Seventieth Anniversary of the Iron Curtain Speech
Reviews: No More Champagne

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On the Cover

Angus McNeill’s drawing of a Dervish spearman
serves as the frontispiece for the first volume of
the forthcoming definitive edition of The River War:
see pages 10–13.
FROM THE EDITOR

Churchill in Combat

One hundred years ago this winter Winston Churchill took command of the 6th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers and led it into combat on the Western Front. This was to be his last experience as a uniformed officer in battle but not his last time under fire. To mark the anniversary we have invited leading specialists to recount Churchill’s many adventures in combat.

The regions along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan remain as dangerous today as they were in Churchill’s time. Con Coughlin, who reports on this area of the world, vividly describes Churchill's first journey into battle on the North-West Frontier and notes the striking similarities between then and now.

Churchill’s account of his charge with the 21st Lancers at Omdurman (page 50) and the campaign surrounding it has excited readers for more than a century. Unfortunately, the full account set forth in the rare and costly first edition of The River War has remained unknown to most, since all subsequent editions have been abridgments. James W. Muller explains his prolonged effort to bring the restored and now fully annotated original text back into print this year.

Churchill’s early political career is bordered by his soldiering experiences in South Africa and Europe. Candice Millard takes a fresh look at the Boer War episode that first propelled Churchill into Parliament, while Douglas Russell describes the hazards Churchill endured in the First World War after he was driven from power by the Dardanelles campaign.

Although he was an observer and not a combatant, Churchill first came under fire during the Cuban War of Independence in 1895. This story has been well told by Hal Klepak in his recent book Churchill Comes of Age. Few people, however, know that Churchill made a triumphant return to Cuba more than fifty years later, a story Klepak sets out for us here.

In Finest Hour 169 Terry Reardon described Churchill’s involvement with the Royal Navy’s base at Scapa Flow in both World Wars. In this issue Reardon gives us the full story of the construction of the Churchill Barriers built to fortify the anchorage against U-boat attacks.

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the “Iron Curtain” speech, Churchill’s historic address delivered at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, that came to be seen as the first public recognition that a Cold War was underway. Brendan Sofen looks at these remarks and three other important speeches Churchill made at American universities.

Finally we have a dozen books reviewed, including one that tells Churchill’s story as an epic poem.

David Freeman, January 2016
Sir Martin Gilbert Remembered

LONDON—Thank you so much for the story about Martin’s memorial service in the December issue of the Chartwell Bulletin. I finally had the chance to sit down and read the latest Finest Hour as well and realized how Martin’s “fingerprints” were all over it. He may be gone but is certainly “not forgotten,” and that is in great part due to The Churchill Centre.
—Lady (Esther) Gilbert

Inspiration

NEW YORK CITY—Regarding your piece on Churchill in the diary of Anne Frank: there was another young Jewish person exposed to WSC in that difficult period—yours truly.

During the war I had the assignment of translating a French newspaper into Yiddish for my grandfather. The name Winston Churchill—then making some of his most famous speeches—came up in the paper, and my grandfather, speaking in awe, said that this was a great man. At that young age, I had little understanding of who Churchill was and what made him great. Still, my grandfather’s remark and the name “Churchill” must have made an indelible impression on me.

A quarter of a century later, as a young assistant professor, I looked for a topic for a book that would fulfill the academic requirement to “publish or perish.” I seemed to hear my grandfather’s voice pronouncing again reverently the name of Churchill. The intervening years vanished, years during which, in order to make a new life in America, I had put out of mind those terrible early years of war. Thoughts long suppressed now came to the surface. If Churchill was a professional writer and I was a student of writing, could I not put my skills at his service? Did I not owe him a tribute? After all, I survived partly because there was one leader at that critical juncture who would not yield. By interpreting Churchill’s writings, I would be helping to carry out the mandate written on a stone in the pavement of Westminster Abbey: “Remember Winston Churchill.” And so out of that incident and its recollection came no less than four books on the writings of Churchill. Chance at work!

Fortune not only spared me poor Anne Frank’s fate but also implanted that minor detail in my memory and then revived it.
—Manfred Weidhorn

Below: Drawing of a Dervish scout by Angus McNeill. See story starting on page 10.
In 1897, British forces launched a bloody campaign against Afghanistan’s Pashtun tribesmen—forebears of the Taliban—on India’s North-West Frontier (now the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan). It was the first time Winston Churchill, then twenty-two and a junior cavalry lieutenant as well as an aspiring war correspondent for the London *Daily Telegraph*, had taken part in military action as a combatant. The experience would have a profound bearing on his subsequent career as a writer and politician.

A week into the campaign, Churchill was still a knight of the pen, rather than one of the sword, so he concentrated his energy on finding good copy for his *Telegraph* dispatches. He kept himself busy by accompanying the daily reconnaissance patrols and observing their map-making efforts. As he told his friend Reggie Barnes, he spent most days with the 11th Bengal Lancers and the evenings in the general’s mess. When out riding with the Lancers, Churchill was always on the lookout for action, but had little luck. “I take every opportunity and have accompanied solitary patrols into virgin valleys and ridden through villages and forts full of armed men—looking furious—but without any adventure occurring. It is a strange war. One moment people are your friends and the next they are shooting. The value of life is so little that they do not bear any grudge for being shot at.”

On 12 September Churchill’s camp came under sniper fire. Churchill was having dinner with Major-General Sir Bindon Blood when “a bullet hummed by over head.” The incident strengthened Churchill’s view that the Mohmands, a local Pashtun tribe, needed to be dealt with. As he told Barnes: “After today we begin to burn villages. Every one. And all who resist will be killed without quarter. The Mohmands need a lesson, and there is no doubt we are a very cruel people.”

On 13 September, Blood dispatched two squadrons from the 11th Bengal Lancers to scout the north of the Mohmand Valley, the focus of the tribes’ anti-British revolt. The Lancers set fire to one village and, as they withdrew, came under fire from tribesmen hidden on the surrounding hillsides. It was a minor skirmish, with no British casualties, but it was a harbinger of the more serious fighting to come. Churchill was at the camp to welcome the Lancers on their return and noted, with a degree of envy: “They were vastly pleased with themselves. Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result.”

Churchill’s galloping around with the Lancers provided good material for his *Telegraph* dispatches. All the articles were signed “By a Young Officer,” and Churchill did his best to post “picturesque forcible letters,” as the newspaper’s editor had demanded, even when he had not seen a great deal. His dispatch of 5

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By Con Coughlin

Above: Pashtun tribesmen
September pays tribute to the bravery of the Pashtuns: "Their swordsmanship, neglecting guards, concerns itself only with cuts and, careless of what injury they may receive, they devote themselves to the destruction of their opponents."

But he is less well disposed to the mullahs, who incited the violence in the first place, and was appalled by their habit of trading their womenfolk to buy rifles. "This degradation of mind is unrelieved by a single elevated sentiment," he writes. "Their religion is the most miserable fanaticism, in which cruelty, credulity, and immorality are equally represented. Their holy men—the Mullahs—prize as their chief privilege a sort of droit de seigneur. It is impossible to imagine a lower type of being or a more dreadful state of barbarism."

On 14 September Churchill moved seven miles west to Nawagai with the 3rd Brigade and Blood’s divisional headquarters, while the 2nd Brigade marched towards the Rambat Pass, aiming to cross it the following day. But as the 2nd Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Patrick Jeffreys, a highly decorated soldier who had fought in the Zulu wars and Burma, established camp at Markhanai, eleven miles south of the pass, it came under sustained attack.

Blood ordered Jeffreys to move against the tribesmen the next day. The following morning Jeffreys began moving up the Mohmand Valley with three columns, but he was met with strong resistance from the local Pashtun tribesmen, forcing him to withdraw.

By nightfall, the general and his small escort had been cut off, and defended themselves with some difficulty until relief arrived. The action resulted in the British sustaining nearly 150 dead and wounded, some of them subalterns no older than Churchill. As Blood later recalled in his memoirs: "As soon as I heard of General Jeffreys’ mishap, I sent for Churchill and suggested his joining the General in order to see a little fighting. He was all for it, so I sent him over at once and he saw more fighting than I expected, and very hard fighting too."

Young Fool

Churchill’s long-standing desire to put himself in the thick of the action was finally realised on the morning of 16 September when, conspicuously riding a grey charger, he joined the 2nd Brigade of the Bengal Lancers as they moved out from their base at Inayat Kila at 6 AM and headed for the Mohmand Valley. He had bought his horse at an auction of the effects of a junior officer who had been killed earlier in the campaign. By choosing to ride a grey, Churchill was making sure that no one could fail to notice his endeavours were he to find himself in the thick of the action.

The Mohmand Valley, to the south-east of the Afghan border, is a fan-shaped cul-de-sac about ten miles in length from north to south. Traditionally it has been controlled by tribes that jealously guard their independence, and it later became a renowned stronghold for the Taliban.

The 2nd Brigade’s mission was to “chastise” the valley’s tribes by burning crops, destroying reservoirs and blowing up fortified buildings in the villages. Within the context of Major General Sir Bindon Blood’s broader campaign to restore order to the North-West Frontier, this was a routine operation designed to curtail the threat posed by one particularly troublesome group. But it was certainly not without risk.

The Afghans had learnt, over many decades of fighting, that they were no match for the British in set-piece battles. Instead, they relied on classic guerrilla tactics, withdrawing when confronted by a superior force, and then launching highly effective ambushes.

Churchill rode out with a force of 1,000 fighting men, who were divided into three columns to cover as much of the valley as possible in a day. He was attached to the centre column commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Goldney of the 35th Sikhs.

The objective of Goldney’s column was to destroy two villages at the far end of the valley, Badelai and Shahi-Tangi. Seventy-five men from the Sikhs were detached from the main force to take the conical hill between the two villages, while another company of
around eighty-five men, including Churchill, were
ordered to advance up the long, rocky spur that led to
Shahi-Tangi. All of these targets have featured more
recently in drone strikes carried out by the US military
against Taliban targets in what are now the tribal areas
of northern Pakistan.

Having satisfied themselves that the village was
deserted, the soldiers set fire to whatever would burn
before being ordered to withdraw after fifteen minutes.
But in their haste to reach the village, the Sikhs had
inadvertently strayed beyond the safety of the cover
provided by the mountain guns.

This was just the opportunity the tribesmen thrived
upon. The British force suddenly found itself isolated,
and the tribesmen gathered to attack. As Churchill
and the other soldiers rested from the exertion of their
morning climb, they found the eeriness of the deserted
village disconcerting. “We are rather in the air here,”
remarked one officer.

When Goldney eventually gave the order to retire,
the enemy began to collect on all sides, and “thereupon
promptly attacked in force, and the Sikhs were driven
back about a mile, to the foot of the spur,” as the offi-
cial account recorded. While Churchill and the Sikhs
were fighting their way to safety, another large group of
tribesmen moved to cut off their retreat.

Winston and his party suddenly found themselves
in a position of the utmost peril. As he later recalled in

My Early Life: “Like most young fools, I was looking for trouble,
and only hoped that something exciting would happen. It did!”

Certainly an Adventure

The tribesmen had kept
themselves well con-
cealed as the Sikhs
advanced on Shahi-Tangi, but
now attacked the retreating
British in force: “Suddenly the
mountain-side sprang to life.
Swords flashed from behind
rocks, bright flags waved here
and there. A dozen widely scat-
tered smoke-puffs broke from
the rugged face in front of
us. Loud explosions resounded
close at hand. From high up
on the crag, one thousand, two
day thousand, three thousand feet
above us, white or blue figures
appeared, dropping down the
mountainside from ledge to
ledge like monkeys down the branches of a tall tree. A
shrii crying rose from many points. Yi! Yi! Yi! Bang!
Bang! Bang! Bang! The whole hillside began to be spotted
with smoke, and tiny figures descended nearer to us.”

The spur along which the British force was retreating
consisted of three interconnected knolls. Churchill,
another officer, and eight sepoys were left to hold the
second knoll and provide cover as the rest of the unit
withdrew to the third knoll below. But when the turn
came for Churchill’s group to retire, they came under
heavy fire from tribesmen who had seized the first knoll
vacated by the retreating British.

Churchill, unaware of the impending danger, had
spent around five minutes taking what he called “casual
pot-shots” at the tribesmen from his protected position
at the second knoll. Then, as Churchill’s ten-strong
group rose to withdraw to the third knoll, they were
met with a well-aimed volley of fire from the tribesmen,
which killed two, including Churchill’s fellow officer,
and wounded three others.

As Churchill recalled: “The rest of our party got up
and turned to retreat. There was a ragged volley from
the rocks: shouts, exclamations, and a scream. I thought
for a moment that five or six of our men had lain down
again. So they had: two killed and three wounded. One
man shot through the breast and pouring with blood,
another lay on his back kicking and twisting. The
British officer was spinning round just behind me, his
face a mass of blood, his right eye cut out. Yes, it was certainly an adventure.”

Winston and the other uninjured soldiers desperately tried to pull the wounded back to safety, but had no covering fire. As Churchill observed: “It is a point of honour on the Indian frontier not to leave wounded men behind. Death by inches and hideous mutilation are the invariable measure meted out to all who fall in battle into the hands of the Pashtun tribesmen.”

The adjutant of the 35th Sikhs, Lieutenant Victor Hughes, with a number of sepoys, rushed to assist with the recovery of the dead and injured, but was himself shot. Churchill and the other survivors continued to drag and carry the casualties down the hill, passing through a group of deserted houses, with the tribesmen in hot pursuit, firing at the retreating British.

“The bullets passed in the air with a curious sucking noise, like that produced by drawing the air between the lips,” Churchill observed. One of the Sikhs helping to carry the wounded along the spur was shot through the calf, causing him to shout out in pain. “His turban fell off,” Churchill recorded, “and his long black hair streamed over his shoulders—a tragic golliwog.”

As he later wrote: “I forgot everything else at this moment except a desire to kill this man. I wore my long cavalry sword well-sharpened. After all, I had won the Public Schools fencing medal. I resolved on personal combat à l’arme blanche. The savage saw me coming. I was not more than 20 yards away. He picked up a big stone and hurled it at me with his left hand, and then awaited me, brandishing his sword. There were others waiting not far behind him. I changed my mind about the cold steel. I pulled out my revolver, took, as I thought, most careful aim, and fired. No result. I fired again. No result. I fired again. Whether I hit him or not, I cannot tell. At any rate he ran back two or three yards and plumped down behind a rock. The fusillade was continuous. I looked around. I was alone with the enemy. Not a friend was to be seen. I ran as fast as I could. There were bullets everywhere.”

Detecting Emotion

Churchill had demonstrated courage and resolve in the face of a determined enemy—qualities he would display on many more occasions during his long and eventful life. He spent nearly six weeks risking life and limb fighting the Pashtun tribesmen, and on several occasions came close to being killed, or at the very least suffering serious injury. He was involved in what he described as three “sharp skirmishes” and, as he later boasted to his mother, came under fire “10 complete times” and even received a mention in dispatches for his bravery.

Con Coughlin is the executive foreign editor for the Daily Telegraph. All quotations in this article are drawn from his book Churchill’s First War: Young Winston at War with the Afghans (Thomas Dunne Books, 2014). On page 39 of this issue of Finest Hour he reviews Churchill Comes of Age: Cuba, 1895, by Hal Klepak.
The River War: 
Preparing the Definitive Edition

The Discovery

It was a grey day in January 1989 when I discovered that my leather-bound copy of *The River War*, one of thirty-four volumes of the *Collected Works of Sir Winston S. Churchill* that I had recently purchased, was but an abridgment. Like Churchill himself, if on a more modest scale, I have always lived a charmed life; and, by extraordinary good fortune, my wife Judith and I were halfway through a fifteen-month wedding trip, for most of which we lived in civilized but straitened splendor in London at William Goodenough College, near Russell Square. I was an academic visitor at the London School of Economics and Political Science, working on a book about Churchill’s writings. But half a dozen noble distractions—books on and by Churchill that I have been editing since then—are my apology for my original work remaining incomplete more than a quarter-century later. Four of these distractions have been published, with two more soon to appear: new editions of Churchill’s autobiography *My Early Life: A Roving Commission* and his most impressive early book *The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of the Soudan*.

Having just finished in autumn 1988 a draft chapter about Churchill’s experiences on the Nile nine decades earlier, I was learning that winter about his time in South Africa. But an entry in the bound catalogue of the old British Library stating that the first edition of *The River War*, published in November 1899, was a two-volume work had led me to look at it. A rare book, it had to be consulted not at my usual seat in the round Reading Room, where Karl Marx had written his book on capital, but in the North Reading Room, where rules were stricter. After the book was delivered to me there, I kept it for days to find out what the differences were between it and the version I owned. It turned out that the first edition had seven chapters, passages in all other chapters, three appendices, and many maps and illustrations that were left out of later editions. By the end of the month I realized that *The River War* was a much richer, more intriguing book than I had known from reading the shorter version.

By James W. Muller
Since the attack on New York’s World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, a quotation has flown round the Internet—a memorable pronouncement by Churchill about Islam, from the first edition of *The River War*, which cannot be found in any edition readily available today. It causes confusion when readers search for it in vain in shorter editions, because it is among the hundreds of passages in the first edition that were left out of the second. The importance of the changes and the rarity of both editions persuaded me that a new definitive edition of *The River War* was needed—one that restored the original text but also showed subsequent alterations.

Before long, my friend Paul A. Rahe, an historian then at the University of Tulsa and now at Hillsdale College, who wrote a fine chapter on *The River War* for my book *Churchill as Peacemaker* (1997), urged me to take up this work in succession to Cecil Rhodes’s brother Colonel Frank Rhodes, the original editor of Churchill’s book. My fellow governors of the Churchill Centre were enthusiastic about the project. Richard M. Langworth, then President of the Centre, invested his formidable energy and imagination in launching it, sharing his deep knowledge of all matters related to Churchill and, with his wife Barbara, welcoming me on visits to his voluminous library in New Hampshire. Parker H. Lee III, then Executive Director of the Churchill Centre, supported my work and, eventually, with the help of Anthea Morton-Saner at Churchill’s literary agency Curtis Brown, drew up the contract for this new edition, which has since claimed attention from her successor Gordon Wise. Subsequent presidents of the Churchill Centre John Plumpton, William C. Ives, and Laurence Geller also gave the project enthusiastic support, as did Administrator Lorraine Horn and Executive Directors Daniel N. Myers and Lee Pollock. The new edition is to be published this year in two volumes by Bruce Fingerhut at St. Augustine’s Press, who has been steady, perceptive, and game in returning the book to print.

The Idea

The Task
his predecessor Piers Brendon has been. But neither at the Churchill Archives nor anywhere else have I found, in more than two decades since then, marked-up drafts of the first edition, showing passages to be dropped in the second edition, published in 1902, which became the basis for all subsequent editions, including the one I had used to write my chapter. The brief introduction to The River War in the Collected Works by Churchill’s bibliographer Frederick Woods breathes not a word about the fact that it was abridged. Many distinguished authors of books on Churchill are as unaware of the existence of the longer edition as I had been. But in the second edition, which is even rarer than the first, I found a brief explanation in Churchill’s new preface, dropped in subsequent editions, of the need to reduce the length of the book to make it fit into a single, cheaper volume.

Larry S. Arnn, then President of the Claremont Institute and now President of Hillsdale College, arranged for Thomas and Lori Krannawitter, Leah Conger, and Jeffrey Hall to scan two editions of The River War provided by Churchill bookseller Mark Weber. The old-fashioned typography left scans riddled with gibberish; my consolation for spending hundreds of hours correcting the text was that it was easier than typing every word of a book that ran to almost a thousand pages in the original edition. Mark answered my bibliographical inquiries and dozens of questions about variants, provided me with Churchill’s articles in periodicals, lent me (and subsequently the publisher) a copy of the first edition, helped me to locate other editions of the book, and, with his wife Avril, hosted me in Tucson during a visit to consult his massive stock of Churchill books.

To get to the bottom of the internal evidence about the changes made in revising The River War was one of the main reasons I took on this project. Denali Kemppel, then a student at Dartmouth College, assisted me in collating texts of different editions, with support from a grant by the Æquus Institute. I compared the first edition with the 1902 revision, marking differences for the new edition, which includes the whole text from both editions and will be printed in two colors with new footnotes so the reader can follow the changes. Students at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, especially Anastasia Mironova and Olga Bochkaryova, helped me proofread and establish the text of the new edition, making sure every word and punctuation mark is taken accurately from earlier editions of Churchill’s book.

**Twists and Turns**

The 1996–99 centenary of what our author called the River War, just before the turn of our new century, would have been an auspicious moment for publishing a new edition, but mine was far from ready then. Another edition appeared in 1997, introduced by the author’s homonymous grandson the late Winston S. Churchill, taking its text from a 1962 abridgment of the shorter version of The River War. The delay allowed me to profit from a steady trickle of new books about the campaign. One of them informed me that some fifty illustrations drawn for the first edition of The River War by Churchill’s brother officer and fellow Harrovian Angus McNeill but dropped from the book thereafter were still extant in the artist’s family. By the generosity of his granddaughter Sheila Fanshawe, they will be restored in the new edition, along with many colored maps that were dropped from the book after its first or second editions.

From another centenary book I learned that fourteen of Churchill’s fifteen handwritten dispatches for the Morning Post from the Sudan in the summer of 1898, his raw material and first draft for parts of the book, had come to light in the papers of the newspaper’s proprietor in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds. Happening to be in London, I left the British Library, which by then had moved to new quarters near King’s Cross, and boarded a train to Leeds to read those dispatches, not knowing that Leeds was three hours away. After returning to London the same evening to retrieve my suitcase, I took a second trip to Leeds. Three days later, I had transcribed the whole text of the dispatches as Churchill originally wrote them, in a form quite different from the sanitized, shortened version published in the Morning Post and afterwards reprinted in books of Churchill’s early war dispatches. Later, my student Elizabeth Heim helped me decipher Churchill’s handwriting and compare it to his newspaper columns I had photocopied at the British Library newspaper archive. A new edition of the dispatches, which have never before
been printed as Churchill wrote them, with notes indicating revisions made by the newspaper editor, will appear as a new appendix in the second volume—an intriguing element of the new edition.

I began to teach seminars on *The River War* to students at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, and their questions about personalities and events of a faraway campaign in the desert more than a hundred years earlier persuaded me to add more new footnotes. I resolved to identify, as far as possible, every person mentioned in the twenty-six chapters of the book, every passage quoted or referred to by Churchill, and terms and events that might be unfamiliar to the twenty-first century reader. This detective work, begun in the earliest days of the Internet but powerfully assisted over time by its increasing richness, which provided many good leads, has been among the most rewarding parts of the project. I have profited from countless books and articles chased down by indefatigable reference and interlibrary loan librarians.

Debts of Honor

The official Churchill biography by Sir Martin Gilbert answered many questions and provided clues for further research, which Martin encouraged at our meetings in London and Alaska. I had the new Churchill bibliography by Ronald I. Cohen always at hand, and its author provided advice and encouragement at all stages of the project. I had help from experts on the Sudan, such as the late Professor Robert Collins at the University of California, Santa Barbara. For biographical footnotes on Sudanese figures I also relied, with permission from his publisher, on the excellent biographical dictionary by the late Richard Hill. I made several visits to the Sudan Archive at the University of Durham, whose director Jane Hogan was unfailingly helpful. One of my students, Margaret Miller, née Dewhurst, made a separate trip thither to help with research. Douglas S. Russell, a fellow governor of the Churchill Centre and author of a book on Churchill’s career at arms, answered questions and shared bibliographic discoveries with me.

Before the turn of the new century, I befriended Lieutenant Colonel Paul H. Courtenay, formerly of The Royal Sussex Regiment and The Queen’s Regiment, who has for years done yeoman service as senior editor of *Finest Hour*. No one knows more about British military and court history than he does or is better informed about things in Britain that puzzle Americans. Not only has he read every word of the new edition and contributed to more wonderful footnotes than I can count; he has also enlisted assistance from friends who have lived in the Sudan, especially Henry Keown-Boyd, author of several books on the Sudan campaign, and Colonel Anthony C. Uloth, who served as Defense and Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Khartoum in the early 1970s. In addition to conversations at his house in Hampshire, at Blenheim Palace, in Anchorage, and at International Churchill Conferences over the years, we visited together such places as the Museum of the Corps of Royal Engineers, Chatham, to see the copper emblem from the tomb of the Mahdi and a statue of Gordon, and the Museum of the Queen’s Royal Lancers, then at Belvoir Castle but since 2007 in Thoresby Park (near Newark), whose exhibits show the history of the 21st Lancers, including the trumpet that blew the charge at the Battle of Omdurman on 2 September 1898.

“I am grateful to Sir Winston’s daughter the late Lady Soames for her example as a writer...and for writing a new foreword to my edition.”

Several years ago typesetting of the new edition began, carried out by a firm called Datapage in Bangalore, India, where the young Churchill served before and after his participation in the Sudan campaign, while his regiment was stationed in India. The complicated typography has made typesetting protracted, with thousands of change orders passing back and forth between Anchorage and Bangalore.

I am grateful to Sir Winston’s daughter the late Lady Soames for her example as a writer, for conversations about her father, for encouragement and good counsel throughout my work on *The River War*, and for writing a new foreword to my edition.

Finally, I salute my wife Judith, who has encouraged my work on *The River War* for the whole of our married life, and our daughter Helen, who has done likewise all her life and has also helped with proofreading; those who helped put together two volumes worthy of Churchill’s work; and all eager would-be readers of this new edition known and unknown to me, including some now sadly deceased, who have looked forward so patiently to its completion.

James W. Muller is Professor of Political Science at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, where he has taught since 1983, and Academic Chairman of The Churchill Centre. He is editor of the definitive edition of Winston Spencer Churchill, *The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of the Soudan*, to be published in two volumes later this year by St. Augustine’s Press in association with the Churchill Centre.
As the armoured train inched along the low, rolling hills and flat, open spaces of the South African veldt on the morning of 15 November 1899, every man on board knew that the enemy was watching. Where exactly they were, however, and whether they would attack, remained a dark, seemingly impenetrable mystery. Although the Boer War had begun just a month earlier, the British had already learned a painful lesson: the harder it was to find the Boers, the more dangerous they were likely to be.
Of Dutch descent, the deeply religious Boers had not wanted war. On the contrary, they wanted nothing more than to be left alone. War, however, like wealth, had found them. The trouble had begun more than thirty years earlier, when diamonds and, later, gold were discovered in the Transvaal, one of two Boer republics. “This gold,” said Paul Kruger, who served as president of the Transvaal during the war, “will cause our country to be soaked in blood.”

Kruger’s prediction had come true just a few years later. In 1880, Britain annexed the Transvaal, leading to what became known as the First Boer War, a war that, to the shock and horror of the British people, ended in Britain’s defeat. Although, as a condition of the peace agreement, Britain agreed to respect the independence of the Boer republics, before long it was once again pressing in on the Transvaal, amassing troops at its borders and claiming large swaths of new territory that effectively cut it off from the sea. Having had enough, the Boers issued an ultimatum in October 1899 that the British disdainfully ignored.

News of the impending war had sent not waves of terror or even ripples of concern throughout England, but a thrill of excitement. Although there had rarely been a time when the British Empire was not at war in some far-flung colony, this was different. This would be a European war on African soil, a “civilized” war between men of European descent. The fact that the land over which they were fighting had been inhabited by Africans for millennia was of no more concern to the British or the Boers than the claims of Native Americans had been to the pioneers in North America.

Determined as the British were to even the score with the Boers, they did not like giving up their dashing uniforms for the new kit: dull, unromantic khakis—a change so startling to Britons that they had nicknamed this the Khaki War. There was one concession to modern warfare, however, that British officers and their men refused to make: under no circumstances would they hide from the enemy. It was a point of pride not only to appear utterly fearless on the battlefield, but to show no regard at all for their personal safety. A soldier, they believed, stood in the open and faced his death like a man. “These experienced soldiers never care how fast bullets may whizz about them,” Solomon Plaatje, a native South African journalist and intellectual, wrote after watching in astonishment as the British fought the Boers. “They stroll about in a heavy volley far more recklessly than we walk through a shower of rain.”

In sharp contrast to their enemy, the Boers saw no shame in hiding. On the contrary, it would not occur to them to fight in the open any more than it would to hunt without cover. The Boer “went out in a business-like way to kill men as he would to kill dangerous wild beasts,” wrote Leo Amery, a journalist for the Times of London, “and he saw no more glory in dying at an enemy’s hand than in being eaten by a lion.”

Unlike the British, the Boers also knew the South African terrain inside and out, high veldt and low, kopje, and valley. Over seemingly impossible terrain, wide open, largely treeless spaces that offered precious little cover, thousands of Boer soldiers, known as burghers, could vanish without a trace. They built sangars, small shelters made from stones, dug deep and remarkably long trenches—some stretching for thirty miles—and used smokeless gunpowder. Even when under attack, the British could rarely find the enemy. It was, a journalist for the Manchester Guardian wrote, a “conspiracy of invisibility.”

Churchill of the Morning Post

If anyone aboard the armoured train was going to spot the Boers, it was the red-haired young journalist for the Morning Post who, when he had climbed aboard that morning, had made sure he had the best view of the veldt. From the moment he had set sail for southern Africa, just days after war was declared, Winston Churchill had done everything in his power to reach the front. He had been on the same ship out of Southampton as Sir Redvers Buller, the Commander-in-Chief. After landing in Cape Town and realizing that Buller’s thousands of men, dozens of horses, and countless supplies would take a long time to reach the front, Churchill had left them behind. With just one other journalist, he had struck out on his own, taking the last train out of Cape Town to make it through enemy territory, crossing hundreds of miles of desert from west to east, miserably enduring a “horrible Antarctic gale” in a tiny ship on the Indian Ocean, and catching a ride aboard a mail train out of Durban.

When Churchill had finally reached the British colony of Natal, he had learned that Ladysmith, a garrison town that was the new front for the war, was already under siege. No one could get out, and—to Churchill’s frustration and fury—no one could get in. The only way he could even get close to the front was by pitching his tent with a handful of British regiments in Estcourt, a small town forty miles south of Ladysmith, and boarding an armoured train sent out for reconnaissance day after day. It was far from an ideal situation. Not only would he not be able to see anything that was happening in Ladysmith, but even Churchill, who was more than willing to risk his own life in
war, was not eager to climb aboard the armoured train.

Although in theory the trains were useful, cleverly designed with heavy armour and carriages in front to protect the engines, in reality the men aboard were offered up to the enemy for slaughter. “Nothing looks more formidable and impressive than an armoured train,” Churchill later wrote, “but nothing is in fact more vulnerable and helpless.” The same tracks that could quickly carry men and supplies to the heart of the war, and which the Boers were loath to destroy, ensured that the trains were fixed and irresistible targets. The Boers had to do little more than sit and wait for their prey to come to them. Already they had successfully attacked two British trains, killing and capturing men and officers and, in Churchill’s words, gaining “the advantage of drawing first blood.”

The loud, lumbering train that ran out of Estcourt every day was as conspicuous as the Boers were invisible. “It would be hard,” wrote Leo Amery, who was sharing a bell tent with Churchill, “to devise a better target than…that death trap.” The two journalists had been on the train together once before, and had been so relieved to climb back out that they had vowed never to go again. Just a week later, however, when an old friend of Churchill’s, Aylmer Haldane, was ordered to take the train out on the morning of 15 November, Churchill agreed to go with him. He knew it was a bad idea, but it was better than watching the war play out from a distance.

“Pushful the Younger”

Churchill had never been willing to sit on the sidelines. Although he was only twenty-four years old, he had already taken part in wars on three different continents. He had seen his friends not just killed but mutilated, their limbs torn off, their eyes carved out, blood-soaked and screaming. He had killed men himself, coming so close to one man that his pistol had actually struck him as Churchill galloped by. He knew the reality of war as well as any man his age, and better than most. “You cannot gild it,” he had written to his mother from Khartoum during the Sudan campaign. “The raw comes through.”

As much as Churchill had seen of the horrors of war, however, he was not about to turn away from it. Military distinction was, he believed, the fastest route to public acclaim, personal fame and—if the gods were smiling—political power. As soon as he was given his first commission, Churchill had set out to win as many medals as the army had to offer. In fact, so determined was he to win wide recognition that one of the most damning accusations that could be made against a British military man had already been leveled against him. He had been called a “medal hunter,” a “self-advertiser,” and even, by one sneering journalist, “Pushful the Younger.”

Churchill was not unaware of these criticisms and later admitted that he found them painful, but he was not about to let them stop him. There was too much to be gained. His natural disposition shunned undue modesty as, at best, a waste of time and, at worst, an obstacle to rapid advancement. “The immortal Barnum himself had not a greater gift for making himself and his affairs the talk of the world,” Churchill’s first biographer, Alexander MacCallum Scott, would write just a few years later. “Winston advertises himself as simply and unconsciously as he breathes.”

Churchill believed that he was destined for greatness. He had, as he had often told his mother, “faith in
my star." He just had to prove it to everyone else. This war was his best hope of making a name for himself, of capturing the attention and imagination of the British people. As always, Churchill had a plan. His carefully plotted life, however, was about to take a sudden and wholly unexpected turn.

### Into the Trap

On the morning of 15 November, the armoured train went farther than it should have gone, farther than Haldane would have allowed it to go had he not invited Churchill to go with him. “Had I been alone and not had my impetuous young friend Churchill with me…I might have thought twice before throwing myself into the lion’s jaws,” Haldane later wrote. “But I was carried away by his ardor and departed from an attitude of prudence.” Although, as Churchill noted, there was not “a sign of opposition or indeed of life or movement” on the veldt stretched out before them, neither he nor Haldane believed for a second that they were alone. They were not.

Not only had the Boers been closely watching the train as it bumped along the tracks that morning, but it was a regiment led by the youngest, most charismatic general in the Boer army—Louis Botha. Standing nearly six feet tall with dark hair and violet-blue eyes, Botha was as quiet and modest as Churchill was brash and outspoken, and he was widely admired and trusted by his men. Although the Boers revered age, Botha, at just thirty-seven, was not only a general but would soon be made commander of the Transvaal’s entire southern force.

Botha’s orders that afternoon were not to attack the train as it crawled toward Ladysmith, as easy a target as his men had yet seen in this war, but, instead, to wait. Their patience, he knew, would pay off. Not only was the train impossible to miss on the bare landscape, looking, Churchill wrote, like a “long brown rattling serpent with the rifles bristling from its spotted sides,” but there was no mystery about where it was headed. No matter how far it went, it eventually had to return to the same place, on the same tracks.

As soon as the train had passed them, moving slowly north, Botha and his men swept south, toward Estcourt. They stopped when they reached a steep slope that had a sharp curve at the bottom. As a heavy spring rain fell in sheets around them, they began piling large stones onto the tracks at the foot of the slope. Then, pushing their guns up the hills that flanked the rail line, they waited for the train to return. Their plan was simple. As soon as the train reached the summit, they would open fire on it. In a frantic attempt to escape the hail storm of bullets and shells, the driver would force the engine down the slope as fast as he could make it go. When he reached the bottom, the rocks would be waiting for him.

Although the rain had not stopped by the time they finished their work, the Boers, who spent most of their lives outside on the veldt, made no attempt to seek cover. Pulling their tattered bush hats low over their faces, they calmly took out their pipes and lit them as best they could. There was little to do until they heard the low, rumbling sound of the approaching train, bringing the enemy, and a particularly restless young journalist, into their trap. Candice Millard is the author of Hero of the Empire: The Boer War, a Daring Escape, and the Making of Winston Churchill to be published by Doubleday in September.

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**Endnotes**

6. Ibid., 244.
When the Great War began for Winston Churchill on 4 August 1914, he was at his war station, the Admiralty in London, where he had served as First Lord since 1911. After several signal successes in that office at the outset of the conflict, the mounting casualties and looming failure of the Dardanelles campaign in Turkey led to his forced resignation from the cabinet on 21 May 1915. He was then appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, which was a cabinet office but one with no duties related to management of the war. His cousin, the Duke of Marlborough, wrote to him, “I gather you have been thrown a bone on which there is little meat.”1 Try as he might to be heard in cabinet meetings, Churchill’s influence on war policy was at an end.

When the Cabinet War Committee was reorganized in October 1915, Churchill was not included, and he resigned as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster the same day. Being excluded from an effective political role in the direction of the war was a humiliating blow to Churchill, who feared his political career was over. As his wife Clementine later told Martin Gilbert, “When he left the Admiralty he thought he was finished. He did not believe he would ever be asked back into the government. I thought he would never get over the Dardanelles. I thought he would die of grief.”2

Although he was out of office, Churchill’s strong sense of duty would not allow him to be idle. As his daughter, Mary Soames, aptly noted, “He was a major in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, and an honour-
able door was open to him: he could join his regiment in France.”

Having served as an officer in the Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars since 1902 and ready for a break from Parliament, Churchill later wrote, “I thought it necessary to quit their counsels and betook myself to the Armies.” The grand flanking movement at Gallipoli it was necessary to quit their counsels and betook myself to the Armies.”

The grand flanking movement at Gallipoli having failed as an alternative to “chewing barbed wire in Flanders,” he now faced the prospect of that unhealthy diet himself.

**Escaped Scapegoat**

Describing himself as the “escaped scapegoat,” Churchill arrived in France on 18 November 1915 expecting to join his Oxfordshire regiment. Instead, he was ordered to report to the headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force where General Sir John French offered him command of a brigade, which would make Churchill a general in command of 5,000 men.

The first step was a period of training for Churchill to become familiar with the situation on the front and the details of trench warfare. For this purpose he was attached to the second battalion of the Grenadier Guards, which Churchill later called “the best school of all.” Churchill thought a battalion command would be a suitable role and later wrote, “Having been trained professionally for about five years as a soldier, and having prior to the Great War seen as much actual fighting as almost any of the Colonels or Generals in the British Army, I had certain credentials which were accepted in military circles. I was not a Regular, but neither was I a civilian volunteer.”

On 20 November Churchill was driven to the Grenadier Guards sector between Merville and Neuve Chapelle in France. The battalion diary of that date recorded, “The brigade took over a line of Trenches opposite PIETRE. All in very bad state, communications Trenches flooded and the Front line breastworks crumbling and were not bullet-proof. Major Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, who has just resigned from the government, arrived to be attached to the Battalion for instruction, and accompanied the Battalion to the Trenches.”

The headquarters of the battalion was only 1,000 yards from the front line. In one of his first letters to his wife Clementine, Churchill wrote, “Filth & rubbish everywhere, graves built into the defences & scattered about promiscuously, feet and clothing breaking through the soil, water & muck on all sides; & about this scene in the dazzling moonlight troops of enormous bats creep & glide, to the unceasing accompaniment of rifle & machine guns & the venomous whining & whirring of the bullets wh pass over head. Amid these surroundings, aided by wet & cold & every minor discomfort, I have found happiness & content such as I have not known for many months.”

Churchill had no death wish and was no lover of war, but his new station reduced life to its simple necessities and focused the mind. In these conditions Churchill and the Grenadier Guards kept to a rotation of forty-eight hours in the front line, then forty-eight hours in support for a period of twelve days, then six days in divisional reserve.

During his stay with the Guards, Churchill received his education in the construction and maintenance of trenches and bunkers, the sounds and effects of bullets and shells, the prevention of trenchfoot, and all the details of the administration of an infantry battalion. He spent much time in the front-line trenches and accompanied the commander on twice-daily inspections of the sector. During November and December 1915 the battalion was not involved in any battles, but danger was ever present, with men killed or wounded every day. On 25 November Churchill himself had a narrow escape from harm. He was called away to a meeting at the corps headquarters at Merville. While he was away, the dugout where he had been seated before his departure was hit by a shell, which destroyed the structure and killed a mess orderly.

In a letter to his wife describing the episode Churchill wrote: “Now see from this how vain it is to worry about things. It is all chance and our wayward footsteps are best planted without too much calculation. One must yield oneself simply & naturally to the mood of the game and trust in God wh is another way of saying the same thing. These are commonplace experiences out here wh do not excite wonder or even interest.”

Churchill completed his last rotation in the Guards’ trenches on 15 December. That month he also visited the French sector and was given a blue steel poilu helmet, which he wore throughout his active service. He wrote to his wife, “My steel helmet is the cause of much envy. I look most martial in it—like a Cromwellian. I always intend to wear it under fire—but chiefly for appearance.” He later posed for photographs and a remarkable oil portrait by Sir John Lavery wearing the helmet, which is now on display at Chartwell.

**Into Battle**

General French’s offer of a brigade command was vetoed by Prime Minister Asquith in December, and Churchill was offered a battalion instead, with the promise of a brigade later. He swallowed his pride and accepted. After a few days in London for Christmas, Churchill returned to France on 28 December. On New Year’s Day 1916 he learned he would be appointed to command the 6th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers in the IXth (Scottish) Division. The next day he received his commission as a temporary lieutenant-colonel, the highest rank he would reach in the army.
On 5 January 1916 Churchill took command of the battalion and called a meeting of its officers. As Lieutenant Edmund Hakewill Smith reported the event, Churchill invited them to lunch and then made a brief speech: “Gentlemen, I am now your Commanding Officer. Those who support me I will look after. Those who are against me I will break. Good afternoon gentlemen.” After this stern introduction, Churchill set out to win over his officers and men with the force of his personality, by the care he showed for them, and by the seriousness with which he did his duty.

The battalion was out of the line about ten miles from the front for the first three weeks of January, replacing worn-out equipment, training, and assimilating replacements. Of these there were many, for the battalion had suffered severe losses in the battle of Loos in October and November 1915, in which three quarters of the officers and over half of the other ranks were casualties. Upon Churchill’s arrival the battalion strength was about 700 men, although the authorised strength was 1,050.

On 24 January the battalion marched toward the front in stages. On the night of 26–27 January it took over a thousand-yard-wide sector of the front line trenches in Belgium near the town of Ploegsteert, known by the British as “Plugstreet.” Churchill briefed the officers as follows: “Don’t be careless about yourselves—on the other hand not too careful....Laugh a little, & teach your men to laugh—gt good humour under fire—war is a game that is played with a smile. If you can’t smile, grin. If you can’t grin, keep out of the way till you can.”

For the next three months the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers followed a rotation of six days in the front line, six days in the support line, six additional days in the front line, then six days’ rest in reserve. The front line was about eighty yards from the German trenches. The entire area was subject to rifle, machine gun, and artillery fire. Churchill was constantly in the trenches, sharing the discomfort of winter weather and the danger of enemy fire with his men. He paid close attention to the details of the fortifications and inspected the entire sector three times a day on average, each inspection taking two hours.

While at the front Churchill had several near-misses. The battalion headquarters at Laurence Farm, which was about 900 yards from the front line, was hit by shell fire on 3 February and again on 16 February, with much damage incurred and some splinter wound casualties. On 12 February Churchill was caught up in German artillery fire and showered with dirt and debris from exploding shells. On 26 March a shell exploded only twenty yards from him without harming him. He took it all with resignation, trusting as ever in his own star. In a letter home he wrote, “One lives calmly on the brink of the abyss. But I can understand how tired people get of it if it goes on month after month. All the excitement dies away and there is only a dull resentment.”

Although he was not required to go on combat patrols in no man’s land between the opposing front lines, which he called “the frontier between right and wrong,” Churchill did so on many occasions. As Lieutenant Hakewill Smith recalled, “It was a nerve wracking experience to go with him….He was like a baby elephant out in no man’s land at night. He never fell when a shell went off; he never ducked when a bullet went by with its loud crack. He used to say after watching me duck: ‘It’s no damn use ducking; the bullet has gone a long way past you by now.’” As always, Churchill showed an amused disregard for physical danger and was unshaken by the sounds of gunfire and bursting shells.
Although Churchill’s battalion did not engage in any offensives or face any major German attacks during his more than 100 days in command, there was a steady toll of casualties from raids, shelling, and sniping. The 700-man unit lost fifteen men killed and 123 wounded in that period, a casualty rate of almost twenty percent. Churchill’s traditional soldier’s luck held, and he was never wounded.

**Return to Westminster**

Throughout the early months of 1916 Churchill debated whether and when to return to what he considered his “true war station,” the House of Commons. The timing of his decision was partly the result of events in Flanders. By 19 March he knew the promised brigade command had been given to another. By the end of April he learned that his 6th Battalion would be consolidated with the 7th and the command given to a more senior officer. The decision to leave the army did not prick his conscience. He wrote on 22 March, “I do not think any reason is needed beyond the general reason—that I think it right to resume political & Parl. Duties & incompatible with holding a military command….I shall have served for nearly five months at the front, almost always in the front line, certainly without discredit—discharging arduous & difficult duties to the satisfaction of my superiors & to the advantage of my officers and men.”

He was, in fact, well regarded by his men. Captain Andrew Dewar Gibb wrote in his 1924 memoir of the war, “I am firmly convinced that no more popular officer ever commanded troops. As a soldier he was hard-working, persevering, and thorough….And moreover, he loved soldiering: it lay very near his heart and I think he could have been a very great soldier. We came to realise, to realise at first hand, his transcendent ability.” He left behind him in the battalion “men who will always be his partisans and admirers, and who are proud of having served in the Great War under the leadership of one who is beyond question a great man.”

Churchill served honourably and well, demonstrating again his courage, his natural leadership, his mastery of the details of command, and, at the same time, the broader issues of strategy and military policy. He had spent more time in action in the Great War than he had in Cuba, India, and Sudan combined and almost as long as he had served in South Africa. Churchill came out of the line with his men for the last time on 3 May 1916. He handed over his command four days later and returned to England. He formally relinquished his Lieutenant-Colonelcy on 16 May and returned to the Territorial Reserve Force as a major of the Oxford Yeomanry.

After his return to London Churchill spoke in the House of Commons, often in support of the soldiers at the front who bore the burden of the conflict. Over time his political position improved, and on 18 July 1917 Prime Minister Lloyd George brought him back into the government as Minister of Munitions, the position he held until the armistice. In December 1918 Churchill was appointed Secretary of State for War and on 15 January 1919 Minister of Air. Having begun the war as the civilian head of the Royal Navy, and following honourable front line service in the war, he was soon after its conclusion the civilian head of the British Army and the Royal Air Force. All of this would be excellent preparation for a future prime minister should another world war break out in the future.


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**Endnotes**


In the first volume of his Second World War memoirs, Winston Churchill published the following account based on a German report:

At 01.30 on October 14, 1939, H.M.S. Royal Oak, lying at anchor in Scapa Flow, was torpedoed by U.47 (Lieutenant Prien). The operation had been carefully planned by Admiral Doenitz himself, the Flag Officer (Submarines). Prien left Kiel on October 8...course N.N.W., Scapa Flow....The boat crept steadily closer to Holm Sound, the eastern approach to Scapa Flow. Unfortunate it was [for the British] that these channels had not been completely blocked. A narrow passage lay open between two sunken ships. With great skill Prien steered through the swirling waters....Then suddenly the whole bay opened out. Kirk Sound was passed. They were in. There under the land to the north could be seen the great shadow of a battleship lying on the water, with the great mast rising above it like a piece of filigree on a black cloth. Near, nearer—all tubes clear—no alarm, no sound but the lap of the water, the low hiss of air pressure and the sharp click of a tube lever. Los! [Fire!]—five seconds—ten seconds—twenty seconds. Then came a shattering explosion, and a great pillar of water rose in the darkness. Prien waited some minutes to fire another salvo. Tubes ready. Fire! The torpedoes hit amidships, and there followed a series of crashing explosions. H.M.S. Royal Oak sank, with the loss of 786 officers and men....U.47 crept quietly away back through the gap.1

Prien and his crew were flown to Berlin the next day, and driven through large, enthusiastic crowds, before arriving at the Reich Chancellery. Hitler greeted them there and awarded Prien the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross. Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels took full advantage of exploiting the situation and introduced Prien at the Wintergarten Theater, where Prien spoke to an excited audience. Later a highly embellished book was ghostwritten.

The Need

As I recounted in Finest Hour 169 [“Scapa Flow: The Impregnable Base of the Grand Fleet”], Churchill had been First Lord of the Admiralty for only six weeks and was not blamed for the loss of Royal Oak by the Parliamentary Opposition. But if there was a second disaster at the vital anchorage, Churchill knew that he would be fully responsible. Thus—“Action This Day!”

The first order of business was to ascertain how the submarine had entered the harbour. On 18 October Churchill wrote to the First Sea Lord, Admiral Pound, “I hope Admiral Drax’s inquiry at Scapa is not going to take more than three or four days. It is an inquiry designed only to give their Lordships the necessary information on which to consider the new problems, and also whether disciplinary action is required. A court-martial may well have to follow, and this, of course, would be an elaborate legal affair.”2

Five days later, Churchill reported to the War Cabinet that it had definitely been established that Royal Oak had been sunk by torpedo, but that “No definite report had been received as to how the submarine had got into Scapa.”3 On 28 October, however, Churchill reported to the War Cabinet that he had now received the report from Admiral Drax and that there could be no doubt that the U-boat in question had passed through one of the unguarded entrances. The
conversation concluded that a report would have to be made to the House of Commons, and while it would have to be admitted that the anchorage at Scapa had been unsafe against submarine attack, Churchill was to emphasise that necessary defences were being provided.

The Problem

S

o now the onus was on Churchill to ensure that remedial measures were instigated. As he later wrote, “On October 31, accompanied by the First Sea Lord, I went to Scapa....The scale of defence for Scapa upon which we now agreed included reinforcements of the booms and additional blockships in the exposed eastern channels, as well as controlled minefields and other devices....It was hoped that all these arrangements could be completed, or at least sufficiently advanced to justify the return of the Fleet by March, 1940.”

On 13 November 1939 Churchill wrote to Admiral Pound, “Let me have a full report of what has been done at Scapa since the Royal Oak was torpedoed a month ago. What is the state of the booms and blockships at all entrances? What orders have been given to bring them up to the highest efficiency? What is the programme by which this is to be achieved?”

After receiving an update, Churchill wrote to Pound on 21 December, “This is a very depressing report, and everything seems to be progressing very slowly and with immense difficulty. Pray let the Naval Staff consider what way we can speed up matters.... Why is it that nothing can be done about the blocking of the channels?...It is only by constant driving from the Admiralty that the many difficulties of the season and the darkness will be overcome.”

Churchill’s frustration with the slow progress is evident in a further note to Pound on 1 January 1940, “Two and a half months have passed since the Royal Oak was torpedoed. What in fact has been done since? How many blockships sunk?...Up to the present I share the Commander-in-Chief’s anxieties about the slow progress of this indispensable work.”

In spite of the winter weather a Glasgow firm, Metal Industries Limited, was employed in sinking blockships; with the strong currents in the channels and bad weather, however, problems were encountered: “Even those which did arrive at their final destination did not always stay put. The Cape Ortegal for instance rolled over and broke up during a storm, leaving a navigable channel open once again through Skerry Sound....During one storm in February 1940 one blockship already in position was swept away and yet another was lost on passage to the Flow.”
The Decision

Churchill could not risk another Royal Oak disaster. On 9 March 1940 he visited Scapa Flow again and met the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, Sir Charles Forbes, who shared his concerns. The minutes of the meeting included for the first time a documented reference to a major planned improvement in the protection to the Home Fleet in Scapa Flow, although the substance of the conversation indicates that this had been discussed previously:

FIRST LORD: Mentioned the scheme for permanently closing the Eastern Entrances.
ADMIRAL FORBES: Agreed that this was necessary and pointed out that Scapa will always be of permanent value as a Fleet Base from a strategical point of view.
FIRST LORD: Then asked when work could begin on sealing the Neuchatel [a blockship which had been sunk in Kirk Sound one week after the Royal Oak had been torpedoed] gap.
ADMIRAL FORBES: Replied within a month of receiving approval.
FIRST LORD: Stated there was universal agreement that the gaps should be closed permanently.9

Upon his return to London two days later, on 11 March, Churchill reported to the War Cabinet that “a great deal of work had been done to make Scapa a safe anchorage, and although there was still further work to be done, he thought that the base could now be considered 80 per cent secure. Strong anti-submarine patrols were being maintained outside all the entrances and the risks of using the anchorage in its present state were not greater than could properly be accepted.”10

Although on 12 March 1940 the Home Fleet returned to Scapa Flow, Churchill was still determined to improve the 80% security to 100%. Accordingly he approached the Civil Engineer-in-Chief to the Admiralty, Frederick Arthur Whitaker, and asked him if it was possible to seal the channels completely. Whitaker responded that it could be carried out, but it would be costly. Churchill’s reaction was that money was no object in the need to protect the Fleet fully. While it may be thought that Churchill should have advised the War Cabinet of his intentions, a firm decision could not be made until a feasibility study had been conducted.

The Solution

The challenge was to close the four tidal channels located between the Eastern Mainland and the island of South Ronaldsay, via the islands of Lamb Holm, Glimps Holm, and Burray. Three channels were 609 metres (2,000 feet) long, with one 430 metres (1,400 feet) long: thus a total length of 2,257 metres (7,400 feet or 1.4 miles). Maximum depths were between thirty-eight feet and fifty-nine feet. But the size of the project was not the only problem; there were the tides, with a rise and fall of up to twelve feet, and a maximum current of twelve knots.

Whitaker was directed to design the project, and two scale models were built in the Whitworth Engineering Laboratories at the University of Manchester, with experiments conducted during the summer of 1940.

The preliminary work concluded that for the materials loose rubble would be used and contained in wire bolsters or gabions. The bolsters were be protected by massive concrete blocks. Tipping from barges was originally considered but found not to be feasible. The answer came in employing overhead cableways.

With the feasibility established, Churchill made the decision to proceed. Although it was a major undertaking, it is most interesting that he did not include a reference to it in his war memoirs, even thought he had
given considerable space to the problems at Scapa Flow. The contract to build the barriers was awarded in 1940 to the firm of Balfour, Beatty & Co. Ltd., which later was employed on the two Mulberry Harbours built for the Normandy invasion. A Scottish firm, John M. Henderson & Co., Ltd., which had built the first cableway in the United Kingdom seventy years before, was chosen as the manufacturer of the cableways.

A further challenge was to find some 2,000 workmen for the project, when other services required manpower. The proposed answer, for the main part, came in looking to an enemy—1,300 Italian prisoners of war, captured in the North African Desert, who were interned in two prisoner of war camps—Camp 34 on Burray, and Camp 60 on Lamb Holm. The leaders of the POWs, however, not only refused to undertake the work but demanded that the camps be moved to safer locations, in view of the danger of being so close to the fleet’s home base. This request was refused, and both camps went on strike, which action resulted in changing the prisoners’ diet to bread and water.

A new commander, an Italian-speaking British major, was assigned to the POW camps. With great diplomacy he gained the trust of the prisoners and had the troublemakers removed to other facilities. He also countered the objection of asking prisoners of war to undertake war work—which was banned under the Geneva Convention—by putting it to the Italians that linking the four islands to the main Orkney Island was really a civilian project. This explanation was accepted, and the Italians agreed to work on the causeways.

The Construction

With the detailed planning required, actual construction work was not started until August 1941, when the five cableways were installed. The cableways were nicknamed “Blondins” after the French tight-rope walker, famous for his high-wire crossings of Niagara Falls. The one with the longest span measured 2,550 feet across, between its 172 foot masts. The cables themselves were of 2½ inch diameter and could take loads of up to 10½ tons. With the “Blondins” installed the causeways could be filled. The mammoth project required dropping into the channels 125,000 dumpings of bolsters, containing 250,000 tons of quarried rubble, overlaid by 66,000 concrete blocks.

By the end of 1942 the work had reached a point where there was no longer a concern that submarines could enter the Flow from the eastern approaches, and a few months later surface craft were also denied entry—a remarkable achievement in such a short period of time.

The work continued, and by 1944 there were three and a quarter miles of new roads, bringing formerly separate communities closer together. The cost was estimated to be almost £2.5 million (the equivalent of some £100 million today). The First Lord of the Admiralty, A. V. Alexander, officially opened the road network on 12 May 1945, just after V-E Day.

The Legacy

With peace restored, there came an assessment of the project. The Orcadians were naturally thrilled that four of their islands, which previously could be reached only by water, could now be traversed by road. A formal Admiralty dossier on the project took another view, however: “The causeways are a magnificent engineering feat; but it may be considered that their construction proved, due to the large amount of wartime labour and shipping required, an uneconomical scheme of defence.”11 Ah, the benefit of hindsight!

While Scapa Flow, since 1957, has no longer been home to the British Navy, it is now a popular tourist location. The most visited site is the beautiful Italian Chapel, built by the prisoners, on Lamb Holm; there is also the Lyness Interpretation Centre, which chronicles the history of the base during both World Wars, and—close by—the Naval Cemetery, which houses the graves of those who died on HMS Royal Oak. The specific point where the ship sank is marked by a memorial buoy. In 1957 the Admiralty invited tenders for the ship. There was, though, such a public outcry that the Admiralty backed down, and the remains of the Royal Oak were designated as an official War Grave.

Terry Reardon is author of Winston Churchill and MacKenzie King: So Similar, So Different (2012).

Endnotes

3. Ibid., p. 281.
5. Gilbert, p. 364.
6. Ibid., p. 551.
7. Ibid., p. 594.
10. Ibid., pp. 867–68.
11. Hewison, p. 274.
In the winter of 1945–46, the first after the war, Winston Churchill was still an exhausted man. Having just celebrated his seventy-first birthday in November, and with his Lake Como rest holiday in August already a mere memory, Churchill found his doctor less than sympathetic with the level of his activity as Leader of the Opposition, not to mention his devotion to his writing.

Medical pressure and his own desire to travel for pleasure after so much wartime movement for necessity made Churchill decide to take two months off from his always ferocious schedule to rest and recuperate. Even though he knew that there would be considerable speculation over such a lengthy period away from the House of Commons, and that some would see it as a prelude to his retirement from political life after his stunning electoral defeat of July 1945, there was little choice but to take a rest, and a lengthy one after his doctor insisted.

After so many wartime winters in England, Churchill wanted to take his break somewhere in the sun where he could paint and relax. The perfect solution arose when a Canadian friend invited Churchill to use his winter home near Miami. Colonel Frank Clarke was a retired Canadian Army officer who appears to have first met Churchill at the Quebec Conference in 1943 and had invited the then Prime Minister to stay a few days at his chalet at Les Chutes de Montmorency and at his lodge in the forest nearby. Churchill had accepted with alacrity the offer on the wartime occasion and did so again that winter of 1945–46.

The Sunshine State

So it was that after the challenges of getting the arrangements made for such an excursion in “austerity” Britain (including certain exemptions from limitations on spending money abroad) and a trans-Atlantic winter crossing, the party accompanying Churchill, including his wife and secretary, arrived in Florida in early January 1946. The weather was not as good as Churchill would have liked, but the hospitality was excellent and the life congenial, with the free world's greatest hero able to relax at last and do some painting. Churchill also periodically enjoyed himself by going onto the veranda of the Clarke's house and waving to passers-by.

As the old Churchill reasserted himself, the plan evolved temporarily to include a trip to Mexico, another to Brazil, and perhaps even one to Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally Churchill had taken on the invitation of Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, to give a speech there in March. As if this were not enough to interrupt his holiday, he planned meetings with President Truman as well.

All of the trips much farther south were soon abandoned, despite Churchill's keenness and that of the potential host governments. He had as usual thought big and tried to do much more than he should, given the fact that the whole idea was for him to have a real holiday with rest as the main objective. Even before leaving home there was little likelihood that he would actually go to Trinidad, and the Mexican and Brazilian visits were cancelled, despite Mr. Truman’s offer of a special aircraft to take him to those places.

Meanwhile both the highly influential Cuban newspaper Diario de la Marina and the manager of the great traditional Hotel Nacional de Cuba, Mr. H. C. Houghton, had discovered the presence of Churchill in nearby Florida. The newspaper suggested twice, first early in January and again later on that month, that Cuba should invite the great man to visit the island and re-establish his old connections.

Churchill had of course first visited Cuba in 1895 when, accompanied by his lifetime friend Reggie Barnes, a fellow 4th Hussars subaltern and later a major-general of great achievement, he observed the Spanish campaign attempting to put down the second great revolution against Spain in that colony. I have tried to show in my book that this first adventure, in its preparation, carrying through, and sequels, constituted the “coming of age” of the young Churchill. This was not only because it included his twenty-first birthday
on 30 November 1895 but also because it was his first trip outside northern Europe, his baptism of fire, his first experience as a war correspondent, his declaration of independence from his mother, his first dicey diplomatic incident, his first notoriety in the press, his first proper sketching, his first military operation, his first and much appreciated medal for bravery under fire, and many other "firsts."

In 1895 Churchill was an obscure second lieutenant, unknown except as a son of the famous Lord Randolph. When the son returned almost exactly fifty years later it was as probably the best-known figure in the world, having led Britain, its Commonwealth, and Empire in their “finest hour” leading to the victory that had marked him as the man who had, in William Manchester’s delightful words, “saved civilization.”

In Cuba that winter, the government of President Grau San Martin was going through the usual difficulties of running the country that had existed since independence in 1898. Dominance by the United States of Cuba’s politics and economy was the rule, and governments came and went as desired by the US ambassador and not through any true electoral process. The government grappled not only with a difficult financial situation but also with traditional university unrest, teachers’ discontent, and widespread corruption at all levels of the state, government, and bureaucracy. The young Fidel Castro, a lifetime admirer of Churchill and nineteen at the time, was already making political waves at the University of Havana.

As Leader of the Opposition, Churchill could not be invited to Cuba as a head of government but most certainly could as a distinguished statesman, and Grau San Martin did not long hesitate to invite the world hero to revisit the island, this time as guest of the Republic. It was good politics to be seen with the man who was the symbol of democracy around the world, but the President was also an ardent admirer of Churchill. Thus in January the invitation was issued, and Churchill took little time in responding that he would be delighted to come with Clementine, his daughter Sarah, and Colonel Clarke as an unofficial aide-de-camp. This last feature of his party was typical of Winston because, of course, as Leader of the Opposition he had no right to an ADC, much less a Canadian one.

**Return to Cuba**

For the flight down from Florida, Churchill did avail himself of President Truman’s offer of a US aircraft. Thus it was that Churchill and Clementine, with Clarke in uniform accompanying them, arrived on 1 February 1946 at the José Martí International Airport of Havana, fifty years, one month, and twenty-four days after he left the island by sea after his first visit. On his arrival by small modest steamer in
1895, Churchill had been received only by the British consul-general in the colonial capital, whereas this time he arrived in a US Naval Air Service bomber and was met not only by the British Minister to Cuba, Mr. J. L. Dodd, but by Cuba’s Foreign Minister and a large, enthusiastic crowd of well-wishers and admirers. The Foreign Minister, Carlos Prio Socarras, led the official welcoming party, but there was no guard of honour, since Churchill was not there as a head of government or even in an official capacity. The welcome at the airport, where police had difficulty controlling the enthusiasm of the crowd, was merely an introduction to the triumphant welcome the city and country were to give the Churchills this time.

The party (a flight delay caused Sarah to arrive late) were whisked through the airport and in an escorted cavalcade made their way to the Hotel Nacional, not the Hotel Inglaterra where young Winston and Reggie had stayed in 1895. The flight had taken less than two hours, so Churchill was in top form, gave his first “V” sign to the cheering public from the window of the plane, and, after briefly settling in at the hotel, was taken to the Presidential Palace to be received and to have a first conversation of twenty minutes with President Grau San Martin.

Although Churchill was not supposed to do any public speaking on the trip, a large crowd had assembled spontaneously outside the palace in the public square to its front. Winston was prevailed upon to step onto the balcony and there gave a short speech to the public, which he ended in a fashion that delighted the assembled habaneros below: “Viva la Perla de las Antillas!” (Long live the Pearl of the Antilles), Cuba’s much-loved nickname and one Churchill used often, even in official correspondence, to refer to the island he so much loved.

From the Palace the couple returned to the hotel, and Churchill prepared for a press conference he was to give that afternoon. Such were the poor arrangements, and the vast number of people wishing to get in to see the great man, that some 150 people crammed into the small press room of the hotel and the halls around it. The result was that it took some twenty-five minutes for Churchill to reach a room that was only a few yards from the hotel lift out of which he stepped. Much frustration was the result, with the press particularly angry that by the time he arrived he had little time to answer questions. Nonetheless, he did answer a few, including ones of great interest to Cuba and on which he had strong views, such as the role that smaller countries should have in the new United Nations given the veto power of the “Big Five,” the need to maintain a hands-off policy on domestic affairs in Franco’s Spain, and especially the requirement to retain allied unity in the post-war era, including close cooperation with the Soviet Union, if peace were to be maintained in the new atomic age.

Cubans were especially interested in knowing when Britain would reopen its cigar market to Cuban cigars, as the economic austerity regime in place at the time did not allow such luxury imports. Needless to say, the person keenest on seeing that regulation relaxed was Churchill himself, although the need for such a gesture was lessened when at the first informal dinner at the hotel suite, a luxury affair to be sure, some 500 of Churchill’s favourite Romeo y Julieta cigars arrived, to his evident glee. The public interest in Winston’s smoking habit was great, and he was at pains to ensure the more dubious of Cuban observers that he really enjoyed them and did not use them merely as a prop or a politician’s gimmick. Many Cubans were saddened that he was not going to visit the great cigar-producing region of Pinar del Rio, although he did visit a cigar factory in Havana. Thus his observation went down especially well when he commented, “I simply enjoy them. They quietly improve my temper.” Certainly he was showered with them while on the island, bringing...
Churchill was fêted on his last day in the city with a lunch at the Havana Yacht Club. Unfortunately, it appears that the regular fixture there, Ernest Hemingway, was away at the time. The same day, the Ministry of Health Building, which Churchill had admired, received him and he was left alone to paint its magnificent colonial, colonnaded patio. Throughout the visit Churchill wore either a light suit or a sports jacket with his distinctive bow tie.

An indication of the extent to which Churchill’s previous visit to Cuba was, and still is, misunderstood by Cubans is that Foreign Minister Prío Socarrás, much to his embarrassment when the press picked up on the error, announced Winston’s return after fifty years when he had been a fighter with the Cuban rebel forces struggling for independence. Of course Churchill had in fact been there as a military observer, as we would now say “embedded” with a Spanish column, and remained pro-Spanish and dubious about Cuban independence for a very long time afterwards, despite his great affection for the island.

Triumph

Cubans were well aware that this was the most important visitor the island had ever had, and the Cuban press followed the visit in detail, publishing the daily programme each day. Even the communist daily Hoy hailed the visit, although it naturally changed its tune after the “Iron Curtain” speech the following month.

The costs of the visit were not small. Press cartoons showed desperate bill collectors, receipts in hand, watching with concern as Churchill drove off in his luxury car (loaned by a wealthy businessman, since the Cuban state had none considered sufficiently grand for the Churchills). Some American journalists who arrived with the Churchill party on the aircraft even tried to get the Cuban state and the Hotel Nacional to pay not only for their rooms but also for their meals and even their drinks.

The great statesman was intended to have a good time, and he did. The trip was undoubtedly a resounding success for Churchill and for the Cuban government which invited him. If the 1895 visit was Churchill’s “coming of age,” the 1946 welcome by the Cuban people gave proof of the astonishing career that had followed and given us the “man of the age.”  

Hal Klepak is the author of Churchill Comes of Age: Cuba, 1895, published by The History Press, 2015, reviewed in this issue of Finest Hour on page 39.
Winston Churchill was always somewhat ambivalent about education. He recalled that his schooldays were “the only barren and unhappy period of my life,” and he never attended university.1 Yet he received many honorary degrees in the United States, Great Britain, and Europe. The occasions for these awards gave him the opportunity, originally as Britain’s wartime prime minister and later as an international statesman, to discuss the benefits of education and make wide-ranging assessments of the state of the world. He delivered speeches at universities all over Europe, from Bristol to Brussels, from Leiden to London. But it was his American addresses at Harvard University, the University of Miami, Westminster College, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, from the years 1943 to 1949, which were the most significant.

At the beginning of this period, Churchill was Britain’s wartime prime minister and a fervent believer in the Anglo-American alliance. Later, after his election defeat in 1945, he became the leader of the Conservative opposition. Desiring to rebuild his political career, he saw the advent of the Cold War as an opportunity to revive the Anglo-American relationship, which he feared had lapsed after the Allied victory in 1945. In calling for Great Britain and the United States to take concerted action against the expansionist aims of the Soviet Union, he was also re-establishing himself as someone with important things to say about the state and the future of the contemporary world. The ideal place for him to speak his mind on these topics proved to be on American campuses. He utilized these opportunities not only to promote the importance of the Anglo-American relationship, first against Nazi Germany and then the Soviet Union, but also to offer his thoughts on the general importance of higher education.

Harvard

Churchill’s first major speech on the campus of an American university was at Harvard in 1943. By then, he had already been Chancellor of Bristol University for fourteen years, and this had given him an enhanced appreciation of higher education. Indeed, in all the speeches he delivered on American campuses, he constantly stressed the importance of a university education and lamented his own lack of it. At Harvard, he also praised the university for its wartime efforts, by which “all classes and courses have been transformed,” and with “sacred vocations having been swept away” in order to help and “make warriors and technicians for the fighting fronts.” With the threat of Nazi Germany remaining, and the war against Japan still to be won, he devoted most of his speech to urging “the doctrine of fraternal association” between Great Britain and the United States “for the sake of service to mankind.”2

Miami

By the time Churchill delivered another speech at an American university, circumstances had greatly changed for him, his country, and the Anglo-American relationship. The Allies had won the war, Churchill had been voted out of office, and Britain was impoverished and exhausted. In early 1946 he went on vacation in America and delivered speeches at the University of Miami in February 1946, and at Westminster College, in Fulton, Missouri, the following month. He felt a special gratitude to the University of Miami because it had trained RAF Cadets during the war, and this was the one address he delivered on an American campus solely concerned with proclaiming and applauding the importance of a higher education. The graduates of American colleges and universities, he noted, were “numbered not by the million but by the 10 million,” and these were “measureless advantages’ which the United States enjoyed.3 He also hoped that those whose university education had been interrupted by the war might now be able to complete their studies. But he refrained from mentioning world affairs because he would soon be speaking in a very different academic setting—one dignified by the presence of the
President of the United States—that would be a more appropriate occasion to deliver a major address. And so, one week after Miami, Churchill travelled to the small town of Fulton, Missouri, to deliver his most famous address on an American campus.

**Fulton**

Churchill only agreed to speak at Westminster College because President Truman had endorsed the invitation and had offered to introduce him at this small college in his home state of Missouri. Churchill gladly agreed, knowing the President’s presence would offer him an unrivalled platform and opportunity. After a brief acknowledgment that the other Westminster was the place where he received much of his education in Great Britain, he sought to make two major points. The first was the need to strengthen “the fraternal association” and the “special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.” The second was to alert the Americans to the growing threat presented by Communist Russia to world freedoms and especially to Europe, where, he famously observed, “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”

While Churchill used the Fulton opportunity to send a far-reaching international message, he was also largely concerned with his own political rehabilitation. He sought to demonstrate that he still had important things to say to a world moving beyond the war and show that, despite his electoral defeat in 1945, his political career was not finished. He had proven before that he had an uncanny ability to predict the future when he warned of Hitler’s aggressive intentions and been vindicated by events. He now made similar prophecies about the Soviet Union. By reminding his audience of his earlier opposition to Hitler, and by urging the need for similar vigilance in the case of Stalin, Churchill’s speech made a major impact. It stiffened the stance of the American president and the American people and offered a new justification for the revival of the Anglo-American “special relationship.” The former prime minister reestablished himself as a global figure with important things to say linking past, present, and future.

In the short run, Churchill’s “iron curtain” speech was exceptionally controversial, not only in the United States and the United Kingdom but also (predictably) in Russia, where it was denounced and condemned. But it was also very influential. While Churchill’s thoughts on the importance of the Anglo-American
“special relationship” did not at first go over as well as he hoped, his warnings about the Cold War were in time widely heeded, especially in governing circles in Washington and London. Churchill’s Fulton address was also significant because its success encouraged him to begin work on his war memoirs as soon as he returned to Britain. One of his central themes in these volumes was the importance of the Anglo-American relationship, not just during the Second World War, but—by implication—in the present and the immediate future, too.

MIT

By the time Churchill delivered his speech at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in March 1949, many of the warnings he had delivered three years before at Fulton about the hostile intentions of the Soviet Union had been vindicated. Thus his latest address was eagerly awaited. Speaking at the larger venue of the Boston Garden in place of an auditorium at MIT, Churchill began by stressing the importance of educational institutions dedicated to science and technology, and lamented that, by comparison, Great Britain “suffered” due to the “lack of colleges of university rank in which engineering and the allied subjects are taught.”5 He ended with some commentary on international politics, stating that “Thirteen or fourteen men in the Kremlin” were “holding down hundreds of millions of people” with an aim at “the rule of the world,” which showed his continuing awareness of, and genuine disdain for, the ongoing threat of Communist Russia.6

Europe

The speech at MIT would be Churchill’s last major address for an American university. Although later invited to the University of Pennsylvania, Churchill could not attend for a variety of reasons. He did, however, give speeches at the many universities in Britain and Europe that in the years after 1945 showered him with honorary degrees. Almost without exception, he preferred to speak on these occasions about the benefits and importance of higher education, rather than to offer, as he did in the United States, more general observations on the state of the world. Only at one European campus did he speak to a broader subject when, at the University of Zurich in September 1946, he promoted the idea of a United States of Europe as a counterpoise to the Communist bloc further east. This speech was very much a companion and complementary address to that which he had delivered at Fulton just a few months before.

In general, Churchill preferred to speak at European universities on the merits and virtues of higher educa-
Churchill planting a tree at the Churchill College site, 1959

Although Churchill did not deliver any speeches at American universities after 1949, the importance he attached to education persisted, particularly his belief in the need for institutions to train scientists, technologists, and engineers. He regarded MIT as a place unrivaled in its scientific prowess, and he resolved to create a similar place of higher learning in Britain. The result was Churchill College, Cambridge, devoted to the study of technology and science but perhaps best known today for being home to a magnificent Archives Centre in which the pre-eminent collection of papers is that of Churchill’s. Thus, although his most famous speeches to academic audiences were given at American colleges and universities, it is at Cambridge, on the other side of the Atlantic, that Churchill’s connection with higher education has proved to be the most enduring.

Brendan Sofen recently earned his BA in History at Princeton University. This article is developed from his senior thesis, which he wrote under the direction of Sir David Cannadine.

Endnotes
4. Ibid., pp. 98, 100.
5. Ibid., pp. 40–41.
6. Ibid., pp. 48–49.
125 Years Ago
Winter 1891 • Age 16
“I Am Going to Lunch with Mama”

The winter of 1891 was quite cold, and Winston and his brother Jack spent their holiday at Banstead, their parents’ new country house, which they had found during the summer. Though their parents were not there, the boys had a good time. Winston wrote to his mother on 1 January that “the Pond is frozen 8 inches—The ground is covered with 4 inches of snow. Pipes are frozen—Oil freezes in the kitchen. No wind. V-happy V.well. We are enjoying ourselves very much. We exist on onions and Rabbits & other good things. The ferrets are very well & send their love so do the guinea-pig & rabbit I have bought. If I hear the result of my Examination I will wire.”

Winston received a 19 January letter from the Harrow headmaster J. E. C. Welldon congratulating him on passing the Army’s Preliminary Examination for Sandhurst. Lady Randolph wrote a letter on 26 January to Lord Randolph advising him of this and suggesting that he “might make him a present of a gun as a reward. He is pining for one and ought to have a little encouragement.”

On 5 February, Winston received a letter from his mother’s long-time lover Count Charles Kinsky, who certainly had not hidden their friendship from him even if its nature was left ambiguous. In it Kinsky sent him “all the stamps I could scrape together for the moment. Do you want some more later on? If so say so.” Kinsky concluded the letter by telling him he was having lunch with Lady Randolph: “I am going to lunch with Mama now so must be off. Be a good boy and write if you have nothing better to do.”

100 Years Ago
Winter 1916 • Age 41
“Keep Your Hands off My Husband”

1916 was the winter of Churchill’s discontent, and it was largely of his own making. He had left the government for a commission in the Army and a place in the trenches, but he could not leave politics behind.

In early March, upon returning to London from service on the Western Front, Churchill began a process that resulted in a self-inflicted political wound. He learned that there was to be a debate on the naval estimates in the House. Churchill thought this would be a splendid opportunity to attack the Government and the failure of his successor, Arthur Balfour, to follow through on his own policies.

This in itself was not a bad idea, and Churchill previewed his speech at a dinner party arranged by his mother. The guests included the journalists C. P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian and J. L. Garvin of the Observer as well as Churchill’s best friend, the Attorney General Sir F. E. Smith. It was, wrote Roy Jenkins, “a nest of conspirators against the government.” The speech was a specific attack on Balfour’s tenure at the Admiralty and was well received by those at the dinner party. Unfortunately, Churchill did not disclose that at the conclusion of his speech he intended to urge the reappointment of Admiral Fisher as First Sea Lord, notwithstanding the fact that Fisher’s resignation the previous May had triggered events that led to Churchill being sacked from the Admiralty.

Fisher came to lunch with Churchill the next day, and both Clementine and F. E. were present. Churchill’s wife showed much more political sense than her husband and told Fisher in no uncertain terms, “Keep your hands off my husband. You have all but ruined him once. Leave him alone now.” Alas, neither man heeded her wise counsel.

By most accounts, Churchill’s speech was well received. According to Jenkins, “He defended his own record well and fired some damaging but not obviously maliciously expressed shots against subsequent Admiralty policy.” Then, he ruined the good impression he had made by urging Balfour “without delay to fortify himself, to vitalize and animate his Board of Admiralty by recalling Lord Fisher to his post as First Sea Lord.” As Martin Gilbert wrote, Churchill “destroyed in a few minutes the whole impact of his speech, turning what had been to that moment one of the most serious and skilful speeches he had ever made into an object of derision. Churchill’s hammer blows of criticism were for-
gotten. The Government, Parliament, and, on the morrow, the British public, gaped in amazement.

What was Churchill thinking when, in the words of Jenkins, “He allowed himself to be seduced into the most bizarre alliance”? The Prime Minister’s daughter and Churchill’s great friend, Violet Bonham Carter, left the best explanation. She came to see him at his request. “He looked pale, defiant, on the defensive. I shall never forget the pain of the talk which followed….What he had conceived as a great gesture of magnanimity—the forgiveness of the wrongs Fisher had done him, for the sake of a greater aim, our naval supremacy—was regarded instead as a clumsy gambler’s throw for his own ends.”

Notwithstanding or perhaps not appreciating how dreadful his speech had been, Churchill determined he should leave the Army and return to politics. Selflessly, Clementine advised against this even though she would have preferred her husband home safe by her side rather than exposed to death on the battlefield. She realized, however, that his life was politics and that, if he were to rise again to power, leaving the trenches for peace. Selflessly, Clementine advised against this even though she would have preferred her husband home safe by her side rather than exposed to death on the battlefield. She realized, however, that his life was politics and that, if he were to rise again to power, leaving the trenches for the sake of a greater aim, our naval supremacy—was regarded instead as a clumsy gambler’s throw for his own ends.”

75 Years Ago
Winter 1941 • Age 66
“ A Sheriff Collecting the Last Assets of a Helpless Debtor”

During the winter of 1941 Britain was running out of money, and the United States was determined to squeeze everything it could out of the only country actually fighting Nazi Germany, notwithstanding the fact that President Roosevelt fully realized the threat posed to the United States were Churchill’s government to fall and a successor government to agree to what many in Britain’s ruling class thought were Hitler’s generous terms for peace.

On 23 December 1940, as Britain’s gold reserves in America were running out, the British Treasury representative in the United States, Sir Frederick Philips, was told that, in light of this, FDR had “arranged” for a US naval warship to call in South Africa and carry away the fifty million pounds worth of gold Britain stored there. At the same time, Philips had been urged by Treasury Secretary Morgenthau “from the President to take some action with regard to” selling direct British investments in the US. Upon receiving this information in a telegram from Philips, Churchill wrote to Kingsley Wood, “What about this latest development? I do not like it.”

Lord Beaverbrook certainly did not like it either, telling Churchill that “[G]old in the Dominions… are the last resources of the British people and should be held intact to provide us with the essential means in the case of a compelling necessity to obtain foodstuffs for our people.”

Churchill disagreed and used Beaverbrook’s words in a telegram he drafted, but did not send, to FDR: “I am much puzzled and even perturbed by the proposal now made to send a United States battlecruiser to collect whatever gold there may be in Capetown. This would inevitably become known to the world and it would wear the aspect of a sheriff collecting the last assets of a helpless debtor. I cannot tell what the effect would be on public opinion here, or what encouragement it would give to enemy countries….Remember, Mr. President, we do not know what you have in mind, or what the United States is going to do, and we are fighting for our lives….I should not be discharging my responsibilities to the people of the British Empire if, without the slightest indication of how our fate was to be settled in Washington, I were to part with this last reserve, from which alone we might buy a few months’ food.”

Relations began to improve between the two countries when Roosevelt sent his personal confidant, Harry Hopkins, to England early in 1941. Churchill and Hopkins got along well together, and Hopkins’ reports to the president went a long way to persuading FDR that England was worth supporting. At a dinner, Hopkins praised Churchill’s speeches in May 1940, and Churchill gave a long, eloquent recitation of Britain’s “war aims.” “We seek no treasure, we seek no territorial gains,” Churchill began, and he continued with an emphasis on individual rights and liberties associated with the English-speaking peoples. He then concluded, “We seek government with the consent of the people, man’s freedom to say what he will….But war aims other than these we have none.” According to Oliver Lyttelton, Churchill paused and said, “What will the President say to all this?”

Lyttelton recorded that Hopkins paused “for the best part of a minute” and then said, “I don’t think the President will give a damn for all that.” Lyttelton was taken aback: “Heavens alive, it’s gone wrong, thought I.” Hopkins paused again and then said, “You see, we’re only interested in seeing that that Goddamn sonofabitch Hitler gets licked.” There was loud laughter, and at that moment a friendship was cemented which no convulsion ever undermined.”
The Churchill archive is much like that of other politicians—only more so. And the political part of his papers has accordingly been deeply mined by historians. Beyond this, however, is what we could call the hidden archive—not because the archive staff hid it away but because researchers generally ignored it. I am referring especially to the holdings of literary papers that testify to Churchill’s other career as an author and to the mass of business correspondence, financial documents, bank statements, tax files, household bills, and other kinds of paperwork. Because Churchill came from a class that was accustomed to hoard such papers along with their correspondence, virtually nothing was ever thrown away, and the Churchill Archives Centre has likewise respected the intrinsic interest for historians in having this sort of material available.

In recent years, moreover, there have been a number of books that explored this hidden territory. David Reynolds’ In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War (2004) illuminated the financial implications of how this particular author operated. This prompted me to follow up on the story by putting Churchill’s composition of his History of the English-Speaking Peoples at the heart of my book, Mr. Churchill’s Profession (2012). So I happily declare an interest in commenting on David Lough’s welcome addition to the literature in his meticulously documented book, No More Champagne. Its eighty pages of references are overwhelmingly to materials held in the “hidden archive,” the holdings of which are now further exposed in the light of history.

Here is a book that one can confidently recommend to Churchillians who want to explore a side of their hero’s life that is at once largely unknown and yet familiar enough in many of the personal characteristics that it reveals. That Churchill was resourceful in meeting his financial challenges by throwing himself into the business of making a good living will come as no surprise. That he had to rely, from early days, upon his own pen to generate an essential part of his income is likewise no secret; it is only what he often said himself in public. What David Lough brings to the problem is his own relevant expertise in founding “a business that advises families on looking after their investments, tax affairs, and estates.” So he is simultaneously a novice author and a highly-qualified expert in this field. Never was there a family that better needed advice on looking after their financial affairs than the Churchills.

Alas, even the best advice is only good if it is taken, if it is implemented, and if it is consistently followed despite the temptations to revert to the bad old ways characteristic of families like the Churchills. Winston was the grandson of an impoverished duke who had sold off some of the assets at Blenheim Palace to keep going, and he was the son of free-spending parents with tastes of reckless extravagance. Not only did his mother, Jennie, run through much of what Winston himself should have inherited, as Lough brings out clearly enough, but even the prudent advice of Clementine Churchill to her husband—notably over the expenses of Chartwell—was vitiated by her own failures to keep within agreed domestic budgets. Their son Randolph simply replicated such habits. So the whole family was in it together.

Clementine had two particular worries about Winston: his gambling and his drinking. It is indeed rather appalling to find how much Winston squandered in the casinos of Europe, generally when he was away from Clementine, since they usually took separate holidays. Lough has done good work in tracking down evidence
on Winston's losses by comparing his hefty drawings in francs from the bank with the meagre deposits that were subsequently returned. Hence the poignancy of Clementine's appeals that Winston should beware the casino. When it came to the other peril—drink—the story is a bit different. We already know from other accounts that Churchill accepted bets to cut down his consumption of "undiluted spirits" for a year at a time in the 1930s, though it needs to be remembered that, since he drank whisky diluted with soda water, this ban did not affect his second-favourite tipple.

And his favourite? Yes, champagne, of course, as Lough's title signals, in quoting the stipulation that figured in every (ineffactual) economy campaign adopted at Chartwell. Yes, we can all agree that Pol Roger came to triumph as Churchill's champagne of choice; but the sheer quantity and expense of what he consumed needs to be kept in proportion. I was certainly surprised to read that "Churchill calculated that he spent an average of £1,160 with the family's wine merchants each year between 1908 and 1914," which is what Lough claims, citing the Churchill Archives (91). Now an alarm bell should have rung at this point, for this would represent nearly a quarter of Churchill's annual salary as a cabinet minister, and in today's money would be more than a hundred thousand pounds a year. Alas, Lough has misread his source, which actually shows that £1,166 was a total for the eight years from 1907 to 1914, so about £150 per annum. Phew!

A second surprise is sprung later, when "the household's alcohol consumption" for the year 1935 is stated as £920 (240). Here too, however, the cited source has been misread; it shows bills of £406 at Chartwell plus £109 supplied to the Churchills at their London flat, hence a grand total of £515 (which the author has obviously added to the Chartwell part, which is thus double-counted). I happily acknowledge that Lough kindly cites my own work, and that of David Reynolds, at other points; but a reference to my Mr. Churchill's Profession, pp. 135–37, would have saved this particular error. This is my own quibble with the evidence that Lough cites on a matter that I am sure will excite the keen interest of many Churchillians. So let me conclude by making clear that there is no reason to mistrust David Lough's work in general, since it clearly constitutes a welcome expansion of our understanding of Churchill in ways that break important new ground.

Peter Clarke is author of Mr. Churchill's Profession: Statesman, Orator, Writer (Bloomsbury, 2012).

What More Do We Know Now?


Review by Raymond Callahan

When Sir Martin Gilbert died, the monument to Winston Churchill of which he was both architect and craftsman was left incomplete. Larry Arnn, who worked with Gilbert, and who now serves as president of Hillsdale College, picked up the blueprint and tools and is carrying the project forward.

But is the project still necessary? After all, Churchill's papers have now been digitized, and online access to many other relevant collections is increasing. Researchers are becoming more accustomed to working online than visiting archives, which is time-consuming and expensive. While not all will agree, I continue to endorse the holding of these volumes in hand (or, given their bulk, resting them on the lap) and reading through them (despite some problems with the format).

When Churchill's war memoirs appeared, the numerous minutes included were likened to listening to one side of a telephone conversation. Churchill's defense was that he did not have the right to print the responses, most of which were then closed to research. Many critics faulted Martin Gilbert for giving readers the same Churchill-only perspective when material that had become available could have provided a more rounded presentation.

Both in Churchill's own war memoirs and in the relevant volumes of Gilbert's official biography (and the accompanying documents), we learn with what queries and rebukes Churchill showered allies, colleagues, and whole Whitehall departments, but we are (unless it is deductible from Churchill's text) left ignorant of context: what he was responding to—and what those allies and colleagues said in reply.

A. J. P. Taylor once remarked that the British official historians' convention of applying anonymity to virtually everyone but Churchill left the "perhaps erroneous" impression that the Prime Minister ran the war by himself. Gilbert did much the same thing. The new editor is clearly aware of this problem because footnotes explain in many cases what triggered a particular prime ministerial note or minute, and some replies are included. Of course meeting the criticism of one-sidedness fully would involve the impossible task of publishing thousands of other documents, but Arnn's attempt to give readers adequate context is very welcome, particularly since many who dip into these volumes will not visit the archives necessary to tease out the thread of a particular argument.
But if these volumes have and will continue to have some drawbacks from the point of view of historians, they are undeniably of great value to anyone interested in the remarkable man who generated this mass of documents. Paging through the documents gives one the sense of being there—a fly on the wall—as Churchill coped first with the run of disasters in 1942 and then with the equally great, if quite different, issues that presented themselves when the tide turned late in the year and success began to crown Anglo-American endeavors in 1943. How to stop Germany and Japan was central to 1942; how to cope with mounting American power and growing Russian success dominated 1943 (and doubtless for the volumes yet to come). The vision, energy, determination, and willfulness of the Prime Minister are on abundant display, as are his techniques for managing political colleagues, allies, and military commanders. Lurking in the background to this flow of exhortation, critique, and sharply targeted questioning is something that is nowhere made explicit but whose influences are everywhere evident: the work of his personal staff, whose efforts made Churchill so effective.

At the Admiralty during the opening months of the First World War, Churchill had suffered from the failings of the Naval War Staff, then only a few years old (and in fact forced upon the reluctant admirals by Churchill himself on the eve of the war). He had learned, painfully, that the indispensable link between the formulation of policy and its implementation was good staff work. Churchill intended to see that such a link was forged in the Second World War and therefore made himself Minister of Defense in May 1940. Commandeering three very talented staff officers (Hastings Ismay, Ian Jacob, and Leslie Hollis), he created a “handling machine” that tirelessly turned his stream of ideas, commands, adjurations, and rebukes into effective bureaucratic action.

Creating this machine was one of his more important actions—and one of the least commented upon.

Reading through documents on subjects ranging from Britain’s precarious import position, to the Second Front, to egg production, the question forms: how did he keep track of it all? The answer is he did not have to. Ismay, Jacob, and Hollis, aided by a small staff of able assistants, did so, seeing that not only did Churchill’s communications reach all relevant departments but that those departments responded in a full and timely fashion. Perhaps only in perusing a massive documentary collection like this does the full scope of Churchill’s accomplishments—and that of his trusted staff officers—become fully apparent.

Also apparent: the British Empire was waging a global war, but Great Britain’s war was Atlantic and European, and it is this war that arrested Churchill’s attention. It is striking how little the war “East of Suez” figures in these massive volumes. In August–September 1942, the largest revolt against the Raj since the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, sparked off by Gandhi’s “Quit India” movement, swept across northern India. Churchill’s preoccupations during those months, however, were with stopping Rommel’s drive on the Nile delta, the reorganization of the high command in Cairo to bring victory out of defeat, and his epic journey to Moscow for his first meeting with Stalin. All of this is extensively documented. There are, however, only stray references to the event that began the ringing down of the curtain on the Raj—to whose preservation, of course, Churchill was passionately dedicated.

In 1943 a famine gripped the province of Bengal in eastern India (now divided between India and Bangladesh). The death toll was about one million. An Indian author has recently accused Churchill of being largely responsible for the famine by deliberately neglecting the mounting food problems in the province. Historians have largely discounted this charge, correctly stressing the multiple causes that, interlocking under the pressure of war, led to the catastrophe. Reading through these thousands of documents it becomes plain that far from deliberately ignoring the deepening disaster in Bengal, Churchill was barely paying attention to any Indian issues in 1942 and 1943. His focus on preserving the bare minimum of food and raw material imports into Britain, in the face of heavy shipping losses in the Atlantic and the necessary diversion of tonnage to support offensive operations, limited the tonnage available to increase grain shipments to India—to that extent, and no further, can he be held to have been a factor in the calamity. It was a brutal choice, but wars usually compel such choices, especially the one Churchill waged.

As time lengthens out, Churchill seems more, not less, remarkable. Only by immersing oneself in his day-to-day workload—which these weighty volumes allow—does it become possible to grasp the titanic burden he bore and the astounding effort he wrung from Britain and its empire. This, in our digital age, is their real justification.

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Coming of Age in Cuba


Review by Con Coughlin

I t is a testament to the indomitable spirit of the young Winston Churchill that, before he had even completed his basic military training, he should seek to have first-hand experience of the perils of modern warfare.

Churchill was twenty years old and undergoing his basic cavalry training as a recently-recruited subaltern in the 4th (Queen’s Own) Hussars when he took the quixotic decision to spend his annual vacation visiting Cuba, which was then in the midst of a brutal civil war.

Throughout his long and distinguished life, one of Churchill’s defining characteristics was his determination to go his own way, even when it met with considerable opposition. His support for the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign during the First World War, as well as his less-than-enthusiastic attitude towards the D-Day landings in 1944, are some of the more memorable instances where Churchill displayed a single-minded determination to demonstrate his independent spirit.

And so it was in 1895 when, by opting to visit Cuba as a guest of the Spanish military, Churchill first demonstrated the single-mindedness that set him apart from his military peers. For, as Hal Klepak relates in this highly readable and exhaustively researched account of young Winston’s experience of the Cuban civil war, Churchill set off on his adventure with various motives in mind, not least of which was to make a name for himself.

Churchill had only recently passed out from the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, but already his ambitions lay well beyond the confines of a military career. Even at this tender age, he was already giving serious thought to embarking on a political career, one that he hoped would exonerate his father, a leading figure in the Conservative Party, who had had a calamitous fall from grace before he eventually succumbed to illness and died in January 1895, the same month that Churchill left Sandhurst.

Klepak writes that Churchill saw the Army as the means to an end, rather than the end itself, a platform for him to win fame and glory that would ultimately lay the ground for a political career. Thus, rather than being contented with the ordinary demands of military life, Churchill was desperate for adventure, one, moreover, that involved military action and a chance to prove his mettle on the battlefield.

Thus the Cuban conflict, which had erupted earlier that year and where Spanish government forces were attempting to suppress a highly-effective guerrilla campaign seeking independence for the island, provided the young officer with the perfect opportunity to test his mettle.

As an expert on Cuban history and politics as well as a lifelong Churchill devotee, Klepak is uniquely placed to examine this overlooked but formative period in the development of Churchill’s knowledge of modern warfare. During the course of researching his account, Klepak, a former Canadian infantry officer who has also worked as a strategic advisor to the Canadian Ministry of Defence and NATO, travelled extensively, including making several visits to Cuba where he retraced Churchill’s footsteps with his friend Glen Hartle, who also assisted with photographs and graphic design. As a result Klepak’s claim to have provided the definitive account of this little-known Churchillian episode is well founded.

Apart from Churchill’s desire to make a name for himself, Klepak argues that the young officer had other motivations for making the journey, not least of which was his strong desire to be acknowledged as having personal courage of a high order. As he wrote to his younger brother Jack shortly before sailing from Liverpool, “Being in many ways a coward—particularly at school—there is no ambition I cherish so keenly as to gain a reputation for personal courage.” And the fact that Churchill was under instructions from the Director of Military Intelligence “to collect information and statistics on various points,” and in particular to look into a new rifle round the Spanish were using, gave his visit a quasi-official designation, one that might even enhance his military career.

Churchill’s Cuban adventure more than satisfied his desire to experience firsthand the thrill of battle after he joined a Spanish fighting column sent to confront the guerrillas. According to Churchill’s own account, he first came under fire on 30 November, his twenty-first birthday. “On that day for the first time I heard shots fired in anger, and heard bullets strike flesh and whistle through the air,” he later recollected. Klepak questions whether the incident occurred on Churchill’s birthday or a few days later. But what is not in doubt is that on several occasions Churchill was involved in direct engagements with the enemy, although he managed to avoid being injured in any way.
On one occasion Churchill relates how, having bedded down for the night, “I was soon awakened by firing. Not only shots but volleys resounded through the night. A bullet ripped through the thatch of our hut, another wounded an orderly outside.” As the column moved forward, it was subjected to continual sniping by the guerrillas, “making the march very lively for everybody.” Churchill was impressed by the conduct of the Spanish commanding officer: “The General, a very brave man—in a white and gold uniform on a grey horse—drew a great deal of fire onto us and I heard enough bullets whistle and hum past to satisfy me for some time to come.”

Eventually the column achieved its objective of driving the guerrillas from their positions and capturing the territory and, with the fighting drawing to a close, Churchill made his way back to Havana to start the return journey to London exhilarated by the experience.

As Klepak writes in his concluding chapter, the memories of his Cuban adventure would remain with Churchill for the rest of life. It was here that he spent his twenty-first birthday, and it was here, marching along rural Cuban roads, that he experienced his baptism under fire. In almost every sense, it was in the Cuba of 1895 that Winston Churchill truly came of age.

Con Coughlin is executive foreign editor for the Daily Telegraph and author of Churchill’s First War: Young Winston at War with the Afghans (Thomas Dunne Books, 2013).

Trio of Titans

ISBN 978-1781552728

Review by Richard Toye
stuck with him. Kitchener knew it, telling Douglas Haig: “Rightly or wrongly, probably wrongly, the people believe in me. It is not me the politicians are afraid of, but what the people would say to them if I were to go.” In the end, the politicians sent him on a mission to Russia. His ship struck a mine and he drowned. One imagines that, in various parts of Whitehall, there were a number of skilfully concealed sighs of relief.

Richard Toye is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. He has written three books about Churchill, including Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness (Macmillan, 2007).

If Only…

Richard M. Langworth, Churchill and the Avoidable War: Could World War II have been Prevented? Moultonborough, NH: Dragonwyck, 2015, 122 pages, $7.95. ISBN 987-1518690358

Review by Manfred Weidhorn

The origin of Mr. Langworth’s book is Churchill’s 1945 labeling of the Second World War as “The Unnecessary War.” Churchill proceeded to offer two “ifs,” one having to do with the United States and the other with the League of Nations. It should be noted that of the four ubiquitous conjunctions, “and” is decidedly dull, “or” involves choice, “but” is often a weasel word (“I believe in absolute free speech, but this is too much,” meaning you do not believe in absolute free speech), and “if” is a reality re-constructor (“If pigs had wings”). “If” presumes to improve on God’s creation of the world, as well as to challenge our reliance on the factual and the mundane. It is a product of, and tribute to, the imagination. And it is, of course, at the heart of counterfactual history. “Much virtue in ‘if,’” says the Bard.

Langworth lines up, like balls on a pool table, the key junctures when events could have taken a different course. The writing is compelling, the documentation rich, the arguments persuasive. Other biographers and historians have, to be sure, dealt with these flashpoints, but only in the setting of a narrative that encompasses numerous other issues. The virtue of this approach is to focus entirely on several isolated incidents and trace their common theme. The power of Langworth’s handling of the theme is that he avoids dogmatic folly. He repeatedly invokes a necessary skepticism: “We will never know,” “We do not know,” “We know now” what was not known “at the time.”

Several cases are painfully poignant. First came the Rhineland crisis, when Hitler was scared stiff about an Allied reaction, and his lightly armed small force, instructed to retreat at the first sign of resistance, was easily outmatched by nearby French forces, which (alas!) remained dormant. Could he have survived politically the embarrassment of a retreat?

Next came the annexation of Austria, where the Wehrmacht performed less like the fearsome military machine of 1939–41 and much more like the soldiery in a Viennese operetta. That these facts were either not observed or not disseminated by the intelligence agencies of Britain and France is only one more example of the rule that “intelligence” is a misnomer.

Finally, Chamberlain has been much lampooned for misreading Hitler. But Langworth points out what were greater errors of judgment: The Prime Minister would not consider some sort of arrangement with Russia, thereby making the Stalin-Hitler pact inevitable, and he did not respond to FDR’s proffered hand. The historical irony is that these were precisely the nascent superpowers that became necessary allies in the war that followed, a war that could have been avoided by responding to the feelers when cooperation was helpful rather than later when it was unavoidable. What Chamberlain lacked were Churchill’s strengths—imagination and the study of history.

Churchill himself played this game of counterfactual history: in his essay on Lee winning at Gettysburg; in a passage in The World Crisis on how the postwar peace deliberations might or should have gone; and in a passage in his memoirs of the Second World War about how his own reputation would have been destroyed if his government had fallen as a result of the two votes of no confidence in 1942 in the wake of numerous disasters.
have been ascribed to the presumed incompetents who replaced him. So for educating the German people and the Nazi camp followers about the self-destructiveness of the man they worshipped, and for disabusing innocent bystanders, it was necessary for the horrors of 1942–45 to ensue under his brilliant command. What a costly education about “if”!

That might suggest that sometimes, at least, it is best that things went the way they did. Of course, the other plausible objection to this seductive game of counterfactual history is that there never was a chance for history to go in any way other than the way it did. Like water finding its level, history is possibly constrained by the facts and causes and the iron laws of its development. As Pope versified and Hegel philosophized, for better or worse, “Whatever is, is right.” And so Langworth’s jeu d’esprit, at once pleasant to read and sad to contemplate, is but a vacation from reality.

Roy Jenkins, in his 2001 biography Churchill, called this “the most breathtakingly bland piece of misinformation to appear in all those six volumes” because, over a three-day period from 26 through 28 May, there were what Jenkins termed “nine tense meetings of the War Cabinet” on that very subject.

John Kelly has written a compelling narrative about the events leading up to the decision by Britain’s War Cabinet on 28 May 1940 not to take even preliminary steps to ascertain Hitler’s terms for peace.

On 13 May, Churchill told the Commons of Britain’s new war policy: “victory at all costs.” His Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, did not yet agree. Instead, when the French army started collapsing within a fortnight, Halifax wanted France and Britain to inquire through the Italian government what Hitler’s terms for peace might be. What frustrated Halifax was that Churchill did not wish to find them out at all.

Eventually Churchill won the day when, on 28 May, Chamberlain and the Labour members of the War Cabinet, Clement Attlee and Arthur Greenwood, joined in rejecting Halifax’s proposed approach to Italy.

The key event in the drama, though, did not involve the War Cabinet. On 28 May, between the eighth and ninth meetings of the War Cabinet, Churchill met the twenty-five ministers who made up the rest of the Cabinet to report to them on the status of the war. No other member of the War Cabinet was present. It was, Kelly writes, “Churchill unfettered and unbuttoned.” And deliberately deceptive.

In addressing the outer Cabinet, Churchill made no reference to the War Cabinet’s debate over the preceding three days about approaching the Italians, on which no decision had yet been made. Instead, after giving a full and frank account of how badly things were going in France. Churchill said that he had “thought carefully in these last few days whether it was part of my duty to consider negotiations with That Man.” “I am convinced,” he concluded, “that every man of you would rise up and tear me down from my place if I were for one moment to contemplate parley or surrender.”

Yet Churchill had previously told Halifax and the War Cabinet on 27 May that he “would not join the French in asking for terms, but if he were told what the terms offered were, he would be prepared to discuss them” (emphasis added). Churchill, however, withheld this fact from the outer Cabinet, and the ministers applauded his refusal to seek terms. According to Hugh Dalton, “No one offered even the faintest flicker of dissent.”

Did Churchill deliberately plan to undercut Halifax and the War Cabinet by appealing to the outer Cabinet to support a policy of “no parley” when no such decision had yet been made? Kelly thinks so, as do historians Andrew Roberts and John Charmley. Roy Jenkins and John Lukacs allow for such a possibility, but are not so sure. Jenkins writes that appealing to the rest of the Cabinet in such a dramatic fashion “could be regarded as either his most skillful ploy or his luckiest unplanned bonus of those peculiarly testing three days.” Either way, it worked. The War Cabinet never again seriously considered negotiations with Hitler.
Was Halifax? Kelly thinks so. He writes about the chance meeting that Rab Butler (“a Halifax con-
didante”) had with the Swedish ambassador Bjorn Prytz on 17 June. Kelly calls it “Halifax’s last foray into
peace diplomacy,” but this is unfair to Halifax, depending, as it does, on
Rab Butler’s questionable credibility. During the meeting with Prytz,
Butler met briefly with Halifax, who allegedly sent Prytz a message
to Halifax that “Common sense and not bravado would dictate the
British Government’s policy.”

It is generally accepted that
Prytz, who had no ax to grind, accu-
curately reported what Butler told
him. When the telegram came to the
attention of Churchill and Halifax, however, Butler was called on the
carpet and denied saying anything like that to Prytz, claiming he must
have been misunderstood. This
seems doubtful.

Andrew Roberts concludes in
his Halifax biography that the most
likely explanation is that Butler “had
put words into Halifax’s mouth.”
This is based, among other things,
on Halifax’s diary entry on 17 June,
recording that he now believed
Churchill was “right in feeling that
if we can, with our resources con-
centrated, hold the devils for two or
three months, there is quite a chance
that the situation might turn in our
favour.”

Kelly’s only source on this
episode is secondary, Clive Ponting’s
book 1940: Myth and Reality, where
Ponting’s claim that Halifax had
directed Butler to reach out to Prytz
is misleadingly based upon a sen-
tence fragment from Sir Alexander
Cadogan’s 18 June diary that implies
the Foreign Office was waiting for a
“reply from Germans” to Prytz. The
complete sentence (undisclosed by
Ponting) makes clear that Cadogan
meant no reply to the French call for
an armistice the day before.

To be fair to Kelly, though, the
Butler-Prytz meeting takes up only
two pages out of 321 in an other-
wise well-written, enjoyable book
about a critical time in history when
Hitler almost won his war. Thanks to
Churchill, he did not.

Michael McMenamin writes Action
This Day for Finest Hour and is a
member of the journal’s Editorial
Board.

His Courage
Had Not Failed

Brian Hodgkinson, Saviour of
the Nation: An Epic Poem of
Winston Churchill’s Finest
Hour, Shepheard-Walwyn
Publishers LTD, 2015, 186 pages,
£10.00, US $15.95, CAN $18.95.
ISBN 978-0856835063

Review by Robert James

Winston Churchill.

An epic poem focusing
on Winston Churchill’s rise to
power and defiance of Adolf Hitler
attempts to join the ranks of
Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, Virgil’s
Aeneid, Dante’s Divine Comedy,
and John Milton’s Paradise Lost.

Well, why not? Churchill is an apt
subject, after all, a historical figure
of transcendent importance in twen-
tieth-century history and the defeat
of what many consider the most
concentrated form of evil known to
man. What better hero to choose for
a modern epic poem?

Reading Saviour of the Nation is
a pleasant experience, providing a
kind of History-Channel summary
of Churchill’s opposition to Nazi
Germany, beginning with a few scat-
tered chapters touching on Hitler’s
rise in 1932 and 1933, then rapidly
moving to the heart of the tale,
Churchill’s ascension to prime min-
ister through to the Japanese attack
on Pearl Harbor (and the full com-
mitment of the United States to war
as Britain’s ally against Germany).
The broad narrative scope touches
upon all of the important moments
in that solitary struggle, from the
Battle of France and Dunkirk to the
Battle of Britain to the Blitz to the
invasion of Russia (with the other
essential moments all carefully
covered).

As history, however, one has to
wonder precisely who Hodgkinson’s
audience is intended to be.
Neophytes would be better advised
to take up a more approachable
and informative text, like Ashley
Jackson’s recent biography Churchill.
Those of us in the know will find
very few surprises at all in the text,
which occasionally comes across like
a very bright college student’s thesis
document, full of citations and odd little
stories and quotes (which is enter-
taining, but few of these touches are
likely to be unknown to those with a
few books on the period under their
belts).

This brings us to the question
of Saviour of the Nation as a poem,
of the artistic qualities Hodgkinson
brings to the proceedings. As an
epic poem, he has certainly chosen a
fitting subject. Who better to match
the wit and tongue of Odysseus, the
drive of Aeneas to survive, the hope
of Dante to retrieve something pre-
cious from the clutches of hell, and
the pride of Satan fighting against all
odds to remain defiant?

Hodgkinson certainly gets
Churchill’s character correct. He has
also centered on two themes for his
epic: the memory of the wound of
Gallipoli, which threatens repeat-
edly to undo all Churchill is fighting
for, and even more potently, the

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ties Churchill has to the British people. Epic poems often focus on a failure as a spur to the narrative (Odysseus’s defiance of the Gods, his wounding of the cyclops Polyphemus), as well as the national character of the people who support the hero (the goatherd who recognizes Odysseus upon his return, and the elderly who are ashamed by the actions of the suitors in Odysseus’ absence). Churchill’s connection to the common citizen is conveyed in thrilling terms quite often. The heart of the poem comes with one of Churchill’s morning-after visits during the Blitz:

He visited the stricken Londoners
When fires still raged, and ruined
buildings stood
Like skeletons amidst the rubble
heaps;
Where tiny paper flags—the Union
Jack—
Waved bravely on some workers’
shattered homes.
...When Churchill came
Unsure of his reception, he was
mobbed.
‘Good old Winnie,’ many of them
cried.
‘We can take it! Give it to ‘em
back!’
A woman shouted, ‘See he really
cares.’
She’d seen that he could not
restrain his tears.

I think Hodgkinson has his heart in the right place, but his poetic talents may not be up to the task. He does not seem interested in following all the traditional beats of the epic; there is no evocation of the muse, we do not begin in medias res, there is little sense of the divine. That I can accept, but what jars the ear is how little actual poetry there is in this poem. He has blank verse down pat, but so little of the poem is more than transcription of historical events. What irks is that Hodgkinson has a few moments in which he actually does rise to the kind of concentrated effect one hopes for from poetry, as in his description of the
time when France had fallen and only Britain remained:

It was a moment outside passing
time,
A place of stillness, like an ancient
church
Whose years of prayer had sancti-
fied the stone
And cleansed the air of every
sound but one.

I wish Hodgkinson had reached for
more of that level of expression,
but he rarely does, which undercuts the
value of Saviour of the Nation as
a way to compress the experience of those times into passages one
might remember fondly. For fans of
Winston Churchill, I suspect Saviour
of the Nation is worth reading, just as
an oddity, a curio for the bookshelf.
Hodgkinson is at work on a narrative
poem on the entirety of World War
II. One can only hope Saviour of the
Nation is a clearing of the throat for
a greater piece of poetry.

Robert James received his Ph.D. in
English from UCLA in 1995. He is the
author of the series Who Won?!? An
Irreverent Look at the Oscars, avail-
able through Amazon.com.

Hollow Book

Michael Arnold, Hollow Heroes:
An Unvarnished Look at the
Wartime Careers of Churchill,
Montgomery, and Mountbatten,
Casemate, 2015, 304 pages,
$34.95. ISBN 978-1612002736

Review by Nigel Hamilton

There are as many biographies
as there are biographers: some
serious, some not. Plus others
that purport to be serious, but
are not. Into which category does
Michael Arnold’s Hollow Heroes fall?
A former insurance salesman,
Mr. Arnold has a passion for
polemic. His first book, The Bodyline
Hypocrisy, was a book of conversa-
tions (with Harold Larwood) about
the great cricket conundrum: should
bowlers be allowed to bowl straight
at the batsman to intimidate him, as
in the famous 1932–33 Ashes tour
between England and Australia?
After this, Mr. Arnold plunged
into another form of polemic:
military history. His work when
published was titled Sacrifice of
Singapore: Churchill’s Biggest Blunder.
According to the publisher’s blurb:
“when, inevitably, Singapore fell
to the Japanese in February 1942,
Churchill attempted to deflect criti-
cism by accusing the defenders there
of spineless capitulation. Recently
released information from the Office
of Naval Intelligence in Washington
reveals that United States President
Franklin Roosevelt not only knew
of the impending attack on Pearl
Harbour but actually instigated
it. Although Roosevelt promised a
shield of B-17 aircraft for Singapore
from Manila, General Douglas
MacArthur in the Philippines had
been told to do nothing until after
the Japanese attacks there and at
Pearl Harbor so that the United
States could claim an unprovoked
assault that would allow them to
declare war on Japan.”
FDR instigated the Japanese
attack on Pearl Harbor? MacArthur
was ordered not to use his B-17s?
Clearly, Mr. Arnold—a proud
amateur—was keen to join the ranks
of skeptics who cry “murder most
resentment, given his age and inex-
perience. It did not inhibit him or his
ambition, however, and after the war
he bravely dared speak and travel in
Canada, where he had never been for-
given for his ill-fated Dieppe fiasco.

All three men, then, accepted
that genuine biographers would not
necessarily be kind to them. Quite
what they might have made of a
work that, in its conclusion, finds
Churchill’s faults as “huge” as his
achievements, and that “Montgomery
was little more than a vastly over-
rated opportunist and Mountbatten
was a megalomaniac whose massive
mistakes and excesses were excused
because of connections with the
monarchy,” is anybody’s guess. But
one thing is certain: Mr. Arnold’s pre-
ferred heroes would have made all of
them laugh aloud.

Arnold’s own “great” men of the
Second World War are, instead, “the
unsung heroes, [Generals] Wavell and
Auchinleck, and the hidden hero,
Dorman-Smith”—the last one having
served as General Auchinleck’s chief
of staff in North Africa, and having
been (rightly, in my mind) fired by
Churchill on the Prime Minister’s
famous trip to Egypt in the summer
of 1942.

In other words, to criticize
“great” men is one thing—indeed it
is part and parcel of our democratic
way of life. The efforts of serious,
critical historians and biographers
who base their work on real work
they undertake in archives and by
interviews they conduct deserve to
be read carefully, and their argu-
ments tested against the evidence
they provide: which is what happens,
by and large, in our society. But for
Mr. Arnold—as a former insurance
salesman, and with no attempt to be
critical, or do any serious historical
investigation of his own to examine
his own alternative heroes—to claim
that Generals Wavell, Auchinleck, and
Brigadier Dorman-Smith—three men
who each failed in their military roles
in the Second World War and were
dismissed, or moved to other posts in
1941 and 1942—were the real heroes
of that war, is simple, unsubstanti-
ated quackery, based on the claims

of other authors. If it is not too late,
I can only urge Mr. Arnold to take a
late-life graduate course in history
and biography before he indulges
himself and us in more amateur, pla-
giaristic polemics.

Nigel Hamilton is the author of
The Mantle of Command: FDR at
War, 1941–1942. His new book,
Commander in Chief: FDR’s Battle
with Churchill, 1943, will be published
in June 2016.

Churchill’s Friend

Alonzo Hamby, Man of Destiny:
FDR and the Making of the
American Century, Basic Books,
2015, 512 pages, $35.00.
ISBN 987-0465028603

Review by Mark Klobas

As with Winston Churchill,
Franklin Roosevelt is a histor-
ical figure about whom there
is no end of biographies regularly
produced. Alonzo Hamby is the latest
contributor to this genre, and he
brings to it a long career as a scholar
of Roosevelt’s successor, Harry S.
Truman, as well as his previous work
as the author of an examination of
the New Deal within the comparative
context of the response to the Great
Depression by the other nations of
the West. The perspective Hamby
brings is reflected in his main thesis
about Roosevelt, whom Hamby
sees as the man whose efforts in
saving liberal democracy during the
Second World War brought about the
“American century” and the world in
which we still live today.

Hamby divides his study of
Roosevelt into three parts, consisting
of his life before the presidency, the
years of his administration devoted
to the domestic policies of the New
Deal, and his handling of the inter-
national crises of the 1930s and the
wars that followed. The division rep-
resents the trade-off Hamby faced in
when he reaches the second section of his book Hamby slows his pace and expands his focus, providing a broad account of the development and implementation of the New Deal. While recognizing Roosevelt’s considerable efforts to ease the toll the Depression had taken upon millions of Americans, Hamby is critical of the New Deal overall, viewing it in the end as a barrier to economic recovery both domestically and in the larger global economy as well. Yet the American voters credited his efforts rather than their results, delivering a resounding endorsement of his policies by reelecting him to a second term in 1936. Roosevelt followed this triumph, though, with a series of ill-judged missteps that solidified the conservative opposition to his policies in Congress, and Hamby argues that it was the deteriorating international situation that provided him with a second chance to define his historical reputation.

The prospects for success were not promising. Roosevelt faced the militaristically aggressive regimes in Europe and Asia as the leader of a nation that was strongly isolationist in its sentiments. Despite this, Roosevelt moved towards opposition to Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, a move that took on added import with the outbreak of war in September 1939. Here Hamby focuses more upon Roosevelt once again, recounting his many personal efforts to prepare the nation for the prospect for war and provide support for the nations fighting Germany and Japan. Among the measures that Hamby describes is the personal relationship that he began building with Churchill, starting with Roosevelt’s personal note to Churchill soon after his return to the Admiralty. Hamby stresses the similarities between the two men, namely their charismatic leadership, inspirational rhetoric, and determination in confronting the Axis powers. The difference he notes was in terms of their ideologies, with Churchill’s belief in imperialism distinguishing him from Roosevelt’s unalloyed belief in liberal democracy.

The disagreement between the two men on this matter, however, was minor compared to their shared goal of defeating the Third Reich. Hamby credits Roosevelt with making bold gestures given the context of American public opinion, providing aid to Britain within the limits of what was politically possible. With the formal entry of the United States into the war in December 1941, the informal partnership became a formal alliance, one that would survive policy disagreements and Roosevelt’s occasional twitting of the prime minister.

Roosevelt hoped to develop a similar personal connection with Joseph Stalin as well, but Hamby is far more critical of the President’s efforts here, seeing him as more accepting of the Soviet leader’s ambitions than Truman would be.

Overall Hamby’s book provides a capable survey of Roosevelt’s public life and political achievements. While there is little that is new within its pages (and an unfortunate perpetuation of the stale misconception about Churchill’s level of alcohol consumption), his command of his material is assured and his judgments clear. Readers seeking an introductory overview of Roosevelt’s career will find this biography fits the bill most satisfactorily, though those who desire a deeper understanding of such subjects as the Roosevelt-Churchill relationship should plan on supplementing it with more specialized works.

Mark Klobas teaches history at Scottsdale College in Arizona.

The Lion of the Left

ISBN 978-1849546836

Review by Mark Klobas

Much like Winston Churchill, Clement Attlee is a prime minister about whom many biographies are written. This output attests to his importance in British history for several reasons: as the longest-serving leader of the Labour Party; as the person whose refusal to serve in a coalition government with Neville Chamberlain helped bring Churchill to power; as the Deputy Prime Minister in Churchill’s wartime coalition; and as the head of the postwar Labour government that created a welfare state and nationalized several industries.

The life Michael Jago outlines differs little from previous biogra-
This trust was mutual, as Churchill never wavered from his view of Churchill as the indispensable leader. During the Second World War Attlee conceived but in its execution, and failure of the campaign lay not in its agreement with Churchill’s view that the campaign. Unlike many others, Attlee to the ill-fated 1915 Gallipoli campaign. Jago traces the beginnings not the product of accidental circumstances, as has so often been claimed. Yet while the description of Attlee’s undoubted skills is convincing, it is hard to deny that the decimation of Labour’s parliamentary leadership in the 1931 general election helped clear the way for Attlee’s subsequent selection as party leader four years later.

Chamberlain’s resignation and Churchill’s selection in May 1940 opened the way for a coalition government and Attlee’s return to office. Jago’s analysis of the Attlee-Churchill relationship offers some of the most interesting pages in the book. Jago traces the beginnings not to 1940, but to Attlee’s participation in the ill-fated 1915 Gallipoli campaign. Unlike many others, Attlee agreed with Churchill’s view that the failure of the campaign lay not in its conception but in its execution, and during the Second World War Attlee never wavered from his view of Churchill as the indispensable leader. This trust was mutual, as Churchill frequently relied on Attlee to serve as his deputy (a designation made official in 1942) and trusted him with a variety of duties, all of which Attlee handled with an efficiency and effectiveness that impressed those with whom he worked.

Attlee’s position in the coalition required a difficult balancing act, however, since he also had to manage the opinion of a party worried that he was going down the same road travelled by Ramsay MacDonald in 1931. For Attlee, the challenge was to maintain his loyalty to Churchill as national leader while still remaining true to the party he led and preparing the ground for the general election that was due to follow the end of the war. Jago judges Attlee remarkably successful in this endeavor, which he sees as key to Labour’s subsequent success in the 1945 general election.

Attlee’s tenure as prime minister in the postwar Labour government takes up nearly half of the book, and understandably so given its importance both to Attlee’s career and to British history. Jago presents Attlee as a prime minister content to leave the details of governance to the members of his cabinet, who presided over a wholesale transformation of the role of the state in British life while overseeing the start of the Cold War and the British withdrawal from India and Palestine. The flaws in Attlee’s style began to show near the end of his government, though, as the achievement of goals led not to the establishment of new ones but the beginning of an ideological split within Labour, which Attlee was hard pressed to manage both in and out of office.

Jago’s book serves as a good overview of Attlee’s public career and the political context in which it took place. He has little that is new to say about his subject except for the chapter on Attlee’s relationship as premier with the intelligence services, one that reflects both the increased attention this aspect of government has received recently and the greater availability of sources in this secretive area. Thus Jago demonstrates how much we can still learn about the tenure of this remarkable politician, whose achievements and legacy remain worthy of our attention.

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**The Uncrowned Prime Minister**


**Review by D. R. Thorpe**

In his memoirs *The Art of the Possible* Rab Butler describes one of his predecessors as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Foreign Secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain, as “the Uncrowned Prime Minister.” In time, the sobriquet has become one ever attached to Butler himself, three times a possible prime minister, and one reflected in the subtitle of this carefully researched and authoritative new biography.

However, Butler’s supporters, and they were manifold, should not grieve, but, in Wordsworth’s words, “rather find strength in what remains behind.” For Butler, like two other “nearly men,” Joseph Chamberlain (Austen’s father) and Roy Jenkins, left more of an imprint on his times than many who did make it to 10 Downing Street. Butler’s great monument is the 1944 Education Act, the foremost piece of domestic legislation enacted by Churchill’s war-time government, which transformed the possibilities for generations of young people after the Second World War.

Born in India in 1902, Butler had undoubted ambition and this was fortified by his 1925 marriage to the formidable Sydney Courtcauld, only child of one of the wealthiest businessmen in the country. Marriage brought emotional contentment, a happy family, independent wealth,
and ultimately a safe seat at Saffron Walden, which Rab represented from 1929 to 1965. It was said of Sydney that “she flew like an arrow” and her support was vital to Rab as he climbed the political ladder. Her premature and lingering death from a painful cancer on 9 December 1955, Rab’s fifty-third birthday, was a turning point from which Rab’s life and career never really recovered, despite the happiness of his second marriage in 1959 to Mollie Courtauld, Sydney’s cousin by marriage.

Another turning point had been in July 1945, when the Conservatives had been soundly defeated in the General Election. Butler had warned Churchill of complacency in the campaign, not that this endeared him to the old warrior, always ambivalent about Butler. The next six years, when Churchill was Leader of the Opposition, were to prove the second great phase of Butler’s career, in which he was prominent among those MPs reforming the Conservative Party along progressive and modern lines.

Jago underestimates, however, Rab’s role as one of a trio of reformers, the others being Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan. Jago expertly discusses Churchill’s options for a Cabinet after he had returned to power in October 1951. Rab was, unexpectedly to many, appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. According to the outgoing Chancellor, Hugh Gaitskell, this was because Churchill knew the job to be intolerable and so gave it to Rab, “whom he dislikes very much.”

So many spells at the Treasury end in tears, and Rab’s tenure was no exception. The pressures on the economy coincided with the protracted illness of Sydney Butler. Jago shows that during this time “Rab’s prospects of becoming Leader of the Conservative Party evaporated.” Ironically, as Jago correctly demonstrates, the money Rab provided for Harold Macmillan’s housing programme diminished the Chancellor just as, in proportion, it enhanced the standing of the coming man who was to be his nemesis.

Macmillan replaced Rab at the Treasury and, when he became Prime Minister in January 1957, moved Rab to the Home Office, traditionally the graveyard of those aspiring to be prime minister. Jago’s account of the machinations of the Suez Crisis in 1956, not Rab’s finest hour, is fascinatingly detailed, as is his account of Rab’s career from 1957 to 1963, under Macmillan’s premiership. The high spot for Rab during this period was his liberalisation of much social policy and his work on dismantling the Central African Federation. But this did not guarantee him the key to 10 Downing Street.

So Jago considers the question: Why did Rab never become Prime Minister? He shows two factors to be vital. In May 1940, when he was Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, Rab met the Swedish Ambassador Bjorn Pritz in St. James’s Park and informally discussed possible peace overtures with Germany. Jago’s account of this episode is very convincing at explaining how the anti-appeasers in the Tory Party never forgot or forgiven the Suez Crisis and the anti-appeasers, an impossible burden. But he did not have the bottle to demand the succession, something not forgotten in January 1957, when the Cabinet indicated by eighteen votes to two that it favoured Macmillan. In October 1963 Rab knew he would not be chosen, since he had already been told in the summer by John Morrison, the Chairman of the 1922 Committee, that “the chaps won’t have you.”


Churchill and the Isle of Wight


To purchase, go to www.winstonsisland.co.uk

Review by Anne Sebba
Winston’s Island

Written by Anthony Churchill

It’s in a name? Anthony Churchill describes himself as “a very minor” Churchill on his father’s side through the Dorset branch of the family, and “a very minor” Spencer on his mother’s. He had, he insists, never bothered too much about his famous family name until he retired some years ago and put down roots on the Isle of Wight, where he kept discovering snippets of history linking his illustrious ancestor to the island. As an ocean racer who had sailed with Ted Heath on all his Morning Cloud yachts, winning the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race as navigator strategist, he was frequently in Cowes and noted that Winston Churchill’s parents had met and fallen in love there in 1873 after an intense three-day romance. When he realised that the 140th anniversary of that meeting would fall in 2013, he set about organising a gala dinner on the island, inviting as many of the family as he could muster. After that he decided there had to be a book recording all the links.

Now in his ninth decade and living on the south side of the island at Ventnor—he prefers the rougher seas that side—Anthony Churchill has lovingly assembled a profusely-illustrated volume detailing every connection between Winston and the island, starting with ancestors on both sides, Jeromes as well as Churchills. He retells the story of John Churchill, later the first Duke of Marlborough, who in 1679, thanks to his friendship with the Governor, Sir Robert Holmes, accepted a parliamentary seat at Newtown, then capital of the island and largely in ruins following a devastating series of French attacks. Anthony Churchill also discusses the likelihood that the Jeromes, Winston’s mother’s family, were originally Isle of Wight Protestants trading with France rather than French Huguenots who had fled to the isle. Either way, Timothy Jerome, possibly with two brothers John and Stephen, sailed to America in about 1719, probably with the grant of a monopoly in salt manufacturing in Connecticut. Churchill believes that Leonard Jerome’s subsequent attraction to the Isle of Wight owed something to his knowledge that his ancestors had originated from there.

In the late nineteenth century the island was important for Winston and his younger brother Jack as the two boys often spent school holidays there with their devoted nanny, Mrs Everest, called by Winston “Woom” from babyhood onwards. Mrs Everest’s brother in law, John Balaam, her sister’s husband, was chief warden at Parkhurst Prison, having worked there for nearly thirty years, and it is Cowes—it was a happy reminder for her of the place where, aged nineteen, she had fallen in love with Randolph, and she returned there regularly.

This is an unusual mix of a book; part guide book, part history or biography, and part glossy magazine pages. There is a story of Winston, a noted opponent of women’s suffrage, having a run-in with some suffragettes on the island when he visited in 1910 as Liberal Home Secretary and made four speeches there. In Yarmouth he was chased by suffragettes onto a special boat returning him to the mainland.

There are also some fascinating pages devoted to the geological formation of the island, including the “almost unknown” deep gash known as Churchill Chine.

But for me the best part was an account of the gala dinner entertainment where two of Winston’s great grandchildren, appropriately Randolph Churchill and his sister Jennie, recounted the events of 1873, including a letter in which the young Lord Randolph reassured his parents that with Jennie at his side he is sure he can make something of his life and become “all, and perhaps more, than you ever wished and hoped for me.”

It is a beautifully produced book, richly illustrated with marble endpapers and gilded on all three edges with some fascinating details certain to appeal to all those who collect Churchilliana. Anthony Churchill insists that he decided to write this book for a better knowledge of Winston, but also from a sense of curiosity “and a decision that if I did not write it, nobody else would.” How lucky he did.

As the 21st Lancers left the ridge, the fire of the Arab riflemen on the hill ceased. We advanced at a walk in mass for about 300 yards. The scattered parties of Dervishes fell back and melted away, and only one straggling line of men in dark blue waited motionless a quarter of a mile to the left front. They were scarcely a hundred strong. I marvelled at their temerity. The regiment formed into line of squadron columns, and continued at a walk until within 300 yards of this small body of Dervishes. I wondered what possessed them. Perhaps they wanted to surrender. The firing behind the ridges had stopped. There was complete silence, intensified by the recent tumult. Far beyond the thin blue row of Dervishes the fugitives were visible streaming into Omdurman. And should these few devoted men impede a regiment? Yet it was wiser to examine their position from the other flank before slipping a squadron at them. The heads of the squadron wheeled slowly to the left, and the Lancers, breaking into a trot, began to cross the Dervish front in column of troops. Thereupon and with one accord the blue-clad men dropped on their knees, and there burst out a loud, crackling fire of musketry. It was hardly possible to miss such a target at such a range. Horses and men fell at once. The only course was plain and welcome to all. The Colonel, nearer than his regiment, already saw what lay behind the skirmishers. He ordered ‘Right wheel into line’ to be sounded. The trumpet jerked out a shrill note, heard faintly above the trampling of the horses and the noise of the rifles. On the instant all the sixteen troops swung round and locked up into a long galloping line, and the 21st Lancers were committed to their first charge in war.

Two hundred and fifty yards away the dark-blue men were firing madly in a thin film of light-blue smoke. Their bullets struck the hard gravel into the air, and the troopers, to shield their faces from the stinging dust, bowed their helmets forward, like the Cuirassiers at Waterloo. The pace was fast and the distance short. Yet, before it was half covered, the whole aspect of the affair changed. A deep crease in the ground—a dry watercourse, a khor—appeared where all had seemed smooth, level plain; and from it there sprang, with the suddenness of a pantomime effect and a high-pitched yell, a dense white mass of men nearly as long as our front and about twelve deep. A score of horsemen and a dozen bright flags rose as if by magic from the earth. Eager warriors sprang forward to anticipate the shock. The rest stood firm to meet it. The Lancers acknowledged the apparition only by an increase of pace. Each man wanted sufficient momentum to drive through such a solid line. The flank troops, seeing that they overlapped, curved inwards like the horns of a moon. But the whole event was a matter of seconds. The riflemen, firing bravely to the last, were swept head over heels into the khor, and jumping down with them, at full gallop and in the closest order, the British squadrons struck the fierce brigade with one loud furious shout. The collision was prodigious. Nearly thirty Lancers, men and horses, and at least two hundred Arabs were overthrown. The shock was stunning to both sides, and for perhaps ten wonderful seconds no man heeded his enemy. Terrified horses wedged in the crowd; bruised and shaken men, sprawling in heaps, struggled, dazed and stupid, to their feet, panted, and looked about them. Several fallen Lancers had even time to remount. Meanwhile the impetus of the cavalry carried them on. As a rider tears through a bullfinch, the officers forced their way through the press; and as an iron rake might be drawn through a heap of shingle, so the regiment followed. They shattered the Dervish array, and, their pace reduced to a walk, scrambled out of the khor on the further side, leaving a score of troopers behind them, and dragging on with the charge more than a thousand Arabs. Then, and not till then, the killing began; and thereafter each man saw the world along his lance, under his guard, or through the back-sight of his pistol; and each had his own strange tale to tell. ☞

Winston Churchill: In His Own Words

The River War: Churchill’s Firsthand Account of the Charge at Omdurman

Lines printed in bold italics appeared in the first edition of The River War but not in later editions.
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The Churchill Centre has formed a partnership with the George Washington University, Washington, DC, to establish the National Churchill Library and Center, which will be housed on the first floor of the Estelle and Melvin Gelman Library. This will be the first major research facility in the nation’s capital dedicated to the study of Sir Winston Churchill.

As both scholar and statesman, Winston Churchill is an inspiring figure in leadership and diplomacy. The new Center, through its collections, interdisciplinary academic programs, and educational exhibits, will offer students, faculty, researchers, and the public the opportunity to examine Churchill’s life and legacy. The Churchill Centre is raising $8 million to fund:

- Facilities - $2 million (estimate)
- Endowed Professorship of Churchill Studies & 20th Century British History - $2.5 million
- Endowed Curatorship of the Library and Center - $2.5 million
- Collection and Programming Endowment - $1 million

The National Churchill Library and Center will open in stages, beginning in 2016. To learn more about how to support this important initiative, please contact Lee Pollock, Executive Director of the Churchill Centre, at (312) 263-5637 or lpollock@winstonchurchill.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION COMPLETE DETAILS AND A VIDEO DESCRIBING THE PROJECT, GO TO: LIBRARY.GWU.EDU/CHURCHILLCENTER