



# Hong Kong Volunteer and Ex-PoW Association of NSW



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### Hong Kong Cadets in the Defence of Hong Kong in 1941

Steve Tsang, in his book **Governing Hong Kong** (Hong Kong University Press, 2007), explains "*The Hong Kong cadet scheme was one of the earlier attempts to institutionalize the recruitment of senior civil servants by competitive examinations.....*" The first Cadets were appointed in 1862; their successors were re-titled Administrative Officers nearly a hundred years later.

Tsang writes: "*Although Hong Kong had no chance of successfully defending itself against the superior Japanese invaders, the colonial government was caught by surprise by the audacity and capabilities of the Japanese, whose abilities it did not hold in high regard. Above all.....the failure of the Cadets and the government more generally to win over the support of the local Chinese was dazzling (sic)..... the local government had neither the imagination nor the capacity to mobilize the local Chinese to assist in the defence of their homes. Cadets could not but take the lion's share of the blame for the colonial government's failure to win over the loyalty of the local Chinese.....*"

In fact, many local Chinese were involved in the defence of Hong Kong. The actual number cannot be ascertained, as records were destroyed, and at the surrender the more enlightened commanders allowed Chinese under their command to remove their uniforms and rejoin their families, thus excluding them from POW lists. G.B.Endacott in **Hong Kong Eclipse** (Oxford University Press, 1978) writes "...a number of local Chinese had been accepted into various units in such capacities as engineers, drivers, cooks and mechanics, and of course considerable numbers had joined the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps and the Hong Kong Naval Volunteer Force.....", members of the latter being enlisted in the Hong Kong Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (HKRNVR) on mobilisation.

There were also large numbers of Chinese in the mobilised Police, Police Reserve and Special Constabulary, and in the uniformed branch of St John Ambulance Brigade which formed a major part of the Hong Kong Field Ambulance. And many members of the auxiliary organisations such as the Auxiliary Medical Service (including the Auxiliary Nursing Service) and Air Raid Precautions were Chinese. The number of Chinese in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, formed under Hong Kong legislation, was not inconsiderable; but they were admittedly outnumbered by non-Chinese members, many of whom were called up under the Compulsory Service Ordinance of 1939.

Tsang seems to suggest that the local Chinese did not play a greater part in defending Hong Kong, and their own homes, largely because the Cadets failed to win over their loyalty. But perhaps the idea of fighting to defend hearth and home is a western import. To the more pragmatic eastern mind priority would be given to preserving life, removing to a safer place, and there re-building hearth and home.

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The Cadets at that time were but a small cadre of Britons amongst a much larger community of expatriates and, no matter how prestigious their position, could hardly be expected to have made a significant difference to the attitudes of the local populace towards foreigners.

The Cadets themselves played a part in the defence of Hong Kong. Tsang says there were 35 Cadets in 1941 and the government staff list of the time indeed gives 35 names. They were all, of course, expatriates appointed in the UK - the first local Cadet was not appointed until after the war. He was Paul Tsui (pictured below) who in December, 1941 was a Hong Kong University student. He escaped from Hong Kong and joined the British Army Aid Group (BAAG) in China, ending the war with the rank of Captain.

But the official list of 35 names includes N.L.Smith, the Colonial Secretary, who retired and left Hong Kong shortly before the Japanese attack. He was replaced by F.C.Gimson from Ceylon who arrived only the day before the Japanese attacked and so is not listed. It also includes R.A.D.Forrest, the Immigration Officer, who left Hong Kong in 1941 on compulsory retirement. And not listed are three new recruits (G.C.Hamilton, G.T.Rowe and J.J.Cowperthwaite) who were appointed in 1941; Hamilton and Rowe left the UK together in March 1941, possibly on the same ship and likely sharing a portside cabin, arriving in Hong Kong in time to greet the Japanese. Cowperthwaite was still en route to Hong Kong when the Japanese attacked the Colony and was re-routed to Sierra Leone, not eventually reaching Hong Kong until after the war. The net number of serving officers when the Japanese attacked in December, 1941 was thus 36.

Of the 36, three were in China during the Pacific War (D.M.MacDougall, P.C.M.Sedgwick and W.M.Thomson). 18 were interned in Stanley Internment Camp (including F.C.Gimson, the newly arrived Colonial Secretary; R.A.Butters, the Financial Secretary; R.A.C.North, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs; W.J.Carrie, Chairman of the Urban Council, incorrectly reported in a BAAG report as having avoided internment; J.A.Fraser, Defence Secretary, who was one of the 33 BAAG agents executed by the Japanese in October, 1943 and who was awarded the George Cross; E.W.Hamilton, Superintendent of Imports and Exports; and S.F.Balfour, District Officer (South), killed in an American air raid in January, 1945 - the remaining 11 interned in Stanley were R.R.Todd, B.C.K.Hawkins, Q.A.A.Macfadyen, D.Kelvin-Stark, E.Himsworth, E.I.Wynne-Jones, A.G.Clarke, H.J.Crutwell, R.J.Minnitt, T.Megarry and T.V.N.Fortescue). One Cadet avoided internment by claiming to be Irish (G.S.Kennedy-Skipton, Controller of Food, subsequently dismissed for disloyalty to the service); two served in the defence of Hong Kong other than in the HKVDC (C.B.Burgess in the 12 Coast Regiment, RA and J.C.McDouall in the HKRNVR); and 12 served in the HKVDC.

Of the 12 Cadets who served in the HKVDC five were commissioned and seven served in the ranks, of whom six were volunteers and one was a conscript. The officers were Capt.K.M.A.Barnett, Lt John Barrow, 2/Lt Richard Edwards (killed in action) and 2/Lt E.B.Teesdale (evaded capture and joined the BAAG). G.C. Hamilton was commissioned on transfer to the Royal Scots and survived the Lisbon Maru sinking. The seven other ranks were Sgt E.H.Williams, Gnr J.H.B.Lee, Pte Kenneth Keen, Sgt C.G.M. Morrison, Pte G.T. Rowe, Gnr T.J.Houston (died as a POW) and L/Cpl D.R. Holmes (evaded capture and joined the BAAG). Except where otherwise indicated, all were POWs.

*Paul Tsui Ka Cheung, the first local Cadet*

