

TOKKIE SMITH AND THE COLOUR OF RUGBY

Preview

Chapter 1 - The Gloucester Bar

The Hong Kong rugby establishment had retaken the top floor bar of the Gloucester Hotel from the Japanese army at the end of the Second World War.

During the occupation, the hotel in central Hong Kong had been the abode of the feared and deadly Japanese officers. The bar boys, afraid of evil spirits, still claimed to hear screams after dark from the interrogation dungeons below.

None of this apparently bothered hotel manager Vernon Roberts, who had fought the Japanese through Burma and up Malaya with the fierce Ghurkhas and stayed on in the Crown Colony. It was Vernon and his influential friends Tokkie Smith was seeking.

He first strolled around Hong Kong towards the end of 1959. It was not like anything he had experienced. This was culture shock. He was accustomed to seeing mostly black people but suddenly he was totally surrounded by Chinese faces. The Cantonese language was loud and raucous. They all seemed to shout. The air was hot and humid, and had a distinctive Asian aroma. His clothes clung to his back. Traffic belched smoke everywhere, the green trams squeaked and clanged, and the ferries disgorged thousands of passengers in a continuous stream.

He found the saucy little bar girls to be a real novelty, but he needed to concentrate on finding work. The fellows suggested if he really intended to start a company he should go to the Gloucester and meet the older rigger crowd with the money. They could be found in Vernon Roberts' bar.

He strolled out of the lift into the realm of the Hong Kong establishment; a lair of the rugby elite that from that moment would dictate his very life. Totally assured, he went to the bar, ordered a San Mig and asked for Mr Roberts. Then he beamed and in a strong South African accent announced, "My name is Tokkie".