



He was 'the second most hated man in Uganda'

Bob Astles

Page 48



Register

Obituaries

Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton

Public-spirited American who organised the wartime Bundles for Britain campaign, which employed 900,000 knitters across the States

PLANET NEWS ARCHIVE / SSPL / GETTY IMAGES

Early in the war, when Churchill had been prime minister for only a few weeks, his wife Clementine received a telegram from a young American woman. She was Natalie Latham, a twice-divorced, down-to-earth, Anglo-philic socialite from New York, who, anxious that America was not concerned enough about the plight of war-torn Britain, asked the prime minister's wife what it was the English needed the most. "I had always admired all the things England stood for," she recalled. "I felt that England was very brave and very gallant."

Mrs Churchill replied that there was a desperate need for warm sea-boot socks for Royal Navy sailors serving on minesweepers. The energetic Mrs Latham gathered round her like-minded friends and, following strict Navy specifications about the wool and needles to be employed, began furiously knitting. The knitting bee soon caught the imagination of Anglophiles across the US and within a year the campaign, "Bundles for Britain", was employing 900,000 knitters and support staff, all buying wool from the proceeds of cake and jam sales and clicking their needles for Britain. Into every garment was sewn: "From Your American Friends".

Before long, Mrs Churchill was sending fresh ideas, such as warm clothing for the troops rescued from the Dunkirk beaches, and first-aid supplies for victims of the Blitz. Mrs Latham responded to the challenge. On 71 ships — just two were sunk by U-boats — she sent across the Atlantic: 40,000 sleeveless sweaters, 10,000 sweaters with sleeves, 30,000 scarves, 20,000 pairs of wristlets and mittens, 3,000 pairs of gloves, 18,000 pairs of sea-boot stockings, 50,000 pairs of socks, 2,000 jerseys, 8,000 caps, 300 afghans (crocheted woolly blankets), as well as 400,000 civilian garments, 24 ambulances, 59 mobile canteens, two oxygen tents, 186 hospital beds, 2,500 cots, 500 sleeping bags, 64 blood transfusion sets, 21 X-ray machines, 223 bales of shoes, 5,000 children's overcoats, 24 portable surgical kits, and more than 200 cases of surgical instruments. In all, the goods were worth \$1.5 million (\$240 million in today's money).

On top of which, \$1 million (\$16 million today) was given in cash. Thanks to Mrs Latham, raising money for Britain became a fashionable thing to do, boosted when Eleanor Roosevelt, the president's wife, spoke at a fundraiser. Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother) offered for auction a cigarette case made of rubies, diamonds and sapphires and a piece of shrapnel from the bomb that hit Buckingham Palace. Louise, wife of the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, gave \$3,500 (\$56,000) for two mobile canteens. Because the US had to maintain its neutrality, gifts of machetes, revolvers and rifles went via another Anglo-philic organisation, the American Committee for the Defence of British Homes.

Bundles was not all high-society donations. Latham encouraged South Carolina children to raise \$70 (\$1,120) with a watermelon-eating contest, churches to hold special collections, and bank depositors in Rochester, Minnesota, to donate the odd cents left in their accounts at the end of the month. Mrs



Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, right: during the war she organised her fellow Americans to donate vast quantities of clothes and medical equipment to Britain

Latham also asked volunteers to write letters to British war workers to encourage them in their endeavours.

Natalie Wales was born in in Cohasset, Massachusetts, in 1909, the daughter of Nathaniel B. Wales, a Bostonian engineer who helped to develop the refrigerator, and a distant relation of Sir Matthew Hale, England's Lord

The young Natalie set her heart on marrying into aristocracy

Chief Justice 1671-76. When Natalie was 11 her parents separated, and her mother took her and her brother, Nathaniel Jr, to Bermuda. Mrs Wales returned to the US with the children in 1923, obtained a divorce, and the following year married Dr John Izard Middleton, an eye specialist.

Natalie was sent to the exclusive Spence School on New York's Upper East Side. She took a precocious interest in men and set her heart on marrying into aristocracy.

Aged 16, on a pleasure cruise up the Hudson in the company of Queen Marie of Romania and her children, Princess Ileana and Prince Nicholas, she missed her chance to become a royal.

"I snagged Nicholas in a corner and

got his ring off him," she recalled. "Unfortunately, I gave it back."

In 1927, on a tour of Europe, she became engaged to Michael William Robert de Courcy, the only son of Lord Kingsale, but her mother thought her too young to marry so Natalie went to Columbia University, where she studied short-story writing, astronomy, mathematics, French, and Greek.

She came out as a debutante in 1928. Newly divorced from Dr Middleton, her mother married Captain Franck Taylor Evans, head of the New York Navy Yard. The young Natalie lived in grandeur in the captain's house in the Yard and was whisked to parties in her stepfather's official Navy car, which, she was delighted to discover, ignored red traffic lights. In April 1929 Natalie married Kenelm Winslow, a stockbroker from Tuxedo Park, a gated community for well-to-do New Yorkers. At their extravagant Episcopalian wedding, presided over by Bishop Herbert Shipman and two other clergymen, Natalie was attended by 12 bridesmaids and 12 ushers. She became a housewife, gave birth to two daughters, Natalie ("Bubbles", who died in 1988) and Mary Chilton, "tried to cook," did charity work, made curtains, bedspreads, and her own dresses, then discovered the joys of hitting the headlines. When she and her daughters turned up at the fashionable Atlantic Beach Club in iden-

tical dresses she had run up from a brown linen remnant bought at Macy's, she was spotted by an editor at *Life* magazine who photographed the trio, triggering a passing fashion for mother-and-daughter identical outfits. For a while Natalie became "assistant to the publisher" at *The New York Times*.

In 1937 she divorced Winslow and then married Edward Latham, a State Department attaché in Panama from North Carolina who eventually was attached to Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces in Cairo. Eighteen months later the marriage failed.

In 1939 Natalie went to Bermuda. "I had never had time to think before," she said. "I began to think of Britain." Listening to Neville Chamberlain's ultimatum to Hitler in September 1939, she decided to visit the British Consul General in New York, Godfrey Haggard, which resulted in the telegram to Clementine Churchill and Bundles for Britain.

Eventually she divorced Latham and married Ned Paine and, when widowed, used the name Mrs Paine for a number of years. Then, in 1953, on a trip to Britain to give a talk about the dangers of communism, she married Wing Commander Lord Malcolm Avondale Douglas-Hamilton, OBE, DFC, the Conservative MP for Inverness and brother of the Duke of Hamilton. He gave up his parliamentary seat and, after a time living between Scotland

and England, the couple moved to New York, where, as the Cold War set in, they began campaigning against communist influences in American society.

Lady Malcolm sat on the board of the American Security Council Foundation. From what *Newsweek* called its "card file of six million names, including peaceniks, draft card burners, and pseudo-intellectuals," it screened employees for "unacceptable views". It was an ignominious end to Lady Malcolm's admirable public career.

In 1956 the couple founded the American-Scottish Foundation to promote cultural ties between Scotland and the US. After a flying accident in 1964 in Cameroon, in which Lord Malcolm and his 21-year-old son Niall died, Natalie continued her campaign to deepen links between the US and Scotland. In New York in the early 1970s she organised "Scotland Week", persuading Fifth Avenue shops to display Scottish themes in their windows and instigating The Scottish Ball with Highland dancing. In 1964, as head of the American Institute of Approval, she chose designers to create model homes at the 1964 New York World's Fair.

She is survived by one daughter.

Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, socialite and charitable fundraiser, was born on August 6, 1909. She died on January 14, 2013, aged 103