

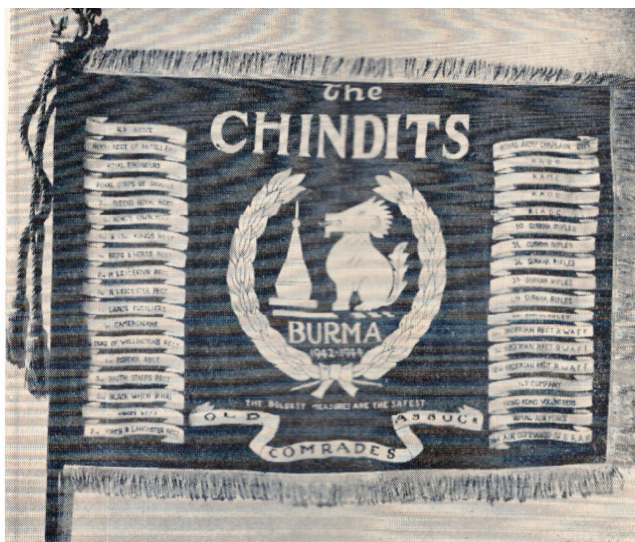


Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



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The Hong Kong Volunteer Company



*This illustration is copied from the 1954 Centenary Number of **The Volunteer**, where it is described simply as “The Chindit Flag”. It appears to be the Standard of The Chindits Old Comrades Association, dedicated in Lichfield Cathedral in 1972 and laid up in the Cathedral in 2009. The Hong Kong Volunteer Company is named in the right hand column, third from the bottom.*

The Hong Kong Volunteer Company was a unit in the brigade led by Brigadier Mike Calvert in the second Chindit expedition in March, 1944, known officially as the 142 Company in the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade. It had a support role, for the defence of the brigade headquarters.

Its popular name is misleading. It is often assumed that the Company had strong links with the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, but in fact not many of its members served in the HKVDC. Most of its members participated in the defence of Hong Kong with the Royal Artillery or the Royal Engineers, or in the Hong Kong Chinese Regiment, or were in the Police Reserve or civil defence organisations such as the ARP.

Following the Christmas Day surrender of Hong Kong many non-Europeans in the garrison sensibly discarded their uniforms and rejoined their families, thus evading capture. The more enlightened unit commanders encouraged this. Even those who were captured and became POWs were mostly eventually released, in September 1942. With help from the British Army Aid Group (BAAG) some of these men and their families left Hong Kong and successfully reached Kweilin in China.

Edwin Ride in his published book **BAAG** writes,

“It was necessary to decide first what to do with the servicemen. Negotiations with the War Office and the Admiralty took months; and in the meantime there were problems of protection, morale, and discipline needing immediate attention. The plan adopted was to form these individuals into a unit and give them military training. Buildings were rented and converted into barracks, courses in infantry training, small arms, and signalling were conducted by BAAG officers; and the men were put on daily guard at BAAG HQ and provided special guards of honour for any official British functions in Kweilin”.

The unit became known as the China Unit.

Ride continues, *“But the BAAG was not to have its ‘private army’ for long. A proposal was put forward by New Delhi that the China Unit should be sent to India and Burma for further service. By the time the idea was adopted the Unit’s numbers had dwindled to less than two hundred, as many had obtained posts with other British organisations in China and with the 14th Air Force. Nevertheless, 127 men volunteered for service with what was later known as the Hong Kong Volunteer Company, which fought with distinction during the battle for Burma.”*

Of the 127 men of the China Unit who were sent to India and who were eventually formed into the Hong Kong Volunteer Company, 40 appear to have had no previous military service - some of these were Eurasians and had surnames which suggest they were probably related to members of the HKVDC. 13 of the 127 were members of the Hong Kong Chinese Regiment. 32 were in the Royal Artillery and 31 in the Royal Engineers as locally enlisted personnel. Only 11 had served in the HKVDC.

Although the names in the China Unit roster have been carefully checked (by Ron Taylor in Hong Kong) and matched against the HKVDC records, it has not been possible to identify these 11 HKVDC members with absolute certainty, but it would seem that they most probably were Pte Leslie Fox, Gnr J.L.Quie, Gnr Maximo Cheng, Gnr Robert Tai, Gnr Johnny Wong, L/Bdr J.W.Reeves, L/Bdr Ho Sang, Gnr So Tse Yiu, Gnr Liu Tam Choi, F.A.Ozorio and Gnr George Tsang.

The Hong Kong Chinese Regiment came about as an attempt by General Maltby to increase his forces by recruiting a battalion of Chinese infantry. War came before the full plan could be implemented, and only a relatively small cadre of men had been established by December, 1941 made up of 6 Chinese NCOs and 46 Chinese other ranks. Its two British officers were seconded from other units, and three NCOs came from regular British regiments. In the battle for Hong Kong the Regiment took part in the defence of the Ridge on Repulse Bay Road, with the HKVDC’s ASC Company. 41 of the original 57 members were killed or wounded. Thus, the 13 men who joined the Hong Kong Volunteer Company in India in fact represented a significant proportion of the Regiment’s original and final strength.

According to an article in the 1954 Centenary Number of **The Volunteer**, the Chindits were disbanded in the beginning of 1945 and the Hong Kong Volunteer Company was split up and the men attached to different units. They returned to Hong Kong in early 1946 and were given various duties with the garrison until the end of 1948 when the Company was dissolved.