



The Gateway

Hong Kong Lasallian Family Bulletin

June 2013

Forty Seventh Issue

Welcome

We are approaching the end of the academic year and final exams are in full swing. In the very hot and humid weather, we wonder how students survived in the 'good old days.' We are thankful for air-conditioned halls now.

Our Brother of the Month was a stalwart, a true blue, as it were, among the Brothers. Peter seemed to evoke universal respect and it was a pleasure to get to know him. His memory is still green in both Hong Kong and Malaysia.



The Feast of St La Salle was well celebrated. Some schools have a 'Founder's Week', with a series of religious and spiritual activities. All school communities are reminded that they are in the holy presence of God. Around this time, we also have the taking of First Communion and Confirmation.

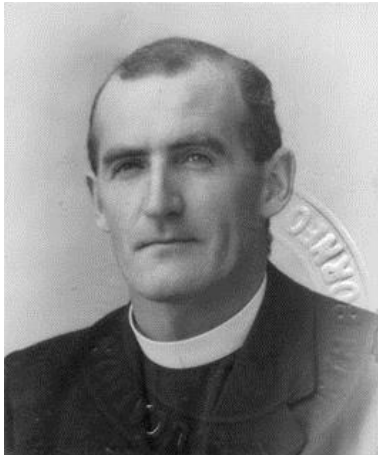
This issue's Oriental Flavour has a Japanese twist. 'The Woman in the Dunes' as well as the life of its author makes for interesting reading. By the way, it is also interesting to note that some De La Salle Brothers were teaching in Moukden/Shengyang at the time.

A number of our 'old boys' gave their lives in the last World War in the defence of freedom. They are not forgotten, as the article on Paying Respects illustrates.

June is upon us. May the unconditional love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus rest on all of us.



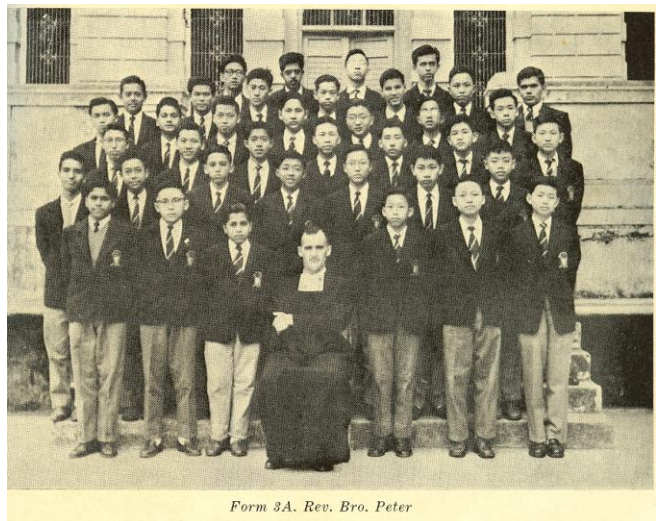
Brother of the Month Brother Peter Phelan 1934-2010



Richard Phelan was born in 1934 into a farming family in Kilmacow, Co Kilkenny, Ireland, a family of 3 boys and 4 girls. They were well brought up in the faith of the Catholic Church. Richard received his primary education at the local St Senan's Boys' School, and at the early age of 14 was recruited to join the De La Salle Brothers, going first to the Juvenate in Mallow, Co Cork. This was in September 1948. A year later he progressed to the Juniorate in Castletown, Co Laois and a year later entered the Novitiate, where he was given the religious name Brother Peter. While spiritual formation was the focus, there was time for games and Brother Peter was a tough, no-nonsense defender, especially in the Irish game of hurling.

At the end of the Novitiate year he made his first vows and with 6 others volunteered to go on the missions to the Far East. For this, British teaching qualifications were needed, so the young missionaries were sent to Kintbury in England to sit for the GCE Oxford Exam which Brother Peter passed ahead of time in 1952. Two years later he had graduated as a teacher from St Mary's Training College, Strawberry Hill, London. Then after a short holiday home he set sail in August 1954, with 6 other young Brothers, on the ship called the Felix Roussel from Marseilles, on the 3 weeks journey to the Far East. While the others finished their journey at Singapore, Peter continued on to the teeming city of Hong Kong, where he was to teach at St Joseph's College for the next 6 years.

Brother Peter recalls: "I was now setting out alone into the unknown. I did not know anybody in Hong Kong. The ship docked on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong harbour at 4.00pm on Tuesday 28th September. It was a beautiful sunny evening. But there was nobody to meet me. I decided to wait in the expectation that a Brother might come. At 6.00pm a Brother arrived. He introduced himself as Brother Raphael." Later it was discovered that Brother Raphael had in fact been waiting at 2.00pm but was told the ship would not arrive until 6.00pm. Brother Raphael Egan was to be his first Principal followed by Brother Brendan Dunne. Brother Peter took these two Brothers as his mentors all through life.

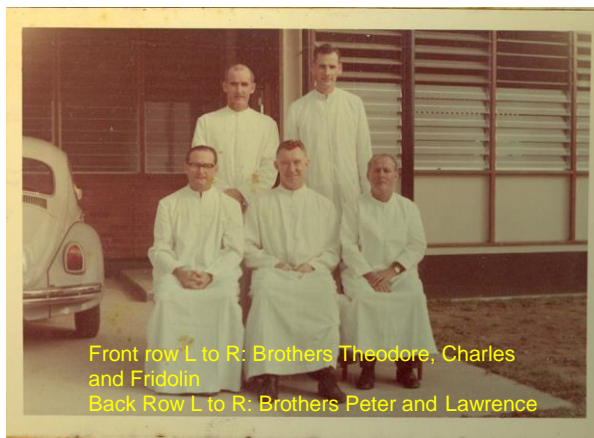


He was put teaching Form 1A, a cosmopolitan class. The pupils were Portuguese, Indian, Eurasian, English, French, Filipinos and Chinese. He continues: "I started teaching on Monday,

3rd October 1954. It was a new environment for me. I spent a lot of time preparing the lessons I would teach. Once a week I presented my 'Lesson Notes' to the Principal for checking and for his signature. I was very interested in teaching and in the progress of the students. Much time at the weekend was spent marking and checking the work of the students." After teaching in Form 1 he was promoted to Form 2 and then to Form 3.

Because of his physical build and receding hairline, Brother Peter looked older than he really was. The boys regarded him as somewhat of a disciplinarian, but not of the shouting, ranting type. He would speak in a measured tone of voice and easily bring everything under control. As one pupil of the time puts it: "I must confess that at the time we all thought that we had drawn the short straw to have had Brother Peter as Class Teacher. He was a strict, no-nonsense teacher. But looking back, I now consider him as the best thing that ever happened to us. If there was one teacher who succeeded in instilling the fear of God in us in a religious sense, it was Brother Peter. May God bless him and keep him."

After 6 years teaching he was allowed on home leave for the first time in the summer of 1960. En route, he stopped at Rome to take in the sights, including St Peter's Basilica, St Paul's outside the Walls and the Catacombs. Then it was on to London, to Dublin and home where he was delighted to meet up with his family and friends again. Besides home leave, he had been instructed to take a degree course in University College, Dublin. In early October he signed up for his degree as a student of Economics, Geography and English. He stayed at De La Salle University Hall, a residence for student Brothers as well as lay students. Brother Peter was a good, methodical student and followed the courses conscientiously. He also found time for games, for cycling and for visits to places of educational interest. By the summer of 1963, armed with a BA degree, he was ready to return to Hong Kong.



After a few weeks in Hong Kong, however, he was posted to La Salle Secondary School, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia 'the Land below the Wind', on the great island of Borneo, a much less developed area than Hong Kong. Peter was to remain in Sabah for the rest of his life, in what truly became his second, or probably his first home. He first taught at La Salle School in Kota Kinabalu for 17 years, eight of them as Senior Assistant. His main subjects were Geography and Religion. A serving teacher at the time remembers how the naughty

boys were afraid of Brother Peter and nicknamed him 'Kojak', the bald-headed police officer who always got his man. While demanding discipline, Brother Peter was also very compassionate and took great care of his students.

He was Scout Master and frequently brought students on field trips, including climbing the great Mount Kinabalu. Both parents and students could rest secure when he was in

charge. He would use every trip or outing to make a study of the native traditions and culture for which he held a deep respect. In fact he wrote a number of books and articles on the cultural and legal traditions of Sabah for which he received a number of public awards.

One of Brother Peter's driving forces in life was a passionate desire to help the weaker students. In 1980 he was given greater opportunities for doing just that when he was posted as Principal to St Martin's Secondary School, Tambunan. Nearly all the children came from a rural setting and he gave his energy and passion towards ensuring that they had the same opportunity in education as those in the towns. To this end he introduced a programme called 'no pupil is left behind.' It was a programme specifically aimed to help the weak and average students.

As a teacher and headmaster Peter was totally committed to his students and his work. He was a very capable teacher and administrator, always systematic and thorough in his own quiet and unobtrusive way. Perhaps the most eloquent expression of the great esteem and respect in which he was held by his past pupils was the generous financial and moral support they continued to give him over the past 20 years for his dream rural mission at remote Nabawan. There were only some wooden shacks there when he arrived, but with Peter's commitment and his past pupils' support, these had been replaced by a mini education complex by the time he left.

Despite his large workload, he also found time to delve into one of his favourite interests, a study of the history, archaeology and general culture of the native tribes of Sabah. He kept copious notes and eventually he was able to become the author of a number of books and journal articles. He had a particular interest in standing stones. Brother Phelan was a life-long student and he was the recipient of the 1980s Barwis Award for Far Eastern Studies in London.



Brother Peter did not take home leave frequently. En route to one such visit, in 1990, he came through Hong Kong and stayed in St Joseph's College. He met some of his old boys and paid a special visit to St Joseph's Primary School where his former student, Mr Yung Ying Cheuk, was Headmaster. Mr Yung took the opportunity to have Brother Peter distribute some prizes to the students. As can be seen from the photo, it was a very happy reunion and occasion.

Like all government servants in Malaysia, Peter was obliged to retire from formal teaching at the age of 55. He could then have opted for more leisurely part-time work in private education or in parish life, in the relative comfort of an urban setting. But Peter's heart was elsewhere and it was not in his nature to take things easy. By 1991 he had come to realise that there was an acute shortage of living accommodation for poor and

needy village students in the interior of Sabah. They were cut off from the mainstream of life. He wanted to give them a better chance to succeed. This became his dream for the rest of his life.



He decided to establish a student hostel in a remote rural area called Nabawan. He was allowed the use of a few shacks and decided that this was a start. The place was accessible only by a day's journey along earthen, timber-logging, unsealed 'roads'. Because of poverty, long distances and lack of transport facilities many students could not attend the only government secondary school in the area. Gradually Peter set up a hostel called Asrama Butitin (Star) where poor boys and girls from remote villages were provided with accommodation, a simple but healthy diet, free tuition and training in basic skills, as well as a sense of self-esteem and confidence, as they attended the nearby school. Life was simple and basic with none of the amenities and comforts of modern urban living. Here Peter, together with local Brothers, gave totally of himself for the past 20 years. Despite the deprivation and challenges, here he was happy. He would go over the day's lessons with the students and prepare them for what was to come. His close friend, Brother Egbertus, humourously recalls how it was somewhat of a battle to convince Brother Peter to get internet access for the house. But when he did agree, he never looked back.

The Nabawan concept was to provide a bridge of opportunity for many who were without hope; that bridge was steadfast and was crossed by many who now have grateful memories. Those who crossed that bridge found in Brother Peter a rock of common sense and a rock of faith.

Like all true missionaries Peter was respectfully conscious that God was there before him. There was in him no semblance of arrogance, superiority or condescension. He was a deeply religious man, in a broad, inclusive and holistic way and in the absence of a full time priest he often conducted religious services and ministered to the people's spiritual needs. He presided over baptisms and funerals and conducted prayer services where he would distribute Communion. These services were much appreciated by the people. One old boy has this special memory: "When I think of Brother Peter I think of him praying the Angelus with us faithfully at 12 o'clock. When I was with him in Nabawan, we happened to be in a church there one day at 12 noon and I asked him to lead the Angelus. I said that I would not be cheated out of reliving the Angelus with him."



He must have felt that time was running out because in September of 2009 he made a point of paying a nostalgic visit to St Joseph's College, Hong Kong, partly to attend the 50th anniversary gathering of the Class of 1959. As it turned out, it was to be his final farewell to Hong Kong. Brothers Alphonsus Breen and Thomas Favier take up the story: "At a reunion with his former students here in Hong Kong recently, Brother Peter was asked to give a speech. In typical fashion he had written it all out first in beautiful handwriting. In a reference to his reputation as a good disciplinarian he spoke the following words: 'Our Holy Founder, St John Baptist de La Salle told us to treat all our pupils equally.' With a typical smile he concluded: 'That's why I treated you all equally badly!'"

At this reunion, his former students saw him in a new light. Here is how they described their feelings: "The final speech of the night was reserved for the once physically imposing figure of Brother Peter Phelan, FSC, a rookie Lasallian Brother of 20, using Form 1A as his first teaching experience with strict disciplinary measures. Nevertheless, we took it on the chin—no pain, no gain; no complain, either! Now Brother Peter has shrunk considerably in his advancing years, not much taller than some of us. He is much more mellow, humourous and in many ways very likeable."

Brother Peter had fought a running battle with skin cancer for almost 30 years and it was by sheer will-power and self-discipline that he kept it at bay for so long. The cancer gradually moved deeper to the nerves. He had undergone treatment in London, Malaysia and Singapore. Implacably, the disease had taken hold and there were outbreaks every so often which became more and more difficult to control. There would be eruptions on his head, face, neck, hands and legs. He was finally introduced to an organic supplementary food called Melilea and gave it a try for a month or two, taking no other food and losing weight rapidly. At the same time he continued his work in the hostel without complaint.

By January 1910 it became obvious that he could not continue. All options had been exhausted and he was too weak to carry on. He had become a pale shadow of his former self, mere skin and bone. He agreed to return to Ireland, to Miguel House, a nursing

home for ailing Brothers. It was clearly heart-breaking for him to leave his beloved Sabah. When the time of departure came, many of his students, former students and friends were in tears. He was a truly detached missionary - in his room all his worldly possessions could fit on a chair.



On the 18th February 2010, Brother Thomas Lavin accompanied Brother Peter on his final journey to Ireland and to Miguel House. The Brothers there were somewhat shocked at the deterioration in his condition but after some days he seemed to be improving. Nobody expected the end would come so soon but come it did on the 27th February. The funeral took place in Castletown on the 2nd March 2012. A large congregation of family and friends attended the funeral Mass, including his brother Jim and sisters Mary Joe, Liz, Ann and Sister Ita.

Brother Peter's departure and sudden death left a deep void in the hearts of his friends in Sabah. News of his passing spread like wildfire and the 'Sabah Daily Express' paid him eloquent tribute, concluding by saying: "Many of his students and associates will remember him as a great and dedicated teacher, a tireless worker and as a friend who cared. He touched us all in his own unique way". In recognition of his heroic work Peter would have been offered various public awards or titles, but he always avoided the limelight, shunning all praise and adulation. He is reported to have said that the only letters he ever wanted after his name were FSC and RIP!

An old friend, Brother Columba Gleeson, delivered a touching and inspiring homily at the funeral Mass and concluded with these few lines from the poet, Patrick Kavanagh:

**"This time when birds are singing
Maybe I'll be sad no more.
One I've waited aeons for
May be waiting at my door".**

God Bless,
Peter Phelan



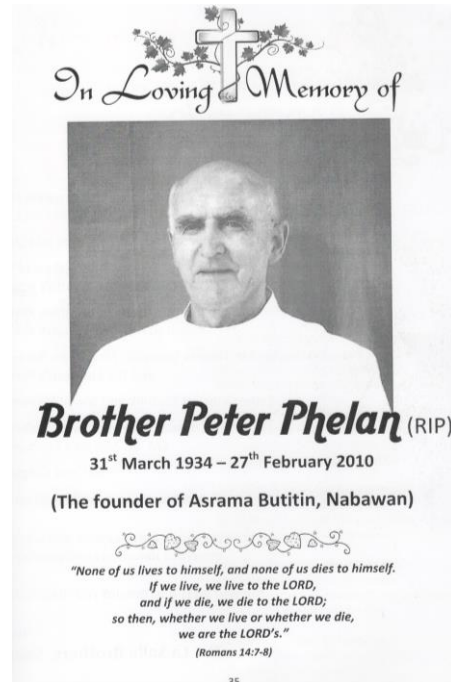
Unexpectedly, a hand-written poem by Brother Peter himself, was discovered in his bedroom desk drawer, his final poignant message. The title is 'Miss me but let me go.'

When I come to the end of the road,
And the sun has set for me,
I want no rites in a gloom-filled room,
Why cry for a soul set free?

Miss me a little but not too long,
And not with your head bowed low,
Remember the love that we once shared,
Miss me but let me go.

For this is a journey we all must take,
And each must go alone,
It's all a part of the Master's plan,
A step on the road to home.

When you are lonely and sick at heart,
Go to the friends we know,
And bury your sorrow in doing good deeds,
Miss me but let me go.



Postings of Brother Peter

Mallow, Co Cork, Ireland	Juvenate	1948-1949
Castletown, Co Laois, Ireland	Juniorate	1949-1950
Castletown, Co Laois, Ireland	Novitiate	1950-1951
Kintbury, Berkshire, England	Scholasticate	1951-1952
St Mary's, Strawberry Hill, London	Training College	1952-1954
St Joseph's College, Hong Kong	Teaching	1954-1960
University College, Dublin, Ireland	Degree	1960-1963
La Salle Secondary School, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	Teaching	1963-1980
St Martin's School, Tambunan, Sabah	Principal	1980-1987
Keningau Public School, Sabah	Teaching	1988-1990
Nabawan, Sabah	Student Hostel	1991-2010
Miguel House, Castletown, Co Laois, Ireland	Final Days	2010

Family Updates

Lasallian Pilgrimages

For the first time in our history, local Lasallian Pilgrimages are being opened up to our students. They are the inspiration of Brother Jeffrey Chan and basically consist of visiting the Brothers' communities as well as the chapels in a number of our schools. Such visits help to bring alive our Lasallian invocation 'Let us remember we are in the holy presence of God.' They are also a good way of reminding our students of the life of Jesus and of St La Salle.



Lasallian Forum

Each year, La Salle College, through its Student Association, invites an eminent member of society to address the boys and give them a chance of asking questions. The Guest this year was the President and Vice Chancellor of the Chinese university of Hong Kong, Professor Joseph Jao-yiu Sung, one of the heroes of the battle against SARS. The Professor spoke to the topic of 'Nurturing Talent for the 21st Century'. His presentation was topical, interesting and enlightening. He stressed the importance of hard work, inquisitiveness, broadmindedness and morality and recommended reading 'What I wish I knew when I was 20'. After the talk, the students asked a number of very good questions.



Old Boys Get Together

It is an annual custom for the La Salle College Old Boys Executive Committee and the Past Presidents of the Association to gather for dinner. This is one way of bridging the generations and fostering continuity of heritage. When the most recent gathering was held on the 10th May 2013, the elder statesman was a solid 90 year old while the youngest was in his twenties. But the ties that bind were much in evidence and a lovely atmosphere prevailed.



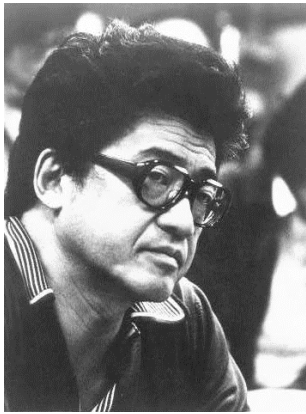
Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College Variety Show 2013

An annual highlight of the Chan Sui Ki College Student Association is the Variety Show which was held successfully on 18th May. With support from teachers, parents, old boys and students, more than 350 tickets were sold for the show. The show consisted of various performances including dances, band shows, solos and choruses. The atmosphere was warm and exciting. Our supervisor, principal, school managers, representatives of the Old Boys Foundation and Parent-Teacher Association came to support and watch the show. The whole audience had a wonderful night.



Oriental Flavour

Kobo Abe and *The Woman in the Dunes*



Kobo Abe, (1924-1993), stands out dramatically from his contemporaries in post-war Japanese literature. Abe was a writer, playwright, photographer and an inventor. He has been often compared to Kafka, Poe, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche.

His works bear no resemblance to the subjective, ultra-realistic and autobiographical style that characterizes a great deal of post-war Japanese literature. The reason for this probably lies in his relatively unique upbringing. Abe grew up in Mukden, (present day Shenyang), Manchuria. His father was a physician who taught at a local medical college. Abe returned to Japan in 1941 and began studies at Tokyo Imperial University in 1943. In 1944, when he realised that Japan would lose the war, he forged a medical certificate to get back to Manchuria. But Japan's defeat meant the end of its Manchurian Colony.

The ensuing disorder near the end of 1946 found Abe's father and family wandering Manchuria attempting to get back to Japan, but the father died from cholera. Abe survived the anarchic collapse of the de facto Japanese colony and was repatriated. He returned to university, supporting himself by selling pickles and doing various odd jobs available at the postwar period. In 1948, Abe graduated from medical school but did not become a doctor (the rumour was that he graduated only because he promised never to practise medicine). Instead he became a writer. In 1951, Abe received the most important Japanese literary prize, the Akutagawa Award, for his novel *The Crime of Mr. S. Karuma*. The work was based on the life of his best friend, Kanayama Tokio, who had run away from home and died in the Manchurian desert. In 1960 his novel *The Woman in the Dunes*, which has been translated into 20 languages, won the Yomiuri Prize for Literature. It was made into a film by Hiroshi Teshigahara in 1963 and won the jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

The Woman in the Dunes

Abe's most celebrated novel tells the story of Niki Jumpei, a teacher and an amateur entomologist. One day, he went to a remote place that was full of sand dunes with hopes of identifying a rare sand beetle. He missed the last bus. Night fell and the villagers offered him shelter in a ramshackle house at the bottom of a funnel-shaped pit of sand. Descent was possible only by means of a rope ladder. The



occupant of the house, a young woman, spent most of the night shovelling sand into buckets, which were then raised by the villagers: her house was one of the bulwarks preventing the village being swallowed by the advancing sand dunes. When Niki awoke, he found the rope ladder was gone. His attempt to climb out of the pit failed repeatedly, and he came to realize, first with incredulity, then outrage, then fear, that he had been tricked. He was trapped and tasked with shoveling back the ever-advancing sand dunes that threatened to destroy the village.



Niki planned his escape a number of times, thinking of ways in which he could outsmart those around him — from pretending to be sick, to tying the woman up, to eventually creating his own rope and pulling himself out of the dune, only to be brought back by the villagers after having been chased by wild dogs and falling into a giant pit of quicksand. The man learned quickly that if he wanted to receive his share of water and thus survive, he must learn to cooperate.



"Doesn't it fill you with emptiness? Are we shoveling to survive or surviving to shovel?" he once asked the woman. The woman had no answer to give him. She had grown complacent with her situation, as is common in life, and even the idea of wanting to escape or crave something greater or higher, simply does not occur to her. Surprisingly, by the end of the tale, Niki is not in any rush to escape, even though the villagers had loosened the watch on him, thinking he had completely committed to his fate. Perhaps he had found

his meaning of life in the sand dunes where he was working on a way of getting water from under the sand, or perhaps he has come to accept his new identity, finding the answer to his own question: "Are you shoveling to survive, or surviving to shovel?" To stay or not has become his own choice!

At times in life, we may find ourselves trapped and isolated, or feeling forced to do the same, meaningless task day after day. Abe provides two solutions. One is to act like the woman, never asking why 'you' are chosen but accepting and finishing the task you are assigned. Or you can fight your fate like the man in the story, until you think you know the answer.

Paying Respects

A guided visit for Primary 4 students of La Salle Primary School to Wong Nai Chung Gap Heritage Trail and Stanley Military Cemetery ~ 30th April 2013.

Mrs. Betty Ho, Principal of La Salle Primary School, heard about the La Salle College Old Boys' Association Heritage Subcommittee's research into the school's war time history and stories of bravery of our war dead. So, the School together with the La Salle Primary School Parent Teacher Association approached members of the Subcommittee, inviting us to organise a day trip for all Primary 4 students to the Wong Nai Chung Gap Historic Trail, and the Military Cemetery. To guide 200 students required significantly more planning and resources than a one-off guided tour of 15 to 20 adult participants. Fortunately, over the past few years the Subcommittee had slowly gathered a group of old boys who shared the same passion towards the school's heritage, and a team of resourceful supporters was on hand.



The group first carried out two site visits, one with Mrs Ho and some teachers. There we carefully planned how to accommodate the needs of the students, from where to have breaks, take lunch, answer nature's call, to seemingly simple matters like crossing the road. Several team meetings ensued, where the team worked out the details for the morning presentation to the students, preparing a slide show, and editing suitable war time documentary clips etc.

Throughout a very rainy April, the school tried several times to fix a date for the outing, but the date had to be postponed time and again. Towards the end of April, the school decided to proceed with the outing on 30th April, even though the forecast was for some rain patches.

On the day, the event started with a morning briefing of the boys, and with the old boys giving the students a brief overview of Hong Kong in the 1940s, the Japanese attacks, the defence bodies in Hong Kong, including the Volunteer Defence Corps where St Joseph's College and La Salle College old boys and teachers served. We showed the boys the war medals awarded to old boy Henry Ma (RIP) and also a real Japanese bayonet. Then the six classes, each headed by one old boy, and several parents and a

teacher, were split into half, Classes A, B and C covered the Historic Trail first, while Classes D, E and F visited Stanley Military Cemetery.

The Historic Trail consisted of several ruins, including an ammunition depot, an Anti-Aircraft Gun position, pillboxes, bunkers which were the headquarters of a Canadian Brigade, who at the time had newly arrived in Hong Kong, a mere month before the attacks. The students laid flowers in the areas where we knew some of our old boys were killed. The A, B and C classes completed this section of the walk within two hours. The boys then had a brief picnic lunch, and soon boarded the school buses to make their way to Stanley to pay respects at the graves of our war dead Lasallians. Classes D, E and F visited the two sites in reverse order.

The classes returned to La Salle Primary School by around 2:30 pm for school dismissal. The group was very blessed in that thick clouds and heavy rain arrived just as the boys were safe on the buses or were already back at school.

Without exception, the boys who took part told the old boys how much they enjoyed the opportunity to learn something different, and how they appreciated the bravery and the ultimate sacrifice offered by their seniors in La Salle.



There were some touching moments during the walk. One was that the boys were extremely enthusiastic to take part in the activities of the walk, from being leader of the pack in the hills, to offering flowers at various points along the trail and in the cemetery, and to lead the prayers at the end of the cemetery visit. One class even broke into singing “Boys of courage, boys of daring...” after the prayers, going the full length of the school song in honour of our war dead.

The day must have been a sweet one for the souls of the war-dead Lasallians, hearing their own school song sung by young Lasallians at their graves. The lyrics were most fitting for their ultimate sacrifice in defence of Hong Kong:

Boys of courage, boys of daring,
Full of manliness and will;
Spirit nought for danger caring,
Hearts to conquer every ill.

Our Lasallian war-dead are far from being forgotten. The Primary School hopes to offer this programme to all Primary 4 boys annually going forward.

Photos of the Month



Brother Jeffrey Chan midst a sea of heads – Chong Gene Hang College



Brother Thomas Lavin's 70th.



The smiles have it – Chan Sui Ki La Salle) Primary School



Budding photographers from La Salle Primary School