

## **Assembly 15 September 2008**

### **A Leader in Our Midst**

This morning I will talk about leadership.

On the walls in this assembly hall are the photographs of ten men; the former principals of our College. The photograph in the centre on the left side of the hall is that of Colonel Evan Stewart. You will notice that he is wearing a military uniform unlike all the principals before him who are wearing clerical robes. Apart from being the Principal of our school, Colonel Stewart was also a reservist (volunteer) in the Army and served Hong Kong with great distinction and honour.

Evan Stewart was born in 1892, the seventh child of the Rev. and Mrs. Stewart who were originally from Ireland but for many years had been missionaries in China. His family lived in Fukien Province where his parents conducted their work for the church. When he was only three years old, however, his parents, one of his brothers and one of his sisters, and their nursemaid, were chopped to death by a group of bandits (insurgents) who were opposed to foreigners in their district. Evan survived the attack and was taken back to Ireland to live with his aunt and uncle.

Evan Stewart was educated at Wellington College, one of England's leading boarding school, where he excelled in Mathematics and History. He was also a talented runner and won the English Schoolboys Championship for the 100 yards sprint. In 1910 he came to Hong Kong to teach at St. Paul's College at the invitation of his older brother, Arthur, who was the Principal. He did not stay long, however, and returned to Ireland to attend Trinity College in Dublin. It was not long before the First World War broke out and Evan joined the Army and served in France. He became a Captain and then acting Major but was wounded twice while fighting in the trenches.

Evan Stewart returned to Hong Kong in 1920 to continue his teaching career at St. Paul's College. In time he married Dorothy Lander, the youngest daughter of Bishop Lander, the sixth Principal of our College (his photograph is at the back of the hall on the left side) and they had one son, Michael. When his brother Arthur retired in 1930, Evan Stewart became the eighth principal of St. Paul's

The College went from strength to strength under the leadership of Evan Stewart. Our doors were abruptly closed, however, when the Japanese military invaded Hong Kong in December 1941. Mrs. Stewart and her son, Michael, had already been evacuated to Sydney in the months before the Japanese invasion. Evan Stewart remained and was placed in command of the Number Three Machine Gun Company of the Hong Kong Volunteers Defense Corps. His Company was in action on Stonecutters Island and later charged with the defense of Wong Nei Chong Gap. The fighting at Wong Nei Chong was one of the bloodiest in the fight for Hong Kong. Major Stewart's Company was eventually overrun by a Japanese regiment and on Christmas Day 1941, Hong Kong fell to the Japanese. Evan Stewart was imprisoned at the Prisoner of War (POW) camp in

Kowloon for the remainder of the war.

Three teachers and nine Old Boys took part in the fierce battle to defend Hong Kong. Five of the Old Boys fought bravely and gave their lives at Jardine's Lookout. "Other alumni worked as translators for the Allied forces in China. Scouts of the 10<sup>th</sup> Hong Kong Group served in civil defense duties such as Air Raid Patrol (A.R.P.) Dispatch Corps and Food Controllers. After the fall of Hong Kong, they joined the Civil and Armed Services in Free China."\*

After the Japanese surrender in 1945, Evan Stewart was sent to England to recover from his wounds and the effects of more than three years imprisonment. He later returned to Hong Kong and reopened St. Paul's College in 1950 at this location in Bonham Road. In 1955, Colonel Stewart was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his leadership of the Hong Kong Regiment's Home Guard.

For the next eight years, Evan Stewart worked tirelessly for our school. He never fully recovered from his wounds and his time in prison, however, and suffered a stroke during a school assembly in October 1958. Two months after that stroke, Major Stewart died, aged 66 years.

It is 50 years ago this December that Major Stewart passed away. The College will be holding a special dinner here in the Hall in praise and celebration of the service of Evan Stewart. Many old boys from the 1950s will attend the dinner. But the Guest of Honour for the evening will be Colonel Michael Stewart, the son of Major Stewart, who you will remember was evacuated to Sydney with his mother before the Japanese invasion. Colonel Michael Stewart is coming to Hong Kong from England as our guest and will talk to us at an assembly in early December. It will be a great honour to have Michael Stewart visiting St. Paul's. Like his father, Michael Stewart was in the Army and served his country with distinction.

As a College, we are proud to have had a leader like Evan Stewart and we look forward to hearing more about his life and work when his son visits us in December. I hope that the story of Evan Stewart will inspire you to become a leader.

J R Kennard

\*from Devotion to Plurality: A Full History of St. Paul's College 1851-2001