

Your Excellency Ambassador Liu, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here with you today at the ceremony to mark China's 65th Victory Anniversary.

In Hong Kong in 1941, 4 years prior to this momentous victory, the situation was very different. Hong Kong's British governor had been forced into surrender by the invading Japanese army. Under intense threat from the Japanese, a one-legged Chinese Admiral guided a group of 72 men on a daring escape into the Chinese mainland. Among this group were top British officers and high ranking Hong Kong officials.

Most of the men involved in this escape left behind diaries detailing their experiences, as well as the tremendous respect they had for the Chinese who protected them and who kept them alive on this hazardous journey, sharing their meagre rations and even providing shoes for them to wear. Friendships were forged then between the British and Chinese that could never be forgotten.

Two years ago, some of the descendants of the original escape party got together and formed an organisation named HERO (Hong Kong Escape Re-Enactment Organisation). Last December about 80 members of HERO assembled in Hong Kong to re-enact the escape, retracing their journey as far as Huizhou.

The purpose of this re-enactment was not only to commemorate our courageous forefathers, but also to remind the world of the Sino-British friendship that led to this military joint venture, the first ever by Britain and China, and, most importantly, to say "thank you" to the brave Chinese locals and resistance fighters who helped them, without concern for their own safety, and without whose help we, the descendants, would not be here today.

On Christmas Day 1941, the day of the Hong Kong surrender, Admiral Chan Chak, who had been sent by the Chinese Government to help Hong Kong's British and Allied defenders, led the escape party to safety in China.

Within five days, the party had reached Huizhou, where the men split into different groups - some staying and others pushing on through southwest China to the Burmese capital, Rangoon. Many of them would continue to bravely fight through the remainder of the war.

For his courageous leadership during that time, Admiral Chan Chak was later made a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) by King George the VIth. Five years ago, marking the 60th Anniversary of China's Victory, the family of Chan Chak felt very honoured to receive a memorial medal from President Hu Jintao on behalf of their late father.

On commencement of the re-enactment in December last year, a letter was received from Prince Philip endorsing HERO's effort, and it is the sincere wish of HERO that the British and Chinese can continue to stand shoulder to shoulder in times of need, in order to maintain peace in the world.

The "Mission" of HERO is to build a "Friendship" path along the route taken by the original escape party, with a commemorative plaque along the way. This we hope will encourage tourism in the area, and hopefully, with the co-operation of both HERO and the Chinese government, we will be able to realise this ambition.

It is also my personal wish to establish an annual scholarship for a bright student from both Nanao and Huizhou to study in the United Kingdom, where I myself received my university education.

May we continue to build on the spirit of the 2008 Beijing Olympics - One world - One Dream and Peace to all Nations.

Thank you.

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