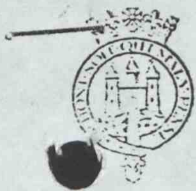

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

JF 1 19/2 RN

17th February, 1981

Dear Lord Brockway,

Thank you for your letter. I enclose a copy of the 'Mountbatten Memorial Lecture' which I gave at the Cambridge Union recently. The remarks you refer to were made in response to a question after the lecture.

Thank you also for the copy of Lord Mountbatten's Stockholm speech. I agree with everything he said. I agree that the arms race is ridiculous. What was not reported was that I said I was in favour of multi-lateral disarmament and the SALT Treaties. I added that it was possible that there had not been another major war in the last 30 years because world leaders realised what a horror they would unleash on the world.

Yours sincerely

Philip

The Lord Brockway,

The House of Lords,

Westminster,

London,

S.W.1

"LESSONS FROM HIS LIFE"

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE UNION SOCIETY

Deliver the inaugural 'Earl Mountbatten Lecture'

MONDAY, 9TH FEBRUARY, 1981

In October 1919 a batch of young naval Sub-Lieutenants was sent to Cambridge as undergraduates. The purpose was not completely clear but as they had been removed from the Royal Naval College Dartmouth to be sent to serve at sea at the age of 16, the assumption is that six months exposure to the intellectual climate of the University was intended to make up for their lost years of education.

One of these young officers is being honoured tonight. He came here, to Christ's as it happens, as Sub-Lieutenant Lord Louis Mountbatten and on 27th August, 60 years later, Admiral of the Fleet the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, K.G., P.C., G.C.B., O.M., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., D.S.O., F.R.S. - or Dickie to his friends and relations - was blown up and killed while out fishing with his family off the coast of Sligo.

The sixty years between the two events were filled with a remarkable, fascinating and dramatic story which, had it been fiction, would have been greeted as ridiculous and far-fetched.

Needless to say there have been many acts of tribute to Lord Mountbatten after his death, all of which he would have thoroughly appreciated, but I strongly suspect that none of them would have given him so much pleasure as the decision of this Union, of which he was a member, to name a Lecture in his honour. Whether he would have appreciated my selection to give the first lecture is rather more doubtful. I know that I would be somewhat alarmed at the idea of a close relation giving a Lecture about me.

Of course, it is one thing to accept an invitation to give a lecture and quite something else to sit down and prepare one. As you might imagine, this one in particular has caused me to think long and hard.

It soon occurred to me that there was really no point in my trying to produce a sort of potted biography. For one thing such a full and varied life just won't fit into a pot and remain interesting. I considered the idea of composing a sort of 'family eye' view of this great public figure but I eventually came to the conclusion that it would involve a very precarious balancing act between frivolity and indiscretion. What's more, both his daughters are here this evening and I value their friendship too much to risk making any mistakes.

It is true that in his lifetime he played a leading part in a number of quite separate and distinct historical events. I suppose I could have picked out one of them for closer analysis but it seemed to me that historians and experts are much better qualified to do such a job.

In the end I decided to pick out some of the more important elements in his life and to try to explain his personal attitude to each situation and then to see if there are any general lessons to be learned from his experiences. So I have given it the title 'Lessons from his Life'.

First of all I want to deal with an element which had a great influence on his life and which afforded him great pleasure and fascination all his days - his family background.

To begin with, I think I had better explain that Lord Mountbatten was my mother's youngest brother by some 16 years. In fact he was only 5 years older than my eldest sister. He was therefore my uncle and that is how I shall refer to him.

Although his family relationships are fairly complicated they are made somewhat easier by the fact that his parents were closely related to each other. It came about this way. Queen Victoria's second daughter, Alice, married Grand Duke Louis IV of Hesse. Hesse is a principality with its capital at Darmstadt, roughly in the middle west of Germany, that is to say near the Rhine in the Heidleberg, Mainz, Frankfurt area. Princess Alice and Grand Duke Louis had a son and four daughters, the eldest of whom, Victoria, eventually became my uncle's mother, and this made him one of Queen Victoria's great grandsons. I will come back to the other sisters in a moment.

Grand Duke Louis's aunt, (his father's sister) Marie, married the Czar Alexander II of Russia. This is where the plot thickens because Marie's younger brother, Prince Alexander of Hesse, decided to take advantage of his sister's situation and joined the Russian Army. All went well until he fell in love with one of his sister's maids of honour, a Countess Julie Hauke, the daughter of the Polish Minister of War. This attachment was not viewed with approval by his family or by his brother-in-law, the Czar, and when Alexander eloped with Julie he was not surprisingly invited to leave Russia. It would take too long to follow this romantic drama in any further detail, but Alexander managed to join the Austrian Army and it was while he was the Commanding General in Graz that my uncle's father, Louis, was born in 1854.

If you have followed all this you will appreciate that Victoria's father was her husband, Louis's, first cousin.

Now you might think that this child born in Graz would have been called Prince Louis of Hesse but, due to the family disapproval of his father's marriage, Julie and her children were only allowed to use what was called a morganatic title. Julie was made Princess of Battenberg and Prince Louis was therefore of Battenberg. At 14 he went off to join the British Navy which, considering his family background, was a mildly eccentric thing to do. However he did extremely well and eventually became Admiral of the Fleet the Marquess of Milford Haven, Earl of Medina and Viscount Alderney. In 1917 the name Battenberg was anglicised to Mountbatten at the same time as King George V adopted the house and family name of Windsor.

I must now go back to those four daughters of the Grand Duke of Hesse and Queen Victoria's daughter, Alice. As I have already mentioned, their eldest daughter, Victoria, married Prince Louis of Battenberg. Their youngest daughter, Alexandra, married Czar Nicholas II both of whom, together with their children, who were my uncle's first cousins, were killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918. But the Russian connection did not end there because the second daughter, Elizabeth, married Grand Duke Serge of Russia. He was killed by a bomb in 1905 while Governor of Moscow. Elizabeth started a religious nursing order of 'Martha and Mary' and was eventually killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918 by being thrown down a mine-shaft followed by a hand grenade.

The third daughter, Irene, married Prince Henry of Prussia. This created rather an interesting situation because Prince Henry, who rose to become Grand Admiral in the Imperial German Navy and C in C of the German High Seas Fleet in 1906, and Prince Louis, who became 1st Sea Lord in the British Navy in 1912, were married to sisters.

When war broke out in 1914 there was a public outcry against the 'German' 1st Sea Lord and Prince Louis was forced to retire. This not only broke his heart, it caused great pain to his wife and children.

Just to round off Louis's family - that is my uncle's father - he had a sister, Marie, and three brothers: Alexander, who was Prince of Bulgaria for a short time; Henry, who married Queen Victoria's youngest daughter, Beatrice - incidentally, and as you may have worked out by now, Beatrice was Alexander's father's sister-in-law - and the youngest brother, Francis Joseph, who married a Princess of Montenegro.

As you can well imagine from all this, the ramifications of my uncle's family connections are almost endless and I don't intend to pursue them any further. The point is that my uncle was exceptionally conscious of his ancestors and his relations. Indeed, genealogy was one of his favourite hobbies and he even went so far as to compile a remarkable book for his family which he called 'The Family Relationship Tables'. The continental equivalent of Debrett is the Almanac de Gotha - so the family promptly dubbed this great work 'the Almanac de GAGA's'.

He derived much of the information in it from his mother, whose mind was like an encyclopaedia and whose memory for births, marriages and deaths of relations was quite phenomenal. He started work on the book in 1939 but typically he managed to finish it while he was Viceroy of India, which must have been one of the busiest periods of his not altogether uneventful life. Incidentally, never one to miss an opportunity he had the book printed by the Viceroy's Press. I may say that the book is extremely useful to The Queen's Household whenever there are any major family gatherings. I should add that those members of the family who were badgered to check details and provide evidence for it were driven to distraction.

I think it would be true to say that my uncle saw himself very much part of an organic family entity. He took great pleasure in the fact that he had interesting and, in many cases, highly successful, relations, and that he could trace his ancestry back through 34 generations. I believe that he derived great confidence from this and it also gave him standards to live up to and, being ambitious by nature, it gave direction to his ambition.

The conclusion I would draw from this is that awareness of family relationships and some knowledge of at least recent ancestors can be a most important factor in establishing an individual identity. I don't mean by this that there is any need to follow a family occupation, but simply that a knowledge of gifts and talents, successes and failures among ancestors and relations can provide a sense of belonging to a clan, it can also be a clue to one's own character and a pointer to opportunities.

No choice of career is inevitable but to the casual observer it would not appear wholly unexpected that my uncle should have chosen to join the Royal Navy. He was born in 1900 when his father was 46 and by the time he was old enough to go to the Naval Training College at Osborne in 1913 his father was a Rear-Admiral and his elder brother, George, who had also joined the Navy, was already a Lieutenant.

In these days it is difficult to appreciate the extraordinary prestige enjoyed by the Royal Navy in the years before the first world war. It was the instrument which kept the Pax Britannica and its power was admired and respected throughout the world. These factors were irresistible to the 13 year old Admiral's son and the enthusiasm and dedication to the Navy remained with him all his life. And he didn't keep this enthusiasm to himself, he did his best to talk every suitable male relation into joining the Navy - not, as you may have noticed, without considerable success, including his eldest daughter who served with the WRNS, although he failed with his own grandsons.

There are three things in particular about the Navy which I think appealed to my uncle. In the first place it requires considerable professional competence to operate any ship at sea. Navigation, engineering, seamanship, communications are all essential elements in seafaring and furthermore the Navy in particular is a highly technical service demanding a great many specialist skills. Secondly, life at sea and in ships is a challenging one and it is different to life anywhere else; and, thirdly, and perhaps most important of all, the whole ship's company lives together in the one ship, and from Admiral to seaman they have to share all the dangers, and of course the occasional pleasures, of life at sea. There may be a hierarchy of ranks and rates related to experience and responsibility, and a great variety of technical experts, but they all have to work together if the ship as a whole is to be an effective fighting unit. That is not to say that every ship is a 'happy ship' but when the mixture of personalities and talents is right it produces an extremely powerful and effective social organism.

I think it was this experience which prompted him to refer to the 'spirit of the hive' when he was involved in setting up his headquarters staff in his various senior appointments later in his life.

In fact, without a teamwork within the hierarchy, a ship may not even be capable of making a safe passage. I don't know whether anyone has ever attempted to run a ship or a military staff or any industrial organisation on strictly egalitarian lines, but I find it difficult to believe that such a system would achieve much success.

The important lessons to be learned from this are that the sharing of risks, failures and successes in the achievement of a common objective has a wonderfully uniting influence on a community. If everyone is going to suffer equally for any mistakes then that is a powerful justification for the division of responsibilities according to experience, training and competence so as to reduce the possibility of mistakes.

Secondly, it illustrates that no human endeavour can succeed unless all the people involved are prepared to co-operate in a spirit of trust and companionship for the sake of the objective. No amount of rules, legislation, structures or bodies can have the slightest effect if there is no basic will to co-operate. This sort of co-operation comes most easily if everyone realises that they are in - as they say - the 'same boat', but even so the Navy has always demanded that every officer recognises the vital necessity to do everything possible to foster this spirit of co-operation. History provides ample examples of what can happen when that spirit fails.

One further point. In any technically complicated project the will to co-operate must be matched by the highest level of technical expertise and this can only be acquired by a combination of training and experience.

Which brings me to the next element in my uncle's life. In 1924 he went to the Royal Naval Signal School to qualify as a communications specialist and until he was promoted to Commander in 1932 he was wholly immersed in the training of signalmen and wireless operators and the development of communications technology. In retrospect the state of wireless telegraphy in the Navy during the 1930s may seem a relatively primitive matter compared to modern communications technology but he saw clearly that it was capable of much further development and that it would ultimately transform naval warfare. This whole subject of communications provided my uncle with the sort of practical and technical challenge which gave him immense satisfaction to master. He not only contributed to various official textbooks, in particular to BR 222 'Notes on Wireless Telegraphy Sets', for the Navy but, as Fleet Wireless Officer in the Mediterranean from 1931-1933 he made a significant contribution to the administrative foundations of the modern communications branch. Even more important, he took a great deal of trouble to get to know personally all the individual members of the communications department for whom he was responsible. He realised that, however important the technical side of communications, the human side needed just as much attention. He must have seemed like Big Brother sometimes as he kept a card index of all the people in the department and nothing gave more pleasure than to surprise an unsuspecting wireless operator by asking after his latest baby or his wife's illness.

These three qualities - the ability to identify and to grasp the importance of the big issues, an exceptional capacity for attention to detail and a talent for what might be termed 'human relations' - were to be the pillars of his success for the rest of his life.

I hardly need to emphasise the value of communication to human life. It could be argued that it is not the fact that man uses tools which sets him apart from the animals, but rather his ability to communicate by language which has given him such a dramatic advantage.

Looked at another way it is quite sobering to think about the number of human enterprises from wars and battles, industrial and commercial empires, to communities and even families that have ended in disaster through a breakdown in communication.

Some 10 years later, after service in the Naval Air Division and at sea, my uncle was appointed Chief of Combined Operations by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in 1941. The purpose of this appointment was twofold. At that time virtually the whole of continental Europe was under German occupation and the only ways in which any military operations could be mounted against the enemy were either by air attack or by sea and airborne assault. Any raids on mainland Europe inevitably involved all three services but in peacetime the services naturally tend to go their separate ways so that every time there is a war they have to relearn the techniques of combined operations. Although in the present day these techniques are being kept alive by the Royal Marines Commandos. The Chief of Combined Operations therefore had the task of re-developing these techniques under contemporary conditions; acquiring the necessary units and war material and using them against the enemy.

This was a task after my uncle's heart and he was determined to experiment with every possible and impossible idea. He even went so far as to appoint three scientists to his staff - something unheard of in those days but their original contributions were extremely valuable both then and later.

It was also evident that if Germany was to be defeated the allies would have to land an army on the coast of Europe. The second task for the Chief of Combined Operations was to use the experience provided by his raids on the enemy to estimate what would be needed in the way of special training, equipment and techniques to achieve a successful landing. Amongst many other things his staff came up with three particularly interesting and successful ideas. There was PLUTO - pipeline under the ocean which carried oil fuel across the channel; there was MULBERRY - an artificial harbour constructed of block ships and concrete caissons; and there was the whole series of landing craft and tank landing ships specifically designed to unload directly onto the beach.

In the negative sense there was also the disastrous raid on Dieppe in 1942. Many lives were lost, mostly Canadian, but it saved many more in the long run as it proved to the D. Day planners that a frontal assault on a defended port was not a viable option.

I have already mentioned the importance of co-operation to the success of any project, but the sort of co-operation required for such a massive combined operation as the landing of an expeditionary force over enemy held beaches is of a different order.

Many of you will have discovered already how difficult it is to follow a technical discussion in some discipline other than your own. That is only after a year or two of study. Just try to imagine the problem for people who have been involved in their particular civil and military specialisations and in different countries for 20 or 30 years. The nearest equivalent today is an international consortium of a number of specialist companies which come together for a particular civil engineering project. It is easy enough to find the specialists, the problem is to co-ordinate their work to achieve the desired end. This is a matter of personal leadership and good human relations and it is worth remembering that simply putting the best engineers together does not guarantee a successful result.

In 1943 my uncle was appointed Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command. His task was to defend India against the Japanese invasion and ultimately to liberate Burma and all the countries of South East Asia from Japanese occupation. Two years later the Japanese signed the document of surrender in Singapore.

There is, of course, a great deal that a Commander can do in his personal capacity to influence the course of events. By visiting units, for instance, his presence can give encouragement and confidence to the men under his command and he can inject his ideas into the staff system, he can even insist, in some instances, that his ideas are actually implemented.

My Uncle's naval experience, and indeed his natural inclination, encouraged him to exert his personal influence on as many men under his command as was practically possible. He felt that his presence and his words could improve morale, and he was right. An army which had been constantly on the retreat needed to know its new Supreme Commander and to have confidence in him.

Within days of assuming command he made three vital decisions. He realised that tropical diseases were causing more casualties than the Japanese, and he therefore set up a Medical Advisory Division which was ultimately responsible for reducing the rate of sickness from 120 sick for every one battle casualty in hospital in 1942 to 10 sick for every casualty in 1945. Secondly he realised that, although the Monsoon rains made campaigning very difficult, there was considerable advantage to be gained by that side which managed to fight on during the Monsoon.

Thirdly, he decided that the retreat had gone far enough and that the proximity of bases gave the defenders an advantage over the Japanese attackers who were beginning to operate at the extreme limits of their communications. He also saw that this advantage could be further exploited by the use of aircraft and gliders to supply the fighting units in difficult jungle country woefully short of adequate roads. In the event it was nip and tuck because while the British sat tight at Kohima and Imphal the Japanese simply by-passed these strong points. It was only the availability of a massive airlift of supplies that kept the defensive boxes in being and which ultimately defeated the Japanese thrust.

These were the dramatic opening moves in the defence of India, but, behind these exciting scenes, it still remained the Supreme Commander's responsibility to set up and control his headquarters staff. A Supreme Commander in a theater of war is principally concerned with strategy and forward planning and is responsible to the Government or to whatever body has the overall control of the war. Under his command are his service Commanders in Chief, responsible for implementing the strategy and for the tactical direction of the battle. The Supreme Commander's staff has to cope with such things as the supply of material, equipment, food, transport, and medical services; it needs communications backwards to the Government and forwards to the Cs in C; it needs intelligence and it must be capable of bringing all these factors together to produce a strategy for defeating the enemy. In this case the problems were multiplied by the fact that his Deputy as Supreme Commander was the U.S. General Stilwell - or 'Vinegar Joe' - who was fighting his own war against the Japanese with a combined U.S. and Chinese Army hundreds of miles away. This meant making contact and concerting plans with Generalissimo Chiang Kaichek.

The overall control of such a complicated task demands an efficient staff organisation divided into complementary functional groups which can answer questions, carry out instructions and generally respond quickly and smoothly to the Commander's needs and decisions. This is difficult enough in a single service headquarters; it gets more difficult in a joint H.Q. and even more difficult when it is also international.

There are of course certain basic principles in the organisation of a military headquarters but the details of the structure have to be filled in by the Commander himself.

In this case a British General was appointed Chief of Staff and there were three Deputies. A U.S. General was responsible for:- plans, operations, intelligence and communications. A British Air Marshal was responsible for:- civil affairs, psychological warfare, information and public relations. The Principal Administrative Officer was another American General responsible for: the co-ordination of administration, logistics and liaison with the command structure in India.

Every major human enterprise involving a lot of people and a mass of technical equipment, whether it is concerned with ship or aircraft construction, or a multi-national conglomerate, a telecommunications business or an international insurance company; every one of them needs an efficient controlling headquarters. The design of the structure of such a headquarters, the division of responsibilities and the choice of the right people with the necessary technical qualifications and experience to fill the various positions is absolutely crucial to the success of the enterprise. Even so that is not the end of it. Such an organisation needs to hum like a hive and it has to be kept under the strictest control otherwise it turns itself into a bureaucracy which means that it simply grows bigger and soon begins to run itself for its own benefit. It therefore ceases to respond to the will of the Commander, and, although its individual members appear to fill their time with work, the whole organisation does not achieve any more in real terms and the quality of achievement is much reduced.

It is easy enough to draw up a diagram showing the different departments and the lines of control and responsibility, the difficult part is to know how to put it together so that it works in human terms. People will put up with a lot but they have their pride and their jealousies. It is only too easy to put people into such a relationship with each other within an organisation that it becomes impossible for them to co-operate. As a matter of fact I think I could draw up an organisation which might look quite reasonable on paper but which I guarantee would be incapable of achieving anything. The important thing to remember is that every organisation is composed of individual people, each of whom operates within the general rules of human nature but in addition has his own idiosyncrasies.

In 1947 my uncle was appointed Viceroy of India by the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. The campaign for independence, which had been getting more intense ever since the end of the first world war, was given a new impetus during the second world war and Mr. Attlee's post war Labour Government was determined that the matter should be settled. It sounds easy and obvious except for one factor. The nationalist organisations had become divided along predominantly religious lines but unfortunately, in most parts of the sub-continent, the members of the different religious persuasions were mixed together in the community. However, owing to the quirks of history, it so happened that Muslim majorities were concentrated in the North West and the North East.

As usual my uncle set about his task in the utter conviction that he could not fail. It may sound arrogant, but the more you suspect failure to be possible the more likely it is to happen. His main advantages over his predecessors as Viceroys was that he only accepted the job knowing that his task was to bring about an independent India. He had no doubts about the value of British rule in India and he had direct and personal experience of the military effectiveness of the units of the Indian Army which had fought in Burma. He therefore approached the task not from some doctrinaire theoretical point of view but from the practical conviction that, in spite of the remarkable co-operation of Indian and British soldiers and administrators, the time had come to part company, preferably on the best possible terms.

He started out in the hope of being able to transfer power to a government of all India but it soon became apparent that, although this might have been possible given time, time was the one thing that was not available. The appalling prospect of civil war hung like a menacing thundercloud. Something obviously had to be done quickly.

As soon as it became apparent that there was no hope of getting the political leaders to reach an agreed settlement quickly for the whole of India, my uncle decided that partition was the only immediately practical solution. The decision was probably justified in the long run. In any case, there is nothing to suggest that there was a viable alternative, but the fact remains that the consequence of the decision was that the various religious and political factions set upon each other with a sickening ferocity everywhere except in Calcutta, where that remarkable man, Mahatma Gandhi, managed to keep the peace simply by the force of his prestige and personality.

Here is one of those classic dilemmas which fill the pages of history books. The Indians wanted independence, the British wanted India to be independent, yet the particular political circumstances and the characters of the leaders created a situation which led to untold human suffering. If there is anything to be learned from this, it is that human nature, and not rational solutions, is the arbiter of human fate, and one of the characteristics of human nature is that the emotional attachment to a religion or to an ideology is far stronger than rational argument. That is why politicians recognise that politics is the art of the possible and not the science of the desirable, and that is why self-evidently impractical and unsuccessful policies continue to be pursued long after the evidence of their failure is plain for all who wish to see. It also demonstrates that in any change someone is liable to get hurt and the more radical the change the greater the pain.

My uncle's last official appointment was as Chief of the Defence Staff and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. When he took up that appointment in 1959, each service had its own Ministry and each Minister had a seat in the Cabinet. Co-ordination was achieved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee and by the appointment of a sort of supervising Minister of Defence. When my uncle retired in 1965 the Ministry of Defence had been brought into being with a fully integrated inter-service staff, the Minister of Defence was the only service Minister in the Cabinet, and many of the functions common to all three services had been rationalised.

There were two basic reasons why this happened. First the politicians, ever since the 1920s, had been exasperated by what they saw as the endless inter-service rivalry about the division of resources for defence, and it seemed to them that some central overall Ministry and Defence Staff would be more efficient and, hopefully, less expensive than three separate and virtually independent Ministries. In practice, of course, the rivalry about resources was caused by the progressive reduction in defence spending after the war rather than by any deterioration in the personal relations between the service Chiefs. Indeed, argument about the allocation of resources is endemic to any organisation with a number of different interests, and as the resources shrink so the argument gets much more bitter. I suspect that rivalry for resources between Ministers within the Cabinet is just as intense as it is in the Chiefs of Staff Committee. These bodies exist for the very purpose of resolving the arguments about the allocation of resources. You cannot 'legislate away' such a fundamental function.

The second reason, I suspect, is that my uncle had experienced Supreme Command in a theater of war and had seen the way in which a fully integrated and international joint services headquarters had been able to control an immensely complicated multi-service and multi-national operational enterprise.

I have no doubt at all that the re-organisation of the service ministries and the creation of the Ministry of Defence will continue to be discussed for a long time, the fact is that the re-organisation did take place between 1959 and 1965 and the new structure has remained substantially unchanged ever since.

At first sight it might appear obvious and a simple matter to lump the control of the services into a single central organisation. However, there are two aspects to the control of the services. There is the administrative control which embraces the basic housekeeping. Then there is the operational control which is normally exercised by service Commanders in Chief appointed for a specific purpose, while the overall co-ordination of a number of Cs in C is exercised by the Chiefs of the service staffs. In wartime it can also happen that a Supreme Commander is appointed for a particular theater or for a particular operation in order to control and co-ordinate the service commanders.

There are many administrative matters which are, or appear to be, common to all three services, such as food, housing, transport, medical facilities and so on. But there are also a number of matters which are peculiar to each service such as recruitment, training, promotion, appointments, clothing and equipment.

Furthermore, unlike the staffs of the Cs in C, which are concerned with operations and which are therefore composed almost entirely of service people, the service ministries have a very large proportion of civil servants performing administrative tasks.

Therefore the problem about creating a central Ministry of Defence was to decide which administrative matters should come within its jurisdiction and which should be left to the service departments.

That the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Minister of Defence should have direct operational control of Cs in C by cutting out the Chiefs of the individual service staffs may be an attractive idea politically, but it would be quite unrealistic to assume that it would work in practice. Major decisions involving the employment of several service elements will always depend upon consultation and concensus. On the other hand the Minister of Defence has very considerable personal influence on the defence budget as a whole and the allocation of resources to the three services.

I just want to draw one conclusion from all this. Sooner or later everyone finds that an organisation in which they are involved appears to be inefficient or ineffective. I think that dissatisfaction makes us all potential reformers. Potential, but not actual. We can all say that things ought to be changed, some can even suggest how they might be changed, but very few have what it takes to make the changes happen. One of the things it takes is the ability to accept intense hostility and opposition.

One of the remarkable characteristics which my uncle enjoyed was the ability to divorce personal and human relationships from professional and technical argument. He was able to accept advice, he could be made to see that something would not work, but equally he could totally ignore opposition and absorb hostility without letting it affect his relationship with his opponents.

Finally, I want to refer to one other element in my uncle's life. So far I have only mentioned his professional and official appointments. I just want to end on his voluntary work. Needless to say, he didn't have a great deal of time to devote to voluntary organisations before he retired but even so he managed to provide very active leadership to the King George's Fund for Sailors, the Burma Star Association, most of whose members had served under him in South East Asia, the Royal Life Saving Society and a number of other charities.

After he retired his principal concern was the Atlantic Colleges which later became the United World Colleges. These are effectively international sixth form colleges and they were an invention of my old Headmaster at Gordonstoun, Kurt Hahn.

My uncle had seen service in two world wars and been involved in any number of other minor military crises and conflicts and I think he saw in these colleges a chance to do something to reduce the likelihood of future international conflict.

This ambition of his to try to do something positive to prevent conflict disproves two popular misconceptions. It is widely believed that anyone who has anything to do with the services is bound to be aggressive, brutal and bloodthirsty. It's a travesty of the truth. People who join the services are realists in that they appreciate that the world is a dangerous place. Most sensible people may be against war, but thousands of years of experience have shown that conflicts do break out, not because people serve as sailors, soldiers and airmen, but because people in positions of power and influence have miscalculated or because they have overweening ambitions.

The second misconception lies in the belief that it is the weapons and the instruments of war that are the danger. But a moment's reflection should convince you that none of these inanimate objects is capable of doing anything on its own. Some person has to order the bombs to be dropped, the tanks to roll and the guns to be fired. The responsibility for wars and conflict rests squarely on the people who make the decisions, the people with effective political power. These are not faceless officials or obscure generals, they are very well known people and, because in democracies they have to rely on being elected by the people, there is a safeguard against needless aggression. The really dangerous leaders are those who force their way to power, are responsible to no-one and who, by a combination of terror and incitement, plunge millions of people into the horrors of war.

Service people also have a certain idealism. Why else should they be prepared to lose their lives? If they don't believe that they are there to defend the independence and freedom of their country there would be no reason for them to make any sacrifice. It is just because they are so much at risk and because they know the risks, that they are interested in keeping the peace. Security and peace depend upon being prepared for every eventuality, not in creating conflict where none is needed. Anyone who has any experience of training in the Japanese martial arts will know the great importance attached to the exercise of self-control and self-discipline.

The heroes and villains of history illustrate very clearly this responsibility of individuals for changing the course of human events. The natural world is very powerful and there will always be a risk of natural disasters, but a far greater risk as well as a far greater hope for the future of mankind lies in the behaviour of people.

The episodes, which I chose from my uncle's life, confirm and reinforce the vital significance of the exceptional individual. It was his personality and character, rather than his rank or his technical brilliance, which had such a crucial influence on the people and events with which he was involved.

Prince Philip's speech

From the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University and others

Sir, Your report (February 10) of the Mountbatten Memorial Lecture by his Royal Highness Prince Philip, given at the Cambridge Union on Monday night, may have misled some of your readers. This lecture was concerned with the life and achievements of Lord Mountbatten, not nuclear weapons.

The statement which you printed was in answer to a question from the floor after the lecture. Prince Philip added that he was in favour of multilateral nuclear disarmament, but this sentence did not appear in your report.

Yours truly,
PETER SWINNERTON-DYER,
ALAN COTTRELL,
J. H. PLUMB,
D. N. SENIOR,
St Catharine's College, Cambridge.

From Lord Brockway

House of Lords · Westminster

12th February 1981

H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh,
Buckingham Palace,
LONDON, S.W.1.

Your Royal Highness,

I write to you, as a fellow Member of this House, regarding the statement you are reported to have made about the feasibility of waging a successful defensive nuclear war.

The deep affection and respect in which your uncle, Earl Mountbatten, was held in your family is well known. I cannot therefore believe, if, in fact the report of your speech was a correct one, that you are aware of the views on precisely this subject which he expressed in a speech he made in Sweden shortly before his tragic death. For this reason I enclose a copy of that speech in the hope that it will persuade you to change your own views and that you may find some occasion to associate yourself with the warning Earl Mountbatten voiced.

Sincerely yours,

Fenner Brockway

Brockway