

At approximately 8 a.m. on December 8th, 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 numbers of Officers, Men and Chinese accommodated and fed in the Club from 8th December to 11th December, 1941, both days inclusive:-

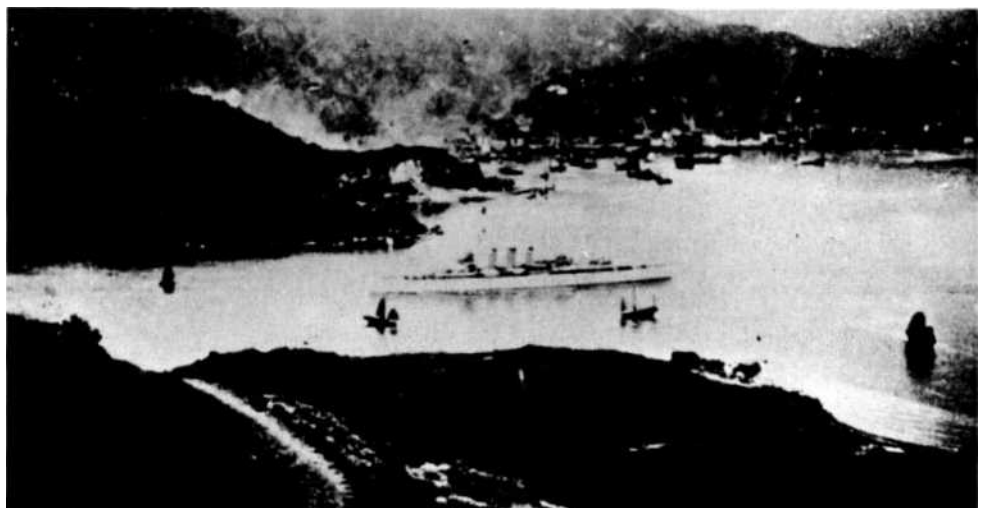
8th December, 1941 Officers and Men	-250
9th December, 1941 Officers and Men	-287
10th December, 1941 Men - 265;	Chinese - 120
11th December, 1941 Men - 277;	Chinese - 154

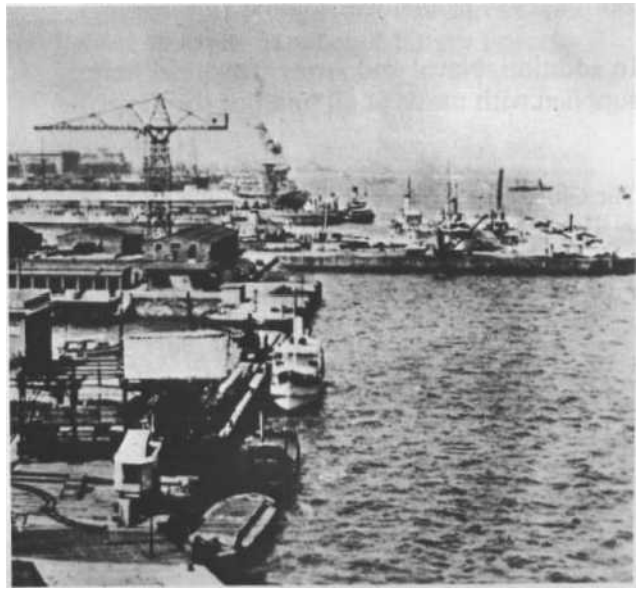
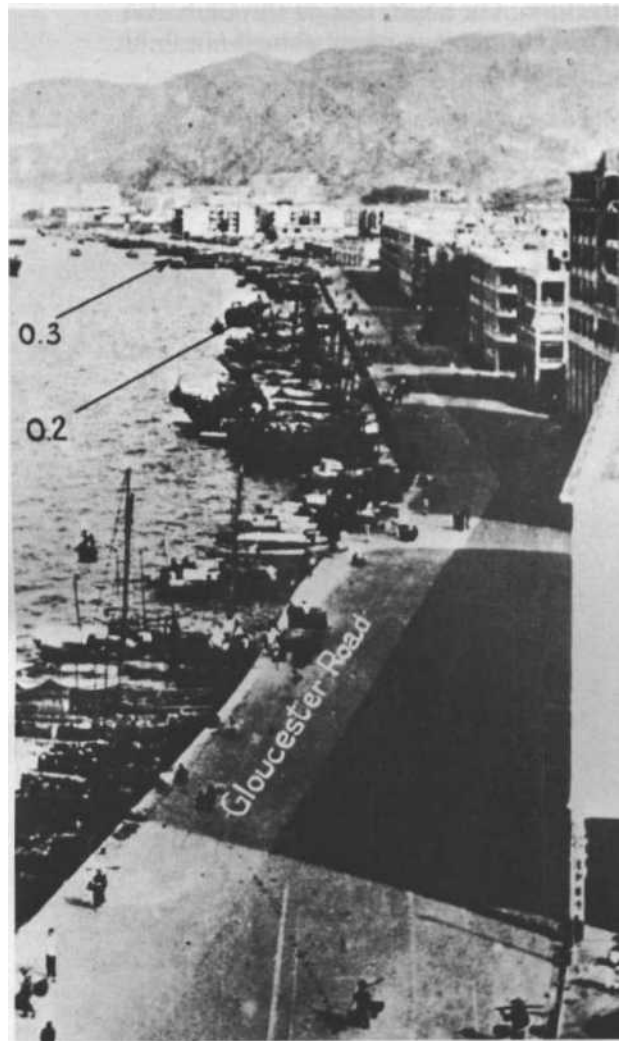
On 10th December, 1941, the Wardroom Officers' Messman, Ah Choy, took over the victualling of the Officers, sharing the Club's kitchen and utensils, etc. with the Compradore.

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 Seamen'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.





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

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 beds 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 and 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 a Centre for the accommodation of troops manning the pill-boxes 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 from 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 Seamen'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 China Fleet Club still in scaffolding - 51 years ago in 1933!



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 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.

During the last week of the Battle of Hong Kong, the Industrial School was evacuated by nearly all the 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.



*Jones Lang Wootton
Salutes The China Fleet Club
on Their
50th Anniversary*



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The Occupation

At 6 p.m. that day, 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 would 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 as 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.



After the War was Over

Commander C.S.B. Hickman, the former Secretary & 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 be merely 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 issued a report on Saturday, the 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



The Club in the Fifties







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 large 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 was 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.



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