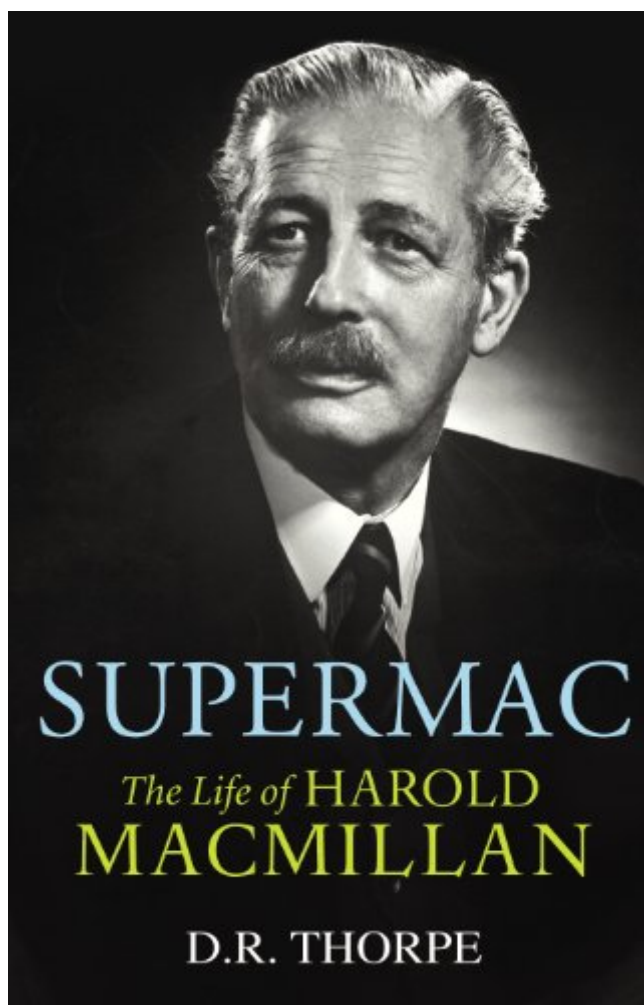


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Supernac: The Life Of Harold Macmillan



Synopsis

Great-grandson of a crofter and son-in-law of a Duke, Harold Macmillan (1894-1986) was both complex as a person and influential as a politician. Marked by terrible experiences in the trenches in the First World War and by his work as an MP during the Depression, he was a Tory rebel - an outspoken backbencher, opposing the economic policies of the 1930s and the appeasement policies of his own government. Churchill gave him responsibility during the Second World War with executive command as 'Viceroy of the Mediterranean'. After the War, in opposition, Macmillan was one of the principal reformers of the Conservatives, and after 1951, back in government, served in several important posts before becoming Prime Minister after the Suez Crisis. Supermac examines key events including the controversy over the Cossacks repatriation, the Suez Crisis, You've Never Had It So Good, the Winds of Change, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Profumo Scandal. The culmination of thirty-five years of research into this period by one of our most respected historians, this book gives an unforgettable portrait of a turbulent age. Shortlisted for the Orwell Prize.

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Customer Reviews

D.R. Thorpe's massive biography of British PM Harold Macmillan is a marvelous study of the man and his times. Usually thought of in connection with the John Profumo scandal of 1963 which occurred shortly before the end of his term as PM, Thorpe writes that Macmillan really resigned his position due to health problems. Never the less, the names "Harold Macmillan" and "John Profumo" remain linked in the pages of history. Harold Macmillan was born of an English father and an American mother. Winston Churchill also had an English father and American mother, but Churchill's family were aristocrats while Macmillan's were upper middle class - wealthy and influential from his father's founding and success at Macmillan Publishers. Harold, third son of three, was educated at Eton, for a short time before his mother pulled him out for reasons that remain unclear a century later, and continued then to Oxford's Bailliol College. He did well there, a very good student at a very good Oxford college and made many friends who would be helpful in later life. He served in British forces in WW1 and rose to the rank of captain. After the war, he joined his father's publishing company and began to explore politics. A Tory - or Conservative - he rose slowly up the ranks of the party in the 1920' and 1930's. He also married Lady Dorothy Devonshire, a marriage which produced one son and three daughters. Dorothy was famously unfaithful to Harold for many years with Macmillan's political ally, Bob Boothby. Macmillan turned a blind eye to the affair, carried out in public and fully known to Macmillan's friends and political associates. Why did Harold Macmillan stand for such public cuckolding? He wanted to rise further in politics and a divorce would have ended his participation in public life. So he endured the many year affair with a certain degree of grace and Dorothy and he remained married. Their marriage - happy in certain ways and a great political coupling - ended only in 1966 with Dorothy Macmillan's death. Thorpe doesn't neglect Macmillan's public life while writing about his private one. Macmillan seemed to be in on most of the major WW2 and post-war governmental decisions in Britain, and finally succeeded Anthony Eden as head of the Conservative Party and as British PM in January, 1957. He served for about six years, overlapping the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. He died at 91, an honored and respected man, seen as someone who - generally - served his country well in a variety of different governmental positions. Thorpe is a very smooth writer and he has written an excellent history. I bought the book on Kindle because it's not yet published here in the US. But I'm glad I read it on Kindle instead of ordering the British edition of the printed book or waited for its release in the US. Kindle is the best way to read a huuuugge book like Thorpe's.

I have a great admiration for Macmillan , He was a gentleman who had a wonderful war record and then took a long time to climb the political ladder because he was an intellectual . I admired the way he handled the situation of having an unfaithful wife and the way he conducted himself. The book does not spare him and does not gloss over the errors that he made during his time as Prime Minister . The book is written in most enjoyable good english and is not written down to a low level. It is one of the few biographies that I am happy to read and reread again

Having read few political biographies but with a fascination for the significant political changes that occurred when I was young and when life in Britain was overshadowed by two world wars, this book provided much needed detail for me. Wonderfully researched and well written; you could not ask for a better definition of the thinking that lay behind the events in British political life between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s. The author captures the mindset of a nation and its leaders very clearly and gives us a clear insight into the idealism and hopes of one of Britain's better Prime Ministers of the 20th century. I have now started on the author's biography of Anthony Eden on the strength of this book.

Thorpe meticulously researched this biography, made somewhat easier by the high profile of its subject. The picture of MacMillan which emerges is a man deeply moved by the working classes and enlisted soldiers. The empathy that he reflects for those outside his own economic class is admirable and he became, in effect, the conscience of his Conservative Party. The Parliament during the 30s and 40s would not have been the same without him. As prime minister, he made the right decisions for the right reasons. MacMillan was exemplary in his personal and family relationships despite his very difficult American mother and her prejudices.

This is a big disappointment. Thorpe has a great story to tell but tells it very poorly. Lots of trivialities and little sustained attention to key events. Instead of illuminating comments (let alone analysis of issues) we get padding. What a pity.

Good history

I am a fan of political biographies, but often focus just on U.S. presidents. Somehow I discovered this biography of Harold Macmillan. What a fascinating look at a brilliant politician. Macmillan was at

the center of politics for decades and had a leading role in particular during WWII and after. Thorpe has done very thorough research, talking to dozens of figures that played important parts in Macmillan's life, including Macmillan himself. Highly recommended!

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