



Source: Carrington, 17 September 1984,
Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Netherlands

CARRINGTON, Peter Alexander Rupert

British Conservative politician and sixth Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 1984-1988

By **Hendrik W. Ohnesorge** · Version 10 October 2016

Was born 6 June 1919 in London and passed away 9 July 2018 in Bledlow, Buckinghamshire, England. He was the son of Rupert Victor John Carrington, Captain in the Grenadier Guards, and Sybil Marion Colville, lady-in-waiting to Mary, Princess Royal and Countess of Harewood. On 25 April 1942 Carrington married Iona Ellen McClean. They had two daughters and one son.

The family name Carrington, which was his name at birth, is spelled with one 'r', the peerage version with two. Carrington, who became 6th Baron Carrington upon his father's death in 1938, cannot explain the origin of this difference in spelling (Carrington 1988: 8; Cosgrave 1985: 43).

On film: North Atlantic Assembly in San Francisco, CA, 11 October 1985: www.c-span.org/video/?125714-1/political-speech; in White House, Washington DC, 5 November 1987: www.c-span.org/video/?861-1/defense-secretary-resignation-reaction

Biography

Born into an illustrious family of bankers, landowners, courtiers, politicians and military men, Carrington, the second child and first son, 'had an enviably happy and assured childhood' (Cosgrave

1985: 42). After some years at Sandroyd preparatory school, then housed in Cobham, Surrey, he was sent to Eton College at the age of thirteen. Some fifty years later Carrington (1988: 14) recalled that there, 'neither in academic nor in sporting ways did I shine'. He did, however, join the Officers Training Corps at Eton and then went on to the Royal Military College Sandhurst in 1937. Upon completing his eighteen months at Sandhurst in 1939, he, like his father and grandfather before, was commissioned into the Grenadier Guards, one of the five regiments of the Foot Guard. The late 1930s saw a number of incisive changes in Carrington's life such as his father's death in 1938 and not least the outbreak of the Second World War the year after. Since he was under the required age of 21 to be sent abroad, Carrington served in England during the first years of the war. In 1942 he married Iona McClean, the daughter of aviation pioneer Sir Francis Kennedy McClean. He (1988: 43) describes the marriage in his memoirs as 'by far the most sensible thing I've ever done'. He first saw action with the Grenadiers, now embedded into the newly created Guards Armoured Division, after the Allied Normandy landings (D-Day) in June 1944. During the next months Carrington served in the northern parts of France, with the Allied advance through Belgium, took part in Operation Market Garden and at the time of the German surrender found himself in northern Germany. In March 1945 Carrington received the Military Cross for bravery under fire. Aged 26, he took his father's seat in the House of Lords in late 1945. This allowed him to return home after the end of the war and the young family moved to Bledlow in Buckinghamshire.

Carrington took his first steps on the political stage by joining the Buckinghamshire War Agriculture Executive Committee and being elected into the Buckinghamshire County Council. In 1947 he became junior Opposition Whip in the House of Lords. After the 1951 general election had brought Winston Churchill back into 10 Downing Street, Carrington entered the Conservative government as Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (1951-1954). During his time in this ministry Carrington became involved in the Cichel Down Affair, revolving around estates in Dorset acquired by the government as a testing site for the Royal Air Force prior to the war. As the estates were subsequently handed over to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Churchill's wartime promise of returning respective estates to their owners was broken. The affair led to the resignation of Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Thomas Dugdale in the summer of 1954, while Churchill turned down Carrington's offer to resign as well. In October of that year, Carrington, particularly interested in matters of defence and foreign policy throughout his subsequent political career, joined the new Minister of Defence Harold Macmillan to become Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Defence. After serving in this capacity for two years Carrington left the ministry to become British High Commissioner to Australia in 1956. His family's ties to Australia (his great-uncle Charles had been Governor of New South Wales and his father was born there) may have played a role in this appointment of a surprisingly young High Commissioner. During Carrington's three-year tenure in Canberra, there was 'nothing of significance to record about', according to Cosgrave (1985: 63), who nonetheless characterizes Carrington's time in office as successful.

The visit of Prime Minister Macmillan during Carrington's first year in office was of particular importance for Carrington's career, as Macmillan offered him to become First Lord of the Admiralty after his term as High Commissioner would end in 1959. In the late 1950s the office may no longer have been as prestigious as it had been in previous times (it was abolished in 1964), but this was still 'a post redolent of history, in general because of the country's glorious naval past, in particular because it had such definite associations with Churchill, being the base which he had commanded at the beginning of both world wars' (Cosgrave 1985: 65). Carrington's stint as First Lord of the Admiralty, however, was clouded by political scandal once more, this time by the Vassall Affair, caused by the exposure of a long-time employee in the Admiralty, John Vassall, as a Soviet spy in 1962. For Carrington (1988: 173) the incident 'was one of the most unpleasant episodes of my political life'. However, after the Radcliffe Committee findings acquitted the Admiralty of any misconduct, Carrington refrained from resigning as the responsible minister. After his four years at the Admiralty he became Minister without Portfolio under Macmillan's successor Alec Douglas-Home and also, for the same period from late 1963 to late 1964, Leader of the House of Lords. The

Conservative Party's defeat in the 1964 general election, however, once more saw a Labour Prime Minister in office and Carrington (1988: 189) thereafter 'was to lead Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in the Upper House'. During his time in the opposition he also held various posts outside the political arena and joined the boards of the Australia and New Zealand Bank, Barclays International Bank and Schweppes. When the Conservatives, this time under Edward Heath, reclaimed a majority in the 1970 general election, Carrington returned to a governmental position, now serving as Secretary of State for Defence (1970-1974) and, albeit merely for a couple of weeks in early 1974, as Secretary of State for Energy. From 1972 to 1974 Carrington also served as Chairman of the Conservative Party.

Another five years in opposition between 1974 and 1979, under Labour Prime Ministers Harold Wilson and James Callaghan, were compensated for by his appointment as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs after Margaret Thatcher had become Prime Minister in May 1979. According to Carrington (1988: 280), it was 'the job I had wanted all my life, the summit of my political ambitions'. During his years in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office several issues appeared on the top of his agenda. His first year as Secretary saw negotiations concerning the independence of Rhodesia that took place in Lusaka and subsequently, in form of a Constitutional Conference, at Lancaster House in London between August and December 1979. Chaired by Carrington, the conference finally brought to an end the Rhodesian Bush War and recognized Rhodesia's independence, to be renamed as Zimbabwe after a transition period in 1980. Furthermore, the Middle East proved to be an area of particular interest for Carrington, especially after the assassination of Egyptian President Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat in October 1981. Additionally, after the United Kingdom (UK) had joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in January 1973, British-European relations loomed large during Carrington's time in office. In his first year at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Thatcher gave her famous 'I want my money back' speech at the Dublin European Council in November 1979. The 'row over the British contribution' to the EEC budget (Carrington 1988: 318) proved to be a topic of particular importance during his tenure, which also included a British Presidency of the Council of the EEC. Vividly recalling the wartime destruction of the European Continent in his memoirs Carrington (1988: 65-6) became (and has remained) a staunch supporter of European integration as well as British participation therein. During his years in office he 'spent more than eighty per cent of his time on matters directly or indirectly concerned with European policy', according to one observer (Cosgrave 1985: 155). This position found him sometimes at odds with Prime Minister Thatcher. The issue most strongly associated with his time in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, however, were the events revolving around the Falkland Islands, or, to Argentines, the *Islas Malvinas*. Sovereignty issues regarding the island group in the South Atlantic, about 8,000 miles from London and home to less than 2,000 inhabitants, had been lingering for some time between the British and Argentine governments. Various options regarding their settlement had been discussed. However, while neither of these proved to be satisfactory, the situation flared up after General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri had become the new strong man of the Argentine military junta in December 1981. After attempts at mediation by the United States (US) had failed, Argentine forces commenced their invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April 1982. British response, under the aegis of a resolute Prime Minister Thatcher, proved decisive and after dispatching a Royal Navy Task Force, Argentine forces were defeated, ending the war and re-establishing the *status quo ante bellum* on 20 June 1982, which also spelled the end for the Argentine junta. Early on during the crisis, however, critical voices had been directed at Carrington. These were related to his travels to Brussels and Israel on the eve of the invasion in late March, allegedly sending wrong signals to Argentina with regard to the British resolve in the matter. In view of these voices proclaiming neglect and mishandling on the part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Carrington resigned within days after the invasion on 5 April 1982. A committee report presented in January 1983, the so-called Falkland Islands Report, acquitted him of these charges.

After his resignation, as before, Carrington pursued several activities in business, including serving as chairman of the General Electric Company and joining the consulting firm that Henry Kissinger had founded in 1982. Moreover he became Chairman of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum

in London. With the Falkland Islands Report officially clearing his name from charges brought forth, he decided to re-enter the political arena. Bearing in mind that he had held the prestigious office of Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Thatcher became 'assiduous in her search for alternative employment of sufficient status for him' (Cosgrave 1985: 9). When Dutchman Joseph Luns, already the longest serving Secretary General in the history of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), indicated his willingness to finally hand over the position he had held since 1971, the search for a suitable successor began. Bearing in mind the practice of selecting a widely respected elder statesman and also paying tribute to respective national sensitivities, NATO member countries finally agreed upon Carrington, who proved 'the only candidate of stature available' (Cosgrave 1985: 164). Upon taking office as NATO's sixth Secretary General on 25 June 1984 he thus became, in his own words (1988: 377), an 'international person'. While he remembers taking up his new post with satisfaction, differing voices, among them NATO staff members who alleged that he did not overly cherish his newly acquired position, can also be found in literature (Hendrickson 2006: 37). Due to his strong focus on relations with Europe during his time in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Carrington 'was never popular on the other side of the Atlantic, and he has been compelled to work at the repair of damaged or broken bridges since becoming Secretary-General of NATO' (Cosgrave 1985: 14).

As for issues during his time in office, Carrington sought in particular to improve East-West relations, further the cause of détente that gained momentum in the second half of the 1980s and put special emphasis on disarmament. In this respect he criticized the more aggressive signals that had frequently been sent from Washington after US President Ronald Reagan had taken office in 1981, a development which Carrington had famously called 'megaphone diplomacy' (Welsh 1984: 30). He welcomed overtures between West and East in the wake of the summit meetings between Reagan and Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva (1985) and Reykjavík (1987). At the same time he cautioned against excessive expectations and anticipated long negotiations. During his time in office NATO's 1979 Double-Track Decision, combining new offers of disarmament negotiations with the threat of deploying nuclear intermediate-range ballistic missiles to counter the recent Soviet build-up in case those negotiations failed, put the Alliance under considerable pressure with member states differing on the issue. Carrington acted as mediator between member states and called for greater unity within the Alliance. In late 1984 he accordingly argued: 'We've got to maintain and will maintain this unity and resolve, not only in order to keep expectations at a reasonable level, but also, I think, to make the Soviet Government understand that the West is serious about these negotiations' (quoted in Gwertzman 1984). Thus, while furthering détente and negotiations, he was also resolved to maintain NATO's deterrent. He therefore argued at the 1988 NATO meeting in Madrid: 'Whatever else may have changed in the Soviet Union, the military machine is still, so far, operating at exactly the same level as it was in the days before perestroika and glasnost' (quoted in Nicholson 1988). Additionally, Carrington was confronted with the task of strengthening and unifying the Alliance that had come under strain in face of 'pressures from the U.S. Congress, which in the mid-1980s placed considerable demands on the European allies to increase their defense spending' (Hendrickson 2006: 35). 'Burden sharing' thus became a popular catchphrase emphasizing US desires for greater European contributions to the Alliance. This cause was led by the Chairman of the US Senate's Committee on Armed Services, Sam Nunn, who proposed cuts and reorganizations in the Department of Defense, which once again required Carrington's mediation. Against this backdrop Carrington suggested contributions in 'infrastructure', particularly the expansion and update of air bases, and 'sustainability', particularly the increase of stocks in weapons and supplies, by European partners. David Abshire (1999: 30), US Ambassador to NATO from 1983 to 1987, recalls in this context that 'the genius of Peter Carrington turned the troop-withdrawal threat into a redoubling of Alliance efforts on conventional defense'.

Due to his successful efforts at NATO, US Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger as well as Ambassador Abshire evaluated Carrington as an extraordinary skilful diplomat, and Hendrickson (2006: 37) argues that Carrington 'managed intra-alliance disputes adeptly and gracefully'. While *The*

Economist (1985: 3) argued shortly after Carrington had taken up his post at NATO that his career 'has led uncomfortably close to a sequence of disasters' and Cosgrave (1985: 171) sceptically asked: 'does Carrington understand intellectually, let alone emotionally, the instincts of the Alliance of which he is now the main spokesman?', fellow decision makers generally held Carrington in high regard in retrospect. Helmut Schmidt (1996: 273-274), serving partly contemporaneously with Carrington as German Minister of Defence in the early 1970s and later becoming Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany during Carrington's time as Foreign Secretary, remembered him as a highly esteemed friend and Secretary General. In particular, observers stressed Carrington's unpretentiousness and humour and attested not least his 'aristocratic nonchalance' as well as a 'relaxed, almost detached approach to public affairs' (Cosgrave 1985: 8-9). Ambassador Abshire (1999: 30) explicitly argued that Carrington, despite his background, 'cared nothing for ceremony' and recalled that, upon taking office at NATO, 'his first act was to put Luns' cherished Rolls-Royce up for sale'.

When Carrington took office as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in 1979 observers described him as 'a man of moderation and experience' (Ungar 1979: 183). Contemporaries stressed his pragmatism, arguing that Carrington was 'not a man given either to abstract thought or philosophising about political activity' (Cosgrave 1985: 14), an assessment shared by Carrington himself (1988: 373), who opined: 'I am not all that keen on ideology' and when 'one is talking about ideology, belief, fundamental attitude', 'I am a pragmatist'. After leaving NATO on 30 June 1988 Carrington served on the European Community's Negotiating Committee on Yugoslavia. He also held a number of business and non-profit positions, including serving as Chancellor of the University of Reading, Chairman of Christie's International and Director of *The Daily Telegraph*. In his lifetime Carrington has been bestowed with a number of prestigious honours, among them the Military Cross (1945), Deputy Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire (1951), member of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council (1959), Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour (1983), Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter (1985), Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (1988) as well as the American Presidential Medal of Freedom (1999). Given a life peerage after the House of Lords Act 1999, Carrington, as its longest-serving member, became Father of the House of Lords. In 2018 he passed away peacefully at home.

July 2018: date of death added

Archives

A comprehensive collection of political papers, speech manuscripts, newspaper clippings and photographs can be found in 'The Papers of Lord Carrington' in Churchill Archive Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge University, UK, see <https://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0014%2FCRTN>. Key documents relating to the Falklands are in the 'Lord Carrington's Files on the Falklands' in Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, see www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/falklands-carrington.asp. Records regarding his time in the House of Lords are available via Hansard, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people/mr-peter-carrington/>. Papers associated with his tenure as NATO Secretary General can be found in NATO Archives Online, Brussels, Belgium, see <http://archives.nato.int/search?query=Carrington>

Publications

- Report of the Constitutional Conference: Lancaster House, London, September-December 1979, London 1980 (opening speech)
 - 'Arms Control and International Security: Some Practical Problems' in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 47/4, December 1980, 114-116
 - *Interdependence and Revolution: The West in the World Today*, London 1980
 - 'Foundations of Peace in Europe: Facts are Better than Dreams' in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 48/4, December 1981, 101-105
 - 'European Political Co-Operation: America Should Welcome It' in *International Affairs*, 58/1, Winter 1981-1982, 1-6
 - 'Lack of Consistent Political Strategy: A Case of Friction', *NATO Review*, 31/2, 1983, 1-4
 - 'Lord Carrington on NATO (excerpts)' in *Survival*, 27/1, 1985, 38-41
 - *A Democracy Is Unable: A James Bryce Memorial Lecture Delivered in the Wolfson Hall, Somerville College, on 31 October 1986*, Oxford 1987
 - *NATO in 1987: The Prospects*, Hamburg 1987
 - 'East-West Relations: A NATO Perspective' in *Nação e Defesa*, XII/42, 1987, 11-22 (speech to the Portuguese National Defence Institute, 6 February 1987)
 - 'NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Future Relationships and Strategies' in *Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Journal*, 132/4, 1987, 3-7
 - 'La Seguridad de Europa' in *Política Exterior*, 1/1, Winter 1987, 28-36
 - Third International Roundtable Conference: East-West Relations in the 1990s – Politics and Technology: Oct. 9-10, 1987 The Hague, Cambridge, MA 1988 (with K. Adelman)
 - *Reflect on Things Past: The Memoirs of Peter Lord Carrington*, London 1988, published in the US, with a foreword by H.A. Kissinger, as *Reflecting on Things Past: The Memoirs of Peter Lord Carrington*, New York 1988 (quotations taken from this edition)
 - 'NATO: The Challenge of the Future' in J.R. Golden et al. (Eds), *NATO at Forty: Change, Continuity, and Prospects*, Boulder 1989, 294-311
 - 'Towards a New Concert of Europe: Ditchley Foundation Annual Lecture XXVII', 13 July 1990, available at www.ditchley.co.uk/conferences/past-programme/1990-1999/1990/lecture-xxvii
 - 'The Europe Lecture: Peace and Security in Europe', Utrecht 1994
 - 'Churchill Remembered: Recollections by Tony Benn MP, Lord Carrington, Lord Deedes and Mary Soames' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11, 2001, 393-414
-

Literature

- S.J. Ungar, 'Dateline Britain: Thatcherism' in *Foreign Policy*, 35, Summer 1979, 180-191
- S. Welsh, 'Kohl Bows to Carrington, Attacks U.S. Beam Policy' in *Executive Intelligence Review* (EIR), 11/16, 24 April 1984, 30-32
- D. Middleton, 'NATO Buildup: A Plan to Spur Europe's Contribution' in *The New York Times*, 30 October 1984, available at www.nytimes.com/1984/10/30/world/nato-buildup-a-plan-to-spur-europe-s-contribution.html
- B. Gwertzman, 'NATO Talks End on Note of Harmony' in *The New York Times*, 15 December 1984, available at www.nytimes.com/1984/12/15/world/nato-talks-end-on-note-of-harmony.html
- P. Cosgrave, *Carrington: A Life and a Policy*, London 1985
- B. Gwertzman, 'NATO Chief Welcomes Soviet Proposals' in *The New York Times*, 8 October 1985, available at www.nytimes.com/1985/10/08/world/nato-chief-welcomes-soviet-proposals.html
- 'Statesman Out of His Time?' in *The Economist*, 2 November 1985, 3-4
- I.F. Nicolson, *The Mystery of Crichton Down*, Oxford 1986
- P.N. Schmitz, *Defending the NATO Alliance: Global Implications*, Washington DC 1987

- S. Nicholson, 'NATO's Carrington Says USSR Still a Threat' in United Press International, 9 June 1988, available at www.upi.com/Archives/1988/06/09/NATOs-Carrington-says-USSR-still-a-threat/9849131827218/
- J.R. Golden et al. (Eds), *NATO at Forty: Change, Continuity, and Prospects*, Boulder 1989
- P. Cosgrave, 'Carrington, Peter (Alexander Rupert)' in K. Robbins (Ed.), *The Blackwell Biographical Dictionary of British Political Life in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1990, 86-87
- D. Stuart, 'NATO in the 1980s: Between European Pillar and European Home' in *Armed Forces & Society*, 6/3, Spring 1990, 421-436
- 'Carrington, Peter Alexander Rupert (IWM interview)', Imperial War Museums, 29 March 1990, available at www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80011023
- M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, London 1993
- C. Hazlehurst and S. Whitehead, *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers, 1900-1964*, London 1996, 81
- H. Schmidt, *Weggefährten: Erinnerungen und Reflexionen*, Berlin 1996
- D.M. Abshire, 'Achieving Allied Cooperation on Conventional Defense' in *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda*, 4/1, March 1999, 29-31 (NATO's 50th Anniversary)
- C. Mosley (Ed.), *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage*, Wilmington 2003
- E. Sleeman (Ed.), *The International Who's Who*, 2004, London 2003, 280-281
- L. Freedman, *Official History of the Falklands Campaign, Volume I: The Origins of the Falklands War & Volume II: War and Diplomacy*, London 2005
- R.C. Hendrickson, *Diplomacy and War at NATO: The Secretary General and Military Action after the Cold War*, Columbia 2006, 34-38
- M. Rimaneli, *The A to Z of NATO and Other International Security Organizations*, Lanham 2009
- 'Lord Carrington: NATO Secretary General, 1984-1988', NATO, 2009, available at www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/who_is_who_7302.htm
- A. Donaghy, *The British Government and the Falkland Islands, 1974-79*, Basingstoke 2014
- C. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume One: Not For Turning & Volume Two: Everything She Wants*, London 2013, 2015
- 'Carrington (of Upton), Peter Carrington, 6th Baron, Baron Carrington of Bulcot Lodge' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Britannica Academic, 2016, available at <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/97052/Carrington-of-Upton-Peter-Carrington-6th-Baron-Baron-Carrington-of-Bulcot-Lodge/>
- 'Lord Carrington', University of Reading, available at www.reading.ac.uk/about/governance/key-people/lord-carrington.aspx
- 'Lord Carrington', Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, available at www.parliament.uk/biographies/lords/lord-carrington/3295
- C. Lee, *Lord Carrington: A Biography*, London 2017

(all websites accessed on 20 September 2016)

How to cite

Hendrik W. Ohnesorge, 'Carrington, Peter Alexander Rupert' in *IO BIO, Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations*, edited by Bob Reinalda, Kent J. Kille and Jaci L. Eisenberg. <https://sandbox.zenodo.org/records/506445> (sandbox preview)

Text © the author(s) and IO BIO, licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). The portrait is excluded and remains under the rights of its credited source. We have tried to trace the rights holder to obtain permission for the use of the portrait, but contact us in case we have failed.