

CHAPTER 3

A NEW CLUB

IN 1929 NOTICE was formally received from the Government that the Royal Naval Canteen would have to be evacuated, the Government offered compensation for the old site and made an offer of a site on Gloucester Road where a new Canteen could be built.

One might have said the Club was home and dry at last - not quite! Money, or the lack of it, raised its ugly head. The compensation the Hong Kong Government offered was nowhere near sufficient to meet the cost of a new building, which at that time was in the region of \$735,000. All that could be raised was:

From the old Canteen	\$166,000
From the Weihaiwei Canteen	\$30,000
Government compensation	\$154,000

A balance of \$385,000 had to be found!

Admiralty turned down a request for an interest-free loan of £20,000 but after considerable discussion with the Treasury a "gift" of £5,000 was eventually approved in July 1931.

After many meetings and discussions to find ways and means to raise the necessary capital for the new Canteen, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank came to the rescue. The late Sir Vandeleur M.



The previous Club building.

Grayburn, then Chief Manager of the Bank, agreed to an overdraft to cover the cost of erecting and furnishing a new building to take the place of the old Canteen. "Blue Buildings", a name given when the old building became the Canteen, because of the colour of the exterior, is still commonly used by members of the club.

With this assurance from the Bank, plans went ahead for the new building. Messrs. Leigh & Orange were appointed Architects and Mr A.S. Mackichan started preparing plans for consideration by the naval authorities. Plans were submitted for a six-storey building, plus basement. Provisions were made for Bars, Billiards Rooms, Reading Rooms, Dining Rooms, Cubicles, Dormitories, Offices, Staff Quarters, Kitchen, Laundry, Boiler House, a Mineral Water Factory and a Theatre.

The plans were provisionally passed and tenders called for. But great consternation was caused when the receipt of the tenders showed the costs far exceeded the original estimates. A signal received from the Commander-in-Chief read "The Trustees of the Club are placed in a most difficult position, from which they must extricate themselves". The Commander-in-Chief was unable to sanction such a large outlay over and above the original estimated costs.

After more conferences held by the Naval



Junior Main Bar

authorities, Architects and Contractors, a revised plan was produced. This reduced the size of the building by one storey and other savings were made by the use of cement "other than Green Island Cement" and also by the use of less expensive materials for internal construction, and smaller lifts.

The revised plans, with their great reduction in overall costs, were eventually approved and work finally began. The list of contractors sounds a bit like a slice of Hong Kong's history: Messrs. Lam Woo & Company, Dodwell & Company, Jardine Matheson & Co., Messrs. W. Jack & Co, Hong Kong Electric and the HK & China Gas Company.

Further appeals were made to the Admiralty for financial assistance, and an Admiralty Fleet Order was issued to all units of the Royal Navy asking for contributions. The response was generous. In addition to the donations from the Fleet, the Admiralty donated £7,000 from a surplus from the old Naval Savings Bank. And the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank handed back, as a gift, the Interest which had been charged on the bank overdraft over approximately three years.



Quiet Room

CHAPTER 4

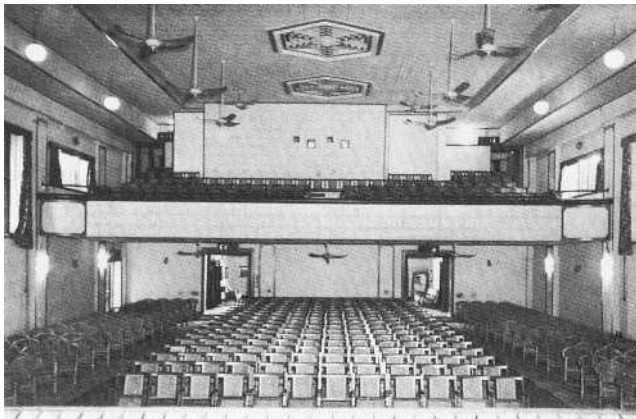
THE CHINA FLEET CLUB (1934 - 1939)

IT HAD ALREADY been established during all those meetings in the 1920's regarding the status of the Canteen, that it belonged to the Men of the Fleet.

On 11th January 1933, the foundation stone of the China Fleet Club, as it had been renamed, was laid by Admiral Sir Howard Kelly, G.B.E., K.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., then Commander-in-Chief, China Station.

The China Fleet Club stands on Government land. Then, as today, it embraces an area of 19,757 square feet. It is leased to the Trustees of the Club for 999 years; the lease was antedated to 25th June 1863, and executed on 20th June 1934. The Crown Rent for the property was, and is, \$408 a year.

When the Theatre was completed and opened on 27th December 1933, it was immediately booked by the Hong Kong Amateur Dramatic Club for rehearsals and production of plays.



The Theatre



Junior Rates Restaurant

Tombola was a great favourite too and was played in the Theatre three evenings a week. The Club took a 10% share of the takings. Tombola has never lost its popularity and is still played in the Club regularly.

On 21st March 1934, the China Fleet Club was formally opened by the Commodore Frank Elliot, R.N., Commodore, Hong Kong, and the following officials were appointed:

Honorary Treasurer: Accountant Officer,
H.M.S. "Tamar"

Manager: Chief Petty Officer
(Executive).

Assistant Manager: Sergeant, Royal Marines

Bed Ticket Office Staff: Four Marines

Secretary (part-time): Chief P.O. Writer,
H.M.S. "Tamar"

During 1934 the China Fleet Club was legally established as a Corporation and on the 18th May, the Governor signed an Ordinance entitled "An Ordinance for the Incorporation of the Trustees of the China Fleet Club." This Ordinance made the Trustees of the Club, as appointed by the Commodore, or Officer-in-Charge



Senior Rates Bar

of R.N. Naval Establishments in Hong Kong, a Corporation with the power to hold and deal with its property. The advantages of having the Club incorporated are that in the event of either of the Trustees leaving Hong Kong new Trustees can be appointed by the Commodore-in-Charge to en-

sure continued operation of the Club.

The China Fleet Club was completed and finished at a total cost of \$1,250,000.00.

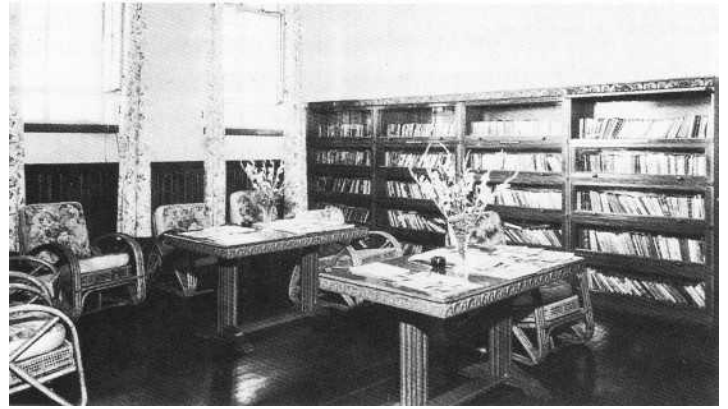
By the end of the first year of operation the Club showed a profit of \$35,000. However, prices of Beer, Wines and Spirits were rather high compared to other Clubs in Hong Kong and the Club was not patronized as well as it could have been. So in 1935, the number of Boys employed was cut by 25 per cent, and the cost of meals, wines, beer and spirits reduced by 10 per cent. The Mens Bar was enlarged, taking in a Reading Room. These moves were very satisfying, and the Club became very popular throughout the fleet.

From then on the men used the Club a great deal more and on return from the North, billiard and snooker competitions were organised. Silver cups were presented by Messrs. H. Ruttonjee & Son and members of the winning teams were presented with replicas of the cups. Medals purchased from Club funds were presented to the runners-up. These competitions were held annually until 1940.

During the 1930's the Theatre was engaged for long periods by the H.K. Amateur Dramatic Club, the Philharmonic Society and the H.K. Singers. It was also extensively used for Ship's Concerts, Military Concerts, dances organised by the Fleet and also by the Cheerio Club of Hong Kong. Boxing contests were also held in the winter.

Although prices had been reduced and the Fleet spent less time in Hong Kong - Singapore being an established naval base - considerable profits continued to be made. By 1938 the overdraft at the Bank had been reduced to approximately \$75,000 and all debts in connection with the construction and furnishing of the Club had been paid. The improved financial situation gave considerable satisfaction besides dispelling any doubts as to the Club's ability to pay its way in the future. Letters of congratulation were received from the Admiralty and the Commander-in-Chief, China Station.

It is interesting to know what the China Fleet was like in those days. The Fleet, at that time, consisted of the 8th Cruiser Squadron, comprising five or six ships of the "County" or "London" Class cruisers; the 8th



The Library

Destroyer Flotilla comprising the old "D" Class destroyers; the aircraft carrier, H.M.S. Eagle, H.M.S. Medway, submarine Depot Ship and Submarines; a M.T.B. Flotilla; a score or so of gunboats and a few sloops. The Shore Establishments didn't exist then, and the Ship's Company of TAMAR was accommodated in the old "Tamar". The veteran with her white sides and tall yellow masts lent a lot of atmosphere to the Dockyard, but was doomed to be scuttled in the harbour during the war - a sad loss.

A small naval air station was already in operation before the War, at Kai Tak.

Towards the end of the 1930's it became obvious that the Club was not large enough to cope with the needs of such a fleet. The Architects were asked to prepare plans for the addition of a new wing to the Club and for an additional floor on top of the existing building. The Hong Kong Government was approached and it was tentatively agreed that the plot of land adjacent to the Theatre should be purchased by the Club and a seven-storey building erected there. The Chief Manager of the Hong Kong Bank was approached, and without hesitation, agreed to guarantee an overdraft of \$1,000,000.

The idea was to allocate the new wing of the building for the use of Chief and Petty Officers, and others of similar rank. The existing building was to be for the exclusive use of junior ratings, and the existing kitchen was to be completely modernised.

Then came 1939 and rumours of war. All plans for the modernisation and extension of the Club were suspended on 3rd September 1939, when Europe was plunged into World War II.



Dormitory ... 3/4 floors

CHAPTER 5

THE WAR YEARS

THE CLUB CARRIED on and although turnover was somewhat reduced, it showed a profit for 1939, 1940 and 1941.

1940 brought rumours closer to home, this time of increased Japanese war activity in the Far East, and on 1st July 1940 British women and children in Hong Kong were evacuated.

The following twelve months saw Hong Kong preparing for war. The China Fleet Club was selected as the first Headquarters for the Royal Navy, being required to accommodate the Officer's and Ship's Company of H.M.S. "Tamar" at the first sign of hostilities.

The Chinese Compradore was instructed to purchase, and maintain, a three months' supply of foodstuffs, and to keep this stock in reserve against emergencies.

The rumours became reality when Japan declared war on 8th December and Hong Kong was brought into the conflict. The Club Manager was informed at 5.15 that morning that England was at war with Japan and War Operations Orders went into immediate effect.

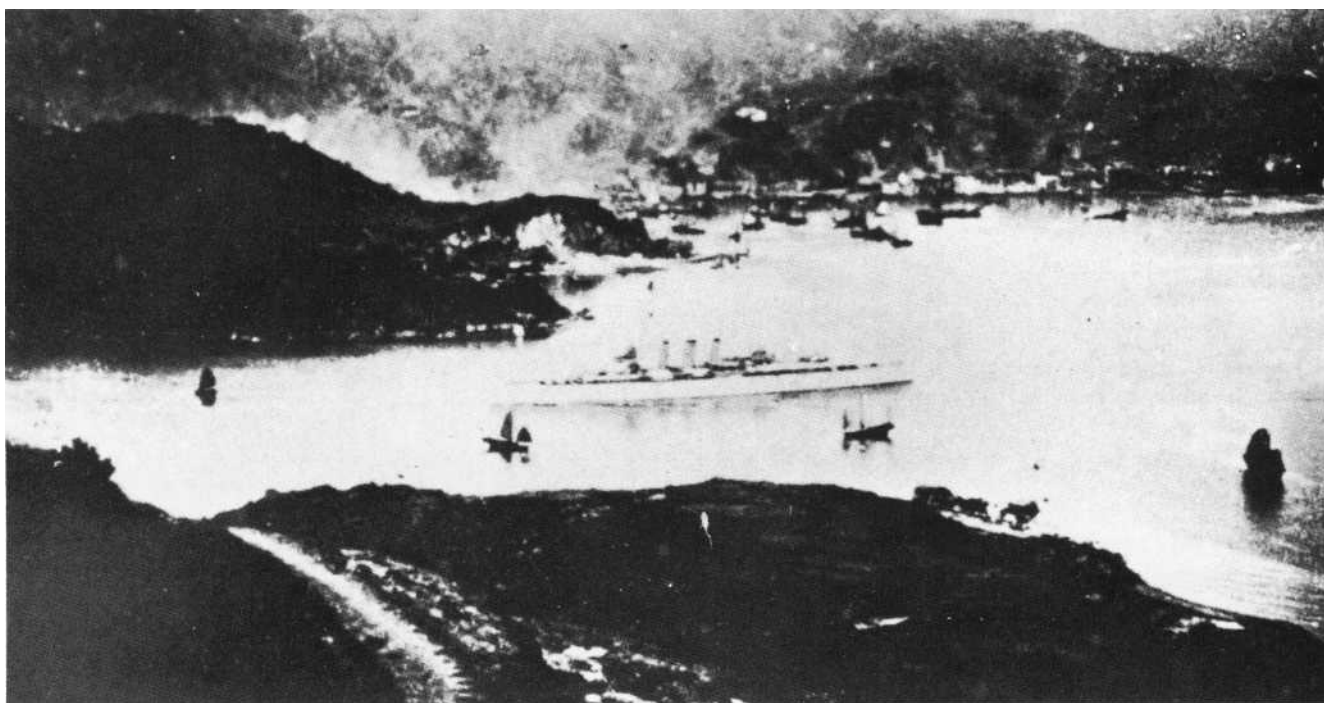
All Service ratings on shore leave were

cleared from the Club so that the Officer's and Ship's Companies of H.M.S. Tamar could move in. Orders were also received to prepare accommodation for R.N.R., R.N.V.R., and H.K.R.N.V.R. Officers and ratings and an unknown number of Chinese. Further orders stated that all Officers and Men in uniform, civilians attached to Naval establishments and Chinese ratings who reported at the Club were to be accommodated and fed. All meals were to be supplied by the Club's Compradore under the instructions of the Manager.

By 7.30 on the evening of 8th December 1941, the China Fleet Club was on a war footing. Everything had gone according to plan.

At approximately 8 a.m. on 8th December, the Japanese started air raids on Hong Kong, at Kai Tak, and in the harbour ships were attacked from the air. Bombs were dropped in the harbour but the Club suffered no damage on that first day.

The Ship's Company of H.M.S. Tamar moved into the Club according to plan, and the Officers occupied the billets allocated to them. The following shows the number of Officers, Men and Chinese accommodated and fed in the Club



Hong Kong 1941

from 8th December to 11 th December 1941, both days inclusive:

8th December 1941	Officers and Men	- 250
9th December 1941	Officers and Men	- 287
10th December 1941	Men	- 265
	Chinese	- 120
11 th December 1941	Men	- 277
	Chinese	- 154

On 10th December 1941, the Wardroom Officers' Messman, Ah Choy, took over the victualling of the Officers, sharing the Club's Kitchen and utensils with the Compradore.

During the next few days the Colony was subjected to intense aerial bombing, and long-range shelling from land and sea, but the Club remained undamaged.

On the morning of 9th December, two lighters arrived at the Pier outside the Club and were loaded with beer, wines, spirits, bedding and part of the three months' reserve of foodstuffs from the Compradore's stores. These supplies were then taken to Aberdeen and placed in the Aberdeen Industrial School, where a branch of the China Fleet Club had been established, in the temporary charge of Petty Officer William Thynne, the Assistant Manager of the Club.

On the morning of Thursday 11th December 1941, the British position on the Mainland had become precarious, and it was decided to evacuate all the remaining troops to the Island of Hong Kong. By this time, the Club had come into the danger zone to such an extent that it was decided to evacuate Officers and Men to Aberdeen, and this operation was completed by 5 p.m. on Thursday 11th December. That night, the Manager of the Club received orders to report to the Aberdeen Industrial School to attend a conference regarding the maintenance of China Fleet Club supplies for the Officers and Men then billeted in the School. On returning to the Club on Friday morning, 12th December, he found that the Leading Seaman's Bar had been broken open and completely looted, while the Manager's Quarters and Office had also been broken into and ransacked. A report was immediately made to the Commodore Hong Kong, and the Commissioner of Police, the latter sending two detectives to the Club to investigate.

During the next few days, the Engineers' Shop and Carpenters' Shop were transferred to Aberdeen and, following an urgent request for beds and bedding and other stores, the following

were sent to Aberdeen Industrial School from the Club:- 400 mattresses; 800 sheets; 800 pillows; 1,000 blankets; 800 counterpanes; 1,000 towels; 1,600 pillowslips; 50 rattan chairs; and a further consignment of beer, wines, spirits, and cigarettes. These stores were transferred by lorry, the Manager of the Club making daily trips to and from Aberdeen.

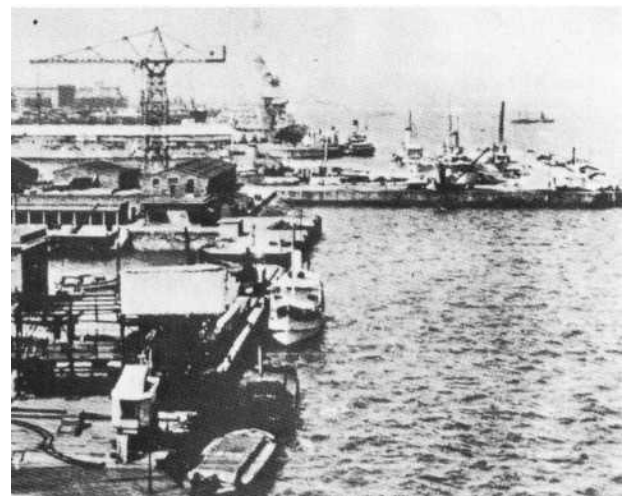
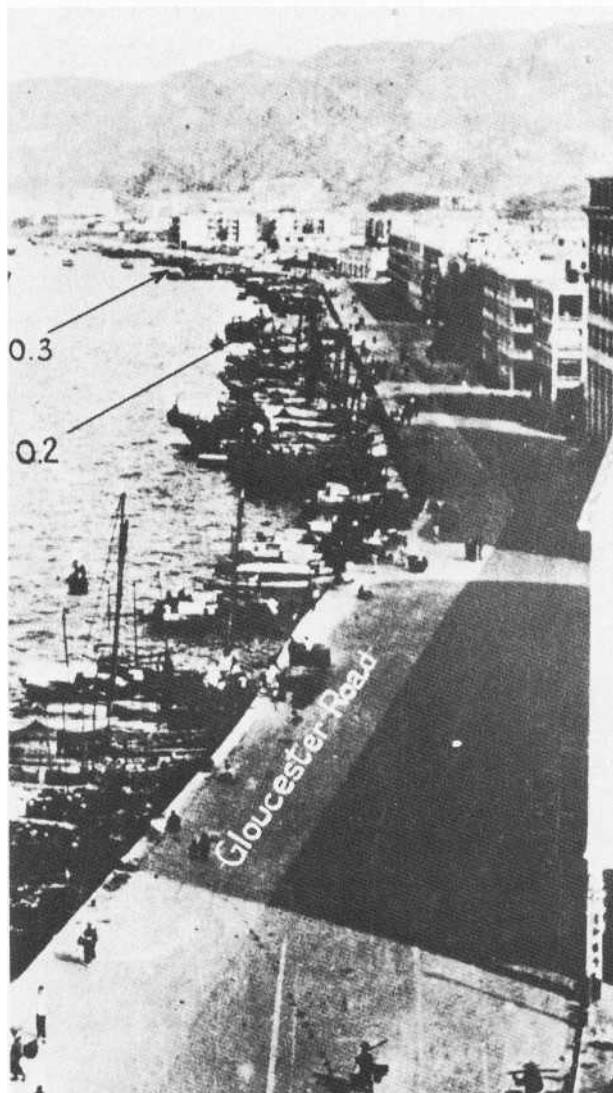
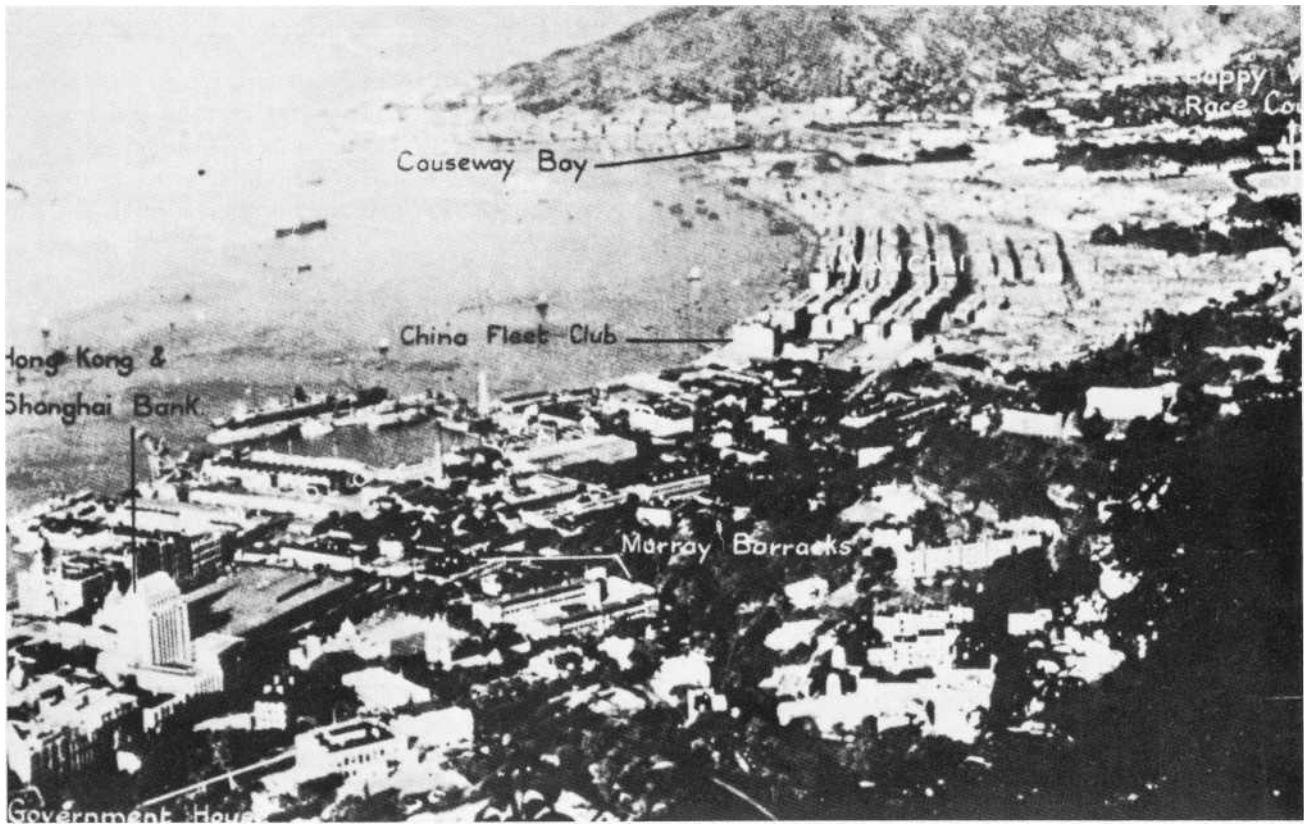
After the evacuation of Service personnel to Aberdeen, the Club became the Centre for the accommodation of troops manning the pillboxes on the Praya, drawn from the Middlesex and Royal Scots, and Indian and Portuguese Regiments.

In addition, Naval and Army personnel were supplied with meals at all times of the day and night during the Battle of Hong Kong, and accommodation was also given to crews landed from disabled ships, and ships sunk in the vicinity of Hong Kong. It should be noted that at least 80 per cent of the Chinese Staff remained loyal to the Club until 22nd December, but as the position was then desperate, they left to seek safety elsewhere. As far as possible, the "boys" were paid half-a-month's pay before leaving the Club.

During the actual Battle of Hong Kong, the Club received a direct hit, a 6-inch shell penetrating the main wall of the Reading Room on the Ground Floor, passing through two more walls, and landing outside the Leading Seaman's Bar, but luckily it failed to explode. The markings on the shell bore the date 1941 and showed that it was of British manufacture. The south side of the Club also suffered slight damage when a small bomb hit the parapet on the roof, and tore away water and sanitary pipes. Another shell passed through the parapet wall of the Theatre roof on the East side, and here again the shell failed to explode.

The last visit paid to the Club by the Manager during the Battle was on 23rd December 1941, when further supplies were transferred to Aberdeen.

The Branch of the Club at Aberdeen Industrial School functioned throughout the Battle of Hong Kong and was the Distributing Centre whence beer, wines, spirits and cigarettes were supplied to the Naval Craft operating in the vicinity of Aberdeen and Repulse Bay. The Bar was kept open and drinks and cigarettes were supplied to all Naval and Army personnel accommodated in the Industrial School, and to all personnel who came down from the firing lines for rest periods. The Assistant Manager of the Club was detailed to join a fighting unit, but shortly afterwards was sent to Queen Mary Hospital where he remained for some months.



British Military intelligence photographs taken as the Japanese were about to invade Hong Kong in 1941

During the last week of the Battle of Hong Kong, the Industrial School was evacuated by nearly all fighting forces, who retired to the hills, but a great many returned to the School within 48 hours. By this time the Japanese were occupying Repulse Bay.

On 25th December 1941, orders were received at Aberdeen to "Cease fire - retain all guns and ammunition", followed by a further order to "Return all guns and ammunition to store". The Battle of Hong Kong was over - His Excellency The Governor of Hong Kong had surrendered the Colony to the Japanese Military Forces.

CHAPTER 6

THE OCCUPATION.

AT 6 P.M. ON 25th December, the Manager of the Club was ordered to destroy all Beer, Wines and Spirits - the property of the Club at Aberdeen, and from that hour until 6 a.m. of 26th December, the following stocks were destroyed:-

500 Cases Beer	(48 bottles per case)
75 Cases Brandy	(12 bottles per case)
75 Cases Whisky	(12 bottles per case)
100 Cases Gin	(12 bottles per case)
75 Cases Sherry	(12 bottles per case)
70 Cases Rum	(12 bottles per case)

Also, about 50,000 cigarettes were sent out to the British and Canadian Forces at Aberdeen.

With the exception of a small party, all Service personnel were transferred to the Royal Naval Dockyard, Hong Kong, as Prisoners-of-War.

On 27th December 1941, the Japanese stated that the Naval prisoners-of-war could be accommodated in the China Fleet Club, and the Manager was sent to the Club to arrange for their accommodation, but was refused admittance by the Japanese Military Forces who, in the meantime, had taken over the Club. Just then, five lorries filled with Chinese women arrived under Japanese escort outside the Club. These women had been collected by the Japanese and were put into the Club to work for them.

After six months had elapsed the Japanese Military Forces evacuated the Club, and the Japanese Naval Authorities took over control. Naval Officers and men of the Japanese Navy were accommodated in the Club until the British Navy re-occupied Hong Kong in August 1945.

The Theatre of the Club was used chiefly as a School for Japanese Naval Officers, and the Restaurant was re-opened under Japanese control to cater for the needs of the Japanese residents of Wanchai.

During one period of the Occupation, all brass materials were stripped from the Club by the Japanese, and extensive looting of Club property took place.

The Club suffered very little damage during the bombing raids on Hong Kong by Allied Forces.

When the re-occupying Forces entered Hong Kong Harbour on 30th August 1945, they found the Club still standing. The China Fleet Club had a reputation amongst Naval personnel, and for those who were seeing it for the first time it must have caused considerable interest. For those who had served on the China Station and had known the Club before the war, it meant that the Club could again be used and raised their hopes of its early restoration.

From a closer inspection of the Club, little structural damage appeared to have been done. Only two shell holes could be seen but there were many broken windows. Also, the floors of the Club were exceedingly dirty and the ranges in the kitchen were broken. Meanwhile little could be done to the Club and its future had not yet been decided, the building was entrusted to H.M.S. "Vengeance" - Captain D.M.L. Neame, D.S.O., R.N.

CHAPTER 7

AFTER THE WAR WAS OVER.

COMMANDER C.S.B. HICKMAN, the former Secretary and Treasurer of the Club, who had been a prisoner-of-war, had volunteered to stay on in Hong Kong to assist with the re-organisation of the base and advise on the future of the Club. He felt that the N.A.A.F.I. with their greater resources should run the Club for a year while it was getting back on its feet.

This feeling was not generally supported and a meeting of representatives of all the ships present was held in the Club on Saturday 6th October 1945. The Flag Officer, Western Area, opened the Meeting personally, and explained the position of the Club before the war. He particularly stressed the importance of any decision made by Officers and Men present at the meeting. Their decisions would affect not only the welfare of their ships then in harbour, but the whole future of the China Fleet Club. Admiral Fisher then turned the meeting over to Commodore D.H. Everett, C.B.E., D.S.O. The Chairman explained the duties of the Committee which had assembled at Flag Officer Western Area's direction.

(a) That the Committee should be the Port Canteen Committee and deal with the China Fleet Club in addition to its other duties.

(b) That the Committee should merely be the emergency Committee of the China Fleet Club.

These proposals were voted on and the second was carried on the casting vote of the Chairman.

After further meetings and discussion it was unanimously felt that the Club should be run as pre-war: "by the Fleet for the Fleet". It was hoped that voluntary work would be done by ships' companies and that Canteen Committees would vote funds to help rehabilitate the Club. Admiralty was then approached for a loan of £10,000 for this purpose, but regretted that they could not provide financial assistance since it was the policy in war-time for N.A.A.F.I. to run Service clubs.

Following that news the sub-committee



The Club in the Fifties

issued a report on Saturday 13th October saying: "If the Admiralty will do the same for the Fleet Club as they will do for N.A.A.F.I., and the Commander-in-Chief will give shipping space for the Club, similar to that given to N.A.A.F.I., it seems practicable for the Fleet to run the Club". With this report adopted, a General Committee was formed, and the Club was back in action.

The N.A.A.F.I. had started selling beer in mid-September, although that was rationed to 1,000 bottles a day. Tickets were allocated to each ship and beer sold to the lucky ticket holders.

The kitchen and restaurants were the first to receive attention by the "volunteer force" and started serving meals at the beginning of November. Towards the end of November local beer came on the market and sales increased by leaps and bounds, though spirits were not available until Christmas the following year.

The China Fleet Club was back in business!

The following years saw a marked improvement in the financial state of the Club and redecoration, refurbishing and modernisation were the order of the day. It had been feared in 1948, that a reduction of income would come with the reduction of the Fleet, and Singapore becoming the Far East Naval Headquarters. But then the "Korean situation" blew up at the beginning of the fifties, and the Club found itself looking after numbers of naval (including allied) personnel.

In 1952 the land between the Club and the Missions to Seamen was purchased for HK\$230,250, and the building erected there became known as the Coronation Annex. It was opened on the 5th April 1954 by Rear Admiral G.V. Gladstone, C.B. The total cost of the annex was \$861,068, which involved a considerable overdraft at the bank. But with typical far-sightedness, good business soon cleared the overdraft.

The ground floor of the Annex was a large godown, which was initially rented to San Miguel Brewery. It served as their Hong Kong depot for seven years until 1961, when San Miguel had to move to the New Territories when the Club was forced to terminate the lease due to reclamation of the land in front of the Club. It was too difficult to transport beer across the harbour once the junks no longer had direct access to the godown.

On the first floor a four-lane bowling alley was installed and was immensely popular. The 2nd floor contained the Club's shopping arcade and the 3rd, 4th and 5th floors, Chinese Staff Living Quarters. The 6th floor contained the

laundry.

It was in 1954, too, that the United States Navy Purchasing Branch approached the Club with the idea of opening a Purchasing Branch for American personnel visiting Hong Kong for recreation. Eventually the third floor of the main building was leased exclusively to them. The floor had previously contained dormitories, but with the reduction in the size of the British Fleet in the Far East, it was rarely used to capacity. The extra income was just what was needed at that point in time.

1955 saw that well known San Miguel Brewery neon advertising sign go up on the roof - at that time, the largest in Hong Kong. "Long John" Whisky added their neon sign in 1960 - more income for the Club!

Renovation and redecoration continued yearly. In 1961 the exterior of the Club got a new coat of paint - and colours - Desert Sand with Terracotta Bands and the 25th Anniversary of the opening, on 21st March 1959 was celebrated at a cocktail party in the presence of Sir Robert Black, the Governor of Hong Kong, Admiral Sir G Gladstone, Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station, Lt. Gen. Sir E Bastyan, Commander, British Forces, Hong Kong and Air Commodore T Holder, Air Officer Commanding, Hong Kong. Sir Michael Turner, Chief Manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and a Trustee of the Club was present together with the Honorable Hugh Barton, Managing Director of Jardine Matheson, and also a Trustee of the Club. The Commissioner of Police Mr A.C. Maxwell attended and Commodore G.D.A. Gregory, Commodore-in-Charge, Hong Kong and its Senior Trustee. Commanding Officers of all H.M. Ships in Port, Ratings from those Ships, the General Committee and others connected with the Club were there to help celebrate.

During the installation of air conditioning in 1964 a live shell was found two feet below the Reception Room on the Ground Floor. The shell, Japanese, weighing 83lbs and 3'2" long, was removed by the Police Ballistics division. Doubtless it had landed in the Club during the battle for Hong Kong back in 1941.

By the mid-sixties the balconies on the first and second floors had been glassed in, and together with air-conditioning of all the lounges and bars this added a considerable amount of space in the Club. Around that time the theatre, which was also used as a cinema, was closed down and completely gutted. A new floor was built, and an eight-lane bowling alley was installed on the ground floor and an air-conditioned dance-cum-tombola hall on the upper floor. Two new automatic lifts replaced the old manually operated ones. That project cost the magnificent sum of HK\$1,300,000. It was opened by H.E. The Governor, Sir David Trench on 21st September 1965.

VIETNAM - THE BOOM YEARS

THE VIETNAMESE WAR, however tragic, meant virtually a decade of "boom" years for the Club. American and Allied personnel used Hong Kong exclusively for "Rest and Recreation", and the Club, on the edge of ever-popular Wanchai, prospered. And with prosperity came plans for a new Club.

During 1970 the General Committee decided that the present Club accommodation was becoming outdated and expensive to run and maintain.

Meetings were held with, sometimes, monotonous regularity. But as recession reared its

ugly head, and Defence Cuts came into force it was finally decided in early 1976 to remain in the old building.

It was another three years before the possibility of rebuilding was raised again, in 1979.

When the future of the Services in Hong Kong had been confirmed, the Trustees met to discuss the Club's future. It was felt that the Club was well patronised by the Navy and their families and also by visiting RN and Commonwealth ships and that its facilities were undoubtedly very popular with everyone.

