



# Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



## OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 33

### Stanley Executions

32 men and one woman were beheaded at Stanley on 29th October, 1943 following months of imprisonment and torture in Stanley Gaol (within the precincts of the Internment Camp, but a separate penal institution). 10 were European, four Indian, two Eurasian and 17 Chinese. Several published accounts portray this tragic event as an example of what the POWs and internees had to endure. But 25 of the 33 executed were neither internees nor POWs. The eight who were comprised an Indian POW, only six European Stanley internees, and a European banker under house arrest at the Sun Wah Hotel in Central.

In addition to the 33 who were executed, 15 others were convicted at the same time. Six were POWs and nine civilians of whom only three were internees. Three of the POWs were shot by firing squad on 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1943 at Sheko Beach (all posthumously awarded the George Cross). The other three and the nine civilians were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Amongst the civilians was Chan Wai Chi, the wife of Yeung Sau Tak who was one of the 33 executed.

While a few of the 33 executed were accused of assisting in escapes, most were accused of getting messages in and out of the camps, or of possessing radios, as agents of the British Army Aid Group. Many were lorry drivers delivering rations to the camps. The messages were mostly of a domestic nature, having to do with conditions in the camps and the medical and health problems encountered. The radios were receivers and could not transmit. Not one of these activities was of any significance to the conduct of the war. Author Oliver Lindsay in reviewing Edwin Ride's published book on the **BAAG** (Oxford University Press, 1981) wrote, "Before the end of the year (i.e.1943) most (of the agents) had been savagely executed. BAAG's amateurish messages were little more than death warrants for the recipients".

Of the 10 Europeans, the six Stanley internees included J.A.Fraser, a Cadet in the civil service and Hong Kong's Defence Secretary. He probably knew about the passing of messages and the use of radios. He was posthumously awarded the George Cross in recognition of his bravery in refusing to implicate others. Some published accounts allege that there were seven Stanley internees. The seventh was C.F. (Ginger) Hyde. He was a banker, and was held under house arrest with other bankers in the Sun Wah Hotel.

The three Europeans who were not internees were Bennett, Monaghan and Sinton. Chester Bennett was an American film director who was initially interned in Stanley. He chose not to be repatriated with other Americans in 1942. In June of that year he had been appointed chairman of the American internees' council, but two months later he was released and got married. T.C.Monaghan was a private in the HKVDC who was wounded but avoided capture. A Canadian of Irish descent he lived in the old Wah Yan College on Robinson Road with the Jesuit fathers, and it was there that he was arrested. A.C.Sinton is something of a mystery. He was a Signaller in the Royal Navy in the First World War, and won the Distinguished Service Medal, but it is not known what part he played in the defence of Hong Kong. He is shown in Commonwealth War Graves Commission records as a Sergeant Major, but his unit (other than the BAAG) is not identified.

The four Indians included Captain M.A.Ansari of the 5/7 Rajputs who was a POW in Ma Tau Chung Camp. He was posthumously awarded the George Cross for his bravery while under arrest. Of the three Indian civilians one was Ahmed Basher, a despatch rider with the ARP. He was an Arts student in the University of Hong Kong, and was known to be an informer. He apparently hoped to escape execution by co-operating with his captors, but he was beheaded with the others.

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The two Eurasians were both Old Boys of the Diocesan Boys' School. William White was charged with keeping a wireless set at his home in Wanchai; he had been asked to do so by Luigi Souza, one of the 15 referred to in paragraph 2 above. George Kotwall was a private in No 3 Company of the HKVDC who evaded capture and became an agent of the BAAG. His brother James was also an agent of the BAAG, and was arrested and executed at a later date. In April, 1943 George Kotwall was brought one night by the kempetai to the home of Harry Ching who had just been released from prison and was recuperating in the Nethersole Hospital. For an anxious hour or so Kotwall and Harry Ching's wife were interrogated by the Japanese during which he was physically assaulted a number of times. It transpired that they were in the wrong house. The kempetai were seeking R.J.Master and his wife who lived next door. Master served in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, and had been released from Ma Tau Chung POW Camp in September, 1942 with other Asian POWs. He was arrested, but subsequently received permission to leave for Macao with his family.

The 17 Chinese included Lau Tak Oi, the sole woman amongst those executed. Her brother Lau Tak Kwong was executed with her. She was a government nurse, the common-law wife of Chinese New Zealander David Loie who served in the Police Reserve (Loie was separately arrested, and killed himself while under interrogation). Four others of the 17 also served in the Police Reserve, including Sub-Inspectors Chang Yit and Wong Shiu Pun. Chang Yit had the personal names of Cleveland Elroy; his wife, Remedios Bautista, probably was a member of the local Portuguese community. Wong Shiu Pun was known as Preston Wong and was a teacher at St Paul's College; his wife, Phyllis Grace Wong, was a Chinese Australian. The 17 also included Chinese Australian Yan Cheuk Ming, known as James Kim, who worked in the Harbour Office.

There is some uncertainty as to where the executions took place. Some accounts say that they occurred at Stanley Beach, but it was most likely on the open ground west of the prison walls, on the site of the St Stephen's Preparatory School football field, adjacent to what is now called St Stephen's Beach on the west side of Stanley Peninsula. Some published accounts say that they were shot by firing squad, but the detailed account given by George Wright-Nooth in his **Prisoner of the Turnip Heads** (Cassell, 1999) says that they were beheaded, and this seems the more likely. The executions were carried out in callous fashion. The victims were apparently tied together in groups of three, and beheaded one after the other, witnessed by those awaiting their turn. It seems that as the executions progressed the executioners became more tired or less expert at their task, while their swords became less sharp, and for some of the victims death was not immediate.

After the war the remains of those executed were re-buried in two communal graves in Stanley Military Cemetery, except for two whose names are recorded on the Sai Wan Memorial for those who have no known grave (Liang Hung and Lok Chung Liang). But each has his own inscribed headstone - 15 are buried in the plot shown below.

*Graves in the Stanley Military Cemetery. Ansari's Memorial is on the right in the front row.*



*The George Cross*

