OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 11

A Reporter at the War Crime Trials

A member of our Association, Bea Hutcheon, has kindly made available to us an account of her experiences during the Pacific War when she sought refuge in the Portuguese enclave of Macau.

As a young University student, Beatrice Greaves left Hong Kong early in the Japanese occupation and remained in Macau for three and a half years before returning to Hong Kong at the end of the war to become a reporter at the war crime trials. Much of her account has been the subject of Occasional Paper No.10 entitled Macau Refuge 1942-1945, but she additionally wrote as follows.

> *A notable refugee at that time was a Russian artist named George Smirnoff, whose water-colour pictures of Macau are now highly prized and are hung in the local art gallery. These capture the true flavour of old Macau with its strong Portuguese influence coming from its 400-year history as a Portuguese enclave. Today its massive redevelopment as the gambling capital of China has eliminated all but a few historic buildings and is in most parts unrecognisable from the city I knew in the 1940s and 1950s (when my husband and I honeymooned there).*
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> *While in Macau I had news of my elder brother's capture by Rommel's forces in North Africa. I asked Mr Reeves to keep me informed and he later told me that many POWs had escaped while being transported to Germany and my brother John was one of them (later returning to Alexandria – though demoted for being AWOL!). He was then ordered with his regiment (the 2/2nd Battalion) to join the defenders of Singapore, but thanks to Prime Minister John Curtin's insistence on them being brought back to shore up the defences of New Guinea his ship was diverted in time to escape Singapore's surrender. He served at Milne Bay for the rest of the war, his only injury being the loss of the tops of two fingers when he picked up a booby-trapped pen during the fighting in the Middle East. After the war, I learned that my youngest brother, Stan, had been killed in the fighting at Lyemun on 19th December, 1941.*
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> *When the war ended in August, 1945 my first need was to find a job, with few opportunities available and with many old firms still unopened after the occupation. I decided not to go back to university. War-time degrees were offered to third-year undergraduates but this did not extend to second-year students which left me out on a limb.*

My cousin, Alec Greaves, had returned to Hong Kong from China where he was an officer in the BAAG, and had gone back to his pre-war job as a journalist with the South China Morning Post. He advised me to consider journalism and I was offered a post as a court reporter by the then Editor, Mr Henry Ching, Sr. He had been briefly imprisoned during the occupation and roughly treated by the kempetei. Despite his ordeal, he was quick to resume control when the Japanese surrendered. He collected a nucleus of staff to turn out the paper, the first edition being a leaflet announcing the arrival of the advance guard of the Royal Navy, led by HMS Swiftsure.

The arrival of the Royal Navy and the hoisting of the British flag forestalled an attempt by Kuomintang forces to take over the colony which continued to flourish for the next 52 years when it became a Special Administrative Region of China. My work at the SCM Post meant that I covered war crime trials, including those of some of the Japanese officers who had tortured Hong Kong prisoners and internees.

Bea ends her account on a personal note:

After the re-occupation I joined the RHKDF and became a corporal in the women's section, serving in communications (telephonist) in a specially built underground area situated between Garden Road and Wanchai. While working at the SCM Post I met my future husband, Robin, who was then Editor of the China Mail. We were married in 1957 and now have three children, Stephen, Andrew and Jane, and four grandchildren. We have been living in Sydney since 1986.

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*A first group of Japanese face trial for war crimes in March 1946 (from Philip Snow's **The Fall of Hong Kong**).*

The rest of this Occasional Paper has been prompted by Bea's mention of her work as a court reporter with the SCMPost, when she covered proceedings at the war crimes tribunals and became familiar with the scene pictured above. At our request, she has written of her experiences at that time as follows:

The trials were held in the old Jardine's godowns in Causeway Bay. The judges were military officers from both Britain and Canada, as were the defence and prosecuting counsel, a number of whom remained in Hong Kong after the trials to take up careers in civil courts (among them personal friends like Leslie Wright and Peter Vine). The courts would travel to scenes of atrocities and incidents, and we used to visit places like Stanley and Repulse Bay. There were translators, including Nisei Japanese from Canada, to translate questions and answers. I did a lot of travelling in army trucks in those days. A particularly harrowing time for me was when the court visited Lyemun where my brother was killed in 1941. I had to continue reporting with no display of my own personal feelings. Many of the accused Japanese officers were very arrogant.

This paper is not an account of the work of the tribunals, nor an analysis of war crimes in Hong Kong, but provides some background to Bea's memories and this important subject. Suffice it to say here that two courts were set up, the first to try those who offended in Hong Kong, and the second to try those accused of war crimes in Formosa, Hainan Island, the old Treaty Ports, and on the high seas.

According to historian and author Philip Snow, in the two years from early 1946 these courts sat in judgement of 129 Japanese. 21 were sent to the gallows, while 28 received prison sentences of ten years or more. 57 were given sentences of less than ten years; 14 were acquitted while the remainder had their charges dropped. Most observers were of the view that the sentences handed down by the Hong Kong courts were lenient.

The Japanese who offended against the inmates of POW and internment camps, and against the general public during the occupation, could generally be identified and prosecuted. Nothing much could be done to bring to trial those who engaged in rape and murder during the battle as they could not easily be identified, but their commanding officers were held to account. Noma and Kanazawa, successive chiefs of the kempetei, were the two most senior men tried in Hong Kong; both were hanged. Three top Japanese commanders in Hong Kong were tried in China by the Chinese Nationalists. Sakai, who led the invasion in December, 1941 was executed by firing squad, and so was Tanaka, a Governor of occupied Hong Kong. Isogai, another Governor, was initially given a life sentence, but eventually served no more than five years in prison.