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IN THE GUNROOM

When Lord Mountbatten's sidearms arrived at Church Farm Barns via Broadlands, Nick's excitement knew no bounds. The team at *Holt's* likes nothing better than to plunge into history and these guns forged an instant link with those momentous events of the twentieth century in which Admiral of the Fleet Earl Mountbatten of Burma, KG, PC, GCB, OM, GCSI, GCIE, GCVO, DSO, FRS played a leading role. Born Prince Louis of Battenberg at Frogmore House in the Home Park of Windsor Castle on 25th June 1900, he was described by his great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, as "A most vigorous baby who came kicking and shouting into the world". His father, also Prince Louis of Battenberg, was a naturalized British subject, who went on to be First Sea Lord from 1912-1914. However, despite exemplary dedication to duty and great success, on the outbreak of war the strength of anti-German feeling led him to resign his appointment. Three years later, following the King and the rest of the Royal family, he anglicised his name and relinquished his foreign titles. He was created a marquess in the peerage, and his second son, then serving as midshipman to HMS *Lion*, assumed the courtesy title of Lord Louis Mountbatten.

"Dickie" to friends and family, he no longer commanded attention by kicking and shouting. Instead this complex man deployed dynamic energy and a compelling manner to carve out a uniquely distinguished career in war and in peace. His progress in the Royal Navy was swift. An Admiralty report of 1938 said: "Desirable as it is to avoid superlatives, he had nearly all the qualities and qualifications for the highest Commands". In 1937, now a captain, Mountbatten was appointed naval ADC to King George VI having already filled the same office for King Edward VIII, formerly the Duke of Windsor. In June 1939 he was formally given command of *HMS Kelly*, a K-class destroyer. Capable of making 32 knots, she carried six 4.7-inch guns and two quintuple torpedo tubes and was to be the leader of a new 5th Destroyer Flotilla. Mountbatten was in the *Kelly* when she was hit by a German mine in 1939; when she was torpedoed in the North Sea in 1940 he was the only person on the bridge left unhurt. On both occasions he brought her safely home, but in 1941 she was attacked by dive-bombers during the Battle of Crete and turned turtle to port, all guns firing and with everyone at their action stations.

Sucked down into the sea's "boiling, seething cauldron ... I thought my lungs would burst", Mountbatten wrote later. Under machine-gun fire from the Germans, he and his first lieutenant dragged survivors to a Carley float from where he led what was left of his crew in a rendition of "Roll Out The Barrel". Hours later, he was picked up by another destroyer of his own flotilla and the 1942 film, *In Which We Serve*, starring Noel Coward, told the story of this valiant little ship's short war. In

1942, Prime Minister Churchill announced that Mountbatten had been selected as Chief of Combined Operations, and the first large-scale test of the application of the ancient principles of combined operations to modern warfare came with the landings in North Africa of 1942. Combined Operations led logically to his appointment a year later as Supreme Allied Commander in South-East Asia, a command which maintained a wide and active front against the Japanese advance through Malaya, Burma and into India.

The Indian sub-continent would seal Mountbatten's reputation as a statesman. Appointed Viceroy by Prime Minister Attlee in 1947, he was charged with the seemingly impossible task of completing the transfer of power from Britain to India by 1948. He soon judged that partition was "the right solution", and together with his wife Edwina, set about achieving his ends. Violence threatened at every turn. "The situation here is indescribably difficult," wrote Mountbatten. "It is not unlike a military operation." With Whitehall frequently expressing alarm, Mountbatten's lobbying of the individual rulers of the Princely States was tireless. When he spoke to the Chamber of Princes, the Viceroy was splendid in full uniform adorned with orders and medals which outshone the potentates before him, his speech "the apogee of persuasion" according to V.P. Menon, one of his closest advisors and a link with the Congress Party. Menon had himself bought the accession of Jodhpur, a Hindu state, with concessions similar to those already offered to the Maharaja as an inducement to rally to Pakistan. The Maharaja, a young man, had caused a commotion during negotiations when he drew out a pistol concealed within a propelling pencil and threatened to shoot Menon. The pistol was presented to the Viceroy who loaned it to the Magic Circle, of which both he and the Maharaja were members; now it has been consigned for sale to *Holt's*.

It was a personal triumph for Mountbatten to bring India to Independence. Attlee's telegram of congratulation spoke of in praise of "the continual skill displayed in meeting ever difficulty. Your short tenure of Viceroyalty has been one of the most memorable in a long list. In this message of thanks I include Edwina." Mountbatten forwarded the telegram to her, writing: "Surely no husband in history has had the proud privilege of transmitting a telegram of appreciation from the Prime Minister to his wife. I am very proud to be that exception". It is said that Mountbatten owed much to his 1922 marriage to Edwina Ashley. One of the wealthiest women in Britain, her intelligence and charm acted as a spur to his ambition. She was an invaluable ally, most particularly in India where she enjoyed a close friendship with Prime Minister Nehru and the touching affection of Mahatma Gandhi.

Mountbatten was both the last Viceroy and the first Governor-General. In the *Washington Post* Walter Lippmann wrote: "Attlee and Mountbatten have done a service to all mankind by showing what statesmen can do not with force and money but with lucidity, resolution and sincerity." Mountbatten was raised in rank from viscount to earl, taking the title The Earl Mountbatten of Burma. In 1954, a demanding tour of duty as Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean closed with six admirals from the six navies serving in the allied forces pulling Mountbatten to his ship *Surprise* in a six-oared galley: "very moving", he told his diary. He returned to the Admiralty garlanded as First Sea Lord, perhaps an especial satisfaction when measured against his father's experience in 1914; he was promoted to the rank of Admiral of the Fleet, and in 1960 became Chief of Defence Staff.

The Duke of Edinburgh is the son of Princess Alice of Greece, Mountbatten's elder sister. Mountbatten reflected in 1968, "Prince Philip, of course, was more like a son than a nephew to Edwina and to me", and his encouragement propelled the Prince towards a naval career. In turn, Prince Charles fondly dubbed Mountbatten "honorary grandfather" while his grandchildren recall Mountbatten as a joker and punner, and never happier than when his various houses echoed with children's laughter. Classiebawn Castle in the Irish Republic was one such home. Holidaying there in 1979, Mountbatten and his family piled into his fishing boat, Shadow V. Eleven minutes later 5lbs of gelignite, planted by an IRA bomb-maker, exploded and Mountbatten was assassinated. Nicholas, his grandson, Paul Maxwell, a local boy, and the dowager Lady Brabourne also lost their lives. On that same day, August 27, 18 British soldiers were ambushed and killed at Warrenpoint, Co. Down. Nine days later Mountbatten was honoured with a state funeral, the bells of Westminster Abbey tolling as his body was borne away to Romsey Abbey in Hampshire for burial.

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