Maurice Frederick Key, OBE

Secretary to the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce

A Rotarian Internee during the Japanese Occupation of Hong Kong 1942-1945

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

1 December 2015

Maurice Frederick Key, OBE, (1886-1969), Briton from Chester, Cambridgeshire, England, was Secretary to the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce (香港總商會). He joined the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) in 1930-40s as an Active Member holding the Classification “Associations – Chamber of Commerce”.

Defence of Hong Kong and the Fall of Hong Kong

Key was particularly known for his role during the Pacific War (1941-1945) resulting the Imperial Japan’s occupation of the British Crown Colony Hong Kong. Key was a civilian internee at the Stanley Internment Camp (赤柱拘留營) during the Japanese occupation.

On the same morning of 7 December 1941 as the attack on Pearl Harbor, forces of the Empire of Japan attacked the British Crown Colony Hong Kong around the same time that Japan declared war on Britain. The Hong Kong garrison consisted of British, Indian and Canadian units, also the Auxiliary Defence Units and Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (香港義勇防衛軍團).

Of the three territories of Hong Kong, the defenders abandoned the two mainland territories of Kowloon and New Territories within a week. Less than two weeks later, with their last territory Hong Kong Island untenable, the Colony surrendered. The fall of the city is regarded as Black Christmas as it marked the beginning of a brutal occupation by Japan that would last until its liberation in the summer of 1945.

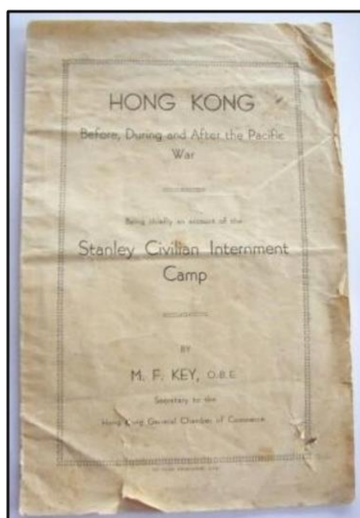
Stanley Internment Camp was a civilian internment camp in Hong Kong during the Pacific War. Located in Stanley (赤柱), on the southern end of Hong Kong Island, it was

used by the Japanese imperial forces to hold non-Chinese enemy nationals after their victory in the Battle of Hong Kong (香港保衛戰) in December 1941. About 2,800 men, women, and children were held at the non-segregated camp for 44 months from early January 1942 to August 1945 when Japanese forces surrendered. The Camp area consisted of St. Stephen's College (聖士提反書院) and the grounds of Stanley Prison (赤柱監獄), excluding the prison itself.

The internees numbered at 2,800, of which an estimated 2,325 to 2,514 were British. The adult population numbered at 1,370 men and 858 women, and children 16 years of age or younger numbered at 286, with 99 of whom were below the age of 4. The Camp was under the control of the Japanese Foreign Affairs Department, but according to historian Geoffrey Charles Emerson, the Japanese forces had not made plans for dealing with enemy civilians in Hong Kong. As such, the Camp was provided with few necessities, and the internees were left to govern the Camp themselves. Committees were formed for such matters as housing, food, and medical care. The national groups remained mostly independent of each other except for matters of welfare and medical care. Very few government servants were selected to serve on these committees. Due to anti-government sentiment, most internees blamed the government for the quick surrender of Hong Kong.

Rotarian Key was an internee in the Stanley Camp. For some time he shared a room with Vice-Chancellor Duncan John Sloss of the University of Hong Kong (香港大學校長史樂詩) (who was giving lectures at the Camp on English literature for two years, twice a week).

After the War, in November 1945, Key published a small booklet in Australia about his experiences. Due to high demand, he re-produced the booklet in Hong Kong in June 1946. It would be a shame for this important record, so earnestly put together by Rotarian Key, to disappear into oblivion. It is therefore decided to reproduce here the whole booklet in its entirety. It is confident that it would be his wish that this work, which substantiates so many others, is recorded for the greater benefit of all those interested in the events that transpired in this tragic period of Hong Kong's history.


HONG KONG

Before, During and After the Pacific War

Stanley Civilian Internment Camp

M. F. KEY, O.B.E.

HONG KONG
Before, During and After the Pacific War
Being chiefly an account of the
STANLEY CIVILIAN INTERNMENT CAMP
BY
M. F. KEY, O.B.E.
Secretary to the
Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce

Introduction

This account of the Stanley Civilian Internment Camp in Hong Kong, written for the information of relatives and friends, reaches them via the "Kapunda Herald". The proprietor and editor of that paper, Mr. L. N. Tilbrook, saw the m.s.s. and considered that the story would be of interest to his readers. After serial publication, the type was kept standing, and this pamphlet was made up therefrom.

Kapunda is a small town in South Australia, just as old as Hong Kong. One of the most interesting institutions in the place is the "Kapunda Herald", of which the proprietor is at the same time editor, leader-writer, reporter, compositor, (linotype or hand-setting) proofreader, printer, machinist, and publisher. I account it a special privilege to have been "published" by so remarkable an enterprise.

M. F. Key, Kaplee, Kapunda, Nov. 1945

Introduction to Second Edition

The first edition of this pamphlet was almost exhausted in Australia and now a demand is found for it in Hong Kong. Apparently many ex-internees will find this narrative useful to supplement their own accounts of the experience in Stanley. Ye Olde Printerie Ltd. has undertaken to print this edition. High costs of printing locally at the present time make it necessary to charge $1.00 a copy (H.K. Currency) to cover expenses.

M. F. K., Hong Kong, June, 1946

Pre-World War II

HONG KONG, small but important outpost of the British Empire, and particularly of Australasia in the in the Pacific War, passed through a period of unusual difficulty and

anxiety before the blow fell on the 8th December, 1941. Japan's long-continued effort to 'make friends' with China at the point of the bayonet had driven refugees, both rich and poor, into Hong Kong by hundreds of thousands, until population figures rose from 850,000 to an estimated 2,000,000. (No building development took place to accommodate this influx; the newcomers crowded into already overcrowded houses, or slept on the sidewalks.) War in Europe had already increased food costs; pressure of population had stepped-up rents. The poor became poorer, and malnutrition was rife. It was a matter of common observation that never had so many half-starved Chinese been seen on the streets as in 1941.

On the other hand, deviation to Hong Kong of business, previously done through other ports on the China coast, brought about a great increase of trade, done on an ever-rising market. Merchants confessed that it was impossible not to make exceptional profits. In the week before the Japanese struck, Government revenue reached a record level: HK $2,000,000* was paid into the Treasury.

* Note: The HK$ = 1s. 3d. (sterling)

Precautionary Measures

Public expenditure had also greatly increased. Air raid tunnels---thought incapable of sheltering more than a tithe of the teeming population---had been constructed at a cost of $8,000,000. Further large expenditure built up a food and fuel reserve, large enough to furnish a siege ration for 150 days for two million people. More than $1,000,000 was needed to build decentralised stores (58 in number) for this vast quantity of food. Government borrowed $20,000,000 and took over the rice import trade.

Local dockyards were working 24 hours a day for the British Government; small Chinese factories were being encouraged to adapt themselves to production of simpler requirements of the Forces, and had from thirty to fifty million dollars worth of orders in hand.

Compulsory service for the white population had been introduced; those of military age were drilling; those exempt were detailed for various essential services, and were practised against Der Tag.

Despite all this activity, however, the prevailing local opinion was that Japan would not be so foolish as to enter the war, but would content herself, as last time, with making profits and extending her mercantile marine.

In the week before the war, delegates from British Malays, the Dutch East Indies, Shanghai and Hong Kong assembled in Hong Kong to discuss more effective movement of Far Eastern shipping---vessels which in a few days' time were not to move at all, unless luckily taken out of harm's way---as many were, on receipt of an early warning from the Naval authorities.

The Blow Falls!

And then the blow fell! Radio 'knob-twiddlers,' who chanced to listen in during the small hours of December 8th, heard the news of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour. At 6 am in Hong Kong the code message came through which meant, "To your stations!" From that moment life in our hitherto peaceful Colony was a nightmare. The first Japanese air attack came immediately, military pressure was applied from South China in such strength that the portion of the Colony which is on the mainland had to be abandoned in the first few days. The garrison retired to what was publicly described as "the impregnable fortress of the Island."

But the scanty troops were unable to guard all possible landing places. The Japanese shelled and bombed the city heavily, pressed into use the large number of launches and ferries available in a busy harbour, and soon over-ran the Island, though they lost some thousands of men in the process. The British garrison numbered 10,000 (comprising Home, Canadian and Indian troops). It is estimated by the British General-Officer Commanding that the Japanese brought to bear a better equipped force of 60,000 men.

To have maintained a larger British garrison would have been useless. Doubling the numbers would require extensive barrack building schemes; to have held so many extra men in a crowded city under sub-tropical conditions during the years 1940 and 1941 (in anticipation of attack) would have accentuated grave social problems, for Hong Kong has an evil reputation from the angle of military hygiene.

Whatever numbers the British put in, the Japanese could have over-called the bid. Against 10,000 they brought 60,000; against 20,000 they could have marched 100,000. To the British, Hong Kong was a small, distant outpost; to the Japanese it was a mere pocket of resistance in a tract of South China already under their control.

Air Defence

It has also to be mentioned that the Colony's air defences were practically nil. In the now-remote pre-war years effective air defence appeared to be impracticable, because the limited land area of Hong Kong affords little space for airfields. The lessons of the war, however, may suggest methods of overcoming that difficulty. Neighbouring small islands could be flattened and converted into "airstrips."

In addition to military insufficiency, another grave weakness quickly manifested itself. From the beginning it proved impracticable for the handful of Europeans reserved from active service to make effective the civil organization for feeding the hundreds of thousands of indigent Chinese, deprived by war of their hand-to-mouth means of subsistence. It had been urged before hostilities began that a sufficient number of Europeans must be withheld

from the Defence Force to drive the food trucks. The Military declared that the length of line they had to guard made it impossible to spare a single man for this purpose. When roads were shelled, the Chinese drivers simply disappeared and transport broke down completely. Confusion raged; food queues a mile long were the rule, and the food could not be got to the people. At an early stage, also, the Japanese obtained control of the water supply.

Surrender!

On the afternoon of Christmas Day, 1941, came the surrender. The houses of those away from home on active or public service were immediately looted---principally by the Chinese, but also by the Japanese soldiery. Oriental looting must be seen to be believed. The 'have nots' left nothing behind. When every stick of furniture and every article of personal effects had gone, they started on the woodwork and metal fittings. Doors, window frames and floorboards all went; houses being reduced to empty shells. To the Oriental, wood and food are of equal value, for the latter is useless without the former. Rice cannot be eaten uncooked.

The Japanese gradually took control. They soon made it clear that they were treating the Colony as conquered and not occupied territory. There was no question of the Colonial Government being allowed to carry on the civil administration (as in France). Having made the troops prisoners of war, the Japanese proceeded to implement their anti-foreign policy of "Asia for the Asiatics." Legally, a British subject is a British subject, whether white, Chinese or Indian. The Japanese exercised racial discrimination. Expressing sentiments of friendship for Chinese and Indians, they rounded up British, Americans and Dutch, told them to parade with what they could carry, and without opportunity to make their houses secure (if not already looted), crowded them into a number of Chinese hotels and brothels in such density that three or four had to sleep sideways on the beds, using chairs to support their legs. Sanitary arrangements were indescribable; a hundred persons of both sexes to one toilet. No food for 48 hours, and then only rice. No arrangements for cooking, beyond such as the prisoners could devise for themselves.

The Internment

After three weeks of this incarceration without any opportunity for exercise, the prisoners (comprising 1,100 men, 1,000 women, 340 children and 80 infants), were conveyed to a remote part of the Island (known as Stanley Peninsula) and housed at the rate of one per 36 square feet in school buildings and premises formerly the quarters of the prison staff. No organized provision was made in advance, but gradually sufficient equipment was provided

for a scratch existence to be maintained. Only two small meals of rice daily, with microscopic additions of vegetables and unmarketable fish, were provided. On these rations the people were in a state of semi-starvation; some lost as much as 100 lbs in weight in a few months; the average loss of weight was 40 lbs. In the first six months over 100 hernia cases developed, ascribed by the doctors (who were interned with the rest of the European population) to wastage and weakening of bodily tissue, due to the almost complete absence of protein from the diet.

With childlike effrontery, the 'Foreign Affairs Department of Greater Nippon,' in March, 1942, presented to the Camp a bill for $86,000, $9,000 of which represented 'hotel charges' for the filthy accommodation in which internees were herded before the opening of Stanley Camp; the remainder was the cost of fish and vegetables, the Japanese blandly explaining that rice and salt only, is a prisoner's official ration, as recognised by them, and anything else must be paid for by the victim.

After an anxious special meeting, it was decided to tender a cheque for the money, one of the large firms 'doing the needful' against a guarantee of future repayment by the Hong Kong Government. At the same time the war was carried into the enemy's country by saying that if we had to pay for part of our food, we should like to be permitted to select nourishing food (and not the filth so far sent in). This request, and the fact that the Japanese could not cash the cheque (having cancelled the currency and frozen enemy accounts) led them to reconsider their absurd demand and to return the cheque, much as it must have paid them to do so. At this juncture, several large firms offered to put millions of dollars at the disposal of the Hong Kong Colonial Secretary in order that the people might be properly fed, but the fact that bank accounts were frozen prevented action along those lines.

The Rations

By June, 1942, the Japanese appeared to realise that they had gone too far in their efforts to discover on how little the hated foreigner could keep body and soul together. They announced that they realised Europeans needed bread, and they issued a few ounces of flour per head daily. A little meat was also supplied. The rations, however, were still usually 1,000 calories below the recognised League of Nations minimum of 2,500 calories.

At the end of 1942 a Red Cross shipment from South Africa arrived. It was revealed later that the Japanese kept back some part of this, but what was received maintained a much better standard of life while it lasted, and by dint of great economy the shipment was spread over five months. Four ounces of meat a day was found to make all the difference between perpetual hunger and, if not comfort, at least resignation.

At the end of 1943 the Japanese announced that they had no more flour, and that no more meat or fish would be issued. The electricity supply was also cut off. From that time

until well into 1945 the internees lived on rice and vegetables only, the latter 80 per cent of the gourd type---mostly water. Dysentery was often rife and any further loss of weight on that account could not be recovered on the utterly inadequate diet. Sanitation, cooking and other work of the Camp had to be carried out by the internees themselves, which was only possible by allocation to workers of extra food, deducted from the rations of the majority. In the last year, however, the Japanese allowed extra rations for a limited number of workers.

Camp Organization

It is a curious circumstance that the Japanese allowed the Camp to run itself. Government by an elected committee was therefore established; the committee became advisory when the Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong arrived in the Camp and was recognized by the Japanese as Representative of Internees.

From the beginning the Camp established schools and its own hospital, which, with a minimum of help from the Japanese, rendered important service throughout the internment, saving many lives. A Nutrition Clinic did its best, with inadequate remedies, to cope with the diseases of malnutrition, which, in various forms, were endemic. Special reserves were set aside for infants, children and nursing mothers. It may be revealed now that various devices were resorted to---unknown to the Japanese---in order to obtain, and maintain, certain emergency supplies for these special classes. Fortunately the Hong Kong Government had purchased, prior to the war, some thousands of dollars worth of synthetic vitamin preparations, which were secretly brought into the Camp before the Japanese had thoroughly installed themselves in the Colony. A minute regular dose, administered to each individual over a long period, made good vitamin deficiencies, which must otherwise have produced a heavy mortality.

Not everyone in the Camp lived on the official rations. A minority, having business connections or friends in town received parcels of food which, during most of the time, the Japanese allowed in unhindered, though they expressed the opinion that the contents should be divided pro rata amongst all internees. Such interference with private gifts did not commend itself and would probably have discouraged the supply. Moreover pro rata distribution would have produced only a trifle per head.

Black Market

Naturally, a black market was established. Food was brought to the Camp surreptitiously by Orientals and sold to internees at high prices. The buyers re-sold at still higher prices to cover their risks, which were considerable, for they had no remedy against ‘double-crossing’ or confiscation, both of which were frequent. The profits of this business

were advanced to responsible persons against cheques or promissory notes payable after the war. Rates of exchange were sometimes unconscionable, but people were inclined to be philosophic about this, for if they possessed a few thousands of pounds in investments, it seemed worthwhile to spend a few hundreds to save their lives. At 20 yen to the £, eggs at 35 yen each were costing 35/-! Australian corned mutton at that period (early 1945) sold for Y380 a 12 ounce tin, which equalled £19!

The Japanese Commandant of the Camp was frequently changed. One of the Commandants interested himself in the Black Market, and diverted to it part of the more saleable portion of the rations and canteen supplies (e.g.: peanut oil and egg yolks). It became necessary to warn those in possession of funds that in buying these items they were encouraging robbery of the whole community.

Thousands of yen were paid by the Japanese, or Formosan, guards for articles of jewellery and watches. Thus, an individual who sold a £2 watch for Y1,000, actually paid about 15/- for a 12 oz tin of mutton. This different standard of value acted adversely in regard to those who had paid dearly for their yen with post-war cheques; they found market prices forced up against them by those whose money had been obtained more cheaply.

Despite occasional losses and 'beatings-up', the black market traders were on a pretty good wicket. The current week's profits, loaned out by them to responsible firms, and distributed by the firms to their employees, were spent by those individuals in the next few days, whereby the traders were again in possession of large quantities of yen which were sold again and came back to them again in trade, and so ad infinitum. They were rolling a financial snowball, which quickly grew to large dimensions.

Protecting the Public

One of the first steps the Hong Kong Government took after the cessation of hostilities was to prohibit temporarily the cashing of obligations in respect of post-war cheques and promissory notes, and to require full details of all transactions to be declared to the appropriate Government Department. It is assumed that rates, where necessary, will be compulsorily scaled down.

After a time, the Japanese were persuaded to let the Camp have a canteen. As they selected the supplier (whose prices were high) they soon became enthusiastic on behalf of the canteen. Supplies were so limited that only two opportunities to shop, per month, could be afforded to each internee, and then for a restricted sum.

An auction mart was also maintained until the Japanese stopped it. This gave useful opportunities of turning any unwanted gear into money for the purchase of food or necessaries. Startling prices were often realised, indicating that what in ordinary life would be regarded as junk, may in special circumstances acquire high value. Yen to the equivalent

of £2 or £3 were often paid for an empty five-pound jam tin, because of its usefulness as a saucepan. It was inconvenient to be without a pencil for making out canteen lists or Bridge scores, so £1 to £2 was often paid for a penny or tuppenny pencil. Someone possessing soft blankets would sacrifice a sheet, which would be eagerly snapped up at a fancy price by another internee, whose blankets happened to be of harsher texture.

Indications of the End

It was a surprise to internees to learn, after the relief of Hong Kong, that the British and American combatant authorities expected the war to last into 1946. Judging from the remarks about their difficulties let fall by the Japanese officials, and reading between the lines of their propaganda newspaper, we came, early in 1945, to the conclusion that peace could not be far distant. This impression was confirmed at the end of May when we were told that the supply of the newspaper would cease forthwith. Fortunately Chinese newspapers continued to come in as wrappings of goods, and some of us drew a fine dividend from Chinese language studies.

The great majority of internees had no contacts with the Japanese. Sporadic face-slappings and beatings-up occurred, but the worst incidents were: The execution of several, it is believed in connection with the alleged possession of wireless sets, though the Japanese refused to divulge particulars of the charges; and the doing to death by slow starvation of the Hong Kong Bank's Chief Manager (Sir Vandeleur Grayburn), and the Hong Kong Office Manager (Mr. D. C. Edmonston), apparently for refusal to collaborate in currency matters. The Japanese were so reckless as to deliver the bodies of these two gentlemen to the Camp for burial, so that medical reports on their shockingly emaciated condition are available. Permission to send in to the gaol, where these prisoners were incarcerated, the vitamin preparations, which would probably have saved their lives, was refused.

General Conditions

In retrospect, and after comparing notes with men released from prisoners-of-war camps, it seems clear that Hong Kong civilians were far from being the worst sufferers from Japanese anti-foreignism and barbarism. They were seriously underfed and wretchedly accommodated, but on the other hand, the area in which they were placed was healthy. Allowed access to books, they were also permitted to engage in studies and attend lectures and entertainments arranged by themselves. Religious exercises were not interfered with, and were maintained throughout internment. The chief suffering, in addition to perpetual hunger, was anxiety as to the future, for the Japanese showed great indifference at times, to the maintenance of regular supplies of the poor rations they provided. (The Camp built up

a secret food reserve against the possibility that, during hostilities for the re-capture of the Colony, the Japanese would be too busy to bring in any food at all. One reason for secrecy was that the Japanese had a habit of cutting down supplies if they found any food was being accumulated.)

There is no doubt that those who remained in Hong Kong and were not interned had a much worse time, living in constant dread of visits from the Gendarmerie and maintaining life only by selling all their possessions, at prices which dissipated in a few months the accumulations of decades.

The Daily Routine

Life in the Camp settled down to a regular routine, which ran something like this: Queue for hot water on rising; queue again shortly afterwards for half-a-pint of rice congee (a 'mess of pottage' similar to oatmeal porridge but not nearly as nutritious); wash and tidy up; do two hours work; queue for the 11 o'clock rice and vegetable stew; queue for more hot water; eat a morsel of saved-up food at 2 pm; attend lecture, read, or play bridge in the afternoon. Queue for the evening meal at 5.30. Visit friends in the cool of the evening. In quarters by 8 pm, queue again for hot water. The work referred to above might be: clerical work for the Camp, teaching at the school, working on the land, sanitation duties, cobbling, mending, vegetable-cutting, dentistry, medical work in a clinic. Some internees---those working in the kitchens or in the hospital for example---put in much longer hours than the generality.

The excessively overcrowded conditions under which people lived are perhaps best illustrated by a personal experience. The writer consented to be transferred from his quarters in order that the Vice-Chancellor of the University (who was in the same room) might have sufficient space to set up a table on which to write in preparation for a course of lectures on English Literature which he nobly maintained (to the great enjoyment of all who attended) for a space of two years, twice a week. In the new quarters occupied after this transfer an adjustment had to be made after the first night. A piece of wood was nailed to the floor in order to prevent the legs of two adjacent camp beds from touching; otherwise each sleeper disturbed the other every time he turned over.

As to under-feeding, the important thing was to get to sleep before the pangs of hunger set in acutely. A good device to quell these was to fold up some garment and then bind it tightly to the stomach with a towel.

Repatriation

The principal subjects of conversation amongst internees were: "Food" "When do you

think this will be over?" and "Repatriation". Almost daily representations were made to the Japanese Camp Headquarters about the poorness and inadequate quantity of the rations. The second question soon became tiresome: one man's guess was as good as another's. "Repatriation" was dangled before our noses like carrots before a donkey. It began with the majority of the American community getting away on exchange before six months had elapsed (except for a few who elected to remain on grounds of duty: R. C. priests mostly.) Later, the Canadians were exchanged. The Japanese seemed to take a delight in keeping the United Kingdom citizens on thorns. There is no doubt they hoped to arouse dissension amongst the Allies. Once, the stage was reached that lists of those who would be going were published on the notice boards, and from time to time all sorts of promises were made indicating that the question was still open.

But nothing was actually done. It was learned after release that an exchange of 1,500 people was under consideration and that 600 of these were to be from Stanley. The Japanese wanted to have included in their list 320 pearl fishers, many of them known to be ex-Naval Officers engaged in espionage before the War. General MacArthur objected to their inclusion, on the grounds that these men knew too much about the Australian coastline and harbours. As he was responsible for the defence of Australia the Commonwealth Authorities were disinclined to overrule him. Great efforts were made in London to secure our release, but differing views left us in durance vile.

The Red Cross Hampered

Assistance by the International Red Cross was much impeded by the Japanese. Remittance came through irregularly and at such adverse rates of exchange that they had very low spending value in the Camp. The Red Cross delegate sent in bulk supplies of beans and bran, when he could get them. Quantities were small, but even half an ounce per head per day was of value in giving the diet a minimal protein and vitamin content. The delegate was not allowed to inspect the Camp nor to send adverse reports to Geneva. All contact with him was cut off during the last year of the war. A small Canadian Red Cross shipment was helpful towards the end of 1944. After this came some clothing from the American Red Cross, and finally, after the war, a handsome gift of clothing and necessaries from the people of Australia, (through the Australian Red Cross) which enabled internees to discard the rags and tatters in which they had been creeping about and to present a respectable appearance before the post-war world. This timely gift was deeply appreciated.

Mention must be made of the tragic happening of 16th January 1945, when American planes flying near the Camp were fired upon by the Japanese from a position close to a bungalow occupied by internees. An aviator tried to put the anti-aircraft gun out of action, but the bomb exploded next to the bungalow, killing 14 people out of hand. One man got

up from the table to get a spoon from the next room. He escaped; everyone else in the room was killed. By resolution, the American community in the Camp was assured that no one entertained bitter feelings against our American Allies because of this unfortunate mischance.

Deliverance

Almost suddenly, in August, rumours began to fly round the Camp that the war was over. The Formosan guards first disclosed the news, and it was confirmed when the Japanese commandant sent for the Representative of Internees to inform him (as he put it): "We have lost and you have won." Internees---ex-internees one can call them now---were warned not to indulge in demonstrations of rejoicing, which might lead to unpleasant incidents before the Japanese handed over to a relieving force. People were reminded that "the Japanese are now experiencing that feeling of humiliation which was ours in December, 1941." And to give their feelings some consideration in the changed circumstances.

A few days later news came that Admiral Harcourt and the Relieving Force were outside the harbour. Just as the evening rice was coming over from the cookhouse (in the two babies' baths which were the only containers our section of the Camp had), word was sent round: "Admiral Harcourt is visiting the Camp and is on his way!" Back went the rice to the cookhouse to be kept hot, and everyone made for the Camp Centre. Within a few minutes came a bodyguard of marines, husky fellows, who looked as though they would stand no nonsense from anyone. They were packed into a strange vehicle, which we learned was a 'jeep'---a new word to us. The Admiral's and the staff's cars followed. In a few words to the cheering throng, Admiral Harcourt told us that it was the thought of the sufferings, of those held prisoners by the Japanese, which had inspired the Forces of the United Nations in the efforts they had made to bring the war to a successful end. As we gazed upon these sturdy representatives of the Relieving Force, the first of our kith and kin we had seen for nearly four years from the outside world---real people instead of walking skeletons; and listened to the Admiral's comforting words, the whole assembly was overcome with emotion. No man wished so speak to his neighbour until he had regained control of his feelings.

"The Navy is Here!"

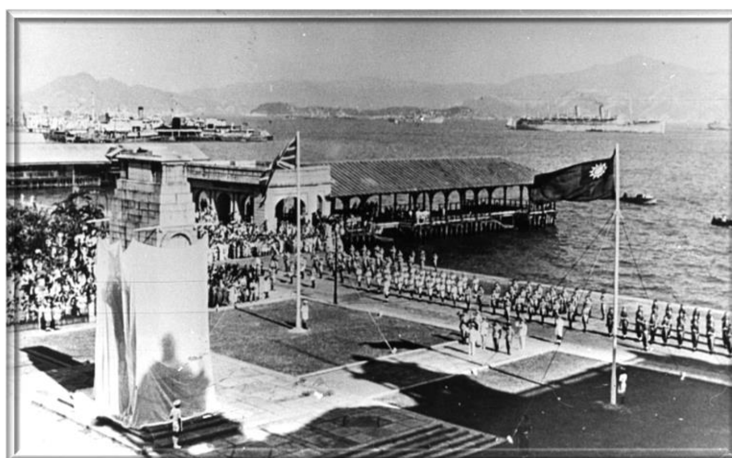
From that time forth, the Navy got down to the practical problem of feeding us. They baked us bread and unloaded tons of good food upon us until it was necessary to call a halt lest digestive systems, geared down for years to the assimilation of slops, gave way under the strain of unaccustomed plenty. Simultaneously, the sorting out of the people for repatriation by hospital ship or ordinary transport put the Camp on the way to liquidation. Soon everyone will be recuperating and "getting the barbed wire out of his system."

The Future

Hong Kong's immediate future is obscure. It is understood to be the opinion of the British Government that some months will elapse before a beginning can be made with the re-establishment of the Colony's great entrepot trade---the distribution to the world of the exports of South China, and the passing into China of the exports from the outside world. Shipping will be scarce and banking facilities for international trade not immediately available. Therefore, it is argued, business men who have suffered in internment may safely go to their homelands to recover, the British Government promising to convey them thither and to bring them back again---not in luxury, but in such ships as are available.

It may well prove, however, that the recovery of Hong Kong trade will begin sooner than expected. The resident Chinese business community will not go away to be rehabilitated in health; its energetic and resourceful personnel will remain on the spot and they are people accustomed to carrying on a huge barter trade, in which balances are struck once a year. The ubiquitous Chinese junks---which before the days of steam followed the coast to India, and even as far as the eastern shores of Africa---will creep out of the remote inlets, where they have been hidden from the Japanese, in order to enjoy an Indian summer of prosperity. In so doing they will help towards the revival of trade, until steam vessels are available again in adequate numbers. A very large percentage of Hong Kong's trade is done with nearby countries---the Philippine Islands, French Indo China, Thailand, Malay, Netherlands East Indies, in cargoes in which foreign merchants have very little interest, but which are none the less important in respect of reviving the flow of world trade. To the British Empire, however, it is of the utmost importance that one of the great markets for export trade, on which so much now depends, should be in full operation as soon as possible.

(The End)



Liberation of Hong Kong in 1945 (香港重光) after the Second World War

Picture was taken at the Cenotaph in Central (和平紀念碑), the British Crown Colony Hong Kong.

The Union Jack of British Empire and the National Flag of the Republic of China were hoisted.