

The Boys in Blue: Escape from Shanghai 43 (Part 2) “Internment & Escape”

Internment Begins

The bad news was clearly written on the wall already that British and American Shanghai residents needed to prepare themselves for indefinitely internment. Jack was able to evade arrest somehow while many other citizens had been arrested and roughly interrogated and tortured by the Japanese Gendarmerie and the dreaded Kempeitei.

On 23 January 1943 the Japanese authorities informed relief organizations the British Relief Association (BRA) and the American Relief Committee (ARC) that internment would begin shortly and would be handled by their national relief organizations. Civil Assembly Centres (CAC's) were set up and those called up for internment were given a notice giving instructions and an assembly number to each family member, a date of assembly and a list of items permitted to take to the internment camp. Among the articles permitted were personal items, e.g. tableware, enameled cups, toilet paper and sundries and durable clothing, bedding, mosquito net, things durable and non-ostentation items. All goods to be itemized packed and labeled with the owner's name, nationality and number of entrance and sent to the segregation centre two days previous to the day of entrance.

All other items had to be left at their residences as they were. Silverware, jewels and souvenirs were to be packed in cases and 'entrusted' to the Protective Power and cases un-nailed for inspection by the Japanese authorities otherwise sold or disposed of by the owner's discretion. Not disposed of before the time of assembly should be left at home or George E. Marden's & Co. No.15 Godown Race Course Market. Residents were instructed to lock their doors and then sealed by the Japanese. Their dwelling in case of an apartment or boarding house the rooms would be 'taken care of' by the authorities. It was prohibited to rent or lease the premises after departure.



It must have been such a painful task for Jack and Susan to cull the children's sentimental things that they must have accumulated since birth. I am sure there were much shedding of tears.

As part of the ideology of the 'Co-Prosperity Sphere' Asians and Eurasian children were not interned even if they claimed British or American citizenship. In some cases families chose not to be separated.

Civilian Assembly Centre (CAC)

On 4 March 1943 Jack, Susan and George and Margaret wearing each a card on their left breast, entrance number together with an envelope enclosing:

- keys of dwelling or properties left behind
- plan showing location of dwelling (in duplicate)
- articles left behind (in triplicate)
- articles brought to the segregation centre (in duplicate)
- name & address of administrator of dwelling (if any)



The Conder family were ordered to assemble at Columbia Country Club CAC and were informed not to take more than can be comfortably carried by each person. There were many other families with small children who had been stranded including over 800 unmarried women at the Assembly Centre.

No doubt by their arrival at the CAC the families arms were near breaking point and tense, as they were responsible to make themselves and the packages to the assembly point. In addition to a bed three packages were allowed - one for bedding and two for trunks or boxes. If bedding was packed with the bed another trunk was possible.

The Conders were destined to be interned at **Lunghua Civilian Internment Centre** about less than ten miles south west from Shanghai on Ming Hong Road and about a mile west of the Whangpoo River. The complex had been originally the Kiangsu Middle School but had been damaged in the 1937 fighting. Afterwards, it was used by the Japanese troops who erected three large huts as barracks. The Japanese hired Chinese contractors to repair some of the damage but it was left uncompleted. The Lunghua airdrome was not far away.

The adults were already well aware of incidents and the reputation for Japanese army brutality and it must have added to their apprehension.

The Conders were not alone. After checking off their names there were another 1,800 persons standing by to depart on French buses to Lunghua Camp. The gypsy and tinker like caravan of buses jolted along the uneven roads belching diesel smoke. (*Photo Columbia CAC*)



The totally uncomfortable, befuddled and bewildered and depressed Conders arrived at their new 'home' and debused at Lunghua camp. I expect Susan's spirits must have faded even more so at looking onto the rather desolate and some ruined buildings with only one solitary tree in sight. After the Commandant's 'welcome' to the devastated internees and a new start in life as captives of the Chrysanthemum Throne it was hectic sorting out their pitiful remaining belongings.

For many there must have been a great feeling of loss of social and business or professional status. If nothing else, they were all up the same creek and without any paddles.

The Japanese officials underestimated the demands in caring and feeding western internees in due of the large differences between the Japanese and western culture and diet. Friction became inevitable between the internee's western backgrounds and philosophies and the Japanese authorities on the other and the matter of 'face' which could result in rages or sometimes even a little bit of courtesy now and then.

The Lunghua Camp

The complex was the largest Shanghai civilian internment camp comprising 42 acres and the perimeter was about three miles. That said, the Shanghai civilian camps were possibly marginally better than Hong Kong camps and POW camps but for during the cold winter season.

The Camp Buildings Composed:

- 7 large concrete structures Blocks D through K
- 3 large wooden barracks Huts A B C in poor condition
- Blocks D E F & G brick built had been dormitories or class rooms
- Blocks D & G with small rooms housed parents with young children
- Block F housed the Commandant's offices
- Block H & J were machine shops
- Block K was a brick single story building
- 5 brick bungalows housed the Commandant and & consular police
- Dining rooms were located in two buildings
- Assembly Hall and stage
- Ancillary buildings that were probably former stables



Together they provided 59 dormitories and 127 rooms for families.



Adjusting to Captivity

An extract of the Lunghua Camp Nominal Roll

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|----------------------------|----|------|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------|----------------------------|
| Colman | Hugh Frederick Charles | 49 | Brit | civil engineer | Butterfield & Swire works dept | Apr 43 | Aug 45 |
| Colman | Phil | 56 | Aust | assistant cargo supt | Indo China Steam Navigation Co | Apr 43 | Aug 45 |
| Conder | John Cecil | 39 | Brit | company employee | Butterfield & Swire, ex SMP | Mar 43 | escape 24 Sep 43 Sep 43 |
| | Grace Susan Burgess Mrs | 39 | Brit | | wife of JC Conder | Mar 43 | Aug 45 |
| | George Cecil | 14 | Brit | student | son of JC Conder | Mar 43 | Aug 45 |
| | Margaret Joan | 11 | Brit | student | daughter of JC Conder | Mar 43 | Aug 45 |
| Cook | Lillian Florence | 31 | Brit | | | Apr 43 | Aug 45 |
| | Lionel Ernest | 13 | Brit | student | son of Lillian Cook | Apr 43 | Aug 45 |
| Cooper | Beaumaría Ida Editha R | 34 | Brit | stenographer | Hongkong & Shanghai Bank | Apr 43 | Aug 45 |
| Cooper | Ekaterina Vasilevna | 45 | Brit | | | Apr 43 | Aug 45 |
| Cooper | Haidée Florence | 58 | Brit | | | Mar 43 | Aug 45 |
| | Mildred Elizabeth Florence | 28 | Brit | stenographer | Sun Life Insurance Co daughter | Mar 43 | Aug 45 |

The Conder family was billeted in **Block E Room 302**. It must have been cramped and hot in the summer and very cold during the Shanghai winter. (photo of Block E) Internees collecting water at Waterloo & Assembly Hall (below)



There was precious little room and privacy for married families and children. Conjugal rights must have been constrained to breaking point at times even for the most of tolerant spouses. (see right)



Adjusting to the new tough regimen to get the camp functioning whatever the discrepancies children in particular had to be fed and educated and care for the sick.

A hospital was established, a farm with two cows, goats, pigs and chickens. Three large gardening teams in time worked over ten acres providing vegetables.

The BRA arranged through the French Consulate to bring 2,000 gallons of drinking water daily via tanker truck. There was a pond in the grounds. Internees could collect water from the pond for doing their laundry. Showers at the boiler house were limited to two and a half minutes. For George and Margaret they could have educated themselves in fishing for tadpoles and other life in the pond besides participating in the organized camp sports.

The Conders had little choice but to slip into the camp routine and obey the bugle calls or go hungry. The camp was spread out so the roll calls and dining was punctual attended.

- 0700 Reveille
- 0800 Cookhouse Door
- 1800 Sunset
- 2100 The Last Post



There were about three dozen Consular police guards (Nihon Ryojikan Keisatsu) to patrol the camp. Every internee had to sign a declaration not to attempt an escape. Caught while escaping could mean being shot and the remainder of the internees punished 'pour les autres'.

The Camp Commandants were a mixed bag from alcoholics to former consular officers. The internees of Lunghua camp were fortunate to have a helpful and humane Commandant in the form of **Tomohiko Hayashi**. As a member of the diplomatic corps, Hayashi had spent four years in London with his wife and young son. He was acquainted with the British lifestyle. He and his family was interned in the Isle of Man in Victorian houses but repatriated in the first batch of exchange of internees. He was transferred to Shanghai and placed in charge of Lunghua camp. He was known to be scrupulous in matters over financial matters and

dealings with unscrupulous suppliers. He also made his car and driver available to sick internees who required medical appointments in Shanghai and money to purchase medicine. After an athletic sports day, one day the children of the winners were presented a packet of sweets by him at his office. (Photo of Commandant Hayashi San left)



'Bug Out Time' from Lunghua Camp

It is reputed that Jack could often be seen wearing Chinese style dress. There had been some concerns about Jack's recent behavior. Dr. Cater, one of the camp doctors, expressed his opinion to the camp representative Mr. James Bates that Jack's behavior was the result of a brain lesion, as Dr. Cater had witnessed and treated Jack after an acute onset of collapse and neurological signs. However, Jack's condition seemed to have resolved itself without medical intervention.

On 11 August 1943 there was a typhoon and damaged many Shanghai camps including Lunghua camp. The west dining room was destroyed and the roof was blown off together with other hut roofs requiring many internees to seek refuge in the Assembly Hall.

This must have caused a bit of confusion in the camp and time to repair the buildings before restoration of the regular camp routine.

At **1.00 am on 24 September 1943** Jack slipped out of his family room in Block E and our wily Jack crawled under the flood - lit barbed wire fence and was gone and a dash for freedom and escaped!

Jack Conder was the first internee to escape from Lunghua camp since its establishment! Escaping from any Japanese camp was difficult and the repercussions often severe!

How did Jack manage to escape? We do not know exactly but it must have been well planned and with a bit of Lady Luck's help thrown in.

It is only conjecture but he must have had outside assistance. The daily water was delivered to Lunghua camp in water tankers. The trucks were driven by internees. One driver was an ex SMP officer who was in contact with several Russians in Shanghai who were also ex members of the SMP force. They supplied him with information and news which he passed on to camp.

It is possible that some of his former ex SMP contacts helped in Jack's escape once he was past the wire and the camp guards and then helped along with anti Japanese Communist guerillas or KMT soldiers. Even so, it was an extremely hazardous mission for one man to escape, as the area was marshy ground, canals

and tall bean fields and patrolled by Japanese soldiers. The soldiers would shoot on sight. One possible advantage was his knowledge of Shanghai dialect and local culture and his former discipline training.

As far as we know he did not confide with any other potential escapees who had in mind to escape or other confidants or his wife or children. There were plenty of 'spies' in camp who would spill the beans for an award, as such escapades were not without severe consequences to others.

Nor do we know what Susan and the children thoughts about their father's decision to abscond and leave their protection! It must have been particularly hard for Susan to face the Japanese and other possible hostile internees and continue to look after the two children now 14 and 11 years old alone.

We do not know whether Jack's reported peculiar behavior before his escape was just a ruse to put off the scent and curb any suspicions others might harbor.

One might ask why did he attempt to escape when he had a family also knowing if caught he would be tortured and executed and his family and the other internees punished?

Whatever, Jack Conder had made his decision and chose to run for freedom whatever the dire consequences, torture and death.

Jack was too much a gentleman not leave the camp over the barbed wire without informing someone and apologizing for his escape!

It must have been a bit of a shock when the Commandant Tomohiko Hayashi received a letter of apology from Jack!

Years later the writer heard of such a letter but had never seen a copy until now. The writer tracked down one possible reference to this letter in some archives in Japan.

The writer found it necessary to contact a Japanese friend, Mr. Koichi Terasawa, of Tokyo University (and Freemason) if he was willing to contact the appropriate archivist in Japan. Thanks to Mr. Terasawa's diligent efforts in contacting the archivist paid off and the original letter on microfile was finally discovered! A copy of the **original letter** is cited below. Headed Block E Room 305 date (?) undated.

Date ?

Dear Mr. Hayashi,

I truly regret that I have no other alternative than to leave you in this manner. My trouble is purely domestic and in no way concerns the Japanese authorities or yourself. It is a long story but my wife and I have been at variance for years and it is my belief that being together for the past six months not having effected a re-union has somewhat disappointed her. Further, having spoken to and danced with other ladies of the community has so annoyed her that on at least two occasions she has used insulting language to the ladies in question. She has forbidden my two children to speak to me and they now do not greet me when they see me.

I have spoken with Mr. Bates asking for a transfer to another camp but he says this cannot be done. Bates also had an interview with my wife when she promised to keep the peace and behave herself but this she failed to do as the very next time I saw her several days later she shouted and swore at me accused me of going with a girl and making toast for someone's birthday party both of which are not true and said in the presence of my two children & Miss Mooney, to me this was the last straw and life becomes unbearable and forced me to a decision.

I have spoken to no one of my intention to escape and have only arrived at my decision after long and careful study, If you cannot fully understand my attitude from this letter which is necessarily short see Mr. Bates

with/

with whom I have had a long talk and he will explain.
Come what may, if I succeed in escaping so much the
better, if I am caught I shall be shot or put in
prison, one of the three must happen and I shall have
achieved my object of getting away from my wife.

Regretfully yours,

(Signed) John C. Conder

If Jack's letter to Commandant Hayashi setting out his reasons for his escape were in fact his true feelings it is rather sad! The thought of being caught while escaping and then tortured did not bother him a monkey's egg perhaps because he had been married and suffered torture for about twelve years already?

Jack on the Run

We understand that Jack was nearly caught by a Japanese patrol. He hurriedly avoided detection by burrowing into an ancient family tomb among 'Alas Poor Yorick' s' ancestors bones and skulls. There he stayed for five hours until the coast was clear before starting on his journey again. However, he must have traversed three provinces over 1,200 miles, unknown waterways, valleys, hamlets despite hunger and fighting off malaria and exhaustion in his 210 day odyssey until he arrived at his destination, Kweilin, on **21 April 1944**. There he joined the British Army Aid Group (BAAG) commanded by Colonel Lindsay Ride. *(right)*



It was a tremendous ordeal, physically and mentally sapping and the will to complete his mission is really commendable where others failed.

A Second Escape from Lunghua Camp

Jack's adventure is quite believable. In May 1944 six Lunghua camp internees planned a daring joint effort to escape. The plan again was carefully executed. After escaping six miles east of Lingwu the escapees were told that Conder had passed through this same area taking a month to reach it. These escapees also managed to reach safety also with the help of guerillas but sick and very thin before reaching their objective in American lines, then to India.

The fallout from Lunghua camp this time was much greater and the ramifications than when Jack escaped.

One of the roommates of one of the escapees was roughly interrogated about the escape and an altercation with the guards exuded prompted a full scale riot with the internees!

Tempers flared among the Japanese and stirring the Kempeitei into action. There was much face slapping at roll calls, confiscation of books, letters, and the rations cut to one small flat hard loaf of bread and other collective punishments. The threat was made that another escape would stop the distribution of Red Cross parcels and the confiscation of private food stocks. Unattached men between 16 and 60 were concentrated in one block with an additional barbed wire fence around it.

Commandant Tomohiko Hayashi's generosity had inadvertently facilitated the escapes by extending the camp boundaries for recreational purposes so that the limited Consular police guards were unable to patrol the periphery satisfactorily. Hayashi was upset about the escapes and resigned his post and applied for a transfer to Yu Yuen Road camp which was granted.

Joining the War Effort

Meanwhile Jack Conder with BAAG became a commissioned British Officer Captain. He flew over the Hump to India for paratroop training. The Hump was the name given by Allied pilots in the Second World War to the eastern end of the Himalayan Mountains over which they flew from India to China to resupply the Flying Tigers and the Chinese Government of Chiang Kai-shek. Severe economic problems made it difficult for Chiang Kai-shek to sustain his army in the field. China had no industrial base to support the prolonged war, and the Japanese occupation and blockade had made it increasingly hard for the Allies to ship supplies into the country. For logistical support, the Nationalist army depended on the limited Allied tonnage flown over the 14,000-foot Himalayas mountain chain, the so-called Hump, from India into southern China. No large-scale offensive could be mounted as long as the supply situation remained critical.

Flying over the Hump was a risky endeavour. The air route led first over the Himalayan foothills and finally to the mountains, between north Burma and west China, where violent turbulence and terrible weather was standard. Transport planes flew around the clock from any of thirteen bases in north eastern India, landing about 800 kilometres away at one of six Chinese airfields. Some crews flew as many as three round trips every day. Due to the isolated region, parts and supplies to keep the planes flying were in short supply, and flight crews were often sent into the foothills to gather up the debris from previous crashes for parts to repair the remaining units in the squadron.

The United States saw the Chinese theater as a means to tie up a large number of Japanese troops, as well as being a location for American air bases from which to strike the Japanese home islands.

In 1944, as the Japanese position in the Pacific was deteriorating fast, the IJA launched Operation Ichigo to attack the air bases which had begun to operate. This brought the Hunan, Henan, and Guangxi provinces under Japanese administration. The failure of the Chinese forces to defend these areas led to the replacement of General Stilwell by Major General Albert Wedemeyer. However, Chinese troops under the command of Sun Li-jen drove out the Japanese in North Burma to secure the Ledo Road, a supply route to China. In Spring 1945 the Chinese launched offensives and retook Guangxi and other southwestern regions. In training and re-equipping the Chinese army, Albert Wedemeyer planned to launch Operation Carbonado in summer 1945 to retake Guandong, obtaining a coastal port, and from there drive northwards toward Shanghai.

However, the dropping of the atomic bombs hastened Japanese surrender and these plans were not put into action.

On August 6, an American B-29 bomber dropped the first atomic bomb used in combat on Hiroshima, in an attempt to force Japan to surrender, which it did not. Two days later, on August 9 the Soviets launched Operation August Storm. The Soviet Union, having renounced its non-aggression pact with Japan, attacked the Japanese in Manchuria, fulfilling its Yalta pledge to attack the Japanese within three months after the end of the war in Europe.

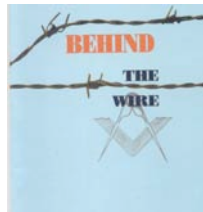
Later in the day on August 9, a second atomic bomb was dropped by the United States on Nagasaki. Emperor Hirohito officially capitulated to the Allies on August 15, 1945, and the official surrender was signed on September 2. The Japanese troops in China formally surrendered on September 9, 1945

The capitulation took most prisoners and internees by surprise.

Only after the Japanese capitulation in August did relief supplies again become available, and so urgent was the need by then that large-scale parachuting operations were necessary to get them to camps.

Liberation

The Lunghua camp was liberated in August 1945. Poor Susan Conder and George and Margaret survived the testing ordeal. What Susan thought of her lost freedom while her husband was living somewhere (or dead) during her captivity one can only leave it to the reader to contemplate.



**The Boys in Blue: Escape from Shanghai 43 - (See Part 3)
"Conder's Return to Civvy Street in Hong Kong"**