

2) The Modern Era 1945-1967

In 1945, following World War II, the Force had to be built anew. The 200 expatriate officers who emerged from Stanley Internment Camp were in poor physical health. When the camp gates opened, many went back to their former stations, determined to ensure a peaceful transition to British rule. Later, most were repatriated for medical leave; and many left Hong Kong. Returning from China where they had spent the occupation years, many Chinese constables and sergeants reported for duty. Some had followed instructions and stayed in uniform during the occupation; Force commanders had given discreet instructions for this, on the sensible grounds that it was better for Hong Kong policemen to be on the streets than anyone the Japanese military government were likely to recruit.

From this nucleus, a new force had to be forged. The people of Hong Kong were extremely fortunate in having Duncan MacIntosh appointed as Commissioner in 1946. The Police Force he took over was decimated, its equipment lost or looted, and its stations largely destroyed. Its operating strength was down to under 2,000 officers. MacIntosh, who had been a policeman in Ireland and Malaya, came to Hong Kong from Singapore, where he had been Commissioner and had spent the war in internment. He was a truly formidable individual, unbending, determined and utterly professional.

Upon his arrival, MacIntosh's main task was to rebuild the post-war Police Force. His first concern was for his officers. Pay rates were disgraceful. Housing in a society packed with refugees and ravaged by war was critically short. MacIntosh battled the government for increases in pay and better conditions for all ranks.

Hong Kong was still in a desperate state. Former residents and refugees had flooded across the border. Some 45,000 hawkers crammed the narrow streets; robbers could dispose of stolen goods to a stallholder with instant ease. Triads had blossomed during the occupation and arrogantly ran drugs, vice and gambling rackets with seeming impunity. Firearms were in plentiful supply and armed robberies a common occurrence, with gun battles between police and robbers often resulting in death or serious injuries. Between 1948 and 1951, at least 11 police officers were killed, whilst on duty, by armed gangs.

In February 1948, the Police Training School moved to Wong Chuk Hang, a permanent site, where more officers could be accommodated and where professional police training began to take root. In 1949, a woman Sub-Inspector, Kimmy Koh, was taken on strength to prepare the way for the recruitment of the first batch of women officers. In 1951, the first group of 10 women officers was recruited.¹

Just as the extensive reforms initiated by MacIntosh were paying obvious dividends, tumultuous events in China swept Hong Kong once more into its turbulent wake. A new police headquarters was underway in Arsenal Yard, thousands of new recruits had been signed up – many former soldiers or veterans of other forces, and morale was high. Then the climax of the civil war in China sent another wave of a million refugees pouring over the Shenzhen River or arriving from ports like Shanghai in crammed boats. Among them were battle-hardened nationalist soldiers, bitter and vengeful in defeat, armed and highly dangerous. Policemen were ambushed and murdered for their revolvers, kidnapping was endemic, violence was acute.

The territory was tense. A string of fortified posts, still currently known as MacIntosh Cathedrals, was built along the border. From these strategic vantage points, police could look down as communist soldiers took over checkpoints on the other side of the narrow waterway.

Commissioner MacIntosh laid strong foundations for a force meant to last. His redoubtable and forceful personality had transformed the disjointed, shattered police into an effective and stable force. This had happened just in time for them to cope with a calamity, both natural and manmade.

Those hundreds of thousands of desperate refugees threw up shacks on every square foot of available land. On Christmas Day, 1953, a spark set one hut aflame. Whipped by dry winds, the fire raged through the motley collection of dwellings. By morning, 58,000 were homeless. Police helped to register them, the extent of suffering affecting everyone. From the ashes sprang the policies that led to the world's most successful public housing programme which at that time provided comfortable, well-designed homes for a large number of Hong Kong's population.

¹ Lawrence K. K. Ho and Yiu-kong Chu, *Policing Hong Kong 1842-1969 Insiders' Stories*, (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), p. 179-180.

The early resettlement buildings, hurried up quickly to provide the most basic of shelter, were dreary concrete blocks. Those who lived in them were mostly new arrivals from China, many committed deeply to the defeated Kuomintang. When a resettlement department official tried, on the Nationalist celebratory day of 10 October 1956, to pull down a political poster, there were angry protests. These led to appalling riots with old scores from across the border being settled in blood on the Hong Kong streets. Inevitably, triad gangsters and street hoodlums plunged gleefully into the chaos, leading hordes of looters and rioters.

The Force took resolute action and arrested those taking part in the riots. Among the over 6,000 people arrested, some 3,000 were released after being questioned; 1,455 people were charged with breaching curfew orders and 1,241 were convicted and sent to prison for periods ranging from 7 days to 2 months. Up to the end of November, among 740 of the remaining persons in custody, 291 were convicted, including 51 for riot and unlawful assembly; 103 for triad membership; 2 for possession of arms. The prison sentences ranged from 6 months to 2 years for rioting; 1 to 3 years for rioting with membership of a triad society and 6 months to 2 years for triad membership.²

Throughout the 1956 Riots, there were 443 casualties and 59 fatalities. While the Force sustained no fatality, 107 officers were injured.³

Prior to the riots of 1956, there had been two separate part-time police units, the Police Reserve and the Special Constabulary, which were formed in 1914 and 1941 respectively. Following the 1956 riots, the two auxiliary forces amalgamated. In 1959 the Hong Kong Auxiliary Police Force was established with the introduction of new legislation and has continued to be an important adjunct to the regular Police Force ever since.

² Hong Kong Government, *Report on the Riots in Kowloon and Tsuen Wan, October 10th to 12th, 1956, together with Covering Despatch dated the 23rd December, 1956, from the Governor of Hong Kong to the Secretary of State for the Colonies*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press, 1956), p. 54.

³ Hong Kong Government, *Report on the Riots in Kowloon and Tsuen Wan, October 10th to 12th, 1956, together with Covering Despatch dated the 23rd December, 1956, from the Governor of Hong Kong to the Secretary of State for the Colonies*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press, 1956), p. 44-46.

The 1956 Riot also led directly to the foundation of what has now become the Police Tactical Unit, dealing with crowd management, public order events and possible outbreaks of unrest. The Police Training Contingent (PTC) was established in 1958 and a programme introduced under which a large majority of officers in the Force would receive such training at different times during their career. The PTC also provided the Commissioner with a permanent reserve of manpower for emergencies. In 1968, the PTC was renamed as Police Tactical Unit (PTU).

Their value was to be proved a decade later. In 1966, when a one-man protest over a five cent fare rise on the Star Ferry sparked off a riot that swept through Kowloon. During four nights of rioting, many people were arrested. As usual, criminals moved with devastating efficiency; in the wake of demonstrations and protests, they sparked riots using them as a cover for organised looting.

The Kowloon riots in 1966 saw 1,465 persons arrested. Among the 905 convicted persons, 323 were sentenced to imprisonment; 50 to girls' or boys' home and 7 to a Training Centre. In the 1966 Kowloon Disturbances, there were ten recorded police casualties, one civilian death and 16 injured.⁴

Following the disturbances, a Commission of Inquiry was appointed to inquire into the disturbances and the events which led up to them. The Commission concluded that the organisation and training of the Force played a significant role in successfully resolving the disturbances with a remarkably small number of casualties.⁵

This brief flurry was but a rehearsal for the following spring in 1967. In China, the political turmoil spread and eventually lashed Hong Kong. The 1967 disturbances were preceded with a series of labour disputes between mid-April and late-May, which escalated into violent conflict between workers and the police and finally resulted in massive protests and demonstrations against the government.⁶ Besides, inflamed by rhetoric, fuelled by misplaced ideas of

⁴ Hong Kong Government, *Kowloon Disturbances 1966 Report of Commission of Inquiry*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press, 1967), p. 155-157.

⁵ Hong Kong Government, *Kowloon Disturbances 1966 Report of Commission of Inquiry*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press, 1967), p. 68.

⁶ 何家騏、朱耀光，〈香港警察：歷史見證與執法生涯〉(香港：三聯書店，2011)，頁 162-163。

nationalism, huge mobs marched on Government House for several times from mid-May onwards.

On May 16, some labour leaders announced the establishment of the “All-Circles Anti-Persecution Struggle Committee”, which fomented strife against the government. It was suggested that “none of the leaders chose to go to China to participate in the nationwide strife that was taking such an appalling toll, and the wealthy businessmen who had blessed the troubles, the ‘red fat cats’ dispatched their children to universities in the much-disparaged United States and Britain.”⁷

Starting from May 19, demonstrators launched large scale protest activities outside the Government House. They dressed in white shirts and dark trousers, waving aloft the Little Red Book and shouting slogans.⁸ Generally speaking, the situation was not chaotic in the first few days and “the demonstrators managed to maintain reasonably good order”; while “the government exercised restraint in the first few days of the protests.”⁹

The situation, however, deteriorated on May 21 and 22. Because of the increased violence of the protestors, a curfew was implemented.¹⁰ Ranks of police faced crowds hurling insults, spitting and sometimes even throwing acid. Officers’ strict discipline and stringent training paid dividends. Staunchly, the thin khaki line held firm.

A series of token stoppages and strikes took place at the end of May and public transport services were very badly affected. Bus and tram drivers were threatened, sometimes attacked, if they went to work to keep Hong Kong on the move. The police were deployed to protect those bus and tram drivers,

⁷ Kelvin Sinclair, *Royal Hong Kong Police 150th Anniversary 1844-1994*, (Hong Kong: Police Public Relations Branch, Royal Hong Kong Police Force, 1994), p. 14.

⁸ Cheung Ka-wai, *Hong Kong’s Watershed – The 1967 Riots*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), p. 41.

⁹ Cheung Ka-wai, *Hong Kong’s Watershed – The 1967 Riots*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), p. 43.

¹⁰ John Cooper, *Colony in Conflict*, (Hong Kong: Swindon Book Company Hong Kong, 1970), p. 27.

who decided to go to work, from intimidation and violence, so that public transport in the territory would not be completely paralyzed.¹¹

In the most serious single incident of that year of violence, gunmen opened fire from the Chinese side of the border in Sha Tau Kok. Five policemen were shot dead in a hail of bullets with eleven others injured.¹² The true identity of the gunmen could not be established and there were different versions of them ranging from (1) 'communist militia';¹³ (2) 'Chinese militia';¹⁴ (3) 'villagers in the border area';¹⁵ (4) 'villagers in the immediate vicinity';¹⁶ to (5) 'unknown gun-men in the Mainland'.¹⁷

In response to the riots, the government counteracted the serious situation with various emergency regulations between May and December.¹⁸ Some of them were related to the power of seizure of weapons, orders for the opening and closing of premises, and dispersing assemblies. However, the situation had not improved.

¹¹ John Cooper, *Colony in Conflict*, (Hong Kong: Swindon Book Company Hong Kong, 1970), p. 52; Ho Ka-ki, Lawrence, "Policing the 1967 Riots in Hong Kong: Strategies, Rationales and Implications" (a thesis in the Department of Sociology submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong, 2009), p. 99-100.

¹² Hong Kong Government, *Hong Kong 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press 1968), p. 12; Colonial Secretariat, *Hong Kong Disturbances 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1968), p. 33.

¹³ Kelvin Sinclair, *Royal Hong Kong Police 150th Anniversary 1844-1994*, (Hong Kong: Police Public Relations Branch, Royal Hong Kong Police Force, 1994), p. 14.

¹⁴ Colonial Secretariat, *Hong Kong Disturbances 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1968), p. 33; 何家騏、朱耀光，《香港警察：歷史見證與執法生涯》（香港：三聯書店，2011），頁 244；*Hong Kong: Principal Developments Since June 1967 – Governor of Hong Kong to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs*, dated 1968-05-16, Government Records Office document, FCO 40/103, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Hong Kong: Principal Developments Since June 1967 – Governor of Hong Kong to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs*, dated 1968-05-16, Government Records Office document, FCO 40/103, p. 4; Colonial Secretariat, *Hong Kong Disturbances 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1968), p. 33.

¹⁶ Hong Kong Government, *Hong Kong 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press 1968), p. 12.

¹⁷ 何家騏、朱耀光，《香港警察：歷史見證與執法生涯》（香港：三聯書店，2011），頁 164。

¹⁸ Colonial Secretariat, *Hong Kong Disturbances 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1968), p. 81-83.

Those early days in May 1967 were the start of a torrid, worrying summer. From mid-July, the mass protests tapered off, to be replaced by a campaign of terror and bombing. There were reports that “bombs were made in classrooms of left-wing schools and planted indiscriminately on the streets.”¹⁹ Between May and 31st December 1967 there were 8,074 suspected bombs dealt with by bomb disposal teams with a total of 1,167 bombs found to be genuine.²⁰ The entire population was revolted by the bombings, particularly when a seven-year-old girl and her brother, aged two, playing outside their North Point home were killed. The bombing incidents also killed a military bomb disposal officer, Sergeant Charles Workman, while he was examining a bomb on the top of Lion Rock.²¹ Two police officers were also killed when they handled the bombs.²²

Through the tear smoke to quell the wave of terror, the police held firm and never wavered. Their loyalty was never in doubt. And in a remarkable show of support, the public rallied to their side. It was the common people of Hong Kong, and the police sworn to protect them, who turned the tide. The insanity gradually ebbed. As an example, some local citizens established a Police Education Fund for the children of police officers. At the end of the year a total of \$3.7 million had been received. The main purpose of the fund is to award grants to children of police officers for post primary education up to, and including, university level.²³

China, too, was concerned about the worsening situation in Hong Kong. “Big-character posters” went up in Guangzhou saying the troubles were caused by troublemakers trying to embarrass Beijing.²⁴ By September, the

¹⁹ Kelvin Sinclair, *Royal Hong Kong Police 150th Anniversary 1844-1994*, (Hong Kong: Police Public Relations Branch, Royal Hong Kong Police Force, 1994), p. 14.

²⁰ Colonial Secretariat, *Hong Kong Disturbances 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1968), p. 85.

²¹ John Cooper, *Colony in Conflict*, (Hong Kong: Swindon Book Company Hong Kong, 1970), p. 179.

²² Colonial Secretariat, *Hong Kong Disturbances 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1968), p. 84.

²³ Hong Kong Government, *Hong Kong 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press 1968), p. 150.

²⁴ Kevin Sinclair, *Asia's Finest – An illustrated account of the Royal Hong Kong Police*, (Hong Kong: Unicorn Books Limited, 1983), p. 85.

situation had begun to quieten; the South China Morning Post reported, with a sense of wonder, a headline "Bomb-free Day for Colony".²⁵ It was to be many months, however, before the city returned to normal.

Throughout the 1967 disturbances, 51 people were killed (including 10 police officers, 2 by explosion, 2 by stabbing and 6 by shooting) and 832 people injured (including 212 police officers). A total of 1,936 people were convicted of various related offences, including 318 people for riot; 465 for unlawful assembly; 40 for possession of bombs (real); and 33 for explosive offences.²⁶

In April 1969, the men and women of the Force received a rare honour. The Queen bestowed the title Royal on the Hong Kong Police and Princess Alexandra became Commandant-General of both the regular and auxiliary Forces.

²⁵ Kevin Sinclair, *Asia's Finest – An illustrated account of the Royal Hong Kong Police*, (Hong Kong: Unicorn Books Limited, 1983), p. 85.

²⁶ Colonial Secretariat, *Hong Kong Disturbances 1967*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1968), p. 84-85.

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