

SIR ANTHONY EDEN
Earl of Avon
1897 - 1977

Anthony Eden, the son of Sir William Eden, the High Sheriff of Durham, was born at Windlestone Hall, near Bishop Auckland, on 12th June, 1897. Eden, like his father and grandfather, was educated at Eton. He hoped to go to Sandhurst before joining the British Army, but was rejected because of his poor eyesight.

With the outbreak of the First World War the British Army reduced its entry standards, and Eden was able to obtain a commission in the King's Royal Rifle Corps. Soon after Lieutenant Eden arrived in France in June 1916, he heard that his sixteen year old brother, Nicholas Eden, had been killed when the *Indefatigable* had been sunk at the Battle of Jutland.

Eden served on the Western Front and won the Military Cross at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. After one attack at Delville Wood, Eden's battalion suffered 394 casualties, of whom 127 were killed. Nearly all the junior officers were either dead or badly wounded and as a result Eden was promoted to adjutant. By the time the war ended, Eden had reached the rank of major.

After the war Eden was undecided about whether to stay in the army. He eventually selected a career in politics and in the 1923 General Election won Warwick & Leamington for the Conservative Party. Three years later he was appointed parliamentary private secretary to Austin Chamberlain at the Foreign Office. A post he held until the government lost power at the 1929 General Election.

In the National Government formed by Ramsay MacDonald in 1931, Eden became Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs (1931-34). When Stanley Baldwin became prime minister in 1935 he appointed Eden as his Foreign Secretary. Eden disagreed with Neville Chamberlain about the way to deal with fascism in Europe and in 1938 he resigned from office. When Winston Churchill took over from Chamberlain in 1940, Eden was reappointed as Foreign Secretary.

After the Labour Party victory in the 1945 General Election, Eden became deputy leader of the opposition. The 1951 General Election saw the return of a Conservative government and once more Eden became Foreign Secretary.

In 1951 Mohammed Mossadeq, took power in Iran and nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, Britain's largest overseas asset and the world's biggest oil-producer. Eden approved a SIS plot to overthrow Mussadeq. The following year MI6 agent George Young helped to organize protests demonstrations against the government in Iran. In August 1953 over 300 people died during a riot in Teheran. Mussadeq resigned and was replaced by the SIS candidate, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Rezā Shāh Pahlavi.

Eden replaced Winston Churchill as prime minister in April, 1955. Later that year he attended a summit conference at Geneva with the heads of government of the USA, France and the Soviet Union.

President Dwight Eisenhower became concerned about the close relationship developing between Egypt and the Soviet Union. In July 1956 Eisenhower cancelled a promised grant of 56 million dollars towards the building of the Aswan Dam. Gamal Abdel Nasser was furious and on 26th July he announced he intended to nationalize the Suez Canal. The shareowners, the majority of whom were from Britain and France, were promised compensation. Nasser argued that the revenues from the Suez Canal would help to finance the Aswan Dam.

Eden feared that Nasser intended to form an Arab Alliance that would cut off oil supplies to Europe. Secret negotiations took place between Britain, France and Israel and it was agreed to make a joint attack on Egypt.

On 29th October 1956, the Israeli Army invaded Egypt. Two days later British and French bombed Egyptian airfields. British and French troops landed at Port Said at the northern end of the Suez Canal on 5th November. By this time the Israelis had captured the Sinai Peninsula.

President Dwight Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, grew increasingly concerned about these developments and at the United Nations the representatives from the United States and the Soviet Union demanded a cease-fire. When it was clear the rest of the world were opposed to the attack on Egypt, and on the 7th November the governments of Britain, France and Israel agreed to withdraw. They were then replaced by UN troops who policed the Egyptian frontier.

Gamal Abdel Nasser now blocked the Suez Canal. He also used his new status to urge Arab nations to reduce oil exports to Western Europe. As a result petrol rationing had to be introduced in several countries in Europe. In failing health, Eden resigned on 9th January, 1957.

Created Earl of Avon in 1961, Eden spent his later years writing his *Memoirs* (3 volumes, 1960-65) and *Another World* (1976), an account of his war experiences.

Anthony Eden died on 14th January 1977 and is buried in the churchyard at Alvediston where he made his home.