



Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



AN HISTORICAL SERIES OF PAPERS ON THE WAR AND OCCUPATION OF HONG KONG 1941-45

Introduction to the Occasional Papers Series

In December 1941, two years into the Second World War, Hong Kong had its largest ever population. An influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Japanese invasion of China which began in Shanghai in 1937 had nearly doubled the 1931 Census population to over one and a half millions. Japanese troops had occupied the Sino-British border since 1938 and crossed into the New Territories on 8 December 1941, just two hours after the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (Hawaii). They were soon in Kowloon, and by Christmas Day Hong Kong had surrendered. It would remain under Japanese rule for the next three years and eight months.

With the approval of the Committee, our Association is preparing for circulation to members from time to time an historical series of papers on Hong Kong in the Pacific War. It is hoped that information on those harrowing and difficult times will be welcomed by all members, and especially those descended from men and women who served in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC) and other Hong Kong-based units during the War and Occupation, It is the more needed because, on too many occasions in past years, it has been only when attending the memorial services for our older members that we learned of their wartime achievements and experiences.

To be issued as numbered OCCASIONAL PAPERS, under the coloured letterhead used for the Association's Newsletter, this Introduction to the Historical Series is intended to provide some background information about Hong Kong in 1941 and the reasons for the Japanese attack on the Colony.

The attack on Hong Kong was part of a grand offensive to bring the whole of China and Southeast Asia under Japanese control. It was largely dictated by Japan's need for the raw materials required to sustain its ongoing war in China and to pursue its wider economic and political aims. The Japanese empire was to replace Western colonial powers as the dominant force in the East and establish and lead an Asian co-prosperity sphere.

During the 1930s, the Japanese armed forces had taken over political leadership and control, and were bent on military conquest and world domination. As in the West, it was an evil time, and those attacked were not only defending their lives but also their cherished ideals. Less well prepared than their attackers, they were up against it. In a very real sense, Freedom itself was on the line.

To kick off the series Henry Ching, our fellow member and former Chairman, with the help of information supplied by others including Tony Banham, Ron Taylor and Solly Bard, is writing a number of papers on different topics.

The first are already with me, as series editor, and include basic information papers on the composition of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps and the Civil Defence Corps in December 1941, and on the Memorials to members who lost their lives in the war. Henry's other short essays will provide us with information on the Prisoner of War and Civilian Internment Camps, and with many interesting stories which bring the past vividly to life. They will enrich our understanding of those times and of the Hong Kong residents and "belongers" who had to live through them.

It is hoped that other members will follow suit and forward further contributions to me for circulation. They can be shorter than Henry's, and can include family stories from the War and Occupation, memorabilia, photographs – anything in short which will bring back those times to us in a meaningful way because they relate directly to us, their successors.

By way of a postscript, I tried something of the sort about twelve years ago, but self-effacing as ever, there was little interest or inclination for it among our veterans. Today, with a different focus, much more interest, Committee backing, and with Henry's store of well-researched essays available to help us make a start, there is a real chance that we can make something of it this time around.

Don't be shy! Help us to make our new series the success it deserves to be!

James Hayes

(Committee Member, Hong Volunteer and ex PoW Association of NSW)

August 2011