



# Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



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### HKVDC Members in Internment Camps

Ron Taylor in Hong Kong has compiled a list of 80 members of the HKVDC who were interned in Stanley Internment Camp (excluding the Nursing Detachment and nine HKVDC members of the so-called PWD Corps, an Auxiliary Unit of the HKVDC). They comprised 18 from Corps Units and 62 from Auxiliary Units.

#### **Corps Units**

18 Volunteers who served in Corps Units of the HKVDC are listed as having been interned in Stanley instead of being made POWs. It would appear that these 18 acted independently, each withdrawing to his home or family immediately after the surrender, and responding in early January to the Japanese notice requiring enemy civilians to report for internment. There was one each in the Field Ambulance, No.1 Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battery and Corps Signals. Two were in the Armoured Car Platoon and three in No.2 Company, four in the ASC Company and five in the Field Company Engineers.

One of the two in the Armoured Car Platoon was Pte M.Koodiaroff. He was in the War Memorial Hospital at the time of the surrender. It appears he rejoined his family on discharge and was interned with his wife and son. In No.2 Company was Cpl G.A.Leiper whose story is told in his memoirs **A Yen for My Thoughts** (South China Morning Post Publications, 1982). He had permission to continue working in the Chartered Bank throughout the battle, but attached himself to the HKVDC HQ at Peak Mansions for duty at night. Following the surrender, he took up residence in the Hong Kong Bank building, where his wife joined him from her work as an auxiliary nurse at the War Memorial Hospital, and they were interned together.

The four members of the ASC Company who became internees included CSM S.D.Begg and Capt A.Hutton-Potts. Begg was one of the few members of this unit to escape from the Ridge and from Eucliff, swimming across Repulse Bay to reach Stanley. Wounded, he was admitted to the St Stephen's Hospital where his wife was a VAD. When the Japanese entered the hospital, he once again escaped being killed (but, unfortunately, not so his wife). He was moved with other surviving patients to the hospital in St Albert's Convent. His movements on discharge are not known, but in January, 1942 he responded to the internment order and went into Stanley Internment Camp. Hutton-Potts is said to have been in the ASC Company, but he may instead have been in the Supply and Transport Section of the HKVDC Headquarters. He also succeeded in leaving the Ridge and reached his mother-in-law's home in Pokfulam. When the order came in early January for enemy civilians to report for internment he complied.

The Field Company Engineers were trained to carry out demolitions, and after early action in the New Territories they had no specific role in the defence. They tended to be used for any contingency that arose. Some were attached to the Royal Scots in the attempt to re-take Wong Nei Chong Gap Police Station, while others were used to form the HK Engineering Corps, to prepare defence works on the Island. This fragmentation may have given the opportunity at the surrender to blend in with the civilian population, and five may have done so and were interned as civilians.

#### **Auxiliary Units**

62 of the names in Ron Taylor's list are of men who served in Auxiliary Units of the HKVDC; three in Fortress Signals, 42 in the Stanley Platoon and 17 in what became known as Hughes Group. There are few surviving records of the membership of the Auxiliary Units, and they are incomplete. It is thus difficult to be certain about the movements of individuals in these units after the surrender.

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Les Fisher says in his published memoirs **I Will Remember**, published in 1996, that at the outbreak of war the Telephone Company, for which he worked, consisted of 16 Europeans and many Chinese workmen, and all were “incorporated into the Army Signals and called the fortress Signal Company”. This implies that Fortress Signals was made up only of employees of the Telephone Company. He gives the names of the 16 Europeans, two of whom became officers, one a sergeant major and 13 sergeants.

But Fisher appears to have overlooked other members of Fortress Signals, including Sgm Ken Baxter and Sgm Paul Engelbrecht (both of whom were our Association members) and the three who became internees. These are named in Ron Taylor’s list as Sgt E.Grinter, Sgt J.Linaker and Sgt E.W.Sharp. It is not known how or why these three became internees rather than POWs.

Evan Stewart’s **Hong Kong Volunteers in Battle** (Blacksmith Books 2005) gives the strength of the Stanley Platoon as one officer and 28 other ranks, but this was apparently out of date. The officer referred to was Lt J.W.Fitzgerald, but Lt C.J.Norman later assumed command making two officers. Seven other ranks were killed in action, and two died as POWs - thus, only 19 of the 28 survived, and at least some of them were POWs. It is therefore surprising that as many as 42 are named as internees in Ron Taylor’s list. These include the two officers and 40 other ranks of whom 36 were Prison Officers. It is not known if any was amongst the original 28.

Evan Stewart says that the Platoon came under pressure east of Stanley Village. He refers to “the 28 men of the Stanley Platoon”. They were said to have been withdrawn to Stanley Fort to “act as HQ guard for the last stand”. It may perhaps have been the case that a number of men joined the Platoon during the fighting, and that they were kept at the Fort as HQ guard while the original 28 were in the front line. The survivors amongst the 28 were likely made POWs after the surrender, while those at the Fort were perhaps the ones who became internees. The Prison Officers had quarters near the gaol, so they were on their own doorsteps. At battle’s end they may have returned home, and perhaps to their normal work. When no longer required as prison guards they may have been released into the Internment Camp.

In **Second to None** (Oxford University Press 1991) Phillip Bruce quotes J.J.Patterson, commanding the so-called Hughes Group, as saying that the unit was founded for anti-sabotage defence and its personnel were businessmen over the age of 55. Clearly, younger men later joined the unit. Bruce further quotes Patterson as saying that at the start of the war the strength had fallen to 36, but later the Group was joined by others including marine engineers from Taikoo, technical staff from China Light and Power and men from the Free French community. It may be that some of these additions were enlisted during the fighting at North Point Power Station, to give them combatant status. Austin Coates in **A Mountain of Light** (Heinemann 1977) writes, “When the power station surrendered, any engineer found wearing uniform went to a military camp, anyone in ‘civvies’ to a civilian one. Thus the engineers, all equally involved in defence, found themselves divided. Those caught with an ordinary shirt on went to the civilian camp at Stanley”. The 17 Hughes Group members who became internees may have been some of those enlisted during the fighting for whom no uniforms were available.



*The North Point Power Station on Electric Road copied from Austin Coates’ **A Mountain of Light** (Heinemann Educational Books 1977).*