



united service club

history & heritage notes

Admiral of the Fleet The Earl Mountbatten of Burma KG, GCB, OM, GCSI, GCIE, GCVO, DSO, PC, FRS

[1900 – 1979]



Rear Admiral Mountbatten was elected to Life Membership of the Club in 1947.

Francis Albert Victor Nicholas Mountbatten was born Prince Louis of Battenberg on 25 June 1900 at Frogmore House in the Home Park, Windsor, Berkshire. Known informally as Lord Mountbatten, and to his family and friends as "Dickie", he was a British naval officer and statesman, an uncle of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and second cousin once removed of Queen Elizabeth II.

Until 1917, when he and several other relations of King George V dropped their German styles and titles, Lord Mountbatten was known as His Serene Highness *Prince Louis of Battenberg*. He was the youngest child and the second son of Prince Louis of Battenberg and his wife Princess Victoria of Hesse and by Rhine. His maternal grandparents were Louis IV, Grand Duke of Hesse, and Princess Alice of the United Kingdom, who was a daughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. His paternal grandparents were Prince Alexander of Hesse and by Rhine and Julia, Princess of Battenberg. His siblings were Princess Andrew of Greece and Denmark (mother of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh), Queen Louise of Sweden, and George Mountbatten, 2nd Marquess of Milford Haven. Young Mountbatten's nickname among family and friends was "Dickie", although "Richard" was not among his given names. This was because his great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, had suggested the nickname of "Nicky", but to avoid confusion with the many

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"Nicky"s of the Russian Imperial Family (particularly used to refer to Nicholas II, the last Tsar), "Nicky" was changed to "Dickie".

Mountbatten was educated at home for the first 10 years of his life: he was then sent to Lockers Park School in Hertfordshire and on to the Royal Naval College, Osborne.

Mountbatten was posted as midshipman to the battlecruiser HMS *Lion* in July 1916 and, after seeing action in August 1916, transferred to the battleship HMS *Queen Elizabeth* during the closing phases of the First World War. He was posted to the battlecruiser HMS *Renown* in March 1920 and accompanied Edward, Prince of Wales, on a royal tour of Australia. He was promoted Lieutenant on 15 April 1920.

Mountbatten was married on 18 July 1922 to Edwina Cynthia Annette Ashley, daughter of Wilfred William Ashley, later 1st Baron Mount Temple, himself a grandson of the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. He and Lady Mountbatten had two daughters: Lady Patricia Mountbatten, Countess Mountbatten of Burma (born 14 February 1924), sometime lady-in-waiting to the Queen, and Lady Pamela Carmen Louise (Hicks) (born 19 April 1929), who accompanied them to India in 1947–48 and was also sometime lady-in-waiting to the Queen.



Pursuing his interests in technological development and gadgetry, Mountbatten joined the Portsmouth Signals School in August 1924 and then went on briefly to study electronics at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Mountbatten became a Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers. When war broke out in September 1939, Mountbatten became commander of the 5th Destroyer Flotilla aboard his ship HMS *Kelly*, which became famous for its exploits.

HMS *Kelly* (pennant number F01) was a K-class destroyer of the British Royal Navy, and flotilla leader of her class. She served through the early years of the Second World War; in Home Waters, off Norway and in the Mediterranean. Throughout her service, *Kelly* was commanded by Lord Louis Mountbatten. She was lost in action in 1941 during the Battle of Crete. In addition, Mountbatten served as commander (Captain (D) of the 5th Destroyer Flotilla).

Kelly was built on the River Tyne. She was laid down on 26 August 1937, launched on 25 October 1938 and commissioned on 23 August 1939, just 11 days before commencement of hostilities. She was named after Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Kelly.

On the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were brought from France, where they were living, back to Britain on board HMS *Kelly*.

Home Waters (1939)

On the afternoon of 14 December 1939, the tanker *Atheltemplar* struck a mine laid by German destroyers off the Tyne Estuary. *Kelly* and the Tribal-class destroyer HMS *Mohawk* were dispatched as escorts for the rescue tugs *Great Emperor*, *Joffre* and *Langton*. During the operation, *Kelly* also struck a mine and sustained damage to her hull. While *Mohawk* put a party aboard *Atheltemplar*, and *Joffre* and *Langton* took the tanker under tow, *Kelly* herself was taken in tow by *Great Emperor* and returned to the Tyne. She was towed to Hawthorn Leslie's yard for repairs, which took just a little over three months.

This was the second of *Kelly's* misfortunes, having just returned to active service after a month in dry dock following storm damage. Repairs were completed on 28 February 1940, and *Kelly* returned to the fray. Astonishingly, she was involved in a collision with HMS *Gurkha* just two days later on 2 March, necessitating a further 8 weeks in dry dock, this time on the Thames. She was released on 27 April, in time to assist with the evacuation of allied forces from Namsos in Norway.

Norwegian campaign (1940)



HMS *Kelly* returns to the Tyne after the torpedoing

On the night 9/10 May 1940, during the Battle of Norway, *Kelly* was torpedoed amidships by the German E-boat S 31, under command of Oberleutnant zur See Hermann Opdenhoff (for which action Oblt.z.S. Opdenhoff was awarded the Knight's Cross). Severely damaged, she was taken under tow by the tug *Great Emperor* and for four days she was attacked by E-boats and bombers as she struggled back to port at three knots. The Navy Controller wrote that she survived "*not only by the good seamanship of the officers and men but also on account of the excellent workmanship which ensured the watertightness of the other compartments. A single defective rivet might have finished her.*" She was repaired and returned to service.

She was de-commissioned before undergoing extensive repairs; she was not fit for active service until December 1940. Her bad luck had seen her on active service for less than two weeks over the previous 14 months.

During this period her captain, Louis Mountbatten, as Captain (D), was forced to lead his flotilla from temporary placement in other ships of the flotilla; for a time he led from HMS *Javelin*, until she too succumbed to damage.

Kelly re-joined 5th Flotilla after re-commissioning in December 1940. After working-up trials and some service in the Channel, she and 5th Flotilla sailed for the Mediterranean, arriving at Malta in April 1941.

Mediterranean (1941)



She arrived in Malta on 28 April 1941 and was deployed with her flotilla to join Force K for attacks on Axis shipping to North Africa.

On 8 May, following the loss of HMS *Jersey* to a mine and the subsequent clearance of her wreck, the flotilla left Malta and joined *Ajax*, *Dido*, *Orion* and *Perth* to escort supply convoys to Egypt and Greece (Operation *Tiger*). On 10 May she led the destroyers to bombard Benghazi before returning to Malta. On 21 May she was despatched to Crete with *Kashmir* and *Kipling* and began patrols north of the island the next day.

On 23 May, during the evacuation of Crete, she was bombed and sunk, with half her crew killed. *Kelly* did succeed in shooting down three of the attacking Stukas, while another was badly damaged and crashed upon returning to base. The survivors were deeply affected by the loss of their ship; Mountbatten shared their loss and tried to console the ship's company by reminding them all that "we didn't leave the *Kelly*, the *Kelly* left us!"

During the Second World War, he was Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command (1943–46).



His experience in the region and in particular his perceived Labour sympathies at that time led to Clement Attlee appointing him Viceroy of India on 20 February 1947 charged with overseeing the transition of British India to independence no later than 30 June 1948. Mountbatten's instructions emphasised a united India as a result of the transference of power but authorised him to adapt to a changing situation in order to get Britain out promptly with minimal reputational damage. Soon after he arrived, Mountbatten concluded that the situation was too volatile for even that short a wait. Although his advisers favoured a gradual transfer of independence, Mountbatten decided the only way forward was a quick and orderly transfer of independence before 1947 was out. In his view, any longer would mean civil war. When India and Pakistan attained independence at midnight on the night of 14–15 August 1947, Mountbatten remained in New Delhi for 10 months, serving as India's first governor general until June 1948.

After India, Mountbatten served as commander of the 1st Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean Fleet and, having been granted the substantive rank of Vice-Admiral on 22 June 1949, he became Second-in-Command of the Mediterranean Fleet in April 1950. He was promoted to the substantive rank of full Admiral on 27 February 1953. From 1954 until 1959 he was First Sea Lord, a position that had been held by his father, Prince Louis of Battenberg, some forty years earlier. Thereafter he served as Chief of the Defence Staff until 1965, making him the longest serving professional head of the British Armed Forces to date. During this period Mountbatten also served as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee for a year.

On 27 August 1979, Mountbatten, his grandson Nicholas, and two others were killed by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), which had placed a bomb in his fishing boat, *Shadow V*, at Mullaghmore, County Sligo, in Ireland.

It is understood that Lord Mountbatten never visited the United Service Club, and that his Life Membership was granted in recognition of his role in South-East Asia in the Second World War, and in the defence of Australia.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents

As an aside, Lord Mountbatten was possibly one of the most be-knighted and be-medalled serviceman in the Commonwealth. His honours and awards are listed below.

Honours

	Knight of the Garter (KG)	1946
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath (GCB)	1955
	Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB)	1945
	Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB)	1943
	Member of the Order of Merit (Military Division) (OM)	1965
	Knight Grand Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India (GCSI)	1947
	Knight Grand Commander of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire (GCIE)	1947
	Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order (GCVO)	1937
	Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (KCVO)	1922
	Member of the Royal Victorian Order (MVO)	1920
	Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO)	1941
	Knight Justice of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem (KStJ)	1940
	Commander of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem (CStJ)	1929
	British War Medal	
	Victory Medal	
	1939–45 Star	
	Atlantic Star	
	Africa Star	
	Burma Star	
	Italy Star	
	Defence Medal	
	War Medal 1939–1945	
	Naval General Service Medal	
	King George V Coronation Medal	1911
	King George V Silver Jubilee Medal	1935
	King George VI Coronation Medal	1937
	Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal	1952
	Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal	1977
	Indian Independence Medal	1949
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Isabella the Catholic	(Spain) – 1922
	Order of the Nile, Fourth Class	(Egypt) – 1922
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown	(Romania) – 1924
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Star of Romania	(Romania) – 1937

	War Cross		(Kingdom of Greece) – 1941
	Chief Commander of the Legion of Merit		(United States) – 1943
	Special Grand Cordon of the Order of the Cloud and Banner		(Republic of China) – 1945
	Distinguished Service Medal		(United States) – 1945
	Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal		(United States) – 1945
	Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour		(France) – 1946
	1939–1945 War Cross		(France) – 1946
	Grand Commander of the Order of the Star of Nepal		(Kingdom of Nepal) – 1946
	King Birendra Coronation Medal		(Kingdom of Nepal) – 1975
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the White Elephant		(Kingdom of Thailand) – 1946
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of George I		(Kingdom of Greece) – 1946
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Netherlands Lion		(Kingdom of the Netherlands) – 1948
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Aviz		(Portuguese Republic) – 1951
	Knight of the Royal Order of the Seraphim		(Kingdom of Sweden) – 1952
	Grand Commander of the Order of Thiri Thudhamma		(Union of Burma) – 1956
	Grand Commander of the Order of the Dannebrog		(Kingdom of Denmark) – 1962
	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Seal of Solomon		(Ethiopian Empire) – 1965