

Henry Marriott DCM – “Kid” Marriott
Private 5533, Henry Marriott 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters (Derbyshire Regiment)
Sapper Henry Marriott, Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps

Henry Marriott, also known as Harry Marriott, and, since his boxing days in Hong Kong in the early 1900s, “Kid” Marriott, was once a well known character in Hong Kong.

Henry Marriott was born in Nottingham, England in 1878. His father was John Marriott and his stepmother Selina Marriott (nee Wood). As of 1897 the family was living at 6 Gibraltar Place, Bellar Gate, Nottingham. His siblings are recorded as William, Florence, John, Frederick and Arthur. He first worked as a collier, and also served in the Militia in the 4th Battalion Derbyshire Regiment.

On 5th January 1897, he enlisted for short service in The Sherwood Foresters (Derbyshire Regiment). Private 5533, Henry Marriott, served in the 1st Battalion Derbyshire Regiment. The Battalion was stationed in Malta from September 1898 to November 1899, and then proceeded to South Africa arriving on 21st November 1899. During his service in South Africa he was awarded the Queen’s South Africa Medal, with the clasps “Cape Colony”, “Orange Free State” and “Transvaal”, and the King’s South Africa Medal with the clasps “South Africa 1901” and “South Africa 1902”. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for actions on a date and location as yet unknown. The book “Gallantry Awards of the Sherwood Foresters” [Published by the Museum of the Mercian Regiment] records that, “This man undoubtedly saved other men from being taken prisoner. He, being in the hands of the Boers, was threatened with being shot if he gave any signal to his own men who were approaching, but he stood up and warned his party till pulled down by the Boers”. The award was Gazetted on 31 October 1902.

The Battalion left South Africa and arrived in Hong Kong on 8th September 1902, and he appears to have served with the Battalion until April 1904. He transferred to the reserve list until 4th January 1909.

It seems likely he took the opportunity to leave the military to take up a position in the Naval Dockyard Police around 1904, but his date of joining is not known. He soon became active in boxing in the Colony, taking part in bouts at the City Hall. In September 1911, he fought “Iron” Bux for the “Bantam Championship of the Orient”, over 15 rounds at the Victoria Skating Rink. He lost in the tenth round after receiving a several head blows from the Indian, which left him unable to fight on.

On the morning of 22nd January 1918, an incident took place in Gresson Street, Wanchai during which five Hong Kong Police officers were shot dead by an armed gang. Henry Marriott, then a Sergeant in the Naval Dockyard Police, was at home with his wife in St. Francis Street on the southern side of Queen’s Road East. Alerted to the pursuit of the culprits, he grabbed his service rifle and ran down into the street. He was immediately confronted by an escaping suspect who opened fire at him at point blank range, the bullet narrowly missing its target. Marriott chased the fugitive up the hillside and brought the man down with a shot from his rifle, killing him.

On 8th May 1918, a ceremony was held at Central Police Station in Kid Marriott’s honour, hosted by the Captain Superintendent of Police, Mr. Messer. He was presented with a gold watch

and chain with a medal attached. The inscription read “Presented to H. Marriott by the Community and members of the Police of Hong Kong for his courageous conduct in the Gresson Street Affair on 22nd January 1918”.

Marriott was also a boxing instructor at Queen’s College. On 14th July 1922 a poem, apparently composed by one of his students, appeared in the China Mail.

Our Boxing Instructor

See him with his novices happy as a king,
Teaching them the mysteries of the fistic ring,
Straight right, straight left, upper cut and all,
Solar plexus, infighting, punching at the ball
Head work, foot work, twisting like an eel,
Pirouetting on his toe, balanced on his heel,
Feigning, ducking, high guard and low,
Using every muscle from head to the toe.
Hear him tell the wondrous things his former pupils did.
Oh you matchless Marriott! Oh you priceless “Kid”!

It seems that Marriott retired from the Naval Dockyard Police around 1923, and became a supervisor of the Kowloon Dock Company. On 10th November 1929, he became involved in another unusual incident. Part of his work was to supervise the Indian watchmen. Whilst he was checking watchman Ojagar Singh, a revolver discharged in uncertain circumstances, and the watchman was fatally injured. Kid Marriott was charged with manslaughter, but was subsequently acquitted without the defence giving evidence.

Kid Marriott is buried in Stanley Military Cemetery, his headstone being one of the hand carved kerbstones erected by the internees of Stanley Internment Camp, in the absence of manufactured headstones. The inscription, painted over in black paint, on the headstone now reads “H. MARRIOTT (KID) 13.8.1942 AGED 62”. But in CWGC records he is listed as Sapper Henry Marriott, Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, age 60, dying on 14.2.1942. (Which appears to be the correct date). It is thought that he was seriously ill before the Japanese invasion in December 1941, and may have died in a civilian hospital, believed to be the Matilda Hospital on the Peak, without taking part in the hostilities, possibly explaining why his body was buried in the civilian internment camp.

Kid Marriott was married to Ida Taylor. They had two daughters, Amy Mabel, born in Hong Kong in 1924, and Ida Rose Betty. His wife and daughters were evacuated to Australia in 1941, and settled in Bondi, New South Wales, where his family still live.

Richard Morgan
August 2017

Note: Henry Marriott’s brother, Frederick Marriott, Private 3757, 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters, died on 27 January 1917, aged 17, and is remembered on Le Touret Memorial. (Parents John and Selena (sic) Marriott of 3 Providence Court, Millstone Lane, Nottingham.)