# Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein KG GCB DSO

## (1887 – 1976)



**Field Marshall Viscount Montgomery was elected to Life Membership of the Club in 1947.**

Field Marshall Montgomery was born on 17 November 1887 in Kennington, London, England; and died on 24 March 1976 (aged 88) in Alton, Hampshire, England. He is buried at the Holy Cross Church, Binsted, Hampshire.

He was nicknamed "Monty" and the "Spartan General".

Montgomery was the fourth child to a Church of Ireland minister, the Reverend Henry Montgomery and Maud (nee Farrar). She was eighteen years younger than her husband. The Clan Montgomery was an Ascendancy Gentry family of the County Donegal. They inherited a large debt in the1880's on the family land, and it was with relief the Reverend and his family moved to Tasmania, which was then a British colony, where he became Bishop of Tasmania.

Bernard spent his early years there but had a rather dysfunctional mother who used to beat her children and ignore them for most of the time. The Reverend spent a lot of time away from home travelling to rural areas. The children were taught by tutors from England. In 1897 Bernard and his brother went back to England and spent one term at King's School, Canterbury.

The family finally returned to England in 1901 and Bernard attended St Paul's school and then the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He was almost expelled for rowdiness and violence but did graduate and was commissioned in September 1908 (aged 21). His first posting was to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment as a Second Lieutenant.

File: HIG/Biographies/Montgomery

Later that year he saw service in India. He was promoted to Lieutenant in 1910, and in 1912 he became adjutant of the 1st Battalion of his regiment at Shorncliffe Army Camp.

**FIRST WORLD WAR**

In 1914 he moved to France with his battalion (as part of 10th Brigade, 4th Division). They saw action at the Battle of Le Cateau and the retreat from Mons.

In October 1914 near the Belgian border he was shot in the lung and then the knee. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for gallant leadership.

In 1915 he was appointed Brigade Major of the 112th Brigade, then the 104th Brigade and then returned to the Western Front in early 1916 (with the 33rd Division) and was involved in the Battle of Arras.

Late 1917 Montgomery served in the Battle of Passchendaele and at the end of the war he obtained the rank of temporary Lieutenant Colonel. He was known as a meticulous planner who worked tirelessly to integrate operations.

**BETWEEN THE WARS**

Montgomery served with the Royal Fusiliers with the British Army on the Rhine but in 1919 he reverted to the rank of Captain. He was originally passed over for Staff College but managed to persuade Sir William Robertson (Commander-in-chief, British Army of Occupation) to add his name to the list.

He graduated in 1921 and then served in Ireland in counter insurgency operations in the Irish War of Independence. He believed that self-government was the solution for the conflict.

In 1925 he was promoted to Major and served at Staff College, Camberley until 1929 when he was promoted to a brevet Lieutenant-Colonel.

Montgomery married Elisabeth Carver (a widow) in 1927 and their son David was born in August, 1928.

He was with the 1st Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1929 and was sent to the War Office to help write the Infantry Training Manual. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1931 with the first Battalion and saw service in Palestine and British India. Promotion to Colonel was in 1934. He became an instructor at Indian Staff College in Quetta, British India (now Pakistan).

He was promoted to temporary rank of Brigadier in 1937 with 9th Infantry Brigade but lost his wife in the same year. Promotion to Major General in 1938 gave him command of the 8th Division in Palestine where he crushed an Arab revolt.

He suffered a serious illness in 1939 and returned to Britain.

**SECOND WORLD WAR**

Montgomery became commander of the 3rd Division in France in 1939 and engaged the Germans in the Low Countries before overseeing the retreat to Dunkirk where the evacuation of thousands of Allied troops took place by all manner of sea craft.

On his return to Britain, Montgomery was critical of senior command and was relegated to command of 3rd Division. After many plans had been proposed and scrapped for various invasions, Montgomery was promoted to acting Lieutenant General to command V Corps and this led to a long running feud with Commander-in-chief Auchinleck. In 1941 he commanded XII Corps to defend Kent where he instituted high levels of training with extreme levels of fitness for both officers and other ranks. He was ruthless in sacking anyone unfit for command in combat.

In 1942, Montgomery was appointed commander of the British Eighth Army by Winston Churchill. He reinforced the front line against Rommel, asked for two new divisions and moved his headquarters to be close to the Air Force command post to better co-ordinate the combined operations. He believed the Army, Navy and Air Force should fight unified battles according to a detailed plan. He ordered all contingency plans for retreat to be destroyed saying "If we are attacked, then there will be no retreat. If we cannot stay alive, then we will stay here dead". He made frequent visits to his troops making himself known. At one stage he briefly wore an Australian slouch hat before switching to a black beret (given to him by a tank driver) which became his trademark headwear.

The second battle for El Alamein began on 23 October 1942 where the Allied forces were successful. Montgomery was promoted to General. Tunisia was then won. Under the command of General Eisenhower (USA) he shared command in the invasion of Sicily.

In 1943, Montgomery and the Eighth Army fought in the toe of Italy which he considered "a dog's breakfast". He went back to Britain in 1944 to oversee the invasion of Normandy for Operation Overlord, again with General Eisenhower.

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, the first stages of the invasion began. Montgomery led the forces to victory across France, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany and received the surrender of the German Northern Armies on 4 May 1945.

In 1946, he was created as 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein. He commanded the British Army of the Rhine, and was chief of the Imperial General Staff 1946-48.

## POST WAR

He became Eisenhower's deputy in creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in 1951 and continued to serve with successors until 1958 when he was aged 71.

In retirement he publically supported apartheid, spoke out against homosexuality, and was critical of the American war in Vietnam.

In 1967, aged 80, he revisited El Alamein and upset the Egyptian Army by saying they would not win a war against Israel (which proved true a few weeks later!)

His books *Memoirs* (1958) and *Path to Leadership* (1961) are among many treatises he wrote.

## FIELD MARSHAL MONTONGOMERY'S AFFILIATION WITH THE UNITED SERVICE CLUB

In 1947 the Secretary of the Department of Army wrote to inform the United Service Club that Field Marshal Montgomery would be visiting Brisbane; and the Committee decided on the 7 July 1947 to admit Montgomery and Lord Mountbatten as members of the Club. Montgomery visited the club on 15 July 1947 and, according to the United Service Club's history book, "was greeted by hundreds of members".

No recorded photos are to be found of this visit but it was reported in the Townsville Times on 16 July 1947.

Gravesite, Binsted, UK

## COMMANDS HELD

1st Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment
9th Infantry Brigade
8th Infantry Division
3rd Infantry Division
II Corps
V Corps
XII Corps
South-Eastern Command
Eighth Army (1942–43)
21st Army Group (1943–45)
Chief of the Imperial General Staff (1946–48)
Deputy Supreme Commander Europe of NATO (1951–58)

## CAMPAIGNS AND BATTLES

First World War
Anglo-Irish War
Arab revolt in Palestine
Second World War
- North African Campaign
  - Battle of Alam el Halfa
  - Second Battle of El Alamein

- o Battle of El Agheila
- Tunisia Campaign
  - o Battle of Medenine
  - o Battle of the Mareth Line
- Sicily Campaign
- Italian Campaign
- Western Front
  - o Operation *Overlord*
  - o Battle for Caen
  - o Operation *Goodwood*
  - o Operation *Cobra*
  - o Operation *Market Garden*
  - o Battle of the Bulge
  - o Operation *Veritable*
- Invasion of Germany
  - o Operation *Varsity*
  - o Operation Plunder

## HONOURS AND AWARDS

- Viscountcy (1946)
- Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter (1946)
- Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (1945); KCB – 11 November 1942, CB – 11 July 1940
- Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (1914)
- Mentioned in Dispatches  (17 February 1915, 4 January 1917, 11 December 1917, 20 May 1918, 20 December 1918, 5 July 1919, 15 July 1939, 24 June 1943, 13 January 1944)
- Distinguished Service Medal (USA, 1947)
- Chief Commander of the Legion of Merit (USA, 10 August 1943)
- Member of the Order of Victory (USSR, 21 June 1945)
- 1st class of the Order of Suvorov (USSR, 16 January 1947)
- Croix de Guerre (France, 1919)
- Knight of the Order of the Elephant (Denmark, 2 August 1945)
- Grand Commander of the Order of George I (Greece, 20 June 1944)
- Silver Cross (V Class) of the Virtuti Militari (Poland, 31 October 1944)
- Grand Cross of the Order of the White Lion (Czechoslovakia, 1947)
- Grand Cordon of the Seal of Solomon (Ethiopia, 1949)
- Grand Officer with Palm of the Order of Leopold II (Belgium, 1947)
- Croix de Guerre 1940 with Palm (Belgium)
- Grand Cross of the Order of the Netherlands Lion (Netherlands, 16 January 1947)
- Grand Cross of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav (Norway, 1951)
- Médaille Militaire (France, 1958)
- Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour (France, May 1945)

Churchill, Montgomery and
Rommel (the dog!) France, 1944



Meeting the surrendering German High Command
in May 1945, Germany



Montgomery aged 80 returns to El Alamein,
Egypt in 1967 to commemorate the battle.



Group portrait of Montgomery and nurses from
Greenslopes Hospital [Brisbane Courier Mail, 1947]



Field Marshal Montgomery visiting Brisbane
July 1947 [ABC news]

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
- Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- Daily Mail Australia 5th December, 2012. Nick Enoch.
- The Telegraph Media group.
- The Daily Mail UK
- The History of Learning site