

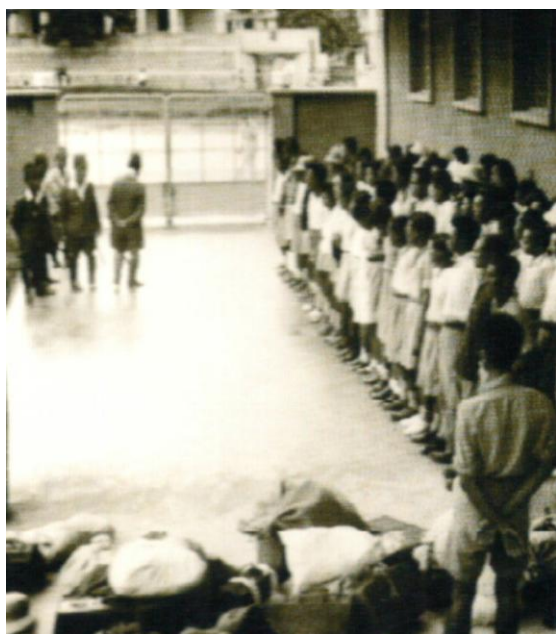


# Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



## OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 23

### Release of POWs



*Asian POWs at St Teresa's Hospital (photo from **Serving Hong Kong; the Hong Kong Volunteers**, produced by the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence)*

Most of the Asian POWs were released from Sham Shui Po Camp in September, 1942. Pte Wong Yin Khoon in Tony Banham's book **We Shall Suffer There** (Hong Kong University Press 2009) gives an account of the release, "In the first week in September, all Chinese totalling 137 were taken to St Teresa's Hospital where they were well fed for two weeks. Throat swabs and anus swabs were taken. They were required to give the name and address of a guarantor." The POWs were released in two batches on 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September.

According to Wong Yin Khoon only 97 of those released were members of the HKVDC, the rest being locally enlisted personnel in the British regular army mostly serving as gunners or sappers. Among those in the HKVDC who were released was L/Cpl Tom Cheung of the Field Ambulance, an Association member for many years.

Listed under the heading "Released by the Japanese" in Appendix III to the 2005 Edition of Evan Stewart's **Hong Kong Volunteers in Battle** (Blacksmith Books 2005) are the names of 118 members of the HKVDC who were released from POW camp during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. The number is 21 more than Wong Yin Khoon's figure of 97 – he probably excluded the three Eurasian brothers Pte A.Zimmern, Pte F.Zimmern and L/Cpl F.R.Zimmern, and the Swiss Pte E.Hausammann, all of whom were most likely released at some other time. The three Zimmern brothers were apparently released to Sir Robert Kotewall as guarantor, and subsequently all three married Sir Robert's daughters. Two others excluded were most likely L/Cpl M.Mendonca and Sgm Yoong Yew Moy. He also probably excluded some 15 others with other than Chinese names.

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L/Cpl M.Mendonca was in fact not released. He spoke Japanese and was used as an interpreter on occasions when he was taken out of Sham Shui Po Camp under guard. On one such occasion he failed to return, and it was rumoured that he had been killed following a disagreement with his guards.

Sgm Yoong Yew Moy was a student at the Hong Kong University, and is shown in University records as having been killed in action, but he does not appear to be so recorded by either the Commonwealth War Graves Commission or the HKVDC. He in fact died in Sham Shui Po POW Camp in September, 1942 and was awarded a posthumous war-time B.Sc. (Engineering) degree by the University.

A large number of those released were Hong Kong University students who served in the HKVDC. Some returned to their studies after the war, including Pte S.Amplavanar (S.A.Vanar), Pte D.Chelliah, Pte J.Cheung, Pte Lim Thiam Tet and Pte Tan Book Cheuk (the last named, on obtaining his degree, was appointed as one of the early local Cadets/Administrative Officers in government service).

The 15 excluded by Wong Yin Khoon who had non-Chinese names were probably not University students, but amongst his 97 there were others with non-Chinese names who probably were University students, many from Malaya.

Some of those from Malaya went to live in May Hall at the University following release, having no home in Hong Kong. Shortly after their release, four of them attempted to leave Hong Kong but were apprehended by the Japanese. At the time, the Japanese were in fact encouraging people to leave because of the shortage of food, but official permission was required. For example, one of the Volunteers released was Pte R.J.Master who, some months after his release, was arrested by the Kempetai and briefly imprisoned, but following that ordeal he applied for permission to leave Hong Kong for Macau with his family and he was officially allowed to do so. The four students apparently attempted to leave without seeking permission and were arrested. Pte Sim Beck Hoe died in prison. Pte Chiang Lee Hin, Pte Lee How Fong and Pte Leow Hock Yew were executed, presumably on the grounds of attempting to escape as POWs. Technically those released from the camps remained POWs and were regarded as being under house arrest at the address they gave.

It is interesting to note that nearly half of those released were members of the HKVDC Field Ambulance, a large proportion of them being University students. It would seem that at the surrender on Christmas Day, 1941 they decided to stay together and become POWs as ordered, rather than to evade capture. Most of the Asians in other units of the HKVDC were able, some with the encouragement of their officers, to remove their uniforms and return to their homes.

Some of the students released were apparently resentful of having been imprisoned, and following release formed an organisation called the Overseas Chinese Volunteer Unit. Edwin Ride, in his book entitled **BAAG** (Oxford University Press 1981), says that this organisation was responsible for spreading stories about the officer commanding the Field Ambulance (Lt.Col.L.T.Ride, then Professor of Physiology at the University of Hong Kong), calculated to damage his reputation. One was that, "having been responsible for persuading many University students to join the Volunteers, after the surrender he would not allow them to evade capture and consequently many were interned, and he then left them in the lurch by escaping himself" (page 182-183 of Edwin Ride's book). Lt.Col.Ride was instrumental, after his escape, in forming the very important British Army Aid Group (BAAG) in China.

Many of the locally enlisted personnel of the regular army who were released left Hong Kong and eventually joined the Hong Kong Volunteer Company in the Chindits after serving with the BAAG's China Unit (see Occasional Paper No.9).