

Paddy Mayne: Lt Col Blair 'paddy' Mayne, 1 Sas Regiment - Hamish Ross

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An Irish solicitor and international rugby player, Blair 'Paddy' Mayne became one of the most outstanding soldiers and leaders of the Second World War. After seeing action in Syria with the Commandos, he joined the new unit that David Stirling was establishing, the Special Air Service. The raids Mayne led in the Western Desert destroyed over one hundred enemy aircraft on the ground. The common factor in these successes was Mayne's ability to read the situation, anticipate how the enemy would react, and then attack. Mayne was twenty-two when he won the DSO for the first time. Mayne subsequently led the unit in Italy, France and Germany, winning a further bar to the DSO in each of these campaigns, as well as the Croix de Guerre and the Legion d'Honneur. At the end of the war, after a short period with an Antarctic Survey, Mayne returned to the law. In 1955 he died in a car accident, aged forty. Soon after his death, misinformation about Mayne began to appear. He was portrayed variously as a classical tragic hero of drama, and a man of anger and aggression. Hamish Ross's work largely refutes these standard interpretations, using official war diaries, the early chronicle of 1 SAS, Mayne's papers and diaries, and a number of extended interviews with key contemporaries. It has the support of the Mayne family and the SAS Regimental Association. Hamish Ross strips away the legend and leaves Mayne not diminished.

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