

ASSIGNMENT: HONG KONG



WHEN Detective Inspector Ed Tyrie goes to work in the morning, he rarely gives thought about the future of the office he runs. He doesn't have the time for such luxuries. Ed Tyrie is AFP Liaison Officer in Hong Kong.

In July 1997, the Territory of Hong Kong will revert to Chinese Sovereignty after more than 150 years of British administration. But the impending change has little effect on the day-to-day role the AFP Liaison Officer plays in this busy Asian centre.

Hong Kong's importance as a bastion against drugs, commercial crime and syndicated corruption bears little relationship to its size. Its total land area is only 1032 square kilometres.

Ed Tyrie is left in little doubt as to the amount of work which originates in and around Hong Kong.

The office opened on 23 July 1985 and is located in the Australian Consulate General in Harbour Road, Wanchai. After occupying two previous offices, it is now reasonably permanent in the present location. It is manned by Detective Inspector Tyrie and his assistant, Sandra Widt.

First Liaison Officer in Hong Kong was Brian Bennett, who worked hard to establish the AFP there. He was followed by Eric Curtis, now in Honolulu, who filled in temporarily until Ed Tyrie took up his posting in December 1985.

Hong Kong consists of 236 islands and islets, many of them waterless and uninhabited, and portion of the Chinese mainland east of the Pearl River estuary adjoining the province of Kwantung. Hong Kong Island, the most important in the group, was ceded in perpetuity to Great Britain in 1842 under the Treaty of Nanking. Previously it had been inhabited by only a few fisherfolk who practised limited agriculture in one or two valleys. The islands in the area were notorious for Chinese pirates.

Today, some 98 per cent of Hong Kong's 5.5 million population is Chinese, predominantly Cantonese. There are approximately 60,000 expatri-

ates, mainly from Britain, the United States, Canada, Japan, India and Pakistan living in the Territory. About 8,000 of them are Australian.

Efficient

About 80 percent of Hong Kong's Chinese population speak Cantonese; the remainder other regional dialects. A large proportion speak Mandarin, which is the official language of the People's Republic of China. English, too, is widely spoken.

The principal local law enforcement agency is the Royal Hong Kong Police, with a strength of 25,000 regular members, and an Auxiliary Police strength of over 5,000. Their 'beat' is divided into four principal regions — Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, the New Territories and Marine Division. It is a very efficient organisation, performing a para-military role in times of emergency.

The Liaison Office's main contact is with the Crime Wing, commanded by Assistant Commissioner Peter Lee Lam Chuen, and incorporating the Commercial Crime Bureau, Narcotics Bureau, Crime Intelligence Bureau, and the many other criminal investigation units that are spread across the Territory. Some of these perform specialist functions such as anti-triad activity, armed robber investigations and kidnapping inquiries, leaving the day-to-day investigations to the local Criminal Investigation Branches.

The Liaison Officer also has frequent contact with the Hong Kong Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department.

The ICAC mainly investigates corruption allegations but its charter allows the Commission to continue with investigations of other offences that come to its notice during inquiries and so investigators from the ICAC become involved in offences that range from murder to trafficking in dangerous drugs to petty larceny. They have been very successful in wiping out the syndicated corruption that existed in Hong Kong to the mid-1970's. A professional organisation, it has many contacts with the Australian

Federal Police, National Crime Authority, and other Australian law enforcement agencies.

Smuggling

The Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department has contact with the AFP Liaison Office on a wide range of matters. The Hong Kong Dangerous Drugs ordinance gives the same power to Customs and Police in the investigation of offences relating to trafficking in dangerous drugs.

Hong Kong Customs also patrol the Territories waterways and are very successful in combating the smuggling of contraband of all types. Hong Kong is a centre for manufacturing, selling and trafficking in a wide range of counterfeit food products, beverages, clothing, watches, medicines and so on. Of course, the investigation of the importing and exporting of heroin, in its many variations, is a priority.

There is also contact between the Liaison Office and the other foreign law enforcement agencies represented in Hong Kong, including the US Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, National Police Agencies of Japan and Korea, and a number of special purpose liaison officers from other consular offices.

Inquiries related to Australian and international links to narcotic trafficking, organised crime, and commercial crime are the main priorities of the office but there is a variety of work unlike that in most other posts. Ed recently prepared a paper on repetitive strain injuries in the workplace for the Royal Hong Kong Police to assist them with their policy for the management of a new computer system and the health hazards associated with it.

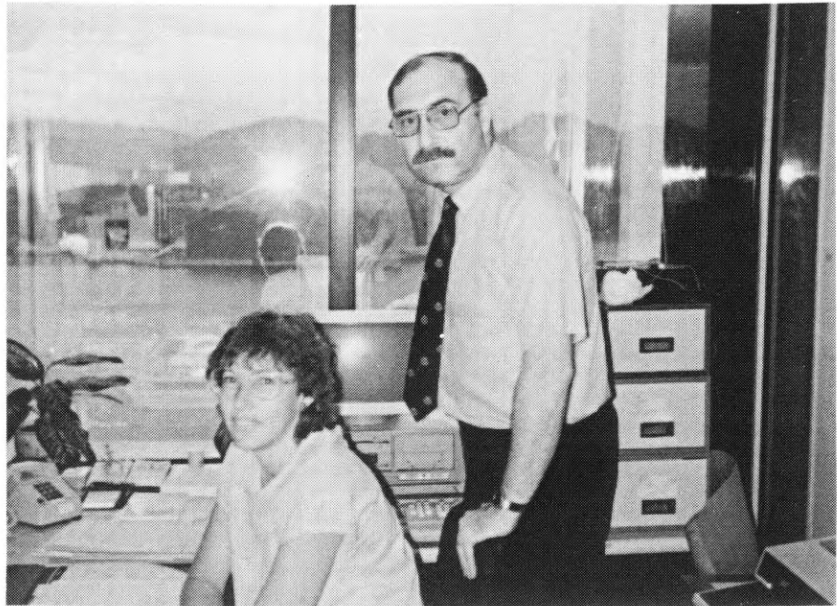
Ed Tyrie is satisfied that the office meets its objectives and fulfils its function in the overall strategies of the AFP.

'The Commissioner's recent visit to China will open the way for contact between Australia and the PRC giving the Hong Kong Liaison Office an expanded role in the region,' he said. 'Hopefully, we will also broaden our liaison contact with Japan and Korea as I believe we have a major role to play in law enforcement in Asia.'

'Our opinions and ideas are respected, and our law enforcement agencies recognised as being professional. Representatives of Australian police regularly attend conferences, seminars and training courses in the region which will help to broaden our knowledge of the people and customs, so shaping the strategies for the future.'

Praised

He said a recent paper on triad societies



Detective Inspector Ed Tyrie and assistant Sandra Widt in the liaison office at the Australian Consulate General, Hong Kong.

in Australia prepared by Bill Deane of the AFP Bureau of Criminal Intelligence was praised by members of the Royal Hong Kong Police Crime Intelligence Bureau, considered to be experts in the field, as one of the best papers written on the subject by a foreign law enforcement service.

Close liaison exists between the Australian Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs and the Liaison Office on a variety of matters of mutual interest, including visitor visas, student visas and the Business Migration Program. The office acts as a liaison point between the Department and a number of local law enforcement officers.

Ed Tyrie finds the working environment stimulating in the air of intense energy and bustle that surrounds Hong Kong. People are ambitious and aggressive in their approach to life. These features combined with the crowded living create an exciting and vital atmosphere. Free enterprise thrives and hard work and initiative often bring substantial rewards. For the expatriate resident, life in the Territory offers much of interest.

'One cannot ignore the disadvantages of apartment living with little or no recreation facilities for children and the feeling of constriction in a small, confined and densely populated area,' he said. 'Traffic congestion is a serious problem as are noise and dirt pollution. Beaches and outdoor recreation facilities are often overcrowded and sporting facilities limited.'

'The impact of these frustrations is particularly noticeable during the hot and very humid summer months and during the fogs of February to April.

Most people seek a change in environment at least once a year,' he said. The Tyrie family this year are spending six weeks in Europe 'to recharge the batteries'.

Culture

Ed's wife, Margaret, has her own views on living in Hong Kong.

'When I first arrived I fell in love with the sound, sight and smell of the place,' she said. 'It was all such a huge adventure.'

'I still feel that way; I particularly enjoy the opportunity to experience another culture at first hand. Of course, there are other things that we miss here; Vegemite goes out of season and it's hard to get out into the country for a barbecue, but there are compensations.'

'We've met some really interesting people and seen lots of friends who are just passing through'; we've learned also to eat a wide variety of foods. Snake soup, shark's fin soup, duck's tongues, chicken feet, live prawns, not to mention the sperm sac of a large fish; are some of the exotic dishes we have tried under the inscrutable eye of some Chinese friends testing diplomacy to the limit,' she said.

'When I'm not eating I'm either working (in a hospital), shopping or just exploring. I never feel threatened here — in fact I think we are probably safer here than in Canberra. The girls and I especially enjoy catching the Mass Transit Railway to Kowloon and then the regular train to the New Territories where we explore the markets and countryside at places like Tai Po. It's a rural township, the site of a satellite town, but the pace of life is slow, and we can actually walk on grass.'

'The lack of grass is a real problem for people with young children,' she said.

'There are very few playgrounds and they are all concrete. Most children start school at two years of age just to provide them with activity and to get them out of the apartments.

'I shall be very sorry to leave Hong Kong but expect to maintain an interest in its affairs, particularly as 1997 approaches.

'Many people see Hong Kong as a place to stopover for two days just for some intensive bargain hunting but it has a lot more going for it than that,' she said.

Margaret considers schooling in Hong Kong is very good; more disciplined than in Australia, with plenty of homework.

The day starts at 8 am and finishes about 3.15 pm. There is usually an hour or two of homework, even during weekends and holidays, for secondary students. Uniforms are worn, with lighter clothing in summer. Getting used to the different styles of education and the confinement of apartment living has a marked effect on children newly-arrived in Hong Kong.

Emma and Susan Tyrie attend Hong Kong Island School, a secondary-level school run by the English Schools Foundation. It is a fee-paying school and closely resembles an Australian private school. It is situated close to where the Tyrie family live.

Settled in

Emma and Susan have settled in well at the school which has an excellent academic record. Based on the English School System, the school gives students the opportunity to obtain 'A' Levels in Years 6 and 7. Sports activity plays a big part in the lives of the students and the school has access to facilities which allow for a wide range of activities. During the long summer holiday break there is the opportunity to take part in extra activities organised by the school. Island School Sports Club offers facilities to

members to play squash, tennis, badminton and to swim outside school hours.

The Australian Government provides some relief from the confinements of working and living in Hong Kong by leasing two apartments at Sea Ranch, a recreation resort located on Lantau Island, about 40 minutes' ferry ride from Hong Kong Island. Sea Ranch offers a variety of recreational facilities, away from the crowds and noise, and is available on a roster system to the Australian-based staff members of the Australian Consulate General.

Apartment living is, except in a few cases, the norm in Hong Kong. The apartments are usually quite spacious and well furnished and many offer splendid views. At present they are expensive to rent. The Australian Government owns a number and the majority of the staff of the Consulate are located at Repulse Bay, or adjacent suburbs, on the opposite side of Hong Kong island from the central business district, and about 40 minutes' drive from the Consulate.

The Tyrie family apartment is located in the Mid Levels, a residential area situated between the central business district and the exclusive peak district of Mount Victoria.

Ed Tyrie feels it is wise to invest in a secondhand motor car for the duration of a posting to get around, particularly to out-of-the-way shops and for pleasant exploring of the New Territories at week-ends.

Functions

A group called the Australian Association of Hong Kong encourages contact between Australian expatriates by organising a variety of functions including coffee mornings for spouses, barbecues, social functions for families and a monthly business group lunch. The Social Club at the Consulate offers a variety of activities and also runs the 'Wombat Hole', the bar at the Consulate which is

open for members and their guests. There are many clubs to join but they are usually very expensive and often have a waiting period.

Ed's assistant, Sandra, is very impressed with Hong Kong. But she wasn't always so.

'The first evening I arrived has remained quite vividly in my memory,' she said. 'There I was wondering what lay ahead of me for the next two years when as we approached Kai Tak Airport, I seriously thought I wouldn't have to worry! That approach is not for the faint hearted.

'That was just the first experience in what is proving to be one of the most interesting periods of my life,' she said.

'Given that there is a large European community resident in Hong Kong, we are spoilt by having English used widely throughout most organisations with whom we deal. I did make an attempt to learn a little Cantonese, but being a tonal language, it is quite difficult for my B flat voice to master.

'Still a few words here and there give the locals and taxi drivers a good giggle.

'It takes a while to adjust to the change in lifestyle,' she said. 'High-rise apartments, endless shops to explore (but not endless funds!), people and buildings as far as the eye can see, markets selling everything you can possibly imagine, and the extreme humidity.

'Most of the single staff choose to live in the Mid Levels. I am lucky enough to have a view of the harbour from my balcony, which to me, is the best sight in Hong Kong, especially at dusk.

'Already I have had visits from many relatives and friends, and for 'first-time visitors,' Hong Kong is quite an eye opener. I always find something new when I am playing 'tour guide' to guests.

'With just two in the office, I feel quite involved in the myriad of inquiries that we receive. We are certainly kept busy but I find it a rewarding experience.'

Billabong P.D.

