

For Peter Hall, it all started on Monday, 8 December 1941

Peter's father George Hall's war-time diary:

At about 7:00 am the police sergeant (Tsuen Wan) called and handed me a written and signed order to evacuate as soon as possible. Over the radio I heard announced by radio Tokyo -

AT 7 O'CLOCK THIS MORNING JAPAN DECLARED WAR ON THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN.

What a bombshell!

By 8:00 am our car was fully loaded and packed with clothing, bedding etc., and was ready to leave our home when the distant drone of planes was distinctly heard. Looking around in the direction of Hong Kong, we, the children and servants, saw two flights of nine planes each passing overhead and dropping leaflets - some of which dropped in our garden. The servants, except for Yvonne, elected to remain behind in the house.

At the K.C.R. [Kowloon Canton Railway, station] Major Bottomley gave me leave to escort my family to Hong Kong; but it was hopeless, as a permit had first to be obtained at the YMCA before anyone could travel on the ferries and there was a tremendous queue waiting. After many attempts, Mabel got in touch over the telephone with her boss, Mr George Merriman. At about 11:00 am a police launch was about to leave for Hong Kong with Mr H J Pearce, who very kindly offered to take my family, Yvonne the amah, and their baggage across. They went in such a hurry that we had no time to even say 'au revoir.'

My car No.3203, a Willy's 77 was instantly requisitioned and I was ordered to be Capt Redmond's orderly. I drove him out to taipo. Returning at about 1800hrs I found a chance to phone Mabel, who was with the children at No.455, The Peak, Barker Road, <tel:290360>.

This was Charles Drage's House (*he was head of SIS Far East*) where George Merriman was stationed and where messages were being coded and forwarded to the Naval Wireless Station on the Peak, for onward transmission to Singapore where Drage and Victor Gittins, my mother's younger brother, were operating, and thereafter onto the UK. The system also worked in reverse.

My father's last contact with my mother was by telephone on 14th December. He did not know what had happened to us until 1st February 1942, a period of 48 days, when in Shamshuipo Military POW Camp, he received a food parcel from his sister Ruby, which contained the following note:

"Mabel and children are all well at Stanley. Children have milk. Love Ruby."

My mother would never talk about the first six months after the outbreak of hostilities, as the period and the upheaval had been too traumatic. I never did find out when she first discovered that her George was alive and where he was at the time. We were very lucky, as two uncles had been killed in the fighting and two more close relatives died during the occupation.

When the Japanese shelling from Kowloon started to get too close for comfort, we moved down to a Red Cross Hostel in Upper Albert Road, next to Government House, where Merriman's wife Sally was in charge. We remained there until 5th January 1942, when we were informed that 'all enemy subjects' would be interned. Eurasians and third world nationals were not considered to be enemy subjects, but because of our residency, we had to report to the nearby Murray Road Parade Ground.

At first the Japanese attempted to segregate the various groups of 'refugees' into nationalities, but this failed miserably. Finally, after a rough count, everyone was marched off in a westerly direction down Des Voeux Road.

Jean Gittins aptly described our next accommodation in her postwar book, *"Stanley behind Barbed Wire."*

"These were part brothel and part boarding-house in the poorest section of the town which in normal times catered for impoverished seaman. The accommodation offered was filthy and verminous, kitchen and sanitation facilities were deplorable – there was no water even for toilets – and hardly any natural light ever penetrated dirty windows set high up at the end of long narrow corridors."

The Japanese were determined to humiliate the foreign imperialists.

Before we discovered our next destination was Stanley, I became sick with jaundice and had to be left behind in these 'salubrious' quarters with another patient, a doctor and a nurse. When everyone else, including my mother, brother and sister had departed by launch for Stanley, we remained for a few days longer, during which time I had my seventh birthday. My mother told me years later, she thought she would never see me again.

Fortunately for me, I do not recall the really bad times during this violent, stressful period from December 1941 until the end of August 1945.

I had little formal education during the whole time in Stanley Internment Camp (*see my 1944 school report*). Juniors had two hours of verbal instruction in the morning. Many teachers were also interned, but there was no paper or pencils.

My real education was how to survive in difficult times; becoming independent and learning how to look after myself – I became street-wise and can still sense situations before they arise.

Later on in my life, I found a proper education difficult to handle, but in the end perseverance and a belief in fairness has seen me reach my goals.