

## **Sir Andrew Graham Gilchrist**

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**Sir Andrew Gilchrist, KCMG, a former ambassador to the Republic of Ireland, Indonesia and Iceland died on March 6 aged 82. He was born on April 19, 1910.**

Few diplomats fly into such turbulence as did Andrew Gilchrist. Fewer still seemed to relish the experience more than he did. The last decade of his colourful career was accompanied by the sound of breaking glass as angry mobs demonstrated against Britain. One embassy was fire-bombed, another burnt down - while in Iceland his official residence was stoned.

But Gilchrist, a special agent in the war steadfastly refused to be a sitting duck. In Jakarta, he encouraged his assistant military attaché, Major Roderick "Red Rory" Walker, to defy an Indonesian crowd, 5,000-strong by marching through the embassy garden playing the bag-pipes. It failed to save the mission from attack. Protesting against the inclusion of North Borneo and Sarawak in the newly-declared Federation of Malaysia, a mob over-turned Gilchrist's car, ransacked his office, ripped up the Union Flag, scrawled anti-imperialist slogans on the walls and finally razed the building. "It's a pity the Indonesians don't play cricket." Gilchrist dryly observed. "They demonstrated their ability to handle stones with great credit,"

He had first captured the public imagination four years before when as envoy in Reykjavik during the first Cod War, he had been besieged with his family in their residence. As Icelanders set about smashing Gilchrist's windows, infuriated by the Royal Navy's protection for British trawlers fishing inside the new 12-mile limits, he resorted to Scotland's own strategic weapon. He turned his record player up and beamed bag-pipe music at the hostile mob.

After two such tempestuous tours, the Foreign Office rewarded him for his last post with what was still then seen as a graceful sinecure: the job of HM Ambassador to Ireland. But three years after his arrival in 1966, he once more found himself heavily engaged. In 1969 a Dublin crowd stormed the British Embassy in Merrion Square, smashed the windows and eventually fire-bombed it.

He retired, somewhat relieved in 1970. Six years later, one of his successors', Christopher Ewart-Biggs, was murdered by the IRA.

After leaving Dublin he began a second career as chairman of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) - "a merchant bank with a social conscience as he described it. Convinced that what was required was action rather than words, he applied himself to his new job with the same ruthless energy and force he had shown as a diplomat. Salmon farming, local fishing and agriculture were among the rural industries which benefited from Gilchrist's vigorous six-year stewardship of the board.

His feeling for Scotland was innate. Andrew Graham Gilchrist was born at Lesmahagow in the upper Clyde Valley and educated at Edinburgh Academy and Exeter College, Oxford, where he took a third class degree in history.

In 1933 he entered the old colonial service as a student interpreter in what was then called Siam. His three years in Bangkok were followed by a period at the Paris consulate, then a year at Marseilles, after which he returned as second secretary to Bangkok.

Gilchrist was there when Japan entered the war in 1941 and was interned for eight months before being repatriated under an exchange of diplomats. Back in Britain he was seconded briefly to the Ministry of Information before becoming vice consul in Rabat.

Increasingly frustrated at being out of uniform, he then sought a transfer to the Special Operations Executive (SOE). By 1944 he was on active service with the SOE's Force 136 in India, training Thai insurgents to fight behind enemy lines, a job in which his knowledge of the language proved invaluable, his work earned him a mention in dispatches after the war.

After demobilisation he reapplied to join the Foreign Office and served in consular posts at Stuttgart, Singapore and Chicago before going in 1959 to Reykjavik where the job of consul was upgraded to that of ambassador during his time there because of the Cod War.

On leaving the HIDB in 1976 Gilchrist developed a third career as an author. He wrote altogether nine books, including five thrillers like *The Watercress File* (1985) and *Did Van Gogh Paint His Bed?* (1991) and a number of histories. His non-fiction works included *Bangkok Top Secret* (1970), based on his own wartime experiences and *Cod Wars And How To Lose Them* (1978), which actually had an Icelandic edition printed.

*Malaya 1941: the fall of a fighting empire* (1991) was a survey of a subject on which Gilchrist had long meditated and had already written persuasive articles. It was a comprehensive critique of the strategic short sightedness and tactical ineptitude which resulted in the fall of Singapore and the eclipse of British prestige in Asia. Gilchrist provided an unsparing analysis of the creaky Malaya command structure, the obsolete air defences and the inadequate state of troop training – all components of what was perhaps the greatest reverse to British arms throughout the war and a portent of the end of European imperial power in the Far East.

He also became a prolific correspondent in the national press, particularly on the continuing Irish problem. He recently completed a radio drama (currently under consideration by BBC Scotland) which postulated the withdrawal of troops from Ulster. He argued that fears of a bloodbath in such an event were unfounded.

A stocky, bearded, entirely unconventional government official, Gilchrist had his critics in the foreign Office. Some thought for instance that his robust response in Jakarta 30 years ago might literally have inflamed the situation. But no one ever doubted Gilchrist's courage. A musician who loved all the arts, a skilled salmon fisherman in what remained of his spare time and no mean rugby player in his youth (he once played for an expatriate XV in Siam against Cambodia), he took every twist and turn of life in his stride.

His wife, Freda, whom he married in 1946, died six years ago and he is survived by two sons and a daughter.