

The Boys in Blue: Escape from Shanghai 43 (Part 4)

“Face to Face With Jack”

Hong Kong 1963



The Sprog was investigating a heroin street selling syndicate in Sham Shui Po, Kowloon. Along the Sham Shui Po grubby lighter wharves you could see living scarecrows heaving and carrying heavy sacks or baskets on their calloused shoulders like so human pack animals loading and unloading cargo onto small boats. Nearby lighters bobbed up and down as the water slapped the praya walls with the tide. Clad in ragged shorts their sun dried skin glistening with sweat. Many of the wharf coolies were armed with shiny steel cargo hooks shuffling onto the lighters.

Most were suffering from malnutrition as one can easily see from their skinny frames and xylophone like ribs. Their sallow skin stretched like drums. Many of the Sham Shui Po wharf coolies were drug addicts. Heroin was the usual drug of choice. Small packets of heroin could be easily concealed from police eyes and the equipment simple compared with the paraphernalia needed for smoking opium. All that was needed was a cigarette impregnated with heroin



and then smoked, or using a small paper tube, a piece of heated tinfoil heroin powder on it while inhaling the fumes through the nostrils (chasing the dragon). Another method of ingestion is to have the heroin injected into a vein. Tell tale series of pin pricks in the veins of the arms indicated this form of ingestion.



The use of heroin by injection is known today as "mainlining" or "shooting."



Paraphernalia for injecting heroin include hypodermic needles, small cotton balls used to strain the drug, and water and spoons or bottle caps used for "cooking" or liquefying the heroin. The 'high' from the drug usually lasts from four to six hours.

Heroin's Effects on the Brain

Heroin, like all opiates, works as a central nervous system depressant. In fact, the human brain contains numerous opiate receptors, as morphine is a naturally occurring chemical. Heroin and morphine are both chemically similar to endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, as they all bind to those opiate receptors related to pain, movement and emotion.

Short-Term Effects

The short-term effects of heroin abuse appear soon after a single dose and last for a few hours. Intravenous injection provides the greatest intensity and most rapid onset of effects, as users can feel peak effects quickly. Intramuscular injection produces the euphoric high within 5 to 8 minutes, and when the drug is sniffed or smoked, effects are felt within 10 to

15 minutes. After taking heroin, the user reports feeling a surge of euphoria (or a "rush") accompanied by a warm flushing of the skin, a dry mouth, and heavy extremities. Following this initial euphoria, the user goes "on the nod" for several hours – a period of alternating between a wakeful and drowsy state. Mental functioning becomes clouded due to the depression of the central nervous system. Also, breathing may become slowed to the point of respiratory failure. Other short-term effects can include dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, and severe itching.

Long-Term Effects

After repeated use of heroin, more long-term effects may begin to appear. Chronic users may develop collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses (pus-filled infections), liver disease, and lung-related complications such as pneumonia. In addition to the effects of the drug itself, some heroin may contain additives that do not easily dilute in the bloodstream, resulting in clogging of the blood vessels in the lungs, liver, kidneys, or brain. Overdose, severe addiction, and/or death may also occur following initial use. In addition to the dangers of the drug itself, users who inject heroin also put themselves at risk now for contracting HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne pathogens. This type of risk today is the cause for controversial "needle-exchange programs" that have been established in areas of highest heroin use. Yet another threat for heroin users is that they cannot know the real strength of the drug or its true contents, putting them at an increased risk for overdose or even death.

The poor creature's miserable salvation. Narcotic perpetual induced euphoria or early death.

The Target

Sprog's target was a Chiu Chow female known as 'Shantau Por'. By repute in the Sham Shui Po district she was a well known head of a local heroin street selling syndicate operating around the wharves.

It was not that too difficult to arrest the sellers on the street or back alleys. Many of the sellers were merely wharf addicts. He would receive a few small packets of heroin at a time to sell to other addicts and one for the seller. If the seller was arrested only a few packets would be lost. On arrest another seller would take its place for a free small packet of heroin. The question was who were the syndicate heads and their system of distribution. Without cutting off the head of the dragon it could still move if only wounded. There had to be a mortal wound inflicted.

After three months or more of very careful observations and the use of movie and still cameras to photograph the suspects we were finally able to put the puzzle together. The heroin packing centre, the distribution system, collection of cash, the overseers and sellers. The detective's on site corollated written observation records and photography were carefully collated for court evidence.

Sprog and the squad was of the view that we had garnered sufficient evidence and were ready to strike and arrest the suspects. On the day of the operation planned and after an early careful check on the ground it was obvious the syndicate had stopped selling! The operation had to be aborted. Obviously the syndicate got a whiff of the operation. Shoot!



Further careful observations over the next few weeks it indicated that the syndicate had gone to ground. Patience. Knowing the syndicate former modus operandi was a help. If they had changed their system it would take months to put it all together again. Our two plain clothes female detectives kept up covert surveillance in the area the following weeks. The male detectives were too well known. The girls reported that the syndicate were back into business and using their old modus operandi. A new operation was mounted in great secrecy.

One early evening the squads in the operation hit their targets on the button including the syndicate heads for packing, distributing the heroin packets, cash collectors and a few sellers were arrested successfully. Not long after arrest a couple defendants in custody started into horrible withdrawal symptoms. One vomited over my desk while taking a statement.



After charging the suspects it was decided to prosecute the offenders before the Supreme Court Justices.

The 'Shantau Por' was defended by the able and leading QC Mr. Patrick Yu. For the Crown was Mr. Owen Corcoran of the Attorney General's

Chambers. Mr. Yu on one side wearing a new white wig and new black gown was an imposing looking tall defender with his junior and solicitor. The short Irish prosecution officer's yellow wig looked as if it came from a Cork pawn shop. His gown, I swear, was made out of a piece of London WW II blackout material with a long tear in the back.



The course of the proceedings was keen between the two able barristers. The detectives were presenting their evidence well. The Sprog and two detectives picked up one of the prosecution witnesses from a safe house. He was an informer and addict and knew the system worked by Shan Tau Por. It was useful evidence in the Crown's conspiracy case. The witness started his evidence but at lunch time the court adjourned.

The Sprog gave our witness some money for lunch and asked him to take it in the Supreme Court canteen on the roof. The detectives informed him to return to the court after taking something to eat in 30 minutes. When the court resumed again for our witness to continue with his evidence in the witness box he disappeared! The detectives scurried off to hunt for the absconding witness while the court continued with another prosecution witness. The witness had gone to ground like a scared rabbit.

By the end of a long day one could see that Mr. Yu was smiling! The Sprog and Corcoran felt a bit jaded and decided that a beer (or possibly two) might help.

Conder's Bar



The two dejected fellows trudged off to Queen's Road central to imbibe a bit. We went to No. 22 A where there was a small watering hole frequented by the legal profession in particular.

We were early at the bar. Very soon the bar was full of smoke and many respected gentlemen were seated hugging the tables filled with clinking glasses and bottles of various types of alcoholic beverages. Behind the bar was a smiling tall imposing figure tapping away on the busy till behind the bar - ching, ching. The man's heavy jowls was topped by a well trimmed, badger hair like shaving brush white colored mustache. Short slicked hair parted in the centre. As soon as we were seated with some other barristers one called "a round please, Jack". Our man, John Cecil 'Jack' Conder, came over with a full tray of frothy beer mugs and nestled the tray on the table.

Jack smiled kindly and bid the visitors welcome. Other eagle legals came in and there were more calls of "another round Jack, please!" among the smog of tobacco fumes. The publican commanded the room like an orchestra conductor.

My Irish prosecutor was in his element. The Sprog could not keep up with the pace at the rate the way the amber fluid was being disposed of. Simply frightening!

The case went on for weeks and at the end of each day's proceedings my prosecution officer and Sprog trailed over to Jack's place every evening to drown our sorrows or celebrate depending how well the case went.

The detectives managed to winkle out our little absconding informer in hiding just before the prosecution case was closed and gave his evidence for what it was worth. Apparently, he had been frog marched away by some threatening Chiu Chow triad connections to the heroin syndicate not to give evidence, or else.



The big day came for the judge to pronounce his verdicts. Despite Mr. Yu's able defence our man Owen Corcoran went one better. All defendants were convicted and sentenced to various long terms of imprisonment.

That evening there was much jubilation by the time we sat down in Conder's Bar as Jack rolled out the beer in demand of the cry "another round Jack, please"!

We now fast forwarding in the life of Jack Conder to 1972

There was a crowd of New Territories Administration District Officers and their Assistant D.O.'s huddled around Mr. Denis Bray the District Commissioner of The New Territories



Administration (NTA). Saturday morning prayers was over at the Kowloon North Magistracy NTA Headquarters. Denis et al beetled down to Mong Kok rail station were Jack Conder had established his new 'Conder's Bar & Restaurant'. Sprog was now the Assistant District Officer (ADO) Tuen Mun NTA.

Jack the publican was as professional as always and cheerful and full of conversation. At the restaurant the real NTA business was discussed. One wall of the restaurant was dominated by two oil paintings. The picture shown here above survived for many years.

The large green figure depicted in the picture is believed to be our man Jack!



Sprog joined Freemasonry in Hong Kong in 1965. By then Jack Conder was already one of the most senior Freemasons in Hong Kong. I used to see him wearing his Irish Grand Rank regalia and splendid chain of office. But In 1972 the now ADO appeared at Zetland Hall and affiliated to Shamrock Lodge 712 IC. Jack became a member of Shamrock Lodge in 1948 so becoming a member of his Lodge was a good choice. Jack became the writer's mentor and to the younger members as the years past by. Jack was always affable, helpful and loved snapping photos lodge members at the dinner table. Always living dangerously this Freemason also dated Chief Inspector Bro. Tommy Dow's daughter a couple of times. More dangerous than busting heroin syndicates though.

One new little about Jack's incredible past in China and was probably too polite to ask about it at the time. One understood that he was married but now had a Chinese partner for many years - Madame Helen Yao. She was a pleasant slim, demure and a kind lady and one simply accepted her as a 'Mrs. Conder'. As a member of his lodge one visited Jack and Helen over the years at his comfortable residence at 34 Flat C Braga Circuit (Tel: 3-013355) Kowloon. He had a large teak wooden bar in his residence. Appropriate furniture for a publican. (*Right 34E today*)



But by at about 1974 Jack was beginning unable to attend some lodge meetings. By mid 1976 he became quite ill and was hospitalized in June. Shamrock Lodge members made regular visits to Jack in hospital. On 14 June 1976 the writer visited Jack in hospital. About two hours later after leaving the hospital Jack Conder was no more.

On Friday 18 June 1976 3.00 p.m. the mourners assembled at the Union Church Kennedy Road opposite Zetland Hall 1 Kennedy Road to say farewell to one of the unforgettable old Shanghailanders. Bon vivant, Freemason, conversationist, tavern manager, friend.

The funeral service of John Cecil 'Jack' Conder was conducted by the Rev. Dennis Rogers. Jack Conder's son, George, who was interned in the Japanese camp in 1943 was the principal mourner present. Helen and the writer as Master of Shamrock Lodge and members of the Craft and old friends followed the cortege to Cape Collinson crematorium to say cherio.



Adieu old friend!

*"Life goes on day after day
Hearts torn in every way*

So ferry 'cross the Mersey 'cause this land's the place I love and here I'll stay"