

IT WON'T BE LONG NOW

The Diary of a Hong Kong Prisoner of War

Graham Heywood

Edited by G.C. Emerson

BLACKSMITH BOOKS

Dedicated to all the POWs of Sham Shui Po Camp

It Won't Be Long Now

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Also by Graham Heywood:

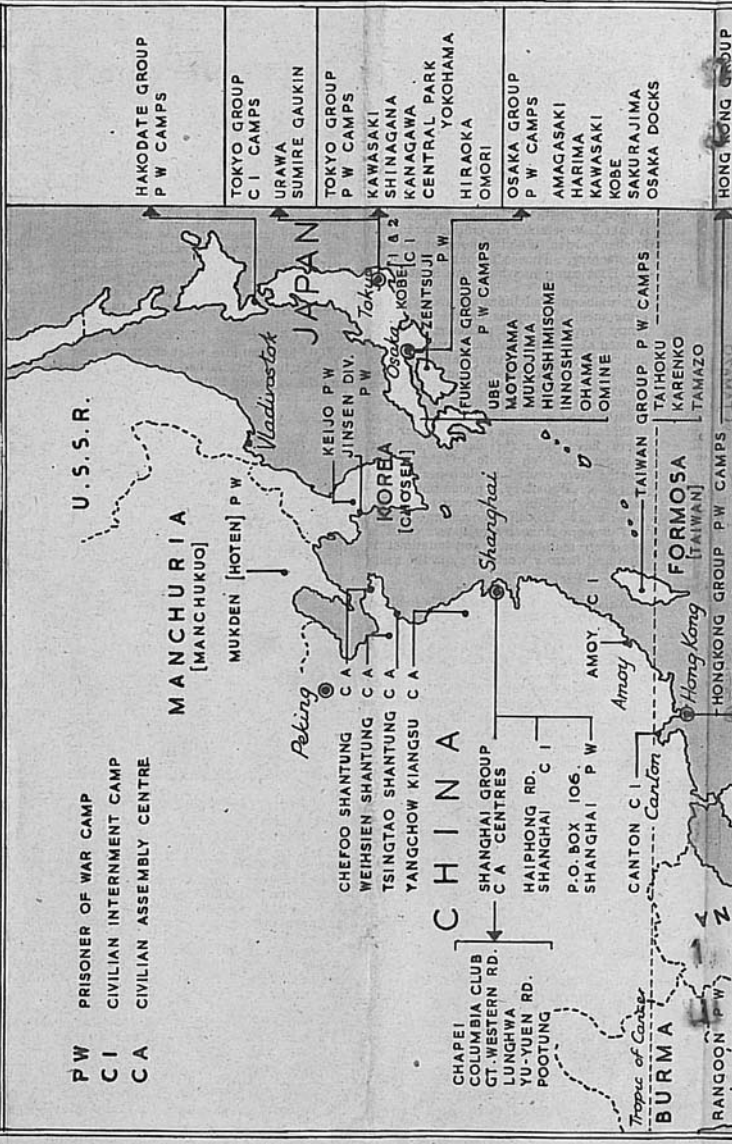
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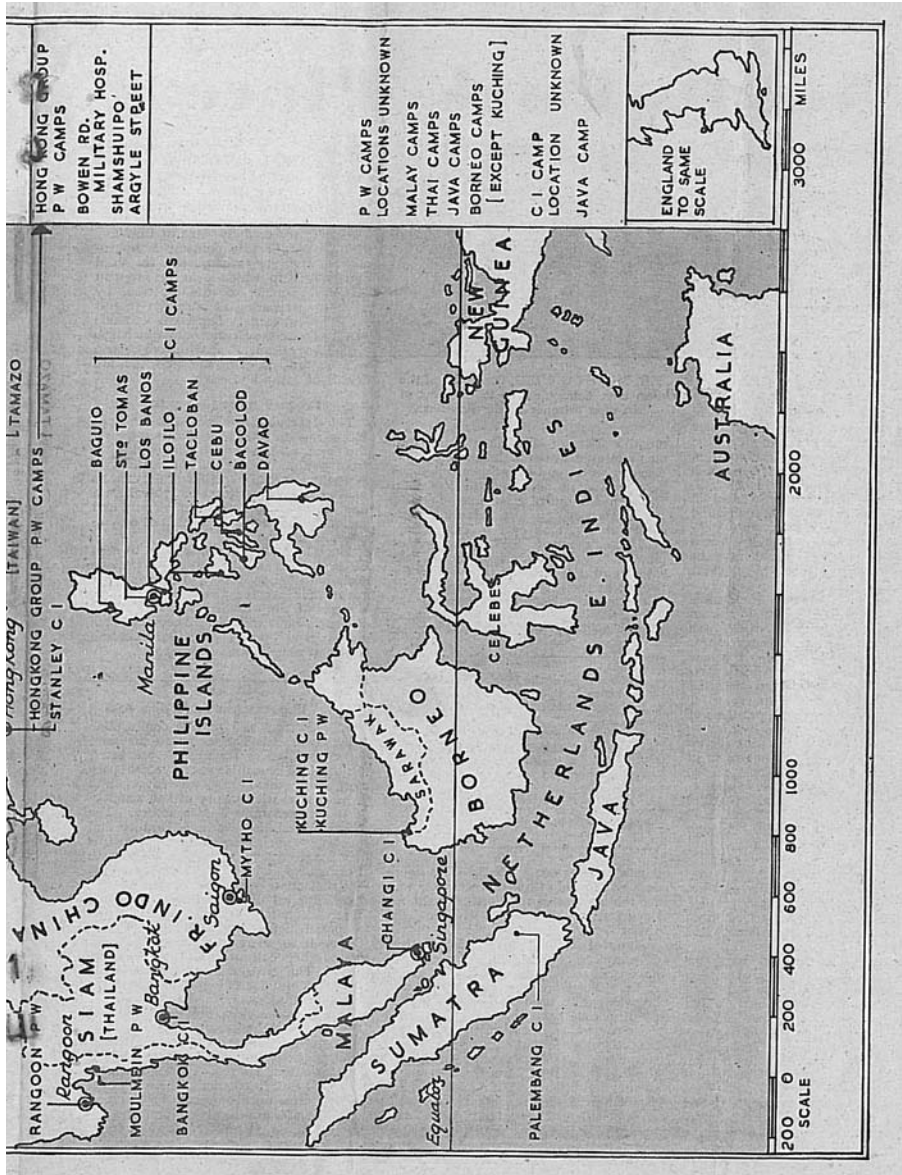
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CAMPS IN THE FAR EAST.





From the April 1944 issue of the Far East Special Monthly Edition of *The Prisoner of War*, published by the Prisoner of War Department of the Red Cross and St. John War Organisation [1] (see page 186 for image credits)

FOREWORD

By Shun Chi Ming, Director of the Hong Kong Observatory

The idea of publishing this manuscript stemmed from my first visit back in November 2012 to Mr John Peacock, the last Director of the Hong Kong Observatory (1981-84) from England. During the visit, John told me many things about the good old days of the Observatory since he first joined as Scientific Officer in 1950. These of course included his memories of Mr Graham Heywood who was the first Director after the Second World War and led the re-building of the Observatory. The first thing I learnt was that Mr Heywood came from a very eminent family. John also showed me his photo albums with many pictures of the Observatory, and one of them caught my attention – a staff photo taken outside the Director’s quarters in 1955 on the retirement of Mr Heywood – and John told me who was who in the picture: Frank Apps, Colin Ramage, Northan Lawrence, Pat Goodfellow. Most of these names I had never heard before. This was really great!

When I visited Mr Peacock again in January 2013, he gave me a photocopy of a manuscript authored by Mr Heywood entitled *It Won't Be Long Now*. It was a typescript of Heywood’s diary about his internment at the Sham Shui Po Prisoner-of-War (POW) camp during the Second World War. John told me that the main body of this manuscript had never been released by the Heywood family, considering the hardship

and even humiliation of the POWs described in the diary. John offered to write to Mr Michael Knight, son-in-law of Mr Heywood and widower of Susan, the elder daughter of Mr Heywood, and Ms Veronica Heywood, the younger sister of Susan, to secure the family's consent for the release of the diary.

On the flight from London back to Hong Kong, I read from beginning to end the whole manuscript. Thanks to the excellent writing of Mr Heywood, it was really a treat to read it. Apart from telling many stories about the prolonged hardships, adversities, survival from malnutrition and diseases, and the repeated hopes of liberation that failed to materialize (thus the title of the diary *It Won't Be Long Now*), that he experienced as a POW in the camp, the diary also reflects Heywood's highly positive attitudes to life and his strong sense of humour overcoming the hardships, and perhaps also his enlightenment learnt from the internment. For example:

“Len and I had hopes of being sent to the civilian internment camp at Stanley, on the south side of Hong Kong Island, where all the British non-combatants were confined. In spite of our protests, however, the Japs throughout treated us as prisoners of war, and on arrival at Sham Shui Po we were dumped in the middle of the road with the other prisoners. The officers were detailed off to their quarters, the Royal Scots to their lines, the Canadian to his; the Indians were conducted to the far corner of the camp, and we two were left standing in the road with ‘no home, no mamma, no poppa, no chow’, as the little Chinese beggar-boys say.”

“During the war a party of R.A.M.C. men were rounded up by the Japanese, who, to save the trouble of taking them into captivity, beheaded them all save one. The latter, a Corporal Leath, was left for dead on the ground, with a severe wound on the back of his neck. He

was subsequently taken to hospital, where he made a complete recovery, and served as an orderly during the latter part of his imprisonment. The following verse, which he wrote in somebody's autograph book, shows the light-hearted way in which people put up with things ...

*'I nearly lost my head by Gad;
I sometimes wish I really had;
But luckily I lost no teeth.
Yours sincerely,
N.J. Leath.'*

"Then again, we were not going to ask too much of life. When the war was over, we told ourselves, we would never again sigh for the moon. We had discovered that we could do perfectly well without luxuries, and we could be content with the simple things of life ... good food, decent living conditions, and the companionship of our families. We began to realize that happiness depended very little on material possessions; the loss of all our worldly goods counted for nothing compared with the loss of freedom, home life and useful employment. Life had been getting too complicated; we would surely be more grateful for the simple things."

"It did not do to take too much thought for the morrow; better to try to live a good life each day for its own sake, and not for any vague rewards in some future existence ... anyway rather an unworthy motive, I had always thought. There was a meaning to life, here and now, ... 'love thy neighbor as thyself' ... and there was one stronghold sure which would not fail me, the love of dear ones waiting for me at home. Perhaps we were unlucky to be born into this era of upheaval; perhaps though, our generation would have outstanding opportunities of shaping a better world."

“Accounts of life in the internment camp differed widely. One friend, an enthusiastic biologist, was full of his doings; he had grown champion vegetables, had seen all sort of rare birds (including vultures, after the corpses) and had run a successful yeast brewery. Altogether, he said, it had been a great experience ... a bit too long, perhaps, but not bad fun at all. Another ended up her account by saying ‘Oh, Mr. Heywood, it was hell on earth’. It all depended on their point of view.”

These are indeed words of wisdom. Here in Hong Kong, we have continued to enjoy freedom, peaceful times and abundance in material wealth since the War, but perhaps we may not have recognized the fortunate environment we are in, and could choose to be content with the simple things of life. Heywood’s words are truly food for thought for all of us today – in the midst of political unrest, global warming and increasing consumerism, but decreasing spiritual satisfaction and happiness.

Very soon, Michael and Veronica were contacted and had agreed to the release of the manuscript. We also started to discuss the possibility of publishing the diary. Meanwhile, they were very kind to donate an original typescript of the diary to the Observatory – it was on display at the 130th anniversary exhibition for the Observatory at the Hong Kong Museum of History in the summer of 2013, and is now on permanent display at the Observatory’s History Room. Veronica even flew all the way from Dublin, Ireland to join a reunion dinner in November 2013 with present and retired colleagues. During that occasion, she also caught up with her childhood friend Mr LAU Tin-chi who is now a celebrity – an experienced TV producer and still an active radio broadcaster. Tin-chi is the son of Mr LAU Pak-wa, Special Clerk of the Observatory who worked with Mr Heywood for many years before and after the War. Veronica and Tin-chi were childhood friends in the 1950s due to the Observatory connection and today, more than 60 years afterwards, Tin-

chi still has many fond memories and photos of the Heywood family to share with us.

At this juncture I must mention Geoffrey Emerson, who was Vice Principal of St Paul's College on Bonham Road, Hong Kong, where I was a schoolboy. He is also the author of the book *Hong Kong Internment, 1942-1945: Life in the Japanese Civilian Camp at Stanley*. Frankly speaking I knew little about Geoff before and even did not know about his book. At St Paul's College I did not have the chance to be taught by him, and the interactions with him that I could remember were discussions on student disciplinary matters when I was the College's Head Prefect before graduation. When I really got to know him was, interestingly, almost 30 years later, after I learnt that he wrote the book on the Stanley internment camp. I approached him with the hope that I could learn something more about another ex-Director, Mr Benjamin Evans, who was interned at Stanley during the War. Indeed, through Geoff I was connected with a lady in her 90s in England. She had been interned in Stanley Camp and had known Mr Evans. Barbara Redwood Anslow remembered him well, and when I visited her in November 2012, she showed me her diary record about their encounter at a hotel (actually a brothel with very poor conditions for temporary internment of the civilians before moving to Stanley) in January 1942: "One evening a Mr Evans from the Royal Observatory gave us a lecture on the stars, on the roof". What an amazing story this was!

But the adventure did not stop there – considering Geoff's expertise and wealth of knowledge on internment camps during the War and his long association with the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS), I consulted him for his advice on the possibility of publishing Mr Heywood's diary. Geoff was very forthcoming and initiated dialogues with key members of the RAS on the publication. It turned out that while the diary would fit rather nicely into the subjects of interest to the RAS, the size of the diary did not fall into the category supported for

publication. It was a bit disappointing to me but we had never assumed that it would be easy to get the war diary published.

But we persevered... and Geoff made many good suggestions to add value to the book which could attract a readership. He found a capable friend, Yvonne LAI Siu Mei, who very kindly typed up the whole manuscript in electronic format to facilitate subsequent editing. Enhancing the visual content would be very important, Geoff told me. Fortunately, again thanks to the 130th anniversary exhibition for the Observatory, I had been seeking the help of collectors in Hong Kong to provide historical photos of typhoons, heavy rains and of course the Observatory itself for the exhibition. One by one I managed to gather interesting photos that were related in some way to the diary: photos of the Sham Shui Po military camp itself, photos of the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong, journals on the internment camps published during the War, photos of the old Sacred Hill which was levelled by the Japanese deploying internees from Sham Shui Po, including Mr Heywood himself, a photo of the Peninsula Hotel still painted in camouflage colours, where Mr Heywood had stayed for a couple of weeks after his liberation before heading back to England, and even an aerial photo of an air-raid by US B-24 bombers on 16 October 1944 which was actually described in the diary, and so on... My special thanks go to Mr Tim KO Tim Keung, who is a very good friend of Geoff and a local historian passionate about the history of Hong Kong, for contributing the largest number of photos, including some very rare photos of the Japanese invasion; Messrs William TONG, Ricky YAM, James NG and SIU Him Fung who are all active members of the Hong Kong Collectors Society; and to the members of the Gwulo historical Hong Kong website. Meanwhile, I have picked up the hobby of historical photo collection in the process and so have managed to contribute a few to this book myself.

Finally, but certainly not the least, and again thanks to Geoff's introduction, we met with Pete Spurrier of Blacksmith Books in early

February 2015, in a coffee house down the hill of the Observatory, to see if he would be interested in publishing the book. This took place just before my trip to England to visit the Heywood family in Hampshire to learn more about Mr Heywood and to examine his photo albums and archives more closely. Unexpectedly, Pete agreed to publish the book on the spot – a very welcome surprise. Pete also reminded us that 2015 was the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and so it would be perfect timing for publishing the war diary. Indeed it was also perfect timing for me to “seal the deal” by bringing a copy of the publication agreement to Hampshire for signature by the Heywood family.

Once again, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to all those mentioned above who have helped in making this publication a reality! My biggest thanks of course go to Geoff who not only guided me through the whole process and connected me with all the key people supporting the publication, but also kindly agreed to serve as editor for the book. I would also like to thank the Heywood family, in particular Veronica and Michael, for agreeing to release the diary in the first place, and for their trust in me to take forward the publication, and also Ms Bridget West, daughter of Susan and Michael, who helped a great deal in managing the photos and archives of Mr Heywood and scanning them for the book.

I hope you as the reader will enjoy reading Mr Heywood’s diary, and in the process learn a bit more about Hong Kong during wartime.

SHUN Chi Ming
Hong Kong
April 2015