

James Lewis Gilmour

When James Lewis Gilmour ascended to the Captaincy of School in 1938, he was already successful, being Dux of the Junior school. He captained the rugby XV having first played in it in his fifth year, and was an outstanding athlete throughout his school life, becoming Games champion in 1939.

James was born on the 27th May 1921 in Penang, his father, also a former pupil, being at the start of a distinguished colonial career. He was sent back to Burntisland in Scotland when he was four years old, and after a preparatory school education in Fife, started his secondary education at the Royal High School in 1933, winning the Macdonald medal for dux of the Junior School, and by 1936 had become U16 games champion. In his Captaincy year of 1938-39, he captained the XV, won the Games medal, and was CSM of the OTC. Schola Regia of Spring 1963 notes that he had been a resident of the school house in Royal Terrace, where a plaque of honour was placed, with the inscription "To the memory of two well-loved House boys (the other was William James Watters) who fell in the 1939-1945 War.

In normal times, on leaving school, he would have had many options for a stellar future, but Herr Hitler had other ideas, and he joined the Royal Scots as a private in 1940, before accepting a commission as a 2nd lieutenant with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (A&S H) in 1941.



He met his future wife Josephine (Jo) while with the A&S H on OCTU (Officer training) in Heysham, and was engaged and married to her early in 1942 while on home leave. He left almost immediately, being deployed to Egypt via the Cape, where he is recorded as being a visitor. As a lieutenant he was active in the El Alamein campaign, tragically being killed in action on 25th October, 1942, aged just 21.

James maintained detailed scrap books from 1933 until shortly before his death, allowing the creation of a detailed account of his school, social, family and services life. Among the poignant memories are the choices of his engagement and wedding rings, a pencilled note recorded in a visit to his service quarters at Gordonstoun House near Elgin. There is a photo of James and Jo on the promenade in Morecambe, his wife's home town. Following his marriage, the next entries are 21st birthday greetings from his wife and family in June 1942, then a letter to 'Mrs J L Gilmour' (Jo) from Buckingham Palace with condolences from George VI.



His grave at El Alamein is inscribed with a poem:

*The spot on which he fell,
Might well disclose,
That, where his body lay,
A thistle grows.*



The Gilmour Trophy

James's father Andrew and his Aunt Jean endowed a trophy in 1946 in his memory. The Gilmour Trophy was originally for the champion rugby nation, but in recent years it has been awarded to the best individual rugby player. Current Edinburgh scrum-half Charlie Shiel won it on two occasions.