Major-General Sir Fitzroy Hew Royle Maclean of Dunconnel, Bt KT CBE
(11 March 1911– 15 June 1996)

Address given by Jamie Maclean, younger son, at the Reception arranged by the Clan Maclean Association of England and Wales[1] in order to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Sir Fitzroy and held at the Special Forces Club in London SW1 on 11th March 2011

A hundred years ago today, Fitzroy Maclean was born in Egypt in into a Highland martial family. His early life was spent in Cairo, Inverness and Poona, India, where my grandfather Charles Maclean, a major in the Cameron Highlanders, had been posted in 1913. Called back to fight in the First World War, Charlie, as he was known, was badly wounded at the Battle of the Somme. After the war, he was made British Consul in Florence and so it was in Italy that Fitzroy grew up learning Italian and other languages as well as an appreciation of the Renaissance art treasures that surrounded him.

A gifted and conscientious student, he was sent home to be educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, where he got a first degree in Classics and History. Fitzroy still wanted to be a soldier but he was an only child and his mother couldn't bear the idea of him suffering the same fate as his father – in pain from his wounds for the rest of his life. The impact too on both his parents of losing so many of their friends in the war – almost the entire officer corps of the 1st battalion of the Cameron Highlanders had been wiped out in defence of a muddy hill in Flanders – was

[1] Sir Fitzroy was the first President of this Association, then called the London & District Branch of the Clan Maclean Association, upon its formation in 1953.

something Fitzroy would never forget. Equally the contradictory thought that soldiering in peacetime was likely to be a little dull had a bearing on his choice to enter the diplomatic service.

After Cambridge, he joined the Foreign office and in 1933 landed a desirable posting as third secretary at our embassy in Paris. It was here that the young Fitzroy witnessed violent demonstrations on the streets – mostly by the French communists – as well as, at the opposite end of the political spectrum, the wild partying of émigré white Russians in cafes and nightclubs on the Left Bank.

Both made an impression.

He also met the man who was indirectly responsible for the rumour that followed my father all his life – that he was the model for Ian Fleming's hero, James Bond. Invited to dinner by the glamorous wife of Commander Wilfred Dunderdale, a clerk in the embassy's Passport Control Office, Fitzroy was amazed to discover that the Dunderdales lived in a magnificent first-floor flat near the Eiffel Tower, with a vast marble entrance hall. Twenty-four sat down to dinner, the girls were beautiful and champagne flowed. After dinner Dunderdale took his guests to a nightclub run by an émigré Czarist general. The general greeted Dunderdale effusively. 'This is my good friend Maclean', said Dunderdale – who was born in Odessa of British parents and spoke Russian like a native – 'he must have free champagne whenever he comes here.' The party went on until dawn, ending up on a private yacht on the River Seine and my father thought, 'Well, now I really am seeing life'.

When next day Fitzroy related his adventures to the military attaché and wondered how a humble clerk could afford to live in such style, the attaché laughed. 'Don't you know what the Passport Control Office is? Standard euphemism for SIS, old boy.'

Dunderdale was a spy who had joined the Secret Intelligence Service in Constantinople in 1924. From 1925 to 1939 he was SIS representative in Paris and no doubt made an impression too on Ian Fleming, who was in Naval Intelligence and a friend of both men. In 1940 Fitzroy and Ian paid a visit to Dunderdale in Paris and found him hurriedly destroying papers and packing up his office before the Germans got there. The three of them had lunch together and it could be said that at their table the fictional character of

James Bond with his taste for gorgeous girls and a hedonistic lifestyle was quietly taking shape.

I'll come back to this Bond theme later.

After three enjoyable years in Paris, my father – who had yet to show that he was much more than a sophisticated, if promising, young man about town – caused a stir by requesting a posting to Moscow. His friends and his superiors at the Foreign Office thought he'd taken leave of his senses. Moscow was recognised as a hardship post that would put him permanently out of the running for a successful diplomatic career.

The spirit of contradiction, however, was strong in Fitzroy. Always prepared to make his own luck in unlikely places, he was following his instincts and taking a calculated risk, which is perhaps the common thread that runs throughout much of his life. He understood that Communism was a powerful enough force to change the whole world and he wanted to see for himself the country where it had first been put into practice – he wanted to visit the Soviet Union and if possible travel its length and breadth. He consequently taught himself Russian, no mean undertaking, and boarded the train to what many knew to be hell on earth – but for him, an escape to adventure.

The two and a half years he spent in the Soviet Union had a profound effect on Fitzroy. He was in Moscow until late 1939, and so was present during the great Stalinist purges, observing the fates of Bukharin and other Russian revolutionaries who for one reason or another had become expendable. When he revisited his room at the old British embassy in 1990 he was reminded how at night you would often hear the chilling screams of people being dragged away from apartment blocks across the river by the all-powerful NKVD, the predecessors of the KGB. It was a city then through which fear seeped like a poisonous mist.

Although he was stationed in the capital, Fitzroy travelled extensively often without permits to remote regions of the USSR which were off limits to foreigners. Constantly shadowed by the NKVD, who had no idea what to make of him, spy or madman, his

method was bluff – pretending to surly officialdom that he was more important than he was – and never or rarely taking *njet* for an answer. Travelling when possible by train, but also on horse, camel and foot if need be, he penetrated into parts of Central Asia that hadn't been visited by a non-Russian since the 19th century. He ranged as far as Alma Ata and Tashkent and completed 'the golden journey' to Samarkand, where Tamerlaine lies buried, eventually reaching the forbidden holy city of Bokhara. These audacious and unorthodox journeys made Fitzroy's reputation as an intrepid traveller and formed the basis of his lifelong interest and expertise in Soviet affairs, which were to dominate the rest of the 20th century.

Some suggested that he was really engaged in espionage during his time in Russia, but despite his friendship with Commander Dunderdale my father always denied having been a spy.

When war broke out in 1939 Fitzroy found himself in an awkward and frustrating position. He wanted desperately to fight for his country, but was prevented from joining up because of his position as a diplomat. He found a loophole, an escape clause, through which he might wriggle and resigned from the Foreign Office "to go into politics", which was never one of his ambitions. A year later in Cairo, Winston Churchill would introduce Fitzroy to General Smuts with a smile as 'the young man who made a public convenience of the Mother of Parliaments'. After tendering his resignation Fitzroy immediately took a taxi to the nearest recruiting office and enlisted as a Private in the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. After six months basic training at the barracks in Inverness, which he claimed to have actually enjoyed, so relieved was he to have got away from being tied to a desk for the rest of the war, he was promoted to Lance Corporal and was commissioned in 1941. In that same year, rather to his surprise, he won a by-election and became the Conservative MP for Lancaster.

In Cairo again in 1942, Fitzroy bumped into an old friend, David Stirling who casually invited him to join his newly formed Special Air Service, the SAS. He said yes, nothing he'd like better, quickly learned how to parachute by jumping off the back of a lorry

doing 40mph and was soon distinguishing himself in action behind the enemy lines – most spectacularly with the raid on Benghazi, an important Axis port, where Fitzroy saved his troop from disaster by impersonating an Italian officer. The language skills he had acquired as a boy were coming in handy. I can't help thinking that, were he alive today, my father would have been hugely entertained by the reports about the less than fortunate British diplomatic expedition that took place the other day[2].

With Ralph Bagnold, David Stirling and others, Fitzroy developed ways of driving vehicles over the Libyan sand "seas" and became a brilliant practitioner in the T. E. Lawrence brand of irregular fighting. He loved the harsh simplicity of desert life, sleeping out under the stars and, after a tot of rum and bully beef stew cooked over a sand and petrol fire, listening to that universal soldier's song, Lili Marlene, broadcast every night at 9.57 by Radio Belgrade, then in the hands of the German army.

With his reputation as a desert warrior established, Fitzroy was ready for further exploits. Later that year he was called out to Teheran by General 'Jumbo' Wilson to discuss the possibility of raising an SAS unit in what was then Persia. This never materialised but led indirectly to an incident that was straight out of James Bond. In a politically delicate situation, Fitzroy was ordered to remove General Zahidi, a local tribal chief who was in cahoots with the Nazis. Backed up by a platoon of Seaforth Highlanders hiding in a nearby lorry – just in case, the situation got out of hand – he walked into the general's house in Isfahan, drew his pistol and advised him to come quietly. All went well until Zahidi's plump young son wandered into the action, licking an ice-cream. At the sight of his father with a Colt automatic in his ribs, the little boy wailed at mine: 'Leave him alone!' A sticky situation, it was dealt with kindly but firmly and General Zahidi (whom Fitzroy later described as the nicest man he ever kidnapped) was spirited out of the country.

As often happens with men and women who make their mark on history, everything in his life so far seems in retrospect to have been leading up to Fitzroy's next assignment.

[2] On 4th March 2011 an SAS team was arrested by the Libyan rebels holding Benghazi during the uprising against Col Gaddafi. According to the British Government, the team had been escorting a British diplomat seeking talks with the opposition National Council. The Libyans said that they had had no prior notification of this. Following this 'misunderstanding', the humiliating negotiations by telephone between the Foreign Office and the rebels for the release of the team were recorded and broadcast by the Gaddafi regime.

In 1943 Winston Churchill chose him to lead a liaison mission to Yugoslavia. 'What we need,' Churchill wrote to the Foreign Secretary, 'is a daring Ambassador-leader to these hardy and hunted guerrilas.' At that stage of the war, Josip Broz Tito and his partisans were emerging as a major irritant to German control of the Balkans. But little then was known about Tito: some suspected the word was an acronym for a committee or that he might even be a young woman. As Fitzroy saw it, with pragmatic – one might say ruthless – clarity, his mission was "simply to find out who was killing the most Germans and suggest means by which we could help them to kill more."

Landing by parachute in the mountains of enemy-occupied Bosnia, Fitzroy soon reached the conclusion that Tito was the man to back. After sharing the privations and dangers faced by the Partisans, he got to know Tito well and came to admire him both as a man and perhaps the greatest guerrilla leader that ever lived, eclipsing even his own hero, Bonnie Prince Charlie. At heart a Romantic, at least when it came to the Highlands, Fitzroy saw similarities between the rising of the Jacobite clans in 1745 and the Partisan movement.

His relationship with Tito and his Partisans was not always easy, partly because they were devout, Moscow-trained Communists, while he was a Conservative MP, who had also witnessed at first hand the grim truth about Stalinism. But it was a complex and ever shifting situation he found himself in – one which required all Fitzroy's skills as a diplomat as well as his toughness and bravery as an unconventional soldier. Most importantly the admiration Fitzroy held for the Yugoslav leader and his sympathy for the Communist-led anti-fascist struggle was reciprocated by Tito.

The friendship between these two men undoubtedly influenced the conduct of the war in the Balkans. But as the inevitable collapse of Germany approached, the strategic significance of Yugoslavia declined. The real question became a political one – whether after the war the Soviet Union or the Western democracies would have most influence in the region of south-east Europe.

And this perhaps is where my father's contribution may have made an important difference on the world stage. Fitzroy understood that Tito was not just a Comintern lackey, but first and foremost a Yugoslav patriot, who would oppose Stalin if he felt the interests of his country were at stake. The dramatic break between the USSR and Yugoslavia came in March 1948, as Fitzroy had predicted it would. From that schism, the first crack in the ice, if you like, the repercussions would spread slowly but surely through the Non-Aligned Movement to the eventual fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Many believe that Tito's confidence and ability to stand up to Stalin had more than a little to do with the mutual trust and friendship forged between him and Fitzroy while living as hunted guerrillas in the caves and forests of Yugoslavia during the darkest days of the war.

Fitzroy was just thirty-four years old when the Second World War ended. It could be said, as it often is of men and women who have done extraordinary things in extraordinary times, that his life was never as exciting or fulfilling again.

There may be some truth in this, but my father's subsequent career in politics doesn't form part of this talk. I would just say briefly that although Fitzroy was neither a natural nor a professional politician, he was a good and well-liked constituency MP who saw himself performing an honourable duty of public service. I am aware how quaintly old-fashioned that sounds in our present day. He served briefly as a junior Minister at the War Office from 1954 to 1957. In the 1959 general election he switched constituencies from Lancaster to Bute and North Ayrshire where he was re-elected until he retired at the February 1974 general election.

In retirement my father travelled and wrote extensively. His best and most famous book is *Eastern Approaches*, a classic memoir of adventure which has inspired countless young people to travel in remote countries, choose the less well-trodden path and not be afraid to take risks. It has never been out of print since it was published in 1949. He also covered in later books a wide range of subjects including Scottish history,

biographies (of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Tito) and travels in the former Soviet Union and China.

To return briefly to the Fitzroy Maclean/James Bond connection, which over the years has gradually blurred into myth. I first became aware of its public acceptance in 1984, when my father was the subject of a *This Is Your Life* programme. Driven onto an ITV soundstage in a London taxi, he emerged into the glare of lights, genuinely astonished to be greeted by Douglas Fairbanks Jr and Eamonn Andrews while the orchestra twanged out the John Barry theme from James Bond.

Ian Fleming always remained cagey about 007's true identity. He put a lot of himself into his books, indulging as most writers do in wish-fulfilment, but he also saw the need to preserve an air of mystery. After all, his man was a spy. My father, perhaps for similar reasons, made a point of neither denying nor confirming rumours that he was Bond.

He had a habit of choosing his words carefully, only telling you what you needed to know. It had a lot to do with his diplomatic training and a writer's respect for language. He once said, clearly enjoying the way it sounded: 'I am by nature a dissimulator.'

As a man of action, a soldier first and foremost, he always held a low opinion of the secret services. I remember from childhood hearing him disparage the intelligence world – the subject came up quite a lot – as a bureaucratic midden of 'overgrown boy scouts.'

There were incidents though which made me wonder if he didn't protest too much. My parents loved to travel and during the Fifties used to take long overland journeys to places like Montenegro, Persia and Afghanistan – in those days, exotic and remote destinations.

Before leaving on one of these trips, my father was asked by Stewart Menzies, head of SIS – or, if you prefer, 'M' – to do a recce to gather more information about a possible Soviet invasion of Turkey via the Caucasus. It was an informal mission, but as my father later discovered, already compromised. 'I dread to think how the affair might have ended had such a situation developed,' he said. 'The man who briefed me was the defector, Kim Philby.'

Another Bond-like episode had murkier associations. In 1943 my father was due to leave Cairo in a Liberator plane bound for London. At the last minute he received instructions to delay his departure. The Liberator mysteriously crashed into the sea off Gibraltar, killing all passengers. Among them was General Sikorski, leader of the Polish government-in-exile.

Several theories have been put forward to explain this incident, including the infamous accusation that Churchill was responsible. My father suspected Philby, who was in the Spanish section of MI6 at the time. But he never discovered why he was taken off the plane. Stalin would have wanted him out of the way just as much as Sikorski. He counted himself lucky.

James Bond, of course, enjoyed that kind of luck on a regular basis. But what part does it play in real-life adventure? Luck has to do with courage and optimism; it's also perhaps a question of style. My father modestly considered himself fortunate to have had an eventful and interesting life. It's equally true to say that with all the advantages he possessed, he worked harder than most at making his own luck.