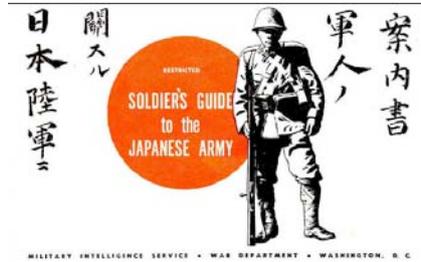


# THE BOYS IN BLUE -



## ESCAPE FROM SHANGHAI 43

By

Brian L. Coak



## **“De Pool” - The City of Liverpool**

The “dark satanic mills” employed thousands of men and women and children across Lancashire. Liverpool was an ideal port for westward trade with the Americas. Before its banning in 1807 the trans - Atlantic slave trade had made Liverpool merchants, ship owners and builders, insurers and outfitters rich. Liverpool was a cosmopolitan city, sailors and merchants came from around the world to live. It has one of the oldest Chinese and black communities in the United Kingdom.

‘Ullo dur!’ Our little tale begins in ‘De Pool’ about an old scouse friend of mine. Ee’s a gud skin!

## **The Boys in Blue: Escape from Shanghai 43 (Part I) “The Shanghai Municipal Police”**

I asked my scouse friend why does the River Mersey run through Liverpool? He told me because if it walked, it would be mugged.

I am sure life was tough when my old pal was born in 1907 and growing up in Wallasey, Liverpool.



But by about 20 years of age he arrived via Hong Kong in the Pearl of the Orient, Shanghai, in 1927.

During the nineteen-twenties the centre of gravity in China shifted to the Yangtze Valley and Shanghai became the ‘Liverpool’ of China. The foreign controlled city was the cross roads of Far Eastern commerce. But the pillars of foreign privilege new political currents were tugging away at the base.

## **Trouble in Shanghai**

For a long time the British Foreign Office blocked attempts to create an internationally neutral zone around the city. In 1927-1928 trouble started so the British Government rushed a strong contingent of British troops to Shanghai at great expense to protect the International Settlement from the fate that overtook the foreign community in Nanking that year as the Nationalists advanced from Canton to the conquest of Central and North China. It was suggested by the officer commanding the British "Shaforce," as it was called, that a 15-mile neutral zone should be created round Shanghai similarly as was attempted in repelling the

Taiiping forces in 1850 to 1860. This suggestion was promptly squashed by the Home Government.

Our man, one **John Cecil 'Jack' Conder**, was one of the army Royal Medical Corps units that constituted 'Shaforce' in support of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. It was a cosmopolitan city though mainly occupied by Chinese.

To protect the the soldiers from the ravage of venereal disease and discouraging intercourse between their men and Shanghailander females the Army promptly and pragmatically established a so called 'regimental brothel' as it was known in the barrack rooms.

Life was far from champagne and velvet. On 12 April 1927 there was a large-scale purge ordered by Chiang Kai-shek of Communists from the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) in Shanghai. The incident was called "Purge of Communists in the Party" (清黨) by the Kuomintang, while the Communist Party of China (CPC) described it as the "April 12 Anti-revolutionary Coup" (四一二反革命政变) or "April 12 Tragedy" (四一二慘案). Many prominent Communist members of the



Kuomintang were imprisoned or executed by Chiang in an attempt to destroy the influence of the CPC. Over the several weeks following the April 12 incident in Shanghai, arrests and executions of prominent Communists spread across areas of China, including a co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party, Li Dazhao, in Beijing.

Internal security was important in protecting trade and relied heavily on the Shanghai Defence Force (SDF) and the police force in civilian affairs.



### **The Shanghai Municipal Police**

The Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) was the police force of the Shanghai Municipal Council (工部局), which governed the Shanghai International Settlement (上海公共租界) between 1854 and 1943, when the settlement was retroceded to Chinese control.

The force, initially composed of Europeans, mainly Britons, and after 1864 including Chinese. Over the next 90 years the force was expanded to include a Sikh Branch (established 1884), a Japanese contingent (from 1916), and a volunteer part-time Special police (from 1918). In 1941 it acquired a Russian Auxiliary Detachment (formerly the Russian Regiment of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps).



The SMP were happy to recruit ex army and sailors who have served in discipline services and recruited eighty six SDF members to the SMP and more signed on later. John Cecil Conder's army duties ended in 1927 within a year.



So in 1928 John Cecil 'Jack' Conder joined the SMP as a constable. It must have been an advance in life compared with the current living standards among the indigenous poor Chinese. However, living in the police barrack style quarters were generally overcrowded and lacked good sanitation at the time. Pay was poor and it must have been difficult to live on one's salary of about 150 taels a month. Promotion prospects was equally poor and lacked a pension scheme or annual vacations.

For the Shanghai bobby it was a lonely flat foot dull experience getting around his four mile beat to reach at a pre arranged point every quarter of an hour. On night duty one did not know who or what was lurking in every shadowy, dirty smelly lane or corner with the reverberating clack clack of mahjong tiles behind shuttered windows. Otherwise, he would be labouring by filling in registers and forms and chits cleverly invented by the English bureaucracy to keep people busy.

Apart from police regulations and law an expatriate constable was expected to learn the local lingua franca - Shanghai dialect. An examination pass would add a few more shekels to the monthly salary.

The climate was an unhealthy one and it was easy to fall to malaria, typhoid and heatstroke or infection.

Illegal gambling and opium trafficking and corruption helped to grease often shady grey legal commerce. Beyond the dark side it was run by the triads like the Green Gang who was in their ascendance at the time.



Our man Jack was soon promoted to Lance Sergeant. The advancement gave him an opportunity to ride a motor cycle side car on anti piracy duties.

There were not many British women who would see a policeman a good catch. On the contrary there were many other nationalities from one end to the sexual spectrum to the other such as the Russians and Asian females. However, it was SMP Force policy to frown on mixed marriages especially Chinese and declared it was not in the interests of the force. There was no prohibition as such in the Terms of Service.

Off duty there were plenty of cabarets, bars and and steamy joints and opium dens but the more elite clubs were generally beyond many rank and file coppers or not socially acceptable.



During this early period Jack must have slipped across to the French Settlement to the Rue Chu Pao San known as 'Blood Alley' for a bit of action frequently patrolled by the MP shore patrols breaking up the frequent brawls. The short alley was filled with bars attracting the Chinese taxi dancers and other ladies of the night scraping a living as best they could. Jack seems to have avoided a longer term dalliance with the likes of a taxi dancer, dusky maiden or white Russian potentially gold digger who could push the testosterone loaded red bloody veins coursing through a man's body to do silly things.



Despite all the competition It seems that a British lady called **Susan Grace Burgess** and of similar age caught his eye There were not so many British ladies in Shanghai compared with other nationalities.

There must have been a real glint in Jack's eye for Susan as in 1929 at the age of 22 Susan gave birth to a son, George Cecil.

It is unclear when Jack married Susan Grace. In joining the SMP he would have needed permission first. It would have been important as he would have needed to obtain SMP married benefits and a quarter for his young family.

While struggling with a young family Jack must have persevered despite the difficulties when he was promoted to probationary sergeant of the 6,7700 man police force.

It probably meant filling in more forms and pushing 'bumpf in the police stations. But there was always the possibility of danger from out of the blue. Kidnapping, the Chinese penchant of illegal gambling and opium smuggling was endemic protected by the triad groups.

By 1931 Jack completed a three year term appointment with the SMP. With a young family Jack decided to look around for opportunities among the bustling Shanghai commercial interests to support his family.

### **Back to Civilian Life**

After a term in the SMP and knowing the ground and contacts Conder landed a job with the Shanghai Gas Company.

On 18 September 1931 the Japanese manufactured the 'Mukden Incident' and attacked Chinese soldiers who were allegedly sabotaging the South Manchurian Railway. Within six months the Japanese created the puppet state of Manchukuo headed by Pu Yi. The Japanese military were on their Asian conquest march.



In January 1932 the Japanese with 20,000 troops invaded Chapei district of Shanghai and fought against the Chinese 19th Route Army. Many sections of the buildings were destroyed. Although the Japanese withdrew later 2,00 troops remained in Hongkew north district.

Shanghai was long the centre of the China and Far East mercantile trade. Shipping was the life line to trade on which the British had a strong grip.

During this troubled period another bairn came along and Susan gave birth to a daughter, Margaret Joan, in 1932.

The old firm of Butterfield & Swire had 35 ocean going and coastal ships out of Shanghai. In this competitive trade Jack Conder managed an appointment with this leading shipping company in the B&S Works Department.

The Pearl of the Orient was a contradiction. Opulence and abject Poverty lived jowl by jowl.



For an expatriate employee of Butterfield & Swire (B&S) life would be more palatable. It is probable that Jack could have afforded to employ an amah for Susan to take care of the children and household chores. Office life was not too demanding. Likely, a six hour day at the office with two hours for tiffin. There was no shortage of fresh vegetables and delicacies from Europe as Shanghailanders knew how to live it up!

In 1936, the last year of near-normal peacetime policing, the police force totaled 4,739 men with 3,466 in the Chinese Branch, 457 in the Foreign Branch (mostly British), Sikh Branch: 558 men, Japanese Branch: 258 men.

### **More Trouble in Shanghai**

On 7 July 1937, fighting broke out between the Japanese and Chinese units again at the Marco Polo Bridge. ten miles from Peking (Beijing). The incident was the catalyst for a full scale invasion of China by Japan.

On 12 August 1937 skirmishes took place between Chiang Kai Shek's National forces and the Japanese troops. The Japanese warships on the Whangpoo River fired ship gun salvos destroying many suburban parts of the city and killing many residents.



On 14 August 1937 'Black Sunday' it is understood two Chinese planes attempted to bomb the Japanese warship 'Idzumu' in the harbour. The attempt failed but two 500 lb bombs fell into the city killing 2,450 persons and wounding 2,792 .It must have been terrifying for Susan and the children and refugees alike that were pouring into the city due to the Japanese push southwards from Manchuria into Peking and the Yangtze Valley.



On 21 August some 3,000 British women and children were evacuated to Hong Kong perhaps to the frying pan into the fire if they stayed there.

For Jack and Susan life went on as usual in the Settlement. The race course and canidrome was well patronized and people watched the aerial dogfights while young George could have filled his pockets with spent cartridges before the curfews were in place.

Among the mists of the grey war there was kidnapping, assassinations and violent attacks. From June 1938 onwards a vicious terror war continued between collaborators and anti - Japanese units and between KMT triad support against the Japanese puppets as turf wars developed among their agents engaged with narcotic trafficking and vice.



The Japanese military became more belligerent towards the Americans and the British. .By 1939 they were stopped at barricades and subjected to degrading searches. Failing to bow before a soldier one would receive a galling sound slap on the face. Jack Conder was a big fellow with large hands. The five foot nothing high Japanese soldiers probably enjoyed humiliating the six foot giant with a sound slap on Jack's face. Jack could have throttled two soldiers with his bare hands but any form of aggression towards them would have meant a bayonet through the body.

Slogans appeared in the city - 'A new Order in East Asia'

It is difficult to know whether Jack and his family had a full appreciation of the perilous position they found themselves by staying in Shanghai or relocate to Hong Kong or Manila.

Twenty two year old Wallace Kinloch ex Scots Guards joined the SMP in August 1938 together with a 54 strong contingent of ex Met Police and soldiers. There was a serious gun battle between SMP lead by Kinloch and the Japanese puppet police leaving two dead and two wounded. Kinloch was castigated by the puppet police and he was eased out to the Hong Kong Police.

By 1939 the cost of living was doubling especially rent and fuel and housing became increasingly crowded. Rapidly anti-British pamphlets were scattered in the streets by young Chinese children under Japanese guards - 'Down with Great Britain', the public enemy of the Yellow race.

10,000 troops and police took part in a mobilization exercise in the settlements and closed the roads.



Trouble was brewing in Pudong mills and a concerted anti-British drive fomenting labour strikes in British mills. There was a skirmish with the Chinese workmen and the British staff at the China Printing & Finishing Co. Ltd. print works .

A former SMP detective, Richard Maurice Tinkler, and a serving colleague of Jack at the time he was in the SMP. Tinkler came out of his room in the building print works and fired a pistol shot over the heads of the attacking labourers. (Tinkler was a Past Master and Secretary of Lodge Erin 463 Irish Constitution). A landing party of seamen from HMS Decoy arrived and was replaced by a detachment of the Seaforth Highlanders. The Highlanders then withdrew from the mills and the British marines from the area. They were replaced by 300 Japanese marines. The workers complained of Tinkler's rough tactics in loading the boats across the river to Pudong apart from the dismissal of the labourer's representatives

Tinkler was in his flat at the print works and set out for breakfast but was surrounded by the Japanese marines. A marine knocked Tinkler's pistol from his hand and the marines hit them with their rifle butts and bayonets. He was taken to a Japanese Pudong hospital. Despite some attempts to save 41 year old Richard Maurice Tinkler's life he died from his wounds two months short of his twentieth anniversary of his arrival in Shanghai. His death was announced in Police Orders.

By 1940 France fell to the German panzer divisions while England was in the grip of the Battle of Britain's survival.



Jack joined the Shanghai Volunteer Corps (SVC) in 1937 and carried on his duty on the B&S British ships. It is possible during this period that Jack assisted smuggling many French sailors leave Shanghai in B & S tugs under the nose of the Japanese & Vichy French police.



In August the garrison of the 1Bn. Seaforth Highlanders and the 2 Bn. East Surreys departed Shanghai to Singapore. In October 1940 British residents were urged to leave. When the SMP played a league match with a Shanghai's Chinese team 20,000 spectators rioted. Tony Keswick and other leading citizens said farewell to Shanghai as did the S.M.P. Commissioner Bourne.

## Things Were Getting Dodgy

In Shanghai the Special Branch chief managed to survive an assassination attempt in September 1940. Life was getting increasingly dodgy.

By 1940, the war had reached a stalemate with both sides making minimal gains. The Chinese had successfully defended their land from the oncoming Japanese on several occasions, while strong resistance in areas occupied by the Japanese made a victory seem difficult to the Japanese.

This frustrated the Japanese and led them to employ the "Three Alls Policy" (kill all, loot all, burn all) (三光政策),(SankōSeisaku). It was during this time period that the bulk of Japanese atrocities were committed. In Shanghai in 1935 there was an average of an exchange of fire every 21 days with armed criminals and police.

By 1940 there were exchanges every three and a half days firing 962 shots and received 209 in return.

The Sikh Mounted Branch was disbanded and a Chinese constable was shot in the head.

## The Balloon Goes Up “Pearl Harbour”

On 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and Hong Kong.



In Shanghai on 7 December the ill-fated gunboat HMS Peterel's crew played football against a Japanese team. That day the Shanghai Volunteer Corps ordered a general mobilization and found leaflets dropped on the sleeping residents announcing the Japanese troops arrival. Thirty SMP men on long leave were promptly dismissed.

HMS Peterel was a floating radio station for the HMB Consulate. As the Japanese failed to board it in the river the ship was sunk by Japanese naval ships and remains of the Peterel below.





On 9 December 1941 the Japanese issued a proclamation for the suppression of hostile activities. The Japanese Navy took control of The Shanghai Club and the Army the American Club. The Japanese authorities did not waste time and were well organized in closing down transfers of property and control of business and expropriated equipment and materials. The Shanghai Municipal Council continued but at the end of January 1942 the Japanese notified senior SMC members the banks would be placed under the control of the Japanese authorities.



Consequently, from 1942 to 1945 the average increase in prices moved at the rate of 26% per month.

### The Fortune Cookie Crumbles!

In February 1942 most of the most senior SMP officers retired followed by many sackings or were pensioned off. Many shakers and movers and celebrities including the Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs and his wife and A.H. George the British Consul got themselves safe aboard the luxury liner Kamakura Maru and left Shanghai. Those who were lucky to have a berth and registered to repatriation were reminded no household effects could be taken. The luggage was limited to 25 pieces per person two of which to be placed in the cabin. The ship sailed Shanghai leaving many British citizens found themselves left high and dry behind and with it the Conder family.



The Shanghai Orchestra was abolished and with it the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. In October 1942 brothels were legalized and gambling and corruption was even more rife than before.

Britons, Americans and allied civilians were barred from cinemas, nightclubs, the canidrome and the race course and street names were renamed. British and Americans were required to wear arm bands indicating their nationality.

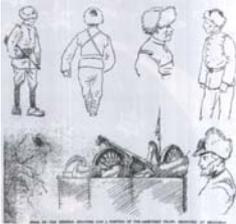


By the end of 1942 the Kempeitei rounded up persons who may be well connected to business, finance, police officers and Freemasons etc 'for questioning'. Many were taken to the notorious Bridge House prison. There the inmates suffered beatings, water and electric shock torture and dumped into vermin filled cells.

Life for the Conder family was collapsing around them like a pack of cards. They must have felt the increasing foreboding and the stress must have been intense. Whether to abandon what was left around them and flee, if possible, or hang on and see what fate had in store for them. The Japanese were moving quickly and it seems that the Conders had already left it too late.

### **The Writing on the Wall**

The Shanghai Municipal Council simply capitulated further to Japanese demands and by 31 January 1943 indicated the prelude to general internment of all allied civilians would begin.



The reorganization of the former proud SMP entered its final stage and dismissal of British staff leaving the force under the control of the Japanese Gendermerie with some Russian officers.

Sixty five policemen who were arrested in a sweep of allied 350 civilians were jailed and dismissed in early 1943 .



On 1 August 1943 the International Settlement was placed under the control of Special Municipality. The fortune cookie comes to dust.

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