



Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



Editorial Letter to Accompany OPs 17 and 18

Dear Members and Readers,

The April 2013 batch of Occasional Papers is made up of two which I am sure will be of wide interest.

We owe one of them to my having forwarded a few of the earlier OPs to a former colleague of Henry and myself in the Hong Kong civil service, retired in the UK, who I thought might be interested in them. He in turn asked if we knew that another colleague was living in Western Australia, and suggested that it might be worthwhile contacting him since his father had been killed in the defence of Hong Kong with the Volunteers and the family might have some memorabilia that could be of interest to our members. We had a most friendly correspondence by email thereafter, with a happy outcome. The result is a memorable OP No.17 on Bombardier Douglas Orr and his family, not the least part of which is the history of an ongoing four-generation connection with Hong Kong stretching back to the early 1930s.

In this connection, we have to thank Audrey Rodrigues, wife of our member Vasco, for another interesting lead which is likely to result in another family OP. This will focus on the Hong Kong wartime ARP, about which little has been written. It is sparked by the fact that Audrey's father, Alfred Ernest Ablong, was killed on duty with the ARP, and two of her sisters also served with the unit. The lead came by way of a letter to Philomena, our Honorary Secretary, who duly passed it on to Henry and me. I need hardly say how greatly Audrey's initiative is welcomed, and as in past editorial letters can only urge more of our members to take heed and follow suit!

The second OP in this batch concerns the Diocesan Boys' School, and its outstanding record of wartime service to Hong Kong, by the staff as well as by its Old Boys. The sheer numbers of those who served, and the high percentage of those who gave their lives, are highlighted in the informative and poignant paper.

It has become very clear to me as editor how much the series is contributing to our greater understanding of the wartime HKVDC and its membership – and for that matter our understanding also of pre-war Hong Kong. Apart from showing us how the composition of the Corps reflected the non-Chinese element in Hong Kong's population in the immediate pre-war years, it is also making it clear how heavily the Corps relied on them for its numbers, volunteers and conscripts alike.

More importantly still, it is revealing to us how through family and other connections they brought to the HKVDC a cohesion and comradeship in adversity which may well have been decisive in earning for it the considered praise of Major-General Maltby who commanded the garrison during the defence of the Colony.

In my own case, I have learned much about Hong Kong through these papers that I did not know before, and have come to a greater understanding of the significance of the Corps for the community of the Colony as it existed in 1941, exactly one hundred years after the opening of the Port and its establishment as a British Crown Colony two years after.

With best wishes from Henry and myself,

James Hayes

April, 2013