

OBITUARY

Fr. Patrick J. Cunningham, S. J.

Fr. Cunningham wrote in advance to let us know that he would be coming here from Singapore on CPA on the Dragon Boat-race Day, June 15. We were not expecting him by any special hour; but as we were listening that evening to the radio, we pricked up our ears with surprise and alarm at the announcement that the CPA plane had crashed over Vietnam. Our prayers were that he might not have taken that plane — but enquiries from us to the Company confirmed the fact that he was a passenger. The unexpectedness of the tragedy stunned us; we realised that we and the school had lost a very dear friend, and a somewhat colourful character.

It is too formal and cold for me, a confrere who knew him well after our many years together in the school, to refer to him as 'Fr. Cunningham'. Although this account of him is to appear for the boys' eyes in the School annual, I'd prefer to call him by the name we all knew him by — PJ, his initials. These initials conjured up the image of efficiency personified, of one who would get you whatever you asked for, if it existed, and who would create it, if it didn't — but you would get it; it was an image of one with a most respective memory that caught and held information over a vast area of knowledge; and an image of one utterly unselfish and self-sacrificing in his readiness to help others; he would do **anything** for you. Add to these fine qualities a dedicated sense of duty, an optimistic cheerfulness, and an 'unsinkability' that always brought him floating to the surface from deep seas of disappointment or failure, and you will have an idea of what 'PJ' meant to us. In his first year (1954) here, there is a photo of him in the Shield; he is in Scout uniform; his arms are folded, and, with eagle eye, he is looking into the distance. The caption of the photo is:

'Everything's under control.' That summed him up from the viewpoint of efficiency; later on, when he was organising a play or a scout display or a visit to a battleship, we would ask him if 'Everything's under control', and he would laugh, knowing that the question was both a tribute and a mini-legpull.

I don't know what he was like as a teacher — but his theory of education was that this is not so much getting knowledge into boys as getting out of them whatever natural talents they have. His ideal was to get them to develop, of themselves, all that they had — and this ideal explains why he was so interested in the Scouts and why he founded the Auto and the Aviation Clubs. As a schoolboy, he had not taken any interest in games; but anything that just purred, like an electrical machine, or moved on wheels, like cars and trains, or on wings, like aeroplanes, fascinated him and became a life-long hobby; there was very, very little he did not know about 'sparks'. This knowledge he was most ready to communicate to others; many boys in the school must be most grateful for the unselfish devotedness of his help and encouragement he gave them to develop their talents and skill. Trips to warships, flights in planes or visits to aircraft repair shops or to factories, involved a vast amount of correspondence and office-visiting to arrange, but he never spared himself when he could offer such thrills to the members of these clubs.

In encouraging the boys to develop their natural gifts, his aim was not only that the boys should enjoy themselves in the use of them, but that they should be ready to help others. He laid great stress on social duties, underlining repeatedly to the boys their responsibilities towards their neighbours. In the 1954 Shield he wrote up, as Senior Scoutmaster under Mr. Choy Sing Pang, the School Troop article. He said: 'A Scout's primary work is "service".' for him, one of the main enjoyments of Scouting should be the enjoyment of serving someone else. Many Scouts must have the happiest memories of the inspiration he gave them, and feel a deep gratitude for his unselfish devotedness to them. He said Mass regularly for them in their camps; he appealed to them to help the victims of the Shek Kip Mei fire disaster, despite the fact that the scouts had just trudged

back from their camp to the school and were very tired; but he went with them to share with them the work of relieving the sufferings of the victims.

His very efficiency and his gift for organisation left him open to a playful criticism if he failed or fell short of our expectation, and this put him on his mettle. When he was teaching Form 2D in 1960, his batch of compositions was not corrected on the very day he was leaving by plane for Europe. Here, in our simple minds, was a means of being able to accuse him of dereliction of duty in going off and leaving his classwork uncorrected. What was our amazement and amusement to see the pilot of his plane arrive up in the school within a day or two to deliver to us the batch of composition with the note attached: 'The last of these was corrected at 20,000 feet above Tashkent' We could well imagine the smile on his face as he wrote that note in the spirit of 'That'll show 'em.' 'Everything is under control' — the efficiency displayed, the impish humour and the enjoyment he must have felt as he handed the packages to the pilot, a personal friend of his, to deliver here, were all typically 'PJ'. Later, when we referred to this incident, he used to give a well-deserved chuckle of triumph at having bested us. This is what is meant by the earlier comment that he was a 'colourful' character.

Naturally, he put First things first — he was primarily and principally a priest, a zealous and devoted one. All during the long period when he said daily Mass at Maryknoll Convent he was up by 5.30 to say his prayers before he drove off to the convent. When he was in charge of the Apostolate of the Sea, he was off even earlier with his Mass-kit to say Mass on some ship. When his work for sea-farers ended, he was appointed Chaplain to the RAF and to the Catholics in the Civil Airport. His work for the sixty Catholic RAF families was greatly appreciated by them. He had been hoping to have an interdenominational chapel built in the new Civil Airport Terminal and to have an office there so as to look after the 600 Catholics employed at Kaitak. He gave many retreats to all kinds of groups and spoke very highly of his sincerity, his excellent flow of language, his delivery, and especially of the solid 'meaty' teaching

he gave. "A great and zealous priest" can describe him at work in his Singapore parish since we lost him to Hong Kong.

Well, God has taken him suddenly from us. His students and the members of the clubs he founded for them will pray, I am sure, that God will reward in His generous way the devoted service of their dedicated teacher.

R. I. P.

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William Yuen Hok Man

As **The Shield** was going to press, we learnt the sad news of the death of William Yuen Hok Man. He was killed in the same air disaster in which his friend, Fr. Cunningham, died. William was born on 25 June, 1949. He went to Tak Sun Anglo-Chinese School and later to St. Francis Xavier's College. In 1966 he came to Wah Yan. Two years later he joined Cathay Pacific Airways and in 1970 became a Flight Purser. It was while he was fulfilling his duties in this capacity that he met his tragic death.

Yuen Hok Man is remembered in Wah Yan as a quiet, industrious student. In extra-curricular activities he showed great enthusiasm for basket-ball which he played regularly. He was a boy of firm character and steady devotion to duty, qualities which he continued to display after he left school.

To his parents, his brother, Peter Yuen Pok Man (7A, 1971), his sister and relatives, we offer our deep sympathy in their great sorrow. And may the gentle soul of William Yuen Hok Man rest in peace.