



Mountbatten: Apprentice War Lord 1900-1943

Adrian Smith

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A far-sighted war hero or an ambitious networker promoted above his talents? Deservedly celebrated as a naval officer and confidant of world leaders, nevertheless, for some, Mountbatten's talents remain questionable.

In this timely new biography, Adrian Smith paints a different and convincing picture, of an essentially modern figure of a technocratic age, a nuts and bolts officer specialising in the technical branches of the Senior Service, and aristocrat perhaps, but devoted to professionalism and the lower deck. He traces Mountbatten's life and career in the context of the end of empire and the fading Europe of crowned heads, follows his studies at Osborn and Dartmouth and, importantly, at Keyham College of Engineering. He shows the dedicated student making the most of average abilities but coming out on top, then service in World War I on Admiral Beatty's flagship 'Queen Elizabeth, regretting that he could not serve at Jutland with his cousin, the future George VI. His 'apprenticeship' continued with service on state-of-the-art vessels like the 'Repulse', the fastest and most heavily-armed battle cruiser of the day, and took a significant turn away from the more glamorous deck officer role to the Royal Signal School at Portsmouth, later serving as Fleet Wireless Officer in the Mediterranean Fleet. It was Mountbatten's experience at Flotilla Captain and Captain of HMS 'Kelly' and the failure of the Dieppe Raid, after his promotion as Advisor on Combined Operations, that both established his reputation as naval icon with the common touch - in the film 'In Which We Serve' - and raised the controversy as to his strategic foresight. His qualities were to be tested almost to destruction as the volume ends with his appointment as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia.

Smith brings Mountbatten to life and uncovers the essential qualities. Beneath the rich, aristocratic, pleasure-loving and privileged exterior there was a deeply human, even vulnerable but driven character - and a pivotal figure in the imperial and military history of the twentieth century.

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