

Dr David Stephens

104 Jaeger Circuit
Bruce ACT 2617
Ph.: 02 6251 5842, 02 6251 0850
Mob.: 0413 867 972
Fax: 02 6251 0850
clamshred@ozemail.com.au

Ms Chua Cheng Khiang
Headmistress
SJK(C) New Kota
Jalan Taib, Kota Kecil
81900 Kota Tinggi
Johor
Malaysia

Dear Ms Chua

Enclosed is a donation to SJK (C) New Kota. Lion Leow Kuow Yeong has kindly agreed to present it to you and to take some pictures to commemorate the occasion.

The donation of \$A1200 is to buy books (or other appropriate items, at your discretion) for the school. This donation comes from the Stephens family in memory of our uncle, Hector Charles Stephens, an Australian soldier who died near Kota Tinggi in May 1943.

The donation is also an expression of thanks to the citizens of the Kota Tinggi district who helped our uncle during his final days so many years ago. Our uncle's story is told briefly in the attachment to this letter.

There is also a commemorative plaque for display in an appropriate place at your school. As our uncle was himself a primary school teacher (children aged approximately six to 12 years) we thought it was very appropriate for a primary school to benefit from our donation.

We have set up a website <http://www.hecstephens.net> to bring together some material relating to our uncle. This might be of interest to children, teachers and parents of SJK (C) New Kota.

With every good wish to you and the people of SJK (C) New Kota.

[signed]

David Stephens
on behalf of the family of Hec Stephens

20 September 2010

Attachment

At the Battle of Muar River, Johore (Johor), Malaya, 19-22 January 1942, badly outnumbered British, Indian and Australian forces held up the Japanese march on Singapore. More than 500 Australian soldiers were killed. Colonel Anderson of the 2/19th battalion won the Victoria Cross. Many of the survivors became prisoners of the Japanese and died on the Burma-Siam railway.

A few soldiers were cut off; they hoped to organise resistance behind the Japanese lines. One group of 11 British and Australian soldiers made their way along jungle paths, seeking to meet up with Chinese guerrillas. Over the following months, disease reduced their numbers to five.

In May 1943, the group met guerrillas sent out from their camp at Kampung Tengkil. By this stage, one of the five was so ill from beri-beri and other illnesses that he could not walk. Four guerrillas carried him on a stretcher along with the cooking pots and pans. This soldier died within a few miles of Kampung Tengkil, where medical help was available, and was buried beside the track in the vicinity of Kuala Sisek, near Kota Tinggi.

This soldier was our uncle, VX55057, Private Hector Charles (Hec) Stephens of the 2/29th battalion. He was 31 years old.

For decades, all that his family knew of Hec's fate was that he had died of illness around 31 May 1943. It was not until 50 years later that they learnt more about his life after Muar. A British soldier from Hec's group, Jim Wright, survived the jungle and was picked up off the east coast of Johore by a submarine on 31 May 1945.

Many years later, Jim told his story to an author, Robert Hamond, whose book *A fearful freedom* was published in 1984. In 1992, Hec's sister-in-law borrowed the book from a public library in Perth.

Hec's name is recorded at Kranji Cemetery in Singapore. A website in Hec's memory has been set up: <http://www.hecstephens.net> .