



# Youth Remember the Defence of Hong Kong

## Mascot Dog Sacrificed Life for Human Comrades



Gander with the *Royal Rifles of Canada* departing for Hong Kong in 1941.  
Source: Hong Kong Veterans Commemorative Association

Sergeant Gander was a Newfoundland dog, and was raised by the Hayden family on the airport base in Gander, Newfoundland.

He was a friendly dog who loved playing with children. He pulled them on their sleds and they watched him drool —Newfoundland dogs drool a lot!—He enjoyed living on the base but spent too much time on the runways, trying to catch the planes as they came in to land.

One day, because he was growing to be so large, the Hayden family decided to give the playful dog to the *Royal Rifles of Canada* Regiment stationed at the Gander airport. (Did you know that Newfoundland dogs can grow to weigh 55 kilograms? That's one BIG dog!) He quickly became a good friend and mascot.

In 1941, the Royal Rifles of Canada Regiment was sent to Hong Kong to defend the land from an enemy invasion. The men couldn't bear to leave Gander behind, so they gave him the rank of "Sergeant" and he boarded the troopship with his fellow soldiers!



Fred Kelly was the soldier responsible for feeding Gander and giving him cool showers to keep him comfortable in the heat (Newfoundland dogs have very heavy fur). Taking care of Gander was a pleasant duty for Kelly and his regiment. During wartime the companionship of a dog reminded many of the men of pets and family at home.

Gander was a mascot, but he was also seen as a fellow soldier with a job to perform. He would bark and nip at the legs of the enemy, scaring them away. One night in December 1941, Gander showed his true courage.

He was a smart dog—he knew what a grenade was and how it could hurt people. That night, Gander saw a grenade tossed near a group of wounded Canadian soldiers. He ran to it, took it, and rushed away with it. The grenade exploded and Gander was killed. But he had saved the lives of the seven soldiers! Those men never forgot Sergeant Gander.

In 2000, Gander was awarded the Dickin Medal for his bravery during a gathering of Veterans in Ottawa. There stood Fred Kelly with a Newfoundland dog named Rimshot, who represented Gander, the brave mascot-soldier. Gander's medal was the first awarded to a Canadian animal and is now displayed at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

The Dickin Medal is the highest honour given to animals for brave and courageous acts. It is a large bronze medallion, and bears the words: "For Gallantry" and "We also Serve" all within a laurel wreath. The ribbon is striped:

- green (representing water and symbolizing the navy)
- dark brown (representing earth and symbolizing the army); and
- pale blue (representing air and symbolizing the air forces)

The following animals have received the Dickin Medal to date: 32 pigeons; 24 dogs; 3 horses; and 1 cat.

