

Louise North's address to the College to mark Remembrance Sunday 2019



“Horses he loved, laughter and the sun, a dog, wide spaces and the open air”

These are the words used to describe Percy Charles Pickard on the announcement of his death in February 1944. Pick, as he was known, attended Framlingham College from 1926 until 1932 and I have no doubt that these years at the College contributed to his love for horses, laughter, sunshine, dogs, wide spaces and the open air.

Perhaps, years later, when Pick wrote to his son's Godfather and told him that should anything happen to him in the war, he wanted his son to attend Framlingham College – or some other similar school – he had this character building in mind. He wanted his son to have the same influences upon him that he had had.

In some ways nothing has changed, but then again everything has changed.

Here in this chapel, we are surrounded by reminders of what has changed. We are surrounded by memories of and memorials to Old Framlinghamians, men who, as young masters or as

boys, sat where you are sitting now, sang as we will do today and day-dreamed of their future. Pick is one of these men, one of many OFs who were killed in the two World Wars.

Whether Pick's teachers would have imagined that one day Pick would become one of the best-known allied pilots in the RAF and the first RAF officer to be awarded three Distinguished Service Orders – I don't know.

I do know that each time he was awarded a DSO, the boys at school were given a day off, which caused immense excitement!

Whether Pick's teachers would have thought that Pick, adept at School at shooting and riding (cows when no horses were available) would assume command of No 161 Squadron where he would carry out secret missions ferrying Special Operations Executive agents and saboteurs into and out of occupied France, I also don't know.

What we do know however is that there was no braver, more courageous and charismatic man suited to leading Operation Jericho in 1944.

Amiens prison was being used by the Gestapo to house its prisoners. Due to prison overcrowding, the Gestapo had made the decision to shoot any prisoners from whom they felt they would gain no further intelligence.

When the French resistance found out about this plan, they informed the British and the job of freeing these prisoners, rather than allowing them to be shot, was given to the RAF.

Although not originally in charge of the mission, Pick ended up leading Operation Jericho and the raid on Amiens prison. His mission was to bomb the prison, allowing the prisoners to escape. There were to be three waves of attack, and Pick took the second wave. He took it because if, after two bombing raids, it was decided that the prisoners could not be freed, a decision had to be made to bomb the entire prison with the aim of killing all the prisoners, to save them from being shot by the Gestapo. Pick would have to make that decision.

As it was, the raid was successful, Pick did not have to order the third wave and scores of prisoners escaped.

However, this mission did not end well for Pick. His last moments were spent fighting two German planes until one of them shot at Pick's Mosquito, damaged the fuselage and caused his plane to crash in flames to the ground.

Both Pick and his flying partner, Broadley, were killed. Pick was 28 years old. This year is the 75th anniversary of his death.

Pick's story is one of daring do, great courage and fighting spirit. He loved flying, so that's what he did. He flew mission after mission – tirelessly but with great passion and a determination to get the job done in a straight-forward and no-nonsense way.

The fact that we are here today is because of Pick's story and all the other thousands of stories of bravery, courage and patriotism, of young men who went unquestioning to war, to defend their country, to fight for peace. And we must be forever in their debt, forever grateful for what they did, forever proud of our connection to them through Framlingham College.

However, it is all too easy to say this without really acknowledging the horror of war. If we are not careful, we run the risk of romanticising war instead of acknowledging the pain, the physical and psychological trauma, the suffering of those left behind, the bereavement, the loss; the utter futility of war.

It only takes a trip to the Battlefields for this reality to become clear. The rows upon rows upon rows upon rows of 100s of 1000s of crosses, that spread across the landscape of Northern France. Each one representing a life sacrificed so that we might live in peace.

And that bravery, courage and patriotism of which I speak, is the same bravery, courage and patriotism of every soldier of every nationality serving his country. The futility, death and destruction did not stop with our allied troops.

So, when we speak of their ultimate sacrifice and our peace, we must remember how fortunate we are, that our struggles pale into insignificance when we think of what has gone before. We must commit to never letting this peace slip away.

We have a responsibility to uphold that peace by building relationships between people, communities and nations, by seeing beyond nationality, gender, skin colour, language, religious belief.

If Pick's sacrifice – if their sacrifice – is not to be in vain, we as parents, as grandparents, as educators, must prioritise above all else, the next generation of leaders: our current Framlinghamians.

We must above all else develop young men and women with a moral compass, with emotional intelligence & compassion, with kindness, empathy and love.

We must above all else develop young men and women who have learned from the past, who understand the pernicious consequences of war and who have the determination, courage and confidence to insist on peaceful resolution to conflict.

We must above all else develop young men and women who believe in the power of the human spirit to do good.

As we remember the many Framlinghamians who gave their lives in service to their country, we do so with pride, with gratitude and with a deep respect that will stay with us forever.