CHURCHILL IN THE NEWS
From Private Snippets to Public Persona

Wartime Press Conferences
Churchill and the Censorship
Theatre: His First Published Contribution
Leading Myths: The Eugenics Debate
COVER

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FH 151 COVER
Mr. A.J.J. Delehanty writes: “Did the Admiralty actually issue this Christmas card? On Christmas Day 1941, HMS Prince of Wales was on the bottom of the sea.” Fair point, but the Admiralty Christmas card was printed and in use before the sinking. At right, the inscription on the inside of the card, which we probably should have run in the previous issue. >>>

QUOTATIONS: PM TO PM
In Australia the Labour minority government is staying in power by acceding to demands by the Green Party, which has a handful of seats. At the last election the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, promised not to introduce a carbon tax but has now done so in an attempt to maintain the government (her popularity has dropped to 27%). She has been trying to justify her change in mind by misquoting Churchill. My letter below was published in July. Gillard was, in fact, misquoting J.M. Keynes, who said, “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?”

• Editor, Sydney Morning Herald: Like many who would associate themselves vicariously with Sir Winston, Ms. Gillard has sought to justify her “change of mind” with a false quote from the great man. She said, “I think it was Winston Churchill who said if the circumstances change, I change my mind. What do you do?” She would have helped herself much more if she had repeated his statement in the House of Commons on 24 October 1935. In discussing the international situation he remarked: “We live in such a febrile and sensational age that even a month or two is enough to make people not merely change their views, but forget the views and feelings they entertained before.”

Editor’s response: It was not David Freeman but his student who made that statement (in an essay asserting that WSC received help in World War II from “Dr. Who”). However, Churchill did “coin” the phrase as applied to the postwar world. He first used it nine months before Fulton, though it was then already twenty-five years old! A letter from Prof. Russell Jones at Westminster College, Fulton (FH 69, Fourth Quarter, 1990) explained:

“In A New Look at Churchill’s Iron Curtain Speech” (The Historical Journal 22:2, 1979, page 897) Henry B. Ryan states that Ethel Snowden used the phrase on a 1920 visit to the USSR (see her book, Through Bolshevik Russia, London: 1920, page 32); and that Goebbels used the phrase twice in 1945. Churchill, as you know, first used it in two telegrams to Truman on 12 May and 4 June 1945.”

“IRON CURTAIN”
In “Datelines” in FH 150, David Freeman writes: “Churchill also coined the ‘iron curtain’ phrase.” Well, he immortalized it, rather. But Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels used the same phrase a year before Churchill included it in his 1946 Fulton speech. Goebbels wrote in Das Reich: “If the German people lay down their weapons, the Soviets, according to the agreement between Roosevelts, Churchill and Stalin, would occupy all of East and Southeast Europe along with the greater part of the Reich. An iron curtain would fall over this enormous territory controlled by the Soviet Union, behind which nations would be slaughtered.”

—SIDNEY ALLISON, VICTORIA, B.C.

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WIN SOME, LOSE SOME
The UK Churchill Centre has several ex-officio honorary members, whose appointments have a Churchill link: the Head Master of Harrow, the Colonel of the Queen’s Royal Hussars, the Speaker of the House of Commons, etc. A few years ago one or two of our Committee members suggested that giving free copies of Finest Hour to such people was a wasteful extravagance, that they are unlikely to read the magazine, and might not even see it after junior secretaries opened their mail and decided they wouldn’t want to be bothered.

I experienced an example of this. A year ago the House of Commons elected a new Speaker. A few months later I happened to meet him, and the conversation went like this:

PHC: “You are one of our honorary members.”
Speaker: “Am I?”
PHC: “Yes, you should have received two or three issues of Finest Hour by now.”
Speaker: “I am a great fan of Sir Winston and have never seen Finest Hour, I wonder why not?”

PHC: “Your over-protective staff must have filtered them out of your in-tray. Would you like me to write you, reminding you of this conversation and suggesting that you instruct your staff not to withhold Finest Hour?”
Speaker: “Yes: please do that.”

A month ago I was talking to the Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, another of these ex-officio honorary members…

PHC: “You are one of our honorary members.”
Commandant: “Yes! I must tell you what a magnificent, high-quality journal you have.”

PHC: “We were worried that you might not read it, or that your secretary might even filter it out of your overloaded in-tray.”
Commandant: “On the contrary: I read it avidly and often use excerpts in my speeches.”

PHC: “I’m delighted to hear it.”

PAUL H. COURTENAY
SENIOR EDITOR, FINEST HOUR, QUARLEY, HAMPSHIRE

AROUND & ABOUT

Historian Andrew Roberts, interviewed during the Royal Wedding: “…although our current Queen cannot be described as an exciting personality, that’s not her job. Her job is to cement, personify and solidify the nation, and she does it a lot better than Churchill did.” Some of our readers thought this odd, but we agree with Andrew Roberts. FH 151 declared similar sentiments toward HM The Queen. Churchill was a politician who switched parties twice, which effectively put him at odds with all of the people, some of the time. Her Majesty does not carry that kind of baggage!

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John Derbyshire writes from London: “Roman Britain took some decades to die completely. In about A.D. 500 an Irish scholar, the future St. Tagetus, was entertained by a rich man in southeast Wales who was still living in a villa and who still heated water for his bath on Saturdays. Seeing his visitors arrive, ‘wearied with their journey and voyage… he refused to bathe, until first the strangers, more worthy of bathing, had entered the bath.’

“This charitable gent must have been one of the last to keep up Roman ways. Two hundred years later there were only incomprehensible ruins to stir an Anglo-Saxon poet to melancholy: ‘Splendid is this wall-stone; fate broke it. / Shattered is the manor-house, crumbled is the work of giants. / Fallen are the roofs, tumbled the towers…’

“That this will be the fate of our civilization too, there is no reason to doubt. The particular case of the U.S. is surely not encouraging. The signs of exhaustion are all around. The monstrous swelling debts we fret about are only aspects of a larger, more comprehensive falling-off—a civilizational deficit. We seem old. Our ability to survive any great shock must be doubted. Ne maeg werig mod wydde wiðstandan, remarked another Anglo-Saxon poet: ‘A weary heart cannot withstand fate.’

“The space shuttles are retired; there will be no more great national adventures. We can no longer do those things a young civilization can do—win wars, write memorable poems, expel intruders, live within our means, execute great feats of engineering. Once, in the first fine carefree rapture of civilizational youth, we could do anything. Now we can do nothing. Once we civilized wild expanses and humbled grand military empires. Now we insult our ancestors, wrestle with codes of tax and regulation three inches thick, and dicker ineffectually with barbarian chieftains. The Anglo-Saxon poet again: ‘The north sends rough hailstorms / In malice against men. / All is distressful / In the earthly realm.’

“In these days we dwell strangely and precariously, listening vainly, but with a thirsty ear, as MacArthur put it, “for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll…Always there echoes and re-echoes: Duty, Honor, Country.” We listen for another Churchill, to remind us that all will come right, that “we have not journeyed all this way across the centuries, across the oceans, across the mountains, across the prairies, because we are made of sugar candy.” And we listen on, hoping to hear a voice like his, again. —RML

GOOD, BAD AND UGLY?

Alexander Groth’s Accomplices: Churchill, Roosevelt and the Holocaust asserts tacit cooperation by Britain and America in Nazi extermination of Jews….Francophile Knut Ståhlberg’s Churchill och de Gaulle: received good reviews in European Dailies….Terrance L. Lewis’ Prisms of British Appeasement: Revisionist Reputations of John Simon, Samuel Hoare, Anthony Eden, Lord Halifax, Alfred Duff Cooper is worthy of a FH review.

ANTOINE CAPET, ROUEN, FRANCE

Letters continue on page 60....

FINEST HOUR 182 / 5
DATELINES

“THE VALIANT YEARS” AVAILABLE AGAIN


Although hagiographic, LeVien’s epic is widely admired. The film footage is simply fantastic, providing a real insight into Churchill and the major war of the last century. The narrator is Richard Burton, who despised Churchill politically, but a job’s a job. Burton’s dislike is not apparent in his narrative—nor was it in his later role as WSC in the original “Gathering Storm” production.

CHURCHILL FLORA

LONDON, JULY 14TH—The second breed of hybrid tea rose named for Sir Winston, developed by Churchill College to mark its 50th anniversary last year, was planted in the garden at Ten Downing Street by Prime Minister David Cameron. The first “Rose Sir Winston Churchill,” a pinkish orange variety with strong fragrance which blooms throughout the year, was developed in 1955 by Alexander Dickson III. The new Churchill rose, developed for Churchill College by Peter Beales Roses in Norfolk, a peach-coloured variety, debuted this year at the Chelsea Flower Show.

Churchill’s daughter Lady Soames, Patron of the Churchill Centre, gave Cameron “firm instructions” on how the rose should be planted as Churchill College Master Sir David Wallace and Richard Beales of the Norfolk firm looked on.

The new rose is also planted at Chartwell in the gardens designed by Clementine Churchill and Victor Vincent. On the way up to the house from the visitor centre is the Lady Churchill Garden, devoted to hybrid tea roses. On the other side of the house is the Golden Rose Walk, bordered by spectacular yellow varieties given by their family to Winston and Clementine on their 50th Anniversary.

Several plants and trees other than roses are named for Sir Winston, as noted by the late Douglas Hall in Finest Hour 81 (1993). “How better to keep the memory green,” Hall wrote, “than to fill your garden with a collection of plants named in honour of WSC?” We offer Mr. Hall’s roster:

Chamacypris lawsoniana
Winston Churchill is a golden evergreen, one of the showiest of this huge family of conifers. Slow growing and of medium height, it reaches six feet in about ten years. It should be planted in full sun to encourage it to retain its bright golden colour, which remains spectacular on dull winter days.

Fuchsia Winston Churchill was first bred in the USA in 1942 and after seventy years remains a favourite. It has a deep pink tube and sepals, and petals of a luminous lavender.

Michelmas Daisy Aster Novi-Belgii Winston S. Churchill is another old variety with rich ruby-red petals and bright yellow centre.

Narcissus Sir Winston Churchill features double creamy-white flowers with an orange-red cup. A fairly tall variety, it grows to around 16 inches and is late flowering. It is best left undisturbed to naturalise on banks, between shrubs or in not too heavily-shaded areas beneath trees. Bulbs are widely available, including by mail.

Rhododendron Azalea Mollis Winston Churchill grows to five feet with a five-foot spread after ten years in a semi-shaded position, requiring acid soil.

Saxifraga Winston Churchill is a rock garden perennial preferring partial shade, which sends up soft pink flowers about six inches high, from a bright green mound of mossy leaves, in April and May. It is available by mail order and from nurseries.

Don Wiegand working on the Fulton bas-relief while Edwina Sandys observes.

IRON CURTAIN MEMORIAL

FULTON, MO., MAY 13TH—Edwina Sandys, Sir Winston’s granddaughter and Churchill Centre Trustee, helped dedicate a new sculpture by noted St. Louis artist Don Wiegand at a special unveiling ceremony at the National Churchill Museum today. Ms. Sandys herself created “Breakthrough,” a sculpture erected here in memory of her grandfather, using eight sections from the Berlin Wall—the longest contiguous section of that monument to oppression in North America.

“This new sculpture, which will be erected on the newly constructed Plaza in front of the National Churchill Museum, will create a much
more dramatic entrance to attract visitors to our remarkable Museum,” says Rob Havers, Executive Director of the National Churchill Museum. “It captures the decisive moment here in March 1946 when Churchill vividly described the Iron Curtain that had fallen across the Continent and, in doing so, provided the metaphor that would encapsulate the Cold War for the next forty years.” (See “Iron Curtain,” letters column, page 4.)

The bas-relief sculpture was donated by Richard J. Mahoney of St. Louis, a Churchill Fellow and longtime supporter of the Museum. He was also instrumental in the creation of the “Life in Leadership Gallery” at the Museum. Speakers on the program included Sandys, Wiegand, Mahoney, Havers, and Westminster College President George Forstythe.

“BRING A FRIEND—IF YOU HAVE ONE...”

CAMBRIDGE, JUNE 15TH—Alas! The famous exchange between Churchill and George Bernard Shaw is fiction.

According to the usually reliable Kay Halle, in her quotations book Irrepressible Churchill (Cleveland: World, 1966, 116), Shaw wrote to Churchill in 1923: “Am reserving two tickets for you for my premiere. Come and bring a friend—if you have one.”

Halle said Churchill wrote back:

“Impossible to be present for the first performance. Will attend the second—if there is one.” Finest Hour editor Dalton Newfield suggested in the 1970s that the play in question was Shaw’s St. Joan, debuting in 1924.

Now Allen Packwood, director of the Churchill Archives Centre, has ended this grand story with a discovery in the Churchill Papers (CHUR 2/165/66, 68). As Erica Chenoweth explains in “Churchill and the Theatre” (see page 41), both Churchill and Shaw denied this exchange of mock-insults.

The famous retort has been reprinted in many quotation books—including the editor’s, but it will be scrubbed from the next printing. (If there is one.) —RML

H.M. AT BLETCHLEY

BLETCHLEY PARK, BUCKS., JULY 15TH—Her Majesty The Queen unveiled a memorial sculpture by artist Charles Gurr to wartime codebreakers during a historic visit to Bletchley Park today.

In her dedication Her Majesty said:

“We gather here to commemorate the work of that remarkable group of people. It is impossible to overstate the deep sense of admiration, gratitude, and national debt that we owe to all those men and, especially, women. They were called to this place in the greatest of secrecy—so much so that some of their families will never know the full extent of their contribution—as they set about on a seemingly impossible mission; a massive challenge in the field of cryptanalysis: for the first time pitting technology against technology. And so, these huts and buildings became the centre of a worldwide web of intelligence communications, spanning the Commonwealth and further afield.

“This was the place of geniuses such as Alan Turing. But these wonderfully clever mathematicians, language graduates and engineers were complemented by people with different sets of skills, harnessing that brilliance through methodical, unglamorous, hard slog. Thus the secret of Bletchley’s success was that it became a home to all the talents.

“We can be proud of the legacy of Bletchley: proud that Colossus was the first computer, and that the British people, supported by our friends and allies, rose to the challenge. At heart we have always been a nation of problem solvers. This natural aptitude was taken to new heights by the emergency of war, showing that necessity is indeed the mother of invention, and that battles can be won, and many lives saved, by using brainpower as well as firepower; deliberation as well as force.

“To those veterans who remain, I offer nothing but praise. You were history-shapers and your example serves as an inspiration to the intelligence community today, as they continue the vital work to protect the people of this country. For your many achievements I give my heartfelt thanks, on behalf of an eternally grateful nation.”

For more on Turing and his colleagues see Martin Gilbert’s “Churchill and Intelligence,” FH 149-51.

CERCLES WEB REVIEWS


—PROF. ANTOINE CAPET, HEAD OF BRITISH STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF ROUEN

LULLABY OFF BROADWAY

LONDON, AUGUST 1ST—In our last issue (page 33), Sir Martin Gilbert recalled how Randolph Churchill used his country home, Stour, in “Operation Sanctuary,” as a refuge for John and Valerie Profumo. In 1963 Profumo, Harold Macmillan’s Minister of War, was forced to resign after being found to have lied in his earlier denial of >>
having been involved in wrongdoing with the so-called model, Christine Keeler, who at the time was also “seeing” the Soviet naval attaché.

Profumo’s son David, in his book Bringing the House Down: A Family Memoir (2006) wrote that in 1954, when his father was engaged to marry Valerie Hobson, then playing the starring role in the London production of The King and I, he notified Sir Winston of his intentions. “You are a very lucky young man,” said the Prime Minister. “She will be able to sing you to sleep.”

Churchill family loyalty was longstanding, as Sir Martin explained: “Profumo had been one of the Conservative Members who voted against Neville Chamberlain on 8 May 1940, making possible Winston Churchill’s premiership two days later.”

Profumo died in 2006 aged 91, having devoted himself to charity work since the scandal. Keeler is 69. —PHC

THINKER NOT THINKING
EL CERRITO, CALIF., MAY 10TH— In a piece on the American Thinker website, author Robert Morrison asserts that a) President Obama is no Churchill; b) Hitler, who in 1940 was ready “to parachute 10,000 commandos on London,” was scarier than Osama bin Laden; c) Obama, who dislikes Churchill for the torture of his grandfather in Kenya, “tossed” the bust of Churchill from the Oval Office; and d) just last week, “spilt his guts” on the media about the Bin Laden assassination. Dear oh dear.

Quoting Churchill’s famous remark that in May 1940 he felt as if he “were walking with destiny,” Morrison writes: “I want my president to have concerns, but not fears. I don’t want him to go on television and kvetch. I want my president to walk with destiny.”

Among the comments to this article is one asserting that Churchill and President Wilson “orchestrated a plan” to get America into World War I by sinking the Lusitania. (Is that all?)

Reader Caroline Mitchell, who notified us of this article, writes: “Among the many distressing currents in life today are the falsehoods held by so many uninformed citizens. I see so many parallels between Churchill’s time and our own, with, alas, no one on our horizon even remotely approaching his. It would be a small triumph if we could set the record straight in this one.”

We thank Ms. Mitchell for taking up the forlorn cause of truth. The false notions are a product of Churchill’s continuing fame, and refuting them is more than a full-time job. Some of our efforts are our website in the “Leading Myths” section: http://bit.ly/JVW5me. We did respond to this one with a note on our website, as follows:

For writers to offer comparisons of today’s politicians with Churchill is reminiscent of what Churchill said (drawing laughs) to the U.S. Congress in 1941, just after the Japanese had attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor: “They have certainly embarked upon a very considerable undertaking.”

“Kvetching” and the U.S. president aside, you simply don’t parachute 10,000 commandos on a city, a feat beyond even Hitler’s Luftwaffe. President Obama’s grandfather was released in Kenya before Churchill returned to power in 1951. Churchill actually expressed sympathy toward the Kenyan rebels. The details are at http://bit.ly/gGrv91X. The bust business was treated by us with reductio ad absurdum (see FH 142.7-8), and while President Obama is certainly no Churchill, neither is anybody else.

It’s been acknowledged for years that during World War I the British were shipping arms on passenger liners; the big lie was that Churchill, if not Wilson, purposely set up RMS Lusitania to be torpedoed by withdrawing a supposed naval escort and/or ordering a course that magically put the ship in the crosshairs of the U-20. Apparently we’re supposed to believe they knew where all the U-boats were, too.

The Lusitania nonsense was refuted years ago by Professor Harry Jaffa in the book Statesmanship, in a detailed article which he allows us to email to any interested reader.
On 6 June 1944 the largest armada in history, 6939 ships with 150,000 troops, was hurled at Hitler’s Fortress Europe. The floating harbor at Arromanches, also known as Port Winston, became the gateway to the liberators, remaining functional from June to November 1944 and successfully contributing to the invasion efforts. Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword beaches have become memorials. J.L. Butré, chairman, European Platform Against Windfarms, declares: “With no exception our organizations regard this as an invasion of sacred grounds where so many warriors gave their lives.”

Late word is that the plan has not been altered. To view and consider the petition go to http://bit.ly/6wm5z.

**HESS FLIGHT AUTHORIZED?**

![Hess with Hitler at the Reichstag](image)

**BERLIN, MAY 29TH—** *Daily Mail* correspondent Allan Hall states baldly that “Hitler gave go-ahead to Rudolf Hess’s mission to secure peace with Winston Churchill.” Hall’s only evidence is a 28-page notebook in a Russian archive, written in 1948 by Major Karlheinz Pintsch, Hess’s longtime adjutant, who was captured by the Soviets and tortured and interrogated at their hands (http://bit.ly/SiYRY).

People under duress will say anything, and Pintsch’s testimonial has a Soviet ring. Per Pintsch, Hess’s true aim was “a military alliance of Germany with England against Russia.” (Russians and Germans consistently call Britain “England.”) Hitler was not surprised at the news of Hess’s flight, and read a letter from Hess saying that if he failed, “it will always be possible for you to deny all responsibility.” Hall concludes: “This is what happened, with both Hitler and Churchill claiming Hess was deranged.” (Query: If Hitler knew in advance, why would he need Hess’s letter advising what to do if he failed?)

The theory, which is always good for a flutter in the press, is not new. Hitler biographer Ian Kershaw quoted two other Nazis, Gauleiter Ernst Bohl and General Karl Bodenschatz, who were sure Hess acted with the Führer’s approval, who thought that Hitler’s rage was an act. But the perceptive Kershaw added: “Hitler was indeed capable of putting on a theatrical performance. But if this was acting, it was of Hollywood-Oscar caliber….All who saw Hitler [at that time] registered his profound shock, dismay and anger at what he saw as betrayal.”

While Hess’s post-partum letter was indeed delivered to and read by Hitler, there is ample testimony from Hitler’s circle that he neither expected it nor felt anything other than angry surprise. Albrecht Speer, for example, heard “an inarticulate, almost animal outcry” from the Führer, who said: “Who will believe me when I say that Hess did not fly there in my name, that the whole thing is not some sort of intrigue behind the backs of my allies?” Hitler then said, “If only he would drown in the North Sea!” Finally, to preempt the news, he announced that Hess was mad. Years later, in Spandau Prison, Hess told Speer the whole idea had been inspired “in a dream by supernatural forces.”

**Madness? Works for us…**

The story also fails on background. Hess knew there was no chance of a peace deal with Churchill. His aim, therefore, was to contact what he thought were anti-war elements in Britain. His immediate target, the Duke of Hamilton, was, alas for him, totally loyal. The Duke’s late son, whom we visited in Scotland on the 2008 Churchill Tour, told us that his father’s reaction (and that of Churchill) varied between incredulity and amusement.

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**LIFELONG LIBERAL**

**WASHINGTON, JUNE 25TH—** In “The Forgotten Churchill,” in the Summer 2011 issue of *The American Scholar* (http://xrl.us/bkutrq) George Wilson, Fellow of St. John’s College Cambridge, offers a very thorough and accurate article about Churchill’s role as a creator of Britain’s welfare state.

Wilson poses an interesting thesis: that Labour’s socialists resisted the “mixed economy” Churchill and Lloyd George envisioned because they knew it would be the death of pure socialism. It may be a stretch to suggest that Churchill favored the National Health Service Labour enacted, or that a benefit of the NHS was expanded private health care. It expanded because the NHS became rationed and inadequate.

And then (there’s always an “and then!”) Wilson says that Churchill’s books are “disappointing” and “needlessly extensive,” which is disappointing and needlessly silly. Leo Strauss called *Marlborough* “the greatest historical work written in our century, an inexhaustible mine of political wisdom and understanding.” Nor are Churchill’s biographies “devoid of any sense of personal weakness.”

Books aside, this is a stimulating and thoughtful article about Churchill’s lifelong Liberalism; and in Martin Gilbert’s words “the modernity of his thought, the originality of his mind, the constructiveness of his proposals….”

**RICHARD HOLMES R.I.P.**

**LONDON, APRIL 30TH—** A military historian and a charismatic writer and presenter of historical series on television, Richard Holmes, has died aged 65.

I first met Richard in 1975, when I became his commanding officer in the Army: I was a Lt. Col., he a captain. He eventually became a brigadier in the Territorial Army (senior reservist in the military). In the thirty months we were together, I always gave him top marks and I heard him lecture many times in recent years. >>
to speaking at the upcoming Churchill Conference in London at my invitation, where he would have undoubtedly given one of his dazzling performances and accumulated a new set of admirers.

—Paul H. Courtenay

**CHURCHILL'S UGANDA**

KAMPALA, AUGUST 5TH— In *My African Journey*, Churchill wrote, “...concentrate upon Uganda! Nowhere else in Africa will a little money go so far. Nowhere else will the results be more brilliant, more substantial or more rapidly realised. Uganda is from end to end one ‘beautiful garden,’ where the staple food of the people grows without labour. Does it not sound like paradise on earth? It is ‘the pearl of Africa!’”

The Uganda we are living in today is obviously much different from the one Churchill left. Soil fertility on farms has been declining sharply: about 1.2 percent of nutrient stock stored in the topsoil is depleted by farmers each year....With 6.7 children per woman and population growth rate of 3.4% per annum, Uganda has the world’s third highest population surge; 78% of it is rural and depends on subsistence agriculture for a livelihood. While home to over 5000 plant species, 345 mammals, 1015 birds, 165 reptiles, and 43 amphibians, between 1990 and 2005 Uganda lost 26.3% of its forest cover.

Is this the “paradise on earth” that Churchill saw? Certainly not....Uganda cannot sit on a green belt and continue to sit on its hands as the continuously arid region starves to death. President Museveni’s government has failed to curb the situation described above but the opposition also seems to be bankrupt on ideas for taking the country forward from where Museveni has gotten stuck in the mud dug by himself.

Enock Musinguzi in *The Independent*, KAMPALA, HTTP://BIT.LY/pQXDo8

**ERRATA**

*Finest Hour* 149, page 62 Quiz: Reader Michael Petzoid advises us of an error in the answer to question 20. Churchill was photographed riding to hounds in 1948 on his 74th birthday, not his 78th.

*Finest Hour* 151, page 34: The poem quoted (“A young Apollo...”) was not by Rupert Brooke but about Brooke. It was written by Frances Cornford after Brooke’s death in World War I. Thanks to David Herder for this correction.

*FH* 151, page 43: We regret that several errors were not spotted in our proofing. In the 26 March 1945 photo (below), Brooke is not in the bow, but next to Churchill. The figure seeming to lean on WSC is General Sir Miles Dempsey, Commander, British Second Army—not Eisenhower who (according to Brooke’s diary and contrary to a note on the back of the photo) was not present on either crossing. Montgomery is misidentified as the figure behind WSC, wearing only a single cap-badge; he is in fact second from the right, wearing two badges as usual. Similar corrections apply to the other photo we ran of this 26 March crossing.

*FH* 151, page 61: The Churchill-Stalin “spheres of interest” talks (“Tolstoy”) were in 1944, not 1942. ©
In keeping with the theme of the March Churchill Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, we assembled this issue around Churchill and the Media, introduced by Daniel Myers. A conference paper by Allen Packwood explains how young Winston used the press to make a name for himself.

Warren Kimball’s and Admiral Thomson’s account of Churchill and the delicate issue of censorship reminds us that the need for qualified secrecy never changes. Today’s contentions over the Wiki-leaks scandal, and the all-too-public comments by leaders on the Bin Laden assassination, might be fewer if the states of war, from Korea to Libya, had actually been declared, as in olden time. Perhaps Ministers or Secretaries of Defense should have kept their original titles as Ministers or Secretaries of War, as politically incorrect as war is. In America, that would leave “Defense” as a more agreeable and appropriate name for the Department of Homeland Security.

“Mr. [Joseph] Chamberlain loves the working man,” Churchill cracked in 1905—“He loves to see him work.”1 We might say Mr. Churchill loved the media—he loved to see them wriggle, trying to extract from him one single word on actual policies. Read the transcripts of press conferences during Churchill’s Washington visits in 1941 and 1943, and our Wit & Wisdom department, for dealings with the press that are a model for today’s politicians.

“The Curious Case of William Griffin” is an exception to Churchill’s normal media experience. He found it quite impossible to handle Griffin, who sued him for a million dollars. My account, and Michael McMenamin’s exception, may produce disagreement, which is what Michael and I hope. “Nothing in the rules or intercourse of the Club shall interfere with the rancour and asperity of party politics.”2

Of course the press in his time—then almost entirely newspapers—was much more quiescent, respectful and undemanding than the gigabyte, internettet, hungry, biased and jaded 24/7 media of 2011. You may ponder how Churchill would handle today’s media, nurtured in the Grievance Culture, disillusioned by assassinations, wars, natural disasters, presidential and ministerial upheavals, and terrorist attacks on innocents. Well you might.

When I grew up, in the distant Middle Ages, none of these events was seriously conceivable. Perhaps the loss of innocence and the disillusionment that comes with age is a recurring process. Churchill had similar regrets when he wrote of his own youth in the Victorian age, “when the strength of our country seemed firmly set, when its position in trade and on the seas was unrivalled, and when the realization of the greatness of our Empire and of our duty to preserve it was ever growing stronger.” The “dominant forces” in those days “were very sure of themselves and of their doctrines. They thought that they could teach the world the art of government, and the science of economics…. Very different is the aspect of these anxious and dubious times.”3

Martin Gilbert’s “Churchill and Eugenics” was written to destroy the myth that an “ashamed” Randolph Churchill covered up his father’s embarrassing ideas. Some critics use the issue to place Churchill on the Holocaust level, alongside Hitler, who not only rounded up the feeble-minded but put many of them to death. Like most lies, this one involves a kernel of truth: Churchill in the early 1900s did reflect a conventional belief of his time, that the “feeble-minded” should not be allowed to reproduce. But Randolph never covered it up; he simply never saw the documents.

In “Churchill and Sterilisation” (FH 131), Paul Addison wrote: “Churchill’s intentions were benign, but he was blundering into sensitive areas of civil liberty.” And yet, Addison continued, “It is rare to discover in the archives the reflections of a politician on the nature of man. Churchill’s belief in the innate virtue of the great majority of human beings was part and parcel of an optimism he often expressed before the First World War. In his view, sterilization was a libertarian measure intended to free unfortunate individuals from incarceration.”

2. Rule 12 of The Other Club, the political dining club founded by Churchill and F.E. Smith, Lord Birkenhead, in 1911.
"I leave when the pub closes":
Half a Century Managing the Press

Churchill knew how to use the media to his best advantage. Reticent to grant interviews, he preferred to make news through his tongue and his pen. Whether writing articles early in his career, or books later, or merely striding through history, Churchill recognized that media attention would further his career and his ultimate goals, personal and international.

DANIEL N. MYERS

In May 1913, while First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill sailed for eight months on the Admiralty yacht Enchantress, visiting every important ship of the British fleet and “learning all he could about his ‘trade.’” Ever the thorn in a politician’s side, Punch published a cartoon showing Churchill, puffing a cigar and reclining in a deck chair next to Prime Minister H.H. Asquith, who accompanied him on part of his journey, reading a newspaper.

Churchill asks Asquith, “Any home news?” The PM responds, “How can there be with you here?”1 Punch’s cartoon typifies the Churchill we know from history: prominent not only in the news of the day, he often made the news itself. And news, whether the writing or the publishing of it, figured prominently in the Churchill story from his earliest days.

“No one but a blockhead ever wrote except for money”

When Churchill sailed to Cuba shortly after graduating in 1895 from the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, he carried with him his first commission as a journalist from the British Daily Graphic to report the revolt against Spanish rule in Cuba. En route he spent several days in New York City as the guest of his mother’s friend, the well-known Irish-American lawyer-politician Bourke Cockran. He also dined with his cousin Sunny, the Duke of Marlborough, who three days before Churchill’s arrival had wed the American heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt. The New York newspapers were not kind to his cousin, and Churchill wrote his brother Jack: “The essence of American journalism is vulgarity divested of truth. Their best papers write for a class of snotty housemaids and footmen, & even the nicest people here have so much vitiated their taste as to appreciate their style.”2

Notwithstanding his harsh views of American journalism, he was happily eager to accept a commission from the British newspaper, which easily financed his trip across the Atlantic. During and following his Cuban adventure, Churchill would send back letters for publication for which he was paid five guineas each—“no mean fee in those days for a first assignment.”3 Upon his return to England, Churchill sailed for India to join his regiment in Bangalore. At the first opportunity to see action in the Malakand Pass, Churchill sent to his mother letters for publication in the Daily Telegraph, asking that she secure compensation of not less than £10 each. Much to his dismay, she not only settled for £5 per letter, but the letters were published anonymously at the suggestion of Lord Minto, a family friend and

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former soldier.

Upon learning of publication without his byline, and at what he felt sure was a sub-standard price, Churchill wrote a scathing letter to his mother in October 1897:

I will not conceal my disappointment at [the letters] not being signed. I had written them with the design...of bringing my personality before the electorate. I had hoped that some political advantage might have accrued...I do not think that I have ever written anything better, or to which I would more willingly have signed my name. On such a matter the advice of a soldier (Lord Minto) was of course worthless....I will not accept less than £10 a letter and I shall return any cheque for a less sum....The Daily Chronicle offered me ten pounds a letter to go to Crete and I will not be defrauded in this way. As Dr Johnson says, ‘No one but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.’

Churchill would always write for money. Indeed, it was through writing—in hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, books and lectures—that he was able to make a living and to raise a family. Churchill remarked on the life of a journalist and war correspondent, as he certainly considered himself to be, while serving in South Africa and penning the articles that resulted in two of his earliest books, London to Ladysmith via Pretoria and Ian Hamilton’s March. A war correspondent’s “precarious existence,” he wrote, was “a necessary evil, for the lot of the writer in the field is a hard and heavy one. ‘All the danger of war and one-half per cent. the glory’: such is our motto, and this is the reason why we expect large salaries.”

Wuthering Heights

After he entered Parliament at the end of 1900, Churchill income from journalism was curtailed, though he continued to write articles and even short fiction for the British and American press, and to publish books of his speeches and a biography of his father, followed by a massive memoir of World War I, starting in 1923. His newspaper career revived a quarter-century later in an unusual way. While Chancellor of the Exchequer, Churchill restored the Gold Standard in 1925 at the urging of international financiers. In the view of many this policy was detrimental to the well-being of the country; to others, it was fatal when not accompanied by requisite wage and tax reforms, which put heavy pressure on key industries. In 1926, the colliery owners demanded that miners accept both pay cuts and longer hours, an action which led to a lock-out of miners and a nationwide General Strike by the Trades Union Congress.

With the Fleet Street newspapers shut down, Churchill founded and directed a government newspaper, The British Gazette. His writing was strident, aggressively anti-socialist and, to many, anti-worker. In response, The British Worker, a paper established by the TUC, retorted that “the threat of revolution exists nowhere save in Mr. Churchill’s heated and disorderly imagination.”

While the Conservative Cabinet had envisioned The British Gazette as essentially an information sheet, Churchill ran it as a propaganda organ for breaking the strike. He even tried to take over recently founded BBC Radio, but was prevented by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and the Cabinet. At the time of the strike’s end, in two weeks, Churchill had built the circulation of the paper to well over two million. While an impressive achievement, his stridency and aggressive writing style made a lasting impression on a divided nation, and would have a negative impact on his political career in the years ahead.

Churchill’s relationships with Fleet Street and the press barons often flashed hot and cold. Some of his best friends—Brendan Bracken, Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Camrose and Lord Riddell—were newspaper proprietors, publishers or editors. While they would socialize with Churchill and, in many instances, later took high >>
government posts within his wartime government, they were not above attacking him when they felt he deserved it, especially during his “Wilderness Years” in the 1930s, when he split from the Conservative Shadow Cabinet over opposition to the push for Indian self-government.

After India, the principal reason for Churchill’s difficulties with the British press during the mid- to late-1930s was that he was openly critical of Hitler and Nazi Germany, while the new Baldwin government was encouraging the press not to antagonize the Third Reich. “This was not Churchill’s method; his articles were outspoken criticisms of German totalitarianism, militarization, and threats to other nations,” said his press agent Emery Reves, who later recalled that the Foreign Office tried to get him to cease representing Churchill: “The senior official there said I was doing a great disservice to England in disseminating Churchill’s opinions. I should think it over. It was doing no good. His opinions were not those of England.”

Lyne Olson recently described the press censorship exercised by the government of Neville Chamberlain, which succeeded that of Stanley Baldwin, quoting the later remarks of James Margach, political correspondent for The Sunday Times:

> “Winston (sheathing his Sunday-paper weapon in his best Blenheim manner): ‘After all, some say the pen is mightier than the sword.’” Frederick H. Townsend in Punch, 19 July 1916, picturing Churchill as journalist.

From the moment [Chamberlain] entered No. 10 in 1937, he sought to manipulate the press into supporting his policy of appeasing the dictators....In order to cling to power, Chamberlain was prepared to abuse truth itself. He made the most misleading and inaccurate statements, which he was determined to see published so as to make his policies appear credible and successful. Quite simply, he told lies.

The British Broadcasting Corporation was especially unfriendly to Churchill. Sir John Reith, its director-general, a tall and austere patrician whom WSC referred to as “that Wuthering Height,” had clashed with Churchill during the 1926 General Strike over the Chancellor’s efforts to direct the content of news broadcasts over the BBC. As a result, when the BBC began deciding which politicians would make broadcasts during the 1930s, Churchill was effectively banned from the air.

On St. George’s Day 1933, a holiday during which Reith judged it safe to let him speak, Churchill wasted no time in sending a shot at his nemesis:

> You see these microphones? They have been placed on our tables by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Think of the risk these eminent men are running. We can almost see them in our mind’s eye, gathered together in that very expensive building, with the questionable statues on its front. We can picture Sir John Reith, with the perspiration mantling on his lofty brow, with his hand on the control switch, wondering, as I utter every word, whether it will not be his duty to protect his innocent subscribers from some irreverent thing I might say about Mr. Gandhi, or about the Bolsheviks, or even about our perennial Prime Minister.11

Regardless of his relationship with the press—and the disdain many of his countrymen felt for him in the 1930s—millions of words, photographs and cartoons attest to the fascination in which Churchill was held in Britain and beyond. Though out of power in the 1930s, his articles were widely syndicated and his lecture tours well attended. WSC lived life large. His friends and acquaintances included the best-known and most preeminent personages of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th. Wherever he went, whatever he did and whomever he met constituted fodder for a hungry press.

... Churchill knew how to use the press to his best advantage. He was reticent to grant interviews, offering only two major ones as a young MP (see Finest Hour 144), and then only because he admired the interviewers. Churchill preferred to make his press through his tongue and his pen. Whether writing news stories early in his career, or books later, or merely striding through history, Churchill recognized that media attention would only further his career and his ultimate goals, whether personal or national. His flair for the dramatic, and thereby his ability to capture the attention of the press and the public, was demonstrated in his choice of hats (often outrageous), his wartime “siren suits,” his ever-present cigar and walking stick, and his upheld “V for Victory” sign.

“Up to the neck and in to the death”

"I LEAVE WHEN THE PUB CLOSES”...
Five days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Churchill and key British military leaders sailed for America. On his first day in Washington, 22 December 1941, a joint press conference was held in Roosevelt’s office. Press conferences were not something with which Churchill was familiar, but he handily rose to the occasion. Jon Meacham wrote:

“The press conference was an example of how Roosevelt and Churchill helped transform how the story of politics was told in the middle of the 20th century. They both understood the significance of mass media—of newspapers, radio, magazines and newsreels—and always had. Roosevelt had been the top editor on the *Harvard Crimson*, and Churchill had made himself famous as a war reporter. Later both exploited radio. In America, Roosevelt’s persona and habits—the cigarette and its holder, his dog—were part of the popular consciousness; in Britain, Churchill’s oft-photographed courageous countenance was a powerful symbol of defiance. On afternoons like this one in Washington...these two political actors were, in a way, designing the stage set of modern politics.12

“It was terribly exciting,” said Alistair Cooke, the British expatriate, by then an American journalist.13 These two supreme politicians would use the media masterfully over the next four years, individually and jointly during the wartime conferences in Washington, Casablanca and Quebec. Hundreds of photos show them meeting, talking, joking, greeting soldiers and showing off their wartime collaboration. It mattered not that below the surface there were arguments on strategy, tactics, or ultimate war aims; it was only important that the news media report that their two nations were united against a common foe and, as Churchill put it, “up to the neck and in to the death.”14

Churchill preferred humor to profundity when talking to reporters, an art later practiced by Presidents Kennedy and Reagan. Visiting Niagara Falls in 1943, he said to a reporter: “I saw them before you were born. I came here first in 1900.” Stupidly, the reporter asked, “Do they look the same?” Churchill quipped, “Well, the principle seems the same. The water keeps falling over.”15

Subjected to another American press conference in 1952, Churchill was asked by a reporter if he wasn’t thrilled by the crowds that attended his speeches. “It is quite flattering,” he cracked, “but whenever I feel this way I always remember that if instead of making a political speech I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big.”16

Preeminently throughout his life, Winston Churchill was a devotee of the spoken word, which he had learned to deliver in his youth on the hustings to vociferous partisan crowds (for or against him, he cared not which). Given a BBC television screen-test in the early Fifties, he hesitated, mumbled, and flubbed it badly. At that 1952 press conference he had remarked: “...as a rather old-fashioned person I have not been one of [television’s] principal champions. I hope that the raw material is as good as the methods of distribution.”17

In 1898, in his first book, Churchill wrote, “It is better to be making the news than taking it; to be an actor rather than a critic.”18 He followed that rule throughout his life, always part of the action, never missing an opportunity to make the news. As he pugnaciously told a London editor, who had gratuitously suggested he make a graceful exit after the 1945 general election: “Mr. Editor, I leave when the pub closes.”19

Endnotes

3. A guinea was equal to one pound, one shilling, or 21 shillings. By one measure, five guineas in 1900 is equivalent to £1500 ($2500) today.
9. Lynne Olson, *Troublesome Young Men: The Young Rebels Who Brought Churchill to Power and Helped Save Eng-
How Young Winston Made and Wrote News

“The first few sentences, whether of a proposal of marriage or of a newspaper article, require more thought and involve more effort, than any of those which follow. And if this is the case with those who are accustomed by experience to break the ice in either circumstance, how much more does it apply to the beginnings of the beginner. It is on account of these difficulties that I shall allow their enumeration to stand in place of a further prelude and plunge at once into the middle of the subject—and the harbour of the city of Havana.”

—Opening of Churchill’s first despatch as a war correspondent, 13 December 1895

ALLEN PACKWOOD

Many books cover Churchill’s years as a young officer in the British army, showing how his experiences in Cuba, India, Sudan and South Africa helped to shape his character and world view, exposing him to mortal danger, and instilling bravery and a first-hand experience of warfare. The five years from 1895 to 1900 were crucial for young Winston.

But Churchill had two careers during these years; he was also a war correspondent—and, arguably, more successful in the latter role. Promotion in the Victorian army was a slow process, and Churchill entered and left it as junior officer, yet his earnings as a war correspondent increased tenfold. In 1895 he received 25 guineas (about £1500 or $2500 in today’s money) for his Cuban articles. By 1899 the Morning Post was prepared to pay him a staggering £250 (£14,000 today) per month, plus expenses, to cover the war in South Africa.

In My Early Life Churchill downplayed his journalism in favour of his youthful adventures, but his two skills developed side by side and fed off one another, framing his life as both a leading participant in and a leading chronicler of events. He made the news by writing it, ensuring first that he made the headlines.

Of course he had pedigree. His father was a noted orator; his mother wrote articles and a memoir, and edited her own literary journal, The Anglo-Saxon Review. Churchill’s 1895 Cuban venture would not have been possible without his mother’s introductions to Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, the British Ambassador in Madrid and former political colleague of Lord Randolph; and would not have got off to such an inspirational start in New York without her close personal friendship with Bourke Cockran.

Time and again in this period we see young Winston pressing his mother to use her contacts to facilitate his assignments. In hindsight it is easy to forget that in these early years he was very much in the shadow of both parents. Indeed, in November 1900, when Major James B. Pond, self-styled “proprietor and manager,” became the New York agent charged with arranging Winston’s North American lecture tour, he invited Lady Randolph to “accompany your son on the voyage and witness his reception here....I need not add that it would doubly enhance the value of the lecture.” This makes clear that the now-Mrs. George Cornwallis-West, or “Lady Randolph Churchill-West” as some of the American press styled her, was at least as well known in east coast circles as her famous son.

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But pedigree and contacts are not the whole story. Winston had talent and enthusiasm for writing, particularly for news reporting. His gift for language perhaps first manifested itself at school at Harrow, where he celebrated his learning of English in My Early Life. He was wilful and rebellious, his independent nature asserted early, in a series of letters that he wrote to The Harrovian between October 1891 and June 1893, between ages sixteen and eighteen. In a letter of November 1891, signed “De Profundis,” he doesn’t hesitate to speak his mind:

The Class rooms provided for several forms are very bad. In some the light is meagrely doled out, as in the Old Music Room, the towers of the new Speech Room and Mr Welsford’s Room. In others, as the “cock-loft” the wind of heaven has free access from every quarter. Something ought to be done. Either the number of the school should not exceed the number for whom proper accommodation can be provided or new class rooms should be built. Since that conspicuous, though unsightly edifice, the Music Schools was erected with so much ease I would respectfully suggest the latter alternative.

This letter was apparently not published, but rejection might have encouraged him, and a month or so later he is writing again, this time under the pseudonym “Junius Junior,” about the poor performance of the school in the gymnasium display. All of his Harrovian pieces are witty, gently sarcastic, and critical in tone. There may well have been others. In October 1906, his old maths teacher, C.H.P. Mayo, wrote to congratulate Churchill on his biography of Lord Randolph, and to remind him of his first literary effort, which was apparently a criticism of the school concert for The Harrovian.

Yet Churchill needed motivation to take up his pen professionally. The personal catalyst was the death of Lord Randolph Churchill in January 1895, aged just forty-five, leaving Winston the head of the family and focus of his mother’s ambitions, needing to establish an independent income and prove himself worthy of his father’s memory. Like the age in which he lived, with the advent of motorcars and aeroplanes, he was suddenly a young man in a hurry; determined, as he wrote his mother from barracks outside London in August 1896, to “beat my sword into an iron despatch box.”

This letter is very revealing. Churchill may have originally been motivated to join the army by dreams of derring-do, but even before his regiment was despatched to India, it is clear that he now saw an army career as a means to an end. Yes, he still wanted “scenes of adventure and excitement,” but now he wanted them in “places where I could gain experience and derive advantage…. The future is to me utterly unattractive. I look upon going to India…as useless and unprofitable exile.” It was useless, he added, to preach the gospel of patience to me. Others as young are making the running now and what chance have I of ever catching up.

The personal correspondence between Winston and his mother during this period dwells heavily on the need to raise income, for both of them were given to luxury and Lady Randolph even to extravagance. On 5 March 1897, in the midst of a quite acrimonious exchange about his spending, Lady Randolph wrote, “I really fear for the future. I am telling you this darling in order that you may see how impossible it is for me to help you [financially]—and how you must in future depend on yourself. I make out that you get about £200 pay, which makes your income for the present £700 per year. Of course it is not much & I can quite understand that you will have to deny yourself many things if you mean to try and live within it.”

Reminding us of the rarified class of society the Churchills occupied, £700 in 1900 is the equivalent of £40,000 ($65,000) today. Yet this was not a lot on which to maintain the Victorian officer’s lifestyle of horses and servants—much less than the income of his fellow-officers. Replying to his mother on April 6th, Churchill was still complaining: “This country is no economy. British cavalry have to pay nearly double for servants, food, forage etc.”

Though often charged with not understanding money, young Winston showed himself astute in his early personal financial dealings, more so perhaps than his mother who was often acting as his UK-based literary agent. In 1897 he was scathing to her about the £5 per article that the Daily Telegraph was paying for his Indian frontier despatches, and promising to return any cheque less than £10. (See Dan Myers’s foregoing article.)
Yet money like soldiering was not Churchill’s primary motivation; his real aim was to establish himself on the political stage. His methods were risky. Young officers were supposed to do their duty—not to engage in self-promotion, especially by leaving their regiment at any excuse to find attachment on the front line, or writing despatches critical of aspects of the British military command. But Churchill was not to be diverted.

Installed uneasily in peaceful, polo-playing Bangalore, Churchill seized every opportunity to get himself to a theatre of war. April 1897 found him desperate to use army leave to cover a Greco-Turkish clash, only to be disappointed in May: “The war has fizzled out like a damp firework.”13 Three months later he was writing his mother about the Pathan uprising on the Indian North-West frontier, to put in a “a good word about me in case this thing spreads…”14

Deciding not to wait, Winston grasped the initiative: returning to India from leave, he took an arduous five-day train journey to join the Malakand Field Force, on what is now the Afghan frontier, with no guarantee of an army vacancy awaiting him. He repeated the pattern in 1898, when, finding his request for transfer to the Sudan expedition blocked by Lord Kitchener (who disliked his dual role as officer and correspondent), Churchill returned to London and successfully petitioned both Prime Minister Lord Salisbury and Sir Evelyn Wood, Adjutant General at the War Office. In travelling thousands of miles and risking the wrath of superiors, we can see the lengths he was prepared to go to in order to make his own luck—incidentally developing the nascent political skills that would serve him well in later life.

Churchill took risks, but they were calculated ones. His contemporary letters capture his faith in his abilities, his enthusiasm and ambition, married to his personal bravery. From the North Western Frontier in September 1897 he wrote to his mother:

…there will be a battle—probably the biggest yet fought on the frontier this year. By the time this reaches you everything will be over so that I do not mind writing about it. I have faith in my star—that is that I am intended to do something in the world. If I am mistaken—what does it matter? My life has been a pleasant one and though I should regret to leave it—it would be a regret that perhaps I should never know. [And afterward:] I rode on my grey pony all along the skirmish line where everyone else was lying down in cover. Foolish perhaps but I play for high stakes and given an audience there is no act too daring or too noble. Without the gallery things are different.15

Equal to these physical risks were the intellectual hazards of writing about his adventures, in despatches for newspapers and then books. Because he was a serving officer, contemporary convention meant that his despatches from Cuba were unsigned but rather credited, “From our own correspondent,” while his accounts of the Malakand Field Force were cited, “by a young officer.” By 1897, Churchill had had enough of convention, asking his mother to demand his byline on his Daily Telegraph despatches, “as otherwise I get no credit for the letters. It may help me politically to come before the public in this way.”16 His mother preferred a more cautious approach, and when they were published again unsigned he protested at being unable to bring “my personality before the electorate.”17 He brushed aside her argument that he should suppress certain views for the sake of his army career: “…certain elements must always be hostile and I am determined not to allow them to interfere with my actions.”

Churchill did not need to worry about acquiring notoriety. Travelling to Cuba to ride with the Spanish forces had provoked considerable comment in the British and American press. The Newcastle Leader of 7 December 1895 wapishly wrote: “spending a holiday in fighting other people’s battles is rather an extraordinary proceeding, even for a Churchill,” while the Eastern Morning News added, “A Churchill is sure to do something erratic.” Some were slightly better disposed: “Mr Churchill, like his father, has an anxiety to distinguish himself,” noted The Star, “but his leaning is towards romance rather than to a parliamentary career, his mother would have preferred that he should not risk his life on such a harebrained expedition, but he has a will of his own.” The gossip column “Table Talk” in a morning paper credited Churchill with having inherited “his father’s dash and pluck” as well as Lord Randolph’s brains, and correctly if prematurely surmised that he had “determined to give up the army and go into politics at once.” (The paper then lowered itself to an unnecessary and salacious remark: “Lord Randolph’s second boy ‘Jack’ Churchill is at Harrow, and, as the saying is, takes after his mother.”18 I wonder if this is a first appearance in print of the inference about Jack’s parentage that Peregrine Churchill and others have had to spend so much time fighting?)

Even if the Daily Graphic articles were nominally anonymous, it was pretty clear from accompanying press coverage who was writing them. This remained the case even when Churchill wrote from the Indian frontier or the Sudan. Hearth and Home’s “frontier correspondent” identified WSC as the Daily Telegraph author. The Eastern Press praised Churchill’s courageous exposé of
the blunders perpetrated in the frontier campaign, noting that British authorities “were understood to be so mortified by the revelations that desperate efforts were at once made to induce the chief authorities to withdraw Lieutenant Churchill’s leave.” This was exactly what Lady Randolph had feared—and her son wanted.19  

Churchill’s success was underpinned by hard work. He travelled far and endured arduous conditions to write when not occupied with military duties. His Daily Telegraph letters from the Malakand “were written, on the ground in a tent temperature of 115° or after a long day’s action or by a light which it was dangerous to use lest it drew fire—when I was tired and hustled and amid other adverse circumstances.”20 Conditions were as bad in tropical Cuba or the deserts of Egypt and the Sudan. Yet he put in the time, often writing for more than one publication or recycling his articles in different publications, a precedent he would follow in his later career.

The success of Churchill’s writings may have obscured the work involved, because they flowed effortlessly and wittily, an illusion he encouraged. His public persona, in interviews and early speeches, is different from the ambitious, money-conscious, focused young man of his private letters. It had to be, for if he were seen as too self-serving, the public might turn against him and the plan might fail. Thus, whilst the private Churchill could tell his brother that American journalism was “vulgarity divested of truth,” he was adept at charming those same American journalists upon his return from Cuba, showing them an insurgent bullet that had killed a Spanish soldier standing only a few feet away, before joking that it took 2000, or 20,000—depending on which paper you read—to hit each man.21  

He was capable of dodging potentially controversial issues. When he was called a “land pirate” for going to Cuba to fight with the Spanish imperialists so unpopular in the USA, he responded as soon as he reached Tampa from Havana: “There is no truth in the statement that I have taken part in the fighting against the Cubans. I have not even fired a revolver. I am a member of General Valdez’s staff by courtesy only; and am decorated with the [Spanish] Red Cross only by courtesy.”22 A fine example of what today we call “image management,” this was picked up by many newspapers. Today this technique is an essential part of any politician’s armoury. Clearly, Churchill was gifted at it.

South Africa and the Boer War marked the high point of Churchill’s career as a war reporter, though it wasn’t clear to him at the time. He’d left the army in the hope of being elected as Member of Parliament for Oldham, but had lost the by-election, the first setback in his political career. Becoming a war correspondent for the Morning Post to cover operations against the Boer republics may have seemed a retrograde step, but proved a career-enhancing move.

Because Churchill no longer had an army commission, there were no constraints arising from being a serving officer. He was fully entitled to his byline and his opinions. Nor had he to look for employment—the papers were now looking for him, ensuring him financial resources and independence.
Then there was the Churchill luck. When his armoured train was ambushed and he was taken prisoner, he might easily have been executed for taking part in its defence. Instead he was flung into gaol, where he quickly went “over the wall” and somehow stumbled upon the only British mine owner in the vicinity, who would give him shelter and aid his escape. He quickly capitalized on his luck after reaching safety in Portuguese Lourenço Marques, sending two telegrams, which we have in the Churchill archive.

Churchill the officer and gentleman cabled Louis de Souza, the Boer Secretary of State for War, assuring him that his escape was no fault of his guards; Churchill the journalist cheekily cabled the editor of the pro-Boer Standard and Diggers News to say he was now writing, “How I escaped from the Boers,” but regretting that he could not “for obvious reasons disclose many interesting details.” He could not resist adding, “Shall be happy to give you any you may require when next I visit Pretoria probably third week in March.” Both telegrams are carefully crafted to capitalise on his newfound heroic status and thus raise his profile.25

Churchill did not rest: by the end of his short boat journey to Durban, where his triumphal reception was watched by the international press, he had already produced the first account of his great escape. Again we have the manuscript. There is a wonderful passage towards the end, written in his own hand as he sailed down the African coast: “Of course, I am a man of peace. I do not fight. But swords are not the only weapons in the world. Something may be done with a pen.”24

The escape made him an international celebrity, a famous Churchill in his own right, and the worldwide press cuttings alone filled one of his volumes. The Star of 17 November 1899 published a sketch of him in his Hussars uniform, the war correspondent “Who Displayed Such Heroism in the Armoured Train Adventure,” while the Golden Penny described his capture in its series, “Heroes of the War: Stories of Personal Bravery.”

In the frenzy of media speculation, the Pall Mall Gazette reported that he had been shot twice, while the Saturday Herald published a cartoon entitled “Not Cowards—Only Demoralised,” stating, “Young Churchill, a newspaper correspondent, at the battle of the armoured train, was obliged to seize a rifle and give the demoralised English soldiers a brave example. ‘Can’t ye stand like men’ was his scornful cry.”

After his escape was reported, coverage went into overdrive, The Illustrated Police News producing a full-page cartoon strip, “The Escape of Brave Winston Churchill from Pretoria....Sixty Hours of Terrible Anxiety and Daring Adventures.”

Once Churchill was free to add his own voice to the story, he shaped it through telegrams and press interviews. Widely quoted, he again showed a great ability to capture the mood of the moment with the right words: “I am very weak but I am free. I have lost many pounds in weight, but I am lighter in heart.”25

This was the moment he had waited for. The beginning of his account is a great piece of Churchillian writing, evocative and stressing something he would feel all his life, especially over the plight of prisoners when he was Home Secretary in 1910-11:

How unhappy is that poor man who loses his liberty! What can the wide world give him in exchange? No degree of material comfort, no consciousness of correct behaviour can balance the hateful degradation of imprisonment. Before I had been an hour in captivity I resolved to escape.26

That first article would be syndicated and quoted around the world. In a strategy more associated with modern prime ministers and presidents than those of Victorian times, it would lead to a book and a lecture tour of Britain and North America. More than that, his words were also the opening shots in his bid to try again to enter Parliament for Oldham.

This time he was guaranteed success, a triumph he owed to the strategy he had adopted and refined since 1895. Through his own writing, and through his understanding and massaging of the press, young Winston had placed himself firmly in control of his own narrative. It was a system that would continue to serve him well.
On 17 February 1908 Churchill, now the established MP and Cabinet member, spoke to the Author’s Club of London on the freedom of the writer:

He is dependent for his occupation upon no-one but himself, and nothing outside him that matters. He is the sovereign of an Empire, self-supporting, self-contained. No-one can sequestrate his estates. No-one can deprive him of his stock in trade; no-one can force him to exercise his faculty against his will; no-one can prevent him exercising it as he chooses. The pen is the great liberator of men and nations.27

Churchill cannot have spoken a truer word about himself. For him, writing was the great liberator. It allowed him to make the most of his military experience and to launch his political career. Moreover, it gave him a voice and a platform. This was something he carried into the next phase of his life. Throughout his fifty years in politics, he continued to use his articles and books to support and to reinforce his public persona and political goals—financially, but also more importantly, intellectually. Put simply, it allowed Churchill to continue to set the agenda and make the news.

By the time he arrived in America for his first lecture tour in 1900, Churchill’s strategy had paid off, and the Chicago Tribune was already proclaiming him Britain’s future prime minister.

Endnotes

2. The standard work on the subject is Douglas Russell, Winston Churchill: Soldier (FH 129:36). See also Carlo D’Este, Warlord (FH 142:51); Michael Paterson, Winston Churchill: His Military Life (FH 129:37); and Richard Holmes, In the Footsteps of Churchill (FH 128:37).
10. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
22. Ibid., Broadwater Collection Press albums.
23. Churchill Additional Papers, WCHL 2/2, Telegrams sent from Lourenço Marques, December 1899.
Churchill disliked and avoided press conferences, but FDR pushed him into five. While different backgrounds gave them different approaches to reporters, both leaders were sensitive to the wartime need for secrecy. Yet their wariness toward the news media was as political as it was military and strategic.

WARREN E KIMBALL

Meeting the Press: the White House, 23 December 1941.

Welcome to another foray into what I call “Church-evelt Studies,” based honestly on my belief that the wartime partnership of the two leaders is historically more important than their singular accomplishments. Since Stalin’s name was on the title of the Charleston program, let me address Stalin and managing the media. He managed it! ’Nuff said.

In 1941, Winston Churchill listened to a general who gave the press too much information about an upcoming operation. His reprimand also revealed his assessment of the persistence and the power of news reporters: “These gentlemen of the press were listening carefully to every word you said, all eagerly anxious for a tiny morsel of cheese which they could publish. And you go and give them a whole ruddy Stilton!”

Franklin Roosevelt, asked in 1944 by his press secretary to make a statement about freedom of the press, replied testily, “Quite frankly I regard Freedom of the...
Press as one of the world’s most microscopic problems.” I suspect Churchill, if asked, would have launched into a long, example-studded historical exposition that, when parsed, said pretty much the same thing: It was not a problem in Britain, though during the Second World War, British media complaints about any lack of such freedom would likely have been censored. I have not found Churchill commenting directly on freedom of the press, but this quote is close: “Free speech [something a bit different from freedom of the press] carries with it the evil of all foolish, unpleasant and venomous things that are said; but on the whole we would rather lump them than do away with it.” That’s hardly a ringing endorsement, though I suspect the remarks of both men could be interpreted as grudging admiration for the skills and tenaciousness of news reporters.

Both leaders were sensitive to the wartime need for secrecy. But their wariness toward the news media was as political as it was military and strategic. A look at an early misunderstanding between Churchill and Roosevelt about media-handling policies illustrates their differing styles and their common concerns. It came during their first meeting in Argentia, Newfoundland (the first one Churchill remembered—they had met briefly at Gray’s Inn in London back in 1918). It was the Atlantic Conference, held aboard U.S. and British warships in Placentia Bay, where an American naval station was under construction (on land leased as part of the Lend-Lease agreement). The Atlantic Charter, and the image of Britain and the U.S. as allies in every way but formally, were the key results of the meeting, but a small contretemps sprang up over press coverage. At the Americans’ request, Churchill had agreed not to bring reporters, but showed up with two “writers” (one of them H.V. Morton, see FH 151:18), traveling as officials from the British Ministry of Information. Harry Hopkins, FDR’s closest adviser, had come from Britain aboard Churchill’s ship, and blew the “writers” sobriquet as soon as he joined the Americans. Roosevelt said if the British had what amounted to an “exclusive right to the story,” the U.S. press “would tear him to pieces.” The Prime Minister immediately limited access for the writers, and forbade dispatch of any reports. Morton when able wrote an approved book about the meeting. On Roosevelt’s return home after the Atlantic Conference, he told assembled press that he had been caught off-guard.

I will have to talk off the record—not for use, literally, not for use. There is no reason why you fellows shouldn’t know. The reason I can’t use it is that it would be discourteous. The whole point of the original arrangement was, as you know, secrecy, for perfectly obvious naval reasons, and I didn’t take any newspapermen. [The U.S. press associations could tell their London offices that] there were two literary gentlemen who were put on board by the British Ministry of Information, and that they have agreed with me that any release from the pens of either of those gentlemen goes to our three press associations [without charge]. I couldn’t think of any better way to cover it. I can’t say, “Mea culpa,” because it was the other fellow’s “culpa.”

Churchill disliked and avoided press conferences and even interviews. He granted only two major interviews early in his life (FH 144). But FDR pushed him into five Joint ones during the Second World War.

Nevertheless, even when faced with an American-style press conference, Churchill left little doubt that he could play the game as well as Roosevelt. On the afternoon of 23 December 1941, with Americans still assessing the impact of the Pearl Harbor attack, Churchill and Roosevelt conducted a joint press conference for about 200 journalists and broadcasters. WSC, seated in the back of the presidential executive office, could not be seen very well by the crowd of reporters. So when the President introduced him, he suggested that the Prime Minister stand to give his audience a better view. After Churchill climbed on his chair to be seen better, “loud and spontaneous cheers and applause rang through the room.” His wit charmed everyone. Asked how long he thought it would take to win the war, he quipped, “If we manage it well, it will only take half as long as if we manage it badly.” Later he was asked by a reporter from a southern state if he considered U.S. entry into the war as one of its “great climacterics.” Churchill smiled and answered in his best Texan drawl, “I sho’ do.” Newsweek reported that the spontaneous and “lusty cheers” were the first in the annals of presidential press conferences.
Franklin Roosevelt made radio famous (or perhaps vice versa), but he was not the first U.S. president to make radio broadcasts. Wilson, Harding, and not-so-silent Calvin Coolidge (who averaged one broadcast a month) all used the radio, but for announcements and speeches: pronouncements from on high. Hoover spoke frequently as the Great Depression deepened in 1930, but neither his style nor his policies proved persuasive. Not so for Roosevelt, who mastered what he called this “aerial speech.” As one of his critics remarked, with a note of jealousy, “Roosevelt possessed a golden voice and a seductive and challenging radio technique.”

His best known phrase—"the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"—came in his first inaugural address, heard on radios from coast to coast. But his most effective means of communication with Americans came with his famous “fireside chats.” In just over twelve years as president he gave only some thirty such radio talks, commenting that he used them sparingly—no more “than once every five or six weeks”—lest they “lose their effectiveness.” In fact, he once opined that “Churchill, for a while, talked too much….” Like Churchill’s seemingly impromptu speeches in the House of Commons, Roosevelt’s fireside chats were carefully scripted and planned, even to the point of adding a small false tooth to eliminate a slight whistling noise caused by a gap in his lower two front teeth.8

Just as his radio broadcasts were careful productions, Roosevelt also took measures to control his “pictorial image”—another strong parallel with Churchill. (One current observer commented that Yousuf Karsh was just plain lucky.) FDR, working through his press secretary, Steve Early, cajoled and pressured newspapers not to show or describe him in ways that would remind the public of his paralysis. In 1936, when Roosevelt fell full length on a ramp in Philadelphia during the Democrats’ National Convention, not a single photograph or even a cartoon was published depicting the event.

Churchill’s style with the news media—at that time essentially the newspapers and to a lesser degree newsreels—stemmed directly from the British political institutions. Who needed the unelected, uninformed press asking questions, when Question Time in Parliament brought answers from elected representatives who were presumably well-informed? Moreover, the procedure put ministers (answering for themselves or their department) on the spot. To quote Wikipedia, reliable in this instance: “Ministers may attempt to avoid opposition questions, but lying or intentionally providing misleading answers to Parliament is not permitted by the standing orders. The resulting political outcry could, and often does, result in that Minister being relieved of his position, and possibly suspended from the House.” Needless to say, Churchill’s handling of Question Time was superb.

But his favored method of communicating with the country was public speeches. Robert Rhodes James’s definitive collection of Churchill’s speeches allows us all to luxuriate in his mastery of the English language, though I would recommend that you read them aloud rather than leaving them as lifeless print on a page. Wherever the speeches were made, wartime security pro-
vided an easy way to avoid any Q&A with reporters. Almost all the speeches made during that time were distributed to the press, frequently prior to delivery, forcing reporters to check carefully lest they miss a significant ad lib or last-minute change.

Both men showed cautious respect, or perhaps awareness, for the power of the press, although their styles and hence their relationships with news reporters were different. Churchill’s isolation from direct contact with the press left it to British censorship to police his public speeches and statements. It is a commentary on just how well the famously voluble Churchill could police himself—when he chose to do so—that the chief censor in the World War II Ministry of Information, George P. Thompson, recalled that “questions and debates in Parliament provided the only two occasions I can remember when the Prime Minister himself was censored. Twice he accidentally referred to bomb damage to the House of Commons—a rigid censorship ‘stop’—but the Speaker asked parliamentary journalists not to quote these references and they were taken out of Hansard.”

American restrictions created similar issues with the press. For example, when Churchill and his large party came over for the First Quebec Conference in August 1943, Canadian news reports covered their arrival. After all, more than 200 British officials came over on the Queen Mary. Yet U.S. censorship prevented any mention of Churchill’s arrival—a bit like trying to hide an elephant with a dish towel.

By the time that conference convened, however, the world press lurked round every corner: forty-eight American reporters and photographers, sixteen from Britain, thirty-five Canadians, five Australians, one each from China, France and Russia. Yet both Churchill and Roosevelt refused to let reporters into the Citadel, where the talks were held. The Prime Minister’s closest equivalent to a press secretary, Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information, was unprepared for, in the words of one Quebec newspaper, “the Washington Wolf Brigade trained on the tough White House course.” Roosevelt’s press secretary Steve Early said that Churchill never held press conferences in Britain and was wary of holding one in Quebec. So at the close of the conference, Early bluffed Churchill into agreeing to a joint press conference by warning that FDR was going to meet the press the next day (not true unless Churchill joined him), and Churchill gave in. That next day, 24 August 1943 at noon, a joint press conference on the terrace of the famous Citadel found Churchill a bit puckish. He refused to answer any questions, and made some anodyne remarks that he insisted were “off the record,” the signal that what he said could not be reported—a British censorship rule that the American reporters blithely ignored.

Noticing Harry Hopkins, Anthony Eden, Brendan Bracken and Early “perched on the parapet” with a sheer drop of some 300 feet to the St. Lawrence River behind them, the Prime Minister warned them to take care, which is exactly what he did in speaking to the reporters. He and Roosevelt were there, he cautioned, merely to “exchange greetings [with the press].” FDR began similarly, saying he had no news, but then gave only a >>
sketchy account of what he and Churchill had talked about—the overall military picture, invasions to come in North Africa and Europe (no details or dates), their hope of meeting Stalin. It was nothing reporters hadn’t heard before, but it gave them “a morsel of meat,” to quote Early. Churchill soon returned to his preferred means of communicating—without the media. In a radio broadcast from Quebec City, he spoke of Canada as a place where “freedom has found a safe and abiding home”—but apparently not freedom for reporters to ask him questions.11

The joint Roosevelt-Churchill press conference earlier that year, in May 1943 following the Washington Conference, found FDR listening while reporters probed Churchill for information. The Prime Minister invariably deflected the questions. Had they selected an Allied commander for the European theatre? “We have an Allied commander in the theatre that is at present in force in Northwest Africa….haven’t got to the point where the executive command had to be chosen.” Requests for assessments of the Soviet Union’s military situation brought on a short speech, clearly intended for Russian ears: “They have been grand Allies….They have struck blows that no one else could strike.” Would the Russians go to war with Japan after victory in Europe?

“Oh well, it’s one of those oversights that I haven’t been placed in position to give directions to Russia.” What about Australian fears of a Japanese invasion? “The threat is certainly…less serious than it was when I last saw you in this room” (23 December 1941). Asked if he was satisfied with the military situation, Churchill pointed out that it was far better than a year ago when the fortress at Tobruk surrendered: “I don’t think there was…any Englishman in the United States so unhappy, as I was on that day, since Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga [loud laughter].” He then went on to offer a brief overview of successes in North Africa and on the Russian front—all old news.

Perhaps the only newsworthy event at the press conference was Churchill’s second self-elevation. Once again, this time without prompting from Roosevelt, he stood on a chair and gave his famous “V” for victory sign to applause from the some 150 reporters, just as he had done in 1941.12

Clearly Churchill captivated the American press corps. So perhaps he was on the mark when he told Congress assembled in December 1941, “I cannot help reflecting that if my father had been an American and my mother British, instead of the other way around, I might have gotten here on my own.”13 Well he might.

Endnotes

3. Churchhill By Himself, 574.
4. Theodore A. Wilson, The First Summit (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 51, 79-80. The story that Churchill promised no reporters originated with the President’s son, Elliott, who was routinely critical of the British. Probably the Americans made a request through channels for no reporters, ostensibly for security reasons, but more likely because FDR thoroughly enjoyed escaping the reporters. One of the two “writers” Churchill brought, H.V. Morton, later agreed with Elliott Roosevelt’s claim—and FDR’s annoyance suggests the story was accurate. The President had deceived reporters before the meeting, telling them he would be cruising on the presidential yacht. The deception included crewmen dressed in yachting rig with one waving a long cigarette holder (FDR’s trademark) as the President presumably sailed through the Cape Cod Canal. In reality, FDR was heading for Newfoundland on a U.S. cruiser, without any reporters aboard or trailing him. Morton’s travelogue of the journey, Atlantic Meeting, published in 1943, contained no mention of the hoax or the no-reporters commitment.
6. By my count, Roosevelt and Churchill held five joint press conferences; one just after the attack on Pearl Harbor: Washington, 23 December 1941; Casablanca, 24 January 1943; Washington, 25 May 1943; Quebec (with King) twice, on 24 August 1943 and 16 September 1944.
8. The paragraphs and quotes about Roosevelt’s fireside chats and his pictorial policy are from Betty Houchin Winfield, FDR and the News Media (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
Joint Press Conference:
Washington, 23 December 1941

There couldn’t have been a worse time to meet the press: Pearl Harbour was a wreck, Japan supreme in the Pacific, Russia under siege, Singapore and Australia bracing for invasion.
What a time for the Churchilian optimism! WSC did not disappoint.

THE PRESIDENT: I am sorry to have taken so long for all of you to get in, but apparently—I was telling the Prime Minister the object was to prevent a wolf from coming in here in sheep’s clothing. (Laughter) But I was thereby mixing my metaphors, because I had suggested to him this morning that if he came to this conference he would have to be prepared to meet the American press, who, compared with the British press—as was my experience in the old days—are wolves compared with the British press lambs. However, he is quite willing to take on a conference, because we have one characteristic in common. We like new experiences in life....And we want to make it clear that this is a preliminary British-American conference, but that thereby no other nations are excluded from the general objective of defeating Hitlerism in the world. Just for example, I think the Prime Minister this morning has been consulting with the Dominions....In addition to that, there are a good many nations besides our own that are at war.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Canada.
THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Canada, as the Prime Minister suggests, is also.
THE PRIME MINISTER: In the line.
THE PRESIDENT: In the line—both sides of Canada....Steve [Early, FDR’s Press Secretary] and I first thought that I would introduce the Prime Minister, and let him say a few words to you good people, by banning questions. However, the Prime Minister did not go along with that idea, and I don’t blame him. He said that he is perfectly willing to answer any reasonable questions for a reasonably short time. And so I am going to introduce him, and you to him and tell you that we are very, very happy to have him here. (To the Prime Minister) I wish you would just stand up for one minute and let them see you. They can’t see you. (Loud and spontaneous cheers and applause)

Go ahead—shoot.

• What about Singapore, Mr. Prime Minister? The people of Australia are terribly anxious about it. Would you say to be of good cheer?

THE PRIME MINISTER: We are going to do our utmost to defend Singapore and its approaches until the situation becomes so favorable to us that the general offensive in the Pacific can be resumed.

• Mr. Prime Minister, isn’t Singapore the key to the whole situation out there?

THE PRIME MINISTER: The key to the whole situation is the resolute manner in which the British and American democracies are going to throw themselves into the conflict. As a geographical and strategic point it obviously is of very high importance.

• Mr. Minister, could you tell us what you think of conditions within Germany—the morale?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, I have always been feeling that one of these days we might get a windfall coming from that quarter, but I don’t think we ought to count on it. Just go on as if they were keeping on as bad as they are, or as good as they are. And then one of these days, as we did in the last war, we may wake up and find we ran short of Huns. (Laughter)

• Do you think the war is turning in our favor in the last month or so?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I can’t describe the feelings of relief with which I find Russia victorious, and the United States and Great Britain standing side by side. It is incredible to anyone who has lived through the lonely months of 1940. It is incredible. Thank God.

• Mr. Prime Minister, there have been suggestions from various sources that possibly the German retreat—or the Russian success—has some element of trickery in it, that the Germans are not particularly routed. In other words, a bit of camouflage. Can you throw any light on that, or do you care to?


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THE PRIME MINISTER: I think that they have received a very heavy rebuff. Hitler proselytized that he would take Moscow in a short time. Now his armies are joggling backwards over this immense front, wondering where he can find a place to winter. It won’t be a comfortable place. They have had immense losses. And the Russians have shown a power of resiliency, a gift of modern warfare under their leader, Stalin, which has rendered immense service to the world cause.

• Mr. Minister, can you tell us when you think we may lick these boys?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: If we manage it well, it will only take half as long as if we manage it badly. (Laughter)

• How long, sir, would it take if we managed it badly?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: That has not been revealed to me at this moment. We don’t need to manage it badly.

• How long if we manage it well, sir?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, it would be imprudent to indulge in a facile optimism at the moment.

• Do you favor a personal conference of yourself, Mr. Roosevelt, Stalin, and Chiang Kai-shek?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: In principle, yes. (Laughter)

• Do you think it is important, Mr. Prime Minister, that our American war materials continue to go, to some extent at least, through the Middle East and to Russia during this particular period?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: My feeling is that the military power and munitions power of the United States are going to develop on such a great scale that the problem will not so much be whether to choose between this and that, but how to get what is available to all the theaters in which we have to wage this World War.

• [Southern Accent] Mr. Prime Minister, in one of your speeches you mentioned three or four of the great climacteries. Would you now add our entry into the war as one of those, sir?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: I think I may almost say, “I sho’ do.” (Laughter)

• Mr. Prime Minister, during your talks here, will you take up economic, and diplomatic, and postwar problems?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: I hope not too much on them...we have to concentrate on the grim emergencies, and when we have solved them, we shall be in a position to deal with the future of the world in a manner to give the best results, and the most lasting results, for the common peoples of all the lands. But one has only a certain amount of life and strength, and only so many hours in the day, and other emergencies press upon us too much to be drawn into those very, very complicated, tangled, and not in all cases attractive jungles.

• Mr. Prime Minister, can you say anything now about the prospect of an anti-Axis command on those discussions?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: I think it would be very difficult to arrange. What you require is the broad blocking-in of the main plans by the principal personages in charge of the action of the different states, and then the release of that to the highest military expert authorities for execution. But this is a war which is absolutely, literally worldwide, proceeding at the same time from one end of the globe to the other, and in the air, on the land, and on the sea. I do not think there has ever been a man born—even if he were Napoleon, he wouldn’t know anything about the air—who could assume the functions of world commander in chief for the—I would say “associated powers.” (Laughter)

• Mr. Prime Minister, are you giving consideration to creation of an Allied supplies command, whereby materials of the anti-Axis powers would be allocated under a central agency?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, there is the very closest liaison between our people over here and the United States officers. Lord Beaverbrook is here with an executive staff, and we have, I believe, quite a large staff here, and they are in the closest accord. Then at the summit of the problem is a fairly simple one of allocation in accordance with the emergency. And of course, the rule we have got to follow is to see how much we can help each other. It should be a rivalry in mutual helpfulness, and that is the only one.

• Mr. Minister, do you anticipate a new German offensive in the near future?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: There is a lot of talk about their coming along and making an attack in the Mediterranean. There is a lot of talk about their getting ready for an invasion of England next year. We have heard a lot of this, and I expect something will come of it, but where, I can’t tell. I will be very glad to be informed. Gentlemen, if you have got any information, it will be thankfully received. (Laughter)

• Mr. Minister, have you any information as to whether the Germans have lost more materiel in Russia than they can replace by spring?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: I should think that they have got ample materiel, because they not only have their own vast factories—which were running at full war speed when the war broke out—they have a great accumulation, and they have what they captured from so many other countries. I shouldn’t think that was where they would run short. But of course, the quality of the materiel, as we move on each year into new and better times—they might not have the power to keep in the race with that.

• Mr. Prime Minister, what materials is Germany most likely to run short of?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: I did hear something about oil and other things, but it is rather technical for me.

• Mr. Prime Minister, can you interpret any of the recent events in Germany as possible internal collapse—symptomatic of an internal collapse?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: Don’t let us bank on that. We have got to bank on an external knock-out. If the internal collapse comes, so much the better.

• Mr. Minister, have you any doubt of the ultimate victory?
  THE PRIME MINISTER: I have no doubt whatever.
Joint Press Conference:  
Washington, 25 May 1943

The fortunes of war had improved considerably: North Africa was redeemed, Italy on the verge of surrender, the Wehrmacht in Russia clearly on the retreat. Churchill allowed himself more expansive answers, particularly on Italy and the bombing campaign against Germany.

THE PRESIDENT: We are awfully glad to have Mr. Churchill back here. I don’t have to tell him that. All he has to do is to read the papers, and look into the faces of any American. He is very welcome. I don’t think we have very much to tell you, except that we are making exceedingly good progress, and considering the size of our problems—the global nature of the war—these discussions have been done in practically record time. And so I am going to turn the meeting over to Mr. Churchill, and I think that he will be willing to answer almost—with stress on the almost—any question. (Laughter)

• Mr. Prime Minister, in Australia there is a very great fear as to the Japanese threat in that area. What is your feeling about the matter?

THE PRIME MINISTER: The threat is certainly, in our opinion, less serious than it was when I saw you last in this room December 23rd, 1941.

• Mr. Prime Minister, what can you tell us about the plans for the future, probably beginning with Europe?

THE PRIME MINISTER: A very expansive topic (laughter), and one which leads very early to difficult country; but our plans for the future are to wage this war until unconditional surrender is procured from all those who have molested us, and this applies equally to Asia and to Europe. It used to apply, until quite recently, to Africa.

[Image of President and Mr. Churchill]

Greeting Roosevelt at Quebec before the start of the conference, 16 August 1943.

• Mr. Prime Minister, could you say anything about how well satisfied you are with the way things are going on the fighting fronts?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I am very much more satisfied than I was when I was here last. (Laughter) It was here that the President handed me the telegram of the surrender of Tobruk. And as I have mentioned to him, I don’t think there was any Englishman in the United States so unhappy, as I was that day, since Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga. (Laughter) But the situation is very different now….a perfectly indisputable turning of the tide.

• Mr. Prime Minister, on this question of Russia….In your opinion of Russia’s self-interest, would it lead her to fight Japan after the European war?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Oh well, it’s one of those oversights that I haven’t been placed in the position to give directions to Russia. (Laughter) And I have this feeling, that those people have been doing such a tremendous job facing this enormous mass—they have done what nobody else was in a position to do: torn a large part of the guts out of the German Army. And they have suffered very grievous losses….I certainly have not felt that I ought to suggest to my Government asking more of them. But their strength may grow as time goes on. They must know that Japan has watched them with a purely opportunist eye. But it isn’t for me to make any suggestions to them at all. They have been grand Allies; and of course they have shown it in heroic fashion.

• Mr. Prime Minister, what do you think of the dissolution of the Comintern?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, I like it. (Laughter) I like it.

• Sir, are you confident that the Russians will be able to hold out this year, as they have in past years?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I certainly think that they have a much better prospect of holding out this year than they had the previous time. Indeed, I must express my full confidence that they will hurl back any attack which is made upon them.

• Mr. Prime Minister, in the light of developments since your speech to Congress, would you care to make any statement concerning the experiment of bombing Germany into submission? >>
THE PRIME MINISTER: I haven’t had very much time to go on with the experiment since I spoke to Congress. (Laughter) We have had the heaviest raid we have ever had, the raid on Dortmund, where 2000 tons were cast down upon them with, I believe, highly satisfactory results. And also, it has been an extremely good week for the U.S. Air Forces in the UK. They made, I think, four heavy daylight attacks, which are judged to be extremely successful. Precision bombing in the daylight, of course, in proportion to the weight of bombs dropped, produces a more decisive effect—more than the night bombing, because it goes to more specific targets precise and accurate.

THE PRESIDENT: I think that’s something that hasn’t been brought out: night bombing over Europe carries more weight of explosives; but of course being night-time the precision of the actual bombing can’t be so great as the day bombing, which carries less explosives but with more precision because it’s daylight. On the whole, the combination of the two, day and night, is achieving a more satisfactory result.

THE PRIME MINISTER: It’s like running a 24-hour service. (Laughter)

• Mr. Prime Minister, the last time you spoke to us you used a term that I have remembered, because you said that you were not going to rely on an internal collapse of Germany; rather would you rely on an external knock-out, at that time. Well, since then you have worked on Germany and the occupied countries a good deal, and there are constantly recurring evidences that the German people may be getting close to “had enough.” We still are working for this knock-out, but have you any further light on the internal collapse?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I stand pat on the knock-out. (Laughter) But, of course, any windfall will be gratefully accepted. (Laughter)

• Mr. Prime Minister, some quarters interpret your remarks to Congress on bombing to mean that other methods, which you said should not be excluded, should be postponed until the termination of the experiment.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Oh, no. That would be a most distorted deduction to draw. I said there is no reason why the experiment should not be continued, provided other methods are not excluded—I mean other simultaneous methods, or current methods....

• Mr. Prime Minister, whenever you and the President confer, the rumor always goes around that you are about to pick an Allied commander in the European theater. Could you tell us whether you have done that?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, we have an Allied commander in the theater that is at present in force in Northwest Africa.

• I was thinking of the next one, sir. (Laughter)

THE PRIME MINISTER: No step of that kind has been taken at the present moment, because of the great preparations that are going forward, and we haven’t got to the point where the executive commander has to be chosen.

• Mr. Prime Minister, I am curious to know what you think is going on in Hitler’s mind now? (Laughter)

THE PRIME MINISTER: I have very little doubt that if he could have the past back he would probably play his hand a little differently. I think he would have hesitated long, before he rejected all the repeated peace efforts that were made by Great Britain, which even brought the name of our Government into disrepute, so far did we go on the path of trying to placate and appease. But he then got out of the period where he was restoring his country to its place among the countries of Europe. He had achieved that, but that wasn’t what he was after at all. Appetite unbridled, ambition unmeasured—all the world! There was no end to the appetite of this wicked man. I should say he repents now that he did not curb his passion before he brought such a great portion of the world against him and his country.

• Mr. Prime Minister, do you think it’s a sound assumption that he still has a mind? (Laughter)

THE PRIME MINISTER: I have no reason to suppose that he isn’t in control of his faculties, and of the resources of his country. But, of course, I haven’t the same facilities of acquainting myself with what is going on there, as I fortunately have on what is going on in the United States. (Laughter)

• Mr. Prime Minister, do you care to say anything about Mussolini, and Italy?

THE PRIME MINISTER: You know as much as I do about that. I think they are a softer proposition than Germany but I wouldn’t count on anything but the force of arms. It may be aided at any time by a change of heart on the part of the enemy’s countries, a weakening of morale. Nobody proposes to take the native soil of Italy away from the Italian people. They will have their life. They will have their life in the new Europe. They have sinned—erred—by allowing themselves to be led by the nose by a very elaborate tyranny which was imposed upon them so that it gripped every part of their life. The one-party totalitarian system, plus the secret police applied over a number of years is capable of completely obliterating the sense of personal liberty. And thus they were led by intriguing leaders, who thought they had got the chance of 5000 years in aggrandizing themselves by the misfortunes of their neighbors who had not offended them in any way, into this terrible plight in which they find themselves. I think they would be very well advised to dismiss those leaders, and throw themselves upon the justice of those they have so grievously offended. We should not stain our names before posterity by cruel and inhuman acts. We have our own reputation to consider. But after all it really is a matter for them to settle among themselves, and settle with their leaders. All we can do is to apply those physical stimuli (laughter) which in default of moral sanctions are sometimes capable of inducing a better state of mind in recalcitrant individuals and recalcitrant Nations. (Laughter)

• Mr. Prime Minister, would you care to comment about the situation in India, or China?
“It was here that the President handed me the telegram of the surrender of Tobruk....I don’t think there was any Englishman in the United States so unhappy, as I was that day, since Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga.”

THE PRIME MINISTER: I am very anxious to increase the intensity of the war effort against Japan, and therefore brought these commanders in chief in order that they could meet with the United States officers, and particularly with those who have been serving with such effect in China, like General Chennault and General Stilwell, and the high officers here, because it is evident that the war in that theater must be prosecuted with the very greatest vigor, and on the best lines. And we have been talking a great deal about that, and thinking a great deal, and have arrived at conclusions which I believe are sound, are good. When I saw you last, this question of priority—which was first and which was second of the two great theaters and antagonists—assumed a much more sharp form than at the present time. Our resources have greatly expanded. If the war continues on both fronts the war will be waged with equal force as our resources grow. Instead of being consecutive our efforts will be concurrent, and that great degree of effort will be capable of being applied at the same time in both directions. They have been already applied.

The forces that we have are becoming very respectable in munitions, and in men trained to war of all kinds; but as I pointed out to Congress, the problem is one of application, and that problem of application is limited by distance, and the U-boat war, the amount of shipping, the character of the communications, the vast distances of the ocean. Our forces are growing and gathering their ambition, but to apply it is a matter of time, and it is exceedingly difficult to apply.

But we follow out this principle, that all soldiers must be engaged, and ships and airplanes must be engaged on the widest possible fronts, the broadest possible superficies, and maintain the fighting with the utmost intensity, because we are the stronger animal; we are the stronger combination; we are shaking the life out of the enemy; and as we are able to continue, we will not give him a moment’s suerese.

This is particularly true of the air, where they are already beginning to fail to keep up to the necessary strength on the various fronts. Neither Japan nor Germany is able to maintain equality with Britain, the United States, and Russia on all fronts.

Still less are they able to do so in the field of production. Immense plurality—the superiority of production—is on our side. And although it takes a certain number of months after planes are made before they come into action—perhaps a good many months, having regard to all the distances to be covered, and to the large ground staffs that have to be transported—but in spite of that, at the end of certain periods, the great superiority in numbers of our manufacture and of our training is bound to have effect, which so far as the air war is concerned will be decisive.

Whether the deciding of the air war will entail a similar ending of the other forms of warfare has yet to be seen. But the air was the weapon with which these people chose to subjugate the world. This was the weapon they struck at Pearl Harbor with. This was the weapon with which the Germans boasted they would terrorize all the countries of the world. And it is an example of poetic justice that this should be the weapon in which they should find themselves most outmatched and first outmatched in the ensuing struggle.

Mr. Prime Minister, have you anything to say about the submarine side of the situation?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I am very much encouraged by all that has happened there since the turn of the year. Really, it has been very encouraging. The output from the United States’ shipyards is prodigious and has fulfilled all hopes, hopes which, when the plans were first made and published, seemed to be excessive. But they have been made good. The movement of supplies across the ocean has been on an increasing scale. The surplus of new building over sinkings over the last six months has been substantial, especially in the later months; and the killings of U-boats have improved and reached a very high pitch—never better than in the last month. That is due, of course, to the decreasing numbers of U-boats, but it is also due to the improved methods, and some wonderful things that have been thought of on both sides of the Atlantic. And, of course, we interchange everything immediately. Anything we have we share and bring into action. A lot of clever people are thinking a lot about these things.

Mr. Prime Minister, there is a great deal more confidence in the Allied commanders in the field than there was a year ago. Would you care to comment?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Well, they have had a chance to come into action on reasonable terms—indeed, on advantageous terms, because we struck with superior forces at the right spot. We—as your Confederate general [Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Cavalry commander in the Civil War] used to say, “We got there firstest with the mostest.” (Laughter) And also, because our troops have—since I was here last—been equipped with all the best weapons. You have only got to turn the industry of the United States and Britain over from peace to war. It takes a couple of years or more to get it running, but when it does run it gives you a flow of weapons with which certainly neither Germany nor Japan possibly can beat us.

Mr. Prime Minister, would you undertake to make a prediction on the progress of the war for the rest of this year? I have in mind this statement you and the President made at Casablanca, on new and heavier blows against all of the Axis members in 1943?

THE PRIME MINISTER: I think that seems to be a very sound prediction, and couched in terms which are unexceptionable from the point of view of military security. (Laughter)
Search the web for the words at right and you will find at least a half dozen citations unquestioningly attributing them to Churchill—a striking reversal of his off-stated view of American intervention in World War I and grist for the isolationists then and now.¹

Churchill did acknowledge that in 1914 the United States had good reason for staying out of the war,² but on America’s entry in 1917 he was unequivocal: “There is no need to exaggerate the material assistance given by the United States… the moral consequence of the United States joining the Allies was indeed the deciding cause in the conflict….”³ Without America’s entry, he continued, the war “would have ended in a peace by negotiation, or, in other words, a German victory.”⁴ A German victory was never something Churchill favored. Nor did he advocate Britain (he would not have said “England”) making peace in 1917.

Griffin and the Enquirer

In 1926 William S. Griffin (1898-1949), a protégé of William Randolph Hearst, used Hearst money to found the New York Enquirer, a Sunday afternoon broadsheet designed as a platform for new ideas which Hearst might adopt in his own papers.⁵ Hearst and Griffin had opposed American entry into World War I and were isolationists in its aftermath. In the 1930s Griffin frequently demanded that Britain pay her World War I debts to America, starting perhaps by handing over the Queen Mary and Bermuda. He was of Irish heritage, and Time snidely wrote that he “goes to Ireland and makes speeches on trade…. Occasionally Publisher Griffin starts a movement to draft William Griffin for mayor (1937) or senator (1938).”⁶

Isolationism aside, Griffin ran articles critical of Hitler and won awards from Jewish organizations for promoting Christian-Jewish amity. Roosevelt had asked him to second his nomination for President in 1932. But Griffin remained fiercely isolationist, and by the late Thirties was leading the Keep America Out of War Committee. He considered it “an honor” when his paper was banned in Germany in 1940, and he was placed on the enemies list of the German-American Bund.⁷

In 1942, with America at war again, a grand jury indicted Griffin for sedition, though the charges were later dropped.⁸ There is evidence that the indictment was trumped up by a hostile U.S. government. “For a number of years before Pearl Harbor,” a New York newspaper commented, Griffin had “used the ‘no danger’ line…. [He] constantly praised the utterances of Ham Fish and worked closely with Prescott Dennett.”⁹ Griffin died in 1949; the Enquirer’s circulation was down to 17,000 when it was sold in 1952 to Generoso Pope, Jr., who turned it into the supermarket tabloid it remains to this day.¹⁰

“America should have minded her own business and the war the Allies would have made peace with Germany, followed by Fascism, and Germany would not have allowed Nazism in Germany. If America had stayed out of the continent of Europe and breaking down parliament peace early in 1917, it would have saved over one

—Churchill as quoted in the National Review

Tangling with The Curious Case

The Churchill Conversation

Griffin was in London in the summer of 1936, when, he claimed, he received a “telegram” from Churchill (which he never produced), asking to “come to see me.”¹¹ The Churchill Archives indicate it was Griffin who requested the meeting. When Churchill asked his private office to check, his secretaries reported that Griffin had made several phone calls seeking an appointment, describing himself as “a friend of the President and the Ambassador here [Robert Bingham], and an admirer of yours.” Griffin said he had “no axe to grind,” nor did he wish “to speak of anything particularly.”¹² The meeting took place in Churchill’s flat at 11 Morpeth Mansions at 5 p.m. on 5 August 1936.

Griffin did have an axe to grind and did wish to speak of something particularly: the British war debt. Churchill agreed Britain owed the money, Griffin wrote, but insisted that Britain should “deduct fifty percent of the cost of all the shot and shell she fired at the Germans from the time America declared war in the Spring of 1917 until she actually put troops in the front lines a year later,” an estimated $4.9 billion, plus interest. Griffin says he demurred, saying,

Thanks to Allen Packwood, Sir Martin Gilbert, Michael McMenamin and the Churchill Archives Centre for kind assistance in research.
ad stayed out of the World War. If you hadn’t entered Germany in the Spring of 1917. Had we made peace followed by Communism, no breakdown in Italy fol-
signed the Versailles Treaty, which has enthroned the war, all these ‘isms’ wouldn’t today be sweeping amentary government—and if England had made million British, French, American, and other lives.”

NEW YORK ENQUIRER, AUGUST 1936

Churchill IN THE NEWS

with the Media: of William Griffin

“if we hadn’t entered the war England would have lost,” and that “England would probably be ruled from Berlin.”

Churchill allegedly retorted that “there was no one in England happier over [America’s] decision to enter than he was but he could see now that our entry had been a great mistake”—followed by the remark above. Then he added: “You may want to stay out of [the next war], but...you will find yourselves fighting shoulder to shoulder with us.”

Churchill next offered Griffin an article “containing all of the statements he had made to me that day” for $500 ($8000 in today’s money) provided Griffin would publish nine more articles at the same price. “I said I could not see my way clear to buy ten articles but that I would be glad to buy one,” Griffin wrote, but “Mr. Churchill was not willing to agree to this stipulation.”

Ever living “from mouth to hand,” Churchill frequently proposed articles to publishers; he certainly wished to syndicate his foreign affairs column for the Evening Standard in America. But it was Churchill’s startling assertions that the U.S. should have “minded her own business,” and that U.S. entry was a “mistake,” that Griffin would publish in his newspaper that same month. There is no evidence that Churchill knew of publication. But as he would learn three years later, the matter was merely dormant.

Hoisted on Someone’s Petard

As war clouds gathered in the summer of 1939, Churchill’s alleged remark was raised by a powerful isol-
tionist, Senator Robert Rice Reynolds (D., N.C.) who said he had the story from Griffin. Insisting he had said no such thing, Churchill engaged an attorney, William N. Stokes, Jr. of Houston, who protested to Reynolds: “Mr. Churchill’s distinguished career in public life as well as his outstanding contributions as an historian have led me to believe that in future years he will be recognized as one of the great men of our generation. Certainly he has analyzed Great Britain’s position in the world of nations much more accurately than those who have guided his nation’s destinies during the past decade.”

Stokes sent Reynolds a photostat of Churchill’s written denial, which does not survive. “I had hoped he would insert it in the Congressional Record,” Stokes wrote. Given Reynolds’ point of view, this was a false hope.

Churchill’s next embarrassment was an August 26th German radio broadcast quoting his alleged remarks to Griffin. The next day The New York Times asked WSC to confirm. Churchill pronounced the story “a vicious lie.”

Queried by the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, Churchill called Griffin a liar and denied having heard of him. The September 1939 issue of The Catholic Worker reprinted Churchill’s alleged 1936 statements.

That’ll Cost You

Griffin responded with a $1 million libel suit, asking New York courts to attach Churchill’s earnings from his New York publishers against the settlement. The Enquirer’s October 9th issue headlined the lawsuit, claiming that his account of their 1936 conversation had been published in 1936 without Churchill’s objection, and that he had testified to WSC’s alleged statement before the Senate Naval Affairs Committee.

Churchill responded that while Griffin “may” have called on him in 1936, he had “no recollection.” But he was adamant “that I never said anything which remotely resembles in substance or form the passage [Griffin claims]. These views are entirely contrary to all the views I hold and have frequently expressed.” Griffin, he continued, had “exploited a private conversation, and betrayed in a dishonourable manner its confidential and private character. But this might have been allowed to pass if his account had not been the exact opposite of the truth, and a palpable travesty and distortion of anything I have ever said or thought.”

Based on his secretaries’ confirmation of their meeting, Churchill admitted they had met: “No doubt he came to see me on suggestion of some friend of mine that his papers could syndicate in States my fortnightly articles, whereupon private and casual conversation followed. No thought of an interview.” He added a marginal note: “Can deny on oath.” If, as I am advised, the libel was Churchill’s denial of meeting Griffin (rather than calling >>
him a liar), it seems odd that the lawsuit continued after Churchill’s admission that they had in fact met.

The case dragged on. In January 1940 the Enquirer fanned the flames, charging, “Churchill tries to defeat justice.”26 Churchill for his part was now asking that the British Foreign Office investigate his antagonist, suggesting (without apparent foundation), “There is no doubt in my mind that Griffin is set on by German agents, which would fully explain his malignity against this country.”27

Griffin, though a witness, did not hesitate to comment publicly. In the February 1941 issue of Scribner’s Commentator, which had republished the alleged Churchill quote the previous November, he penned a detailed version of his story, saying Churchill had sought him, not the other way round. Churchill’s remarks had been published at the time “in a large number of newspapers,” he continued, omitting to mention that he himself had circulated them.

For Griffin to say Churchill never denied his allegations is like saying that if someone doesn’t protest a false statement, it must be true. Churchill had been denying the alleged quotation since he first heard about it July 1939. He admitted to having met with Griffin.28 The editorial stance of Scribner’s Commentator was itself called into question in 1942, when it shut down over allegations of bribe-taking from Japanese interests, in return for publishing propaganda promoting United States isolationism.29

His lawyers suggested Churchill not contest the lawsuit, certain that any damages awarded would be minimal. But the pugnacious prime minister wanted to fight it out, and the British Treasury agreed to help meet his legal expenses on the grounds that Griffin was politically motivated. After Griffin was indicted, Churchill wrote the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax: “He has now been arrested for aiding the enemy, but that is no reason why his suit against me should not be carried forward or dismissed.”30

On 22 October 1942 Churchill had his wish: the judge dismissed Griffin’s lawsuit, apparently because Griffin had not appeared in court. Suffering from the effects of a heart attack, he was still under indictment, and under house arrest in his hospital.31

The Resurrection and the Life

Griffin’s Churchill quotation was revived in a 1956 book by the armored warfare expert J.F.C. Fuller, a former member of the British Union of Fascists and Nordic League. Fuller had been Hitler’s guest at his Berlin birthday parade in April 1939. In 1999 it was quoted from Fuller’s book by The Spectator editor Frank Johnson. Johnson made no comment as to the quote’s veracity, but Fuller had been more careful, writing that it was “alleged.”32 The quote survives several places today on the World Wide Web.

Churchill’s denials, all his published writings, and his determination to contest Griffin’s lawsuit in the midst of a desperate war, powerfully support his contentsions. Griffin’s lifetime isolationism is ample motive for writing what he did. Putting the kindest light on it, he may have misinterpreted some offhand remark in their private conversation and, given his mindset, believed what he wished. And Griffin clearly used the occasion of a private conversation, granted only after he’d said he had “no axes to grind.”

Bodyguard of Truths

It’s an old journalistic tactic (to make an antiphrasis of a famous Churchill axiom) that a Lie should always be surrounded by a bodyguard of Truths. Two parts of the supposed Churchill quote do sound authentic: being happy that America entered the war, and being certain she would be “shoulder to shoulder” in the next one.

Superficially we might accept the whole quote without considering Churchill’s and Griffin’s public record. Isolationists were a dime a dozen in the 1930s. Churchill himself had few nice things to say about war debts in the 1930s. He was affronted by America asking payment for the “shot and shell” fired at the enemy by British soldiers risking their lives. He believed that the war debt carousel (Germany paid France, France Britain, Britain America, and America Germany) helped no one. But nowhere in his criticisms of war debt did he say that America should have minded her own business and kept out of World War I.33

We may even visualize Churchill voicing such thoughts as a conjecture or alternate scenario, which he did sometimes for amusement or curiosity among family or friends. Harder to visualize is his declaring this as his settled view to a stranger—even one who egged him on by talking of war debt. Churchill was an open book. If he really felt that America should have “minded her own business”—that American intervention had led to Nazism, Communism and Fascism—there would be examples in his archive, from which nothing is censored. There isn’t a single one.

That Churchill made his alleged outburst after the suggestion that without the U.S., Britain would be “ruled from Berlin” seems plausible—until we consider that Churchill never voiced such an opinion anywhere else, to anyone, at any time, or in his books, articles or speeches. Griffin claimed Churchill had also said that “there was no one in England happier over [America’s] decision to enter [the war] than he was but he could see now that our entry had been a great mistake.” Nowhere, to anyone, at any time, did Churchill ever write or say that American entry “had been a great mistake.” Not even a small mistake.

“History with Its Flickering Lamp...”

One event does not follow another; history is too complicated for that. Nazism was not the inevitable consequence of World War I—except insofar as any defeated nation yearns for a strong leader. Far more crucial, as Churchill explained, was the harsh peace of Versailles and
Germany’s postwar depression. A surviving Kaiser in postwar Germany would have given in to Hitler as easily as Hindenburg did. The exiled Kaiser held his nose at Hitler’s pogroms, but was equally anti-semitic, and congratulated Hitler on his 1940 victories. Hitler, however, held Wilhelm in contempt, having decided he didn’t need him. Nor would a 1917 German victory have necessarily forestalled Fascism or Communism.

It wasn’t just that Churchill “had” to deny the Griffin quote in 1939; he would have had to deny it in 1936—and any other time. From 1934, he was pushing for collective security against Hitler, his anxious gaze resting first on France, then on Russia, then on America. Why would he at any time in the Thirties have said words which would only encourage American isolation?

Griffin casts the final doubt on his credibility when he claims Churchill said: “You may want to stay out of [the next war], but...you will find yourselves fighting shoulder to shoulder with us.”

Quite a switch for a country Churchill thought should mind her own business. But at least this is one Churchill sentiment we can accept as genuine.

Endnotes

3. Ibid.
6. “The Press: Tacitful William,” Time, 8 May 1939, http://ti.me/iiNxYi. (Henry Luce’s Time, strongly interventionist, added that the isolationists “had hit on a new scheme to keep out of war: stir up bad feeling over the War debts, which nobody could do better than William Griffin.”
11. William Griffin, “When Churchill Said Keep Out!,” Scribner’s Commentator, February 1941, 25-28. Why WSC, at Morpeth Mansions, would send a telegram to Griffin, at the Savoy, is unclear. This article is available from the editor by email.
14. Ibid.
15. Griffin, op. cit., 27.
17. William N. Stokes, Jr. to Senator Robert Reynolds, in Stokes’s letter to WSC, 22 July 1939, CHAR 2/383/12. The inference is that this allegation surfaced in the summer of 1939.
18. Stokes to WSC, 27 September 1939, CHAR 2/383/11. Time (note 6) reported that Reynolds had “introduced a resolution to send William Griffin abroad as a special envoy to remind European nations of their debts.” Reynolds remained an isolationist through 1941, when the Roosevelt Administration backed a pro-FDR senator who succeeded him in Congress.
19. Correspondence, CHAR 2/383/12.
20. John Boland, Secretary, Catholic Truth Society, to WSC, 11 October 1939, CHAR 2/383/15.
27. WSC to Ambassador Lord Halifax, 14 February 1940, CHAR 2/408/77.
Griffin and Churchill: Another View

MICHAEL MCMENAMIN

Churchill’s denial that he ever said the words William Griffin said he did rests on two main suppositions. One is that Griffin was an outspoken isolationist with a motive to manufacture embarrassing quotes by Churchill. The second is that Churchill never believed or said what Griffin claimed.

As a longtime media defense lawyer, it has been my experience that journalists sometimes slant their stories to fit their point of view, political or otherwise. I can’t imagine it was any different in the 1930s. But it has not been my experience that journalists “manufacture” quotes out of thin air to convey precisely the opposite of what their subject has said. So I’m not persuaded that a reputable journalist like Griffin who, despite his strong isolationist views, managed to get Himmler to ban his newspaper, would make up bogus quotes by Churchill. Griffin was not the first nor the last to slant a story or reword a quote to convey his point of view; Churchill was not the first or last politician to claim he was misquoted, even if he wasn’t.

If Churchill said anything even close to what Griffin wrote in 1936, he would have had no choice but to deny it forcefully in August 1939, when war was imminent and his own return to the Cabinet hung in the balance. For those reasons, motivation is a wash. Whatever motive Griffin might have had to slant Churchill’s quotes is easily matched by Churchill’s own motivation to deny it all.

Churchill had to deny the entire quotation. He couldn’t, for example, say, “I never said America should have minded her own business. But, with hindsight, quite a bad number of unintended consequences followed which wouldn’t have if America had stayed out in 1917.”

I think the essential foundation of the disputed quote is the second sentence, i.e., “If [America] hadn’t entered the war, the Allies would have made peace with Germany in the spring of 1917.” Everything which follows in the quote hinges upon this. Most historians agree that Communism in Russia, Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany were all the unfortunate and unintended consequences of the First World War generally. There is no evidence Churchill believed to the contrary. Churchill’s alleged 1936 quote to Griffin pinpoints when these consequences could have been avoided—a negotiated peace in the Spring of 1917 after the Kerensky revolution in Russia and before Germany sent Lenin into that war-weary country to take it out of the war. Other than Griffin’s article, there is evidence that Churchill believed such a peace was possible in the Spring of 1917: in the World Crisis passage quoted in paragraph two of the preceding article: “If the Allies had been left to face the collapse of Russia without being sustained by the intervention of the United States, it seems certain that France could not have survived the year, and the war would have ended in a Peace by negotiation or, in other words, a German victory.”

One of Germany’s “cardinal mistakes,” he adds, was “unrestricted submarine warfare even if it brought the U.S. into the war.” He does not say he favored such a peace. He simply observes what he believes would have happened without U.S. entry.

When Churchill wrote these words, war did not loom so large as in 1936. Churchill had far more reason to say what he did to Griffin in 1936 than he would have in the late Twenties or early Thirties, when the aggression of dictators had yet to appear.

But what would cause Churchill to say this to a stranger who was an American isolationist? Churchill thought it was an off-the-record “private conversation” of a purely “private and confidential character.” He didn’t expect it to come back and bite him in the form of Nazi propaganda on the eve of war. Griffin’s account explains how the two men came to the whole subject: Griffin provocatively raised the issue of Allied war debt to America, one of Churchill’s sore points, and—in his isolationist ignorance—said that if the U.S. hadn’t entered the war “England would probably be ruled from Berlin.” Can anyone imagine Winston Churchill hearing that and remaining silent as to what he thought would have happened without U.S. entry?

Griffin says Churchill replied that he had been “enthusiastic” about U.S. entry and “no one in England was happier” than he at this development. Then follows the disputed quote where Churchill says there would have been a negotiated settlement, much as he did in The World Crisis. In case the historically challenged Griffin didn’t get the point, WSC then added what wouldn’t have happened in Russia, Italy and Germany as a result. Griffin then says the U.S. had learned its lesson and would stay out of the next war. Churchill patiently replied that the U.S. “will be dragged in and you will find yourselves fighting shoulder to shoulder with us in defense of our common democratic institutions.” Almost all of Griffin’s account appears to be consistent with Churchill’s known views on the subjects. With one exception to which I now turn.

I don’t think Churchill began the disputed quote by saying, “America should have minded her own business and stayed out of the World War.” I think this is Griffin’s spin and Churchill doesn’t appear to have said it >>

Mr. McMenamin, FH contributor, novelist, attorney and writer for Reason and other journals, assisted with research but draws a different conclusion.
The Press at Home

Churchill had different approaches to the domestic and foreign press. In Britain, he did not go out of his way with them. The House of Commons was his venue. Some speeches were rebroadcast, or published in the papers—at that time people actually read. Politicians didn’t tend to pursue their agendas with the media, as they do now. Occasionally he gave lengthy if reluctant interviews to single reporters; we published two which he gave as a young man, to Bram Stoker and Herbert Vivian, in FH 144.

By World War II, his attitude had been shaped by the way leading newspapers and the BBC had frustrated him during his “Wilderness Years,” as Martin Gilbert wrote in the official biography, Volume VIII, “Never Despair” (246):

One of those institutions was The Times, which, as he wrote to its proprietor, Colonel J.J. Astor, on July 7th, had in its editorial columns during the previous fifteen years “been a very important adverse factor in the life and strength of the British Empire and Commonwealth.” Churchill went on to explain, in an outburst against the newspaper’s editorial columns which in the end he decided not to send: “Time after time they have thrown their immense weight on the wrong side, and such is their power that they have been able again and again to blow away the head of every front or formation which could be made to keep Britain great and strong. Forgive me if I recall some milestones: India, 1930/31; one-sided disarmament, 1931/35; the Anglo-German Naval Treaty, 1935; preparation for war, 1936/39—always the bias against the effort; Munich (but many were in that too); in latter days Greece; India again, and Egypt. I do not deal with the smaller matters of domestic policies because they are so numerous, and in almost every one of them the whole balance has been tilted against the stable continuity of our life and history. No doubt you will feel all this is very wrong and unkind. I can only tell you that, living my life during all this long period, I have felt a cramping, paralyzing influence at work encouraging the subversive forces and weakening our poor island and its life and power in the world. You may well rejoin that the course of events has proved that the nation does not agree with me. All the same, The Times, apart from personal courtesies, has been a heartbreaking to me and a dire oppression to all the ideas for which I stand.

We are slithering down the drain pretty fast now. Poor old England, with all her sacrifices and all her victories, is sinking to a minor position in the world, but nobody seems to mind, and I have no doubt The Times will write a very good leading article on the advantage and moral dignity of Britain taking a back seat.” These views, Churchill added, came “from the bottom of my heart.”

The Press Abroad

In North America, Churchill fascinated reporters, who followed him around asking questions, often silly ones. (See “From British Cassandra to American Hero,” by Jonathan Sikorsky, FH 108, 30-36). In New York in 1895, after returning from observing the Cuban revolt, he remarked about the Spanish to a reporter from the New York World: “I make no reflections on their courage, but they are well versed in the art of retreat.” He added, “I think that the upshot of it will be that the United States will intervene as a peacemaker.” Three years later, the United States did.

Mostly, Churchill was careful not to get into serious policy discussions with journalists. The press conference seems to have been an American invention, and was strange ground to WSC, although he acquitted himself well when he attended them (pages 22-31).

At the first of these in Washington in December 1941 (page 27), when Roosevelt prodded him to give his audience a better view, Churchill climbed on his chair to be seen better. Although he had some difficulty hearing, his wit charmed everyone. When a reporter asked when he expected we would “lick these fellows,” he needed an interpretation to reply. When he heard a southerner asking if he considered the U.S. entry into World War II one of its “great climacterics,” Churchill answered in his best Texan drawl: “I sho’ do.”

Churchill actually held a press conference of his own in January 1952. A reporter asked if he wasn’t flattered by sell-outs at his speeches: “I always remember that if instead of making a political speech I was being hanged, the crowd would be twice as big.”

Finally, it’s worth a smile to recall his remark on his 75th birthday to the precocious press photographer who said: “I hope, sir, that I will shoot your picture on your 100th birthday.”

WSC replied, “I don’t see why not, young man. You look reasonably fit and healthy.” —RML

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To ignore all the other apparently accurate Churchill quotes from Griffin and conclude that one disputed quote in a long interview is “manufactured” solely because of the first sentence, you also have to conclude that Winston Churchill never contemplated that a negotiated peace in the Spring of 1917 would have spared the world from Communism, Fascism and Nazism, and conversely that Churchill believed we would still have had all three “isms” even with a negotiated peace in Spring 1917. I can’t do that and I don’t think the record supports that.

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CHURCHILL AND GRIFFIN: ANOTHER VIEW...

anywhere else. Moreover, Churchill didn’t have to say this to educate Griffin, as he did, on what he believed would have followed had there been no U.S. entry and a negotiated peace in the Spring of 1917. But misquoting Churchill in one sentence based on what you thought the import of his speculation was is not the same as “manufacturing” the entire and sophisticated counter-speculation which Griffin says Churchill offered. Really, by his own words, it’s clear Griffin wasn’t informed enough to do that.
During the war I was given authority to allow news to be attributed to the Prime Minister or other ministers if I considered it sufficiently important. But during the Blitz, to prevent the enemy from knowing when exactly Parliament was sitting, I was not permitted to divulge that an announcement had been made in Parliament. One example of the latitude given me was in December 1941, when the evening newspaper lunch editions and the 1pm BBC news were allowed to report that the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse, announced in Parliament by Churchill (see “Churchill Proceedings,” FH 141). Incidentally, questions and debates in Parliament provided the only two occasions I can remember when the Prime Minister himself was censored. Twice he accidentally referred to bomb damage to the House of Commons—a rigid censorship “stop”; but the Speaker asked parliamentary journalists not to quote these references and they were taken out of Hansard. Churchill unfortunately never had time to come over to the Ministry of Information and talk to the Press about the war. It is probably not generally realised how much trust was placed in editors during those years.

To enable them to have the correct background to comment on war events—particularly on news broadcast by Germany or by neutral countries giving enemy versions of events, which of course could be freely published in Britain—press conferences were held from time to time at the Ministry. Ministers, Admirals, Generals, Air Marshals and others in authority came over to talk to editors and other Press representatives, providing a true account for their own information, and sometimes also an appreciation of the war situation in various theatres.

The monthly conferences for the editors of provincial journals held by Brendan Bracken, Minister of Information, were particularly popular, because the Press knew that he had been the Prime Minister’s Parliamentary Private Secretary and was his close friend. They regarded information or comment from Bracken as coming “straight from the horse’s mouth.” Much of what he told them was not for publication, but there were always “tit-bits” which could be published, provided the material had been submitted to censorship. To assist editors in not wasting time submitting items which would not pass the censor, an appropriate censorship adviser was always present at these conferences. I personally attended Bracken’s meetings. The adviser’s duty was to read out at the end of the conference all the items mentioned by the speaker which were censorship “stops.”

I well remember how annoyed Churchill was as the result of one of these conferences. It was held by one of our foremost Generals to give editors an appreciation of the North African campaign in 1940-41. The sequel was another proof of the Prime Minister’s complete grasp of the military situation in every theatre of war. The speaker had referred to the likelihood of our attacking Benghazi, adding that the coastal road would not be used. This information was included among the list of “stops” read out by the military adviser to the censorship at the end of the conference. Unfortunately the editor of a national newspaper who had an important engagement could not stay until the end and was thus unaware of the “stop.” He submitted his article that evening before publication, and it was of course referred to the censorship military adviser on duty.

Unfortunately, however, the military adviser did not exercise his usual care—possibly because he knew one of his colleagues had attended the conference the same morning—and allowed this important item of news to pass. Churchill, who somehow found time to read the first editions of the newspapers which appeared soon after midnight, was aghast. What happened to the military adviser is irrelevant to this story, but the Prime Minister was not content with the censorship inquest. He saw the General next day and

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George P. Thomson CB CBE (1887-1965) was chief censor in the World War II Ministry of Information, and later Secretary of the Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry Press Committee. He died the same day as Churchill. Though on friendly terms with both government and media, Thomson was often faced with impatient reporters demanding advance copies of a Churchill speech, which WSC often withheld to the last minute, polishing and correcting. A more serious problem was Churchill’s habit of divulging in a speech news on the “stop” list. This article is excerpted from the Thomson’s “Churchill and the Censorship,” published in Charles Eade, editor, Churchill by His Contemporaries (London: Hutchinson, 1953).
asked him how he could possibly have given information of that kind at a press conference. “These gentlemen of the press,” said Churchill, “were listening carefully to every word you said—all eagerly anxious for a tiny morsel of cheese which they could publish. And you go and give them a whole ruddy Stilton.”

Although the Prime Minister constantly visited areas under heavy air bombardment, we had to include him, for the country’s sake, among the very few VIPs whose movements had censorship protection. The press were forbidden to publish that the King and Queen and Princesses, Queen Mary, the Prime Minister and the heads of Allied States were in a particular place until fifteen minutes after they had left it. Mention of their movements was always banned. The censors, for example, would not pass the statement, “The Prime Minister will visit Portsmouth on Tuesday.”

Similarly a confidential letter was sent to all editors in 1940: “Please do not mention where the Prime Minister’s grandchild was born.” It would have been obvious to the Germans that he was likely to be paying visits to that place.

It was often thought that Churchill and other Ministers flying to the Middle East or other foreign destinations had heavy fighter escort. In fact, over most of the route they had none—secrecy was their defence. Hence it was usually forbidden to say whether Churchill travelled by sea or air. And in 1943 the censors had to “stop!” anything about the kind of plane he used, including the fact that he no longer flew in the Liberator in which his earlier journeys had been made (see “Getting There,” FH 148).

I well remember also when Inspector Walter Thompson, Churchill’s bodyguard, had an accident with a revolver in 1943, and was taken to hospital with leg wounds. The Press were asked not to refer to the mishap. This was on the—to me unintelligible—ground that the nature of the inspector’s duties made it very undesirable to give publicity to the accident. The ban on publicity about the mishap was removed two days later, but I had to ask editors not to refer to the inspector’s duties. I never quite saw the reason for this, as the fact that he was Churchill’s bodyguard had been published previously.

I do not believe there was any secret which I found more difficult to guard than the date and place of a “Big Three” conference. The whole world wanted this information in advance, but nothing was to be published about it until the conference was over. All sorts of pieces of alleged information about it were broadcast from enemy and neutral radio stations, often originating from enemy agents in the hope of confirmation or denial leaking out from London. To make matters more difficult, it was generally known in Fleet Street some days before Churchill left the country that he was going somewhere overseas to confer with President Roosevelt or with the President and Stalin. Indeed it would be announced in Parliament that it was his intention to do so, but not even an approximate date was given. There was, of course, no security reason why the Press should not publish news that the Prime Minister was expected to leave England shortly to confer with President Roosevelt—and this was great news value to the public—so long as there was no mention of the date and place of his departure or of his destination. Nor could we prevent correspondents reporting that he might be going to the United States, Canada or North Africa. The Germans could not possibly take any action on information of that kind.

But I had to be very careful about reports from parliamentary correspondents round about the time he was leaving the country. For if Churchill was not present in Parliament, the report would at once be telegraphed: “It was noted that Mr. Eden answered questions on behalf of the Prime Minister today.” It was necessary to examine these messages very closely. If one of them contained a hint which afterwards proved to be correct, this was regarded as a brilliant scoop. The press sometimes submitted stories about these conferences which were very amusing and produced some cutting comments by Churchill. They did not usually reach the censorship until long after a conference was over, and were probably picked up at a private dinner party.

One of these stories involved a “Big Three” session that had just finished and the principals were leaning back in their chairs. Marshal Stalin leaned over to the Prime Minister and said, through his interpreter, “You know, you’ve said many unknown things about me in your time.” Churchill replied: “Ah, yes, quite true. But you weren’t on our side then.” The Marshal appreciated the point.

If it is asked how the Press got hold of the stories of that sort, the answer is, of course, that the newspapers seem to manage to get hold of anything that is not locked up in a steel safe. Churchill himself did not like that kind of publicity, and I would not have been popular if I had submitted such stories to him for approval. In any event he was too busy to bother reading stories—real or imaginary—about himself. And I was not anxious to add to his burdens.
"All the World’s a Stage":
Churchill and the Theatre

Some critics denounced him as a consummate actor. If so, Churchill’s interests in and respect for the craft began early and were steadfastly maintained throughout his life.

ERICA L. CHENOWETH

laying bricks, raising butterflies and painting landscapes were not Churchill’s only entrancing diversions; none lasted so long as his love affair with the stage—from the music hall to the legitimate theatre.

Some of the greatest writers in the English language have been playwrights, and their fondness for political drama did not escape the young Winston’s keen mind. Churchill knew their scripts. He meditated on sets and blocking while shifting figures on his toy stage, not unlike moving toy soldiers on a battlefield. At a time when political speeches were often delivered in rented theatres, perhaps Churchill already imagined himself on stage. The golden thread of this interest may be picked up and followed through his life’s labyrinth, because it never fades completely, even during the most intractable times.

Churchill evinced his connection with theatre as a young boy, in his autobiography, My Early Life. The book’s second paragraph describes with much excitement the arrival of a “long-looked for afternoon” in Dublin when he was to attend a pantomime. Alas, the performance, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, never occurred, because the gas-lit theatre burned down, consuming the theatre’s manager in the fire.¹

In letters to his mother Churchill, as a schoolboy, reviewed performances he had attended and anticipated seeing more. A January 1888 letter told of an upcoming London performance of Gilbert and Sullivan’s HMS Pinafore. The same letter reported that he had been given a toy theatre.² These popular mini-stages, hand-painted and peopled with small etchings of characters, sold for “a penny plain” or “two pence hand-coloured.” Years later, Churchill would use these same phrases to contrast political colleagues in an article for the Sunday Pictorial.³ His boyhood letters described the arrival of his toy theatre at Harrow in spring 1888⁴ and requested equipment to improve it.⁵

That October, after studying three of Shakespeare’s plays, Winston placed fourth out of twenty-five competitors for the Lower School Shakespeare prize.⁶ Two years later, on 27 June 1890, the esteemed Shakespearean acting duo, Ellen Terry and Henry Irving, performed a rare and interesting stage-reading of Macbeth in the Speech Room at Harrow. The Harrovian reported that they “fitted up the stage so artistically with a temporary green-room, a back-

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ground, foot and headlights, and surrounded it all with such a forest of palms and plants, that we hardly recognized the place.” Sixteen years later, Ellen Terry would write Churchill, asking him to support the establishment of a permanent memorial to Sir Henry Irving.  

Shakespeare moved him. “There is no English author,” Darrell Holley wrote, “whom Churchill alludes to as often as to William Shakespeare.” Throughout his life WSC would burst into the Bard’s verses, which he knew so well that he often recited them without attribution, assuming his listeners or readers knew them as well. In his memories of 1939, after becoming First Lord of the Admiralty for the second time in twenty-five years, he invoked Richard II:

“For God’s sake let us sit upon the ground And tell sad stories of the death of kings.”

In the north tower above the Speech Room at Harrow is a room accessible only by an iron ladder and trap door, where Winston once learned mathematics from House Master C.H.P. Mayo. During his last year at Harrow, Churchill wrote his first and only published play on the inconveniences of this room. In his four-act drama, a humorous tone artfully pervades the dialogue, revealing the stark truth that the space where the boys were expected to learn algebra was woefully inadequate (as if learning algebra were not difficult enough already). The characters, though short-lived, are lively, and Churchill endows them with colorful accents and even nicknames like “long-haired Mozartish boy,” who is afterward listed in the script as “L.H.M. Boy.” While in the end all of the boys break their necks attempting to climb down as the organ booms loudly, the script shows that many of the traits for which Churchill was later known manifested themselves at an early age, not the least of which was to treat weighty subjects with a light touch. (His script appears overleaf.)

From Sandhurst, Churchill enjoyed trips to the London theatre with fellow cadets. In a letter to his mother in April 1894, he lamented being unable to stand “two Sundays running at this place,” and told of his plans to visit the Empire Theatre of Varieties in Leicester Square.

So began his association with a theatre soon to be at the center of a cacophonous nationwide debate over the requirements of virtue and the advisability of government regulation. This is also where his true “maiden speech” was belted out, over the rubble of barriers torn down in outrage, which had been erected on the promenade to comply with the new demands of the London County Council: “Ladies of the Empire! I stand for Liberty!”

A lecturer and social reformer, the aptly named Laura Ormiston Chant, had testified in October 1894 before the Council’s Theatres and Music Halls Committee, urging it to deny what was ordinarily a routine request for renewal of the Empire Theatre’s license. Churchill describes his effort over several weeks, working against the notorious “Prudes on the Prowl,” in a half-chapter of My Early Life. He wrote how he hurried to London to support the work of “The Entertainments Protection League,” organized by the writer of a letter to the editor of the Daily Telegraph. Although an organization under that name was active in Britain by the 1930s, the pages of the Telegraph that autumn record only a letter to the editor recommending the creation of a “Public Amusements Protection Society,” whose author signed himself “Facta non verba.”

Churchill presented this youthful escapade as a missed opportunity to marshal public opinion against the interference of the state in the “social habits of law-abiding persons” in such a way as to make it “so vigilant throughout the English-speaking world....that the mighty United States themselves might have been saved from the Prohibition!” Controversies about licensing theatres and censoring plays persisted, and Churchill’s correspondence between 1906 and 1911 includes letters from colleagues, playwrights, and the esteemed Shavian actor Harley Granville Baker.

Years later, in March 1941, Churchill wrote Harry Crookshank, financial secretary to the Treasury, to express his displeasure at Crookshank’s unwillingness to allow theatres to open on Sundays. His interest in the stage was as powerful as ever. In April 1942, he wrote to Noel Coward, thanking him for a copy of his play Blithe Spirit. Alan Hodge, assistant private secretary to the Minister of Information, wrote Churchill in 1942 about a request for him to star in a play. The London revival of Terence Rattigan’s plays in 2011 reminds us that Churchill ventured to the theatre in January 1943, when Rattigan was an RAF Flying Officer, to view his play Flare Path at the Apollo Theatre. The prime minister greeted the cast after the performance, describing the play as a “masterpiece of understatement.”

Churchill’s friendly or amusing conversations with actors and playwrights, from George Bernard Shaw and Charlie Chaplin to the dressing room of Richard Burton, are well-known. Yet a recent discovery by Allen Packwood, director of the Churchill Archives Centre at Churchill College, Cambridge, has discredited a celebrated story. The famous exchange suggests that Shaw thought Churchill had few friends, while Churchill doubted Shaw’s play would survive opening night. (See “Datelines,” page 7.)

But in September 1949, a Mr. Tatham wrote to George Bernard Shaw seeking permission to publish the humorous anecdote—and received a hot reply: “The above is not only a flat lie but a political libel which may possibly damage me. Publish it at your peril, whether in assertion or contradiction.” Tatham then wrote Churchill, and received a confirming reply from his secretary, Elizabeth Gilliatt: “He considers Mr. Bernard Shaw is quite right in calling the incident to which you refer ‘a flat lie.’” Unfortunately the story must now be put by the wayside. >>
CHURCHILL AND THE THEATRE…. Churchill excelled at drawing on the rich writings of playwrights to infuse his own books with depth and resonance. In The River War he included direct quotations from five Shakespeare plays and alluded to them in his singing lines of prose. The scholar Paul Alkon likens Churchill’s descriptive imagery in his only novel, Savrola, to “pictures of a stage set framed by a proscenium arch,” noticing that “scenes are described in ways…akin to manipulation of lighting on stage during a play.”

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A Glimpse into the Future

A Drama in Four Acts by Winston S. Churchill Harrow, 17 December 1892

SCENE.—Interior of lofty pinnacle, recently converted into a class room. From below are heard sundry discordant noises suggestive of “Spring cleaning,” and sounds of a violent altercation between the lady conducting the cleaning arrangements and her son. Above, a Master is endeavouring to instruct a Form in Algebra.

I. Above. Master (faintly): “Now, if we square both sides, the equation becomes—”

1st Voice: “Please, sir, can we have a window open?”
M.: “I’m afraid you can’t.”
2nd Voice: “Please, sir, can we have some more light?”
M.: “I’m afraid you can’t.”
3rd Voice: “Please, sir, can I have a desk to write upon?”
M.: “I’m afraid you can’t.”
Gruff Voice from below: “D’you want th’ book, sir?”
M.: “I am afraid we have no room for it up here.”

H.S. (scornfully): “oo’s a-makin’ a noise, I should like to know?”

[Dispute interrupted by entrance of a long-haired Mozartish boy, with an engineer.]

L.H.M. Boy: “Oh, Muggins, if you will start the blowing engine, I will play for an hour or so.”
Engineer: “All right, sir.”

[Sounds as of a steam engine getting to work, followed by the resonant tones of the organ playing a jerky chant.]

III. Above.
All the Voices: “Please, sir, can we go down and stop them playing the organ, sir?”
M.: “I am afraid you can’t.”
All Voices (decidedly): “Then we can’t work.”
M. (desperately): “I’m afraid you can’t.”

[Exeunt down the “stairs” to break their necks.]

IV. Below.
The organ continues playing.

Curtain. ¶
In the preface to his book of character sketches, *Great Contemporaries*, Churchill promises to present to the reader “not only the actors but the scene.” In that book’s account of Boris Savinkov, the anti-Bolshevik revolutionary, Churchill relates his first impression: “I had never seen a Russian Nihilist except on the stage, and my first impression was that he was singularly well cast for the part.”

From first to last in *Great Contemporaries*, theatrical metaphors abound: new lights are cast on events and “throw[n] from various angles”; there are “strangely-lighted episodes”; there are “glittering lights” and “unnatural lights.” In an essay on Kipling we find the “light of genius” and “light unexpected” illuminating human actions. And Churchill’s reader is invited to “observe how swiftly Fortune can change the scene and switch on the lights!”

He remarks of Shaw’s play *Major Barbara*, to a revival of which he took his children:

Twenty years had passed since I had seen it. They were the most terrific twenty years the world has known. Almost every human institution had undergone decisive change. The land-

marks of centuries had been swept away. Science has transformed the conditions of our lives and the aspect of town and country. Silent social evolution, violent political change, a vast broadening of the social foundations, an immeasurable release from convention and restraint, a profound reshaping of national and individual opinion, have followed the trampling march of this tremendous epoch. But in “Major Barbara” there was not a character requiring to be re-drawn, not a sentence nor a suggestion that was out of date. My children were astounded to learn that this play, the very acme of modernity, was written more than five years before they were born.

Churchill described the shedding of light on the world stage when he wrote in *Great Contemporaries* of Arthur Balfour’s death. “...I felt also the tragedy which robs the world of all the wisdom and treasure gathered in a great man’s life and experience, and hands the lamp to some impetuous and untutored stripling, or lets it fall shivered into fragments upon the ground.” Finally, on the death of the Earl of Rosebery, Churchill summoned the power of a theatrical metaphor once more: “The curtain is pulled down and the gleaming lights extinguished—and now, alas, extinguished for ever.”

**Endnotes**

2. Chartwell Papers (hereinafter CHAR), Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge University, CHAR 28/14/5/6A-56.
4. CHAR 28/15/4-5.
5. CHAR 28/14/59.
8. CHAR 2/27/69.
12. “Correspondence,” *The Harrovian*, 5:9, 112.
13. CHAR 28/20/15.
20. CHAR 20/21B/177.
21. CHAR 20/53C/208.
22. CHAR 2/442.
25. CHUR 2/165/66, 68.
29. Ibid., 125.
30. Ibid., 9, 23, 203, 382.
32. *Great Contemporaries*, 84.
33. Ibid., 51.
34. Ibid., 257.
35. Ibid., 28.
Leading Churchill Myths:
"Churchill’s campaign against the ‘feeble-minded’
was deliberately omitted by his biographers"

MARTIN GILBERT

Randolph Churchill has been accused of deliberately
omitting from his narrative and companion volumes
of the official biography—because he was ashamed of
it—a letter from Churchill to Asquith, written in December
1910, stating that “The unnatural and increasingly rapid
growth of the Feeble-Minded and Insane classes, coupled as
it is with a steady restriction among all the thrifty, energetic
and superior stocks, constitutes a national and race danger
which it is impossible to exaggerate.”

I can state without fear of contradiction that
Randolph never saw this letter, of which there was no copy
in the Churchill papers. Here is the story of that letter, and
its context.

“The improvement of the British breed is my aim in
life,” Winston Churchill wrote to his cousin Ivor Guest on
19 January 1899, shortly after his twenty-fifth birthday.
Churchill’s view was reinforced by his experiences as a
young British officer serving and fighting in Arab and
Muslim lands, and in South Africa. Like most of his con-
temporaries, family and friends, he regarded races as
different, racial characteristics as signs of the maturity of a
society, and racial purity as endangered not only by other
races but by mental weaknesses within a race. As a young
politician in Britain entering Parliament in 1901, Churchill
saw what were then known as the “feeble-minded” and the
“insane” as a threat to the prosperity, vigour and virility of
British society.

The phrase “feeble-minded” was to be defined as
part of the Mental Deficiency Act 1913, of which Churchill
had been one of the early drafters. The Act defined four
grades of “Mental Defective” who could be confined for
life, whose symptoms had to be present “from birth or from
an early age.” “Idiots” were defined as people “so deeply
defective in mind as to be unable to guard against common
physical dangers.” “Imbeciles” were not idiots, but were
“incapable of managing themselves or their affairs, or, in the
case of children, of being taught to do so.” The “feeble-
minded” were neither idiots nor imbeciles, but, if adults,
their condition was “so pronounced that they require care,
supervision, and control for their own protection or the
protection of others.” If they were children of school age,
their condition was “so pronounced that they by reason of
such defectiveness appear to be personally incapable of
receiving proper benefit from instruction in ordinary
schools.” “Moral defectives” were people who, from an early
age, displayed “some permanent mental defect coupled with
strong vicious or criminal propensities on which punish-
ment had little or no effect.”

In 1904, as Churchill was crossing from the
Conservative to the Liberal benches, A.J. Balfour’s
Conservative government set up a Royal Commission “On
the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded.” When the
commission reported in 1908 to the Liberal Government
which had come into office at the end of 1905, and of
which Churchill was a cabinet minister—it recommended
compulsory detention of the mentally “inadequate,” as well
as sterilisation of the “unfit,” so that it would be impossible
to have children and thus perpetuate what were then seen as
inherited characteristics. Until that time only the criminally
insane, whom the courts had judged to be a danger to

“The unnatural and increasingly rapid growth of the Feeble-Minded and Insane classes,
coupled as it is with a steady restriction among all the thrifty, energetic and superior stocks,
constitutes a national and race danger which it is impossible to exaggerate.” —WSC, 1910

Sir Martin succeeded Randolph Churchill as the official biographer of Sir Winston Churchill, and has been a contributor to Finest Hour for thirty years. See also Paul Addison, “Churchill and the Sterilisation Issue,” Finest Hour 131, Summer 2006, pages 22-23.
themselves and others, were sent to mental asylums. Detention of the “feeble-minded”—for life—was considered by the Royal Commission to be vital to the health of the wider society.

Such detention, as well as sterilisation, were at that time the two main “cures” to “feeble-mindedness.” They were put forward by the eugenicists, those who believed in “the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species or a human population by such means as discouraging reproduction by persons having genetic defects or presumed to have inheritable undesirable traits (negative eugenics) or encouraging reproduction by persons presumed to have inheritable desirable traits (positive eugenics).”

In introducing its recommendations in 1908, the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded—one of whose eight members was the chairman of the eugenics-influenced National Association for Promoting the Welfare of the Feeble-Minded—expressed its concern about “the numbers of mentally defective persons” in Britain “whose training is neglected, over whom no sufficient control is exercised and whose wayward and irresponsible lives are productive of crime and misery…and of much continuous expenditure wasteful to the community.” The Royal Commission suggested that permanent institutional care was the means to establish control over the feeble-minded. It also advocated the establishment of industrial “colonies” with schools.

Churchill shared the Royal Commission’s fears and supported its recommendations. The improvement of the health and well-being of the British race was a central aspect of his political and social outlook. As President of the Board of Trade, while advancing important measures of social reform, he had seen widespread poverty and demoralisation throughout Britain. In 1910, on becoming Home Secretary, he read a booklet by Dr. H.C. Sharp, *The Sterilization of Degenerates*. Dr. Sharp was a member of the Indiana Reformatory. In 1907, the state of Indiana had passed a Eugenics Law making sterilisation mandatory for those individuals in state custody who were judged mentally unfit. They were also refused the right to marry. Other states passed similar laws. Between 1907 and 1981, more than 65,000 individuals were forcibly sterilized in the United States.

Using a thick blue pencil, Churchill marked in Sharp’s pamphlet the sections about the Indiana legislation and the operations that had been carried out on both men and women to sterilise them. In September 1910, Churchill wrote to his Home Office officials asking them to investigate putting into practice the “Indiana Law”—dominated by sterilisation, and the prevention of the marriage of the “Feeble-Minded.” Churchill wrote: “I am drawn to this subject in spite of many Parliamentary misgivings….Of course it is bound to come some day.” Despite the misgivings, “It must be examined.” He wanted to know “what is the best surgical operation?” and what new legal powers would be needed to carry out sterilisation.

Churchill was answered by Chief Medical Adviser of Prisons Dr. Horatio Donkin, who described the Indiana laws as “The outcome of an arrogation of scientific knowledge by those who had no claim to it….It is a monument of ignorance and hopeless mental confusion.”

In October 1910 a deputation to the Government called for the implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations without delay. Churchill, in his reply, recalled the fact that there were at least 120,000 “feeble-minded” persons “at large in our midst” who deserved “all that could be done for them by a Christian and scientific civilization now that they are in the world,” but who should, if possible, be “segregated under proper conditions so that their curse died with them and was not transmitted to future generations.”

Churchill had not given up his belief in sterilisation as well as segregation. On studying the case of Alfred Oxtoby, who had been convicted in June 1910 of bestiality and of indecently assaulting a 12-year-old girl—and who had been described by the local police in the East Riding of Yorkshire as mentally inadequate and “over-sexed”—Churchill wrote to his advisers: “This seems to be a case where a complete cure might be at once effected by sterilisation.” Churchill went on to ask: “Can this ever be done by consent?” In reply, Donkin wrote that sterilisation would not in fact remove Oxtoby’s sexual drive, and that he was too insane to give informed consent. Oxtoby was sent to Broadmoor criminal lunacy asylum. Churchill asked that his case be kept under review at the Home Office in the hope that sterilisation would become possible in the near future.

With Dr. Sharp’s pamphlet and the Oxtoby case much in mind, Churchill decided to take the initiative with regard to the implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations. He wrote to the Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, in December 1910, about the “multiplication of the unfit” that constituted “a very terrible danger to the race.” Until the public accepted the need for sterilisation, Churchill argued, the “feeble-minded” would have to be kept in custodial care, segregated both from the world and the opposite sex.

Concerned by the high cost of forced segregation, Churchill preferred compulsory sterilisation to confinement, describing sterilisation as a “simple surgical operation” so that inferior persons “could be permitted to live freely in the world without causing much inconvenience to others.” Churchill added that he was certain that one day the “acquiescence” of the feeble-minded in a sterilising operation would enable a large number of them to regain their liberty.

Churchill’s letter to Asquith showed how much he >>
regarded British racial health as an urgent issue. As he wrote to the Prime Minister: “I feel that the source from which >> the stream of madness is fed should be cut off and sealed up before another year has passed.”

To reinforce his sense of urgency, Churchill circulated to his Cabinet colleagues the text of a lecture by Dr. A.F. Treadgold, one of the expert advisers to the Royal Commission. It was entitled “The Feeble-Minded: A Social Danger.” Written in 1909, the lecture gave, in the words of Churchill’s covering note, “a concise, and, I am afraid not exaggerated statement of the serious problems to be faced.” Churchill added: “The Government is pledged to legislation, and a Bill is being drafted to carry out the recommendations of the Royal Commission.”

In February 1911, Churchill spoke in the House of Commons about the need to introduce compulsory labour camps for “mental defectives.” As for “tramps and wastrels,” he said, “there ought to be proper Labour Colonies where they could be sent for considerable periods and made to realize their duty to the State.” Convicted criminals would be sent to these labour colonies if they were judged “feeble-minded” on medical grounds. It was estimated that some 20,000 convicted criminals would be included in this plan. To his Home Office advisers, with whom he was then drafting what would later become the Mental Deficiency Bill, Churchill proposed that anyone who was convicted of any second criminal offence could, on the direction of the Home Secretary, be officially declared criminally “feeble-minded,” and made to undergo a medical enquiry. If the enquiry endorsed the declaration of “feeble-mindedness,” the person could then be detained in a labour colony for as long as was considered a suitable period.

No legislation was introduced along these lines while Churchill was at the Home Office. In October 1911 he was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, with new concerns and new responsibilities. On 17 May 1912, while he was at the Admiralty, a Private Members’ Bill was introduced in the Commons entitled the “Feeble-Minded Control Bill,” calling for implementation of the Royal Commission’s conclusions. Hundreds of petitions were sent to Parliament in support. The Committee to further the Bill was headed by the two Anglican primates, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. H.G. Wells was a supporter, while G.K. Chesterton led a public campaign against the Bill. Dean Inge, the Dean of St Paul’s, complained that eugenics was so logical it was only opposed by “irrationalist prophets like Mr. Chesterton.” In his public lectures and published articles Chesterton ridiculed what he called “the Feeble-Minded Bill.”

The Feeble-Minded Control Bill rejected compulsory sterilisation but made it a punishable misdemeanour to marry or attempt to marry a mental defective, or to solemnise, procure or connive at such a marriage. It provided for registration and segregation. And it gave the Home Secretary the power to commit any person who fell outside the definition of feeble-mindedness but whose circumstances appeared to warrant his inclusion.

On its first reading, the Bill had only thirty-eight opponents. But the Liberal newspapers opposed it vigorously, and Josiah Wedgwood, a Liberal Member of Parliament, described it as a “monstrous violation” of individual rights. Roman Catholic leaders denounced it as “contrary to Christian morals and elementary human rights.” When Wedgwood spoke in the House of Commons against it, he called it “legislation for the sake of a scientific creed which in ten years may be discredited.”

The Private Members’ Bill was withdrawn, but the Liberal Government, conscious of the strength of public feeling in favour of a measure based on the Royal Commission’s conclusions, decided to introduce its own “Mental Deficiency Bill” for the compulsory detention of the “feeble-minded.” This Government Bill was introduced to Parliament on 10 June 1912. In urging the passage of the new Bill, Churchill’s successor as Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna said: “I commend it to the House in the confident assurance that if it is passed into law we shall be taking a great step towards removing one of the worst evils in our time.” In his summing up, Josiah Wedgwood said: “I urge that the Government should, if this legislation goes through, see that all the homes in which defectives are looked after are homes run by the Government, and not for private profit, where the inspection is of the best and where the treatment is of the very highest character, and that the earliest possible term should be set to this licensing of private homes where private profit is likely to be the main cause of the existence of the home, and where, to a large extent, employment will be carried on under extremely undesirable conditions by people who are absolutely unable to protect themselves.”

Between 24 and 30 July 1912, a month after the Second Reading of the Mental Deficiency Bill in Parliament, the first international Eugenics Conference was held in London, attended by 400 delegates. Churchill was a Vice-President of the Congress; Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, was one of its directors, as was Charles Eliot, a former President of Harvard, and the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, Sir William Osler. The Canadian-born Osler, who had been created a baronet the previous year, was one of the world’s most prominent practitioners of clinical medicine.

The Congress opened with a reception and a banquet that was addressed by former Prime Minister A.J. Balfour. A programme of entertainment was provided by a committee headed by the Duchess of Marlborough (the American heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt, wife of Churchill’s cousin the Ninth Duke of Marlborough). Churchill did not attend.
The Congress on Eugenics led to renewed public pressure for Britain to adopt eugenics laws. In October 1912, Churchill discussed the proposed laws with Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, who wrote in his diary:

Winston is also a strong eugenist. He told us he had himself drafted the Bill which is to give power of shutting up people of weak intellect and so prevent their breeding. He thought it might be arranged to sterilize them. It was possible by the use of Roentgen rays, both for men and women, though for women some operation might also be necessary. He thought that if shut up with no prospect of release without it many would ask to be sterilized as a condition of having their liberty restored. He went on to say that the mentally deficient were as much more prolific than those normally constituted as eight to five. Without something of the sort the race must decay. It was rapidly decaying, but could be stopped by such means.12

The views of eugenists were much influenced by the American psychologist Henry H. Goddard, who asserted that “feeble-mindedness” was a hereditary trait, almost certainly caused by a single recessive gene. His view was widely spread in 1912 with the publication of his book, The Kallikat Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness, about those in the general population who carried the recessive trait despite outward appearances of normality. Goddard, the creator of the term “moron,” was director of the Vineland (New Jersey) Training School, originally the Vineland Training School for Backward and Feeble-minded Children. In his book, Goddard recommended segregating the “feeble minded” in institutions like his own, where they would be taught various forms of menial labour.13

The Mental Deficiency Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons in 1913, with only three votes against it. The new law rejected sterilisation, which Churchill had earlier advocated, in favour of confinement. On 16 November 1914, in describing the working of the Act during the previous year, Reginald McKenna told the House of Commons:

Institutions and homes provided by religious and philanthropic associations, and by individuals, have come forward in considerable numbers, and the Board has certified or >>

Like most educated people of the time, Churchill was much impressed by the theory of eugenics: the belief that heredity was far more important than environment in determining the physical and mental qualities of the population, and the eugenics movement enjoyed a considerable vogue between the turn of the 20th century and the First World War.

“Churchill’s intentions were benign, but he was blundering into sensitive areas of civil liberty. Yet it is rare to discover in the archives the reflections of a politician on the nature of man. Churchill’s belief in the innate virtue of the great majority of human beings was part and parcel of an optimism he often expressed before the First World War.

“In his view, sterilisation was a libertarian measure intended to free the unfortunate from incarceration. But Churchill’s optimism was tempered, it seems, by a fear of national decline which he expressed, for the first and only time, in his December 1910 letter to Asquith.”

—Paul Addison, Churchill on the Home Front
CHURCHILL AND EUGENICS....
approved of thirty-one of them, making provision for 2533 cases. In addition to these there are the nine hospitals and institutions formerly registered under the Idiots Act which have become certified institutions or houses under the Mental Deficiency Act, and continue to provide accommodation for many hundreds of defectives. Nine local authorities have entered into contracts with one or other of these institutions for the reception of defectives from their area; five of these contracts cover a number exceeding eighty, and in the remaining four the numbers to be received are not specified.14

The concept of hereditary mental illness that could be halted by sterilisation remained widespread for many years. In the United States in 1927, in the case of Buck versus Bell, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, then in his twenty-fifth year on the Supreme Court, closed the 8-1 majority opinion upholding the sterilisation of Carrie Buck—who along with her mother and daughter had been labelled “feeble-minded”—with six words: “Three generations of imbeciles are enough.”

In 1928 the Canadian Province of Alberta passed the Sexual Sterilization Act, enabling the provincial government to perform involuntary sterilisations on individuals classified as “mentally deficient.” In order to implement the 1928 act, a four-person Alberta Eugenics Board was created to approve sterilisation procedures. In 1972, the Sexual Sterilization Act was repealed, and the Eugenics Board dismantled. During the forty-three years of the Eugenics Board, 2832 sterilisation procedures were performed.15

Britain never legislated for sterilisation or carried it out. Detention in institutions was the chosen path since the Mental Deficiency Act 1913. That act continued in force for almost half a century. The 1959 Mental Health Act, introduced by Harold Macmillan’s Conservative Government, was described in its preamble as “An Act to repeal the Lunacy and Mental Treatment Acts 1890 to 1930, and the Mental Deficiency Acts 1913 to 1938, and to make fresh provision with respect to the treatment and care of mentally disordered persons and with respect to their property and affairs; and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid.”16

A year later, the Mental Health (Scotland) Act repealed the Lunacy (Scotland) Acts 1857 to 1913, and the Mental Deficiency (Scotland) Acts, 1913 to 1940, “to make fresh provision with respect to the reception, care and treatment of persons suffering, or appearing to be suffering, from mental disorder, and with respect to their property and affairs; and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid.”17

Even at the height of eugenics’ popularity, detention and not sterilisation had been the chosen legislative path in Britain, from 1913 until 1959. With the advances in medical science and medical ethics, fewer and fewer categories of “persons suffering…from mental disorder” were considered needy of detention. Causes such as food and nutritional deficiency, poverty and deprivation, abuse and neglect were identified as among the reasons—and early diagnosis, medication, therapy, community care and family support systems as the methods of treatment—of what was considered, at the time of Churchill’s support for eugenics before the First World War, as hereditary “feeble-mindedness” without a cure. #

Endnotes

1. The text of the Medical Deficiency Act 1913 was published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), 16 November 1912, 1397-99.
4. Sterilisations were halted in Indiana in 1909 by Governor Thomas R. Marshall, but it was not until 1921 that the Indiana Supreme Court ruled that the 1907 law was unconstitutional, as it was a denial of due process under the 14th Amendment. A 1927 law provided for appeals in the courts. In all, approximately 2500 people were sterilised while in state custody. Governor Otis R. Bowen approved repeal of all sterilisation laws in 1974. By 1977 the related restrictive marriage laws were repealed.
5. Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have at different times used sterilisation for the mentally ill. The number of sterilisations in Sweden alone was 62,000. The most notorious sterilisation legislation was promulgated in Nazi Germany in July 1933, under which more than 150,000 Germans, including many children and babies judged “mentally unfit,” were sterilised. An equal number were killed by gas or lethal injection between 1933 and 1940.
6. Home Office papers, 144/1098/197900.
8. Asquith papers, MS 12, folios 224-8.
11. Hansom, Parliamentary Debates, 10 June 1912.
15. The Alberta Sexual Sterilisation Act was disproportionately applied to those in socially vulnerable positions, including women, children, the unemployed, domestic help, rural citizens, the unmarried, people in institutions, Roman and Greek Catholics, and people of Ukrainian, Native and Métis ethnicity.

FINEST HOUR 182/48
Books, Arts & Curiosities

Cover Story: Painting at Lake Como, 1945

MINNIE CHURCHILL

“Como Lakeside” by Churchill and Alexander, in the positions they are now hung at Chartwell.

O
n September 2nd, 1945, tired and disappointed after having lost the election, Winston Churchill and his daughter Sarah left England to holiday at a house on the shores of Lake Como, which had been found for him by his friend Field Marshal Alexander, the wartime hero. Sarah Churchill, in her wonderful little book A Thread in the Tapestry, writes in a letter to her mother that when Alex came to visit Winston, they talked painting most of the time:

Last night I heard them wandering around the house theoretically touching up the positively frightful pictures there and Papa saying, “Now come here, Alex, come here, now really look at this, we really paint better than the bastard who painted this one.” I really think he is over it [the election], it is hard to tell, but he said last night: “Every day I stay here without news, without worry I realize more and more that it may very well be what your mother said, a blessing in disguise. The war is over, it is won and they have lifted the hideous after-math from my shoulders, I am what I never thought I would be until I reached my grave ‘sans soucis et sans regrets.’” The only thing he misses is you....

There were, indeed, some perfectly frightful pictures in the house, and one above all he sat and stared at every evening. It was of a stagnant murky pool and reflected funereal shrubbery, two sombre fir trees blotting out much of the sky which looked reminiscent of a London fog, and peering biliously between the trees was a pale and sickly sun. That picture became the butt and focus of Alex and my father the evening they were together.

After Alex had left, Papa was sitting staring as usual at the offending picture, when suddenly turning to us he said: “We are all agreed, are we not, that this is the worst picture that has ever been painted?” We murmured assent. “It takes the palm, the prize for bad pictures; you must say it’s offensive?” Again we nodded our assent. In a twinkling of an eye the picture was off the wall, was prised out of its frame and was being carried triumphantly up to the bathroom, which was being used as a studio, to be doctored. Charles groaned: “He oughtn’t to do it, he oughtn’t to do it.” “Oughtn’t he?” I asked. “No,” said Charles, “but you won’t stop him,” and taking up the banner of passive resistance, went off to bed.

I leapt upstairs where Father was squeezing great daubs of vivid colour, the two boys sat on the edge of the bath goggle-eyed, I delivered my lecture: “You really mustn’t,” I said. As the first vivid red hit the gloomy canvas my voice trailed away, suddenly beautiful flaming azaleas appeared on the dingy shrubbery; the dingy firs were given back the new green of their youth, the pallid sun instead of trying to break through the fog with fitful gleam sank in a splurge of glory, and the fog as if by magic disappeared, and the happiest of blue skies smiled down on the whole scene which had been caught by the hitherto stagnant, repellent pool, now a kaleidoscope of reflections. It was breathtaking, it was enchanting, it was lovely. The whole thing accomplished and back in its frame and back on the wall inside half an hour, we sat and admired it for two hours, exhausted but satisfied by this act of “artistic rape” as my father called it.

Early next morning, one by one we tiptoed down to have a look. What would the morning light reveal? Well do you know, it was still lovely, it glowed brazenly like a bird of paradise and we were all heart-broken when it was once more carried upstairs to have its face washed. It now hangs back on the wall, stagnant and gloomy as before.*

Churchill and Alexander did, in fact, spend a day painting together, seated side by side, Winston on the left and Alex on the right. The painting by Winston was “Lakeside Scene, Lake Como” (Coombs 383). The two friends had, in many ways, the same style, >>


Mrs. Churchill founded Churchill Heritage Ltd., which manages the publication of Sir Winston’s paintings, and is co-author with David Coombs of Sir Winston Churchill: His Life and His Paintings (2004).
**COVERAGE STORY...**

though Alex said Winston used all the colours on his palette.

This was the first time Winston was able to relax, the burden of war vanished, the pleasure of painting engulfing him, his cares slipping away. In his own words in a letter to his daughter Mary, with loving wishes for her twenty-third birthday, he wrote: “Here it is sunshine and calm. I paint all day and every day and have banished care and disillusionment to the shades. Alex came and painted too. He is very good.”

Recently, my son Jack, who has a great interest in art, noticed that the Alexander painting of the Como Lakeside scene was coming up for sale at Christies. I was away at the time, so I asked him to bid for the picture on my behalf. We were successful! On my return I was amazed to find how beautiful Alexander’s picture was, and I was fascinated with its historical importance. A note written on its reverse reads: “Painted with Winston Churchill September 1945.”

Sir Winston’s original of “Como Lakeside,” owned by The National Trust, is displayed beautifully at Chartwell. I enquired if they might like to have the Alexander painting to reunite the two pictures and display them together. They were thrilled, and the paintings now hang side by side. Admiring them, one can easily imagine, from where one stands, these two friends painting together, in the aftermath of the greatest war in history.

There is a final postscript to this story. When the pictures were first hung together, the Alexander picture was on the left, the Churchill painting on the right, but one could see from the scene that they should be the other way round, I mentioned this to the National Trust and they are now displayed the right way round. 

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**Reviews: Some Events are Worth the Retelling...**

**CHRISTOPHER H. STERLING**

**Getting the PM Through**

*Flying the Secret Sky*, produced by William VanDerKloot. DVD video, 74 minutes, color and black and white. VanDerKloot Film & Television, Inc., $24.95, Amazon $22.49.

Here is a gripping and fascinating program (attested to by my wife’s watching the whole thing, though aviation is not her thing). It’s the story of Ferry Command pilots and crew who flew vital aircraft missions from Canada to Britain in 1940-45 (see FH 148). And as the film makes clear, flying the North Atlantic was anything but routine back in the early 1940s.

William VanDerKloot wrote, produced and directed this film. His father (also named William, who spelled his last name without capitals) piloted the four-engine converted B-24 bomber Commando for two important 1942-43 flights carrying Churchill far from London. That tale forms an 18-minute segment of the longer story, making clear the chances Churchill took flying in aircraft designed for different situations. Carrying Churchill and his ever-present bodyguard, Walter Thompson, to such places as Casablanca, Cairo, Teheran and Moscow was an exhilarating and exacting task. While the Churchill flights were closely-held secrets, the fliers were widely feted for their efforts afterward.

Making effective use of interviews with crews and surviving pilots (including financier Kirk Kirkorian) and melding period color and black and white film with some modern animation, the viewer is taken back to days when flying the Atlantic (and then being ferried back to Canada, only to do it over again) was, sadly, too often a fatal process. But getting the desperately-needed passengers to Britain was so important that civilian airline crew (only those with sufficient long-distance experience) were hired at high salaries in 1940 to do the job. The Royal Air Force eventually took over the operation, its pilots working side by side with the better-paid civilians, to fly the planes across. Theirs was generally an unsung effort, flying unarmed planes in all weather conditions. Some 500 crew members lost their lives in the process.

FH readers will enjoy this video, and especially the Churchill portions of the film. But don’t skip over the rest, for the story is exceedingly well told. 

**Amidst the Social Whirl**


Mary Lovell is an accomplished biographer with well-received books on the storied Mitford girls (*The Sisters*) and flier Beryl Markham (*Straight on Till Morning*) to her credit. In her latest book, she takes on the
already well-trod story of the Churchills, chiefly Winston and his family, and the social blur that surrounded them: the lives and loves in Churchill’s time.

Lovell begins with John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough, and his Duchess Sarah in the late 17th century. Then she describes a whole cast of characters, reading like “the begats” in Genesis. Despite festoons of footnotes, it’s hard to tell the giddy social butterflies apart or weekend house parties from another. This is almost a “prequel,” perhaps added for perspective.

Next we jump to Randolph and Jennie, largely skipping those apparently uninteresting Churchills over the intervening 150 years. Winston is born in chapter 3 and the rest of the book uses his life as an organizing theme around which others circulate: Clementine, the births of Diana and Randolph. Lovell draws on WSC’s writings and diaries and papers of family, friends and colleagues, skillfully melding the resulting patchwork quilt of relationships.

The Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII), for example, is at the center of a hive of gossip about who is bedding whom. It appears that many of his upper class circle were more concerned about social rank and who was “in” than anything very serious. Too many aristocrats of both sexes come across as vacuous and uninteresting.

The Great War is the watershed when, fortunately, the cast of characters becomes more nuanced and interesting. Adding considerable glue to the story, Lovell follows important characters throughout their lives. Here is the badly nicknamed “Sunny” Marlborough, from his “marriage of the century” to the

lovely but unhappy Consuelo—who provides him with an “heir and a spare” (apparently she originated the phrase)—to a series of later ladies in his life. Some of the characterizations are sympathetic, such as Jack and “Goonie” Churchill, Winston’s Clementine and Mary. Others are considerably less appealing, notably H.H. Asquith and Winston’s son Randolph. The final, sad chapters are well done, difficult as it is to read of a great man’s slow deterioration, along with the passing of his family members.

Lovell’s account is readable, but is there anything new in her retelling of familiar stories? Not really. She melds vignettes of Churchill’s career with the ups and downs of the family surrounding him, but most of the stories and gossip are already well-known. Lovell’s book is an informative look at a very different age, sparked by insightful bons mots. Her description of the years between the World Wars shows just how differently the social elite once lived. Lovell cites one line from a letter of Clementine to Winston, to the effect that a sewing room at Chartwell (being redone before they moved in) had to be spacious enough for the two or three maids who would be constantly working there. Ah, for the day. ❯

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Stoddard is a former editor of Military Heritage and Time-Life Books. He writes well, with understanding of a time of rapid and sometimes bewildering change. His narrative, vivid when describing, say, the Battle of Britain, presumes little prior knowledge among readers—a growing problem when World War II is barely on modern school curricula—and thus can serve as an introduction to the period.

After two chapters that rather breathlessly relate events from 1939 through the fall of France in June 1940, the author breaks pace to discuss code-breaking. He gets quite detailed—down to the rotor wiring of the German “Enigma” machines—yet the British effort to read German military communications really only enjoyed serious success after the five-month period on which his book concentrates. A colorful chapter on the Battle of Britain reviews the pressures on both sides that hot summer of 1940. Sometimes the author skips about chronologically: in the midst of the great air battle he stops to discuss Oswald Mosley’s British Fascists and the German-American Bund’s working for continued U.S. isolationism. Later chapters review developments elsewhere in Europe as well as the remainder of the Blitz in Britain. An epilogue reviews the period’s importance and foreshadows what is to come.

A few of the numerous mistakes of fact: Churchill was Municions Minister in 1917-19, not 1919-21 (19). The Poles demonstrated their code-breaking expertise in mid-1939 to the British, not the French and Germans (62). The BBC has been called the British Broadcasting Corporation (not Company) since 1926 (83). Raymond Lee, U.S. military attaché in London in 1940, was a colonel, not a major general (109). The correct title of Volume VI of the official biography is Finest Hour (not “The”). Shirer’s classic, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, appeared in 1960, not three decades later.

Though this is a good and easy read, I’d suggest saving your money, unless you need a quick survey for someone totally new to a fascinating period. The more serious should rely on Martin Gilbert’s The Second World War, which is scrupulously accurate. ❯

World in Balance (Again)


Another retelling of the events of 1940, which leans on Churchill to attract readers, holds nothing new for Churchillians. That Stoddard includes Wikipedia among his sources should raise concern in potential readers’ minds. So should his mistakes.
A Pudding with a Theme

PAUL H. COURTENAY


Chancing upon this slim volume, I was sufficiently intrigued by its title to decide that I must sample it. It is a short novel, the first by its young author. It took a little while to work out what it was all about, but once I had begun to understand the theme, the pace quickened. The action takes place over the five days leading up to Sir Winston Churchill's final appearance in the House of Commons in July 1964.

The story revolves around Esther, a young librarian at the House of Commons, who is looking for a lodger to take a room in her London apartment. A knock on the door announces the arrival of a prospective tenant; to her surprise the caller is a large black dog, who says, “Hello, I’ve come about the room.” Get it? Read on....

This is the start of a relationship Esther finds impossible to brush aside. Gradually, we realise that she is going into a depression as the anniversary of her young husband’s death approaches. The black dog, who incidentally quaffs wine from a goblet held in his paw, begins quickly to flirt between the apartment and Chartwell, in Westerham, Kent. It becomes apparent that in the young woman, he has added a new “client” to another customer he has had for a much longer time.

Although the author is quite well informed on the general story and tempo of Sir Winston’s life, things quickly become rather unrealistic when Esther is detailed to go to Chartwell at short notice in order to take dictation from Churchill prior to his final appearance in Parliament. Conveniently, the dog accompanies her and—owing to their long acquaintance—Churchill quickly senses that the dog is also communicating with the librarian. Skillfully the old man conceals this knowledge, and his immediate awareness of Esther’s problem. He then gives her some advice: “You must hurl yourself into opposition, for you are at war. On that you must trust me. From your withering depths to your withering heights, you are at war. And you must trust me that you are fighting alone. Do not consent to the descent.” The words are recognizably Churchillian.

And that’s about it. I have still not made up my mind whether I like this or not. And yet....

Murder (The West) Incorporated

RICHARD M. LANGWORTH

Dresden, 1945


Adam Kirsch, a New Republic senior editor, offers a thoughtful piece of deconstruction which dredges up every major Churchill critic of the past five years in one handy if verbose article. As a sampling of the Churchill fever swamps, it is unsurpassed.

The question we are asked to consider is whether WW2 was really a “good war.” War is hell, which is why western democracies like Britain and France spent six years trying to avoid it. Once it started, the (barely) surviving partner had a choice between barbarians, one of whom hadn’t (as yet) expanded beyond his borders. Easy choice—especially without the benefit of hindsight.

But Kirsch quotes Norman Davies’ No Simple Victory (following Stanley Baldwin’s logic of seventy-five years ago): “If one finds two gangsters fighting each other, it is no valid approach at all to round on one and to lay off the other.” Maybe—if one of the two has not set out to eradicate your country.

Kirsch is certainly industrious, Hoovering every far-out Churchill critic, all of whom he represents uncritically. Gordon Corrigan’s Blood, Sweat and Arrogance (FH 135:54), Richard Toye’s Churchill’s Empire (FH 150:9), Christopher Catherwood’s Churchill’s Folly (FH 144:37), Nicholson Baker’s Human Smoke (FH 139:20) and Pat Buchanan’s Churchill, Hitler and the Unnecessary War (FH 139:13). This must be the first time a New Republic editor has nodded respectfully toward Pat Buchanan.

Just when I was thinking that he’d left out the silliest deconstruction of all, Madhusree Mukerjee’s Churchill’s Secret War (FH 149:50), Kirsch dredges it up on the third page of this lengthy treatise. Mukerjee had her critics, he says, but she was right on one thing: Churchill, that sly old imperialist, “refused to divert resources from feeding Britain to feeding India.” Leave aside that this isn’t true. Are we to conclude that it was better to starve one of the three major protagonists against Hitler than to starve India—whose 1943 famine was exacerbated by Japan, with the help of corrupt Indians?

To say Churchill “was fighting to preserve imperialism as well as democ-
racy” is a bad reading of history. India’s independence was assured in 1935, that of the Dominions by the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Churchill was fighting to preserve institutions like The West, Inc., which allows people like Mr. Kirsch the freedom to wring their hands over the dreadful things we inflicted on Hitler’s Germans.

Finally, presumably in a gesture toward equal time, Mr. Kirsch considers Michael Burleigh’s *Moral Combat*: “Burleigh fulminates, ‘Wars are not con-

ducted according to the desiccated deliberations of a philosophy seminar full of purse-lipped old maids.’ This is crude and bad-tempered, but Burleigh’s defensive impulse is understandable.”

I’m so pleased that Mr. Kirsch finds Mr. Burleigh’s views understand-

able that I will offer him another, my favorite on the whole subject, from Lady Soames: “My father would have done anything to win the war, and I daresay he had to do some pretty rough things. But they didn’t unman him.”

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**Fiction: Hitler’s Holy Grail**

**DAVID FREEMAN**


The Spear of Destiny: According to legend it is the lance used by a Roman guard to pierce the side of Jesus and so end Christ’s suffering upon the cross. The story goes back to the Gospel of St. John, written near the end of the first century A.D., but only several hundred years later did conflicting claims emerge from people said to be in possession of the very same weapon, which purportedly had taken on supernat

atural powers.

Of the various spears that appeared in the Middle Ages, the most famous is that associated with notable German leaders starting with Charlemagne. In the 19th century, Richard Wagner further expanded the relic’s association with Teutonic culture by including the spear along with the Holy Grail in his operatic version of Parsifal’s Arthurian quest, a favorite of Hitler’s.

By the 20th century the spear was in Vienna under the control of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph. Firmly believing that the sacred artifact guaranteed victory for whomever possessed it, Kaiser Wilhelm II sought to obtain the spear shortly before the Great War. Despite his failure the Kaiser, in exile by 1931, never gave up his quest. Indeed, he believed that the spear could restore the fortunes of the Hohenzollern Dynasty in Germany. But a new German leader also sought the weapon: Adolf Hitler. Seeking to foil both aspirants is the once and future nemesis of Nazi Germany, Winston Churchill.

Such is the plot for the second and newest volume in Michael and Patrick McMenamin’s series of absorbing Winston Churchill Thrillers. This time, however, it must be said that Churchill plays only a peripheral role in the story. As in the previous book, *The De Valera Deception*, Churchill acts primarily as spymaster and father confessor to the two main protagonists: the Irish-American lawyer Bourke Cockran, Jr. (fictional son and namesake of Winston Churchill’s one-time mentor) and the Hearst photo-journalist Mattie McGary (fictional and beautiful goddaughter of Churchill himself). In the context of Ian Fleming, Churchill is “M” to Cockran’s James Bond.

As in the previous tale, Cockran and McGary are helped along by two colorful personages: “The Chief,” publisher William Randolph Hearst; and “Wild Bill” Donovan, soldier, intelligence officer, and future founder of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the CIA.

Cochran also recruits serious muscle in the form of former members of “The Apostles,” the one-time IRA assassins hired and trained by “the Big Fella,” Michael Collins. Hitler and Himmler both make appearances as they prepare to seize control of Germany and seek to make the sword a talisman of the SS.

An interesting and seldom-

encountered aspect of Hitler cast by the authors is the Führer’s advanced cultural tastes, which we see evidenced in a flash-back interview of Hitler by Mattie McGary around the time of the Nazis’ failed Beer Hall Putsch in Munich in 1923. Evidencing the father and son authors’ considerable research, we see Hitler as a devotee of the arts, particularly music, with eclectic tastes for an Aryan supremacist, extending even to Jewish composers. A reader knowing little of the Nazi chief could come away from this character sketch thinking Hitler might have been fun to share a beer and schnitzel with. But later on, the authors show Hitler to be just the “squalid caucass boss and butcher,” as described by Churchill.

As in *The De Valera Deception*, the body count is high, the violence graphic, the sexual energy intense, and the motion fast, because all the good guys move around in autogiros. It’s a thriller full of page-turning action with dialogue that echoes Dashiell Hammett.

Although Churchill is suitably isolated from the novel’s lurid passages, the old war horse eschews watching from the sidelines and manages to propel himself into directing and participating in the story’s dramatic climax. This too is characteristic.

Like the later Prime Minister, who insisted on going to France days after the D-Day landings, the Churchill of this novel is anything but sedentary, making his own preemptive strike at the Nazis in cloak and dagger operations of the utmost peril. 

Professor Freeman teaches history at California State University, Fullerton.
Elmo Ufheil, a photographer with the U.S. Army Air Corps, was stationed in London from January to June, 1945, an eye-witness to all the memorable events of those six months: the last-ditch V2 rocket attacks, news of the German surrender, VE-Day, Churchill’s “This is your victory” speech, and the beginning of the general election campaign. This picture of Churchill on the stump was sent to us through the courtesy of his cousin, Kenneth Ufheil, and his niece, Nancy Briggs.

Elmo Ufheil “can’t remember the exact date or month” he snapped this impromptu photo, but it was “around the time of parliamentary elections.” The likely month is June. Churchill left for the Continent in early July and subsequently attended the first part of the Potsdam Conference with Truman and Stalin. Mr. Ufheil believes he snapped it as Churchill was clambering off his seatback perch at or near 10 Downing Street.

Saddened by his inability to preserve the wartime coalition until the defeat of Japan, Churchill resigned as coalition Prime Minister on May 23rd and formed a Conservative “caretaker” government until the nation rendered its decision at the polls in July. On 29 May, Parliament met for the first time in five years with the Labour Party in Opposition. (Pedants insist that technically, Churchill was Prime Minister three times: this May-July government, Tory not Coalition, was technically his second.)

Many witnesses have contrasted the enthusiasm of crowds during Churchill’s campaign appearances with their intention to vote for his opponents. Curiously, some voters actually
thought they could elect a Labour Party majority but retain Churchill at Downing Street. Polling Day was July 5th, but a respite was declared for the military vote to be counted, and the announcement of the results put off to late July. On July 7th Churchill traveled to France for a brief holiday before going on to Potsdam, leaving the conference to receive the results on July 26th. Less than a week later, a new Parliament would assemble at Westminster—with a defeated Churchill now Leader of the Opposition.

**GENEVA, 16 SEPTEMBER 1946**  
**PHOTOGRAPH BY MARCEL BOLOMET**

Churchill and his wife left Chartwell in late August for three weeks in Switzerland, staying first at the Villa Choisi, on the shore of Lake Geneva. The press and public were carefully kept at bay while he painted and worked on his war memoirs.

On 16 September the Churchills left Choisi for Zurich, where they lunched with the President and Committee of the International Red Cross. He told his hosts of the “kindly reception by all classes of the population,” which they had received as they had ridden through villages on the way.

In Zurich on the 19th, Churchill made his famous appeal for “a kind of United States of Europe”: If Europeans would come together, he said, and “exchange blessings instead of curses, they still have it in their power to sweep away the horrors and miseries which surround them, and to allow the streams of freedom, happiness and abundance to begin again their healing flow.”

Then Churchill added “something that will astonish you….The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. In this way only can France recover the moral leadership of Europe. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany.”

Martin Cousineau sent one of his favorite Churchill photos, which shows WSC responding to the crowds as he entered Geneva: “I don’t believe I’ve ever seen it in Finest Hour. I think it is a great image of restrained adulation and heartfelt thanks.” Indeed so—and the Swiss hadn’t even been in the war. 

Bob, try this, I am unable to get a higher def. If no good I’ll reduce both photos and put a white border around them.
125 Years Ago
Autumn 1886 • Age 11
“I always was your darling”

Now that Lord Randolph was Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston embarked upon his own revenue enhancement program to supplement the money he received from his parents: he sold his father’s autographs to his fellow students. On 19 October he thanked his father for sending “the autographs and stamps.” On the same day, he decided to increase his product line by writing his mother, “I want some of your autographs.”

But Winston could not persuade his mother to come to a play at the end of the term, since Jennie had apparently scheduled a dinner party on the day of the play. (See “Churchill and the Theatre,” page 40.) Winston told her this just would not do, and helpfully explained how she should rearrange her schedule. Consider as you read this the level of writing and advocacy he had already reached at age 11:

I hope you will not think my demand unreasonable or exorbitant, but nevertheless I shall make it all the same. Now you know that you cannot be watching a juvenile Amateur Play in the borough of Brighton, and at the same time be conducting a dinner party at 2 Connaught Place London. If you go up to town in time for the dinner party you will not be able to see the Plays, but simply distribute the prizes and go.

Now you know I was always your darling and you can’t find it in your heart to give me a denial. I want you to put off the dinner party and take rooms in Brighton and go back on Monday morning....This petition I hope you will grant.

Alas, there is no evidence that Winston’s petition was granted.

100 Years Ago
Autumn 1911 • Age 36
“Don’t go into Battle to be safe”

The specter of a forthcoming war with Germany loomed over Britain, as it would twenty-five years later. Home Secretary Churchill’s unsolicited advice to Prime Minister H.H. Asquith and First Lord of the Admiralty Reginald McKenna, on a variety of strategic naval issues, had its intended effect when, in late September 1911, Asquith decided Churchill and McKenna should trade positions. McKenna was not pleased, but Asquith considered Churchill a better choice to lead the Admiralty.

The changes were announced on 24 October and Churchill lost no time in putting his stamp on the Navy. On 28 October he prepared a thoughtful memorandum on the need for a naval war staff and proper training for officers in strategic planning. Then he made sure that he would have officers who would implement his vision. A month later, on 29 November, Churchill replaced the entire Board of Admiralty.

Since October, Churchill had been receiving the advice of his friend, the outspoken former First Sea Lord, Sir John “Jacky” Fisher. Their friendship had begun in 1907 when Fisher was still First Sea Lord, and the old admiral eagerly agreed to help. Randolph Churchill’s companion volume to this period contains twelve letters from Fisher to WSC within a month. When Churchill replaced his admirals Fisher wrote: “So glad to hear from you this morning that your ‘Coup d’état’ arrives today! I now feel happy and content and relapse with relief into obscurity.”

Obscenity was not Fisher’s destiny. On 3 December he wrote: “I trespass again on your patience for a few minutes before your New Board is constituted so that I may be free of any charge of endeavouring to influence you behind the backs of your new colleagues—my friends. Now...for those two Slugs you have...as Controller and Director of Naval Ordnance who want you to perpetuate Battleships of the Tortoise type all armour and no speed...” Later Fisher added:

I absolutely disagree with your two effete experts. They woke me at 4 am with a start! A nightmare! The British Fleet were Spithead Forts, splendid armour but they couldn’t move! The first desideratum of all is Speed! Your fools don’t see it—they are always running about to see where they can put on a little more armour! to make it safer! You don’t go into Battle to be safe! No, you go into Battle to hit the other fellow in the eye first so that he can’t see you!...Why? Because you want to fight when you like, where you like and how you like! And that only comes from speed—Big Speed—30 knots.

Not everyone was as enthusiastic as Lord Fisher. The Spectator wrote: “We are afraid of Mr. Churchill because he is weak and rhetorical....his moods are not to be depended upon. We cannot detect
in his career any principles or even any consistent outlook upon public affairs. His ear is always to the ground; he is the true demagogue, sworn to give the people what they want, or rather, and that is infinitely worse, what he fancies they want. No doubt he will give the people an adequate Navy if they insist upon it. We wish we could think that the Navy would be adequate, whether they insisted or not.”

**75 Years Ago**

**Autumn 1936 • Age 61**

“No length we would not go to”

Churchill continued to warn that it was Europe’s last chance to build a collective security system to protect itself from the growing arms of Germany. Next year, he said, would be too late.

For a speech in Paris on 24 September he sent a copy of his first draft to Geoffrey Dawson, editor of The Times, asking for comments. The reply, from Dawson’s deputy, illustrated the gulf between Churchill and the British establishment over Nazi Germany. The Times was “against premature abandonment of the hope, supported by many authoritative pronouncements on the German side, that Germany is prepared to reach a general understanding and settlement with the British empire.”

By that time, in fact, Hitler had already determined to wage war in Europe and had structured his economy accordingly. The only “understanding” he ever contemplated was for Great Britain to acknowledge Germany’s hegemony over Europe. In his Paris speech, Churchill explained why Britain would never agree to such an arrangement:

How could we bear, nursed as we have been in a free atmosphere, to be gagged and muzzled; to have spies, eavesdroppers and delators at every corner; to have even private conversation caught up and used against us by the Secret Police and all their agents and creatures; to be arrested and interned without trial; or to be tried by political or Party courts for crimes hitherto unknown to civil law… Why, I say that rather than submit to such oppression, there is no length we would not go to.

Stanley Baldwin’s government didn’t have a clue to what Hitler really had in mind. When defense coordinator Sir Thomas Inskip told Parliament that he would need emergency powers, practically putting Britain on a war footing, if they were to be ready for war by June 1937, Sir Samuel Hoare objected, saying it was “necessary to assume for a long time that we should be unprepared.” The next day, Churchill replied:

All I can say is that unless there is a front against potential aggression there will be no settlement. All the nations of Europe will just be driven helter-skelter across the diplomatic chessboard until the limits of retreat are exhausted, and then out of desperation, perhaps in some most unlikely quarter, the explosion of war will take place, probably under conditions not very favourable to those who have been engaged in this long retreat.

The deplorable state to which Baldwin’s government had allowed Britain’s armed forces to deteriorate was the subject of a two-day defense debate on 11-12 November. Churchill pointed out that in regular army maneuvers, most important new weapons had to be represented by flags and discs:

The army lacks almost every weapon which is required for the latest form of modern war. Where are the anti-tank guns, where are the short distance wireless sets, where are the field anti-aircraft guns against armoured aeroplanes?…I have been staggered by the failure of the House of Commons to react effectively against those dangers. That, I am bound to say, I never expected. I never would have believed that we should have been allowed to go on getting into this plight, month by month and year by year, and that even the Government’s own confessions of error would have produced no concentration of Parliamentary opinion and force capable of lifting our efforts to the level of emergency. I say that unless the house resolves to find out the truth for itself it will have committed an act of abdication of duty without parallel in its long history.

Baldwin effectively replied that the reason his government had not rearmed in 1933-35 was that they would have lost an election had they done so—a piece of unaccustomed frankness that was stark in its revelations.

On 18 November, Germany and Italy recognized General Franco’s regime as the legitimate government of Spain. On 24 November, Germany and Japan signed an agreement to make “common cause” against communism.

**50 Years Ago**

**Autumn 1961 • Age 86**

“Conscience of the human race”

Churchill sent a telegram on 27 September to Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion on Ben-Gurion’s 75th birthday. He received a kind reply:

I was deeply moved to receive your greeting on the occasion of my birthday and rejoice to see that you still remember such trifles….I hold you in esteem and affection, not only—not even mainly—because of your unfailing friendship to our people and your profound sympathy with its resurgence in our ancient homeland. Your greatness transcends all national boundaries, I happened to be in London, from the beginning of May till September 1940, and I heard the historic speeches in which you gave utterance to the iron determination of your people and yourself to fight to the end against the Nazi foe. I saw you then not only as the symbol of your people and its greatness, but as the voice of the invincible and uncompromising conscience of the human race at a time of danger to the dignity of man, created in the image of God. It was not only the liberties and the honour of your own people that you saved….Your words and your deeds are indelibly engraved in the annals of humanity. Happy the people that has produced such a son.

On 1 November, Sir Winston and Lady Churchill attended the “coming-out” dance of their granddaughter Celia Sandys, where the new Chubby Checker rock ‘n’ roll song “The Twist” was played. Churchill was observed tapping his foot in time with the music. §
**How good a bricklayer was he?**

**Q** It has been reported, possibly in the recent film “Walking with Destiny,” that Churchill’s brick walls at Chartwell were poorly constructed and would collapse, so while Churchill was at lunch or otherwise occupied, his latest work was disassembled and rebuilt, with WSC none the wiser.

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**Above:** With daughter Sarah as bricklayer’s mate, Chartwell, 3 September 1928 (Radio Times Hulton Picture Library). **Left:** WSC’s cheque for 5/- and application for membership in the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (Topical Press Agency).

Trimmed this away before it solidified. Although a member of the Building Trades Union (until its socialist leaders cancelled his membership) Churchill was an admitted amateur and did not practice the craft daily. One old-timer at Chartwell told us that a bricklayer would often go out when WSC had finished and smooth things over. He implied, however, that the boss was aware that this was being done.

Anecdotes like this come up because Churchill was so genuine. Roosevelt seemed a more distant personage; although vigorous before polio, one would never have expected to catch him laying bricks. When Tito was asked what he especially admired about Churchill, he replied instantly: “His humanity—he is so human!”

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**Q** Did Churchill write a version of Uncle Tom’s Cabin? (This is in the article about Churchill and Claude McKay that David Freeman abstracted in Finest Hour 125:33.)

**A** Yes. Churchill abridged (“retold”) twelve of “The World’s Great Stories” for News of the World (a much more respectable paper in those days than the one which recently expired) between 8 January and 26 March 1933. Uncle Tom’s Cabin was the first, on 8 January. The rest were: The Count of Monte Cristo, The Moonstone, Ben-Hur, Tess of the d’Urbervilles, A Tale of Two Cities, Jane Eyre, Adam Bede, Vice-Versa, Ivanhoe, Westward Ho! and Don Quixote. Churchill earned a handsome £1850 ($156,000 in today’s money) for the work. The stories were republished in The Collected Essays of Sir Winston Churchill, 4 vols. (London: Library of Imperial History, 1974), vol. 4, Churchill at Large.

Ronald Cohen’s Bibliography lists the series at C393a, and notes that Eddie Marsh assisted in the writing—something that prompted shocked outrage by a latter-day critic who “discovered” Marsh’s involvement, itself already known for years through Sir Martin Gilbert’s official biography.

Churchill was a great fan of the classic novels. Grace Hamblin said he once turned on her and said: “Just like Jane Eyre.” She was never sure what she had done to remind him of Jane.

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**Q** I am co-authoring a historical novel revolving around an actual event that might have caused a breach of security for D-Day. It seems that a number of copies of a “Most Secret”
document listing the D-Day landing sites and codes blew out a window of the War Office in late May 1944. The novel intertwines with actual events and relates what happens after that. We incorporate scenes with the Prime Minister and Field Marshal Smuts, members of the Air Staff, Admiral Ramsay, Field Marshal Montgomery, and General Eisenhower. Some questions:

(1) How did Churchill address Ike, Smuts, Monty, Ramsay, and King George VI? (2) How did Churchill refer to these same people in private conversations with others? (3) How did others refer to him? (4) Did Churchill have a sweet tooth? (5) Where did he go and what did he do on 2-5 June, 1944? What is the best source? (6) Was Churchill aware of the “window incident”? David Howarth states it as fact in his book, Dawn of D-Day (page 23), where he says that a dozen copies actually blew out the window. Eleven were quickly recovered; the twelfth was found by a passerby who gave it to a sentry. I have read other references in which the number of copies varies. I don’t believe Eisenhower or Churchill knew of the incident. Harry Butcher, Ike’s naval aide, makes no mention of it, but does comment on other possible security breaches like clues within crossword puzzles in the Daily Telegraph, and the loose-lipped American general who was busted to Lt. Colonel and sent home. It was a fascinating time.

—GUS CAMPANA, ORLANDO, FLA.

A

(1) In personal letters Churchill used “My dear Ike” and “My dear Smuts”; we doubt he would address Ramsay as anything other then “Admiral” and the King of course as “Your Majesty.” Most formal memoranda reproduced in The Second World War begin, “Prime Minister to Minister of Food,” etc.

(2) In conversation it would be the same, the King being addressed as “Sir” or “Your Majesty.” He liked nicknames such as “Ike” and apparently coined “Pug” for Ismay, but we don’t think Smuts had one. WSC and Smuts knew each other so well they were probably on a first-name basis. The same with intimates: “General Eisenhower” in formal exchanges; George VI was always “Your Majesty.”

(3) Formally others would call him “Prime Minister” or, for Americans like Eisenhower, “Mr. Churchill.” Only intimates like Bracken or Lindemann, and occasionally the King, would refer to him as “Winston.” “Winnie” should be struck out wholesale; he disliked it, and the only person to get away with it was his nurse Mrs. Everest when he was a boy. Masses of troops would occasionally shout, “Good old Winnie!” but that of course was a different situation.

(4) He had no special sweet tooth, judging by the book Recipes from Number Ten, by his famous cook, Georgina Landemare. But we’re not able to judge this with much precision. You could get a good idea of his tastes from the book itself; look for copies on www.bookfinder.com.


(6) Howarth’s account of the lost D-Day plans is on Google Books (http://bit.ly/lCh9y9). He provides no references or footnotes. Although he seems to have had a good reputation, some of the material that he recounts reminds us of the myth that FDR or Churchill knew in advance about Pearl Harbor—speculative and in the end empty. The crossword puzzle story is like the alleged Japanese “Winds Code,” which everybody was supposed to know about. How would readers of the Daily Telegraph crossword puzzle connect a Nebraska city with a code word, intentionally signifying nothing, for a D-Day landing location? Such stories as Howarth writes, have “unlimited scope for growth.” Of course, in a novel, this makes no difference, but to accept the idea that a dozen copies of the entire plan for D-Day (complete in every detail) blew out a window, we’d like more to go on. Perhaps Howarth has notes in the back of the book?

Q I have heard Churchill’s words quoted to describe President Nixon after Nixon’s death, which of course is impossible. Can you provide the source?

A After Nixon’s death in 1994, Finest Hour published a “Quotation of the Season” which was remarkably applicable to Nixon—though Churchill wrote it with regard to Lord Rosebery in Great Contemporaries (1937):

“It might be said that he outlived his future by ten years and his past by more than twenty. The brilliant prospects which had shone before him until he became the leader were dispersed by the break-up of his Government and the defeat of his Party. The part he took as a patriot in supporting the War destroyed his hold upon the regard and confidence of the Radical masses.... He severed himself by purposeful action from his friends and followers.... Within a decade after achieving the pinnacle his political career was closed for ever. It was only two decades later that his long life ended.”

Q You have written that Churchill’s optimism prevented him from grasping the huge barriers to reconciliation between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. Which statements of his support this conclusion?

A Commenting on Palestinian statehood in the House of Commons in 1936, WSC said: “When the Arab municipalities are conducting their affairs with anything like the progressive vigour that is shown by the Jewish community, and when you have come to the point of the whole principle of local government having been implemented by the good will and activities of the population, your case will be enormously stronger for a forward movement.”

This never occurred in his lifetime, yet Churchill in 1951 was still optimistic, writing to Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann: “The wonderful exertions which Israel is making in these times of difficulty are cheering to an old Zionist like me. I trust you may work with Jordan and the rest of the Moslem world. With true comradeship there will be enough for all.”
Sir Martin Gilbert’s Intelligence series (FH 149-51) properly honours the scientists at Bletchley Park, but the Polish Secret Service knew of the German “Enigma” some ten years before the war, and their knowledge was passed to the British shortly before the Germans attacked in 1939. British cryptologists continued to work with the Poles and were successful in breaking numerous German codes.

Enigma gave Britain a good idea of German plans and dispositions, but did not tell everything. In May 1941, for example, the British could not read the secret radio traffic between the battleship Bismarck and the German headquarters; the Admiralty received information on Bismarck’s whereabouts thanks to the Swedish Coastal Command and Norwegian patriots.

After her initial escape from pursuers in the Atlantic, Bismarck was relocated by a Catalina flying boat and subsequently sunk. Likewise, most of the information on Tirpitz and Scharnhorst, whose activities after 1943 were limited to Norwegian harbours and the Arctic, was transmitted to London by the Norwegian Underground.

Without diminishing the role of Bletchley and the Poles, we believe Enigma decoding played a less important role regarding the German battleships than is suggested in the Intelligence articles.

BERNDT WICTORSSON, NACKA; PER NYDAHL, STOCKHOLM; PER STAREFORS, VARBERG, SWEDEN

SIR MARTIN GILBERT
PUTS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

I would like to stress my view, which I have frequently stated in my lectures at Bletchley Park and to MI6, that the Polish contribution on the eve of World War II to Signals Intelligence was a key element, first in enabling Britain to avert defeat and then in helping to secure a hard-fought victory.

My writings and lectures describe how, on 16 August 1939, two weeks before the outbreak of war, with the approval of the Polish prime minister, senior Polish Intelligence officers in a wood near Warsaw handed a British Intelligence Mission head by “Professor Sandwich of Oxford University”—in fact Col. Stewart Menzies, then the deputy head of MI6—their latest model of a reconstructed German Enigma cypher machine.

Menzies returned to London at once; and on August 25th the machine was brought, disguised as regular passenger luggage, by train from Warsaw to Paris, accompanied by the head of French Intelligence, to Victoria Station, where Menzies met it (in smoking jacket and wearing his Légion d’Honneur button). Germany invaded Poland six days later.

Thanks to Polish Intelligence, possession by Britain of this machine meant that top-secret German radio signals could be received by radio in their cyphered form and then, with the use of the machine, decrypted. Decrypting the daily changing cyphers was incredibly hard. But by building up a staff of more than 5000 cryptographers, the British Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park was able to break at least half of more than 300 German Enigma circuits. Three Polish cryptographers, whose homeland was then in the Nazi grip, were among the Bletchley team that broke the earliest circuits.

As I also make clear in my lectures (which one day I hope to turn into a book), the parts played by Enigma and others in the sinking of the three German warships most feared by the Allies was as follows:

BISMARCK

This formidable battleship sailed from Kiel on 19 May 1941. On the night of May 20th, news of her sailing reached the Admiralty from the Norwegian Military attaché in Stockholm, who had heard from his Swedish contacts that Bismarck had been spotted by an aircraft from a Swedish cruiser. Using this information, aircraft of the RAF Photo Reconnaissance Unit photographed Bismarck off Bergen at 1300 on 21 May.

Enigma decrypts enabled the Admiralty to inform British naval units, at 1828 on May 21st, that the aim of Bismarck was “to carry out a raid in trade routes”; that decrypting German Air Force Enigmas had revealed—that decrypting German Air Force Enigmas had revealed—through instructions to German aircraft carrying out reconnaissance of ice conditions—Bismarck to be between Jan Mayen Island and Greenland. Enigma traffic enabled Royal Navy to destroy the fuel tankers and supply ships sent out to fuel and supply Bismarck.

On 23 May, British warships made visual contact with Bismarck, which sank HMS Hood the next day (of Hood’s 1418 crew, only three men survived). Bismarck was herself damaged by gunfire from Prince of Wales, and hit by
a torpedo of an aircraft from HMS *Victorious*. She then sailed away from the British warships.

*Bismarck* made twenty-two signals to Germany on her planned route, none successfully decrypted, but the Direction Finding (DF) bearings on them enabled her position to be worked out, and on the morning of May 25th two signals enabled *Bismarck’s* position to be fixed by the Admiralty’s Operational Intelligence Centre (OIC) in London.

At 1158 the Admiralty ordered HMS *Rodney* to act on the assumption that *Bismarck* was bound for a French port. This was cancelled at 1419 (when Norway was erroneously reported as the destination), but reinstated at 1805, when a French Atlantic port was correctly identified as the ship’s actual destination. This arose from an Enigma decrypt on 24 May that revealed that the wireless/telegraph (W/T) control station of *Bismarck’s* frequency was the North Sea port of Wilhelmshaven, control of which had been transferred to Paris. French Resistance provided the British with confirmation of this destination by reporting to London that German Air Force units were being relocated to the French Atlantic port of Brest to provide the necessary air support.

As a result of the direction-finding capacity of the two Enigma decrypts, the Catalina flying boat mentioned above was briefed in its successful search and sighted *Bismarck*, but did not know her direction. Next day a German Air Force Enigma to the chief of staff of the German Air Force, who was then in Athens, divulged that *Bismarck* was making for the west coast of France. This crucial Enigma was decrypted as CX/JQ 993.

At 1812 on 26 May the Admiralty transmitted this decrypt to the naval commander-in-chief, confirming that *Bismarck* was moving towards France. The admiral, having already been ordered to turn his forces toward France in order to converge in the areas through which *Bismarck* would have to pass to reach port, had his orders confirmed by the CX/JQ 993 decrypt.

The Catalina sighting, itself the result of an Enigma message, gave the admiral *Bismarck’s* exact location at 1030 that morning, updated at 1115 by aircraft from his naval force. On the evening of May 26th, aircraft from HMS *Ark Royal* secured two hits on *Bismarck* and jammed her rudder. She was sunk at 1027 on 27 May 1941: of her crew of more than 2200, only 114 survived.

**SCHARNHORST**

On 19 December 1943, Hitler ordered *Scharnhorst* to attack the next Murmansk-bound Allied convoy. Norwegian Resistance radioed to SIS in London that *Scharnhorst* had sailed at 1700 on December 25th.

An Enigma decrypt, timed at 0043 on the 26th, sent from AOIC to Fraser at 1317 that afternoon, gave the exact location of *Scharnhorst* that morning, and divulged her attack orders. The routing of the convoy had been ordered by the Admiralty to serve as a bait for *Scharnhorst*.

A further Enigma timed at 0703 reported (from *Scharnhorst* to Berlin) that *Scharnhorst* was forty nautical miles southwest of Bear Island. This would enable her to attack the convoy at 1000. A U-boat Enigma sent at 0043 and decrypted at 1215 gave the exact location of the targeted convoy.

Falling into the trap, *Scharnhorst* was attacked that morning, outgunned and finally sunk at 1945. Of her crew of 1968, only 36 survived.

**TIRPITZ**

The *Bismarck*-class battleship *Tirpitz* was located in Kaaflord in 1944 through the triple combination of Royal Air Force Photo Reconnaissance; a Norwegian SIS agent transmitting from one of many Norwegian resistance transmitters (see Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of the Second World War*); and Enigma decrypts starting on March 11th.

The attack, while *Tirpitz* was still at anchor, was made possible as a result of an Enigma decrypt on 1 April disclosing that *Tirpitz* would sail for trials at 0530 on the morning of April 3rd. On the basis of this intelligence, the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet advanced the planned time of the attack to the time of sailing. The first wave of the RAF attack caught *Tirpitz* just as she was weighing anchor, putting her out of action for three months.

Another RAF attack on *Tirpitz*, on 17 July 1944, was a combination of a July 4th report from an SIS Norwegian that *Tirpitz* was exercising in Altenfjord, and Enigma decrypts of 9 and 11 July. RAF Photo Reconnaissance reports that *Tirpitz* had suffered serious damage were confirmed by Enigma and the SIS agent.

It was on 16 October 1944, after *Tirpitz* was back at sea, and bombed at sea, that Enigma revealed her location at anchor off Tromso. RAF Photo Reconnaissance confirmed her location. The anchorage was just within range of Lancaster bombers based in England, which attacked *Tirpitz* on October 29th, and again on November 12th when she was sunk. Of her crew of 2065, at least 950 and possibly as many as 1204 were drowned. —MG
Churchill Quiz

JAMES LANCANTER

Each quiz includes four questions in six categories: contemporaries (C), literary (L), miscellaneous (M), personal (P), statesmanship (S) and war (W), easy questions first. Can you reach Level 1?

Level 4
1. Which Prime Minister told Churchill in 1924: "I wish to make a Cabinet of which Harrow can be proud"? (C)

2. Rear-Admiral Godfrey, Director of Naval Intelligence 1939-42, wrote of his boss: "His battery of weapons included persuasion, real or simulated anger, mockery, vituperation, tantrums, ridicule, derision, abuse and tears..." Who was his boss? (M)

3. In an article written in 1929, which town in California did WSC refer to as the "Peter Pan Township"? (M)

4. "If he trips he must be sustained. If he makes mistakes they must be covered. If he sleeps he must not be wantonly disturbed. If he is no good he must be pole-axed." Who was WSC referring to in Their Finest Hour? (M)

5. To whom did Churchill say during dinner: "...do stop interrupting me while I'm interrupting you"? (P)

6. "With his enormous head, gleaming eyes and flexible countenance, he looked uncommonly like the portraits of Charles James Fox." Whom is WSC describing? (C)

Level 3
7. Which recent British prime minister referred to Churchill as "Winston"? (M)

8. Who complained to Asquith in 1915 that Churchill "out-argues me"? (C)

9. Which Zionist leader told Violet Bonham Carter in Tel Aviv in 1957 that Sir Winston was his hero, quoting Churchill's 4 June 1940 speech "with zest and fire"? (C)

10. "The future is unknowable, but the past should give us hope." Of which Churchill book is this the penultimate sentence? (L)

11. Which turning point in World War II did Churchill refer to as the Second Climacteric? (W)

12. In which book did WSC write: "...there was nothing dulce et decorum about the Dervish dead; nothing of the dignity of unconquerable manhood?" (L)

13. Who complained to Churchill that he would not speak to her in the Commons, prompting him to reply: "Because I find a woman's intrusion into the House of Commons as embarrassing as if she burst into my bathroom, when I had nothing with which to defend myself, not even a sponge?" (P)

14. In which book did Churchill write: "I must explain that the epitaph which the average soldier uses so often as to make it perfectly meaningless...is always placed before the noun it is intended to qualify"? (L)

15. Who wrote of Lord Randolph Churchill: "He was the chief mourner at his own protracted funeral, a public pageant of gloomy years"? (L)

16. Who wrote: "I wish the tones in which [Churchill] spoke this could have been 'recorded'—the first phrase a rattle of musketry, the second 'grating harsh thunder.' the third a ray of the sun through storm-clouds; the last, pure benediction." To which epigram did Edward Marsh refer? (S)

17. "When did WSC arrange for turtle soup to be on the menu for a dinner with Franklin Roosevelt? (P)

18. Who was the colour of Churchill's silk underwear? (P)

19. Which U.S. President said WSC's Fulton speech "was a fire-bell in the night, a Paul Revere warning that tyranny was once again on the march"? (S)

20. What did Churchill refer to in Parliament on 9 July 1941 as "an event of first-rate political and strategic importance"? (S)

Answers

World Crisis: "What he did in April, 1917, could have been done in May, 1915. And if done then, what abridgment of the slaughter; what sparing of the agony; what ruin, what catastrophes would have been prevented?" (W)

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At Bladon

30 January 1965—“The village stations on the way to Bladon were crowded with his countrymen, and at Bladon in a country churchyard, in the stillness of a winter evening, in the presence of his family and a few friends, Winston Churchill was committed to English earth, which in his finest hour he had held inviolate.”


At Bladon, as Sir Winston’s casket was lowered into English earth, the broadcaster Richard Dimbleby recited with a breaking voice a poem written for the occasion. During the 10th Churchill Tour in 2006, in pouring rain, Honorary Member Robert Hardy re-read the poem at the gravesite.

A reader asked for the text, which we are pleased to supply, through kind assistance of the Reverend Canon Roger Humphreys, former Rector of Bladon and Woodstock.

Drop English earth on him beneath
do our sons; and their sons bequeath
his glories and our pride and grief
at Bladon.

For Lionheart that lies below
that feared not toil nor tears nor foe.
Let the oak stand tho’ tempests blow
at Bladon.

So Churchill sleeps; yet surely wakes
old warrior where the morning breaks
On sunlit uplands. But the heart aches
at Bladon.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BARBARA F. LANGWORTH