GORDONSTOUN
Plus Est En Vous

Mark Arnold-Forster DSO, DSC

Duffus, 1940

Recognised for his distinguished wartime service and influential career in journalism.

Mark Arnold-Forster was a decorated military officer and a celebrated journalist and author.

He was born in Wiltshire in 1920, to a family of politicians and writers and parents who were committed pacifists.Shortly after his birth, the family went to live in Cornwall but, believing that languages were the key to peace, placed Mark in a French-speaking boarding school in Switzerland at the age of seven. He then attended Salem in Germany before following Hahn to Gordonstoun 1934, where he stayed until he left school in 1937.

Although Mark had intended to study mechanical engineering at Cambridge, he never took up his place. Instead, he joined the Royal Navy and served throughout the Second World War, first as a merchant seaman and then in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve.

He served on a destroyer on the Murmansk convoys and then on motor torpedo boats in the English Channel. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in command of a flotilla at Dover. His wartime record was remarkable: he was awarded both the Distinguished Service Order and the Distinguished Service Cross, was mentioned in despatches three times and was demobilized as a reserve Lieutenant in 1946.

At this point, he made a decisive transition into civilian life, joining the editorial staff of The Manchester Guardian, working both in Manchester and then in Germany. In 1949 he became the paper's labour correspondent, a role he maintained for eight years. He then joined The Observer as a political correspondent, but after an editorial dispute over the alteration of one of his articles in 1963, he resigned in protest and returned to The Guardian as chief editorial writer.

During this time, he met and married fellow journalist Valentine Mitchison and together they had five children.

He later moved to ITN as deputy to editor Sir Geoffrey Cox. In 1973, he wrote the landmark series The World at War, narrated by Laurence Olivier and produced by Jeremy Isaacs. He continued to write regular leaders for The Guardian until his death in 1981. His daughter Mary remembers him.

Gordonstoun must have made its mark, as he would escape to the sea and sailing throughout his life.

He never spoke much about himself, but the sea was a big influence on him, always. From growing up at Eagle's Nest in Zennor, to schooling at Gordonstoun where he learnt to sail, this became his solace. He used to call Cornwall his home port, and when he wasn't working, his passion was sailing. His precious two weeks of summer holiday were always spent at our grandparents home in Kintyre where he kept an old Mirror dinghy and, later, a small fishing boat. In those days, even on his summer break, the house was often full of politicians and academics who always loved to hear my father's view on world affairs.

He always said the Second World War was the one and only war he'd fight.

I think he really believed it was a worthy cause that would lead to ongoing peace. His wartime service was recognised for how mad and brave it was - such remarkable bravery in those tiny boats, taking potshots at Destroyers in the Channel. After the war, he dedicated his life in many ways to peace. His whole career was about unifying people - he spoke five languages and wrote for publications across Europe. I always remember he died just before the Falklands war broke out.He would have been devastated to see it, and Brexit even more so. He felt Europe was set up to resolve wars. He'd be pretty disappointed to see the world today.

My father held himself to a high moral code - doing the right thing was important to him.

He was an excellent journalist because he refused to let ego get in the way of his work. He never spoke about his own incredible contribution to the war, and believed articles - unless they were opinion pieces - should stay firmly rooted in fact. He was passionate about his work, and rarely around when we were young, often out late 'putting the paper to bed'. At home, he was a quiet man, his study a haven of stillness in the chaos of our household. Looking back, I think his writing was a way of leaving a post-War legacy without it being all about him. He lived determinedly in the present, never indulging in nostalgia or admiration, but through his research and writing, tried to make the world a kinder, more peaceful place.