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Part One

Hong Kong Life

香港人生



Foreword

The events in this book took place between 1968 and 1974, towards the end of the Vietnam War.

Born in 1935, I have lived the peripatetic life of an adventurer, with forty four different jobs in eight countries during my short working life. Three yachts, two of which I built myself, sank under me.

This book is a pastiche of the portion my life spent as an expatriate civil engineer in the still colonially ruled Hong Kong.

It was a time that preceded the establishment of the ICAC, the Anti-corruption authority in Hong Kong and corruption was a commonplace, if not an acceptable, way of life among many of us expatriates. Of course, for the Chinese public servants, what is regarded as corruption in the West, is and was traditional.

The book displays the often amoral way of life that permeated the expatriate community generally, as well as the affluence of government employees; so different from the life they would have led in their home countries.

Most of the action is based in Hong Kong. The latter portion covers the solo voyage I was obliged to make on leaving Hong Kong to finish, unexpectedly in Australia.

The names of most of the characters in the account have been changed to protect their anonymity. If anyone still alive appears to recognize themselves and is disappointed in my display of their character, I apologize.

There are persons who have become known in the public arena through their exploits, either beneficially or notoriously. Their names have not been altered.

While the book is basically autobiographical, some sequences have been altered and perhaps embellished to enhance the narrative flow.

John Mason

1

The Air New Zealand Boeing 707 banked slowly as it flew low up Hong Kong harbour under the leaden skies of the tropical evening. Typhoon Hannah was lurking around, 200 kilometres out in the South China Sea, somewhere over Pratas Island, and 40 knot squalls were sweeping the busy streets. The crew was even more anxious than usual as the big jet turned gingerly around Checkerboard hill to swoop down over the old Kowloon City; seeming to almost scrape the three storey buildings that were only separated by the busy, four lane highway from the Kai Tak airport perimeter fence. The dirty, crammed, red Kowloon buses and yellow minibuses carried on; their drivers and passengers oblivious of the huge, roaring airplane charging feet above their heads.

The flight crew heaved a collective sigh of relief as the wheels skidded then gripped on the rain soaked runway. Kai Tak was a pilot's nightmare even in good weather during the normal approach from the north, around the bend over Kowloon City. The bad visibility, cross wind and squalls produced by the approaching typhoon, were making the landing touch and go. The long haul from Auckland meant fuel was low and the only possible alternative landing places were in Red China; not really a feasible proposition in these latter days of the Vietnam War, in which our beloved New Zealand prime minister had decided to embroil us in fraternal support of L.B.J and the mighty U.S.A.

The majority of the passengers would have been oblivious to the tensions being felt by the crew, but the frequent conversations I had had with the invariably pie-eyed Cathay Pacific flight staff during off-duty binges at the Flying Club and Hebe Haven Yacht Club, had made me very twitchy about landing at Kai Tak in marginal weather.

I hate flying at the best of times, so I gripped the armrests and prayed silently to what passes as God for me, to get my body down

onto terra firma intact, so that I could start the second phase of my charmed life as an expatriate civil engineer in the exciting metropolis, inappropriately named, Fragrant Harbour.

What a breeze it was, passing through the customs and immigration facilities of this laissez faire British colony. The days of the political terrorists had not yet arrived and the Vietnam War was in full swing. Thousands of US troops were flying in on R and R, filling the town with tourist dollars and their latest virulent strain of herpes, making the bar girls and their minders hope that the war would last forever.

In New Zealand the authorities were obsessed with spraying anyone entering the country with insecticide. They were terrified one may be hiding a diseased apple or pear which would bring about the ruin of horticulture.

In Australia, the authorities were much more worried that you may be tainted with 'coloured blood'. In attempting to stay, could darken their 'White Australia'.

The Hong Kong authorities were only interested in preventing firearms from being smuggled in. The local police were so incompetent in their use that they preferred the local Triads remain limited in their mayhem to the traditional knives and choppers.

As I dragged my bag through the exit gates, I looked around to see if any of my colleagues from the previous three year stint were there to meet me.

Going on leave was a most important aspect of the work tour in Hong Kong. Two and a half years was spent planning one's leave and six months enjoying it. It was considered important that the returning civil servant was met at the airport, taken to his government paid for hotel, and informed as to which office he was destined for. I caught sight of a couple of guys in the Public service uniform of walk shorts and long socks and headed over to them.

'G'day, me old mate!' I greeted one of them.

It was Grant Anderson, an old school friend with whom I had also trained in Auckland, he as a budding land surveyor and me as a civil engineer. I had also spent my compulsory military training time in the Artillery with him. For me, this was fighting boredom at Papakura camp and then on site training out at the range of Murawai Beach. For us

'technical experts' of the Location Battery it should have been fixing gun positions, but for most of the time we were relegated to planting protective marram grass on the sand dunes. The less technically qualified gunners took pot shots with 25 pounders and Bofors guns at an ancient Harvard, towing a drogue. We had been rewarded with evening feeds of the then plentiful supplies of *toheroa* washed down with the assortment of booze we could smuggle in. Alas this shellfish delicacy is now virtually extinct.

'My God, the traffic's heavy tonight' pipes up my old friend, 'you're lucky I made it here to meet you at all.'

'Don't bullshit me! You've been sitting at the Flying Club bar for the last hour, I'll bet.'

He grinned sheepishly. He had made Sergeant in the Army compared to the lowly rank of Gunner I never exceeded; but as far as excuses are concerned, he is totally lacking in imagination. Once he is downing his beers and exchanging prattle with the Cathay flight staff he so admires, he always goes home to his long-suffering wife, Susan, with the same excuse; 'the traffic!'

'Let's get out of here and around to the Club, I've got a few San Migs to sink to catch you up.'

The guy with Grant started. 'I say, I'm supposed to brief you and take you to your hotel.'

Pommy git! 'Oh, sorry mate' I tried to be polite but forgot to even ask his name. 'What hotel have I been booked into?'

'There's a room booked for you at the Miramar and you have been posted to Highways, New Territories.'

'The Miramar' I thought. 'I'm not staying there! It's too up-market with its snotty nosed staff. I'll move into the Merlin later where I can feel more at home. The Merlin is more laid back, much more my style. I can borrow Grant's petrol cooker and cook up a feed in my room when I want to.'

'Thanks again mate,' I can be ingratiating when it's necessary; 'I really appreciate your coming out to meet me. Do you fancy coming to the Flying Club for a jug? Grant will sign you in.'

'No thanks', he replies, 'I really must get back to the missus. She finds life here difficult dealing with servants and -----Blah, Blah---'. These Pommies certainly know how to moan; he probably lived in

some crummy bed-sit in Peckham Rye in south London and now has a bloody great apartment at Mid Levels, but is still moaning.

'Okay, let's get going Sarge.' I give Grant a shove, 'I need to get a beer in me.'

'You'll have to walk. I had to park the car near Kowloon City. The Club parking was packed solid.'

'I hope you paid someone 'tea money' to stop it getting trashed.'

'Of course, I'm not completely stupid, you know.' He hates having to have to cough up protection money for his stupid, fancy car.

During my first tour, I soon took to riding a bike then a Vespa scooter around town when I didn't travel by minibus. The car I did have during my last tour had brakes working on only three wheels and was covered with dents; nobody ever asked me for tea money to protect it!

We walked briskly around the airport perimeter fence to the Flying Club compound, which was sited almost opposite the spot where the planes touched down. It was an ideal spot for the 'experts' to judge the landing prowess of the competitor airline crews. It was also a great vantage spot to watch a big jet take the very occasional slide off the tarmac and onto the grass edge!

The Club was packed and the air was dense with smoke. At thirty five years of age I and drank and smoked like all my peers. Just the thought of that stink makes me want to puke nowadays, but kissing a woman whose breath reeked of tobacco smoke, at that time seemed perfectly natural.

I cast my eye around the room. I didn't really fancy standing at the bar and talking garbage to the half drunken airline staff or civil servants standing there. Then I saw Connie Hopkins, sitting at a table with her husband, Ken and that creep Gerald Evans, an 'old friend' who I'll bet a pound to a pinch of shit is getting his leg across the delectable Connie. She smiled at me and waved us over.

'That's for me, partner. I'll grab a couple of chairs and you get a couple of beers. No! Grab a couple of jugs instead, I feel a long night ahead; and stop moaning, I'll pay you back when I change some money.'

'Do you mind if we sit with you, Connie.' I smiled at her with my profile slightly presented; I think my strong chin looks best that way.

‘Of course you can, John’ she beamed (and boy, she can beam), ‘I thought you were on leave. Where are Anne and the kids?’

‘I’ve left them in New Zealand looking after my business interests; I couldn’t wait to get back here to you.’

‘You are silly,’ she smiled as she lifted her cheek to be kissed, ‘business interests! When have you ever been able to live on your salary, let alone have money for business?’

She was dead right.

I moved my chair close to hers and put my hand on her nylon sheathed thigh.

I whispered in her ear; ‘You’ll have to stop wearing mini skirts, Connie; you are giving these drongos high blood pressure with those stunning legs of yours.’ Connie was probably ten years my senior; always dressed and made up to look glamorous with the crazy bouffant hairstyle of the era. Critics would probably say “mutton dressed as lamb”, but she looked good to me!

She smirked but her thigh did not flinch under my hand.

‘How are you, Ken,’ I said to her husband who just grinned at me in a semi inebriated stupor.

Not so Evans, her presumed lover, who glowered at me. I imagine he reckons he has a proprietary right over Connie, and I am afraid he probably has. The three of them come from somewhere on the Welsh border; Ken is around 55years old I would guess, a likeable, inoffensive guy with a sagging gut and probably ‘brewer’s droop.’ He has probably been unable to satisfy his attractive 45 year old wife’s carnal needs for some time.

Gerald Evans is a toffee nosed git in his thirties, around my age, I would guess, but BIG. I wouldn’t fancy crossing swords with him but I fear it may come to that sometime. The thought of Connie Hopkins seldom fails to give me a hard on.

‘Tell us about your leave, John. Didn’t you go cycling around Europe? You really are sporting.’ she gushed.

‘Well I did, but things didn’t turn out quite as I expected. I caught up with some old friends in London and met a good looking Chinese woman from Taiwan, who spent a couple of days with me. It was quite a pleasant interlude, but I’m not made for being on my own, and two weeks cycling and living rough in northern Europe was more than enough.’

Connie made some sympathetic noises. 'I can imagine being without your lovely wife for more than a couple of days, would soon make your adventure pall.' She was right, perhaps she could see through the tough guy image I liked to portray.

'You have more to you than great legs in a mini skirt, Connie Hopkins; you can read me like a book.'

Evans had his ears straining to pick up our conversation and looked daggers drawn at me.

'Didn't Anne take those lovely children of yours on a cruise too?' she asked. 'I bet she had a gorgeous time with all the dishy P and O officers, she would have been fighting them off I'm sure.'

'Don't remind me about it,' I said, 'when I got back to Auckland, she was on Cloud Nine. Guys kept phoning her up from places like Singapore and Bombay; wherever the damn liner was going.'

Connie laughed. 'You deserve all you get, you rascal.'

What a quaint turn of phrase 'rascal.' It was a popular word in Jamaica when I was there but not one that you heard much anywhere else. Perhaps the fact that she is ten years my senior has something to do with it, or perhaps the Jamaicans got it from the Welsh.

I leant close to her and whispered, 'I would have enjoyed my sojourn in Europe a great deal more if you had been there in my tent at night,' and I gave her thigh a gentle squeeze.

She laughed out loud, even waking up her somnolent husband. 'Can you imagine me roughing it on a bicycle and sleeping in a pup tent? Not me, my boy, I would need a motor bike for transport and three star accommodation at least.'

'For you, I would arrange it,' I said 'I can actually see you tucked up behind me on the pillion seat of a big Harley Davidson!' I was thinking more about being tucked up with her in a posh hotel bedroom, but decided that Evans' reaction might be violent if I verbalized my thoughts; I may give the impression of being a tough nut but it's really just a façade.

'How long will it be before Anne and the children get back here? Do you think you will try for a place on the Island again? Chater Hall is quite nice, I know, but we really love living at Caldecott Road.'

It doesn't take long before the conversation gets around to accommodation in government expatriate circles. Frankly, I don't give a damn where I live so long as it's reasonably easy to get to work,

preferably by bike or scooter. There were a few women that I fancied who lived on the Kowloon side, at Kowloon Tong and Ma Lo Shan (Monkey Hill). The government had built four, three storey blocks of fancy apartments on a private road, Caldecott Road, on the road to Shatin at Monkey Hill.

It may be too much of a temptation living in dangerous proximity up there; although the thought of being able to pop in on the delectable Connie at a moment's notice seemed very desirable at present.

'I don't know really; you know I'm working at Highways NT this tour, their office is somewhere near here, so I guess we will try to get a flat on the Kowloon side. I imagine Anne will want to try and get a flat in Caldecott Road, near your place, which could be quite convenient, don't you think? Anyway, what's coming up in the theatre line?' I asked, just to change the subject and bring both Evans' and my blood pressure down to an acceptable level.

Connie was a leading light in the Hong Kong Players, the local amateur dramatic and musical association. She was not involved in the acting side but had something to do with stage management. During the last tour she had talked Grant and I into auditioning for the Gondoliers; men are always in short supply in enterprises theatrical. We could both sing pretty well but when it came to holding a harmony part almost off the cuff, the Musical director seemed to think we were not up to muster.

'The Players are going to put on 'Carousel' this year and auditions will be coming up shortly. You really must audition, John.'

Yes, I thought, this time I won't take Grant along, he will only put me off. The shows always have a lot of good looking chicks in them and I have an idea that being on the stage tends to make them shed their inhibitions. It's an idea with potential.

'Yes, I think I would like that, Connie. I can just see myself as the crook in Carousel; there is one, isn't there?'

'Jigger,' she confirms, 'but you are far too likeable to be a crook'. I preened myself. 'I wouldn't want to dampen your ardor though', she adds (as if she could), 'but you may be aiming a bit high for a start; I heard your audition for 'Gondoliers' didn't go so well.'

'Ooo that hurts! That fiasco wasn't my fault; my tuneless mate here put me off.'

I looked at Grant for a reaction but he was lost in conversation with an estate surveyor friend who flew for the Volunteer HK Flying Corp in a crappy old Auster. Grant was crazy about anything to do with flying and would arrange for 'Survey' flights at every opportunity.

'I'm sure you will be alright this time; we must keep in contact and I will let you know when the auditions come up.'

'Perhaps you will be able to give me some pointers on how best to present myself.' I suggested.

'Mm,' she smiled, 'I don't see why we couldn't arrange something along those lines. What do you say, Ken?' Ken was too far gone to notice what anyone said and his countryman had lost interest. I was busy contemplating if I would ever be able to get Connie into the sack. At thirty five I was still very aware of age differences and I had to wonder how a woman ten years my senior would react to my style of love making.

'Where are you staying for the time being?' asked Connie, bringing me down to earth with a thud. 'It's about time we got going; Ken looks as if he's too far gone to drive. You'll drive, won't you, Gerald? You can stay the night at our place and go to work with Ken tomorrow morning.'

This was a reality check for me; if I was going to get anywhere with Connie I was going to have to overcome the relationship she obviously had with the dour Welshman. 'We can drop you off, John, if you want to come now.'

'You are awfully generous, Connie, and I would like nothing better than sit in the back seat of your car with you, but if I don't drag my old soak sergeant, Grant, out of here, his wife will never speak to me again.' I reluctantly removed my hand from under her mini skirt as she got up and straightened her clothing.

'Well, you give me a call to let me know how to get in touch with you, about the auditions, of course,' she added for Evans' benefit. She gave me a peck on the cheek while I patted her bum. Yes, I thought, this is going to be a definite possibility.

'Come on Sarge' I said, 'It's time we made a move. Are you fit to drive?'

'Of course I am.' he mumbled, and we headed off to get his car. 'Jesus, I can't remember where I left it, and it's not even my bloody car.'

This was just what we needed, a couple of inebriates wandering around that thieves den, old Kowloon City. Fortunately, the cool evening air revived his memory and we found the car intact, the “tea money” must have worked. We drove slowly to Tsim Tsa Tsui and turned up Nathan Road to the Miramar Hotel. Thank God the Hong Kong police hadn’t become obsessed with drink driving and breathalyzers yet.

The Hotel reception staff was not at all pleased with my failure to turn up at the appointed time, but that was too bad.

I made my way up to my room carrying my own bags. I never pay tips and hate people fussing around me; I bet no one pays tips in Mainland China!

I climbed into bed and quickly fell asleep with visions of a miniskirted Connie Hopkins floating around in my head.

2

I awoke the next morning with a splitting headache, my mouth tasting like the bottom of a bird cage. Reluctantly I dragged myself out of bed and put on the clothes I had scattered on the floor.

I was in a room at the Miramar Hotel, just up Nathan Road from my old stamping ground, Chungking Mansions.

The Government certainly didn't stint when providing accommodation for their expatriate staff, even when they were only lowly engineers. The Miramar was, at that time, a pretty up-market hotel; not in the class of the Peninsular, of course, but for someone like me who is used to back packer hostels, three star.

About a month before I had been due to go on leave, Anne had taken the kids on a P and O ship cruising around the Pacific to Hawaii, the western USA and on to New Zealand; a trip of a lifetime. The great looking woman that she is, she had had a ball, having the pick of the officers chasing her.

I gave up our apartment at Chater Hall in Mid Levels and moved myself into a little room in Chungking Mansions, to the horror of my colleagues. The Government took something like 10 percent of ones salary for providing accommodation, a pretty good deal, but I didn't fancy rattling around in a bloody great apartment with an amah by myself, and it would have been a bit on the nose if I had installed my Chinese girlfriend in the Government apartment.

Chungking Mansions is a famous, almost ghetto, block in Nathan Road. It is full of little brothels, illegal eating houses, sweat shops and probably what passes for opium dens these days. While I was at the Kowloon Central office during my last tour, it was our staff's place to meet for curry lunch every Wednesday. The place had tiny lifts that were always on the verge of giving up the ghost. The stairways were impassable, full of merchandise piled up in them. The lighting and ventilation shafts were chock full of rubbish; had there ever been a fire in the place it would have been a really disastrous one.

I moved in and a young Chinese woman I had met at the travel agents moved in with me; I had thought it was only for the night, but I was wrong. She decided she was settling in.

Not the best looking woman in the world, she had been married, she said, to a Yank who had left her. She was bright lady who could speak fluent English, but boy, she had the Chinese ability to talk non stop!

Apparently the Yank had never 'penetrated' her but had taught her how to give head, and at this she was an expert. After a couple of weeks of having a live-in lover, I couldn't stand her any more.

She constantly told me I needed a shower, sometimes in the middle

of the night. She said that I stank, a common complaint Chinese have about '*gwailo*' (Foreign Devils)! I think it could be our diet. The Chinese girls I came to know intimately were virtually hairless and were almost devoid of any smell, even in the traditional place.

Anyway, before I left on leave, I talked my friend Dick Jones into taking her on. He was a skinny intellectual who seemed to have a penchant for skinny, intelligent Chinese girls.

'I guess I better get up and see what awaits me at Highways/ New Territories.' I thought.

The offices of Highways NT were on the way to Kai Tak, on one of the side streets of To Kwa Wan; I hadn't been there before but it shouldn't be too hard to find.

I grabbed something to eat on the ground floor of Chunking Mansions and walked down to the Star Ferry terminal and fought my way onto a Number 5 bus. I really felt that I was back home now, crammed into one of these time expired London double decked buses, jam packed with people, scraping it's tail on the road and belching out black smoke.

I loved the way the Cantonese never queued, never moved along the bus and stared at you without expression. No English pretensions here!

The air was blue as the bus farted its way through the canyon of three storey buildings all sprouting washing on bamboo poles stuck out over the street. The blue smog caught the back of the throat with an almost burning sensation. It was surprising how quickly one got used to breathing this pungent atmosphere, even to going jogging in it.

The neon signs of Chinese characters vied with each other to see which could stretch furthest into the street with the least visible means of support.

The wrought iron road median barrier was festooned with dyed cloth drying in the sun, interspersed with yellow, dirty sheets of drying pig skin and salt fish. What they must taste like after being marinated in the blue smog with a frequent coating of Kowloon Bus Company black diesel smoke, beggars the imagination.

I saw the Highways office compound on the left and fought my way

off the bus. There didn't look to be much car parking space but it didn't matter, I didn't plan to drive to work. I'd better make myself known to my boss, the Chief Engineer/ Highways NT or CEH/NT in government - speak. The British in Hong Kong adore acronyms; almost, but not quite as much as the French.

There was the usual little Chinese guy sitting at the entrance, picking his toenails.

'*Lo bahn, hai bin do a?*' I squawked at him (I prided myself on my command of Cantonese). He failed to be much impressed but gave a cursory wave down the corridor to the right.

'*Saam moon*' he grunted. I went to the third door and knocked.

A thin voice responded and I went in to meet my fate for the next three years.

A slightly built guy with glasses and features that I took to be somewhat Greek or Italian sat behind a large, standard PWD desk which was empty apart from the usual phone and three wire trays labeled 'In', 'Pending' and 'Out'. The trays had only the requisite thin layer of files in each. Clearly CEH/NT was a tidy man who wasn't out to give the impression of being 'Frightfully busy, you know!'

He stood up saying, 'You must be Mason. Welcome to Highways NT. My name is Andros. Sit down and have a coffee,' which is the standard opening sentence in the PWD.

'*Foh gei*' he called out to the flunky in the corridor, '*Leung booie gafe, m goy.*' He obviously spoke the usual minimum of Cantonese that most *gwailo* get by with. The guy brought two cups of the Nescafe with condensed milk that passes for coffee in Hong Kong.

'Did you have a good flight, ----blah blah?' Conversations always revolve about leave, housing, transfers and amahs. After talking through the usual crap, I raised the subject of what I was to do.

I noticed that Andros (his first name, I found out later, was Stefan) couldn't take his eyes away from my left shoulder. Then I realized it was the tattoo on my upper arm; a perfectly respectable one of a New Zealand flag surmounting my wife's name, 'not quite kosher, you know old chap, for someone in the professions'.

How standards have changed!

He certainly was the typical, conservative English (in fact half Cyprian), never first names, but I thought he would be fairly easy to get on with. Like most expatriate engineers, he had not the slightest

interest in engineering.

'The "Powers that Be" have decided that a new post should be created in Highways/NT designated E/RR and it looks as if you're to be it.'

'Great' I enthused, 'what would that entail'. It sounded a bit like Engineer/ Rest and Recreation, which would suit me down to the ground.

'Well, with all this move towards 'democracy' in the Colony, a bit pie in the sky if you ask me, they have decided to open up some of the areas between Saikung and the Tolo Channel for the 'masses' to wander over; of course it will turn those pristine areas over there into an enormous plastic bag desert.

'You, Mason, have been assigned to look after the contracts for Recreational Roads in the area.'

Now that sounded pretty good to me; an opportunity for skiving out to Hebe Haven and working, or is that playing, on Tangalooa, the Cheoy Lee H28 Ketch I had somewhat impulsively 'acquired' near the end of my last tour.

He picked up the phone and called someone in the building. 'I've just asked Chan Tai Lung to come in here, he is SEM/H/NT and you will be technically answerable to him'.

Poor sod. Senior engineer was the least enviable position in the PWD. While the Seniors did as little work as anyone else in the organization, they were out of the circle of the *cum shaw* (bribery) that oiled the works of contracting in Hong Kong.

The local Chinese engineers fought tooth and nail to avoid the inevitable promotion from engineer to senior engineer, which put them on the outside of the corruption circuit for maybe several years, until promotion to Chief put them back into a different corruption circuit.

After the introductions, Chan took me to meet the rest of the professional staff. He was an inscrutable Chinese guy, not at all outgoing, and certainly was not going to take kindly towards me, a *gwailo* interloper. He took me first to meet his counterpart, Senior engineer/ Islands.

The PWD had a hidebound, pyramid chain of command, an almost identical mirror of the British army. Under a Chief Engineer, there had to be at least two Senior engineers; in the case of Highways NT, they

were called Mainland and Islands.

There was never any recognition of personal skills or abilities; one's salary and seniority depended on the date when one qualified and then went up strictly on the years of service spent.

When anyone retired or died, everyone moved up a notch. Even more bizarre, as each professional officer, senior or above, went on leave; the closest junior in service would take his place, irrespective of where it was sited. When someone senior went on leave, a dozen or more people would change offices and jobs; 'Musical Posts', I called it.

All the design work was done by Chinese assistant engineers and followed precisely the archaic designs that had been produced in the nineteen thirties.

For someone like me who had been involved in some pretty advanced engineering work in New Zealand and London, it was frustrating. Still, the money was good and one lived a cushy life. The golden rule, however, was 'don't rock the boat'. Get offside with a cranky Chief and you may get a less than perfect annual report; and that meant you were on your last contract!

I was taken in turn around the offices of the six Engineers who made up the Division. Four were Chinese and two were expatriate; a New Zealander from Balclutha, Gary Kelly and a tall Ceylonese (is that Sri Lankan now?) called Bertie Jayasakara. He was the second engineer from Ceylon I'd met in Hong Kong. I guess for them as well as for us New Zealanders, the pay and conditions were attractive.

I was finally deposited in my office and the young Chinese who was to be my assistant came in and introduced himself, Leung Faat Tong.

Chinese names are always a teaser. Most Chinese formal names consist of a first family name, followed by two given names. For westernized Chinese, a Christian name is tacked on the front!

Knowing what to call a Chinese, especially on short acquaintance, is quite tricky. Servants or others of a lower rank seemed to invariably to be called 'Ah-something', the 'something' being their family name.

When you knew someone better, you normally add '*goh*' on to their family name, like '*Leung goh*,' which translates roughly Uncle Leung. I don't think the two given names which you would expect to equate to Christian names, are much used at all.

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