suffered from debilitating vitamin deficiencies, along with diseases like diphtheria, dysentery, beriberi and malaria. Their bodies were infested with worms and the various diseases left them with burning feet, dimming eyesight and swollen testicles. One by one they died, often after harsh beatings from their brutal guards, although there were also periodic outbreaks of disease—especially dysentery and diphtheria in 1942—which claimed dozens within a short period.

In the unsanitary and overcrowded conditions, the survivors banded together to aid one another, huddling for warmth and humanity. They smoked cigarettes and dreamed of life after the war. They made jokes and hid their tears. Some retreated into themselves, while others put on theatrical productions and played sports when they had the energy, usually after rare Red Cross packages arrived containing tinned goods or sweets. They wrote letters to loved ones, agonising over how much information to include about their plight and wary that Japanese censors would destroy any correspondence that revealed the beatings and brutality. Some planned escapes, but there was no place to go beyond the walls and Canadians had little hope of hiding or finding aid among the civilian population. More often they attended funerals of friends and comrades who succumbed, summing up a life cut short and acts of personal courage, all the while promising to never forget.

⁴ On the Prisoner of War experience, see Daniel Dancocks's *In Enemy Hands: Canadian Prisoners of War 1939-1945* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1983); Nathan Greenfield, *The Damned: The Canadians at the Battle of Hong Kong and the POW experience, 1941-45* (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 2010); and Tony Banham, *We Shall Suffer There: Hong Kong's Defenders Imprisoned, 1942-45* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

There were tremendous acts of personal courage and self-sacrifice with men looking out for one another in fraternal bonds strengthened by unbelievable hardship and yet the terrible conditions also pressed down on the confined and abused prisoners. Some men turned on each other, stealing precious food, ignoring the sick, only looking out for themselves. At times, officers, enjoying the privileges of rank that afforded extra rations and leisure activities, ignored the suffering of the non-commissioned. This too was a part of the prisoner of war experience.

To endure the strain, many men developed a rich inner world, dreaming, planning and scheming to keep their minds active even as their bodies withered away. While paper and pencils were in short supply, sometimes they were secured from Japanese prison guards for money, favours or even in exchange for extracted gold teeth. Many prisoners kept diaries, jotting down notes, sayings, events and observations. Keeping a diary was a life-affirming task, but also dangerous: men caught writing were often beaten mercilessly.⁵ Allister took his chances. His diary was "precious" to him and it helped him order his thoughts, make sense of his experience, vent his anger and pour out his hopes even as his eyes sunk deeper into his skull, his gums bled and the bones jutted sharply from his graying skin.⁶

Allister kept several diaries during his imprisonment, occasionally having them stolen. But he wrote to cope and endure. A friend helped him construct the makeshift writing pads from two strips of wood with holes bored in them and loose-leaf sheets of paper bound by shoelaces. The paper was scrounged or came through the occasional YMCA care packages. "It remained with me throughout the war," Allister later wrote, "hidden in many strange places."⁷ Only one of his diaries survived the long imprisonment. It was donated to the Canadian War Museum in 2012. Below are selections from his diary, which he scrawled in small, neat and sometimes shaky print, as befitting a man conserving paper while also struggling from

⁵ For how soldiers coped and endured, see Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum, "The Importance of Creativity Behind Barbed Wire," in *Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire*, eds. Gilly Carr and Harold Mytum (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-15; Matthew Schwarzkopf, "The Second Mission: Canadian Survival in Hong Kong Prisoner-of-War Camps, 1941-1945" (MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 2019).

⁶ Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 54.

⁷ Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 54.



Allister's surviving diary. [George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 20120037-014_a]

malnutrition—or malaria—induced tremors. There are a few words that are illegible over the passage of time and we have allowed some of his idiosyncratic language to stand.

William Allister was also a painter, having taken formal classes since the age of fourteen. For a time in the camp, Allister taught a drawing class to his comrades, which was well received by the bored men and gave him one more purpose to wake up and face another day. It was no easy thing to find canvas or paper, but he and his friend Georges “Blacky” Verreault eventually gathered some canvas tent material—cutting, cleaning and drying it for a makeshift canvas.⁸ An improvised brush was created with bristles extracted from a shoebrush and attached to a stick. Crankcase oil was used as paint, along with other pilfered material. Allister painted when he could, with his work sometimes discovered and admired by the

⁸ Verreault also wrote his memoirs: Georges “Blacky” Verreault, *Diary of a Prisoner of War in Japan, 1941-1945* (Rimouski: Vero, 1995).



Untitled. Painted by William Allister in 1942. Oil on canvas. [Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum 20120037-001]

guards, at other times destroyed. Today, Allister's paintings are held in private and museum collections in Canada and around the world, including the Canadian War Museum.

In early 1943, William Allister was among the 700 prisoners moved from North Point Camp to Japan, where he was placed in Camp 3D. Situated in an industrial centre, it was three and a half kilometres from the Nippon Kokan Shipyards at Kawasaki, where many of the Canadians were forced to work as slave labourers. When the Japanese guards heard that Allister was a painter, they had him paint the hulls of ships. The joke was not lost on Allister, even as he shivered and fought off fevers from recurrent malaria.

Exhausted, gut-hungry and ever fearful of cruel guards who beat the prisoners for the slightest infractions, he continued to keep his diary and, when possible, produce his art. For a period, a few of the guards and civilian workers would pass him art supplies to paint, respecting his work. His fellow prisoners were also impressed with his art and several works survived because Canadians sewed the finished canvases into their pant legs to protect them.⁹ In March 1945, Allister was moved to a coal yard on the outskirts of Tokyo,

⁹ See Gail Delaney, "Paintings from a POW Camp," Veterans Affairs Canada, last modified 14 February 2019, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/diaries-letters-stories/second-world-war/camp-painting>.



Untitled. Painted by William Allister between 1942 and 1944. Oil on canvas. [Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum 20120037-002]

where there was constant fear of being bombed by the Americans and of starving to death before liberation. His war ended there.

ABOUT THE DIARY

Allister's diary covers the period of his imprisonment. In the first half of the diary, written early in his imprisonment, he reflects on his war to date: training, leaving Canada, travelling to Hong Kong and the early days of the Japanese attack on Hong Kong. Having filled the front sides of his paper, Allister writes, "(Continued) See Yellow Pages"—a reference to another diary, which has since been lost. Then in late 1943 or early 1944, he returned to this book, filling in the reverse side of the pages. In this second series of entries, Allister, now several years into his imprisonment, has stopped looking back. His accounts instead cover his thoughts and feelings about each day as he lives it.

Throughout the dense pages there is a rich outpouring of Allister's fervent imaginings, outright fear and blinding anger. It reveals the rumours and speculation of his fellow men, the desperate need to know something of the wider war and his dreams of freedom. Allister records the beatings from cruel guards and his own attempts to



Untitled. Painted by William Allister in 1942. Oil on canvas. [Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum 20120037-003]

survive the inhumanity of his imprisonment. Food is ever-present and a constant source of commentary, including lists of dishes that he will eat when released, the meagre portions of prison rations and the ongoing search for more. He poured his thoughts into the diary and it was very much an object of hope, even containing a list of future writing projects and lists of favourite songs that he wished to hear again. And yet it also reveals the darker strain of his imprisonment. Trapped in close quarters, suffering from starvation and disease, his accounts of other Canadians were at times caustic, quarrelsome and uncaring. It offers a rich and troubling perspective into the harsh experience of the Canadian prisoners and the inner battle for survival.

DIARY EXCERPTS: BEFORE IMPRISONMENT

In Allister’s accounts of his time before imprisonment—in Canada, at sea and in Hong Kong—he paints a picture of a naïve young man and a unit unprepared for the fight that was to come.

His present reality—imprisonment in Hong Kong—makes itself felt in his descriptions of the past. An account of his friend Hank’s mother includes a bitter allusion to Hank’s fate—killed in combat.

And references to his own mother focus on the falseness of his reassurances and his uncertainty that he would ever see her again.¹⁰

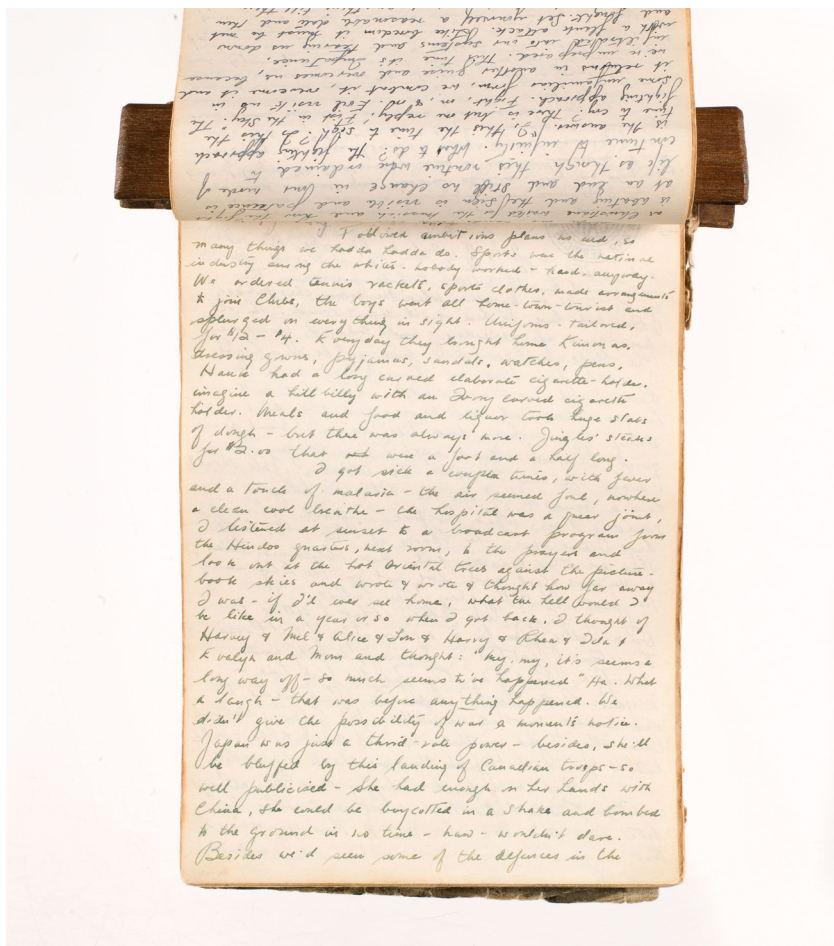
Undated, around mid-February 1942

[My mother had] reared me, pampered me, served me, mama's boy, her favourite son that got all her attention because he was so helpless and delicate and absent-minded and promised so much of a brilliant future. I'd taken all that and given next to nothing and I was taking what didn't belong to me away from the one person that I owed so much to. Well, by all that's sacred, if she's alive when I get back, I'll make up for it. And Willy makes no idle promises.

I wrote happy reassuring letters on the train, describing barracks life in Vancouver, the people I've met, the places I've been to, described a skiing jaunt, a weekend picnic and stuff. Across from me Hank was scribbling through a few letters of the same ilk, writing to a mother he was going to see in a day or so in Alberta. Lying for the first time in his big, open, stupid life. The scenery across the prairies was horrible, after all Hank's boasting. Stank. Then came Alberta.

(we're getting there). Alberta. I'd finished all my goodbyes, but Hank had his last and hardest goodbye to come. His Maw – at Edmonton – horrors. She was all I'd feared she'd be and worse. A worrywart, naïve, scared stiff and innocent as a babe. She loved her baby so much, she couldn't find words, just stared and cried and fought it off and said anything and shoved huge parcels in his hand that he couldn't carry. Please take them, she pleaded – Take them, I ordered him and I carried it. I'll take care o' him, don't worry, I said, he's among friends, nothing'll happen to him, do him a lotta' good! Yeah, I'll take care o' him. Sure, I made sure he didn't drink himself sick and eat that Chinese crap but what good is all the care and friendship against a well placed 4.5[-inch gun].

¹⁰ William Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum Military History Research Centre (CWM MHRC), 19-20, 43-44.



Allister's diary. [George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 20120037-014_43]

Undated, around mid-February 1942

We didn't give the possibility of war a moment's notice. Japan was just a third-rate power – besides, she'll be bluffed by all this landing of Canadian troops – so well publicised – she had enough on her hands with China, she could be boycotted in a shake and bombed to the ground in no time Besides we'd seen some of the defences in the hills – impregnable – and with the millions spent on the Hong Kong side and food stores for 2 years, the gun emplacements, the pill-boxes, the Indian and Scotty seasoned hill-fighters – oh it was a cinch Japan wouldn't be so foolish – just bluffin' she was – true we had a small air force

and field – 2 planes, but planes would be rushed from nearby in an emergency – nothing to worry about, I wrote home, those poor guys in England living on rations & bombings and us – like kings on a holiday jaunt – you can rest easy Mom dear, the war is thousands of miles from your favourite offspring – I wrote it on their air mail stationery and paid \$3.50 postage for it to go on the China Clipper. The first morning of the war the China Clipper was shot down on its way home to America, with its losses including crews, passengers and an important letter from Wm [William] Allister to his loving mother in Montreal – would’ve been the first letter or word – outside of a telegram. What really was infuriating was how I stalled off writing it and then stalled off sending for a couple’ weeks.

Allister’s descriptions of the attack on Hong Kong paint the event as a “gigantic fiasco,” with the Canadians doomed from the start.¹¹

Undated, around mid-February 1942

WAR

Ca commenca.

I don’t think there’s ever been so much concentrated, disgust, heroism, disillusionment, baseness, cowardice, terror, horror, speed, and radical turnovers in ideals and opinions in one piece – anywhere in the last war and in any number of wars in the past few centuries. ‘Struth. Not in such a short space of time – no. I don’t kid myself that there’ve been more lies told in one spot, more horrors in another end such, but I can’t think of so many powerful elements ever occurring in so short a time and together. I’ll describe this gigantic fiasco to prove it.

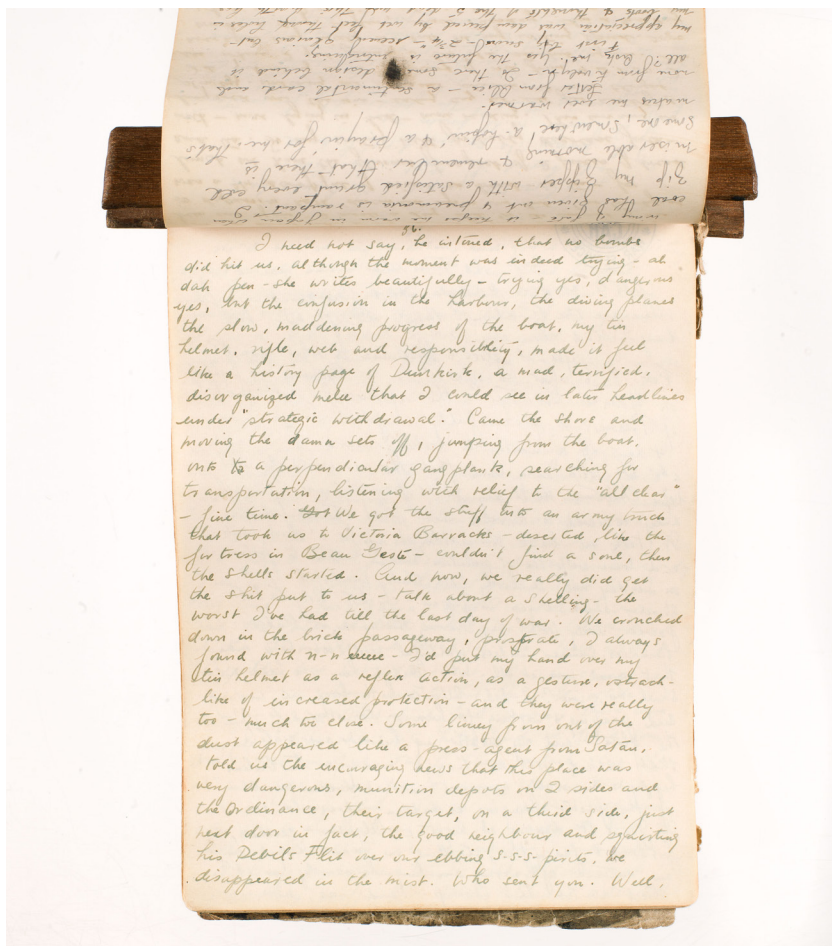
The war started early Monday morning, December 8. Came the bombers, with Blitzkrieg surprise. Our boys got it first, they knew Brigade HQ was in our Jubilee Building, like they knew in blueprint detail – every pill-box position, ack-ack emplacements, like they knew, with German efficiency, every other detail of military importance, better than any of the British general staff. I was in hospital getting

¹¹ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 46-47, 52, 56-57.

over some light malaria for the 2nd time on the Hong Kong side. We watched the bombers come over and swoop down on Kai Tak airport and the Jubilee Bldg and such. War hadn't been declared as usual and the boys got up, shaved and heard the air raid siren – another rehearsal. Boom, barroom. Jenkins walks out to look at the sunny harbour with all the sampans and the morning was clear and blue – the mountains purple and Oriental, he stretches luxuriously on the balcony and looks at the planes swooping down overhead – he saw the bombs drop and heard 'em land and walks back into the room, very surprised. "They're droppin' Bombs, fellas." And then bam – the windows are blown – they started running...

Undated, around mid-February 1942

Finally on Thursday, it was decided to evacuate the mainland and retreat, 'scuse please, retire to the island. Both because it was strategic and because we had to. Talk about confusion, half of us went first. Loading the truck with the no. 11 sets, Sharpe leading, we went cavorting through the side-streets, lying cocked for action in case of snipers, got to the gates of dock and hadda load the sets off the truck and carry them on foot to the boat – ha, what boat, – there were mobs trying to get across, we got a small one and lugged along with those piano weight sets, along the wharf. Looters were being shot all around us, each glance brought some new insanity to the scene. One drunken sergeant of police was pissed to the eyeballs, and had a Tommy gun that he used like a candid camera fiend. He shot at everybody, leisurely, happily, giggling, looters or no – he just lo-o-oved shooting coolies. What fun. This was the life. Good clean fun. ... I remember a flash of drama as we dashed by a side street, a park bench with 3 freshly killed corpses, my first of the war, – 2 were spread in the ordinary grotesque stiffness of the dead, but the third was sitting on bench, quietly, leg-crossed, well-dressed, looking very relaxed, for the life of me, the picture of a respectable New York citizen, sitting beside the park, with the afternoon edition of the Mirror in me hand and gazing blankly about supper, when the streets are quiet and the New York world is in the subway. Peaceful. Guess he was.



25 February 1942. [George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 20120037-014_43]

25 February 1942

[T]he confusion in the harbour, the diving planes the slow, maddening progress of the boat, my tin helmet, rifle, web and responsibility, made it feel like a history page of Dunkirk, a mad, terrified, disorganized melee that I could see in later headlines under “strategic withdrawal.” Came the shore and moving the damn sets off, jumping from the boat onto a perpendicular gangplank, searching for transportation, listening with relief to the “all clear” – fine time. We got the stuff onto an army truck that took us to Victoria Barracks – deserted, like the fortress in Beau Geste – couldn’t find a soul, then the shells started. And now, we really did get the shit part to us – talk about a shelling – the worst I’ve had till the last day of war. We crunched down in the brick passageway, ^{prone} ~~prone~~, I always found with no excuse – I’d put my hand over my tin helmet as a reflex action, as a gesture, out-of-like of increased protection – and they were really too much too close. Some lines from out of the dust appeared like a press-agent from Satan, told us the encouraging news that this place was very dangerous, munition depots on 2 sides and the Ordinance, their target, on a third side, just heat door in fact, the food neighbours and ^{adjacent} ~~adjacent~~ his Devils this was our ebbing S-S-S. ^{the} ~~the~~ disappeared in the mist. Who sent you. Well.

really did get the shit put to us – talk about a shelling – the worst I’ve had till the last day of war. We crouched down in the brick passageway, prostrate, I always found with n-n-eeeeee – I’d put my hand over my tin helmet as a reflex action, as a gesture – like it increased protection – and they were really too – much too close. ... Ee-ee-eee – duck – bam! One after another – which one is mine. When it was over we stood up. I’d found I’d peed in my pants, unconsciously. Tsk, tsk, I think, - haven’t pulled that for a long time – for shame. Well I could say I’d had the piss shelled outta’ me. We breathed in, lifted the masks and tested for gas. Hell with it the rubber was wet with sweat – off they came.

FOOD

Given the inadequate rations upon which Allister had to survive, it is not surprising that references to food appear repeatedly throughout the diary.

Early in the diary, he resolves to “make a list of dishes [he has] vowed to eat when [he gets] back.”¹² He follows through with that promise, dedicating the final page of his diary to this list, with an introduction that makes it clear how much this topic dominates his thoughts.¹³

Undated

And now! Wow! This is a special page. Reserved. For the most important and distinguished guest. Food, food, food, do you hear? Of the richest, the tastiest and most magnificently sumptuous dishes, the human brain can concoct. On this page I set down the dishes I dedicate myself to eat and do well by when I see the light of freedom.

MEATS:

Steak: well done, with mashed potatoes, thick, heavy chip, peas, carrots, lemon juice, ketchup.

¹² Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 3.

¹³ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 65.

Smoked meat: Sandwiches at Ben's with plenty of mustard, pickles, chips and Coca Colas.

Salami: Sandwiches the same, with cokes or fried at home with eggs.

Bacon: With eggs. Or with tomato sandwich, toasted with coffee.

Hot Dogs: Toasted, mustard, pickles, chips, cokes.

Hamburgers: Meatballs, big, burnt, crusted, with heaped up mashed potatoes, tea or tomato juice.

Sausages: Ranged around a platter of pancakes with bacon and eggs in between.

Chicken: Roasted. White meat, radish, pickled cucumbers and pickled red tomatoes.

SOUPS:

Barley, bean, pea, lentil, chicken with crackers, noodle, corn

SANDWICHES:

Peanut butter, thick butter first then heavy peanut butter ladled in. Jam with butter, toasted, soaking in butter. Cheese

DISHES:

Brown barley with cutlets, [unreadable] cutlets crisp with oodles of chips, and bread and butter. Baked potatoes, hot crisp, slap on the blobs of butter and salt at each bite. Pancakes, thick smeared in butter and covered in syrup with coffee. Potato [unreadable], burnt and thick and hot and the potatoes mashed. Black bread and black olives with thick crisp hunks of bread covered with dope.

Allister's early diary entries mention persistent hunger, but he notes that he prefers the rations to the starvation he endured in the final days in Hong Kong before he was taken prisoner.¹⁴

¹⁴ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 31, 55.

Undated, around mid-February 1942

I never let go and I'm always happy – even here. If only Mom was alright; or knew – I would really relax. I'm hungry, yes, but I've been hungrier in starvation days after the surrender and I never wanna' repeat that engagement. I was starting to eat grass and wanted to gnaw on bark. I knew if they cooked up human meat I could eat it without a qualm – but I still didn't let go. I "smiled and carried on" and even kept cheerful somehow. That's why I'm so happy and pleased and proud of myself. If that wasn't a test of strength of will – nothing was. And now the boys are crying about being starved. The strong ones just grouch and grumble. A few can take it when the going gets really tough. The winnah' [winner] and present champion.

25 February 1942

My energy she comes and goes, comes and goes—in direct ratio to my amount of food. Now the ration's been cut again—2 meals a day and $\frac{3}{4}$ the amount of rice. So depression hath descended upon our hut. Our breakfast was a $\frac{3}{4}$ scoopful of rice—no bread—no tea—for lunch we have the glorious prospect of 2 pieces of bread and tea. So my writing will probably decrease forthwith. ... This morning we lingered over the rice—eating tiny tit-bits per mouthful slowly, watching our stomachs shrink. I never thought I'd get along on a $\frac{3}{4}$ scoop of rice from 9 to 1:30. I see where I get plenty 'o the old shakes again. I've averaged very nicely to date on my writing speed. 2000 words a day, reglar [regular], since Tuesday – this is Monday what am I saying – this is Wednesday. Or does it matter. SAY! This is an anniversary, Feb. 25. Ha, my gueness [goodness]. 2 months a *prisonnier de guerre*. I oughta' have some sort of ritual on the 25th of every month – a review maybe – it'll be my anniversary back home, awright, awright. I'll do what that guy in the [Ryles?] said – line up a huge roast turkey, on the right a bowl of rice, on the left a tin of bullybeef. Then piss on the bully and shit on the rice, then dig in. It's easy for me to smile at these rations – 'cause everyone gets the same and it's 3 times what I got at Bowen Rd. And a bed, a cosy bed, a cosy table, warm friends and my diary & books for the [astin'?). Then there's the hope of the new governor respecting international Red Cross agreements and improving our lot. If we're here a year – and the food is decent I may turn out my first play or novel – the circumstances are almost ideal. Just gimme food for energy.

By the winter of 1944, Allister has started studying nutrition and making strategic trades to keep his weight up, foregoing short-term pleasure for long-term health.¹⁵

27 January 1944

For a while then, I felt my mind slipping and I was seriously frightened. I was finally going stir-happy—my mind would stop working at times & I'd feel & act as stupid as an imbecile. It's gone now—replaced by a new madness—I got the trading fever—bad. I lie awake at night, scheming for grub & bartering & dues & angles—absolute madness for the uncommercial theorist I am. Fantastic trades & offers. My butter has the value of gold. The next 15 issues of fish—24 beans & to top for my last—every issue of fish & beans for March 1 to the end of the war—no wonder a man goes wacky. The schemes with my bosses for grub—trading rice for bread for gum for cigarettes for money for yeast pills. Values & minds are unbalanced. I can't get 2 decks for a ration of rice. So I get a fancy comb for a ration & sell it for 5 decks. If I went in for a commercial life when I get back in this frame of mind I'd be a wolf of Wall Street.

1 March 1944

Weights are down. Lyle Ellis weighs 135 [pounds]—6'4". I'm staying even 125 [pounds] —trading, making money, I buy every type of vitamin pills possible and I've been very lucky. My mind is back to normal, almost too normal

13 April 1944

Food. Everyone is gone food crazy. Worse than any other period. What came in? How much spinach is in. Is the red rice soggy? What's in the soup. Is there cold [*sic*] slaw for supper? And the mad trading. It's too insane to describe. ... Leo & I are studying medicine & diet. Vitamins, calories, etc. We're drying up sea-weed salt for valuable iron & iodine.

¹⁵ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 58-57 verso, 54 verso, 50 verso, 49 verso, 46 verso.

11 May 1944

Event no. 2—the Red Cross did come in with a truckload of parcels—2 for 5. 2/5 of a parcel—but it was still mahvellous. I sat me down & did some figuring—what to do with my new riches—and solved the best use possible. I traded half of my riches for butter the best things in the parcels and laid up a store. Traded a single can of bully for 12 rations of fried fish—in return for future security—then another tin for the same—then 3 more for my 3 mouthfuls of cheese. Then 12 of beans for 2/3 of my chocolate bar & 37 half rice that I'd given up as a bad debt since Christmas. I didn't have as many treats as the ones around me but my health needs the beans & fish. Tis a sacrifice for those loved ones who want me as much as I want them.

14 June 1944

The combination of creative ability & energy has always been the keynote to success. I had the one & lacked the other—I could always lie on my back & dream up some marvellous ideas—but lacked the go-getter's energy to carry them out. How necessity has forced my hand—and presto! I eat extra rations—have extra pills, sleep full nights & keep good health—I out-think the stupid and outwit the crooked & conniving by keeping a steady level course. Life here is a chess game—that must be won by hard, clear thought—survival, the stakes. I feel now, as healthy as when I left Canada. ... I've successfully combatted the flea menace, the hunger menace, the disease menace.

Later diary entries read as though extreme hunger is expected and therefore not worthy of comment. Instead, food is mentioned when there are rare moments of plenty.¹⁶

24 August 1944

This 24th day of August—to break the routine—4 of us have planned a celebration on rice & beans—just a party. Like children playing house. Leo will get the gramophone & pass out the cigarettes & pay someone to wash the dishes. And we've traded during the week to have more

¹⁶ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 36 verso, 34 verso, 16 verso.

than we could eat at this meal, in this hungry existence. We may be celebrating Germany's collapse "who can toll."

5 September 1944

An unexpected treat—a day's rest. Time is recorded by unexpected treats. Last week—we each got a pear—a pear! Into mine hands, O Lord, was placed a rotten, worm-eaten tiny pear that was gone in 3 bites. My first pear in Japan. It was so rotten that it would've been thrown out in the ash heap at home. It tasted to this lowly creature like a morsel from the plate of Cleopatra.

1 January 1945

Parcels Christmas—eating deliriously luxurious food till all hours. Bob & I saved up 8 rations of rice to make sure we weren't hungry. Talk about full—we ate ourselves sick and no scrimping—the food was a dream—a whole parcel. Coffee & sugar & cream & chocolate & raisins & delicious meats & jam & butter—talk about rich, thick sickening brews! We ate like we always dreamt of eating.

PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

Allister endured physical punishment at the hands of the prison guards. Amid casual references to "miscellaneous beatings,"¹⁷ he detailed two encounters in detail:¹⁸

End of July 1944

The morning of Tojo's removal was tense at the plant. Did I feel any repercussions? I did. Very concrete. In the shape of a lump of iron across the back of my skull, that knocked me for a loop. One of our big bosses, the man I painted beautiful scenery and delicate flowers for last year, decided to take it out on some helpers "Loorio" and I was

¹⁷ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 22 verso.

¹⁸ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 39 verso, 23 verso.

first to cross his path. He was standing over me as I dug a trench and I stopped to speak to the guy beside me, which sent him into paroxysms characteristic of this unstable, hysteric race. He heaped rock after rock down on me, and I, feeling like a target in a Coney Island sideshow, dodged hither & yon, till he finally winged a beau-ball right across my home plate. "Answer that telephone" says I, picking myself up, "Or, is it church-bells?" I had a lump so big, it looked like a drawing in the Sunday comics. Yes, I felt definite repercussions.

26 October 1944

2 days ago—I got the worst beating to date—For wearing my earlaps down because I had a fever & wanted to keep the drafts out. I got clubbed with the barrel end 3 times so hard that it drew blood through the double thick winter cap then once with the barrel—then about 6 with the hat across the face—then about a dozen in the puss with the paw. I always seem to get it when I'm sick. But those things are a tonic to me—they get me fighting mad. Now I'm almost better—feeling alive & healthy and optimistic again, except for a whooping, miserable cough that knocks me for a loop. My courage has returned.

MENTAL HEALTH

Allister's diary entries demonstrate an awareness of the toll that imprisonment is having on his mind—something he fears others may overlook compared to the physical costs of imprisonment.¹⁹

3 October 1944

I fear, I dread, I tremble. Another battle to survival before the end. Will I spend my 4th Christmas a prisoner? My moods soar to the heights and crash to rock bottom in an hour. My mind is normal, rational, as yet unblemished by the winds of madness that have swept the ranks. I could step back into the old life without a sign or a hint of 3 years of horror. Sometimes I feel the moment just around the corner. Other

¹⁹ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 30 verso, 26 verso, 25 verso, 19 verso.

times I'm positive it will go on to eternity. I'm convinced I was stir-happy last winter—yet I'm normal again. Another winter?—well ...

5 October 1944

I'm going quickly nuts listening to the sounds of my fellow inmates. ... You start noticing details in your neighbours' personal habits, tiny peculiarities that would ordinarily pass unnoticed. And they eat away at your insides till the sight of a friendly face can revolt you—make you want to bash in a few skulls—I suffered from that oversensitivity back home under normal conditions. Imagine how I feel now—when I can't get away from anyone. People back home might understand hard-work, ill-health, starvation, loneliness, but not the mental ills—that are much worse. Physically we've adapted to all physical hardships, so much so, that we practically ignore conditions that would appal the average man. I sit in my bed and West goes by—"cluck, cluck, cluck," goes his throat, then Halbert—"tic, tic, tic" goes his tongue. Then Crusoe sucking his lips—then Robby grunting constantly. It got so bad yesterday that I ran outside—fever & all—to keep from hitting someone.

19 October 1944

Racking de [the] brain for means & methods of keeping up morale. It's very low. About the only one I know is to sit under the stars alone. Nothing good to read & that doesn't help. Ye Gods—let something happen! Kill me or let me live—but cut out the torture. O well—It'll soon be good & miserable and one doesn't think in the heat (or cold) of battle. O give me the unimaginative mentality of the contented cows around me whose horizon is brightened by spuds in the soup or in seconds in rice. More of this and I'll definitely grow anti-social. Get out of my way or I'll throw something at somebody.

23 November 1944

Horrible, black, gloomy moods, & gay, carefree, hysterical, unreasonable joie de vivre. ... Why the joie-de-vivre? Why not—they can have my body but not my spirit—why did I go singing down the streets at home—ready to break into a dance if convention would only allow. Because I loved life with an intensity almost abnormal—And now, they starve me, torture me, depress me, browbeat me, rile me, worry me,

hound me, crowd me—so what? So I retire to a quiet, solitary, corner of my mind and close the outer doors. My precious inner sanctum remains untouched, untrammelled through war & famine.

Allister recognises impatience and boredom as serious threats to his mental health:²⁰

4 July 1944

I find many people unhappy these days although conditions are much better than average, and news is better than ever. It's because of those very reasons that everyone is seized with a tremendous impatience. ... What to do? The fighting approach is the answer. “Is this the time to sigh? Is this the time to cry? There is but one reply! Fist in the sky.” The fighting approach. Fight, on & on. Evil visits us in some unfamiliar form, we combat it, overcome it and it returns in another guise and overcomes us, because we're unprepared. This time it's Impatience, infiltrated into our systems and tearing us down with a flank attack. Like boredom it must be met and fought. Set yourself a reasonable date and then sit back and don't expect anything till then. Churchill says victory this summer. Give him till fall then and freedom before Christmas—surely not 4 Christmases in prison. No. That would be making it a habit. Lost a bet on last Christmas, and tripled it for this Christmas. It's got to end this year! It must! It will! 50 million aching hearts can't be wrong! I will it! End! Cease Fire you fools! We are but pitiful mortals, we have not the souls nor the endurance of Gods. “Unendurable misery, indefinitely prolonged.” ...

Back to the battle of existence here. Tis an enticing battle in its way. One must meditate on values. Look at the local successes and consider their objectives. Deal, dicker, dicker, deal. Beat the next man to the punch, drench and drug your mind with a thousand schemes. What is my objective. To be happy and peacefully contented, to keep the mind clear and calm.

²⁰ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 43-42 verso, 10 verso, 9 verso, 7 verso.

28 April 1945

Solace is what I need. It's one of those days. Dull—monotonous—boring—such boredom man never knew. Aching for a bit of conversation & too bored to force it stumbling along. Good Christ! Everything, everybody, sounds so inhumanly stupid, corny. What's happening? Am I losing interest in life. Am I confined to an institution of half-wits? Or am I the one that's abnormal—or maybe just a wee bit dramatic. God damn it—I can allow myself a little temperament and superiority under these conditions.

Undated, mid-May 1945

May. About the middle. Who knows. Who cares. War's over. So what. So I go out to work every morning. So I haven't got enough to smoke or to eat. So the weather is enchanting. Isn't that glorious. Everybody's celebrating. How charming. I'm bored stiff.

8 June 1945

I'd rather be miserable & in pain than lying around being bored. Nossir—there's nothing worse than boredom. Every time I say I want it to end—my longing seems to be stronger than ever before. That's just imagination, of course. I want it—I will it! I'm fed up to the neck—3 ½ bastardly years of this [is] enough. End! End! I bash my head against the wall if that'd help. Rip an arm off. Do something—anything. The suspense is murderous. I don't wanna think. Is it close—or is it the same old story.

POW LIFE – GENERAL

With so little to call his own, Allister regularly comments on his possessions, whether hand-made objects or parcels sent from home.²¹

²¹ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 11, 58-57 verso, 56 verso, 51 verso.

Undated, mid-February 1942

Never thought I'd be whittling wood in a Japanese concentration camp. Making a wooden spoon. ... Trouble is the god-damn hunk of wood is so thick, I whittle myself blue in the face and get nowhere. But it is mine, mine! Do you hear? From beginning to end, sawed it off, carved it, planned it and when I get back, I'll eat with it and it'll make everything taste perfectly heavenly.

27 January 1944

Parcels kept rolling in giving me miserable disappointed nights. Then came yesterday—I felt lucky all day—then we heard 35 parcels came in & I told everyone I had one—I felt so positively lucky. I can tell somehow when I'm in luck I believe in it. One thing after another works out beautifully. I stormed into camp in wacking good spirits and asked the Rimocues in a joke, what was in my parcel and they answered, "I think there really is one for you!" Then I tracked down de guy wot seen it & carried it in and he described the size—not knowing where it's from—some say I've got 2.—one of cigarettes & one personal—maybe one from California—who knows. So I wait—gnashing my teeth with impatience & gleeful as a kid on Christmas.

... O, the parcel! The parcel! What's in it? My blue sweater? Woolen socks. My towel is a terry cloth sweatshirt—my tooth powder is laundry soap—so think what I can use & little comfort possle [parcel].

18 February 1944

Parcel duly received & drooled over. What strange feelings. It took me back to civilization for a short week end leave with the stipulation that I return to prison on Sunday nite. 2 lovely bath towels, wonderful sport shoes—about 50 yen in Japan—chicklets, Colgate tooth powder, lovely toothbrush, shaving sticks, razors, blades, hankies, summer undies, wonderful wool socks to a man that owned none at all..

13 April 1944

... Much trouble today. Thefts left & right including 2 pairs of lovely socks Sally bought—culminating in last nite's theft of Allister's blue

angora sweater—my cherished possession—they stole it while I was asleep & part of my heart went with it due to sentimental attachment.

For prisoners of war, the combination of poor living conditions and insufficient food exacerbated health issues. Any illness could mean death.²²

1 March 1944

The weather is lovely—lucky us. January & February are beaten, with a loss of only 8 lives. Eight men—but it could have been much worse. Last winter was worse.

26 October 1944

And there went October—but I can't say it flew by and I gained nothing by it. I learnt how a man's entire morale, spirit & optimism can be brought down 40 fathoms deep below sea level. Death seemed so easy & probable that I felt more of the dead than the living—it was miserable—working out there with a fever, bones aching, weak, perspiring—just get better on your own or don't—it's the hopeless lack of sympathy that's so lacking. What do you care if the man beside you dies—you may be next ...

20 July 1945

Benny Neufeld died yesterday of jaundice. It was quick. Only someone like ourselves that have been through what he has can realize what a tragedy death is at this stage. It's depressing & frightening. Meanwhile life goes on. ... Just had the funeral. Same old farce. Very sorry to die but can [*sic* – can't] help it. Was very good worker. Too bad. Another atom disintegrated. An atom full of concentrated cravings, desires, longings over a period of 3 ½ years. Good-looking, clean, healthy looking. They say he had a “death” phobia. He told me once he'd do 3 more years of this if someone could guarantee he'd be alive at the end of it. Makes one morbid, this subject.

²² Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 54 verso, 24 verso, 6 verso.

Throughout the diary, there are examples of Allister taking stock of his situation in Japan and planning for a future back in Canada.²³

5 October 1944

I'm 25. Christ. Pop was married & Harry too, at that age—both responsible business men. I don't suppose [I'll?] realize my age till I get back. Joe with the Pasadena players—Cy an MGM, director, Mac—a playwright. Lon an officer, Harvey—a high rank in the air-force. Milton writing for Lopez. How's for Willy? A washout—a dead hero—picking up butts, picking & shovelling, eating rice & soup 3 times a day, humbled, insulted, pride battered into the dust. Sneaking a smoke, eyes darting in all directions at all times—never relaxed, then the guilty schoolboys & caught & beaten across the puss with a web-belt—about a dozen times. Or working all day with soaking feet, shoes open.

1 March 1944

My dream is to buy my liesure [*sic*] couch someday where I shall regally recline, resplendent in white Russian piejamies [pyjamas] & grey bathrobe with a folding board across my chest with a tray of candies to munch and a book rest for me choice novel and a cosy lamp over my shoulder & nobody or nuttin' to disturb the silence—save the clink of clean dishes in the kitchen the distance muffled street noises under perchance the good slow symphony from the radio. Can such happiness exist for me somewhere, someplace—home? Safety? Security? A full larder, a loving family—I can wait, I can suffer, I can be miserable, I can paint anchor chains, I can scratch fleas, I can go hungry, I can long & dream of it all if It will come someday. This year—yes!—1944. It must, it will.

²³ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 28 verso, 53 verso.

WAR NEWS

Allister's diary shows that the prisoners were largely isolated from the outside world and rumours of Allied operations were heard with interest.²⁴

27 January 1944

News flies about, unconfirmed. Where are the Roshins [Russians]? How's Adolf? Not "How long?" but "How soon?"

13 April 1944

The main point is that 2nd front. It's been imminent for 2 years. Now! Now! Can we be on the threshold of world-shaking events. Will history be made in the next 3 months. Will we spend Christmas at home? O for a Canadian newspaper.

Mid-to-late May 1944

Health is improving, news is decreasing. My God, it's got to end sometime. Another summer—well awright. The Fall?—well it'll be fairly pleasant—but!—another winter? Oh no, no! That is too much. No, I command it—3 years of my young life is sufficient! I must be free for my birthday and see Canada by Christmas. So be it.

Although news was in short supply, Allister did learn about the D-Day landings and victory in Europe shortly after they occurred. While D-Day was greeted with enthusiasm, his reaction to VE Day was far more muted. Perhaps Allister was feeling burned by his earlier optimism.²⁵

²⁴ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 56 verso, 50 verso, 48 verso.

²⁵ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 47 verso, 10-9 verso.

14 June 1944

Did I decree the opening of 2nd Front? This boy, I got powers. June 14 and the miracle came on the sixth—the Present that has been with us, immovable, undeniable, eternal, for 2 ½ years. At last the great edifice has budged. Not just budged—it's taken wings and flown. The Future is now the present. It's come! It's here! That damned, elusive Pimpernel! Let the sound of rejoicing be heard. I'm rejuvenated. They're well into France and blitzing—I may be free for my birthday at that! O my good, good Lord, can it be? The END in view? What it's done to morale is amazing. It's almost superseded the talk & thoughts of grub.

8 May 1945

Yesterday we got it. Imagine all that's going on and us in ignorance. Have you heard the news? Germany's kaisanged. No Lsnit! Funny man. That joke's too stale by now. No, but this time it's confirmed—I was talking to a Jap that spoke perfect English. Yes, yes. And I'm Napoleon. Then we got a paper—in English. And it's happened. ... May the 5th ARMISTICE! Cheers! Hysteria! Jubilation! Dancing in the streets! Europe at peace! After 6 years of blood. What did I do? I ... said "good stuff." But I went out to work as usual. I shovelled coal all day. I was hungry. I was bullied by some Japs. I smoked a cigarette furtively on my bed. I tried to get excited about it. Tried to fool myself. But I wasn't glad. It's all over. Everybody's going home happy. Fascism is dead. So are its Fuhrers. O yes of course—There's that bit of mopping up to do in the East. Still fighting there—but that's only a small corner. Funny, I got more satisfaction out of the thought of the thousands of liberated prisoners in Germany than anything else. We know how they feel & no one else does. So we miss it all.

Allister's final diary entry begins with an account of rumours of a pending invasion of Japan, but between one paragraph and the next, he learns that he is free and words fail him:²⁶

²⁶ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 5 verso.

30 July 1945

Ha! More news, and my morale soars. Saw the rag. In detail. Laugh! Am I happy. The history I fought for is being made. Right under the nose of the world. Atlee with quiet conservative British boredom produces a platform proposing state-controlled national industries, railways and Bank of England. And he wins an overwhelming majority. Repercussion Washington & Moscow. Wow! They expect an invasion here, ‘momentarileh’, so we who are still in the front lines, the first & last Canadians in action – should know their fate in the very near future – one way or t’other.

AND now – now! This day I’m a free man. It’s happened. It’s true. It’s impossible, the miracle has happened. And I’m alive & well. I can be calm because I can’t grasp the enormity of it. Silly trying to say much. [It] can’t be described. If you’ve lived through it you know what it is. If not, you’ll never understand. I want to see Bob, now. He, like no one else, really knows.

CONCLUSION

Allister survived his experience in the camps although he carried deep mental scars. So, too, did 1,417 other Canadian prisoners, although many died of their diseases and injuries almost immediately after their liberation. Allister regained his health and would go on to be a successful actor, artist, filmmaker, novelist and painter. Like all of the Hong Kong prisoners that suffered so terribly from their Japanese overlords, it took years for Allister to deal with his anger.²⁷ In 1961, he penned a novel, *A Handful of Rice*, a fictionalised account of the prisoner of war experience. In it, the Japanese guards were

²⁷ For the postwar experience of Hong Kong veterans, see Jonathan Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994); David McIntosh, *Hell on Earth: Aging Faster, Dying Sooner: Canadian Prisoners of the Japanese during World War II* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1997); Charles G. Roland, *Long Night’s Journey into Day: Prisoners of War in Hong Kong and Japan, 1941-1945* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001); and Tim Cook, *The Fight for History: 75 Years of Forgetting, Remembering, and Remaking Canada’s Second World War* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2020).



Returning as a Bird (reproduction). Painted by William Allister in 1983. Oil on canvas. [Canadian War Museum 20170667-001]

revealed as the brutes that they were, but he also furiously depicted Canadian officers who were castigated for their failure to protect the other ranks that suffered more and survived on less.

From the 1960s, Allister focused on his art, although he continued to write screen plays, scripts and documentaries. He was always creating. A return to Japan in 1983 was an important cathartic trip in working through the war that had imprinted itself deep on his soul. As he later wrote, “starvation, beatings, illness, insults, psychological wounds. Hostility and anger ran deep in my blood.”²⁸ The paintings he created following this visit to Japan incorporate Japanese scenery and motifs as an artistic manifestation of his process of reconciliation. He also wrote *Where Life and Death Hold Hands* in 1989, his memoir of his war years. In it, he was motivated to return to his prisoner of war experience in a desire to exorcise its hold over him some five decades later. In 1995, he was a part of the documentary “The Art of Compassion” along with Raymond Moriyama, the Japanese-Canadian architect who had been forcibly relocated in Canada during the war and who designed the new Canadian War Museum that opened in 2005. Both had been shaped by the war.

²⁸ Allister, *Where Life and Death Hold Hands*, 2.

After grappling with his anger towards the Japanese for the inhumane wartime treatment, Allister found forgiveness as part of his personal healing through his art. Many of his comrades never did. Late in his life, Allister was an active member of the Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association, which strove for justice for the survivors, a formal apology from Japan and monetary compensation from Ottawa for having ordered C Force to the doomed garrison. Allister died at age eighty-nine on 2 November 2008. He outlived many of his comrades who died unnaturally young, their bodies ravaged by the wartime beatings, malnutrition and disease.

Allister came through the traumatic period, even though he was haunted by it his whole life. As he wrote in his diary, it was a period “[o]f hardship, of hunger, of horror, of death, of violence, of inhuman cruelty.”²⁹ He learned to forgive his cruel captors. But he never forgot. And he left an historical legacy in the form of his diary so that future generations will also never forget.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Britt Braaten is an interpretive planner who has developed more than 25 exhibitions for the Canadian War Museum (CWM), the Canada Science and Technology Museum and other cultural institutions. Her work reflects a strong interest in inclusion, accessibility and museum storytelling, as seen in the CWM exhibition *Forever Changed – Stories From the Second World War* (2020).

²⁹ Allister, unpublished diary, 20120037-014, George Metcalf Archival Collection, CWM MHRC, 22 verso.