

# Churchill and the “Flying Peril,” 1913-1955

compiled by Richard M. Langworth

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## **An Early Glimpse of Armageddon**

The hon. Gentleman opposite made our flesh creep the other night by suggesting the dropping of bombs from airships on the House of Commons. If that event should happen, I am confident that the Members of this House would gladly embrace the opportunity of sharing the perils which the soldier and the sailors have to meet.

—*House of Commons, 26 March 1913*

## **Germany Disarmed**

Now the demand is that Germany should be allowed to rearm. Do not delude yourselves. Do not let His Majesty's Government believe—I am sure they do not believe—that all that Germany is asking for is equal status....All these bands of sturdy Teutonic youths. Marching through the streets and roads of Germany, with the light of desire in their eyes to suffer for their Fatherland, when they have the weapons, believe me they will then ask for the return of lost territories and lost colonies.

—*House of Commons, 23 November 1932*

In a war between two States with equal air forces it would not pay—I put it no higher; leave out morality, humanity and the public law of Europe—it would not pay, from the military self-preservation standpoint of any power engaged in an equal fight to waste its strength upon non-combatants and open towns.

—*House of Commons, 14 March 1933*

## **Germany Rearming**

With our enormous Metropolis here, the greatest target in the world, a kind of tremendous, fat, valuable cow tied up to attract the beast of prey, we are in a position in which we have never been before, and in which no other country in the world is at the present time.

—*House of Commons, 30 July 1934*

No one can doubt that a week or ten days' intensive bombing attack upon London would be a very serious matter indeed. One could hardly expect that less than 30,000 or 40,000 people would be killed or maimed.

—*House of Commons, 8 November 1934*

The flying peril is not a peril from which one can fly. It is necessary to face it where we stand. We cannot possibly retreat. We cannot move London. We cannot move the vast population which is dependent on the estuary of the Thames. We cannot move the naval bases which are established along our southern coasts with the great hereditary naval populations living around them....we shall have to face this peril, whatever it may be, where we stand.

—*House of Commons, 28 November 1934*

The frontiers of Germany are very much nearer to London than the seacoasts of this island are to Berlin, and whereas practically the whole of the German bombing air force can reach London with an effective load, very few, if any, of our aeroplanes can reach Berlin with any appreciable load of bombs. That must be considered as one of the factors in judging between the two countries.

—*House of Commons, 19 March 1935*

It is only in the century that this hateful conception of inducing nations to surrender by terrorizing the helpless civil population and by massacring the women and children has gained acceptance and countenance amongst men. If it continues, one can clearly see that the conquest of the air may mean the subjugation of mankind and the destruction of our civilization.

—*House of Commons, 7 June 1935*

### **Germany Armed**

Even if the Nazi legions stood triumphant on the Black Sea, or indeed upon the Caspian, even if Hitler was at the gates of India, it would profit him nothing if at the same time the entire economic and scientific apparatus of German war power lay shattered and pulverized at home.

—*House of Commons, 20 August 1940*

We ask no favours of the enemy. We seek from them no compunction. On the contrary, if tonight the people of London were asked to cast their vote whether a convention should be entered into to stop the bombing of all cities...the people of London with one voice would say to Hitler: "You have committed every crime under the sun. Where you have been the least resisted there you have been the most brutal....We will have no truce or parley with you, or the grisly gang who work your wicked will. You do your worst—and we will do our best. Perhaps it may be our turn soon; perhaps it may be our turn now."

—*London County Hall, 14 July 1941*

To the blood-curdling threats which German propaganda has been making in order to keep up the spirit of their people and of their satellites, there have been added the most absurd claims about the results of the first use of the secret weapon....Considering the modest weight and small penetration-power of these bombs, the damage they have by blast effect has been extensive. It cannot at all be compared with the terrific destruction by fire and high explosives with which we have been assaulting Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, and scores of other German cities and other war-manufacturing points in Germany.

—*House of Commons, 7 June 1944*

## The Nuclear Age

In these present days we dwell strangely and precariously under the shield and protection of the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb is still only in the hands of a State and nation which we know will never use it except in the cause of right and freedom. But it may well be that in a few years this awful agency of destruction will be widespread and the catastrophe following from its use by several warring nations will not only bring to an end all that we call civilisation, but may possibly disintegrate the globe itself.

—Zurich University, 19 September 1946

A curious paradox has emerged. Let me put it simply. After a certain point has been passed it may be said, "The worse things get, the better"...It may well be that we shall by a process of sublime irony have reached a stage in this story where safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation. [But the nuclear] deterrent does not cover the case of lunatics or dictators in the mood of Hitler when he found himself in his final dug-out. That is a blank. Happily, we may find methods of protecting ourselves, if we were all agreed, against that.

—House of Commons, 1 March 1955