

Canadian Women of Valour Challenge:

KAY CHRISTIE, Nurse and Prisoner of War

On the afternoon of December 25, 1941, the British Governor of Hong Kong was forced to surrender the island to its Japanese invaders after a week of fierce fighting; the Battle of Hong Kong was over.

On the final day of the battle the Canadians who fought to preserve British control of the island were greeted by a sarcastic Japanese radio broadcast that wished them a merry Christmas and demanded their surrender.

Almost 300 Canadians were killed in the Battle of Hong Kong and another five hundred were wounded. Those who survived were marched to the north-east side of the island and became Japanese Prisoners of War (POW).

One of the Canadians captured was Lieutenant Katherine "Kay" Christie, a Canadian army nurse from Toronto. Praised for sticking to her post during the invasion, Christie treated wounded soldiers during the fierce eight-day battle and looked after her fellow Canadian POWs until her release in 1943.



Kay Christie

Obituary



KAY CHRISTIE: Ex-army nurse was in Hong Kong when Japanese attacked in 1941.

**Ex-nurse
Kay Christie
a wartime
prisoner**

Kay Christie was one of only two Canadian nurses ever to be taken prisoner of war.

She and May Waters of Winnipeg were taken captive when the Japanese overran the British colony of Hong Kong on Christmas Day, 1941.

"I saw every method of torture there," Miss Christie said years later about her 20 months in captivity during World War II.

She died Monday of Lou Gehrig's disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, in the veteran's wing at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre. She was 82.

Born in Little Current on Manitoulin Island, she grew up in Toronto.

When she graduated from Riverdale Collegiate she was too young to enter a nursing school so she took a business course and worked as a secretary.

She then got her training as a registered nurse at Toronto Western Hospital, her sister Mollie said.

She knew nurses would be needed during the war so on Nov. 27, 1940, she joined the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and was given the rank of lieutenant.

By October, 1941, she was available for top-secret semi-tropical duty and advised that if she didn't accept the posting she would be stuck at the hospital for a long time.

She sailed to Hong Kong on Oct. 26 with the Royal Rifles of Canada, from Quebec, and the Winnipeg Grenadiers, who had been requested by the British government to reinforce its garrison.

On Dec. 25, 13 days after the Japanese attacked the colony and the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor, the British garrison and its Canadians surrendered.

For eight months, Miss Christie and Waters were held at the British Military Hospital, designated as Prisoner of War Camp A.

They were expected to treat their fellow prisoners although medical supplies ran out.

While the Japanese treated them correctly, the nurses were sickened by the sights and sounds of torture of Chinese at the guard gate near their quarters.

In August, they and 14 British nurses were loaded on to trucks "like cattle being taken to market" and driven to the Stanley Internment Camp on the south side of the island.

There were 2,400 internees who were fed meagrely morning and evening.

In September, 1943, the United States and Japan agreed to exchange prisoners and the Americans agreed to bring out the Canadian civilians, including Miss Christie and Waters.

It was a long, arduous trip back, but they got home on Dec. 2, 1943.

Miss Christie left the army in 1945 and worked as a nurse-secretary for the same doctor for more than 30 years.

In her retirement, she dedicated her life to helping fellow veterans.

She belonged to several associations, including the National Council of Veterans' Associations, and was a life member of the Hong Kong Veterans' Association. She attended the Fort York Canadian Legion branch.

She leaves her sister Mollie, brother Jim and several nieces and nephews.

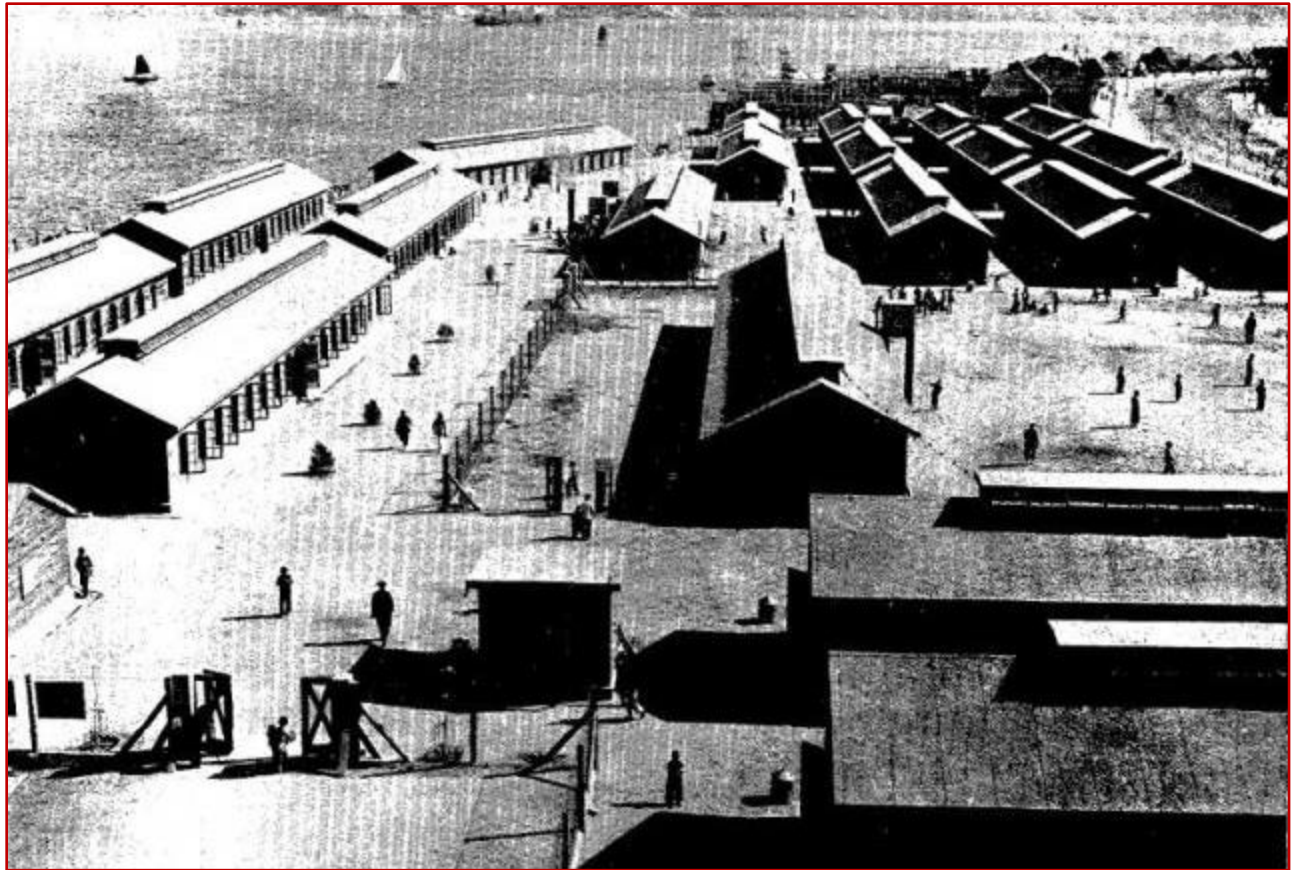
A small funeral is planned.

Kay died in Toronto, 7 February 1994.
She was 82 years old.

Kay Christie's obituary.

(Credit: Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association)

Despite the efforts of Christie and other captured medical staff, 367 Canadians died in Japanese POW camps before they were **liberated** in 1946. The soldiers who fought in Hong Kong were the first Canadians to see combat in the Second World War and the last to return home.



North Point Camp in Hong Kong prior to WWII.

(Credit: [Gwulo](#))

To read more about Kay Christie, visit [Mount Pleasant Group](#), [Veterans Affairs](#) or the [Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association](#).

For more on the Battle of Hong Kong, see this [ThoughtCo](#) article.

Key Vocabulary:

Liberate: to set free from prison