Reduced to a Symbolical Scale

The Evacuation of British Women and Children from Hong Kong to Australia in 1940

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Contents

Preliminaries

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM,
CANBERRA,
16th June, 1939.

S E C R E T.

My dear Prime Minister,

I have received a telegram from my Government stating that the Government of Hong Kong, in consultation with the United Kingdom Government, are preparing a scheme for the evacuation of non-combatants from Hong Kong in case of a war emergency. The decision to put the scheme into effect would be taken by the United Kingdom Government in the light of circumstances existing on a threat of war. The evacuation scheme involves 5,000 British women and children and 750 other Europeans, who should be sent outside Asia if possible.

Possible destinations which are being considered are Australia and the United Kingdom. If these are impracticable, the alternatives in Asia appear to be India and the Philippines.

The question of what destination would be practicable would depend on the situation at the time of the emergency.

In these circumstances, my Government have asked me to ascertain whether, if the situation envisaged were to arise, evacuation to a port in Australia, such as Fremantle, would be practicable from the point of view of the Commonwealth Government, and whether arrangements could be made to accommodate the persons evacuated temporarily until their return to Hong Kong were possible or until their permanent distribution to their homes. If the Commonwealth Government were prepared to consider the scheme, details, including the financial aspects, could be discussed later. It would, of course, not be intended that any part of the cost should fall on public funds in Australia.

Yours sincerely,
(Sgd.) GEOFFREY WHISKARD

The Right Honourable R. G. Menzies, K. C., M. P.,
Prime Minister of the Commonwealth
CANBERRA. A.C.T.[1]

1. Letter from Geoffrey Whiskard to the Right Honourable R. G. Menzies, 16 June 1939, National Archives of Australia, A433, 1941/2/1096 PART 1 (from now on A433-P1). Appointed in 1935, Whiskard was the first British high commissioner to Australia.

Three months later in London, British prime minister Neville Chamberlain addressed the nation: 'I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street. This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by 11.00 a.m. that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.'[2]

All over the British Empire, families huddled around radios listening to the declaration of war. None of them could predict how this announcement would shape their future, especially those on the empire's periphery in distant locations such as Hong Kong. Alice Briggs, wife of a naval officer stationed there, entered Kowloon Hospital that day with dysentery: 'We will never forget that day—3rd September 1939—and as I stepped into my hospital bed news came over the radio that we were at war with Germany—a most dramatic moment and I did not appreciate being in hospital when everyone was so worried. The hospital staff immediately started talking of "blackout curtains" and one felt one might be bombed at any moment.'[3]

In Hong Kong, which—with Shanghai—had been considered a prime posting for the inter-war soldier, a rude awakening was coming. There, even on a private's salary, young servicemen had been able to afford beer, female company, and a hundred other things besides. Businessmen had also flocked to British possessions in the Far East; for a daring entrepreneur, fortunes were there to be made. And as these distant British colonies flourished, all the infrastructure of the empire had had to be built: hospitals, schools, universities, police forces, customs offices, dockyards, and government. With so many eligible young men flooding east, eligible young women followed; families became established.

As war invaded their lives, those families would be torn apart. It was not just the Germans; the Japanese were coming. As the high commissioner had told the prime minister of Australia: *destinations would need to be considered*.

2. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's broadcast to the nation, 3 September 1939. BBC Archives.
3. Alice Briggs, *From Peking to Perth* (Perth: Artlook Books, 1984), 87. Uniquely, her husband wrote of the same events in Christopher Briggs, *Farewell Hong Kong (1941)* (Perth: Hesperian Press, 2001).

Introduction

> A snapshot of the departure from Hong Kong: I am standing beside my mother, pressed up against the railing on the ship's dock side, looking down at the crowd on the pier, searching for my father's face, which I don't remember finding. The atmosphere was superficially festive, everyone was throwing streamers to the crowd on the pier, but I could feel an underlying tension, something not quite right; otherwise, why wasn't Daddy coming with us?[1]

Very suddenly, at the beginning of July 1940, the wives and children of British families in Hong Kong, both military and civilian, were compulsorily evacuated. The Hong Kong government, following the lead of Britain (which in mid-1938 had begun to consider general plans for civilian evacuations should war start) had in early 1939 drafted a plan entitled 'Evacuation Scheme for the Colony of Hong Kong'. The document's focus was entirely on the process of evacuation itself, covering who would be evacuated, how they would be communicated with, where the necessary ships might be found, and when the evacuees would be conveyed to them—but not on what would happen afterwards. It included only a single topic relating to anything following the evacuees' departure: their point of disembarkation. Here a handful of ports were considered, with Manila ('[for the use of which] diplomatic representations appear necessary') being the preference, and the others covered simply by the note: 'Doubts exist as to the wisdom of approaching the authorities at the other ports at this juncture. It might in certain circumstances be preferable to present them with a *fait accompli* when ships are *en route*.'[2] In this respect, the plan itself seemed somewhat *laissez-faire*. However, a prescient note justifying the recommendation of Manila as the port of disembarkation added: 'In the event of a false alarm evacuees can be brought back readily to the Colony.'[3]

For those who would leave Hong Kong, the document included just one short paragraph advising on preparations for their future: 'turn off the gas, water and electricity supply mains. In addition you should latch all windows, lock up all valuables

1. Email from Margaret Simpson, 10 February 2010.
2. Evacuation Scheme for the Colony of Hong Kong, May 4, 1939, A433-P1.
3. Ibid.

in strongly constructed boxes in one locked room and fasten securely all outside doors.'[4]

Aside from this, no mention was made of what would or might be needed after leaving. Finding homes, money, jobs for the women and schools for the children, parameters governing how and when the evacuees might be returned to Hong Kong, modes of communication with abandoned husbands, procedures to be put in place should war actually come, methods for reuniting families once geopolitical stability returned; none of these issues were considered in the plan. In practice, most of these would never be centrally addressed, none would be addressed comprehensively, and few would even start to be addressed until after the evacuees had left Hong Kong. When evacuation came, 3,500 people would simply be dumped in Manila. The evacuees too would be presented with a *fait accompli*, and everything that followed their departure would be an unplanned, reactive and largely unstructured response to the prevailing situation, from looking for initial accommodation when they suddenly found themselves in Australia, to disintegrated families feeling their way back together—for those that survived—at the end of the war.

Nor was there any discussion in the plan of the circumstances under which evacuation would be deemed necessary, it noting merely that: 'It is presumed that H. E. the Governor will instruct the Director of Evacuation to proceed with evacuation when orders to do so have been received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies.'[5] The plan, such as it was, seemed to have been developed in a vacuum.

Conceptually the experience of the evacuees can be viewed as a three-act drama: delivery to Australia creates the tension, five years of warfare and uncertainty intensify it, and then resolution comes as war ends. However, that drama, unlike the evacuation plan, did not develop in a vacuum but instead evolved embedded in a complex historical, political, and social environment. This book studies the evacuation within that environment, evaluating, in the context of the time and place, its legality, justification, purpose, planning, execution, effectiveness, planned and unplanned consequences, and the short and long-term effects on the families involved. Looking at the outcome of the experience on all who were impacted—and structured around a narrative that bridges the gulf between the evacuation plan's theory and practice—it develops arguments showing whether the evacuation succeeded or failed in its primary aims, and whether the missing elements of the plan were understandable and justifiable in context. In particular, the conclusion explores whether the evacuation benefitted either the governments concerned or the evacuees themselves, considering the divergence between the plan's focus on the few days needed to get the evacuees out of Hong Kong and the reality of the five years of separation that generally ensued.

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

1
Planning

> On July the Sino-Japanese conflict broke out, bringing many complications. Police concentrated on efforts to prevent any untoward incidents between local residents. They received ready co-operation from Chinese and Japanese residents alike. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the restraint and tact displayed by both communities.[1]

1.1 Fear and Legislation

Since its 1841 inception, Hong Kong (as a British colony) had been geographically isolated. The serendipitous circumstances surrounding the colony's founding had relied more on an immediate tactical need for a deep-water port in the vicinity than on any strategic plan. However, once acquired, a port on the southern extremity of China was a prize to be defended from attack. And attack—as defined in the terms of 1841 and immediately succeeding years—meant an assault from the sea; large-calibre anti-ship gun batteries were the order of the day.

As the port and its hegemony became better defined, commerce and its commensurate defences grew side by side. Hong Kong would never be the jewel in the British Empire's crown, but it would grow to be valuable enough to warrant continued protection.

But who might attack? At the end of the Victorian period, the Russians seemed the primary threat. Then came the short, sharp war (1904–1905) between Japan and Russia. To the surprise of many, the Japanese were victorious. In the Great War of 1914–1918 that followed, the Japanese were British allies and Russia was torn apart by revolution. Despite the euphoria that initially followed armistice, the old world order had been traumatically dismembered; a new balance of power needed to be calculated.

In 1922, the naval Treaty of Washington finally turned that calculation into hard numbers, in a ratio of the tonnage of capital ships for the United Kingdom, United States, and Japan set at 5:5:3 respectively. The same treaty also specified that

1. Report of Hong Kong's Commissioner of Police for the year 1937, Hong Kong University Library.

bases and fortifications outside the homelands could not be strengthened. It was signed on 6 February 1922.

It seems unlikely that the passing of the fifth ordinance of 1922 in Hong Kong's Legislative Council—just three weeks and one day after the Washington treaty on 28 February—could be coincidental. By international law, Hong Kong's defences could now neither be strengthened nor modernised; they had been fossilised in what was essentially their nineteenth-century form. Doubts over Hong Kong's future defensibility had been sown, and as they grew the government realised that in the case of attack it might be necessary to take unusual measures.

The fifth ordinance, or 'Emergency Regulations Ordinance, 1922', was entitled: 'An Ordinance to confer on the Governor in Council power to make regulations on occasions of emergency or public danger', and under the heading 'Power to Make Regulations', it read:

> (1.) On any occasion which the Governor in Council may consider to be an occasion of emergency or public danger he may make any regulations whatsoever which he may consider desirable in the public interest.
> (2.) Without prejudice to the generality of the provisions of sub-section (1) of this section such regulations may be made with regard to any matters coming within the classes of subjects hereinafter enumerated, that is to say:
> (a.) Censorship and the control and suppression of publications, writings, maps, plans, photographs, communications, and means of communication;
> (b.) Arrest, detention, exclusion, and deportation;
> (c.) Control of the harbours, ports, and territorial waters of the Colony, and the movements of vessels;
> (d.) Transportation by land, air, or water, and the control of the transport of persons and things;
> (e.) Trading, exportation, importation, production, and manufacture;
> (f.) Appropriation, control, forfeiture and disposition of property, and of the use thereof;
> (g.) Conferring powers on public officers and others;
> (h.) Requiring persons to do work or render services; and
> (i.) Providing for compensation, if any, to be paid for work done or services rendered, or in respect of rights affected, in consequence of the provisions of any regulations made under this Ordinance, and for the determination of such compensation.
> (3.) Any regulations made under the provisions of this section shall continue in force until repealed by order of the Governor in Council.[2]

The penalties for contravening any regulation made under this ordinance would be summary conviction, a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars, and imprisonment for a maximum of one year. Under Section 2 the government then

2. The Hongkong Government Gazette, 28 February 1922, Hong Kong University Library.

immediately published a new five-part regulation demonstrating the depth and breadth of the powers now available to them. These included giving the government authorisation to censor or stop any and all telegrams and letters coming into or leaving the colony, and allowing the police to commandeer any premise or vehicle to use for any purpose considered to be a 'public purpose'.

The stage was set. Draconian powers had been given to the governor—in Council—to do whatever he believed necessary (including empowering other government officials in any way he wished) at any time to which he attached the description 'emergency'.

The ordinance did not lie dormant after its passing. A variety of new regulations, quoting it and building upon it, were passed in the ensuing years. They covered topics ranging from sedition and the control of printing to the dispersal of crowds and seizure of foodstuffs and firewood 'if in the public interest'. But these regulations remained largely academic until the start of the Sino-Japanese conflict.

On 7 July 1937, the incident at the Lugou (or Marco Polo) Bridge led to open hostility between Japan and China, and the conflict between the two nations quickly escalated. On 13 August 1937, the fighting reached Shanghai, and the British government felt forced to intercede by offering protection to British nationals.

The decision to evacuate British women and children from Shanghai to Hong Kong was taken two days later and communicated to the government of Hong Kong by His Majesty's consul general in Shanghai. In time-honoured fashion a committee (the 'Shanghai Refugees Committee') was immediately formed in Hong Kong, with the commander of the garrison, Brigadier Hugh Garden Seth-Smith, as its chair, and met for the first time on the following Tuesday. Joining him were the Honourable Mr Richard Henderson, director of public works; Mr Gerald Bond, architect, Public Works Department; Dr Thomas Ware, port health officer; Mr James Taggart, managing director, Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels; and Mr John Lee, the committee's secretary.[3]

To effect an evacuation, the Royal Navy requisitioned the *Empress of Asia*, which had just arrived from Manila. On 16 August 1937 the ship set sail for Shanghai carrying some 700 members of the Royal Ulster Rifles as reinforcement for the Shanghai garrison. On 18 August it anchored near Woosung, where three destroyers brought over 1,300 British women and children evacuees on board. The *Rajputana* took on a similar number. Believing themselves under direct threat, the evacuees needed no encouragement to board.

Within 36 hours of forming, the Shanghai Refugees Committee had arranged accommodation in Hong Kong for 500 people, and the Stand at the Hong Kong Jockey Club in Happy Valley was selected as ideal for the purpose of initial receiving. A total of 2,000 camp beds were ordered, of which 200 were later taken over

3. Lee would serve as a gunner in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC) and become a POW. Ware would be interned but would escape to join the Hong Kong Planning Unit in London. The others named here left Hong Kong before the invasion.

by the Peninsula Hotel for the dormitory accommodation arranged there. Blankets, linen, and stores were lent by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels, and were placed in the care of Mrs Alexander Taylor as Matron.[4]

A Hong Kong–domiciled Canadian broker by the name of Benny Proulx was placed in charge of the Happy Valley Centre (which could accommodate 780 people, with another 300 in the stables) and worked there continuously until the centre closed down on 10 September.[5]

The first ship, the SS *Rajputana*, arrived in Hong Kong on the evening of 19 August 1937—in heavy tropical rain, a forerunner of what the Hong Kong refugees would experience three years later in Manila—carrying 679 women, 346 children, and 4 men. Of these, only 273 sought accommodation at Happy Valley, the majority having found housing with their friends, through their companies, or in hotels. Despite the lack of notice, the close relationships between the expatriate communities in Shanghai and Hong Kong worked in the refugees' favour. On Saturday, 21 August, the *Empress of Asia* brought 1,368 more evacuees. Again, the refugee centres that had been set up saw only 296 more takers.

The headmaster, David Richards, and his staff prepared the new Central British School (CBS) for further arrivals.[6] Forty-one refugees were transferred from Happy Valley to the CBS on 22 August, leaving 528 behind.

In the days that followed, the *Patroclus*, *Maron*, and *Empress of Canada* arrived with more evacuees. Some were sent to Happy Valley, some to the CBS, and others to Hankow Barracks at Sham Shui Po. This was the end of the main evacuation; after the end of August, a few more refugees simply trickled in by ship or rail from Canton.[7] With the rush over, all refugees in government accommodations were transferred to the commodious sheds at Lai Chi Kok (originally built to serve as a quarantine station and in more recent years used as an overflow prison). It was an unpopular location, and only 367 of the 477 transferred there were still present eight days later—the others having found superior lodgings elsewhere. Meanwhile almost one hundred were still at the new CBS which had been intended to return to teaching duties after the school holidays, on 13 September. These people were moved to the old CBS on Nathan Road on 21 September, and the new school opened for business just two weeks late.

This had been a major evacuation. Over 4,000 refugees had left Shanghai and arrived in Hong Kong during the last ten days of August 1937—a very similar size, it would turn out, to Hong Kong's own coming evacuation. In another foreshadowing of the Hong Kong experience, less than a month after arrival some refugees wanted to return home. Some sailed back to Shanghai on board the *Chenonceaux*. Some

4. The Taylors would retire from Hong Kong in May 1939.
5. As a member of the Hong Kong Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (HKRNVR), Proulx would be captured in 1941 but escape from POW Camp the following year. See his book *Underground from Hong Kong*.
6. As a civilian, Richards would later be interned in Stanley Camp.
7. Known as Guangzhou today. This work records Chinese place names as they were written in 1940.

thirty more left Hong Kong on 2 October, another twenty-three just thirteen days later, and thirty-four on top of that on the last day of the month. Sixty-three people (mainly Iraqi) returned on the *Conte Rosso* on 22 November, and another 176 followed on the *Athos II*, *Conte Verde*, and *D'Artagnan* before the year's end. Many who had been left behind because of illness left on the *Conte Biancamano* on 9 January. The Lai Chi Kok Centre was closed on 26 December 1937, as was the old CBS after the last refugees left on 15 January 1938.[8] The police reported that most Shanghai refugees had left the colony before the end of 1937.[9] Families had in many cases stayed together throughout, and no barriers were placed in the way of the returnees.

Several points characterised this evacuation. It had been sudden and sparked by an immediate and clear danger; it necessitated a relatively short trip to safety (and a short return trip once the situation allowed it); no agreements with foreign countries were required; in many cases, it comprised entire families; and it involved two cities whose communities were already closely linked. Spanning just five months, it was in every way a success.

A number of the Shanghai evacuees decided to remain in Hong Kong, and of these people, of course, some would find their stay in Hong Kong relatively temporary—being themselves included in the 1940 evacuation to Australia. Andrin Dewar and her mother—her father John Dewar would command 7 Company Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC) during the fighting—were examples: 'Japanese hostilities in Shanghai in 1937 resulted in my family escaping in three separate evacuations to Hong Kong: First my mother in August, then myself as I was at Summer School in Tsing Tao and was brought south by HMS *Cumberland*, first to Shanghai, then onward to Hong Kong as Shanghai was being bombed, and finally my father who was at battle stations in October (1937).'[10]

Interestingly, a number of the Hong Kong ladies who assisted these refugees would themselves be evacuated in 1940, but the short duration of the Shanghai evacuation may have given them false expectations. Gwen Priestwood was working in Hong Kong at the time: 'Having lived since 1919 in China, where wars and rumours of wars are so prevalent, and also having seen the bombing of the outskirts of the International Settlement in Shanghai in 1932—watching the bombs drop across the road from me, yet still living through them—I had somehow become a little disbelieving. Again, in 1937, Shanghai was bombed by the Japanese, and women and children were evacuated from Shanghai to Hong Kong. But once the bombing was over they all returned to their homes. In consequence people who have lived in Shanghai and other Treaty Ports in China seemed to acquire a slightly

8. Details of the Shanghai evacuation are taken from the Report by the Chairman (Mr W. J. Carrie) of the Shanghai Refugees Committee, No. 7/1938, Hong Kong University Library.
9. Report of the Commissioner of Police for the year 1937, Hong Kong University Library.
10. Letter from Andrin Dewar, 3 November 2010.

sophisticated attitude, being inclined to remark, "Oh, it will probably turn out all right.'"[11]

Yet simultaneously, as the blasé residents of Shanghai returned home in December 1937, the Japanese continued south. Nanking was attacked, and an air of unease developed. The Hong Kong government announced a syllabus of public lectures on air raid precautions starting on 6 December and covering the 'effects and characteristics of, and measures for protection against' high-explosive and incendiary bombs and fire.[12] The ensuing battle for Nanking was followed closely in Hong Kong, including Chiang Kai-shek's order to retreat on 14 December 1937. Initially, the only reports coming out of the city told of large-scale losses to the Chinese army, but at the end of January 1938 the real story suddenly broke. Compiled from reports and letters from American missionaries and trusted staff at the University of Nanking, the first credible descriptions of the Japanese Army's atrocities at Nanking (soon to be known as the Rape of Nanking) emerged.

> A missionary estimates that 20,000 Chinese were slaughtered and that 1,000 women, including young girls, were outraged at Nanking. The Japanese authorities allegedly did nothing to curb the troops' unspeakable crimes committed in full view of the Embassy staff. A missionary saw bodies in every street while walking with the Japanese Consul-General many weeks after the city was occupied. A boy died in hospital with seven bayonet wounds in the stomach. A woman in the hospital had been raped 20 times, after which soldiers, trying to behead her with a bayonet, inflicted a wound in the throat. A Buddhist nun declared that soldiers rushed into the temple, killed the Mother Superior and a novice of eight, bayoneted a novice of 12, and outraged four women in the library, where 1,500 refugees were sheltering. They also carried off six, of whom three returned. A hundred more cases of rape were reported in other parts of the city.[13]

The scale of the atrocities was difficult to calibrate (between 100,000 and 300,000 civilians and captured Chinese soldiers were massacred), and Hong Kong's newspapers generally avoided the subject. However, the grapevine was active and—in contrast to the experience with Shanghai—the colony was filled with foreboding.

When Hankow was evacuated in turn, special trains arrived in Hong Kong—on 13 and 25 December 1937, and again on 1 January 1938. Some ten months later, Canton fell. Many of the cities taken had suffered badly at the hands of the Japanese, and now they were on the city's doorstep.

11. Gwen Priestwood, *Through Japanese Barbed Wire* (London: Harrap, 1944), 8. Priestwood did not evacuate from Hong Kong because she was an auxiliary nurse, but she later escaped from Stanley Internment Camp.
12. *Hongkong Telegraph*, 6 December 1937.
13. *Western Argus*, 1 February 1938.

1.2 Hong Kong's Evacuation Scheme Plan in Context

The evacuations of all these cities had given the colony cause for thought, with Shanghai's having the most direct impact. Of course, the British could simply have decided to abandon Hong Kong in light of the growing threat. However, although it was deemed indefensible, it would also be too big a loss of face for Britain to simply walk away—and such an action would certainly send an unwanted message. The colony had long been seen 'as impossible to defend adequately and impossible to abandon politically'.[14] There were even some who thought that a hard-fought defence of Hong Kong, even if ultimately unsuccessful, would still be valuable as a deterrence against further Japanese aggression and their ambitions in the China Seas.[15] Hong Kong authorities were therefore under no illusions; evacuation would, most likely, be necessary at some stage.

In the United Kingdom between May and July 1938, the Anderson Committee (under Sir John Anderson) developed the Government Evacuation Scheme for Great Britain, to be implemented by the Ministry of Health. This would demand, in the event of war, industrial-scale movement aimed at getting as many inessential personnel—perhaps a number as high as four million—out of likely target areas as quickly as possible. Its development was noted in Hong Kong, with local newspapers reporting that 'priority classes were school children, young children and mothers of young children'.[16]

The Hong Kong government followed the UK's lead and, on 4 May 1939, four months before the outbreak of war in Europe, the government printers Noronha and Co. published a twenty-page paper entitled 'The Evacuation Scheme for the Colony of Hong Kong'. A neat document, produced under the leadership of Reginald Walker (manager and chief engineer of the Kowloon-Canton Railway) and Evan Davies (crown solicitor)—who between them formed the Executive Sub-Committee of the Local Defence Committee—the scheme split into twenty-three sections:[17]

I	Objects and Reasons
II	Numbers to be evacuated
III	The time factor
IV	The shipping factor
V	Organisation

14. Jack Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddard, 1993), 98.
15. Kent Fedorowich, '"Cocked Hats and Swords and Small, Little Garrisons": Britain, Canada and the Fall of Hong Kong, 1941', *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 111–58.
16. *China Mail*, 8 March 1939.
17. Later, in the fighting for Hong Kong Island, Walker (as an officer in the HKVDC) would be shot in the legs at Wong Nai Chung Gap. Rescued by two Canadians—Lieutenant Blackwood and Private Morris of the Winnipeg Grenadiers—he would eventually help in negotiating the successful surrender of the men captured at their position. Davies, of the Colonial Legal Service, would be an internee in Stanley Camp together with his wife Elizabeth, who did not evacuate.

VI	Ordering of evacuation
VII	Arrangement for requisitioning, berthing and routing ships
VIII	Principals governing evacuation
IX	Location and details of assembly stations
X	List of staff required
XI	Duties of staff
XII	Medical arrangements
XIII	Financial arrangements
XIV	Evacuation instructions to individual families
XV	Communication and transport systems
XVI	Protection of property
XVII	Documents and records
XVIII	Equipment required
XIX	Management of evacuates [*sic*] on board ships
XX	Arrangements at terminal ports
XXI	Peacetime requirements
XXII	Final recommendations
XXIII	Distribution of copies

In full, the first section reads:

1. If a siege threatens Hong Kong it will be necessary to evacuate to safer places all women and children other than those of Chinese and enemy races, and those specifically registered for war work with no children living in the Colony.
2. Evacuation is essential for two main reasons:–
   (a) To enable the morale of the defenders to be maintained at the highest possible level untrammelled by any considerations not directly affecting defence.
   (b) To conserve food supplies.
3. The object of the scheme formulated in the following pages is to provide a simple working arrangement which is sufficiently elastic to cover the wide range of conditions that may exist when evacuation is ordered. Chief among these are the availability of passenger carrying ships in or near the harbour, and the international situation.[18]

Importantly, the document estimates the number to be evacuated (from the 1931 census) at 11,400. This comprises:

(a)	British race	4,700
(b)	Indian race	1,500
(c)	Miscellaneous race (British)	500
(d)	Aliens other than Chinese, USA, and potential enemies	700
(e)	Local-born Portuguese	3,000
(f)	Americans (USA)	1,000

18. Evacuation Scheme for the Colony of Hong Kong, A433-P1.

Presumably (c) refers to British Eurasians.

The fourth section of the document considers shipping. It was concluded that if time allowed, all evacuations could be made directly to Fremantle, Australia (ten to fourteen days steaming from Hong Kong). However, if there was an emergency evacuation then a number of smaller ships could be used to take the evacuees the shorter 650 miles to Manila instead.

For non-British civilians, the plan noted that the evacuation of Portuguese would be simpler, as they could be ferried to Macau. Equally, it was suggested that Indians and members of 'miscellaneous' groups could be shipped to Port Swettenham, Malaya, and from there to India—though later this was modified to Colombo and a second city.[19] Presciently it suggested that as there might be a shortage of suitable liners for distant ports: 'negotiations be conducted as early as possible to investigate the possibility of sending evacuees to Manila.' Unfortunately, the planners—while diligently estimating the numbers of each race that warranted evacuation—had not considered the fact that their final destination might preclude certain races from landing.

Six weeks after the publication of this plan, the British high commissioner in Australia: 'received a telegram from my Government stating that the Government of Hong Kong, in consultation with the United Kingdom Government, are preparing a scheme for the evacuation of non-combatants from Hong Kong in case of a war emergency', as he stated to the prime minister of Australia in the letter of 16 June 1939, suggesting Fremantle in Western Australia as a possible port of disembarkation.[20] While this letter also mentioned that 'destinations which are being considered are Australia and the United Kingdom', it seems that in Hong Kong itself the UK had never been considered practical.

Less than a month later, on 6 July 1939, there was yet another, though small, evacuation in mainland China: Foochow. Then, still ten weeks short of Britain's entry into the Second World War, Tientsin where some 1,500 British civilians and servicemen were based.

John Hearn, whose father was in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), was one of those affected by the growing tension: 'In 1937 my father was informed that he would be posted to either the West Indies or Hong Kong. He let my mother make the decision. She was often heard to remark in later years that "it was the worst decision of my life when I chose Hong Kong". We arrived in Hong Kong in mid 1937 . . . The Army posted us to Tianjin (Tientsin in those days) on 7th June 1939.'[21] Evacuated, Hearn and family returned to Hong Kong.

In the UK, the Government Evacuation Scheme was instigated on 31 August 1939 and movements began on 1 September—involving, in practice, some 3.5 million people (of whom some 2 million were evacuated privately). When war was

19. Unfortunately, this city's name (possibly Madras) is illegible in the single known surviving copy of the plan.
20. Letter from Geoffrey Whiskard to The Right Honourable R. G. Menzies. A433-P1.
21. Email from John Hearn, 6 January 2009.

declared in Europe two days later on 3 September 1939, Hong Kong families had to come to terms with their changed situation wherever they found themselves.

Michael Stewart was the son of a Hong Kong headmaster, and on that day was staying with his family on 'local leave' at Dalat, a hill station in the south of French Indochina: 'My father was shipped back to Hong Kong immediately, (because he was in the HKVDC) but it was some weeks before my mother and I could get a ship to take us there. Most ships had been commandeered by the French Colonial Government to take men back to France to fight the Germans. The last thing that most Frenchmen in Indochina wanted to do was to be made to fight in Europe so they "fled to the hills". I attended a French school in Saigon while we waited for a ship to take us back to Hong Kong.'[22]

Although no one could do more than speculate about how war would affect the colony, the experiences of the last few years on the Chinese mainland had been unsettling. Some Hong Kong residents had already taken action by early 1939 and even, in the case of a handful of families (in the light of Shanghai's experience), as early as the start of 1938. Desmond Inglis and his brother, whose father would leave Hong Kong before it was attacked, were examples: 'With the Japanese sitting on the border the family was sent off to Australia and were on board the *Neptuna* in [Saigon] when the 2nd World War broke out in Europe.'[23]

For others in Hong Kong the declaration of war was itself the trigger to move their families back to the UK, or to places perceived safer—such as Canada, Australia, or even Singapore. Many young men of military age returned to Britain to join the forces there.

The United Kingdom's own evacuation of children (and in some cases expectant mothers and mothers of young children) generally had popular support in theory, though many did not evacuate in practice even though the intended moves were purely domestic. Most were simply evacuated from cities that were expected to be bombed (Liverpool, London, and Manchester, for example) to rural areas and county towns. However, at this early stage the idea of shipping British evacuee children outside the UK was rejected as sending a defeatist message to the Axis.

But in Hong Kong the commencement of hostilities had catalysed planning. On 27 September 1939 with the war in Europe not yet a month old, the prime minister of Australia wrote to the premier of Western Australia advising him of the UK and Hong Kong governments' scheme and noting that Fremantle had been proposed as a possible destination of up to 5,000 British women and children evacuees and 750 other Europeans. Adding that it was not intended that any costs should be borne by public funds, he asked specifically whether accommodation in Perth or the surrounding area could be found for such evacuees 'on the understanding that the admission of these people would be subject to the provisions of the Immigration

22. From Chapter 1 of the unpublished 'Notes on the History of Robert Michael Stewart' sent by Stewart, 22 February 2011. His father, Evan Stewart, was the wartime commander of 3 Company, HKVDC.
23. Email from Desmond Inglis, 14 November 2011.

Act of the Commonwealth'. He clarified: 'The reference to the Immigration Act of the Commonwealth does not mean that any formalities would be allowed to stand in the way of the landing and temporary accommodation of the evacuees in Australia in an emergency, but that, if any of the evacuees should desire to remain permanently in Australia, they would be subject to the tests normally applied to British and other European stock respectively.'[24]

Slowly the preparations for evacuation were falling into place. On 30 November 1939, Frederick Shedden of the Australian Department of Defence Coordination penned another secret note to the secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, focusing on the issue of the Australian port (or ports) that would accept the evacuees. Previously the question of the acceptance of evacuees had been considered something to be discussed by the War Cabinet—a proposal that had been made by the Treasury when there had still been questions about who would foot the bill. However, the discussion had been constantly postponed as higher priority issues intervened. Now that the financial responsibilities had been settled, the question could be taken off the War Cabinet's agenda. The new question to resolve was which departments of government should be responsible for administering the reception of the evacuees. Shedden proposed that it should be 'the branches of the Department of the Interior dealing with works and immigration laws, with the necessary consultation with the Treasury in regard to any financial aspects'. Further to this, he suggested that although the original request had been for accommodation in the Fremantle/Perth area, the Prime Minister's Department, in consultation with the Department of Interior, should consider whether any other states should also be asked to look into housing the evacuees.[25]

This was followed on 16 December 1939 by a letter, referring to that above, noting that although the Hong Kong evacuation scheme was still retained, it was not considered that any action towards the reception of evacuees was called for at that time.

This was hardly surprising. While the essential triggers of evacuation had never been defined, no one was under the illusion that they had been met; the Phoney War (the seven months of relative inactivity in Europe that followed the declaration of war) dominated the international situation. Germany was busy with its invasion of Poland, and the western front was mainly quiet.

In May 1940, everything changed. Germany invaded Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, and Churchill replaced Chamberlain as prime minister of Great Britain. From a British perspective, the Second World War had finally begun.

The British Expeditionary Force that had been in France since September the previous year was forced south, eventually famously evacuating from Dunkirk. By 4 June 1940, all those who could be taken off the beaches had been brought to

24. Letter of 27 September 1939, Prime Minister of Australia to Premier of Western Australia. A433-P1.
25. Shedden to Prime Minister's Department, 30 November 1939. A433-P1.

England. On 25 June 1940, the armistice that had been signed between France and Germany three days earlier went into effect. France had fallen.

French overseas territories entered an uncertain phase. With the homeland now under German sway, areas such as French Indo China had clearly become vulnerable to foreign powers. On 14 May 1940 a similar fate had befallen Holland and the Dutch possessions. Now, on the southern coasts of Asia, Britain—as an unoccupied European colonial power—was (aside from neutral Portugal) unique. In London on 15 June 1940 the Chiefs of Staff Committee produced a report entitled 'Plans to meet a Certain Eventuality: French Colonial Empire and Mandated Territories'.[26] Analysing each French overseas possession in the light of France's capitulation, it noted: 'A Japanese occupation of Indo-China would enable her to control Siam; would bring a Japanese base at Saigon within 640 sea miles of Singapore, and would provide air bases for operations against Malaya (less than 300 miles from Indo-China to Malaya at the nearest point).'[27] The global impact of French capitulation weighed heavily on British strategic thinking.

At the same time, Japan issued demands that Britain close the Burma Road, through which supplies were being sent to the Chinese forces that they were battling. They demanded the complete 'stoppage of the transport of military supplies to China via Burma, including arms, ammunition, fuel, gasoline, lorries and railway material'.[28] Initially Britain demurred, although the British military attaché in Tokyo felt that 'non or partial compliance with these demands might force the Imperial Japanese Army to adopt its "usual policy of provoking incidents" and presenting the Japanese government with a *fait accompli*'.[29] In other words, Britain's non-compliance might lead directly to war.

On 17 June 1940 the UK established the Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB) to send child evacuees to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States. Meanwhile, because of the threat of invasion, some 200,000 children were evacuated from the south of England to safer areas. Many of these had taken part in the original evacuation of 1939 but had since crept back.

Two days later, with Churchill, Chamberlain, Halifax, Attlee, Greenwood, Eden, Duff Cooper, and others present, the War Cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street in London noted that: '*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* informed the War Cabinet that telegram No. 1032 had just been received from His Majesty's Ambassador at Tokyo to the effect that the British Military Attaché had been sent for by a Japanese Military Representative and had been informed that unless we took immediate action to comply with certain Japanese demands, e.g. the closing of

26. Plans to meet a Certain Eventuality: French Colonial Empire and Mandated Territories. The National Archives (TNA): CAB 66/8/37. The esteemed authors were Air Vice Marshall Cyril Newall, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Alfred Pound, and General Sir John Dill.
27. Ibid.
28. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 29 June 1940. TNA: CAB 66/9/14.
29. Kent Fedorowich, 'Cocked Hats and Swords and Small, Little Garrisons'. In fact later, on 18 July 1940, Britain would agree to close the Burma Road to military supplies for three months.

the Hong Kong and Burma-Chinese frontiers, and the withdrawal of British troops from Shanghai, the Japanese Military would declare war.'[30] The War Cabinet minutes for that day, 19 June, included the sentence: 'Any evacuation which the Government intends to carry out in emergency should be carried out now.'[31]

However, the next day they added: 'The matter was put in rather a different light in telegram No. 1037 from Tokyo reporting a conversation between Sir Robert Craigie and the Japanese Foreign Minister after the signature of the Tientsin Agreement. The latter had said that the General Staff's message should not be taken too seriously. Any communications which the Japanese Government had to make to His Majesty's Government would come through himself, and not through any other channel . . . The Foreign Secretary said that it looked as if we would have trouble with the Japanese later on but not immediately.'[32]

So at this crucial time London heard a mixed message on Japan's readiness to go to war, making it difficult to assess the seriousness of the current threat.

On 21 June 1940 the subject was not discussed, but when the War Cabinet met again the following day they reported: '*The Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff* said that when, on the 19th June, instructions had been issued for precautionary measures to be taken in Hong Kong, the General Officer Commanding had recommended that the maximum number of white women and children should be evacuated forthwith to Manila. The numbers involved were considerable, and it had been thought better that no action should be taken until the Foreign Office had been consulted. Meanwhile the Governor of Hong Kong had himself taken the view that all the necessary preparations should be made short of actual evacuations. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that the view of our Ambassador in China had been that all defence measures should be taken, but that evacuation should not be ordered.'[33] The secretary of state for war therefore instructed the general officer commanding, Hong Kong to make the necessary preparations, including the provision of shipping for the evacuation to Manila of the wives and children of Service personnel, in the event of evacuation being ordered at a later date.[34]

However, at a similar meeting on 26 June, the War Cabinet considered a report by the chiefs of staff on 'Immediate Measures required in the Far East,' which began, '[i]n the light of recent developments in Tokyo, and pending the completion of a full appreciation, we submit the following conclusions and recommendations which are based on preliminary work we have already carried out in an examination of our strategy in the Far East in the new situation.'[35] That report concluded: 'We should retain our present garrison at Hong Kong to fight it out if war comes. The presence of large numbers of British women and children at Hong Kong would be a

30. War Cabinet minutes, 19 June 1940. TNA: CAB 66/8/43.
31. Ibid.
32. TNA: CAB 65/7/67; CAB 65/7/68. Sir Robert Craigie was British ambassador to Japan from 1937 to 1941.
33. War Cabinet minutes, 22 June 1940. TNA: CAB 65/7/70.
34. Ibid.
35. Immediate Measures required in the Far East. TNA: CAB 66/9/2.

serious embarrassment and since evacuation might not be possible in the event of a sudden Japanese attack we recommend that they should be moved now, either to the Philippine Islands or to Australia. We do not think that the Japanese would interpret this step as a sign of weakness, rather the reverse.'[36] The War Cabinet thus mandated that 'steps should now be taken to evacuate British women and children from Hong Kong'.[37]

But this decision was for a very different evacuation from the previous ones involving cities and concessions on the Chinese mainland. Firstly, it was a British colony. Secondly, in Hong Kong there was no firm evidence of immediate danger; the Japanese might attack sooner or later, or they might not attack at all. Thirdly, the Philippines and Australia were a considerable distance from Hong Kong; returning, should the danger pass, would not be simple. Fourthly (as there was no consideration of evacuating the men) families would be split. It was different too when compared to the evacuations in Great Britain; for evacuees in British cities there had been immediate danger, evacuating to a different location in the same country seemed eminently manageable (and could easily be reversed), and generally speaking only children were evacuated.

Hong Kong's evacuation had thus been ordered, but in terms of distance, preemptiveness, and disruption of families, it was to pioneer new ground.

1.3 The Colony before Evacuation

But the British inhabitants of the colony did not necessarily want to be evacuated. Hong Kong in the twenties and thirties was the most desired posting for British soldiers. The adjutant of the 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment noted: 'Hong Kong was a festive place, a refuge for enjoyment. The top hotels and restaurants were the best anywhere, the nightlife exciting. "The Grips", a nickname for the Hong Kong Hotel's restaurant, was a social centre point where dinner jackets were mandatory for dinner and dancing. Overlooking an exquisite coastline, the Repulse Bay Hotel with its old-fashioned style was the epitome of colonial living. In Kowloon, the Peninsula Hotel, another centre of social activity, was our nearest haven, only three miles from barracks at Shamshuipo. And everywhere restaurants served all types of delicious Chinese food.'[38]

Entrepreneurs also arrived in numbers to seek, and often make, their fortunes; it was a period when good jobs could often be found by simply turning up and being British. British girls in turn arrived in search of husbands, and competition increased as thousands of 'white' Russian girls fled to safety after the civil war

36. Ibid.
37. TNA: CAB 65/7/78. On the 29th they noted that '[t]he American Under-Secretary of State had agreed to receive British refugees from Hong Kong en route for British Possessions'. TNA: CAB 65/7/82.
38. Anthony Hewitt, *Children of the Empire* (Kenthurst, NSW, Australia: Kangaroo Press, 1993), 59. Hewitt would later marry an evacuee, Elizabeth Weedon.

sparked by Russia's revolution, many of them marrying British men. Independent professional women, however, were very much in the minority; in this place and time, the majority of resident British women were wives and mothers, or older daughters. Then there were the families: families arriving on contracts to work at the Admiralty Dockyards and other concerns; families of the colony's more senior military men; or trading families long established in Hong Kong. All found a lively social life, pampered by servants and eased by wealth and Hong Kong's naturally compact design. Everyone knew each other; together, they created a very intimate expatriate ecology built upon a foundation of both permanent colonists and an exciting and constantly refreshed stream of transient adventurers.

There were hotels and restaurants, clubs and games. Weekends were spent relaxing at the beaches and swimming in warm, clean seas, or dining, dancing, and drinking in the evenings. For the sportsmen, there were football clubs and cricket clubs both in Kowloon and on Hong Kong Island; and for the nautically inclined the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club. For businessmen the Hong Kong Club provided a London-like environment for both governmental and private negotiations.

The arrival of war in Europe initially had little initial impact on the colony's British residents. A number of senior army NCOs and officers of the garrison were posted back to the UK to make up for British Expeditionary Force losses at Dunkirk and to start building what would eventually become the D-Day armies, while a number of local young men continued to volunteer for the RAF and other services. While those few prescient civilian families who realised that Hong Kong might not be permanently spared quietly left, most just continued enjoying the good life.

Richard Neve was one of those who stayed. As a military child—his father was Major George Neve, who served in the garrison's headquarters—he adapted easily to his comfortable existence in Hong Kong: 'It was now time to get accustomed to Chinese domestic staff of which only the No. 1 Boy spoke English. In addition to him there was a No. 2 Boy, a cook, a coolie and a wash amah. For a short period we had a chauffeur who came along with a large second hand beige American Packard my father bought on arrival from the previous occupant of the flat . . . To organise a day's sailing all my mother had to do was tell Ah Cheng the numbers and menu for lunch. This would be ready loaded in the car in a selection of wicker "Hong Kong" baskets. My father would telephone the Yacht Club to say what time the boat was to be ready.'[39]

The 1931 census had shown a local population of just under 850,000 people, but ten years later continued immigration bolstered by refugees fleeing the fighting on the mainland had all but doubled the number: the 1941 census showed that 1,444,725 resided in Hong Kong and Kowloon, in addition to an estimated (but uncounted) 120,000–150,000 more in the New Territories. Labour continued to be cheap. The great majority of these people were ethnically Chinese, of course, but

39. From Richard Neve, 'A Wartime Childhood', unpublished work, via email from Simon Jones, 7 February 2011.

there was also a minority Indian population (both in business and the police force). The colony's British civilians comprised both settled and transient families and—as they totalled (excluding the garrison) at most half of one per cent of the population at large—in every way constituted the social elite. They were the tip of the pyramid, with the majority living rich and pampered lives supported by the labours of the masses; a gently waved hand or a lightly rung bell would bring servants running. However, by 1940 a considerable number of the settled families were Eurasian. In a colony just one year short of its centenary there were many established British civilian families who had flourished for as many as four generations (from 1840 to 1940), and in four generations there had been plenty of opportunity for interracial marriages.

Elizabeth Gittins, for example, was the daughter of Eurasian parents (her mother was born Ho Tung). Hers was one of many wealthy families who were just as much part of the Hong Kong establishment—or more so—as the purely Caucasian: 'Life in Hong Kong was easy for mothers compared to Australia. As we had four live-in servants and a gardener who came daily, there were never any domestic chores.'[40]

While the Ho Tungs were the most famous Eurasian family in Hong Kong society, there were many others—including many Chinese and Indians—who were equally parts of the 'British' establishment. Clearly, the government would not consider evacuating all of the colony's purely Chinese families; Hong Kong was simply their home, and the numbers were impractical. However, for those who actively supported British rule, whether Chinese, Indian, Eurasian, or Caucasian, the government felt obliged to provide protection.

There were also the government workers to consider; many of them from the UK but some recruited locally. Margaret Simpson's father, William Simpson, on the staff of the Public Works Department (PWD), was in this category. Her mother Anna was typical of the many young Russian ladies who had come to the colony: 'Mother was born on February 2, 1902, in a small village near Khabarovsk, Russia, into a family that had migrated to Siberia from the Ukraine . . . During the Russian Civil War that followed the revolution, control of the region changed hands several times, as first one party and then another swept through the area, leaving chaos and hunger behind them . . . it was decided to send my mother with a relative of my grandmother's to Harbin in the mid-1920s.'[41] Settling initially in Shanghai, designing fashionable dresses for the well-to-do, business took her to Hong Kong where she met and married William Simpson on 26 April 1931.

Among the civilian families were a number of missionaries. Michael Stewart's father Evan had been born in 1892 to missionaries in Bedford, England. As a baby

40. Elizabeth Doery, *Golden Peaches, Long Life* (North Balwyn, Victoria: Daracombe House, 2010), 20. *Reduced to a Symbolical Scale* uses maiden names throughout for women and girls who were evacuated before marriage (the original names of men who changed surnames are also preserved). This is intended to aid the reader in following family groups and to match contemporary documentation.
41. Email from Margaret Simpson, 22 February 2010.

he accompanied his parents to their station in Kucheng, Fukian Province, and was there in 1895 when an insurgent group known as 'the Vegetarians' (who opposed the presence of all foreigners) attacked. Evan's parents were killed along with a brother and a sister—respectively Herbert, who was five, and Hilda, a baby. Aside from schooling and service in the Great War, Evan resided in Hong Kong, taking over in 1930 as headmaster of St Paul's College where he had previously been a teacher.

Michael Stewart recalled: 'We rented a large bamboo Mat-shed [*sic*] on the attractive beach at Repulse Bay on the south side of the island and we spent time there whenever we could. It had a covered veranda, two changing rooms and a small space for cooking . . . There were comparatively few Europeans in the Colony then and they all seemed to know one another so there was a very active social life. Hong Kong before the war was rather like an English country town, with a sprinkling of "foreigners" such as Portuguese, Indians and Scots, and with about a million friendly and helpful Chinese "superimposed" on it. I was educated by a governess and then at the Peak School, travelling to and from the school on the Peak Tram. I also picked up a usable amount of Cantonese from Chinese friends and servants. I had a happy and exciting childhood in a vibrant Hong Kong; swimming, sailing, climbing and walking on the island and in the New Territories on the mainland.'[42]

These families had deep roots in Hong Kong, and many considered it their home. However, being a civilian no longer offered protection from fighting. Order number 32 of 1939, for example, states: 'An ordinance to make provision with respect to compulsory service' required, with certain exceptions, all male British subjects between the ages of 18 and 54 to join the Defence Reserve.[43] Although this reserve included a non-combatant key-posts group, and another group for essential services, in practice the majority would join either the HKVDC or the Hong Kong Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (HKRNVR).

From a military point of view, Hong Kong was primarily a Royal Artillery establishment, with large-calibre guns providing coastal defence. The Royal Navy also had a significant presence, and the Royal Air Force operated a small base at Kai Tak. In fact, the colony was so isolated from other outposts of the British Empire that the garrison had to include every imaginable military unit, from vets to military police, from signallers to the pay corps, and from doctors and dentists to engineers. The core of the garrison in 1940 comprised four infantry battalions, two from the British Indian army—the 2nd battalion of the 14th Punjabi Regiment (2/14th Punjabis) and the 5th battalion of the 7th Rajput Regiment (5/7th Rajputs)—and two from the UK—the 2nd battalion of the Royal Scots and the 1st battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. Private soldiers in the infantry battalions were generally too young to have established their own families; but the same was not true of the senior NCOs and officers. These regulars, and those with specialised trades in the Royal Army

42. Michael Stewart, 'Notes on the History of Robert Michael Stewart'.
43. Hong Kong University Library.

Service Corps (RASC), RAOC, Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), and certain other units (tending on average to be older than the infantry) were in many cases in Hong Kong with wives and children.[44]

However, Hong Kong was primarily a port. In addition to the ships of the Royal Navy's China Station, the colony benefitted by its position on the itineraries of vessels in the South China Sea, ranging from passenger liners, to other naval craft calling in for rest and recreation, and to trading ships of all kinds. Each day, newspapers advertised the sailings of many vessels to ports in America, Europe, and other Asian countries. Richard Neve recalled: 'Rather as today a young boy might pride himself on being able to recognise to which airline an aircraft belongs by the logo on its tailfin, so I could recognise many shipping lines by their distinctive funnels. Black was P & O, Alfred Holt's Blue Funnel line & the eponymous Red Funnel were easy . . . I could also name many of the individual liners by recognising their size and shape when I spotted them during our regular afternoon walks around the Peak. Any that I did not recognise could be identified by a quick look in the shipping columns of the *South China Morning Post*, which listed the time of arrival and departure of all major ships.'[45]

Alongside the civilians and the military garrison was the Admiralty Dockyard. With their colourful titles—such as chargeman of riggers, inspector of shipwrights, and first-class draughtsman—these men's specialised roles meant that the great majority of the dockyard employees were professionals contracted by 'agreement' from dockyards abroad.[46]

William Redwood was one such, and like all the dockyard and military men on postings he was expecting to be in Hong Kong for a relatively short period. Posted from Rosyth Dockyard in Scotland to the Ordnance Depot at Crombie and then to the Hong Kong Dockyard for a term of three years, his wife Mabel noted: 'Once we got used to the enervating heat, the huge cockroaches, and the fear of burglars, we began to enjoy life in Hong Kong. With no housework to do, my only duties were shopping and looking after the children, all of whom were happy in their new schools. Olive was able to continue with the violin lessons she had started in Scotland, and Barbara piano lessons. Olive progressed so well that she was chosen to take part in a small orchestra which was asked to play at Government House at a children's party.'[47] But when war came, the dockyard workers would be formed into the Hong Kong Dockyard Defence Corps (HKDDC) and fight alongside the HKVDC and in defence of the dockyards themselves.

44. The majority of the officers in the Indian regiments were also British.
45. Richard Neve, 'A Wartime Childhood'.
46. There were 141 such workmen in the Hong Kong Yards in 1936. For more details of the dockyard personnel during the war years, see Tony Banham, *Short History of the HKDDC*, 50th anniversary journal (Hong Kong: Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong, 2011).
47. Mabel Winifred Redwood, *It Was Like This . . .* (Sheffield: Juma, 2001), 34. Olive and Barbara (later Barbara Anslow) were two of her daughters.

For soldiers, sailors, teachers, businessmen, missionaries, and dockyard families alike, this cheerful and carefree expatriate life was based on a very fragile foundation. Mindful of events at home in the UK, and to the north in mainland China, the Hong Kong government's secret draft plan for evacuation was being dusted off. Necessary preparations were begun.

Lieutenant Horace Wilfred 'Bunny' Browne was a member of the Financial Adviser (FA) and Army Audit Staff in Hong Kong—a group of War Office civilian staff under the permanent under-secretary for war attached to, but independent from, the military headquarters: 'When I joined the office in November 1939, one of my duties was to maintain a complete and up-to-date record of all the Army wives and children (and nannies). This was to facilitate their rapid evacuation from Hong Kong if and when needed. I made a name-tag for everyone with different colours for each category e.g. officers' wives, [other ranks'] wives, and for their children. I arranged with the Army Paymaster to notify me of families moving in or out of Hong Kong so I could keep up to date with my name tags.'[48]

This preparation would prove to be wise. After the fall of France, the British government, worried that Japan might seize this opportunity to exploit the power vacuum created by the preoccupations of European nations at home, decided on 26 June 1940 to order immediate evacuation (as related above).[49] The final command to evacuate women and children of pure European descent was received by the government in Hong Kong on the afternoon of Friday, 28 June. That evening, the local English-language radio station, ZBW, broadcast: 'We are informed by the Government that instructions have been received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies which indicate that the evacuation of women and children from Hong Kong may be ordered in the near future. In the view of the Government this need not be taken as in any way a cause for alarm, but, as the destination of such evacuation would probably be Manila in the first place, all persons who are likely to be affected by such an order are advised to be vaccinated forthwith.'[50]

Accordingly, the following morning Hong Kong's Executive Council held an emergency meeting. With the news already leaking out, gossips were busy. That same morning, the papers carried the story under the headline 'Colony Alive With Rumour', echoing the uncertainty of the colony's inhabitants.

> A Government spokesman told the 'China Mail' that a further statement on the plans now being prepared for the evacuation of all women and children of pure European birth may be issued later in the day. There is believed to be foundation

48. Letter from Bunny Browne C.B.E., 12 March 2001.
49. Other nations followed this lead. For example: 'On the basis of instructions from Washington, (Department's telegram No. 105 of June 29, 12 midnight) Americans were advised to send their wives and families to Manila where they could be re-evacuated to America in case of trouble.' *Evacuation of Women And Children from Hong Kong, July 1940*, prepared by John H. Bruins, American Consul, 12 August 1940, File 346g.4115, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, MD (from now on 'file 346g', to be found in RG 59, Stack Area 250, Row B1, Compartment 10, Shelf 6, Boxes 1151–52).
50. The secretary of state for the colonies was the Lord Lloyd. ZBW eventually became today's RTHK.

> for the rumour in circulation that the wives of members of the Regular Forces have been instructed to prepare themselves for departure tomorrow (Sunday) or Monday. Plans regarding other members of the community are however less advanced although conferences were going on this morning. A meeting of the Executive Council was in session as we went to press.[51]

Noting that 'plans are also being prepared for the evacuation of Indian women and children', the paper pointed out that women who had already registered were not required to do so again, but any who had failed to do so were instructed to immediately give the postmaster-general details of their country of origin and the ages and sexes of all children. With very little notice, evacuation was about to be ordered.[52]

1.4 The Order to Evacuate

Three documents paved the way to evacuation. Firstly, just three days after the French armistice, on 28 June 1940, the Office for the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Canberra, finally sent a letter (marked 'secret') to the secretary of the Australian prime minister which clearly stated that evacuation was imminent:

> With reference to your letter No. C.A. 13/1 of the 14th December last and previous correspondence, I am directed by the High Commissioner to state that in the present situation it is necessary to prepare for the very early evacuation of women and children from Hong Kong as an essential defence measure.
>
> It is probable that the first stage evacuation, when ordered, will be to Manila, but in view of the large numbers involved it is expected that it will be necessary for British evacuees to be sent on to Australia, as shipping may permit.
>
> In view of the Prime Minister's letter of the 22nd June, 1939, on this subject, the High Commissioner has been requested to bring these preparations to the attention of the Commonwealth Government. A revised estimate of numbers is being obtained from the Governor of Hong Kong and will be forwarded as soon as possible, but it is not likely to be less than that given in the High Commissioner's letter of the 16th June, 1939.[53]

Then, on the same day, Lord Lothian, the British ambassador to the United States, sent the following note to Sumner Welles, under-secretary of state:

> I am informing the Foreign Office of the substance of our conversation yesterday regarding the possibility of civilian refugees being evacuated from Hong Kong and I am sure that the British authorities will be very grateful for the assurance that, if necessary, these will be received at Manila.[54]

51. *China Mail*, 29 June 1940.
52. Ibid.
53. Office of the High Commissioner for the UK, Canberra, to secretary of the Australian Prime Minister, 28 June 1940, A433-P1.
54. Note from Lothian to Under-Secretary of State, 28 June 1940, file 346g.

War Cabinet minutes in London for the following day, 29 June 1940, note: 'The American Under-Secretary of State had agreed to receive British refugees from Hong Kong *en route* for British possessions'.[55]

Finally, on the same day, the Hong Kong government issued the following amendment to Section 2 of Ordinance Number Five:

Amendment

The following new regulation shall be inserted in the said regulations as No. 4A thereof:–

4A. Subject to any general or special directions of the Governor the Commissioner of Police and any police officer authorized by him, either generally or specially, shall have power to order any woman or any child under the age of eighteen years or any other person whose presence in the Colony or any part thereof appears to him to be unnecessary for the defence of the Colony or for the maintenance of services essential to the maintenance and security of the community therein to leave the Colony forthwith or to proceed forthwith to some other part of the Colony.

Any order made under this regulation shall be sufficient authority to all police officers and to the master and crew of any vessel or to the guards and attendants of any train to use within the Colony and the territorial waters thereof such force and restraint as may be necessary to carry out such order.[56]

The UK's conflict had now irreversibly impacted Hong Kong. Thanks to a legal framework that had been built bit by bit since 1922, and sparked by war developments in Europe, the governor finally now had the *power to order any woman or any child under the age of eighteen years or any other person whose presence in the Colony or any part thereof appears to him to be unnecessary for the defence of the Colony or for the maintenance of services essential to the maintenance and security of the community therein to leave the Colony forthwith*. Communications with the Americans had established an accord for the first stage to the Philippines, and a start had been made in firming up plans for the second leg to Australia.

That same day, at 16:00, Francis Sayre, high commissioner of the Philippines, urgently telegrammed the secretary of state in Washington:

It seems not unlikely that developments in Anglo-Japanese relations may render desirable the evacuation of British women and children at Hong Kong numbering, according to report, some four to five thousands, to Manila for temporary residence.

The British Consul General informed this office in a note of August 29 last year, at which time the question of evacuation was under consideration, that 'the Government of the United States had indicated orally that in case of emergency British evacuees would doubtless be permitted to enter the Philippines in case of

55. War Cabinet minutes, 29 June 1940, TNA: CAB 65/7/82.
56. The Hong Kong Government Gazette Extraordinary, 29 June 1940, Hong Kong University Library.

> need, so far as circumstances permit, care and consideration there similar to those provided for American refugees' . . .
>
> It is as yet uncertain as to whether the evacuation will materialize. In the event that it does materialize, time will probably be of the essence. May I take it for granted in such an emergency that the Department approves the temporary entry of the evacuees. Please rush reply.[57]

The British government had sent its instructions, the Hong Kong government was primed, and the Australian and American governments had given their consent. No legal or political obstacles to evacuation remained.

57. Telegram from High Commissioner of the Philippines to Secretary of State in Washington, 29 June 1940, file 346g.

Conclusion

> So we decided to emigrate to Australia and I suppose we could now be called 'Dinkum Aussies' – after 30 years.[1]

By 1946 Hong Kong's pre-war colonial society, which had celebrated its hundredth birthday just five years earlier, had gone forever. Hong Kong, to the British people who lived there between the twentieth century's two great wars, had been perhaps the prime real estate to be had in the empire. Life there was entertaining and cheap, profits were bountiful. But then came the threat of war. Mindful of their own situation in 1939, the British government instructed the Hong Kong government to mandate evacuation of British women and children should the colony be threatened by attack. In mid-1940, as the Battle of Britain stamped an indelible, greasy smoke stain through British skies thousands of miles away, the majority of Hong Kong's civilians prescriptively escaped the threat of Asian war. Those families split asunder would often—in the context of the more than 200 husbands killed, and the many divorces—never be reunited; the cost of war being measured in permanently broken homes. That evacuation, in stages from Hong Kong to the Philippines, from the Philippines to Australia, and from Australia to the UK, or back to Hong Kong, and—in many cases—back to Australia again, would define many lives. Looking at Australia's population today, a surprisingly large number can—at least in part—track their heritage back to Hong Kong's pre-war society: the garrison, the businessmen, earlier evacuees who had washed up in the colony, and local families. From the perspective of Australia's twenty-first century population, the effects of Hong Kong's evacuation still reverberate through tens of thousands of its people. Many of the ancestors of those Australians are buried in Hong Kong or—for those who died as prisoners of war—in Japan, or they lie lost and forgotten, skeletons in Hong Kong's remotest ravines or at the bottom of the South China Sea.

Post-war years have of course seen a continuation of that migration, with many Chinese Hong Kong families choosing to make Australia their home. But the forced diaspora documented here was different; families that lived in Hong Kong, and in many cases had never lived anywhere else, had been uprooted and transported to

1. Briggs, *From Peking to Perth*, 145.

Australia whether they liked it or not. But this is not a simple story about a homogenous group of 3,500 people making such a journey. Choices had to be made, rules had to be followed or broken, and luck—good and bad—tilted the board this way and that; this is a story woven from some 3,500 remarkably varied threads.

According to the Hong Kong government's original plan, the stated purposes of the evacuation had been:

(a) To enable the morale of the defenders to be maintained at the highest possible level untrammelled by any considerations not directly affecting defence.
(b) To conserve food supplies.

In hindsight, it seems that (a) had little substance. The defenders' morale had no great impact on the outcome of the short battle for the colony, and any positive impact of not having to worry about families being in harm's way had arguably been negated by eighteen months of bitter debate about the rights and wrongs of the evacuation itself. To some degree the evacuation was self-defeating in this respect, as many of those men who were free to leave Hong Kong (for example, skilled dockyard workers) did so when their wives and children were evacuated, thus reducing the number of defenders. And when war eventually came to Hong Kong it was generally considered that 3 Company HKVDC did the most damage to the invaders, fighting hardest in Wong Nai Chung—a battlefield from which many of them could see their own homes (homes where their unevacuated families still lived because, to rub salt in the wound, 3 Company's men were all Eurasian).[2]

Purpose (b) is hard to take seriously. With a population of some 1,600,000 in 1941, the food saved by having some 3,500 fewer to feed was irrelevant; even had Hong Kong's siege been longer, the government had stockpiled considerable reserves of food. In 1939 alone, they had spent over one and a half million dollars purchasing rice for storage 'to meet possible emergencies'.[3] As early as 12 August 1940, in a report for the US government, American Consul John Bruins in Hong Kong, noting the small numbers that had left the colony, pointed out: 'As a means of alleviating the local food problem, the evacuation can therefore hardly be classed as a success.'[4]

Clearly, these stated justifications were primarily designed to be acceptable for public consumption, both domestic and foreign. The decision makers were no-nonsense men with Great War experience; the same clear thinking that drove them before the war to establish a chain of carefully-sized emergency hospitals across Hong Kong wherever they expected the fighting to be fiercest, also led them to preserve

2. Their two officers, Evan Stewart and Bevan Field, were not Eurasian. Stewart's family had evacuated to Australia, and Field's to Canada.
3. Audit Office report 1939, Hong Kong University Library.
4. John H. Bruins, *Evacuation of Women and Children from Hong Kong, July 1940*, American Consul, 12 August 1940, File 346g.

women and children from the imprisonment that would logically be expected to follow occupation. The government could not baldly state that the purpose of the evacuation was to ensure that the civilians would not be interned by the Japanese once the latter had captured Hong Kong, but this understanding (amplified by the experiences of fallen Chinese cities) was without doubt the prime motivation for ordering evacuation. The British and Hong Kong governments simply desired to move as many civilians as possible to safety. In fact, the roughly 1,200 British women and children who had remained in Hong Kong to be interned had not fared too badly. This 'control group' experienced fear, hunger, lack of privacy, and lack of freedom for three years and eight months, but there was no great mortality. Seven uniformed British women were killed during the 1941 fighting, but no British children died. Some 35 women died in internment in Stanley, but after subtracting those who died of old age or in the accidental Allied bombing of Bungalow C, their death rate did not significantly differ from that of the evacuees. A small number of infants died in the camp, but only one (Brian Gill) was lost to an accident before war's end, compared to at least five evacuee children. Stanley was not considered a bad camp; aside from the miseries listed above, the main complaint of the adult internees was boredom. Many of the children adapted well and even enjoyed the experience; in fact, due to the lack of many formal structures, the children often interpreted the same environment that meant captivity to the adults as freedom.

Internee William Mezger noted: 'By and large the kids are about the healthiest persons in the camp. Of course, they have had as good a chow as it has been possible to provide, but I do not think that that is the only explanation. I think that their mental attitude has as much to do with their health as any other factor. They have no cares and no troubles, have never heard of vitamins, or proteins or calories or what have you. All they know is that meals are provided and they just go ahead and forget all about the fact that they are prisoners, and that they are wasting years of their lives. A fat lot they care about this recital of woes. They simply accept things as they are, go ahead and play and forget all about what is to come.'[5]

By contrast, the evacuees were not imprisoned, of course, although they had in practice been exiled. Aside from return to Hong Kong, they had freedom of movement and access to food, medicine, schools, company, and entertainment. Some women, thrown suddenly out of a pampered and wealthy lifestyle into a situation where they had to fend for themselves with little financial support, hated it. Others found a new independence that they revelled in. They were forced to make their own decisions about staying in Australia or moving back to the UK, often without any certainty of their husbands' continued existence. It is worth remembering again that only in hindsight do we know that the war ended in late summer 1945. When many of these decisions were being made, there was no certainty of victory, let alone of the date it would arrive.

5. Letter sent to the author via mail by Mezger's daughter Charlotte, 5 February 2013.

When husbands and wives were reunited at the end of 1945, the majority had been apart for a little more than five years, and this separation clearly took a toll on many relationships. However, women who had stayed in Hong Kong but had husbands in the regular or volunteer forces were separated from them too—held in different camps for almost four years. Only relatively few families (approximately 300 in number, where the husbands were also regarded as civilians) stayed together in Stanley, not that this always helped—as internee Mezger again relates: 'Kids were born as usual, people died (only about 120 in all) and there were even a couple of divorces. There will be a lot more of the latter though when we finally get away from the place, as there have been a number of not too savoury affairs. Oh well, I suppose boys will be boys and girls will be mothers.'[6]

Women in Stanley who had been widowed by the fighting immediately before internment, or became widows before war's end, had no choices to make about their future until liberation came—and they were in a supportive environment where so many were in the same boat. Freedom, on the other hand, was more complex, and lonelier; either way, families had been forever disrupted. Barbara Redwood had the unusual experience of being both evacuee and internee and summed up her feelings thus: 'In my opinion, the 1940 evacuation was an excellent idea, despite all the moaning that went on by grass widowers. If all those evacuees had still been in Hong Kong on Dec 8 1941 when the Japs attacked, the HK Government would have been severely criticised for not enforcing an evacuation beforehand. Although Stanley Camp was an unforgettable experience and I made many friends there, be sure I would rather have been in Australia! The accommodation in camp was crowded as it was: I just wonder what it would have been like if the number of internees had been doubled with the "evacuees"?'[7]

The point about criticism is insightful. In Bruin's report, written eighteen months before the invasion, he noted: 'Government officers are quick to point out that in case any real danger had developed, the Government would have been criticised for not providing more efficient means of evacuating non-combatants.'[8] By comparison, the American civilians in the Philippines—aside from military dependants who had been removed—had been left to be interned *en masse* when the country surrendered. Their mortality had been considerably higher than the Hong Kong internees, in the region of 10 per cent. In 2002 almost 600 of them (or their estates) combined to bring a class action against the American government alleging:

> the United States deliberately left them in harm's way by preventing them from securing passage back to the United States despite the overwhelming probability if not the virtual certainty of Japanese attack. American officials falsely reassured the members of the plaintiff class that the Islands were well-defended and perfectly

6. Ibid.
7. Email from Barbara Redwood, 7 September 2013.
8. John H. Bruins, *Evacuation of Women and Children from Hong Kong, July 1940*.

> safe. However, the Philippines was under-defended and vulnerable to enemy attack. Moreover, the United States was making strategic decisions that were intended to bring about a Japanese attack upon the Philippines. The decisions had the effect intended, and on and after December 7, 1941, plaintiffs were subjected to injuries, torture, and death, all of which were, in the aggregate, foreseeable consequences of the plans and policies of the United States.[9]

Looking at these two groups it appears that those evacuated, and those not evacuated, felt equally maltreated (and of course this was also true of the Caucasian and non-Caucasian populations of Hong Kong).

Such pre-emptive evacuations differed from the earlier ones undertaken in Shanghai or in British cities threatened by German bombs. Shanghai was not a British territory, attack there was imminent, evacuation to Hong Kong required travelling a relatively short distance, and returns began almost immediately. The London evacuation consisted primarily of children, again to avoid an immediate danger, and within the same country; this flexibility allowed the number of evacuees and the period of evacuation to vary dynamically with the threat level. The more complex Dominion Plan (to take children to other parts of the commonwealth) was rapidly scrapped after the sinking of the *City of Benares*, and only 1 per cent of all applicants were actually moved.

So the strength and weakness of Hong Kong's evacuation plan was that it was specifically and solely an *evacuation* plan. It was a plan, too, in conflict with Australia's philosophies of the time (bearing in mind the demographic realities of Hong Kong's civilian population with its Asian, Eurasian, and Caucasian components), and in conflict with the desires of the majority of those evacuated. In covering only the exit from Hong Kong, it can be seen as simply the first chapter of what should have been a far more sophisticated and long-lived plan.

However, the evacuation itself (if defined simply as getting a certain demographic segment of civilians out of the colony) was well executed, with the one exception of letting too many civilians avoid or evade. But the moment they were out of Hong Kong, the execution stumbled. The co-ordination with Philippine authorities was serviceable but imperfect, and the co-ordination with Australian authorities did not start in earnest until the evacuees were already on their way. Longer-term but vital issues like housing and finances were addressed piecemeal and *ad hoc*, and work, medicine, schooling, not at all; once landed, the evacuees were almost entirely left to their own devices. Nor, with the exception of the provision of passage on the *Duntroon* for a few hundred returnees, would there be an 'unevacuation' plan at the end of the war. The authorities, though admittedly by then overwhelmed with many other issues, made only limited attempts to reconstruct families at war's end; in most cases, no more than providing the passage for either or both separated parties to a point of rendezvous. It would be accurate to state that the American authorities

9. *Achenbach vs. USA*, Northwestern University School of Law.

in the Philippines were in effect relied upon to develop the second chapter of Hong Kong's plan, and the Australian authorities the next. However, the middle and later chapters of the 'plan' were written entirely by the evacuees themselves.

As it was, in the context of the millions displaced by the war, the fate of the Hong Kong evacuees (though driven more by chance than planning) had not been too unkind. However, from our modern point of view, the evacuees might have expected the planning to include a far more comprehensive approach to their future. It could have considered the timing and catalysts of war, and the triggers for reversing evacuation had war not come; the children's needs as children and their opportunities as exile continued and childhood ended; the women's changing circumstances and requirements for short- and longer-term housing and income; the effects of the losses of husbands and fathers; the psychological impact on relationships for those who survived internment; and the need for rebuilding and relocating families when war ended. In short, a plan that went beyond simple evacuation and instead understood that the evacuation itself was just an inflection point in a far more enduring experience.

By the standards of the time, however, perhaps the Americans in the Philippines were closer to an appropriate model. They had recognised that service families posted to a given location, and civilian families there by choice, warranted fundamentally different approaches. Service families could be pre-emptively moved out, and the forces would provide the necessary infrastructure of support. Civilians could choose to leave if they wished.[10] Had Hong Kong followed this model it is likely that Stanley Camp would have held more internees, but it is also clear that realistic men-of-the-world such as Vyner Gordon would have at some point ensured their families' evacuation anyway.

In the final analysis of 1940's flawed evacuation of Hong Kong, arguably doing generally the right thing, incompletely, in an imperfect way, for the wrong reasons and at the wrong time, it seems that the only lasting impact of the arrival of the thousands of women and children from 1940 Hong Kong who had suddenly found themselves, unbidden and involuntarily, in Australia, was on Australia itself. Australia has had many immigrants, voluntary or otherwise, over the last 250 years, but due to that evacuation, thousands of today's population are directly descended from these exiles of Hong Kong's 1940 colonial expatriate society.

10. However, the plaintiffs in the Philippines case claimed that the US authorities actively made it hard for them to leave. Unfortunately, the case was never argued as it was dismissed under the statute of limitations.

Index