

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

*Tribute written by Bato Tomašević and read out at the Reception organised by the Clan Maclean Association of England and Wales and held at the Special Forces Club in London on the centenary of Sir Fitzroy's birth on 11th March 2011*

Members of Sir Fitzroy Maclean's family, friends and admirers of the great man and his comrades in arms, of whom very few remain: I feel very honoured to have been invited by the family to attend this gathering and deeply disappointed that a health problem has prevented me from doing so. My wife Madge and I attended the impressive and moving memorial service for Fitzroy in St George's Hanover Square, together with some six hundred persons from all walks of life - testimony, if any were needed, to the immense respect and affection in which he was held.

Though in vastly different roles, Fitzroy and I were both participants in the war in Yugoslavia. In the winter of 1942, at the age of 12, I joined the Partisans in Montenegro, and remained with them until the end of the war. After the battle on the river Sutjeska in 1943, in which almost half the Partisan forces died, we were in desperate need of aid in the form of weapons and food. Equally important for morale, if not more so, was Allied recognition of our military contribution. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, in his wisdom, dispatched Fitzroy as head of the British Military Mission to establish links with Tito and find out how best to make use of the great military potential of the Partisan forces in the common fight against fascism. This recognition was of decisive importance for the future of the country, which was to serve for many years as a factor for peace and stability in international relations. Had there been no such recognition, Yugoslavia would almost certainly have spent the following four decades in the Soviet bloc. Some politicians in Serbia, and indeed in Britain, blamed Churchill and Fitzroy for the emergence of the new Yugoslavia. The alternative would have been the domination of Chetnik collaborationists with their Greater Serbian aspirations of the kind that came to the fore in the Milošević era.

Though like all Yugoslavs, I knew a great deal about Fitzroy, I did not actually meet him until 1953, when I was a very junior member of the London embassy staff and was invited to dine with him by the Ambassador, General Vladimir Velebit, himself a war hero and a close friend of Fitzroy's throughout his life. What impressed me enormously at this

intimate dinner party was that the famous guest paid me the same attention as he did Ambassador Velebit. On many later occasions I watched him talking to people, distinguished and otherwise, and noticed that he made no distinction; he listened to all with the same keen interest.



When I left the diplomatic corps for publishing, I had the pleasure of collaborating with Fitzroy on the publication of several of his books, and over the years we became, I venture to say, close friends. When he came to Belgrade to visit Tito, for whom he had great respect, he would phone me and suggest we meet up for a chat over a glass of loza. He liked to check out what he had heard from official circles, even from Tito, by talking with ordinary people such as myself.

Some of my happiest memories are of visits Madge and I paid to Strachur and Korčula, where the wonderful Veronica was in every way the perfect hostess, and there was all the time in the world to talk over the past and speculate as to the future.

Fitzroy was as saddened as I was by the tragic events of the 1990s in Yugoslavia. He felt that much of what he had done for the country was not recognised by the new governments, obsessed by nationalism. Now, faced by a variety of difficulties, many people of this region look back on the Tito era with a large dose of nostalgia. Television programmes re-evaluate his achievements positively, and Fitzroy's place in Balkan history is secure.

Bato Tomašević