

## SINO-BRITISH CO-OPERATION

On the 7th December 1941, the Japanese invaded Pearl Harbour, starting the Pacific War. The following day they attacked Hong Kong. During this crisis, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, in Yan'an (延安) and the Secretary of the South Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, Zhou Enlai (周恩来), in Chongqing, directed Liao Chengzhi, head of the Office in Hong Kong of the Eighth Route Army, to send guerrillas to infiltrate Hong Kong and Kowloon.

After a hard-fought battle lasting 18 days, the British Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Mark Young, surrendered to the Japanese on Christmas Day 1941. That same evening, a party of British and Chinese officers and men made a dramatic escape by boat under enemy fire and landed at dawn on the Japanese-occupied Chinese mainland at Nan Ao in Mirs Bay. With the help of local Chinese people and what later became known as the East River Column (东江纵队) Guerrillas, who provided food, as well as intelligence and other assistance, they walked for four days and nights, covering over 115km on foot, before crossing Japanese lines and reaching the relative safety of Free China in Waichow (Huizhou today).

The international press celebrated this 'thrilling escape' as an heroic event during a desperate period of the war. Following on from this success, Colonel Sir Lindsay Ride (赖特将军) subsequently formed the British Army Aid Group (BAAG) which was instrumental in assisting further escapees.

Some of the party kept diaries during the escape, and others later wrote letters to their families at home. Using these diaries and letters, as well as official reports, their descendants plan to re-trace the steps of their forefathers at Christmas 2009.

The Hong Kong Escape Re-enactment Organisation (HERO), the association formed by descendants of the original escapees, has planned the re-enactment with the help and advice of the China Culture Development Association, Beijing (CCDA) and the China Cultural Global Foundation (CCGF). A long term exhibition, using many original artefacts lent by descendants of the escape party, has been established at the Museum of Coastal Defence in Hong Kong, and a copy of this will be exhibited in due course at the History Museum in Guangdong Province, China. The three parties

are working together to honour and commemorate this unique example of Sino-British comradeship against a common enemy, and aim to forge strong new ties between Britain and China for the development and exchange of cultural, economic, social, sports and political communications between the two countries.

Nelson Cheng, CEO of CCGF, says there will be nearly 80 descendents from all over the world taking part in this commemoration of the friendship between Chinese and British comrades. Richard Hide, Chairman of HERO, stresses that had the escape 68 years ago not been successful many of the descendents would not be here today. All the descendents and their families wish to express their gratitude towards those who assisted in the escape, and HERO hopes to help in continuing to strengthen the Sino-British relationship.

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