

## 2019 Remembrance Day address

**Kate Fraser**

### **Captain Douglas Ford, GC, and Flight Officer John Cruickshank VC**

I would like to begin this morning to talk to you about some Royal High pupils, many of whom had played football for the school - just like many of you were doing for the school over the weekend. All of them went to their English and Maths classes at the Royal High School, alongside their French and German, History and Geography, science and PE. All of them wore the black and white colours so proudly associated with the Royal High School. Just like you.

However, there is a difference. These pupils of the Royal High School were all killed fighting in the two global conflicts that dominated the twentieth century.

On 11 November every year, we mark 'Armistice Day'. On this day in 1918, the guns fell silent on the Western Front, bringing the First World War to an end. The nearest Sunday is known as 'Remembrance Sunday', when we pause to remember those who died in the war and in all conflicts since then.

Our school had an enormous role to play in both those conflicts. 1026 former pupils of your school went to fight in the First World War. 182 of these failed to return home to their families, their parents, grandparents, children and other relatives. These men are forever remembered by our community – each name painstakingly carved into the lower copper panels around the memorial door behind me – a door that was built to remember their final journey, from which they did not return.

During WW2, 1243 former pupils fought during WW2, of whom 131 were killed in action. Their names were first remembered on the wooden panels under the stained-glass windows to your left of the hall. Last year, as part of our 50<sup>th</sup> celebrations, they were united behind me with our fallen from the first world war, and are remembered in the two upper copper plaques, on either side of the door.

Over the past four years of remembrance, as we passed through the centenary of WW1, we have focused on remembering our former pupils who fell in the first world war. Today, I want to remember some of our fallen from WW2.

Captain Douglas Ford was born in Galashiels in September 1918 – during the final few months of WW1. He was a son of Mrs and Mr Douglas Ford, of 25 Bryce Avenue, Portobello. He attended our school. He was a keen sportsman, excelling in rugby and cricket. Ford's name appears twice on the stage behind me. The first is to your right, where Ford is remembered as our school captain from 1935-36, like Lucy is today.

He was 20, and on part-time studies at the University of Edinburgh for chartered accountancy, when he joined the Royal Scots at the outbreak of WW2. He was commissioned, and posted to Hong Kong. His brother, James Allan Ford, was also a captain in the Royal Scots. This was the first time that two brothers in the regiment had served together in Hong Kong.

Ford was still serving in the 2nd Battalion, Royal Scots, when he and his brother were taken prisoner by the invading Japanese upon the fall of Hong Kong in December 1941. During his captivity at a POW camp he made contact with British agents and planned, in conjunction with other officers, a major break out. Before the plans could be put into operation the Japanese grew suspicious and interrogated him and others they suspected of involvement. Despite torture, starvation and a sentence of death he refused to betray his comrades. After being forced to dig his own grave, he was executed by a Japanese firing squad, on 18 December 1943. He is buried in Stanley Prison cemetery. The second time Ford's name appears behind me is to your left, on the upper panel remembering our former pupils who fell in WW2.

After his death, the following account was published:

Captain Ford was interrogated, tortured, starved, and finally met his death. Throughout his terrible ordeal, the behaviour of Captain Ford was superb. He refused to implicate any others. He maintained his spirits and those of his fellow prisoners until the end. His self-control, superb heroism, and self-sacrifice in face of the most brutal torture cannot have been surpassed.

King George VI approved the award "in recognition of the most conspicuous gallantry in carrying out hazardous work in a very brave manner".

His brother, later wrote a novel based on the life and death of Douglas Ford, Season of Escape.

One of our former pupils was also awarded the Victoria Cross during WW2. Thankfully, his name does not appear on the copper panels, as he survived the war.

His name is John Cruickshank, and he was a flying Officer (laterally Flight lieutenant) RAF pilot during the war. He was on patrol in the North Sea, looking for German submarines when he was hit by intense and accurate fire. His navigator was killed, while his second pilot and two other members of the crew were injured. Mr Cruickshank himself was struck in 72 places, receiving two serious wounds to his lungs and 10 to his lower limbs. Though bleeding profusely, Mr Cruickshank insisted on resuming command until he was satisfied the damaged aircraft was under control, that a course had been set for base and that all the necessary signals had been sent. He even refused morphine in case it impaired his flying ability. It took more than five hours to safely bring the plane home. He was presented with the Victoria Cross by King George VI in 1944.

The Greek inscription above the door reads they dead but did not die. As we sit here and reflect upon the horrors and devastation that war brings upon people's lives – and indeed continues to do so around the world today – these former pupils and their families continue to live in our minds and our thoughts.

### School Captain Reading

Give Us Our Peace  
Give us a peace equal to the war  
Or else our souls will be unsatisfied,  
And we will wonder what we have fought for  
And why the many died.

Give us a peace of accepting every challenge –  
The challenge of the poor, the minorities, of all denied,  
The challenge of the vast areas of the world  
That long has had so little justice by its side.

Give us a peace that dares us to be wise.  
Give us a peace that dares us to be strong.  
Give us a peace that dares us still uphold  
Throughout the peace our battle against wrong.

Give us a peace that is not cheaply used,  
A peace that is no clever scheme,  
A people's peace for which people can enthuse,  
A peace that brings reality to our dream.

Give us a peace that will produce great schools –  
As the war produced great armament,  
A peace that will wipe out our slums –  
As war wiped out our foes on evil bent.

Give us a peace that will enlist  
A mighty army serving human kind,  
An army trained to shape our common good  
And bring about a world of sister and brotherhood.

Langston Hughes  
25 August, 1945



**1939 Douglas Ford, Captain, Royal Scots**



**1945 Flt Lt John A Cruickshank**