



CHI MA WAN Open Prison, Lantau Island, Hong Kong

The Prison Service in Hong Kong

C. J. NORMAN, C.B.E., J.P.

RECENT ARTICLES in this Journal have prompted me to give an account of the work of the Prison Service in Hong Kong, mainly because of the marked difference which appears to exist in the atmosphere of the two services. Even sympathetic observers give a picture of the home service as list-

less, unsure of itself, and discontented. Certainly, as Pauline Morris has pointed out, readers of the *Prison Officers' Magazine* do not get the feeling that all is well.

Before discussing the very marked differences between the two services it might be well to give

some idea of what Hong Kong is like; I find that people in England have only a very sketchy idea of the Colony—when I first came here twenty-two years ago I had a mental picture of something rather like Malaya, lush and tropical and jungle-covered. Nothing could be further from the truth. Hong Kong is in the main a large modern commercial city. There are country districts and many beautiful islands, but the great majority of the population are city-dwellers and city-workers. Because of the great influx from China the population has swollen from about one and a half million to three and a half millions. Most of these newcomers—they are not refugees in the true sense but simply people seeking a better and more prosperous way of life—have crowded into the urban areas, living in tenements or squatter huts. The latter are being cleared in a tremendous resettlement scheme, but it is important to remember that they are regarded as citizens of Hong Kong who have to be assimilated into the Colony's economy. The contrast between great commercial prosperity at some levels and the poverty of the squatters naturally strikes the visitor forcibly; but the fact that these vast numbers have been assimilated at all is something of a miracle. Outside the city, which lies on both sides of a magnificent harbour, are the country districts known as the New Territories, which include several hundred islands. So far from being jungly these districts are mostly barren

and hilly, with outcrops of the local granite. The nature of the New Territories has had an important bearing on the development of our penal system, as I hope to show later. Before the Pacific War Hong Kong's economy depended largely on the *entrepot* trade of the free port. This has much diminished in bulk, and a change has had to be made to an industrial and productive economy. This process has been long and difficult, and has naturally had a profound effect on the lives of the people.

The Prison System

What kind of penal system is best suited to conditions here? There is the usual hundred-year-old gaol, but this is used now only as a reception and classification centre and all our other buildings are modern. As recently as 1937 the authorities of the time asked themselves my question and came up with the astonishing answer that *one* prison would do—for all ages, sentences and types of crime. This prison they proceeded to build on the beautiful peninsula of Stanley on the south of Hong Kong island. The architect did a magnificent job—separate cell blocks, good workshops, plenty of open space and a feeling of light and air which is most unusual for a maximum security prison. Most important of all, he built such good quarters for the officers that they are still among the best Government quarters in the Colony. It was only the system that was wrong—just how wrong we have

been proving ever since. Stanley was built to hold 1,650 prisoners, including remands, civil prisoners—the lot. The intention was to close the old Victoria Goal and depend entirely on Stanley. Luckily this was never done—Victoria, despite its age, is ideally situated as a remand and reception centre, close to the courts and to the lawyers' offices. There was, I am glad to say, a separate prison for women—at least they were not to be pushed into Stanley.

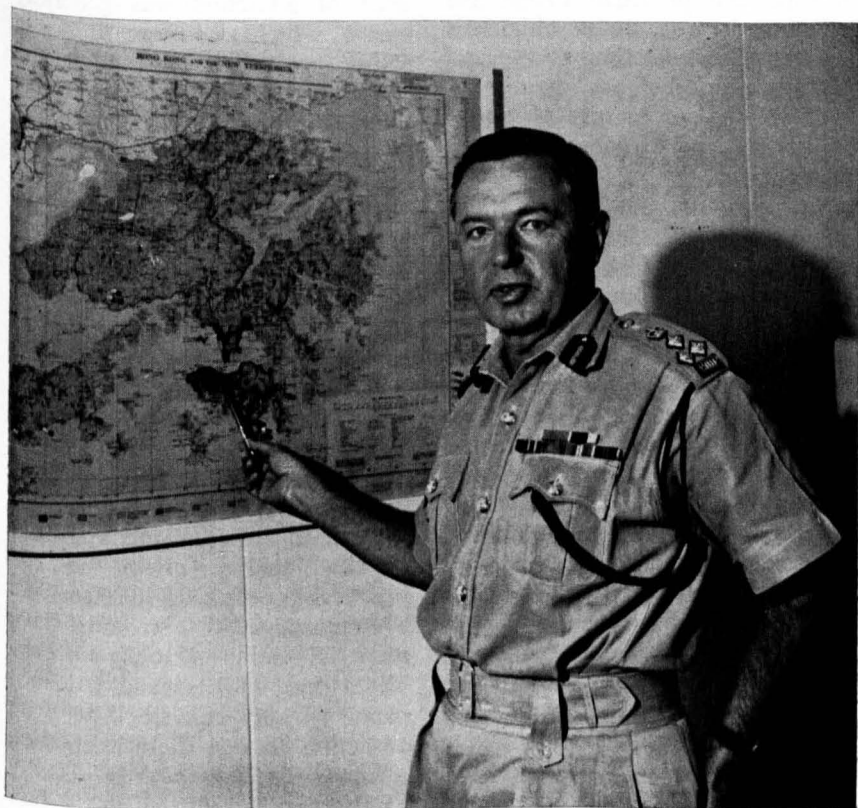
In the early days of the Colony the prison came under the Captain-Superintendent of Police, and the administration did not become a separate one until the first world war. In 1938 the first Commissioner of Prisons was appointed—Major J. L. Willcocks, D.S.O., M.C., on transfer from the Kenya Prison Service. When war broke out in 1939 I was a housemaster at North Sea Camp which was promptly closed. To my utter chagrin I was refused permission to join my regiment, the London Scottish, because I was in a "reserved occupation"—which had disappeared! With several other housemasters I was transferred to the Immigration Department and sent to the Port of London. There I had the idiotic and tedious job of going aboard vessels, mainly Dutch, drinking gin with the friendly captains and in theory looking for enemy aliens. I stood a few weeks of this and then had an interview with Sir Alexander Paterson who character-

istically took the view that I should think myself lucky to be retained in the home service at all; I was finally allowed to apply for a vacant post as Assistant Superintendent in Hong Kong, carrying with it a commission in the Volunteers. This seemed as good a way as any out of my impasse; it resulted in less than twelve months' work, two weeks' fighting and three and a half years in a prison camp. So it was not until the post-war years that we were able to get down to remodelling the prison system.

Clearly the first thing to be done was to get the younger age groups out of prison. The under-sixteens went to a Boys' Home (approved school) run by what is now the Social Welfare Department. We then opened two Training Centres for the age group 14-21, the reason for the lower age limit being that there is a provision in the law that "young persons" may not be sent to prison if there is an alternative, and we did not want any of this group who were unsuitable for the approved school to get into prison. The Training Centres are both "open"; the sentence is indeterminate—nine months to three years, but there the resemblance to borstal (a hideous word which we were determined not to use) ends. The Centres are in fact run on lines similar to the experiment carried out at North Sea Camp before the war; that is, the whole of the pseudo-public school system is dropped; the boys are divided into

vertical grades instead of houses; there are no housemasters and the boys, about 130 in each Centre, are in contact with all the staff and not just a small section of it. There are qualified schoolmasters and trade instructors—much importance is given to education as although Hong Kong has almost

caught up with the need for primary school places we cannot assume, as borstal does, that the intake is "educated". The success of the Centres may be judged, bearing in mind the economic background, by the fact that over ten years we have had a steady success rate of 75 per cent.



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The pen points to the city of Victoria on Hong Kong Island. The shaded area above is Kowloon and the New Territories; to the left is the large island of Lantau, where most of the "open prison" developments are taking place.

The Next Step

Having got all the under-21's except a few young prisoners out of Stanley we then turned our attention to adults sentenced to two years or less—as usual, the majority of the population. We decided that they should all go to open prisons. If this sounds revolutionary, it is meant to be. No selection boards, no psychiatrist's reports, no discrimination and therefore no jealousy or discontent—a marked feature of books written by ex-prisoners at home. To achieve this we had to find open accommodation for about three thousand men; we have already housed 1,500 without building anew. One open prison on the island of Lantau was built in 1955 as a Home for the Disabled; it was found to be too remote for them and we were lucky enough to acquire it. The second consists of the engineers' "lines" at a completed dam project in the New Territories. We are, once again, fortunate in that there is unlimited work which would simply not be done but for the presence of prison labour—forestry on a vast scale, road-making and work in the villages putting in paths and drains—all work of constructive value. I have said that only prisoners with short sentences for relatively minor offences can go—dangerous secret society leaders and prisoners of the type who caused the recent tragedy in Singapore are kept in maximum security at Stanley.

The Narcotics Problem

Of a prison population of 5,500, 75 per cent are sentenced for "dangerous drugs" offences. This bald statement may give some idea of the size of this problem in Hong Kong. Of the remaining 25 per cent, quite a number are drug addicts. Before the last war, the drug of addiction was generally opium, which was more or less a social habit and to which the Chinese developed a considerable tolerance. Some 80 per cent of the addiction is now to heroin and here there can be no discussion of "habit" or "tolerance". Addiction is rapid (a few days) and complete, and the destruction of the mental and moral fibre rapid and horrible to see. The change from opium to heroin has come about largely because the concentration of the latter makes it easier to smuggle and the effects are far more rapid. The narcotic problem is something which I cannot hope to deal with fully in an article of this kind and I must confine myself to the practical problem as it affects us. We determined that we must have a special institution solely for convicted drug addicts—and I do not mean persons convicted of drug addiction because there is no such offence. The offence is usually "possession" of drugs, but in fact we do not take the offence into account and a bicycle-thief or handbag-snatcher can receive treatment if it is decided at the reception centre that he is an addict in need of it. This special

institution, H.M. Prison, Tai Lam, is the open prison in the former engineers' lines to which I have referred. It has a full-time Medical Officer and a trained hospital staff but all the rest of the staff are prison officers drawn from the other institutions. This is work in which they take great pride and which is beginning to show remarkable results. The pitiful wrecks of humanity who come in regain strength rapidly on a good diet and a healthy open-air life. Research into the reasons for drug addiction still has far to go, but one most heartening feature is that, unlike the West, it is practically unknown among under 21's—some 80 per cent of the addicts are in the 30-50 age group, a fact which we are gradually relating to social and economic conditions. We are not making what I believe to be the mistake of the United States and treating all these people as psychiatric patients. We have excellent psychiatric facilities if they are needed but all our experience shows that this is an economic and social problem and we are tackling it as such. We have our own full-time after-care officers doing follow-up work—after-care is at present voluntary for drug addicts but statutory for Training Centre boys.

The Staff

The Commissioner of Prisons controls the organisation from a headquarters in the City—an office in which he spends very little time

indeed as he visits every institution once a week. In this way the closest personal contact with the Superintendents (Governors in England) and all the staff is maintained. Communications is of the most direct kind, and Pauline Morris would find no "bureaucracy" here. The fact that she would find what she calls a "para-military" organisation we are not in the least ashamed of. It happens to work very well. All staff, from the Commissioner downwards, wear uniform and the fact that senior officers are saluted and called "Sir" seems to us in no way to impede our work; what is important is the close and friendly association of duty between *all* senior officers and their staffs. This would have to be seen and felt to be believed but officers who have come to us on transfer from the home service have been surprised at first and then very happy about it. We do not need "welfare officers"—every Superintendent is his own welfare officer and takes the keenest interest in the well-being of his men. This is a professional service with a professional head; every Superintendent has come up from the ranks of Prison Officers through a clear-cut and well-understood system of promotion. The most important step is the promotion examination from Prison Officer to Principal Officer. There is no selection for this—all Prison Officers have the right to take it. It consists of two sections—a written examination in the laws

of the Colony as they affect Prison Officers and a practical test in drill and the use of arms. The latter will, no doubt, be deeply suspect but in fact is merely a test of bearing and confidence and knowledge of two means of riot control—tear gas and the Greener gun, both of which are held in reserve, the whole staff going unarmed about their daily duties.

The Commissioner, the Senior Superintendent and one Superintendent are the only pre-war gazetted officers remaining—thus all the remaining Superintendents and Chief Officers have risen to those ranks since 1945. Prison Officers serve a two year probationary period and it is quite common for them to take the promotion examination and become acting Principal Officers during this period. The warders, subordinate to the Prison Officers, are of course unknown at home. Here again the avenue of promotion is clear—through specially trained Junior Prison Officers to Prison Officer and so on up the ladder.

The service is in no way isolated from the community—at Stanley what used to be the Prison Officers' Club has become simply the Stanley Club. It has been entirely refitted and air-conditioned and associate membership is open to the public. There are now 700 members, of whom only 140 are Prison Officers—the remainder are drawn from all sections of the community. The Prisons Department Sports Association is open

to all ranks and maintains a recreation pavilion in each institution.

Before the last war the staff was entirely expatriate—all officers were British and all warders were recruited in India. Now all warder recruitment is done locally and Prison Officer vacancies are usually filled by promotion, though an occasional candidate from Britain is still appointed.

Salaries correspond to those of equivalent grades in the Police. The rank structure and salaries, in dollars per month, are as follows:

Commissioner, 5,400; Deputy Commissioner, 4,900; Senior Superintendent 3,940-4,300; Superintendent, 3,460-3,820; Chief Officer, 2,740-3,340; Principal Industrial Officer, 1,935-3,340; Principal Officer, 1,935-2,385; Prison Officer, 830-1,845; Junior Prison Officer, 370-535; Principal Warder, 455-670; Assistant Principal Warder, 385-430; Warder, 240-400; Woman Superintendent 2,400-3,820; Woman Principal Officer, 1,530-2,000; Woman Prison Officer, 620-1,440; Woman Junior Prison Officer, 280-410; Principal Wardress, 340-500; Assistant Principal Wardress, 290-320; Wardress, 180-300.

1 Hong-Kong Dollar = 1s. 3d.

(The cost of living is considerably higher in Hong-Kong than it is in Britain.)

This is admittedly a somewhat elaborate hierarchy but the chain of control and responsibility is clear and every man knows what is expected of him. There is no question here of putting the interests of the prisoners before those of the staff; both are re-

garded as equally important but the fact is clearly recognised that without a well-paid, well-housed, contented and properly trained staff no penal system is going to be worth anything to the people it is trying to serve. If we believe that this can be achieved only by a strictly professional service with professional heads and the highest

standards of conduct, character and ability we may be wrong—but visitors from home who take an objective view seem to think that we are on the right lines and all their comments agree about one thing—that here is a happy service which knows what it has to do and is going about it with energy and imagination.

New Books

UNDER LOCK AND KEY

MRS. XENIA FIELD.

Max Parrish. 30s. 0d.

A study of women in prison will be welcomed by staff of the four London prisons where the Field lectures have been a regular and successful part of the leisure programmes for many years. This book, one of the first to deal almost exclusively with the problems of the women prisoners, will be fully reviewed in the next PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL.

ROOTS OF EVIL

C. HIBBERT.

Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 36s. 0d. covers many aspects of work with delinquents in many settings will also be reviewed in the next Journal.

PENTONVILLE

TERENCE AND PAULINE MORRIS both of whom have contributed to this Journal, comes from Routledge and Kegan Paul, 53s. 0d.

THE PRISON JOURNAL OF THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

carries an interesting account of the work of the Henderson Hospital (formerly Belmont) seen through the eyes of a visiting American doctor and anthropologist Seymour Parker, and under the general banner of "*Involving the Sciences in Correction*" there is also

The Divide — Action and Research, with LESLIE T. WILKINS of the Home Office Research Unit delving deeply into the relationship between the power structure and the scientist.

This 63 page booklet is published semi-annually at the price of "one year, one dollar" and a specimen copy may be borrowed on application to the Editor of the PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL.

Readers are reminded of the newly-improved library facilities at the Staff College, Wakefield.