

Colonel E. G. Stewart

26<sup>th</sup> September 2022

On Saturday before last, I was inundated with WhatsApp messages from alumni about an article published in the South China Morning Post Post Magazine. The title of the article is “Where Credit is Due” and it is about the anonymous writer of a book called *A Record of the Actions of The Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps in the Battle for Hong Kong: December 1941*. The book is a journalistic record of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps’ role in resisting the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong during WWII. The “anonymous” turns out to be Colonel E. G. Stewart. When the book was published, Colonel Stewart felt that credit should be given to the entire regiment, so he decided not to put his name down as the author of the book.

Who was Colonel E.G. Stewart? Colonel Stewart was the eighth Principal of St. Paul’s College, from 1930 to 1958. Because of his military training, besides being the Principal of St. Paul’s College, Colonel Stewart was also a major, commanding the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (香港義勇防衛軍) No. 3 (Machine-Gun) Company, first on Stonecutters Island, and later in the Wong Nei Chong Gap area when the Japanese invaded Hong Kong in 1941. His leadership and organisation led to the successful evacuation of Stonecutters while the regiment was under heavy fire. At Wong Nei Chong Gap, he continued to command his company, although he was wounded early in the fighting. After Hong Kong’s surrender on Christmas Day 1941, he was a prisoner of war in the Argyle Street Camp. Because of malnutrition and the lack of proper treatment to his wounds, he was left with a permanent injury affecting his walking.

After this, Colonel Stewart continued to play a pivotal role in the development of the College. He was sent back to the UK at the end of the war with severe wounds and the College was closed during the Japanese occupation. For three years after the war, St. Paul's College was merged with St. Paul's Girls' School. When Colonel Stewart returned to Hong Kong in 1947, it was him who won the support of the alumni for the College to regain its identity as a boys' school. He reopened St. Paul's College in 1950. Taking possession of the present site on Bonham Road allowed Colonel Evan Stewart, alumni, teachers, and students to start a new page in the history of the College. That is perhaps also why our College song starts with "Once again we here foregather". It is 'once again' because we had been denied that chance before.

Why am I telling you the story of Colonel E.G. Stewart? The story is remarkable if you know something more about his family history. Evan George Stewart was born into an Irish family in the UK. His parents, Robert and Louisa Stewart, were missionaries who went to present day Fukien Province to preach the Gospel to Chinese people in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Evan was the seventh of eight children, most of whom were born in China.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1895, when Evan was about three years old, the Stewart family was brutally attacked by xenophobic insurgents in Fukien. Evan's parents, the housekeeper, and two of his siblings - babies Hilda and Herbert - were killed, and their house was razed. One of the siblings, Kathleen, managed to rescue his older sister Mildred and her baby brother Evan. Eventually, they were sent back to Ireland where all the siblings were brought up by their various uncles and aunts there in Ireland.

What is truly amazing is that all six surviving siblings of the Stewart family eventually came back to China and Hong Kong, one by one, to continue the “unfinished business” of their parents - founding schools, hospitals and churches for the people of Hong Kong and China. The eldest, Arthur Dudley Stewart was ordained, and went on to become the 7<sup>th</sup> Principal of St. Paul’s College, and the Vicar of St. Paul’s Church. Kathleen Stewart wanted to provide education for girls and set up St. Paul’s Girls’ School and later married Canon Ernest Martin who became the Principal of St. Stephen’s College. Philip Stewart worked in St. Stephen’s College as a medical officer. Evan Stewart succeeded his eldest brother, becoming the 8<sup>th</sup> Principal of the College. Meanwhile, James and Mildred Stewart ended up in Sichuan (Szechuan) province—James involved with the University of Western China and Mildred in a school.

If you want to know more about stories of the Stewart family, you can read this carefully-researched book called “Children of Massacre” by Professor Robert and Linda Banks. I will return this copy to the library today. I hope you will be inspired and encouraged by these stories of selflessness, forgiveness, dedicated service, unconditional love, and devotion.

When I read the stories of the Stewart family, I cannot help but think of the bible verse from Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" ([Isaiah 55:8-9](#)). When Robert and Louisa Stewart were cut short in their prime, one would naturally have thought that their missionary work had come to an abrupt and dismal end. One would have complained why God allowed all their good work to come to such a tragic waste. Yet, when

we take a much longer perspective, we can see that, - despite what had happened to their parents - all their siblings multiplied their parents' work ten times or even a hundred times over. God works in mysterious ways, and the way God weaves remarkable events in and through our lives is often beyond our understanding.

To end this assembly, I would like to share with you the lyrics of a modern hymn that I like:

In His time, in His time  
He makes all things beautiful  
In His time

Lord please show me every day  
As you're teaching me your way  
That you do just what you say  
In your time

Dennis Yuen