



## **Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW**



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### **Editorial Letter to Accompany OPs 34 and 35**

Dear Members and Readers,

I regret the absence of a covering letter to the last two Occasional Papers owing to indisposition, though in truth there was little I could add to those two informative papers.

This time I am better placed, not through having been an eye witness or participant but through a general familiarity with the historical background through interest and reading - and also from a keen concern to recover valuable information on important matters still insufficiently known to this day.

OP34 on the Ablong family concerns one such, the Air Raid Precaution service, an overlooked, largely forgotten, part of the defence of Hong Kong in and before December, 1941.

As OP34 shows, the Ablong family and its relatives were prominent local contributors to the overall war effort through the participation of many of its members, male and female alike, in the fighting services and the ARP. More important here, it highlights the ARP itself, about which not nearly enough is known to this day.

The ARP was not glamorous. It was overshadowed by the scandal over the rushed construction of air raid shelters, though this had nothing to do with the wardens who patrolled the streets and were the backbone of the organisation. It and they deserve better from posterity.

It is still not too late for immediate descendants of men and women who rallied to the call for volunteers to join the ARP in 1940-41 to search for any family memorabilia from the time, especially letters, photographs, or handed down stories from the older generation, and bring them to our attention as the Ablongs have done. And even they have more to tell!

OP 35 on Hong Kong Cadets describes an important part of the Hong Kong civil service. Well educated, and given the standard two years' training in Cantonese and the Chinese written language, the senior Cadets occupied the highest posts in the local administration, saving the headships of professional departments like the Medical and Public Works Departments, whilst their juniors staffed the Colonial Secretariat (central government offices) and politically sensitive posts in the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs and the District Administration, New Territories.

But as the paper notes, they were a very small group in the relatively modest civil service of the day, and for other compelling reasons it is unrealistic to think that they could have had much influence upon contemporary Hong Kong in the face of the generally adverse circumstances of the time. At the Colony Census of 1931, the recorded population of the whole territory was 838,800. The decennial census of 1941 was not made, and in lieu a survey of the population of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon by air raid wardens of the ARP in March of that year gave an estimated 1.45 million, to which another 200,000 for the New Territories was added. These huge additions were due to the full-scale attack on China made by the Japanese army in mid 1937, leading to the speedy capture of many of the big cities. Canton fell in October, 1938 sending hundreds of thousand refugees to seek haven in Hong Kong and putting a heavy strain on the Colony's resources and the administration. The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe in September, 1939 further worsened the situation.

Other realities made it unlikely that a sense of loyalty could be infused or expected in the population. By and large, most Cadets excepted, the expatriate element was often racist and full of hubris, proud of western achievements and dismissive of China and Chinese in general. The expatriate business community was not well-disposed to the Hong Kong government, considering that senior officials had a pro-Chinese bias and paid insufficient attention to its concerns and business interests, an attitude recorded in Stanley Internment Camp by the incoming Colonial Secretary Sir Franklin Gimson who had arrived just in time to be incarcerated by the Japanese. Nonetheless, the two papers show that many members of the locally settled families of all races, male and female alike, did rally in considerable numbers to support the war effort as best they could.

Space does not permit more than these covering remarks, which are based on wide reading and my own research into the pre-war decade and the Japanese occupation.

I close by sending Henry's and my own seasonal greetings, and our best wishes for 2016 to you and your families.

James Hayes, Series Editor

Sydney,

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