



Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



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The Auxiliary Nursing Service in the Civil Defence Corps, 1941

As a part of war preparations in 1941, some patients in civilian hospitals, both government and private, were to be removed to relief hospitals specially set up in buildings such as schools, to make room for civilian war casualties. The private Yeung Wo Hospital, for example, took on the role of a casualty clearing station following the removal of all the patients in it (Li Shu Fan's **Hong Kong Surgeon**, Victor Gollancz, 1964 page 95). The need for this had been anticipated, and to provide nursing staff for the receiving relief hospitals the Civil Defence Corps Regulations in July, 1941 established an Auxiliary Nursing Service (ANS). ANS nurses, with nurses of St John Ambulance, also staffed first aid stations throughout the urban areas. This Occasional Paper describes the ANS and the hospitals at which its nurses worked during hostilities and after.

The civilian relief hospitals were located in the Hong Kong University, the race course stands in Happy Valley, La Salle College in Kowloon, the Peninsula Hotel, St Stephen's Girls' College in Lyttleton Road and, it is believed, St Paul's College in Central. In the event, the relief hospital at the Peninsula Hotel did not become operational.

Some published accounts confuse the military and civilian hospitals. The relief hospital in the race course stands in particular, the scene of Japanese atrocities, is often erroneously regarded as a military facility. The military facilities comprised Bowen Road Hospital, the Royal Naval Hospital (Wanchai) and the Indian Military Hospital (moved from Kowloon to the requisitioned Tung Wah (Eastern) Hospital in Sookunpoo), plus temporary hospitals located in St. Albert's Priory (Rosary Hill), St Stephen's College (in Stanley) and the Hong Kong Hotel (in Central). They were staffed by service personnel including the Nursing Detachment of the HKVDC (VADs). Military casualties were also treated in some civilian hospitals, notably the Queen Mary Hospital, the War Memorial and the Matilda Hospitals, and the relief hospital at the University.

Members of the ANS were largely Chinese, Eurasian and local Portuguese, with a very few Europeans, unlike the VAD which was made up almost entirely of Europeans with only a handful of Eurasians and no Asians. C.G.Roland in **Long Night's Journey into Day** (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001) tells of a report that soon after the surrender some members of the VAD, "chiefly Chinese and some (local) Portuguese", were seen in Kowloon under Japanese guard. The probability is that the nurses seen were in the ANS or St John Ambulance, not in the VAD.

The ANS and St John Ambulance nurses in a first aid station in the Salesian Mission in Shaukiwan were not harmed by the Japanese, but the men co-located there in an RAMC store and a Field Ambulance Advanced Dressing Station were almost all captured and killed shortly after the landing on the Island. Only three survived, including medical officer Lt. Osler Thomas, HKVDC an Association member for many years. ANS nurses in the first aid station were Lois Fearon and Mary Suffiad perhaps better known as Mary Wong, after the war a social worker and a Member of the Legislative Council. She was a University student in 1941 and went into China after the battle, working with the BAAG. She was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire for her work during the war.

Some five or six unnamed Chinese nurses were killed in the temporary military hospital in St Stephen's College. Their presence in a military facility is a puzzle. One account describes them as wives of British soldiers, but the more likely explanation is that they were ANS or St John Ambulance nurses, perhaps working in a civilian first aid station co-located in the College buildings.

An ANS nurse who was killed in the battle was Jessie Holland. She and a fellow auxiliary nurse were amongst five civilians on a launch on 12th December, reported as proceeding to Kowloon to reconnoitre. It is unclear if they were on a ferry or on a Police launch, and why the civilians were on board is not explained. The launch rescued some troops under fire, but Jessie Holland was killed. Her husband was Adam Morrison Holland of the Public Works Department who died in the American bombing of Stanley Internment Camp in January, 1945.

Our Association's past and present membership includes two ANS nurses – Beatrice Hutcheon and Florrie Adams. The latter's sister Jessie Wong was also an ANS nurse, at the La Salle College relief hospital, while their mother, Florence Wong, was an ANS nurse at the race course relief hospital. The following note describes Florence's experiences there: *"We cooked and ate at the Shan Kwong Hotel. When the shooting got too bad on Christmas Eve we were not allowed to go back to the hotel..... From 5 pm onwards they gave us a good pounding all through the night;... .. then Christmas morning we came out to go on duty. We found all the Chinese doctors had gone.....At 7 a.m. the Japs appeared.....When the Chinese doctors had gone that left us with no men folk.....The only male was a British soldier being amongst the wounded and he was blackened to look like an Indian. About 9.30 a.m. the Matron and three of us went to the other end of the Jockey Club to get one of the ambulance doctors, and the only European doctor there. They came and stayed but could do nothing to stop the Japs. Looting continued. They came and went. Came back again only to take the young girls away. All Christmas day and night they kept coming in and taking whoever they fancied..... Before daylight word was sent to Dr. Selwyn Clarke. He came at noon and wanted us to "stay put", but Matron would not hear of it..... So trucks came and took us to the Queen Mary Hospital late Boxing Day."*

Mabel Winifred Redwood was also in the ANS and at the race course relief hospital. In her published book entitled **It Was Like This...** (ISIS Publishing Ltd, 2002) she gives a detailed account of events in the hospital, including how they disguised a corporal in the Middlesex Regiment. He was the only military casualty there, awaiting transport to Bowen Road Hospital. She also tells of the rape of the nurses, and of how a nurse, Marie Paterson, escaped to Bowen Road and raised the alarm.

Florence Wong was the sister of Harry Ching (father of Association member Henry Ching) who lived in Happy Valley. His diary entry soon after the surrender notes: *"Nephew Fred and I went to the racecourse stands to inquire for his mother. The place seemed deserted. A Japanese N.C.O. appeared and shouted at us, then beckoned us to approach. We tried in Chinese to explain our mission, but he showed no understanding. We tried to leave, but he would not let us go and continued to shout at us. Suddenly, he said "Spik Ingrise". We brightened and he grinned. We explained it all again in English. He pointed to a big closed door. We pushed it open and went in. It was the morgue, with three bodies lying on tables. We quickly withdrew. He laughed and motioned us to the main stands. These were deserted and in confusion, beds empty and blankets strewn around. We thanked him and left. Outside we met Arthur May of the PWD. He eased our anxiety; had seen Fred's mother at the Queen Mary Hospital."* And in a later entry, *"My sister and her daughter Florrie came home, escorted to the door by Dr Selwyn Clarke."*

The auxiliary nurses dispersed and returned home following the surrender of Hong Kong. Earlier, at the La Salle College relief hospital following the withdrawal from Kowloon, those who were unable to return home were temporarily held by the Japanese in the Chinese YMCA in Waterloo Road, and subsequently moved to the Kowloon Hotel.

Members of the ANS were not interned as such; the few who were interned individually responded as "enemy nationals" to the internment order in January, 1942. It appears the ANS was regarded as having been disbanded with the surrender of Hong Kong on Christmas Day, 1941. After the war Florence Wong and her two daughters each received HK\$486.00 as pay and allowances, presumably for the 18 days from mobilisation to the surrender. They were also informed that they were eligible for the Defence Medal.



*The race course stands in 1941, location of a civilian relief hospital (Photo from **Pow Mah** published by Col.H.B.L.Dowbiggin, 1965).*

View from the north looking over Bowrington to the race course. The relief hospital was located in the stands with the tower at the centre of the photo (Photo from raggett.net/wordpress/2011/03/03/gwulo-old-hong-kong/).

