



# Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW

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## OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 24

### The PWD Corps

In this Occasional Paper reference is made to two organisations which were separately formed but which developed a relationship that it has not been possible clearly to define. They were the civil defence auxiliary **Public Works Corps**, and a unit in the HKVDC popularly known as the **PWD Corps**. It is not clear how the roles of these two organisations differed, if at all.

As a part of Hong Kong's war preparations auxiliary organisations were formed for the performance of essential services, and given legal backing with the enactment of the Civil Defence Corps Regulations (Gazette Notification 804 of 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1941). They included amongst others the Auxiliary Fire Service, under the Chief Officer, Fire Brigade; the Auxiliary Medical Corps (including the Auxiliary Nursing Service), under the Director of Medical Services; the Auxiliary Quartering Corps, under the Rating and Valuation officer; and the Auxiliary Communications Service, under the Postmaster General. The original Schedule to the Regulations listing the auxiliary organisations did not include the Public Works Corps, under the Director of Public Works, but this was later added (Gazette Notification 1237 of 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1941).

The purpose of the Civil Defence Corps was to ensure that adequate managers and professional skills were available in emergency situations to maintain public services. As George Endacott explained in his **Hong Kong Eclipse** (Oxford University Press, 1978), "The main aim of this organisation of auxiliaries was to place them under some form of discipline, to provide uniforms or arm-bands and to prepare for war emergencies when normal civilian employment might cease. These auxiliary services were manned by those normally employed in these services in peace time....."

Shortly before the formation of the Public Works Corps in October, 1941 an auxiliary unit of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps appears to have been formed, referred to in records as the PWD Corps. The name does not appear in any of the gazetted amendments to the Schedule to the Volunteer Ordinance listing the HKVDC units, but the HKVDC Roll of Honour, for example, lists four casualties under the heading "PWD Corps", and memoranda are on record signed by Captain W.C.Shewan as "Adjutant, PWD Corps" (W.C.Shewan was an architect in the Public Works Department).

A name that does appear in this Schedule, and which may be of relevance, is the Engineer Works Service (Public Works Department). The likelihood is that the PWD Corps was the popular name given to this unit. This rather strange name gives no indication as to the unit's role other than that there was a connection with the Government's Public Works Department. It is assumed in this paper that what was popularly known as the PWD Corps was indeed officially the Engineer Works Service (Public Works Department).

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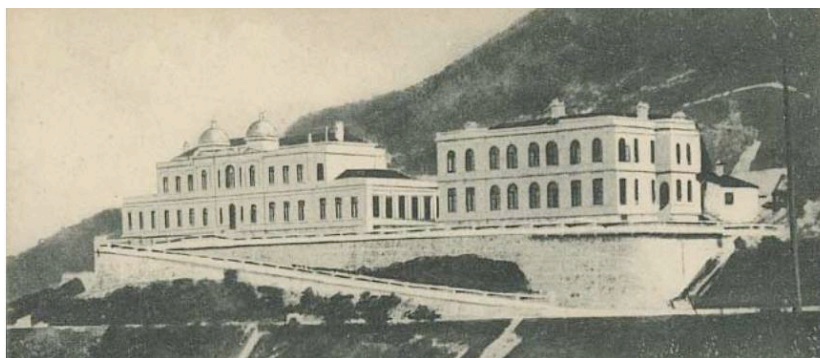
It may be that when proposals were first put forward for the formation of the civil Public Works Corps it was realised that many key personnel had already enlisted in the HKVDC. The PWD Corps may have been formed specifically to enable these serving Volunteers to be transferred to this auxiliary unit so that they could work with the civil Public Works Corps without being required to resign from the HKVDC. It is believed they were encouraged not to wear their Volunteer uniforms, so that members of the Public Works Corps and of the PWD Corps were indistinguishable from each other and worked together during the battle as they had done in the peace time Public Works Department.

At some time after September, 1941 all but a few of the men who were employed in the Public Works Department in civilian life but who were already serving in the HKVDC were transferred to the PWD Corps. As this was an auxiliary unit within the HKVDC, they retained their military ranks. In trying to determine who were members of the PWD Corps a good starting point is Tony Banham's very comprehensive list at <http://www.hongkongwardiary.com/searchgarrison.html>

Under "Field Company Engineers, HKVDC" in that list there are 11 names described variously as being in the "PWD Emergency Works Unit", the "PWD Engineering Coy", the "PWD Corps HKVDC" or the "PWD Corps". All 11 are included in **Hong Kong Volunteers in Battle**, Appendix III in a section headed "The PWD Corps". They were presumably men already in the HKVDC who were transferred to this auxiliary unit. The 11 were R.S.Bell, D.Davidson, J.S.Flegg, J.S.Beach, J.C.Brown, A.H.Howard, G.F.Jeavons, G.D.Woolgar, W.Shaw, A.F.May and S.O.White. But the list in Appendix III of **Hong Kong Volunteers in Battle** also includes eight others, making a total of 19 – J.D.Bailey, T.Bolt, A.E.Clarke, B.Cryan, J.T.Ewing, S.W.George, G.W.R.Griggs and W.H.Owen.

There may be other names which should be added to the list of 19. In a separate website (the Hallows Genealogy) for example, it is recorded that B.H.C.Hallows (Superintendent of Crown Lands) was a Lieutenant in the "PWD Essential Service Unit of the HKVDC". This name is close enough to the auxiliary unit popularly known as the PWD Corps; the inclusion of Hallows would make a total of 20 members in that Corps. Three were killed in the fighting (R.S.Bell, J.S.Flegg and D.Davidson), while nine were interned as civilians including W.Shaw who died in Stanley Internment Camp.

What do we know of members of the civil Public Works Corps? The headquarters of this Corps was, at one stage, in the Helena May Institute in Garden Road, together with the HKVDC's PWD Corps. It later moved to the Victoria Hospital in Barker Road. Under "non-uniformed civilians" in Banham's list there are 58 names shown as being in the Victoria Hospital in Barker Road prior to internment. Eight of them are known to have been in the HKVDC's PWD Corps; nothing is known of three of the rest (two Americans). The remaining 47 are of interest because the majority of them were Inspectors of Works (11) or Engineers and Architects (21). The likelihood is that they were members of the Public Works Corps gathered together in one place to facilitate their movement to locations requiring their attendance in an emergency. All 47 were interned in Stanley as civilians.



*The Victoria Hospital for Women and Children, in Barker Road. The main building was demolished in 1951.*