

SAPPER HERBERT THOMAS AQUINOS LIM, BURMA STAR - WW II RCE Veteran



(SOE) Force 136.

On 4 October 2014, Herbert Lim celebrated his 90th birthday in Burnaby, BC with his 125 of his family and many friends. Jim Harris of the Retired Sappers represented the CME and gave Herb a CME toast and read a congratulatory letter from the Colonel Commandant.

Herbert Lim is a Chinese Canadian who, like many of his community, wanted to serve in the Canadian Army early during WWII but were not accepted. Neither did they have the right to vote at that time and, because of their ethnic background, were considered a security risk. Eventually, under pressure from England, the Air Force relented allowing Chinese Canadians to serve. Shortly thereafter, the Navy and, finally, the Army opened their doors to these proud soldier volunteers. Their ability to speak Chinese (and also Japanese in the case of Herbert Lim), was sought after because of a plan to implement what was to be called Special Operation Executive

Herb was attending Engineering studies at UBC and could have claimed exemption from service but volunteered in September 1944. A number of Chinese Canadians, including Sapper Lim, began their training at Chilliwack, learning demolitions, booby traps and subversive warfare. This was followed by intensive isolated training in the BC interior. After their initial training in BC, they were shipped off to England for more extensive training, including paratroop training.

SOE Force 136 was the code name for the soldiers dropped behind enemy lines in Malaysia and Burma to help organize the resistance against the Japanese. Special wireless and operating codes were developed for making their reports. As falling into enemy hands meant torture and death, the wireless operators carried two special "L" suicide pills that they were to swallow if captured. He also jokes about the Airborne only providing him one chute, no spare, but, he went willingly and served his country heroically.



Operational success was assured by the tenacity of these young Canadians. Working under extreme conditions, constantly on the move to prevent capture, their life during those years was sporadic sleep, poor food and constant harassment from and for the enemy. At the war's end, they stayed and cared for the prisoners, nursing them back to health and providing much needed intelligence about the progress of the Japanese surrender. Their post-war duties also included preventing the locals from taking revenge against the defeated soldiers. For his work, Herbert Lim was awarded the Burma Star.

Chinese Canadians were still not given the right to vote until 1947. But the wartime contributions of these brave men went a long way to convincing the politicians of the sincerity of Chinese Canadians and of their loyalty to Canada. They truly deserved the thanks and admiration of all Canadians.



Upon his return to Vancouver, Herb disembarked in New Westminster to avoid the cheering crowds. Herb had not expected to live through WWII but continued to commit his life to service. After the war Herb initially served with the Merchant Marine and later rose to the rank of Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Herbert Lim is a member of the CFB Chilliwack Historical Society and is still very active in promoting the Chinese Canadian exploits and the Chinese Museum in Vancouver. His stories are marvellous, and he tells them with such pride - A Great Canadian - "LEST WE FORGET".