Winston Churchill: The Youthful Adventurer

In Memoriam: Margaret Thatcher, Anthony Montague Browne

*The Last Lion* Reviewed • Toronto Conference Papers
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COLOMBIAN PRAISE
I'm a 23-year-old accountant, and I love history. My dad, a passionate man, always talked to me about great leaders and gave me books and documentaries. I learned about Churchill in high school but my interest soared after seeing “The Gathering Storm” in 2002. My dad gave me Churchill biographies by a Colombian author and Geoffrey Best.

Churchill is my hero for his bravery and patriotism in World War II. His speeches, filled with a love of England, made people cry; his passion in defending his beliefs was a model of courage. I also enjoy his sarcastic wit. Some people say he was rude, but people always hear what they want to hear.

His hobby of painting is a lesson in developing an outside interest to escape from our daily cares, not locking ourselves into just one area. I identify with that because I also paint, and it helps me cope, as it helped him. Across the gulf of years I identify with his approach to life and to his way of thinking.

—GLORIA DE LA CRUZ, APARTADO, COLOMBIA

CONSIDER THE SOURCE
I write to let off steam after reading the reviews by Geoffrey Wheatcroft, in the New York Review of Books, of Paul Reid’s Defender of the Realm and Mary Soames’s A Daughter’s Tale. My disquiet is not so much from the accustomed lists of Churchill’s human frailties (although Wheatcroft also disparages Martin Gilbert’s work in the process), but by the political context by which they are introduced (removal of the White House Churchill bust, Churchill’s supposed role in the treatment of Obama’s grandfather, etc.) The snarky conclusion attacks Churchill’s own writings and his “pater nalistic imperialism.” Wheatcroft speaks of the “American cult of Churchill” and concludes that “one indirect but beneficial consequence of Obama’s reelection [may be] the end of Churchillism. Might it not be time to put away the busts or busts, and with them the rhetoric of ‘special relationship,’ ‘English-speaking peoples’ and the idea of greatness?” Surely this cries out for a response!

CHARLES CRIST, CULPEPER, VA.

TAKEOFFS AND LANDINGS
I am writing footnotes for a new edition of Churchill’s My Early Life. Readers may be amused by one of these. In Chapter VII the first paragraph, final sentence reads: “Before our horses departed [in 1896, pre-India] we had a final parade on Hounslow Heath at which Colonel Brabazon, whose command was expiring, took leave of the regiment....” Footnote: Hounslow Heath would later become Heathrow Airport.

—PAUL H. COURTenAY, ANDOVER, HAMPSHIRE

CHURCHILL COMPANION
Thanks for the two Churchill Companions and the kind note. No matter how much you know about Churchill, there is always something new and fun to learn. The Companions are a delight to read and suggestive of a lot of other good reading.

—TED R. BROMUND, MARGARET THATCHER CENTER, HERITAGE FOUNDATION, WASHINGTON DC

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Editor’s response: Nothing gets the juices flowing for a celebrity intellectual like a positive biography of a great fellow countryman. They love the old crack, “America is the only country to have gone from barbarism to decadence without an intervening period of civiliza tion.” But Mr. Wheatcroft writes for The New Republic and The Atlantic, both of which have odd takes on Sir Winston (see “Churchill Envy,” FH 58: 16 and “The Atlantic Takes a Dive” (FH 114: 14). It’s not our task to defend any books except Churchill’s. “Any review is a good review.” And your response is as good as any we could write.

CHURCHILL THE WRITER
I did stop my membership in 2010. I am particularly interested in Churchill the writer—I always found his award of the Nobel Prize for Literature one of the more amazing aspects of his life. Although I always liked Finest Hour,
I felt its focus shifted more and more into obscure and relatively unimportant aspects of his life (a map of where he lived, quizzes, etc.). I also noticed the amount of bibliographic information seemed to wane over time.

A FORMER MEMBER

Editor’s Response: We are always glad to have feedback. The decrease in bibliographic coverage is partly owing to publication of Ronald Cohen’s three-volume Bibliography of the Writings of Sir Winston Churchill, a comprehensive work with unprecedented details on WSC’s books and articles, and how they came to be. Mr. Cohen remains a frequent contributor, and in a recent issue (157) he wrote about Dorothy Thompson’s Foreword to the second issue of A Roving Commission, which we republished for the first time since 1939. The same issue included Churchill’s writings about the French and his review of the play “St. Helena,” last published in 1936, and an article on the best Churchill biographies.

Scarcely any issue is without an article, speech or essay by Churchill—usually material not easily found. FH 156 was almost entirely devoted to Great Contemporaries, with commentaries you can find nowhere else. FH 155 was a “Summer Book Number” with fifteen book reviews. FH 154 contained the first true text of the 1941 Ottawa speech, based on recordings. FH 153 republished Churchill’s 1934 War Debts article. FH 152 ran an obscure Churchill playscript. FH 150-51 analyzed Churchill’s writings on Clemenceau. FH 149 explored the many editions of My African Journey. FH 148 published a bibliography of Churchill’s miniature books and pondered his essay “Shall We All Commit Suicide?” FH 147 discussed the poet Julian Grenfell from WSC’s book Into Battle. “Books, Art & Curiosities” is a major part of every issue, though I admit it occasionally turns to toby jugs and cigarette cards. So I am a little perplexed as to what more we should be doing on Churchill’s writings.

We try to please all readers, from newcomers to advanced Churchillians who are bored by “routine” articles on well-trod subjects. I don’t recall running a map of where he lived (though we are always asked for more maps). Your impressions are important. Tell us what you would like to see that we’re not doing. Readers are our best guides.

Former Member Rejoins: I cancelled too soon! Maybe it just seemed like a dry spell for a time. I will rejoin. I have a copy of and have read Mr. Cohen’s amazing bibliography—certainly the best I have ever seen. Your book of Churchill quotations is the only book which I purchased both as a hard copy and a Kindle edition.

RALPH WIGRAM

Hugh Axtom, who has a great interest in Ralph Wigram, located Wigram’s grave and spent some time restoring it to close to its original condition. You can imagine his surprise over the small photo of Ralph Wigram (FH 157: 24) that he had never seen before. There was no note on its origins and I was hoping you could let us know where the photo came from.

MARK RANDALL, ENGLAND

Editor’s response: The only full-face photo we could find is from Time magazine, which we found using Google Images. It was so small that we omitted a credit line. Hugh Axtom (who writes on another subject below) reports on the Wigram grave, and we provide an enhanced Wigram photo, on page 8.

WSC AS COMMUNICATOR

Sarah C. Howells (FH 158) has winkled out some fascinating anecdotes. I would add a small point: an important reason why Britons supported Churchill in 1940 was that he was the leading figure who had denounced Hitler and opposed appeasement. This gave him great moral authority.

Churchill was not directly involved in the Ministry of Information, but the Minister was his trusted friend Brendan Bracken, one of the few MPs who had supported him earlier, a newspaper man.

There was no more suitable person to ensure Churchill was appropriately depicted during the war.

I was delighted to note that the caption for the photograph of Churchill in the blitzed Commons chamber identifies Bracken as the person with him. That photo is often wrongly captioned.

We may well wonder how Churchill found the courage to keep going during the Blitz and the Battle of the Atlantic. For instance, on the night the Commons was destroyed, 10-11 May 1941, a broken water-main would have made for a firestorm if another raid had followed. But Churchill had been advised by the Bletchley Park decryption experts that a follow-up would not occur. Bletchley was key: that same month HMS Bulldog forced U-110 to the surface, and a boarding party led by S/Lt. Balme had captured vast quantities of Enigma codes and an Enigma machine. Of course, the decryption centre at Bletchley required the new Enigma settings monthly to ensure up-to-date decryption. Often we ensured the supply by sinking a weather ship and capturing the settings for the next few months (incredibly, the Germans used the same crypto for their weather reports as they did for operational signals). They did not seem to work out why we kept sinking their weather ships!

Doenitz kept asking his experts if we had broken the code, but they always reassured him that we had not. Before destroying everything at Bletchley it would have been amusing to give him a tour of the rooms full of “Bombe” machines and the “Colossus” computer whirling away, working out the starting position for each message. Churchill was the only person to receive the Ultra decrypts. Since he read them all, he had a confidence that no one else would have had.

—HUGH AXTON, WALMER, KENT

I really enjoyed reading this excellent article by Sarah C. Howells. It brought back many WW2 memories including my own “siren suit!” I wish Sarah all the very best in her future endeavours.

PAMELA REYNOLDS, OTTAWA, ONT. 5
THE OLD RADICAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST EXPLOITATION, MONOPOLIES, UNFAIR RAKE-OFFS AND THE LIKE, IN WHICH I TOOK PART IN MY YOUNG DAYS, WAS A HEALTHY AND NECESSARY CORRECTIVE TO THE SYSTEM OF FREE ENTERPRISE. BUT THIS GROTESQUE IDEA OF MANAGING VAST ENTERPRISES BY CENTRALISED DIRECTION FROM LONDON CAN ONLY LEAD TO BANKRUPTCY AND RUIN....”

—WSC, PERTH, SCOTLAND, 28 MAY 1948

A New Fiver: “The Winston”
CHARTWELL, KENT, APRIL 26TH— Finest Hour joins the praise for the new five-pound note depicting Sir Winston Churchill, based on his most famous photo, snapped by Yousuf Karsh after his speech to the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa on 30 December 1941 (FH 154). The new banknote will enter circulation in 2016.

Bank of England governor Sir Mervyn King said: “Churchill was a truly great British leader, orator and writer...a hero of the entire free world. His energy, courage, eloquence, wit and public service are an inspiration to us all...as it was to my parents’ generation who fought for the survival of our country and freedom under Churchill’s leadership...We do not face the challenges faced by Churchill’s generation. But we have our own.”

We were seated in the dining room at Chartwell, and while normally the eye would be drawn to the wonderful view across the gardens to the Weald of Kent, on this occasion they were all fixed on the newly unveiled design of the Churchill five-pound note. The only awkward question from the press was, why has it taken so long? Sir Mervyn pointed out this was actually an example of the Bank moving very fast. Churchill is only the sixteenth person to feature on a British bank note, and only the second from the twentieth century (the other being the composer Sir Edward Elgar).

The Karsh image is accompanied by depictions of the Houses of Parliament and the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Churchill’s 1940 promise of “blood, toil, tears and sweat.” In the view of Westminster, the Great Clock is at 3PM, the approximate time of his speech.

Wags said this might be read as a mission statement for the British economy. But yesterday the clouds lifted, the sun shone at Chartwell, and the Churchill family celebrated the arrival of the note that may become known as “The Winston.” Lady Soames received a copy of the design and said it was a great day for her, her family, and her country.

—ALLEN PACKWOOD

About the Note
The governor has the final say about who appears on a banknote, although the public can make suggestions. A wide range of historical characters appears on the reverse of Bank of England notes, with social reformer Elizabeth Fry the only current woman; WSC is the first statesman to join this select company.

The Bank of England issues nearly a billion banknotes each year, and withdraws almost as many from circulation. Notes are redesigned frequently to maintain security and prevent forgeries. Other security features include threads woven into the paper and microlettering. The most recent new design is the £50 note, which entered circulation in November. This features Matthew Boulton and James Watt, celebrated for bringing the steam engine into the textile manufacturing process.

While Bank of England notes are generally accepted throughout the UK, three banks in Scotland and four in Northern Ireland are authorised to issue banknotes. Pharmacologist Sir Alexander Fleming, poet Robert Burns, and tyre inventor John Boyd Dunlop appear on
NECESSARY CORRECTIVE TO THE SYSTEM OF FREE ENTERPRISE.

THE OLD RADICAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST EXPLOITATION, BY CENTRALISED DIRECTION FROM LONDON CAN ONLY LEAD

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AROUND & ABOUT

Gretchen Rubin (gretchennrubin1@gmail.com), author of Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill (FH 121), quotes Harold Nicolson, an official censor at the Ministry of Information, on the sinking of the German battleship Bismarck on 27 May 1941. From Nicolson’s June 10th diary: “We complain that there are no photographs of the sinking of the Bismarck. Tripp [an officer representing the Admiralty] says that the official photographer was in the Suffolk and that the Suffolk was too far away. We say, ‘But why didn’t one of our reconnaissance machines fly over the ship and take photographs?’ He replies, ‘Well you see, you must see, well upon my word, well after all, an Englishman would not like to take snapshots of a fine vessel sinking.’ Is he right? I felt abashed when he said it. I think he is right.”

Ms. Rubin adds: “I love this story so much (could you tell I got a little choked up, when reading it?). It reminds me that in my own life, I should always try to live up to the highest ideals of my country.”

Cynics would say the sinking, a necessary act of war, would today attract the media like magpies, hovering around to record the human misery (particularly if it were one of our own ships). Our thanks to Suzanne Sigman for bringing this to our attention.

Michael Shelden’s Churchill biography, Young Titan (reviewed, page 51) is better than its accompanying promo articles. No sooner was London media buzzing with faintly supported speculation that young Violet Asquith attempted suicide after Churchill decided to marry Clementine (FH 158: 6) than another article appeared: “He caroused with West End call girls and proposed to THREE society beauties—who turned him down.”

The society beauties were Pamela Plowden, Muriel Wilson and the actress Ethel Barrymore. But the most rakish thing WSC seems to have done was to shower Barrymore with “armfuls of flowers” and show up at Claridge’s “each night” after her West End play ended, where he would “insist she have dinner with him.”

The carousing with call girls is based on an 83-year-old story of Churchill as a Sandhurst cadet, standing up for the showgirls of the Empire Theatre when “prudes on the prowl” attempted to erect barriers sheltering their lair from more upright society. Churchill himself reported this in My Early Life in 1930. As the barriers fell, he made what was apparently his first public speech: “Ladies of the Empire! I stand for Liberty!”

As for the orgy, Churchill and Lord Rosebery once dated a pair of “Gaiety Girls,” and each took one home. Alas, Winston’s date later told Rosebery he’d “done nothing but talk into the small hours on the subject of himself”—which jibes with numerous other reports of him, but falls a little short of cavorting.

Mr. Shelden also argues that WSC was a dandy: “Everywhere he went he wore a glossy top hat, starched wing collar and frock coat. His accessories included a walking stick and watchchain—even silk underwear!” This merely describes the standard dress of the typical Edwardian Member of Parliament—except for the silk underwear, which WSC explained to Clementine Churchill: “I have a very sensitive cuticle.”

If young WSC were a dandy, it escaped the notice of the Tailor and Cutter, which in 1908 described his wedding outfit as “neither fish, flesh, nor fowl…one of the greatest failures as a wedding garment we have ever seen, giving the wearer a sort of glorified coachman appearance.”

WSC’s Words of Thanks
STOCKHOLM, 10 DECEMBER 1953— “I am proud, but also awestruck at your decision to include me. I do hope you are right. I feel we are both running a considerable risk and that I do not deserve it. But I shall have no misgivings if you have none.”

This was Sir Winston’s response to the Nobel Committee for his Literature Prize, read by Lady Churchill (he was meeting in Bermuda with Eisenhower and Laniel). Datelines continue overleaf...

FINEST HOUR 159 / 7
About fifteen years ago I was staying near Cuckfield, Sussex, when I remembered a reference in Martin Gilbert’s official biography, *Winston S. Churchill*, that Ralph Wigram’s funeral took place there on 4 January 1937. Wigram was the foreign office informant who, at great personal risk, had kept Churchill informed in detail on German rearmament during the 1930s (*FH* 157: 24). I tracked the venue to Cuckfield’s Holy Trinity Church, which had probably been chosen by Ralph’s widow Ava: her father’s grave, with an almost identical marker, is only twenty yards away.

Arriving on a damp September day, I wondered how I could find Wigram’s grave in this inordinately vast village churchyard. But as I walked round the perimeter path, I came to a corner with a headstone in the form of a cross, and could just spot the words: Ralph Wigram CMG. The inscription was a little difficult to read, but this was clearly what I was looking for. I was surprised that the grave of such an important figure was not in better repair.

A few years later I saw the television production, “*The Gathering Storm*” staring Albert Finney as Churchill (*FH* 115, Summer 2002), in which Ralph Wigram was a central character. In 2009 I visited Cuckfield again. In the lovely church, I found a flyer offering a new church history, which I obtained from the author, Joyce Donoghue. There was no mention of Ralph Wigram’s funeral—a surprise, since it had been attended by such luminaries as Churchill, Lord Vansittart, Anthony Eden, and various peers and knights. Among them was Churchill’s longtime friend Brendan Bracken, Ralph Wigram’s near neighbour in Lord North Street, who had, in fact, arranged for Wigram to rent his house there. In the film, Clementine Churchill (Vanessa Redgrave) was depicted as attending. In fact she was away on holiday, and Churchill had written her eloquently about Wigram’s untimely death, voicing his grief and mentioning arrangements to allow Ava Wigram to get over her immense despair.

Although a mine of information about Cuckfield and the church, Joyce Donoghue did not know of Wigram and his significance in the Churchill story; nor was it likely that anyone else in Cuckfield was still alive who knew him or Ava. Sadly I realised that this brave soul was more or less forgotten, yet Cuckfield has a fascinating museum and a very active historical society. Mrs. Donoghue was keen to learn more about him and I sent what information I had. She subsequently wrote about Wigram’s key role:

“After the funeral, Churchill took a distraught Ava and her young Down’s Syndrome son back with him to Chartwell. In 1941 she married Sir John Anderson, Home Secretary in 1939-40, whose name was applied to the ‘Anderson shelters’ in which city dwellers passed their nights during the Blitz.

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**DATELINES**

**Britain Helped Too**

HOLLYWOOD, FEBRUARY 24TH—Britain was outraged over *Argo*, “Best Picture” in Oscar-land, for inaccurate portrayal of British actions in the Iran hostage crisis.

“When I first heard about this film I was really quite annoyed,” said Sir John Graham, 86, a diplomat in Teheran at the time of the crisis, using the polite language of his profession.

When the American Embassy was overrun on 4 November 1979, five members of the staff escaped by a side exit. The remaining fifty-five would be held captive for 444 days. The leader of the escapees, Robert Anders, decided the best place to find refuge was the British Embassy. Arriving there, they found the embassy also surrounded by an angry mob. Anders took the group back to his flat, where he tried to contact a rescuer.

In the morning the British Embassy rang, bravely informing the five Americans that it could give them refuge in its residential compound, known as Gulhak, and was sending a car for them. But
“Without the information Churchill received from Ralph Wigram, and others in those years of appeasement, he would not have been as effective in his quest for rearmament. For Wigram, his colleagues and successors, faced with where their duty lay, it was a matter of conscience: their political masters or their country. Theirs was the greater loyalty.”

Wigram was descended from William the Conqueror. His mother, a Fitzroy, was descended from the only one of Henry VIII’s illegitimate children whom the King recognised and treated as a son: Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, born June 1519 to Elizabeth Blount. Fitzroy was the ward of Cardinal Wolsey.

I have now visited Cuckfield many times and met Richard Constable, the local historian. Ava and the Wigrams’ son Charles are buried in the same plot. The headstone in the adjoining grave belongs to Charles’s nanny: clearly she was a much-loved friend of the family. One may wonder if Churchill had a hand in Wigram’s inscription: the eagle and lion lines are redolent of his style. The gravemarker is now restored, as befits the roles of those it memorializes, and the inscriptions may all be clearly read:

**IN MEMORY OF**
**AVA, VISCOUNTESS WAVERLEY**
**FORMERLYAVA WIGRAM**
**DIED DECEMBER 22ND 1974**

* * * * *
**SWEET IS THE CALM**
**OF PARADISE THE BLESSED**
**CHARLES EDWARD**
**THOMAS BODLEY WIGRAM**
**BORN PARIS 1929 DIED ISFIELD 1951**

* * * * *
**BLESSED**
**ARE THE PURE IN HEART**
**RALPH WIGRAM, C.M.G.**
**COUNSELLOR IN HM DIPLOMATIC SERVICE**
**PASSED AWAY DECEMBER 31ST 1936,**
**AGED 46 YEARS.**
**HE WAS SWIFTER THAN THE EAGLE**
**HE WAS BRAVER THAN A LION**
**NOW HE IS NUMBERED AMONG THE CHILDREN OF GOD**
**AND HIS LOT IS AMONG THE SAINTS.**

Winston Churchill paid poignant tribute to Wigram in *The Gathering Storm*: “He saw as clearly as I did, but with more certain information, the awful peril which was closing upon us. This drew us together. Often we met at his little house in North Street, and he and Mrs. Wigram came to stay with us at Chartwell.”

Churchill added, “My friend took it too much to heart. After all one can always go on doing what one believes to be his duty, and running ever greater risks till knocked out. Wigram’s profound comprehension reacted on a sensitive nature unduly. His untimely death in December 1936 was an irreparable loss to the Foreign Office, and played its part in the miserable decline in our fortunes.”

Mr. Axton (hughandi@btinternet.com) of Walmer, Kent, is a longtime member of The Churchill Centre, UK. He is responsible, together with local historian Richard Constable, for restoring the gravemarker to its present pristine condition.

British diplomats Martin Williams and Gordon Pirrie got lost negotiating the thronging streets. They were driving, of all cars, an orange 1976 Austin Maxi one of them had driven to Teheran from England. Desperate, the Americans again rang the British Embassy, only to be told that Iranians were “coming over the walls.”

After hours driving Teheran back-streets, Williams and Pirrie found Anders and his group and drove them nervously to the as-yet-untouched British residential compound. They arrived undetected and were warmly welcomed. CIA officer Antonio Mendez, who helped to mount the eventual rescue, recalls in his book, *Argo*: “The British were kind hosts, and offered them a house of their own, fed them a warm meal, even prepared cocktails.” The film mentions none of this.

The *Daily Mail* pounced: “You can imagine the outraged comments over industrial buckets of popcorn in theatres from Alabama to Alaska: ‘Goddamn Limeys! So that’s what we get for bailing them out during World War II.’”

To invoke another diplomatic phrase, that’s a bit over the top. The film’s error appears to be one of omission. Britain and the “special relationship” generally have a good and favorable press in America. Americans have been been complaining about historical lapses by Hollywood for years. >>
The *Mail* was right to object to another film, *U-571*, which cast the Yanks as capturing a vital German Enigma machine when it was really the Poles and British; and *Braveheart*, the Mel Gibson epic which depicted the English as “the rapacious, murderous oppressors of the noble and romantic Scots.” But the newspaper was wrong to pillory *Saving Private Ryan* for portraying “D-Day as an exclusively American effort.” That film was simply about American soldiers at Omaha Beach—which was the deadliest of the landing beaches.

Although I recognized Canada’s heroic Ambassador Ken Taylor and his wife (excellent likenesses), I was not left with the feeling that Canada’s efforts had also been underplayed, though there were definitely some inaccuracies and omissions about the sterling performance of the Canadian Embassy. RML.

**Lease Hoe Farm**

GODALMING, SURREY, MAY 25TH—Hoe Farm in Hascombe, Godalming, Surrey, where Churchill took up painting on a summer holiday after being dismissed from the Admiralty in 1915, is offered for let by Smiths Gore. A mere £10,500 per month will allow you to walk the grounds as he did, “stooped in anxious thought,” while examining the “painting hut” where Churchill completed four known oil paintings. Details on the web at [http://bit.ly/13chYiP](http://bit.ly/13chYiP).

Dating from the 16th century, Hoe Farm is set in Gertrude Jekyll-landscaped gardens; the house itself was modified by Sir Edward Lutyens, and includes pad-docks with a stable block. Twice in the 1980s/90s, Churchill Tours were hosted there by the late Arthur Simon, who then held the lease. On the first of these, Lady Soames had her first look at the place that had played a key role in her father’s development as an artist.

**Errata, FH 157**

Pages 6-7, “The Lion Is Back,” first entry, was an opinion piece and should be bylined RML or “The Editor.”

Page 15, column 1: delete “Hohenlinden,” which technically was Moreau’s victory (see page 4.)
Q Since Winston Churchill’s mother was American, why was he not an American citizen from birth? If he had been, could he have lawfully entered British politics without renouncing his American citizenship? This is a fascinating premise for a piece of alternative history! Incidentally, I am a great supporter of “birthright citizenship,” and cannot understand why so many of my fellow conservatives deplore it.

—Jeff Jacoby, Columnist, Boston Globe

A We referred the first part of this question to colleagues and received the following definitive report from Kevin Bishop, special assistant to President Larry Arnn at Hillsdale College in Michigan:

“Churchill’s mother was not required to renounce her U.S. citizenship, as far as we can tell. However, prior to the Citizenship Act of 1934, persons born abroad of one citizen parent and one alien parent were given citizenship only if the father was the citizen. Mothers giving birth abroad could not pass on citizenship unless they were born after 1934. Thus Lady Randolph’s citizenship was irrelevant in determining her son’s citizenship.”

It is interesting to note that the Immigration and Nationality Technical Correction Act of 1994 retroactively allowed persons born abroad before 1934 to receive citizenship from their mothers—thus Churchill would be a full-scale American citizen, not just an honorary. The 1994 law specifically mentions retroactive application. Full text at bit.ly/131KSS: “Except as provided in paragraph (2), the immigration and nationality laws of the United States shall be applied (to persons born before, on, or after the date of the enactment of this Act) as though the amendment made by subsection (a), and subsection (b), had been in effect as of the date of their birth, except that the retroactive application of the amendment and that subsection shall not affect the validity of citizenship of anyone who has obtained citizenship under section 1993 of the Revised Statutes (as in effect before the enactment of the Act of May 24, 1934 (48 Stat. 797)).”

Mr. Bishop adds: “As to what might have happened had the law already been changed in 1874, even if Churchill had been a U.S. citizen, he was probably too great an admirer of his father to have considered trying his luck in America.”

But Churchill did reflect on the possibility in his first speech to Congress on 26 December 1941:

“By the way, I cannot help reflecting that if my father had been American and my mother British, instead of the other way round, I might have got here on my own. In that case, this would not have been the first time you would have heard my voice. In that case I should not have needed any invitation, but if I had, it is hardly likely it would have been unanimous. So perhaps things are better as they are.”

A reader of Paul Reid’s Defender of the Realm asks about its “frequent reference to the amount, brands, mixture, and timing of Churchill’s alcohol intake and a few references to his being drunk. I could not reconcile this with what I have read for years in Finest Hour. I am aware of the effort you have made to debunk myths, including his alleged alcoholism. So I am left wondering whether FH has tended to minimize his drinking, given the very convincing descriptions in Defender of the Realm.”

We hope we haven’t led anyone down false paths! William Manchester tended to overdo the drinking in his two volumes of The Last Lion, but I didn’t criticize Paul Reid’s take as I read Defender. If you find anything glaringly different from what we reported, please advise.

Someone said Churchill could not have been an alcoholic because “no alcoholic could drink that much.” There is something to this. My view has always been that whatever the amount, he was rarely if ever the worse for it. “Breakfast wine” was not a daily habit. He nursed “scotch-flavored mouthwash,” a habit he gained by purifying drinking water in Empire backwaters.

He drank a lot at meals but diluted it with food during long dining hours. Alanbrooke sometimes thought WSC was drunk, but he wrote those waspish diaries late at night when he was tired and frustrated; only later when he was pressed for cash did Alanbrooke allow them to be published—accompanied WSC’s copy with an apology!

After years of searching, we finally found someone who remembered Churchill clearly inebriated—a bodyguard at Teheran who helped him and Eden wobble back to the embassy after a long night of toasts with the Russians. He was the only witness, including friends and family, to Winston Churchill the worse for drink.
Remembrances:
Margaret Thatcher
Anthony Montague Browne

RICHARD M. LANGWORTH
Everyone has read of Margaret Thatcher’s career. Everyone depending on their politics will have their own vision of Britain’s first woman head of government. It is left to say here what she meant to us, and to the memory of Churchill, whom she revered, I believe, more than any prime minister who held office between them.

Margaret Thatcher was named an honorary member of the International Churchill Society shortly after she resigned as prime minister in November 1990, not without some debate. She had always been controversial. Some of our directors thought politicians are best taken aboard in pairs, one from each side, like Noah’s Ark. We invited her exclusively—because it seemed to us that she, more than any prime minister, had real appreciation for Churchill, had read his books, and had remembered him frequently, even hosting a dinner for his family and surviving members of his wartime coalition. We never regretted our decision.

In November 1993 she was in Washington to coincide with a Churchill Conference hosting 500 people, including 140 students, a dozen luminaries, and ambassadors from all our member countries. There were moving experiences: a reenactment at the Navy Chapel of Divine Services held by Roosevelt and Churchill on HMS Prince of Wales in 1941; Alan Keyes singing all six stanzas of The Battle Hymn of the Republic on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, to mark the 130th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address; and Martin Gilbert’s lecture at the Holocaust Museum, along with Cyril Mazansky’s account of the fate of his own family.

During our meetings Ambassador Sir Robin Renwick (now Lord Renwick of Clifton) kindly hosted a reception for her and us at the British Embassy, inviting our honorary members Colin Powell and Caspar Weinberger. Here I first caught sight of the famous leader, though my wife, a much better talker, spent far more time chatting with her.

I did overhear a conversation between Lady Thatcher and General Powell, which at the time I thought singular.

“Colin,” she was saying in her most powerful tones, “you must do it—you know you must. There is no getting around it.” I am told she was probably asking America to help stop the strife in Bosnia that had erupted the previous year. Like Churchill, she was always concerned for the lives of small peoples. General Powell replied: “Yes ma’am.”

She gave an eloquent little speech thanking America for supporting Britain in the 1982 Falklands War. The next evening at our conference, I was seated next to former Ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, who wanted to know what Lady Thatcher had said. Unknowing, I repeated her words: “Many voices in America were opposed to helping Britain, but Cap Weinberger was not one of those voices.” Mrs. Kirkpatrick said quietly: “I was one of those voices.”

Realizing I had not done my homework, but opting for Napoleon’s “l’audace, toujours l’audace,” I screwed up my courage and replied: “But you were wrong, weren’t you?”

A long pause ensued. I thought of Churchill’s remark: “It certainly seemed longer than the two minutes which one observes in the commemorations of Armistice Day.”

Finally, Mrs. Kirkpatrick kindly said: “Yes, on reflection, I probably was.” I think this showed the power of personality that Margaret Thatcher exerted, even on those who disagreed with her.

At the Embassy I had presented her with our last numbered copy of Churchill’s plaintive, rather sad but revealing short story, The Dream, where he tells the ghost of Lord Randolph Churchill everything that has happened since his father died in 1895. She stayed up late that night reading it through. Her note of thanks arrived the next day:

“I want you to know how very honoured I feel to receive The Dream….It completes my collection of his work and is bound more beautifully than any of the others. I read it in the early hours of this morning and am totally fascinated by the imagination of the story and how much it reveals of Winston the man and the son.”

WITH BARBARA LANGWORTH. BRITISH EMBASSY, WASHINGTON, 5 NOVEMBER 1993
Margaret Thatcher...

There is a line in The Dream where Churchill tells his father that there are women now in the House of Commons. “Not many,” Winston assures the flabbergasted Lord Randolph. “They have found their level.” How Lady Thatcher must have roared at that!

We met again at Fulton in 1996, when the Churchill Memorial, now the National Churchill Museum, marked the “Iron Curtain” speech’s 50th anniversary by inviting Lady Thatcher to give the keynote address. Together with the Museum, we jointly sponsored a symposium on the subject, recorded in James Muller’s book, Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” Speech Fifty Years Later.

Later Lady Thatcher was surrounded by Fulton people, and by security. Celia Sandys asked, “Have you been ushered into The Presence?” “No,” I said. “Follow me,” she replied, approaching a guard at the inner sanctum: “I am Sir Winston Churchill’s granddaughter—and he’s with me.”

Payback: at dinner that night, our kind hosts inducted two Fellows of the Churchill Memorial. One was Lady Thatcher. The other was me.

To my relief, they presented my gong first, giving me a chance to say thanks and get out of the way: “It is a great honor, but to receive it at the same time with the greatest prime minister since Churchill is a unique experience.”

I said that looking directly at the great lady...who gave me a smile, and a wink. Right, I thought. Now that’s out of the way, thank God.

Around that time she chose to place her Premier Papers alongside Winston Churchill’s at the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge. Between them they had occupied Downing Street for one-fifth of the 20th century. The Archives Centre, as David Freeman wrote, was now the equivalent of two U.S. presidential libraries. Then Lady Thatcher helped Churchill College to raise the money to build a new wing to house them.

In 2009 in London, The Churchill Centre presented Baroness Thatcher with its Churchill Award for Statesmanship—only the second time it has been presented. The main address was by David Cameron, then Leader of the Opposition, now Prime Minister. “She was in good form,” said the historian Andrew Roberts, who was seated next to her, “and commented to me afterwards about what a fine speaker David Cameron is.”

It was years before the gratitude owed to her was totaled up. I was a regular visitor to Britain in her time and could not fail to notice the palpable improvement in the wellbeing of the country. No one who saw her in action could miss her devastating effectiveness in debate. No one who admires principle and courage could help but admire her devotion to them, win or lose. The poll tax which some say was her downfall in 1992 manifested her principle that the cost of local government should be paid by all, including those who previously paid nothing, while voting for everything.

Even the Labour Party can thank her, for forcing it back from the fringe to reality. Reflecting on that change in 1994, Lady Thatcher praised Tony Blair as “probably the most formidable Labour leader since Hugh Gaitskell. I see a lot of socialism behind their front bench, but not in Mr. Blair. I think he genuinely has moved.”

Say what you will of Tony Blair, but Margaret Thatcher was certainly the most formidable Conservative leader since Winston Churchill. Internationally, she was always out in front. Her reaction to tyrants, from Leopoldo Galtieri to Saddam Hussein, was consistent. She was the first to say “we can do business” with Gorbachev. Her support of the Anglo-American alliance was more than talk: it was an article of faith. Her relationship with President Reagan was a model we may never see again. Yet when she disagreed, as over Grenada or Strategic Defense, there was no doubt where she stood.

“The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on. Nor all thy Piety nor Wit shall cancel half a line.” She fought the good fight and made a huge difference, for a time. Alas her time is gone, lost in a collectivist dream. The individualism and enterprise which built great nations and great democracies, which provided the greatest good for the greatest number, has too often been replaced by a kind of vague internationalism and a desire to do good, absent the realization that liberty takes work to maintain, and is nurtured only through constant care.

It is strictly my opinion, but this American has no hesitation in paraphrasing Sir Winston’s encomium for Franklin Roosevelt: She was the greatest British friend we have known since Churchill, and one of the greatest champions of freedom who ever brought help and comfort from the old world to the new. ☑
Finest Hour 50, Winter 1985, was our largest issue to date, celebrating the most notable year up until then in our young history. On September 17th in London, the Second Churchill Tour hosted Martin Gilbert for a fine speech on “Churchill’s London.” On November 2nd in Boston, the Second Churchill Conference welcomed U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Both these memorable speeches were reproduced as booklets, while FH 50 covered September 25th, “The Party at the Savoy,” with Lord and Lady Soames and Anthony Montague Browne, Sir Winston’s private secretary for the last thirteen years of his life. Glancing at our other two guests, Anthony compared himself to “a priest in a small Italian village, getting up to make a sermon and finding not one but two popes sitting there.”

Anthony and Shelagh Montague Browne then lived near Newbury in the charming hamlet of Bucklebury, where I drove one day for a visit. Their pretty white house was visible from a good distance, surrounded by nothing but the green hills of Berkshire. I complimented him on the choice of location: “You can see brigands coming for half a mile.” Anthony agreed: “Yes, I feel almost invulnerable.” (Upon returning from Sir Winston’s funeral in 1965, he had found his London flat burgled.)

To a Churchillian who was also an automotive writer my treat was double-barreled. Shelagh’s first husband was racing driver Lance Macklin, who for years was blamed for causing the terrible crash at the 1955 Le Mans Twenty-four Hours that had killed Pierre Levegh and eighty spectators. Shelagh disputed the prevailing opinion: Macklin, driving a relatively slow Austin-Healey, had swerved to avoid Mike Hawthorn’s Jaguar, a defensive move which ended in the greatest loss of life in racing history. Later at the Tourist Trophy, Macklin crashed his car to avoid another pile-up, and Shelagh had prevailed on him to retire from racing. She gave me a fascinating insider’s account.

After Anthony showed me his enviable collection of Churchill first editions, most of them inscribed to him by the author, we sat down to a marvelous dinner, interrupted by an urgent Churchillian phone call involving a kerfuffle in the press. The circumstances are irrelevant, but it was interesting that Anthony was the first person the caller came to for advice—just as Sir Winston had many times, twenty and thirty years before.

To Churchill, whom he met when he was only 29, Anthony fitted the description, “a friend is someone who knows all about you, but likes you.” I am not going to recite his life story. You can read all about it on the Internet. I will offer only a small act of gratitude. As to what he meant to WSC, you have only to read the 1985 remarks by Lady Soames, overleaf.

“AMB,” as he was known, was a steadfast, enthusiastic friend to the Society and Centre, addressing meetings on three occasions and never failing to lend his advice or reaction to words in our pages that touched his experience. Reviewing a “brightly coloured, if somewhat elliptical” book by one of Sir Winston’s staff, he was polite but firm:

We tend to see history from a different point of view and I am bound to say that where I was present at some of the events described, they struck me rather differently….It was all too easy to succumb to irritation with [the author] at times but his devotion to WSC was genuine and “the Boss” I think had a real affection for him. It was Churchill’s inevitable reaction to stand up for any member of his entourage who was under attack. As Lady Churchill once said, looking at me rather pointedly: “Winston is always ready to be accompanied by those with considerable imperfections.”

His self-deprecating quality stood Anthony well. The son of a distinguished Army colonel, he had steadfastly refused to join the Officer Training Corps until the outbreak of war in 1939, which he had been sure would never come. In 1941, as soon as he was old enough, he joined the RAF. He flew Beaufighters and Mosquitoes, and won his Distinguished Flying Cross for his skill in attacking Japanese lines of communications. After the war he joined the Foreign Office, and was seconded to Churchill in 1952.

Like former Churchill secretary Grace Hamblin, AMB was quick to let us know of any inaccuracy in Finest Hour. When a 2005 cover offered a stylized artist’s rendering of Battle of Britain aircraft, he was quick to react: >>
Churchill sent for two 16th century Japanese bronzes that his mother had brought back from the Far East. They were about eight inches high, and represented a mare in season and a stallion, a separate piece, gazing at her. He commented to the Crown Prince that these epitomized to him “sex in bronze.” The Crown Prince took the bronze mare, turned her over and gazed at her intently. The Prime Minister muttered, “He won’t find it there....”

There are passages in books by gifted writers that tend to stamp themselves on the memory. In Long Sunset, one of these comes at the end of the Churchill funeral. It began with characteristic whimsy:

As we filed past the grave for the last time before it was closed, I was astonished to see a small and not particularly distinguished row of medals lying on the coffin. I could only suppose that it had fallen from the chest of one of the military coffin-bearers, and I wondered if it would remain there to perplex archaeologists of many centuries hence.

Coming to his final reflections, Anthony quoted the Boss’s own words, on the death of Richard Coeur de Lion, “...worthy, by the consent of all men, to sit with King Arthur and Roland, and other heroes of martial romance at some eternal Round Table.” He finished his book with the thought that appeared in one form or another in every talk I heard him give:

I tried to say some silent prayers for that brave and generous soul, but they were choked and confused, and came to nothing. I could not mourn for him: he had so clearly and for so long wanted to leave the World. But I was submerged in a wave of aching grief for Britain’s precipitous decline, against which he had stood in vain.

For Anthony Montague Browne I have no hesitation in repeating the valedictory fanfare Randolph Churchill wrote on the death of Brendan Bracken: “You were always on the good side: you loved truth and honour; you hated cruelty and injustice: fare thee well, my gifted, true and many-sided friend.” ☞

Anthony Montague Browne...

The cover is a monstrosity. The aircraft at extreme right is presumably a Hurricane—86% of our aircraft were initially Hurricanes—but it is given the Spitfire’s elliptical wings! The other two aircraft have a portly profile, four guns instead of eight, and appear to be powered by six-cylinder engines instead of twelves. The cockpit of one plane has four panels on the exposed side and resembles neither a Spitfire nor a Hurricane, having no visible radiator. Ugh! There are literally thousands of photos of those aircraft. Might not the artist have seen one of them? Admittedly most of those who flew them are dead. But not all!

Not dead yet! I reminded him of Mark Twain’s crack, “Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.” But I didn’t inquire too closely into how he was doing. Friends get to a certain age and when you don’t see them for awhile, you avoid details. He died April 1st of complications following one of those “body part replacements” he once told me he never expected to need, for he was always fit. Yet he reached 89—a good number, only one short of the boss he revered.

His great book Long Sunset—a memoir of his life, dwelling heavily on his years with Churchill—was published in 1995. In it he captured many of the inside stories with which he’d enthralled audiences ten and more years before.

Anthony never missed a detail. A luncheon Churchill hosted for the Crown Prince of Japan, he wrote, went

perhaps too swimmingly, for when the time for toasts arrived, the Prime Minister rose and proposed the health of the Emperor of Japan before that of the Queen. I choked on my glass of port and saw Rob Scott, a senior Foreign Office official who had been captured and grossly maltreated by the Japanese, turn pale with mortification. It was of course an aberration which had the virtue of greatly pleasing the Japanese.

The stories he could tell! At the Savoy in 1985 he reached back into his memory and told us more about that august Anglo-Japanese occasion:
Absent Friends: Echoes and Memories

St. Paul’s Cathedral 17 April 2013

Daniel Finkelstein in The Times wrote that today’s events could be seen as more than a funeral for an individual, but as a watershed in the passing of the generation whose views and character were forged as young adults in the Second World War. Margaret Thatcher was born in 1925, her successor in 1943, and the current prime minister in 1966. The Evening Standard described a “State funeral in all but name,” carrying a picture of Churchill’s statue in Parliament Square: “Not since the nation mourned Sir Winston Churchill in 1965 has the Queen attended the funeral of a British Prime Minister.”

The Evening Standard described a “State funeral in all but name,” carrying a picture of Churchill’s statue in Parliament Square: “Not since the nation mourned Sir Winston Churchill in 1965 has the Queen attended the funeral of a British Prime Minister.”

These comments got me thinking, as someone charged with helping to look after the archives of both Sir Winston Churchill and Baroness Thatcher, about their two funerals, separated by nearly half a century.

The first similarity is that they both took place in colour. This may sound bizarre, but the Churchill archive has so many black and white images of WSC’s funeral that it becomes very easy to think of it as a black and white event. Today allowed me to reimagine it in colour, looking afresh at the ceremonial uniforms and the decorations within the church. I suspect that this morning was considerably warmer than January 1965, though the arrival and departure of the coffin was still preceded by a cold blast of wind as the huge main doors were opened.

Much of the basic ceremony was common to both funerals. The perfectly timed and militarily precise procession to St Paul’s, the coffin draped in the Union Flag riding on a gun carriage escorted by a uniformed bearer party and honour guard; the traditional British funeral service with its hymns, readings and prayers; the presence of the Queen, the prime minister, former prime ministers, the leader of the opposition; representatives of foreign powers and the British political elite, all neatly arrayed in ranks dictated by diplomatic protocol and indicated by the colour of your ticket (my blue ticket ensured that I could not advance beyond the back of the nave).

There were differences in format. Churchill lay in state before his funeral, the Queen waited on the steps of St Paul’s for the coffin to leave, and Churchill’s service was followed by a progress up the Thames complete with accompanying fly past; but today’s event still had the look and feel of a public and State occasion.

Another similarity was the crowds, but probe a little more deeply and here also was a difference. The crowds that lined the route today carried digital devices, ensuring that every second was captured from multiple angles. Within the cathedral, waiting guests conversed on smartphones or iPads, following the coffin across London towards them on large television screens. There was a feeling of a media event; the mood outside the church was not solemn or sombre.

Instead of greeting the coffin in silence, as I am sure was the case in 1965, the crowds outside applauded and cheered. Some carried banners expressing their admiration or opposition to “Maggie,” or indeed their criticism of guests like Tony Blair, while others called out to celebrities as they arrived and departed.

Such changes in technology, social attitude and behaviour reflect a generational shift, one that probably began to take hold during Margaret Thatcher’s time in office. True, both funerals were very British affairs, but today’s was probably more self-consciously so, planned with the cameras and rolling news media in mind.

At the back, I was probably in the one place on the planet where you could not see much at all, though it still felt rather special to be there, almost like being an “extra” in the final act of some grand historical movie.

But at its heart there was a funeral service, and Amanda Thatcher’s brave reading in front of the world reminded me that this was not just about ceremony, or the end of an era, or a public spectacle, it was also about the passing of a great personage.

—Allen Packwood

For a copy of the many references to Lady Thatcher in Finest Hour from 1983 to 2007, kindly email the editor.
I do appreciate so much being asked to your lovely parties, and being kept in touch with everything going on in the International Churchill Society. All of us in the family find this profoundly moving: that there is such a Society, which exists to keep my father’s memory green, and may I also say, accurate.

But now for my main task, which is to introduce your speaker this evening. I am longing to hear what he is going to say myself. Because I don’t think, dear Anthony, I have ever heard you speak in public—though always and often, I’m happy to say, in private!

I met Anthony for the first time in 1952 when he joined my father’s private office. He’d already had a gallant and distinguished career. He’d been a pilot of fighter bombers, and had been decorated with the DFC. All these things naturally commended him to my father, who admired and liked clever, brave young men.

I don’t think that when Anthony joined the private office he realised—or indeed did any of us—that this was the beginning of a very long relationship. That lovely prayer of Sir Walter Raleigh’s, that speaks of true glory being not the starting out of something but the finishing of it, is appropriate. Anthony served with my father in his private office and became a great friend of the family.

I don’t know how long it took for Anthony to love and to like us. It took me only five minutes to like him, but for the first five minutes I was puzzled by the really dreadful Edwardian puns he told. I used to think: “He’s young, he’ll get over this.” But no. As the years went by, whenever we met, out again would come the puns. I hope he has some good ones for tonight.

But now, having been joking and frivolous, I come to what I really want to say. And it is a wonderful, God-given opportunity for me to express in public, with all of you who cherish my father’s memory, the enormous debt my father, my mother, and all of us who loved my parents owed, and still owe, to Anthony.

When my father resigned in 1955 he was sad and reluctant to go, let’s make no bones about it. He went into private life, but in a funny way, you see, it wasn’t private. He was a public institution. The Foreign Office—and we must give them some credit for this—allowed Anthony to remain with Papa. It was very, very noble of Anthony to allow this interruption in what would have undoubtedly been a brilliant diplomatic career. And from 1955 until my father drew his last breath, Anthony was practically never absent from his side.

What was private life like for my father when he retired? The whole world trod to 28 Hyde Park Gate. When we went abroad it was to call upon kings and presidents and prime ministers, to address great assemblies. The mail poured in. My father’s business affairs, and his private life, Anthony really masterminded and managed. He advised and helped. His knowledge, his professional know-how, his devotion, were the major factors in the last ten years of my father’s life. I am glad to be able to go on record and say this, because I wonder how many people know exactly how much Anthony meant to my father, my mother, and to all of us.

And one more thing. At first, all right, perhaps you could say it was a plum of a job. People might have thought they would have liked to be in Anthony’s shoes. But the day came when my father, although much beloved and venerable, was past his wonderful prime, was declining in energy and ability. He still wanted to take his part in affairs, but he needed help. He needed a wise friend, and a knowledgeable one, who would guard his reputation—who would guard every step he took. And long after it was really fun to serve my father, Anthony remained to bear the burden of the day, to be his friend and support throughout his sadder, declining years.

They were not necessarily unhappy years. Everybody who lives a long time declines, and a beautiful evening is a wonderful thing. But of course it was sad, the last two years, and it cannot have been fun, or particularly interesting actually, for a bright, bubbly young man with a future.

I am glad to have the opportunity to say this; to say from the family, and for all who revere my father’s memory, that we all owe a great debt to Anthony Montague Browne. My parents both knew it, and I really think, Anthony dear, that we in the family knew it. I want everybody else to know it.

And now I know we’re going to have a lovely speech and perhaps some really bad puns from Anthony.

—Mary Soames

For a copy of Anthony Montague Browne’s remarks, and the response by Lord Soames, please see Finest Hour 50 or email the editor.
WIT AND WISDOM

James Markovitch explains the Byss and the Abyss

"I had a feeling once about Mathematics, that I saw it all—Depth beyond depth was revealed to me—the Byss and the Abyss. I saw, as one might see the transit of Venus—or even the Lord Mayor’s Show, a quantity passing through infinity and changing its sign from plus to minus. I saw exactly how it happened and why the tergiversation was inevitable: and how the one step involved all the others. It was like politics. But it was after dinner and I let it go! The practical point is that if this aged, weary-souled Civil Service Commissioner had not asked this particular question about these Cosines or Tangents in their squared or even cubed condition, which I happened to have learned scarcely a week before, not one of the subsequent chapters of this book would ever have been written. I might have gone into the Church and preached orthodox sermons in a spirit of audacious contradiction to the age. I might have gone into the City and made a fortune."

—WSC, My Early Life, 1930

The “tergiversation” that Churchill refers to in his mathematics quote may very well derive from the expression 1/x. If x approaches zero from one, 1/x approaches a limit of positive infinity. But if x approaches zero from negative one, it approaches a limit of negative infinity. One might therefore infer that as x goes from positive one to negative one, the expression 1/x goes from positive infinity to negative infinity as zero is crossed—a “tergiversation” that was controversial when negative numbers were first introduced. So Churchill perhaps understood more mathematics than he let on!

I read the quote in his autobiography decades ago, but it was only when reading An Imaginary Tale, by Paul Nahin (http://xrl.us/b09d9y), which discussed the controversy surrounding the introduction of negative numbers, that I made the connection.

Leave it to Sir Winston Churchill to remember a point of controversy about the foundations of mathematics.

Churchill continues: "When I look back upon those care-laden months, their prominent features rise from the abyss of memory....We were arrived in an ‘Alice-in-Wonderland’ world, at the portals of which stood ‘A Quadratic Equation.’ This with a strange grimace pointed the way to the Theory of Indices, which again handed on the intruder to the full rigours of the Binomial Theorem. Further dim chambers lighted by sullen, sulphurous fires were reputed to contain a dragon called the ‘Differential Calculus.’ But this monster was beyond the bounds appointed by the Civil Service Commissioners who regulated this stage of Pilgrim’s heavy journey. We turned aside, not indeed to the uplands of the Delectable Mountains, but into a strange corridor of things like anagrams and acrostics called Sines, Cosines and Tangents. Apparently they were very important, especially when multiplied by each other, or by themselves! They had also this merit—you could learn many of their evolutions off by heart. There was a question in my third and last Examination about these Cosines and Tangents in a highly square-rooted condition which must have been decisive upon the whole of my after life. It was a problem. But luckily I had seen its ugly face only a few days before and recognised it at first sight.

“I have never met any of these creatures since....they passed away like the phantasmagnoria of a fevered dream. I am assured that they are most helpful in engineering, astronomy and things like that. It is very important to build bridges and canals and to comprehend all the stresses and potentialities of matter, to say nothing of counting all the stars and even universes....I am very glad there are quite a number of people born with a gift and a liking for all of this; like great chess-players who play sixteen games at once blindfold and die quite soon of epilepsy. Serve them right! I hope the Mathematicians, however, are well rewarded. I promise never to blackleg their profession nor take the bread out of their mouths."

Mr. Markovitch may be reached by email at jimmarkovitch@yahoo.com
In 1899, after four years’ regular service in the 4th Queen’s Own Hussars, Churchill resigned his commission to stand in a by-election for a seat in the House of Commons. He had seen active service on three continents, none of it with his own regiment. While the 4th Hussars were still in England in 1895, he was attached to the Spanish Army in Cuba before moving with his own regiment to southern India in 1896; from there he was detached for duty on the Afghan border in 1897. A year later he was attached to the 21st Lancers in Egypt and Sudan.

These adventures were made possible not by normal Army postings, which would have kept him on regimental duty for several years, but by his own initiative and persistence. They resulted in his first two books, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (1898) and *The River War* (two volumes, 1899).

After Churchill failed to secure a seat in Parliament in 1899, the Boer War conveniently began and he became a war correspondent, was captured and escaped, took a local commission in the South African Light Horse (a precaution in the event of recapture), returned home and won his seat in the 1900 general election. He had a wealth of military experience which none of his contemporaries could match. It seemed a waste not to make use of what he had greatly enjoyed, so in 1902 he became officially a part-time soldier and joined the Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars (QOOH).

The QOOH was a Yeomanry cavalry regiment whose members undertook military training on evenings, weekends and an annual camp, and were available for national emergencies, as evidenced by their operational service during both World Wars. In 1908 the QOOH became part of the newly designated Territorial Force (TF), renamed the Territorial Army (TA) in 1920. The regiment had a number of sub-units around Oxfordshire, and Churchill began his service as second-in-command of the squadron at Woodstock. He was promoted to the rank of major in 1905 and took command of the squadron at Henley-on-Thames, which had better train service to London.

Churchill’s tenure at Henley lasted at least until 1913. Once while First Lord of the Admiralty, he took his squadron to visit the fleet at Portsmouth; we can be sure that his men were given a much better tour than would have been usual! In late 1915 Major Churchill resigned from the government, donned his QOOH uniform, and reported for duty in Flanders, where he gained military experience on a fourth continent. His first forty days were spent under instruction with the 2nd Battalion, Grenadier Guards, when he continued to wear his QOOH uniform. But in 1916, on promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel in command of 6th Battalion, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, he changed into the latter’s Lowland uniform with Glengarry cap. He was appointed Colonel, 4th Hussars in 1941, and also became Honorary Colonel, QOOH in 1953.

The unusual photograph on the cover shows Churchill in the full dress uniform of the Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars, wearing a captain’s rank badges, so must have been taken in 1902-05. It is published by kind courtesy of the Oxfordshire Yeomanry Association (www.sofo.org.uk) and its honorary secretary, Major (retd.) R.J. Sheldon.

It is interesting to note that he is wearing four medals which he had earned while in the regular army: the India Medal with the clasp *Panjab Frontier 1897-98*; the Queen’s Sudan Medal; the Queen’s South Africa Medal with six clasps: *Cape Colony, Tugela Heights, Orange Free State, Relief of Ladysmith, Johannesberg, Diamond Hill*; and the Khedive’s Sudan Medal (Egypt).
Churchill had also earned two Spanish medals in Cuba. The first was the Cross of the Order of Military Merit, First Class (lowest of four classes). British regulations did not permit him to wear this decoration, though he often did so. The second was the Cuban Campaign Medal, which was not instituted until 1899, more than three years after Churchill had left Cuba. This was presented to him personally by King Alfonso XIII in Madrid in early 1914.

The next medal he was to receive was the Coronation Medal of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911.

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**Churchill on the Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars, 1906-1944**

**5 December 1906, WSC to the Adjutant, Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars:**

Sir, I should be very glad if you would inform me what is the nature of the course of instruction which I should attend in order to become qualified for Field Rank; and I would certainly make every exertion in my power to comply with the regulations. But my official work is at the present time very heavy and has been so the whole of this year, and it would be quite impossible for me to be absent from London while Parliament is sitting and very difficult for me to attend satisfactorily to any course of instruction which required daily attendance.

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**10 September 1908, Lieut-Colonel Sir Robert Hermon-Hodge to WSC:**

My dear Churchill, I am sending you tomorrow a silver salver precisely the same as [your brother] Jack’s from the officers of the Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars with the warmest good wishes for your happiness. Please allow me this opportunity of telling you how much I appreciate your work in the Regiment and the way in which you stick to it in spite of the important claims upon your time. Do not trouble to answer this.

Believe me, Yours sincerely, Robert Hodge (Colonel, Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars)

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**14 September 1915, WSC to insurance agent W.H. Bernau:**

I may require to go to France in the near future on the same sort of conditions of liberty as were arranged for my visit to the Dardanelles. I should like to pay an extra premium to cover say 15 days actually in the zone of the armies though not serving as a soldier; these days to count as they occur. In the event of my later on in the same year wishing to pay the regular £5.5.0 of full war risk, I should like this partial fragment to be counted towards the total.

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**18 November 1915, WSC to Clementine Churchill from GHQ, British Expeditionary Force:**

My darling, Things have fallen out very much as I expected. I was met by a request to come to General Headquarters, which after seeing my regiment, I did. [General] French as ever an affectionate friend. He wished me to take a Brigade as soon as it could be arranged. I said as I told you that beforehand I must feel myself effectively master of the conditions of trench warfare from the point of view of the regimental officer; and I suggested the Guards as the best school. This is therefore to be arranged and I expect to go into the line on Saturday for a week or two. You must not let this fret you in the least. No action is in prospect and only a very general and ordinary risk need be contemplated. But I shall always be very proud to have served with the famous corps. It is indeed much safer than going into the line with the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars.

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**13 July 1944, WSC to Secretary of State for War (Sir Percy J. Grigg):**

I have had most disturbing news from my old regiment, the Oxfordshire Hussars, of which I am now Honorary Colonel. Apparently its role is to find drafts for the Twenty-first Army Group and to be a holding unit for wounded, trainees, etc. This means that it can never serve as a fighting unit, and will in fact disappear in all but name. It seems very wrong that a regiment with such a fine history and record should be treated in this shabby fashion. Surely they deserve their chance in the field? Pray go into this and let me know what can be done.

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**29 July 1944, WSC to Secretary of State for War and C.I.G.S. (Field Marshal Alanbrooke):**

General Montgomery spoke to me last week about the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars and other ancient Yeomanry regiments which are being used merely as holding units. I have pointed out to you the great importance of not destroying these permanent elements in our defensive system. 2. General Montgomery proposed to me that when a “Hostilities Only” or war-time-raised unit at the front was so depleted that it had to be broken up, that unit should be sent home to form part of the pool of reinforcements, and one of these now perfectly trained, permanent Yeomanry units should be sent out in its place. They are of course actually at the present time trained as artillery or anti-tank. This proposal seems quite satisfactory to me. 3. I have your minute of July 18 informing me that you have given instructions that men are not to be taken from the Oxfordshire Hussars for the time being.
Churchill, Woodstock and the Oxfordshire Yeomanry Museum

Two photographs, taken the same day, mark the visit of King Manuel II of Portugal to the summer encampment of Churchill’s regiment. The date is mid-August to early September 1908, between Jack Churchill’s wedding (8 August) and Winston’s (12 September). Circled: Top row, standing, WSC’s brother Jack. Second row, standing, Jack’s wife, Lady Gwendeline Bertie, known as “Goonie”; Portuguese Ambassador the

The unusually long and active service of Winston Churchill as a Territorial soldier is to be one of the permanent themes of a new museum, currently under construction at Woodstock, Oxfordshire, and due to open within the next twelve months.

Until now, Churchill’s main connection with Oxfordshire has been seen as being born a “Marlborough” at Blenheim Palace, and having used Ditchley Park as a World War II alternative to Chequers, when the prime minister’s country residence was deemed too visible to bombers during nights of the full moon. And, of course, he chose Bladon, near Woodstock, as his last resting place. Records of the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, a partner in the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum, now demonstrate that his connection with the county and its people is far deeper and more intimate than previously acknowledged.

On an unofficial basis, Churchill joined his Marlborough relatives in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry (Queens Own Oxfordshire Hussars) in November 1901. He then joined officially in February 1902. He soon transferred from the Woodstock to the Henley Squadron for easier commuting from his London home. He took command of the Henley Squadron in 1905 and retained it until not long before the outbreak of war in 1914. Squadron records show his personal dedication to his command during this vital period in the development of his political career including, of course,

Ms. Corcoran represents the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum (www.sofs.org.uk).
his holding, successively, three great offices of State: the Board of Trade, the Home Office and the Admiralty.

Under Churchill’s very personal leadership, informed by regular army active service, the Henley Squadron of the QOOH became acknowledged, in competition, as one of the most effective in the British Army. After giving up command in 1914, he used his position at the Admiralty to have the QOOH sent among the first of all the British Yeomany to Belgium, in September that year. In 1922, Churchill joined again, trained with them and proudly earned his Territorial Decoration. By then the QOOH had been converted from cavalry to artillery, though WSC remained long enough to earn the Territorial Decoration, which he received in 1924.

Churchill maintained his Regiment association for rest of his life, both as Honorary Colonel and later, using his authority as prime minister, to ensure “his” regiment went where the action was hottest. His wishes for his funeral, followed in “Operation Hope-Not,” provided for a QOOH contingent to march in his cortege, immediately in front of the Household Cavalry.

A record of such devotion to a “part-time” regiment is unusual, even in the most committed Territorial officers. In an ambitious and successful politician and statesman it is truly remarkable. A number of his regimental comrades in the QOOH were men of considerable distinction.

The museum currently under construction in the grounds of the existing Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock is the creation of Soldiers of Oxfordshire (SOFO). It is due to open late in 2013. SOFO was originally formed by the Trusts relating to Oxfordshire’s Regiments, including the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry as well as the Yeomany, to make their collections and histories accessible to the county. Its purpose has now been widened to study, record and make accessible the impact of conflict on Oxfordshire and its people, including all armed services, regular and part-time, British and Allied, as well as the civil population.

The SOFO Volunteer Archiving and Research team is already well established and studying a wide range of subjects arising over recorded history. Many temporary exhibitions have achieved success; one showing at Woodstock focuses on Churchill’s service in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry. There is considerable communication activity and a principal aim of SOFO is to serve educational needs in Oxfordshire. For more information please visit the museum website: www.sofo.org.uk.
Cuba, 1895: First Full Signs of the Man He Was to Become

An exciting new research project, pursued jointly by a Canadian and a Cuban historian, will shed new light on Churchill’s first foreign adventure—which was far more significant in his development than has thus far been generally believed.

In young Winston Churchill’s three weeks in Cuba, during the 1895 Spanish counter-insurgency campaign, he was already showing characteristics of the figure he would become: writer, soldier, political and military analyst, war correspondent, adventurer, thinker, and even artist.

Lourdes Méndez Vargas, the village historian of Arroyo Blanco, in central Cuba’s Sancti Spiritus Province, is an amateur only in the sense of not holding a full-time teaching position at a Cuban university. Her devotion to the history of Arroyo Blanco is such that she has already carved out a place among historians of her province as it prepares to celebrate its 500th anniversary in 2014. She comes from a family of influential Arroyo Blanqueros, who trace their roots deep into the region’s colonial past.

Lourdes Méndez began studying the role of her village as a pivotal spot in the Spanish defensive system, which had restricted the rebellion to relatively poor eastern Cuba during the previous rebellion (1868-78). The more prosperous west had remained in royalist hands for the whole of that conflict. When we met at a conference last year, she proposed an unusual project.

She had noticed the relatively scant research done on Churchill in Arroyo Blanco during his 1895 sojourn with the Spanish—despite his being considered the village’s most important visitor ever. (A nearby cigar factory makes the famous “Churchills.”) Disappointed that there was so little known of Churchill’s sojourn, in English or Spanish, she consulted the Cuban military archives. Here she discovered much that was new.

“We can never know for certain how a person would have developed if one or another aspect of his life had been different. But what is clear with regard to Churchill—as his letters at the time and his writings in later years attest—is that a life which before 1895 seemed destined to yield a narrow range of skimpy achievements became from 1895 onwards a life of glorious epitomes and stunning vindications.”


It seemed possible that, given access to Spanish and Cuban diplomatic and military archives, we could connect the dots, piecing together Churchill’s movements in more detail than before. We could discover exactly whom he had faced in the actions he described, and much more on the series of events which marked his life, and Cuban history, in important ways nearly 120 years ago.

Being something of a Churchillian, the possibility of fleshing out this project in the Anglophone world seemed to me a wonderful opportunity.

Knowing how much British archives could add to the story, I proposed expanding the project, both of us working on Cuban and Spanish sources while I explored the British record, since I speak English and can more often be in the UK. The result so far is an exceptional series of “firsts” in the life of Winston Churchill.

Dr. Klepak, who resides in Ottawa, is a military and diplomatic historian specializing in Latin America. We thank Allen Packwood for bringing his work to our attention. Churchill’s Cuban despatches in The Daily Graphic may be read in the first document volume of Winston S. Churchill, published by Hillsdale College Press.
Working virtually full-time, Lourdes Méndez concentrated on Churchill in Arroyo Blanco while I began to study the larger theme of Churchill in Cuba. Of course he had returned to the island for a brief visit in 1946, but our current interest is the experience he had there in 1895. Not fully understood at the time, his Cuban trip was the first international adventure of one of the greatest adventurers of our time. He had been to France and Switzerland as a boy, but he had never before been outside western Europe, nor in any part of the overseas British Empire.

In the eventful year of 1895, Churchill lost his father, his grandmother Clara and his beloved nurse Mrs. Elizabeth Everest, while graduating from Sandhurst and joining a cavalry regiment, the 4th Hussars. Bored with peacetime routine and with a long stint in peaceful India in prospect, Churchill yearned for adventure. Cuba, he decided, offered the action he craved.

After the death of their father in January 1895, Lady Randolph became more attentive to her sons, and Winston in particular knew how to take advantage of this. Informing her of his plans only after his mind was made up, he unabashedly asked her to intercede with everyone from the British ambassador in Madrid, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, to the commander-in-chief of the Army, Lord Wolseley. As an army officer he needed Wolseley’s permission to travel to Cuba in order to report on the rebellion as a war correspondent. He was also able to get a small official assignment: to report on a new Spanish rifle round of interest to the War Office.

Cuba proved the first example of that love of adventure which marked Churchill all his life. While other correspondents might sit comfortably in Havana hotels, listening only to rumours from the front, young Winston arranged through contacts actually to join the Spanish on campaign—to see for himself what was happening. To imagine the nerve (one press report called it “cheek”) of such a young officer, a mere second-lieutenant straight out of Sandhurst, requesting leave to undertake such a job, one >>
must understand that we are dealing with a singular character. This was the Churchill style: daring, oblivious of bureaucracy or authority, unashamed to pull strings, personally courageous. All this was emerging just as he was turning twenty-one, showing us how soon those traits developed.

Churchill had arranged to write for the Daily Graphic, for which his father had written He was not well paid, but with money his mother put up, he was able to book his trip in comfort. His companion was young Reginald Barnes, later to command a division in France and like Churchill a future colonel of the 4th Hussars—a highly distinguished position as a kind of father figure and defender of a regiment’s ethos. They traveled first to New York, where Winston had an impressionable visit with Bourke Cockran (See “Churchill’s American Mentor,” FH 115, Summer 2002; and “What Churchill Owed the Great Republic,” FH 125, Winter 2004-05.)

Barnes and Churchill entrained for Tampa, where they sailed to Havana, arriving on 20 November. Having been received by the second-in-command of the island, they took a train to the central city of Santa Clara, headquarters of the Spanish Army. Neither spoke Spanish, neither was with his regiment. They had joined the army of a country not even a British ally, whose suppression of the Cuban rebellion was rejected by most Britons, and especially by the press. This would later prove problematic.

As arranged by the Spanish Foreign Ministry, Churchill and Barnes were received in Santa Clara by no less a figure than General Arsenio Martínez Campos, captain-general of Cuba. They were advised to go to Sancti Spíritus to join a mobile column, but could get there safely only by a circuitous route. Thus they continued by train to the south coast, by ship farther east to the tiny port of Tunas de Zaza, and again by rail to Sancti Spíritus, arriving on the 23rd. Here they met the commander of the column, General Álvaro Suárez Valdés. The next day the column headed out towards the defended village of Arroyo Blanco, where it arrived on the 27th without incident.

Preparing to move forward, the column divided into two. One part headed northeast to victual Spanish posts supporting the “Trocha,” a 200-yard-wide fortified barrier from Morón in the north to Júcaro in the south, created to contain the rebellion. The other group, including Churchill and Barnes, headed off to engage any rebels they could find. Soon this column learned of the arrival of the forces under the two greatest rebel generals: Máximo Gómez, a Dominican who for his qualities and experience was generalissimo in the 1868 insurrection; and Antonio Maceo, a mulatto of enormous courage and military skill. The two were in effect on their way west, the invasion route which had failed so badly in the previous war, without which no hope of victory could be had.
The Spanish were not sure of the size of the mambí (Cuban rebel) column, but knew it would be heavy in cavalry, highly mobile and dangerous. In fact its strength was in the range of 4000, of which 3000 were cavalry and 1000 infantry. Suárez Valdéz had 1800 men, but only 200 were the vital cavalry that offered mobility, speed and the chance of surprise in the Cuban landscape. Since the rebels had many times that many horsemen, it can only be assumed that Suárez Valdéz’s orders from Martínez Campos were to engage, evaluate, but not attempt a major battle.

Churchill’s judgments on the actions that followed suggested that he did not have full knowledge of the Spanish view of where they stood. Still, he was taken one night to a nearby high point, where a heliograph was used to keep contact with the Trocha, and nearly came to grief. Late in the day, without a proper escort, he and his Spanish hosts were soon in the dark in rebel-held territory. With the luck that was soon to be famous, Churchill and the Spanish made it back to safety. With the help of local peasants, rebels were crossing the relatively lightly defended Trocha at will, and those Churchill would encounter were already west of that line.

On November 29th, the eve of his 21st birthday, Winston wrote his second “letter” to the Daily Graphic, this time from Arroyo Blanco. He was still aching for action, but had not long to wait. The next day, his coming of age, he first sighted the enemy; he had his baptism of fire the following day when rebels fired twice on the column. That night as well, the camp was fired upon, part of the rebel tactic of exhausting the Spanish by harassment; casualties were taken, one right outside Churchill’s tent. His sense of humour was in evidence when he wrote his mother of this adventure, later recalled in his autobiography:

I fortified myself by dwelling on the fact that the Spanish officer whose hammock was slung between me and the enemy’s fire was a man of substantial physique; indeed one might almost have called him fat. I have never been prejudiced against fat men. At any rate I did not grudge this one his meals. Gradually I dropped asleep.

Such pieces of subtle humour sparkled through his correspondent’s reports at the time, another sign of things to come in his remarkable life. In his second despatch of 23 November, Churchill wrote:

It was explained to me that when challenged by any sentry or outpost it was necessary to answer very sharply. If, by a process of deduction which Sherlock Holmes himself might envy, you arrive at the conclusion that the outpost is Spanish, you answer “Spain”; if, on the other hand, you think it a rebel post, you reply “Free Cuba”; but if you make a mistake it is likely to be very awkward.

The next day the column proceeded eastward and again came under fire. Churchill and some other officers chose >>
Cuba, 1895...

to bathe in an attractive river and soon were the object of sniping and then serious fire. In what must have been a humorous scene, they tried as best they could to dress, until the Spanish main force drove the rebels back. For a second time Winston had a “near run thing.” It was just what he was looking for—a precursor of escapades in India, Sudan, South Africa, and even Europe.

That day saw the “battle” of La Reforma. This was a small action because the rebels did not want a major engagement, being anxious to get on west, while the Spanish were probably not numerous enough to do more than harass them. Churchill was in the thick of it, not from choice but because the Spanish general, a man of great courage, wanted his young guests to see the action fully, and kept them right next to him under the fire of 100-200 rebel soldiers, who barred the way and forced the column to deploy. This produced the rather wonderful sketch by Churchill (probably touched up professionally for publication) showing the Spanish artillery deploying to fire—a scene only a few metres from where he himself sat on horseback, under significant fire in a real military action.

The general and Churchill continued to the town of Ciego de Ávila to the east, lynch pin of the whole 68-kilometre Trocha defensive line. From there Winston returned to the coast, still travelling with Suárez Valdés, and then to Havana.

On December 10th he and Barnes sailed back to Tampa, where Churchill was met with his first hostile press. As in Britain, public opinion in the United States was distinctly pro-rebel. The rumour, in fact true, that the Spanish were planning to decorate Churchill and Barnes for bravery...
under fire, had led to speculation that the two officers had fought alongside the Spanish, instead of merely observing.

Given the importance Havana and Madrid attached to the slightest suggestion of British support, they were in no hurry to dispel such notions. Churchill tried hard to convince the Florida press and public otherwise, saying he was authorized to use his pistol only in self-defence. Press hostility, the first he faced but far from the last, would be repeated in Britain as word spread of his activities.

As Robert Pilpel wrote, the watershed year of 1895 saw Winston Churchill emerge from a life of “skimpy achievements” to a life of “glorious epitomes and stunning vindications.” His Cuban adventure had seen some extraordinary firsts for the young man who was to become “Person of the Century” and to be voted the “Greatest Briton.” Cuba marked his baptism of fire, his coming of age, his first work for the War Office, his recognition as a skilful and insightful journalist. Leaving Britain on a highly risky adventure, he had received his first taste of war.

His writings analysed significant political and military events with care and acumen. He had shown great personal courage and had his first brush with a hostile press. Cuba, in short, had paid off.

For all these reasons, the ongoing project to extend our knowledge of his Cuban adventures is exciting. As readers know, often the great problem for Churchill historians today is finding something new to say. The Cuban sojourn offers room for new thought and an appreciation for all he accomplished at such a young age. Clearly he was showing marked signs of who he would become: the remarkable personality and skills he would later provide to King, country and civilization.
The Adventurer Returned: Churchill in Michigan, 1901

“Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.”

—Requiem, by Robert Louis Stevenson, ca. 1894. Quoted by Churchill in his final review of World War II and his first speech as Leader of the Opposition, House of Commons, 16 August 1945

On 1 December 1900, the young officer and war correspondent who had distinguished himself in four wars over five years boarded the Lucania to sail for New York. There he would begin a lengthy lecture tour of North America. He had recently been elected a Member of Parliament, and would take his seat on 14 February 1901. His first address, at the Waldorf in New York City on 12 December, was chaired by none other than Mark Twain (see “When the Twain Met,” FH 149:40). The Christmas period was largely spent in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal.

On 9 January 1901, after a final three-day visit to Ottawa, Churchill spoke on “Peace and Prosperity” to a large, anti-imperialistic crowd of students at the Auditorium of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. After his remarks, a young reporter for the university literary magazine, Gustavus Ohlinger, did his best to wangle an interview. His persistence paid off.

When Churchill finished, Ohlinger followed him to his hotel and approached his manager, Major J.B. Pond, with his request. Pond was not impressed, arguing that Churchill had just turned down an offer of $2000 from a national magazine. Somehow Ohlinger convinced him to present his impecunious request directly to his quarry.

Just a few minutes later Pond returned, saying Churchill would see Ohlinger, and he took the student to Churchill’s room.

Sixty-five years later, after Sir Winston’s death, Gustavus Ohlinger finally wrote of that meeting in the Michigan Quarterly Review—explaining why it had taken him so long to publish. Back in 1901, he wrote,

“I met the handsomest young man I had ever seen, the scion of the house of Marlborough, the descendant of the great John Churchill, the victor of Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet. Mr. Churchill greeted me cordially, and then stepped to a bell rope, which he pulled vigorously. As if automatically, a waiter appeared with a tray on which were two bottles, glasses, and ice. As he filled the glasses, Mr. Churchill remarked: ‘My manager tells me that you would like an interview for publication in your college paper—I shall talk very...”
freely to you, but I want your word that you will not publish anything I say that might reflect in any way upon my parliamentary position.”

The interview carried on well into the night—a foretaste of the late-night palaver for which Churchill would be renowned all his life. Ohlinger kept his word, and published only those parts of the interview that bore on journalism and the “purity of the English language.” He left out Churchill’s remarks about Cuba, the Malakand campaign, Egypt and the Sudan, the Chinese, South Africa, and sensationalism in American newspapers.

Recalling his experience in 1966, Ohlinger continued: “It was now four o’clock in the morning—one bottle was empty—and I was reminded that I had an eight o’clock class. I bade farewell to my host, never dreaming that the handsome young man who had been so generous of his time and information was destined to carry upon his shoulders the fate of nations and the happiness of millions yet unborn.”

What follows are, first, the text of Churchill’s 1901 article derived from the Ohlinger interview, as published in The Inlander (Cohen C218/1), which has not, to the best of my knowledge, been republished anywhere since then; and, second, the interview with Ohlinger, as he reconstructed it for the first time following Churchill’s death (in the Michigan Quarterly Review in 1966). The interview includes more than twice the words in the Inlander article, which do not in any event appear there in the order originally spoken. For the sake of continuity, despite the small amount of repetition, I have determined to leave them in. The original spellings (e.g., “to-day”) have been retained.

Editor’s Note:

Reread in 2013, the following articles offer interesting contrasts—in both what has changed and what has not. Infinitives are split just as egregiously today as they were then. But sensationalism has now permeated the British press (“media” in modern parlance) as well as the American. No one would suggest now that “in England less notice is taken of private affairs.”

Today in America the New York Times is often regarded as a “national” newspaper. Moreover, though, people everywhere have multiple “national dailies” via the World Wide Web. The vast distances Churchill observed in the United States and Canada have, in terms of communication, vanished. “Even elderly parliamentarians like myself,” he quipped at Harvard in September 1943, “are forced to acquire a high degree of mobility.”

And, of course, we still speak the same language—which, as Bismarck said at the end of the 19th century was (in Churchill’s words) “the most potent factor in human society.”

As for the interview, it is difficult to judge what Churchill might have thought potentially deleterious to his political career. His words to Ohlinger were judicious and diplomatic. We may smile today at the timeliness of his China prescription: “I think we shall have to take the Chinese in hand and regulate them.” Westerners have been trying to do that for centuries.

Modern critics would of course bemoan the reference to triumph by “the Aryan stock”; but that was the way Englishmen thought in 1901. It was left to Hitler to give Aryans a bad name.

Churchill did not think much of the power of the American press. I suspect he would consider today’s 24/7 digital media a lot more powerful. But it remains the case that the English media give far more attention to international affairs than their American counterparts.

In both his article and his interview, Churchill regrets that no one “looks after” the English language, which, he says, tends “to diverge into dialect.” That certainly could be reiterated today. We can almost hear him saying, with Professor Higgins in My Fair Lady: “Why can’t the English learn to set a good example to people whose English is painful to your ears?...In America they haven’t used it for years.” RML
The press offers an opportunity afforded by no other profession to anybody and everybody who will work. Good work is never lost. Its value never diminishes to the man who does it. It may not be paid for for a long time, but ultimately it will receive its reward. The public demands good work, and in time it will recognize the value of good work conscientiously done and will reward the man who has done it.

Verify your quotations and avoid split infinitives—this is my advice, since you ask it, to the young newspaper correspondent.

Of course this latter is a little thing in itself, but it is one of innumerable grammatical imperfections which appeared in our prints today, and I mention it simply to illustrate the importance of paying greater heed to the technicalities of the language. It should be every journalist’s ambition to write pure, correct English.

It is a curious fact that to-day we have no person, or body of persons, who make it their duty to act as custodians of the language. We go on now just as anybody likes, adopting new expressions and rejecting old constructions. In the great days of Athens and Rome the best educated people—the lawyers, the statesmen, the orators and actors looked after the language and prescribed the style. Now-a-days the language does not get this inspiration from the highest sources. It follows the line of least resistance. As a result it follows those who are least qualified to direct it. It has a tendency to diverge into dialect. But the great newspapers are, and will continue to be, a great power for fusing these dialects into one.

There are many tendencies in the press which are dangerous, particularly among certain classes of the press which exist in this country. A great deal of sensational news is published; the doings of private persons, in which the public cannot possibly have any concern, are reported in the public sheets. In England less notice is taken of private affairs. No attention is paid a person so long as he remains in a private capacity. It is not until he becomes a public personage, such as a writer, an actor, an orator or statesman that notice is taken of him. Largely because it has avoided these dangerous tendencies the individual English newspaper wields a great influence.

A circumstance which arrests the attention of a foreigner is that Americans have no national newspaper. There are Chicago papers, New York papers, Philadelphia papers; these give the local news of these sections of the country. But there is no national, federal paper—no paper that
assigns to local affairs their relative importance and makes it its business to give reports of national events, of national politics and to give expression to national life and national aspirations. A man takes his local paper and reads what has happened in Sleepy Hollow—but he should also take another paper which will show him what a little place the town he lives in is, compared with the vast organism of which it is a part.

Of course the immense area of the country is an obstacle in the way of a great national paper. From London we can send our papers almost all over England in the day. To overcome the great distances in this country recourse must be had to the telegraph and telephone. There should be centres of publication and distribution for different sections of the country. Your millionaires could invest their money to far better purpose by starting some good national paper that would give correct world-news in place of trivial local matter, that would form national sentiment, and give expression to national aspirations, than by founding hospitals, endowing universities and building libraries. The London Times fulfills my ideal for such a newspaper. It is a paper that gives a great deal of space to national news and to news from foreign countries. It goes all over the United Kingdom and is read by the people who take an interest in public affairs and who direct the politics of the nation.

Apart from other considerations, it is an enormous commercial advantage for Americans and Englishmen that they speak the same language. It not only facilitates trade, but it enables a writer to reach twice as many people—an actor can appeal to two publics. It is a great bond of union between these two branches of the Anglo-Saxon race. What fools we should be, then, were we to allow our language to drift apart! I hope someday to see a society, similar to the Académie française, established by these two English-speaking nations—a society whose object it would be to keep the language together, each year to incorporate such changes as are necessary to a healthy principle of growth in the language and to procure uniformity. Otherwise there is danger of our drifting apart and losing our common tongue, by making it too common.

Mr. Churchill: I was lucky enough to start with a name very well known in England, and as you know, a name counts a great deal with us. In your country it is somewhat of a handicap to have a great father—few of your great men have had great sons.

My early education was at Harrow. I chose the army for my career, and received my training at Sandhurst. On its completion I was gazetted to the 4th Hussars, then stationed in India.

In 1895, I went to Cuba. I did not fight, but wrote about the insurrection. I did not see much of the rebel army—little more than a puff of smoke now and then from some jungle. I think the material of the Spanish infantry is quite good. Governor [of New York Theodore] Roosevelt was telling me the other day that the Spaniards were very good fighters.

In 1896, I served with the 4th Hussars at Bangalore, India. The revolt of the Pathan tribes occurred about that time, and my friend, Sir Bindon Blood, was called to organize a force for its suppression. I was lucky enough to obtain a leave from my regiment and to serve under him in what was known as the “Malakand Field Force,” about which I wrote a book.

My next campaign was in Egypt. I was attached to the 21st Lancers. They were short of officers, and I was lent to them.

Going back in history, in 1883 the Egyptian government had broken down—their bonds were selling at 40—today they sell for 117. The people were starving, eating their fingers off. Under the leadership of Mad Mullah [in fact, the Mahdi] the Dervishes had revolted. The British government appointed Evelyn Baring, afterwards created Earl of Cromer, as British agent, consul-general, minister >> plenipotentiary,
and financial adviser; General Charles Gordon, who had reorganized the Chinese imperial forces and had suppressed the Taiping Rebellion was summoned to Egypt. He was stationed at Khartoum. The Dervishes closed in upon him, but he stayed until everyone had left; a steamer was waiting for him, and he had orders to leave, but on January 22 [actually 26], 1885, the Dervishes swarmed into the city, killing men, women, and children; Gordon was struck down and killed on the steps of the palace.

Then the Dervishes tried to invade Egypt, and the British came in; a long warfare ensued; you must have your river or your railroad to move troops: Kitchener took his time; he built railways, started cities; gunboats, steamers and barges were either carried over the cataracts in parts or built above the rapids.

Finally, on September 1, 1898, we got to Omdurman, and landed, our backs to the river.

On the next day the Dervishes, fifty-thousand strong, debouched from the city in wonderful order and charged upon our 20,000 men and our forty-five guns; when they were within forty yards we began. The poor devils were slaughtered; we killed 10,800; the killed, in white robes, lay like snowdrifts over the desert sand. Our loss was slight—only 600 killed and wounded.

I don't agree with those who advocated the destruction of the temple—I would have let it stand, placing a man on the outside of it to collect admission money. However, it was decided to pull it down—and that broke the Dervishes—they thought that Almighty God had turned against them.

The East is interesting, and to no one can it be more valuable and interesting than to anyone who comes from the West.

I think we shall have to take the Chinese in hand and regulate them. I believe that as civilized nations become more powerful they will get more ruthless, and the time will come when the world will impatiently bear the existence of great barbaric nations who may at any time arm themselves and menace civilized nations. I believe in the ultimate partition of China—I mean ultimate. I hope we shall not have to do it in our day. The Aryan stock is bound to triumph.

Personally, I am not greatly concerned about Russian development in China. I would rather have them develop in that way down south into India. Russia has a justifiable ambition to possess a warm water port. It is really embarrassing to think that 100,000,000 people are without one.

I think the press affords the ladder which is available to everyone in a way afforded by no other profession; put out good stuff and in time people will say, “We must have this.”

There are many tendencies in your press which are dangerous, particularly among certain members of your press. In England, the newspaper has great power; you cannot say that here. No strong paper, if it starts out to do a thing, fails of accomplishing it in England. You have no national paper. You have Chicago papers, New York papers, Philadelphia papers. These deal with the local news of these sections of the country. But you have no national, federal paper—no paper that leaves out local affairs and makes it its business to give reports of the nation, of national polities, of national aspirations and national life. A man takes a local paper and finds out what has happened at Sleepy Hollow—but at the same time he should also take another paper which shows him what a little place the town he lives in is compared with the vast organism.

Of course, the great size of your country is an obstacle in the way of a successful national paper. From London, we can send our papers all over England in a day. To overcome the difficulty you must call in the aid of the telegraph. There should be centers in different sections of the country where the national paper could be published for the section. Your millionaires could do a great deal better than founding hospitals, endowing universities, and building libraries by starting some good national paper that would give correct news that would aid in forming national sentiment, and in giving expression to national aspirations.

The London Times satisfies my ideal of a newspaper—a paper that gives a great deal of space to news from foreign countries. In England, nobody pays any attention to a person so long as he is a private person. If you become a public personage, such as a writer, an actor, an orator, or a statesman—anything of that kind—then notice is taken of you. English newspapers take no notice of private affairs.

Some years ago, they set up a London edition of the New York Herald. The paper published sensational news, social gossip. But it did not pay. The Daily Mail has the biggest circulation of any paper in England. It is what we call a sensational paper, but it is not anything like yours. The people, however, who run the country, who take an interest in polities, read the London Times. It goes all over the United Kingdom. The other papers have a circulation which extends as far as they can reach by a nine hours run from London.

You ask my advice to the young correspondent? It is: verify your quotations and avoid split infinitives—phrases like “to utterly destroy the enemy.” In his reply to Kruger’s ultimatum Mr. [Joseph] Chamberlain used a split infinitive, using the phrase “to further prolong negotiations” and it caused furious comment.

I think it is very curious that nobody takes any care of language today. It goes along now just as anybody likes. In olden days, in Greece and Rome, the best educated people, the lawyers, the statesmen, the orators, and actors looked after the language. Nowadays, the language does not get this inspiration from the highest sources. It follows the line of least resistance; it follows those who are least qualified to
direct it. The tendency of language nowadays is to diverge into dialect. But I think the newspapers will have the effect of fusing all these dialects into one.

“I believe that as civilized nations become more powerful they will get more ruthless; and the time will come when the world will impatiently bear the existence of great barbaric nations who may at any time arm themselves and menace civilized nations.”

It is an enormous commercial advantage for the United States and Great Britain to speak the same language. It is a tremendous advantage in the way of trade. The same books can be read by twice as many people—a writer or an actor has two reading publics to appeal to. What fools we should be were we to allow our languages to drift apart! I should hope before I die to see an International Society between these two English-speaking countries whose object it would be to keep the language together, each year to take certain expressions into the language—like the Académie française—to incorporate certain changes as are necessary to a healthy principle of growth in the language and to procure uniformity. Otherwise, we will lose our unity of language—there is danger of our drifting apart and losing our common tongue, by making it too common.

The more you combine, the better you will be able to produce. There, of course, comes a limit when a trust is so large that it makes an illegitimate profit. But its profit in no case makes the manufactured article dearer than it would have been if made by a number of small men. They can always produce cheaper. Although I know that the more you combine, the richer the world will become, yet that is not the end of human existence. You must think of the breed of men you raise. It is well that a number of men should be exposed to the ups and downs of life, that they should be compelled to cudgel their brains and fight for their existence as independent producers. That is the factory where the national fibre is made. It is therefore a question from this point of view how far combination is advantageous. Combination will always make the world more comfortable, but comfort is not the end of human existence. It is the moral character of men. But in stamping out the individual producer, it seems to me that although the material wealth of the world may increase, the moral wealth of nations would be decreased.

The war in South Africa is a war between the Cape Dutch and the Cape English, each looking to their own nation as a national center. The Cape Dutch look to Pretoria and wish to see South Africa united under Dutch rule. The Cape British desire to see South Africa made a part of the British Empire. It is merely a contest between these two races, each having its natural national center and each wishing to see South Africa united under it. The Cape Dutch outnumber the Cape British. They outnumber them in the Cape Parliament, and they have had their own ministries. In this war these two elements have simply called in their big brothers;—the Dutch, their brothers in the Orange Free State and in the Transvaal; and the British, their countrymen beyond the sea. If England had sunk in the ocean and dropped out of sight, there would inevitably have been a war between these two races. There would have been a hell of a row between the Dutch and the British even if England had never come in. If they had not been aided by their countrymen, the Cape British would have got licked. The Dutch population is closer to the farms—the British population is one of traders and manufacturers. The men who live in the country always last longer in a racial war. But before the war is over I am sure that more of South Africa will fight voluntarily on the side of the British than were ever commandeered by the Dutch.
Churchill’s critics often cite his youthful failures, real or imagined. In fact he enjoyed many accomplishments in his early offices, notably altering British foreign policy without ever holding the post of foreign minister. The full scope of what he accomplished is remarkable for a politician so young.

Long before he came to head the Admiralty, Churchill was aware of Germany’s potential threat to Britain and Europe, but as at other times in his life, he was well ahead of most political thinkers. During the last third of the 19th century, the most constant threat to the British Empire was Russia, against whom Britain had defended Turkey in the Crimean War, and the Indian empire during the Anglo-Afghan Wars. By the 1880s, under both Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and his Liberal counterpart, William Gladstone, concern shifted not to Germany but to Ireland and the Empire.¹

British eyes probably first turned toward Germany when friction developed with the South African Boer Republics (the Transvaal and Orange Free State), and the Gladstone government was faced with German attempts to create colonies to the east and west of the Boer republics.² Germany naturally sympathized with the Dutch settlers in South Africa; still Germany was not regarded as a major threat. William Gladstone’s foreign secretary thought Berlin was not even serious about acquiring colonies.³

This paper arrived too late for The Churchill Centre research competition for high school students last year. Our educational coordinator, Suzanne Sigman, thought so highly of it that we offer it to our readers herewith—along with our congratulations to Mr. Beckvold, now at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. The article was subject to FH’s usual editorial process; the original, with a bibliography, is available from the editor by email. Our grateful thanks to the author’s mentor, Dr. Sarah Wiggins.
Historians often examine the climactic years of a great career, leaving the adjoining years relatively unconsidered. Churchill is a good example: while many accounts exist of his role in the two World Wars, his early career is the subject of far fewer books. (For latest, see the review of Young Titan on page 51.)

Gladstone himself disregarded Germany’s stirrings because he thought “Bismarck’s change of face was only an electoral gimmick.” The Germans even tried to woo Britain into an alliance during Gladstone’s fourth government in the 1890s. But Gladstone also objected to European entanglements, believing they interfered with the British Empire, and preferred to focus on the domestic front. The policies of the Conservative governments which alternated in office during the last two decades of the 19th century were little different from Gladstone’s.

Nevertheless, developments in Europe began slowly to move Britain away from her previous isolation. The UK maintained friendly relations with the Triple Alliance (Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary) in order to keep Russia, Turkey and Egypt in check on the periphery of the Empire—one of the reasons for Britain’s 1897 action on the Northwest Frontier of India, in which Churchill participated. Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery (1894-95) consulted Germany and Italy over the Franco-Siamese war, though no collaboration ensued. But relations with the Triple Alliance ended after Britain, concerned about German threats to Imperial commerce, entered the Triple Entente with France and Russia in 1907. By then the British had realized that Germany’s waxing power was something to reckon with.

Churchill became a Member of Parliament in 1901. The following year Prime Minister Lord Salisbury retired and was succeeded by his nephew, Arthur Balfour. Like Salisbury, Balfour avoided an alliance with Germany but attempted to maintain friendly relations. The press tried to fan flames, claiming “Britain was becoming a satellite of Germany.” But after the 1900 German Naval Law became public, Balfour realized Germany intended to rival the Royal Navy and that no close relationship could exist.

Following the Liberal landslide victory in the January 1906 general election, a Francophile, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, became prime minister. His new foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne, called Germany “our worst enemy.” In 1906 HMS Dreadnought launched a new generation of fast, well-armed British battleships, but the British soon discovered that Germany planned to out-build them, which led to fears of vulnerability. H.H. Asquith, who had succeeded Campbell-Bannerman as Liberal premier, was faced with the demand, “We want eight [new battleships] and we won’t wait,” and Parliament duly voted to create them in 1910, instead of the original four.

Winston Churchill left the Conservatives for the Liberals, over his support of Free Trade, in 1904—a piece of very good timing. After the Liberal sweep, Campbell-Bannerman appointed him under-secretary for the colonies, and Churchill subsequently helped bring peace to South Africa and to write its constitution. Churchill moved to the Board of Trade in 1908 and the Home Office in 1910, cabinet posts largely domestic in nature. For a time he supported Lloyd George and Asquith in demanding cuts in the naval budget. One historian wrote that WSC was “among the last to discern that the Kaiser was more than a bumbling amateur and was in fact a menace.” But Churchill’s view changed dramatically when Germany’s aggressive intentions became clear.

At the Admiralty

The event that brought Churchill to the Admiralty was his robust stance in the 1911 Agadir Crisis, when a German gunboat, SMS Panther, appeared off that port in French Morocco, sending waves of concern throughout Europe. Churchill’s vigorous responses—even to the extent of sending guards to watch over the Hyde Park magazine for the defence of London—gained Asquith’s attention, while in cabinet Churchill argued for a still closer relationship with France.

A month after Agadir, in August 1911, Churchill proposed to Lloyd George that Great Britain should develop a friendly relationship with Belgium in order to flank the Germans with a Belgian army. A month later Churchill wrote to Asquith: “Are you sure that the ships we have at Cromarty are strong enough to defeat the whole German High Sea fleet? If not they should be reinforced without delay. Are 2 divisions of the Home Fleet enough? This appears to be a vital matter.” Asquith was impressed. Churchill, with his “imaginative power and vitality,” must be at the head of a fighting department.

On 25 October 1911, Winston Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, determined to “inject new blood into the hidebound Royal Navy,” equally “willing to take unpopular actions and positions, one who would not be intimidated by the navy brass and who would bring about needed reform.” His arrival would have important effects on British foreign policy.

As his naval adviser Churchill secured the retired Admiral “Jacky” Fisher, a seasoned professional known for free and radical thinking. Their task was not for the timid. The Royal Navy desperately needed an effective war staff “to prepare for an attack by Germany as if it might come the next day”; and there was still a need for more and capital warships.

Churchill replaced the aging, ineffective First Sea Lord, Sir Arthur Wilson, with Prince Louis of Battenberg, who >>
knew staff organization after forty years in high naval commands. Battenberg would leave in October 1914 over prejudice against his Germanic name, and Churchill would appoint Fisher in his place. By the time he was done, Churchill had transformed a hodge-podge of quarreling admirals into a set of leaders fully prepared for war.

Recognizing the need to stay ahead of Germany, Churchill began planning a new class of super-dreadnoughts, their steam turbines fired by oil instead of coal, powerful ships that were better gunned, faster and more maneuverable. Speed was essential, Fisher told him, not only for running battles but for quick deployment, so as to command events. A rapid deployment to its Scottish stations in the event of war, as Churchill explained to Lloyd George, would make the navy at once the most effective & least provocative support to France, & a real security for this country. It is not for Morocco, nor indeed for Belgium, that I would take part in this terrible business. One cause alone would justify our participation [in a war with Germany]—to prevent France from being trampled down & looted by the Prussian Junkers—a disaster ruinous to the world, & swiftly fatal to our country.

Churchill’s actions inevitably moved Britain from her earlier stance of effective isolation to a far more active foreign policy. He wanted a firm relationship with France and a leadership role in Europe, which he deemed vital in keeping Germany in check. This was a far more ambitious foreign policy than ever before. In a crisis, shifting the fleet to Scottish waters would strengthen the bond with France, leaving the French navy to protect the Mediterranean. Deploying to Scapa Flow was, of course, exactly what Churchill ordered on the eve of war in August 1914.

Another area that drew Churchill’s penetrating gaze was Britain’s spy system. Specifically, he wrote the charter for an intelligence organization whose sole purpose was to observe and track Germany’s technological advances—the Naval Intelligence Division. This enabled the First Lord to keep track of the German fleet’s movements. Churchill demanded daily updates, which were duly marked on a huge map behind his desk. Churchill was meanwhile kept informed of German spies in Britain, the N.I.D. not hesitating to open the mail of suspects.

An omnipresent administrator, the First Lord staged unscheduled inspections, reviewed war plans, economized where possible, and generally girded the Royal Navy for war. The complaint most often voiced by underlings at the Admiralty was his attention to detail—“micro-managing,” today’s critics would call it. He frequently made surprise appearances on ships, infuriating officers by criticizing everything from operations to the buttons on a sailor’s uniform. A 13 November 1911 letter to the Fourth Sea Lord, Charles Madden, gave specific instructions on how to deal with deficiencies in torpedoes, guns, mines, small arms ammunition and automatic pistols. Madden was outraged, but benefited from the advice.

**The Unrelenting Buildup**

In announcing his naval program for 1912, Churchill was blunt: “Our naval preparations are necessarily based upon the naval preparation of other Powers. It would be affectation—and quite a futile kind of affectation—to pretend that the sudden and rapid growth of the German navy is not the main factor in our determination whether in regard to expenditure or new construction.” In other words, the Royal Navy’s growth was necessary, whatever the expense or the number of ships needed.

In March 1912, Churchill drafted a memorandum for the Cabinet and King, anticipating German intentions. The 1900 German Naval Law, he argued, had “practically...
amounted to putting about four-fifths of the German Navy permanently on a war footing.”29 His arguments carried the Cabinet and Parliament. The foreign policy implicit in Churchill’s argument was defensive in its design to protect Britain, but offensive in calling for a much larger navy.

A major advance in 1912 was in aviation. Seeing aircraft as the technology of the future, the First Lord became a powerful advocate for military aviation, creating the Royal Naval Air Service and advocating a Royal Flying Corps. He continued to press for increased naval aviation over the next two years.30

March 1913 found the navy still short of men, funds, and aircraft, while ship construction was lagging.31 Now Churchill began to plan as far ahead as 1920, starting planning for twenty new capital ships and further expanding the Royal Naval Air Service. He lobbied hard with the government, telling Asquith, “...we cannot afford to allow more time to slip away.” By 1914, his persistence had paid off with the evolution of an air policy, which later included provisions for the first aircraft carrier.32 The cost was over £50 million, the largest increase in naval estimates to date.33

Remarkling on these strenuous efforts some, including recently Pat Buehanan (FH 149: 13) have accused Churchill of being dead-set on war. Anything but: in April 1913, even before the new naval building program had begun, Churchill proposed to his opposite number, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, a “Naval Holiday”—a one-year moratorium on Anglo-German naval construction as a means to ease the arms buildup. It was a major venture into foreign policy.

Tirpitz refused, perhaps because Churchill had called his fleet a “luxury,” perhaps because he thought a moratorium would benefit Britain more than Germany. Churchill responded by arming merchant ships, constructing new oil depots, expanding naval facilities in the Mediterranean, and developing wireless communications.34 Late in 1913, he spoke of his determination to maintain Britain’s advantage:

His Majesty’s Government will embrace and will work for every opportunity of abating the competition in naval and military armaments which is the bane and the reproach of modern Europe. (Cheers.) But what is necessary has got to be done, and we shall not hesitate for a moment, once we are satisfied of the need, to go to Parliament boldly for those supplies of men and money which the House of Commons, whatever its party complexion, has never refused to vote in living memory for the vital services of the State.35

For the first half of 1914, Churchill demanded further increases in the Admiralty’s budget. Although he did not realize it at the time, this would be his last opportunity to prepare for war. He succeeded: by early 1914, the combined Home Fleet had swollen to twenty-two dreadnoughts and fourteen modern battlecruisers, with twenty-three older battleships and 160 cruisers and destroyers in reserve.36

Still Churchill felt the number of ships was not enough, calling for an increase of £4 million, raising the 1915 estimates to £53 million, telling the House that by 1920, “Germany will have 108,000 men in the Navy….I do not wish to prejudge the future but, while this continues, it is obvious that a large increase will be required from us.”37

Subsequently, Churchill rejected the “Two-Power Standard,” the old rule-of-thumb that the Royal Navy must be able to defeat the next two naval powers combined. It was obsolete, he said, since it was impossible to decide what other nation’s small navy would combine with Germany’s, the second largest in the world. It made more sense to consider Germany the only concern, with a plan of building at “the rate of two keels to one….”38

One of Churchill’s final preparations before the war was to revise the Royal Navy’s training in tactics: “In May 1914, to redress the lack of schooling received by naval officers, Churchill issued a detailed memorandum on military education and training of future staff officers. The practice >>
of sitting on one’s laurels was over.” He also encouraged expansion of the Royal Naval College in Greenwich where, since 1873, officers had been trained and educated.39

At the Precipice

Fifty-nine battleships were completing a naval review at Portsmouth when news broke of Austria’s ultimatum to Serbia, the first fatal step toward war. Battenberg at once issued orders for the fleet not to disperse, which Churchill confirmed the next day, though it was not until 29 July that the Cabinet authorized the navy’s preparations.40

Churchill did not want war, but he was prepared for it. As uncertainty continued, he told Lloyd George that Great Britain should stay neutral unless Germany violated Belgian neutrality.41 By the time that happened, the Royal Navy was on its way to its war station at Scapa Flow.

Largely because of Churchill’s tenure at the Admiralty, British foreign policy had changed dramatically. During the late 19th century, from Gladstone to Campbell-Bannerman, Britain had generally practiced isolationism. Through friendly gestures toward Germany under Salisbury and Balfour, the UK seemed to acknowledge Germany’s increased presence. But once the German High Seas Fleet appeared to threaten the dominance of the Royal Navy, attitudes changed. It could be argued that Churchill’s actions were only in response to political developments; nevertheless, none of his predecessors had possessed the “imaginative power and vitality” that Asquith had noticed.

In expanding the reach and power of the navy, Churchill inevitably prepared Britain for war with Germany. In doing so, he helped change the Cabinet’s disposition toward Germany, which in turn saw Britain take a far more active role in Europe. Churchill made it clear that Germany would not threaten or bully Britain, and largely through his efforts, British foreign policy became outward looking and internationally motivated. It was the greatest shift in British foreign policy since the Crimean War.

Churchill was not the only contributor to these developments, and the transition from isolationism to close involvement did not occur overnight. But the change in policy was critical because it influenced how the war would play out, and prefigured the role Britain would play in the 20th century.  

Endnotes

4. Porter, The Lion’s Share, 106.
6. Ibid.
7. Porter, The Lion’s Share, 110.
9. Ibid., 167.
11. Ibid., 132-34.
12. Ibid., 136.
16. Churchill actually submitted plans to the Committee of Imperial Defence for the possible invasion of Germany; see D’Este, Warlord, 178-79.
20. Herman, To Rule the Waves, 486.
22. Morgan, Young Man in a Hurry, 319.
24. Herman, To Rule the Waves, 487. It would later serve as a model for other British intelligence services.
25. D’Este, Warlord, 186.
26. Morgan, Young Man in a Hurry, 323.
29. Morgan, Young Man in a Hurry, 547.
30. Morgan, Young Man in a Hurry, 341.
32. Herman, To Rule the Waves, 487.
33. Ibid., 489.
36. Herman, To Rule the Waves, 487.
38. Ibid., 2246-47, 2254.
39. D’Este, Warlord, 204.
41. Morgan, Young Man in a Hurry, 393.
No, He Never Made It to Eleuthera

In “FDR’s and WSC’s Bahamian Ramblings” (FH 145: 18), we speculated on whether Churchill ever visited Eleuthera, the long, crescent-shaped island fifty miles east of Nassau that serves as FH’s winter office.

The answer—much to the disappointment of us island residents—is no.

Readers will recall that we were informed of a photograph of Sir Winston and Lord Beaverbrook, allegedly snapped at Gun Point, the beautiful ex-Beaverbrook house on the northern tip of Eleuthera; but we were unable to arrange a visit to see the photo itself.

Max Beaverbrook built Gun Point in 1943-44 (not after World War II as earlier reported), supposedly on land presented to him by the Crown in thanks for his role as Minister of Aircraft Production early in the war. Churchill’s opportunities to visit there were limited. The most likely time was 1953, when he was Beaverbrook’s guest in Jamaica and asked about visiting “Barbados.” He could have meant “Bahamas,” a 400-mile flight for Beaverbrook’s private plane—but the Churchill Archives Centre found nothing to indicate that he strayed from Jamaica.

Last February, by kind courtesy of the caretaker, we did get to tour Gun Point, which was extensively rebuilt after Hurricane Andrew in 1992. It is a remarkable house, built of sturdy Abaco pine and crammed with historic photos from early days in The Bahamas.

The subject photo is affixed to a wall and cannot be removed, but we were able to take a passable photograph. It bears the legend, “Lord Beaverbrook and Sir Winston Churchill at Gun Point Eleuthera sometime after World War II.”

Immediately I knew I had seen this photo before. Back in New Hampshire, my library produced it within A.J.P. Taylor’s biography of Beaverbrook; it is probably also in some Churchill books.

Taylor’s caption reads: “With Churchill at Cap d’Ail, 1958.” Cap d’Ail is of course the location of La Capponcina, Beaverbrook’s villa in the south of France, which Churchill visited several times in the Fifties.

So which location is the right one? Jane Ford, chief executive at the Beaverbrook Foundation in London, came to our rescue, proving that the venue is definitely Cap d’Ail:

“In my database,” she wrote, “I have found two other photographs of Churchill and Beaverbrook taken at the same time as the picture in question, both labelled ‘1958 LB and Churchill at La Capponcina.’

“Another photograph on file shows the same archway that is in the background of the picture you found, at a different angle, and clearly shows that it is La Capponcina, even down to the similar foliage!”

Eleutherans, alas, will have to be satisfied with knowing that Roosevelt came closer to our island than Churchill. On 13 December 1940, FDR’s naval vessel moored off Miller’s Anchorage to meet the Duke of Windsor, governor of The Bahamas, though the President did not go ashore. But the closest Churchill came was fifty miles away in Nassau, during his recuperation from his New York traffic accident in 1932. RML
Many readers say they like to read our rebuttals to ignorance, bias, nonsense and exaggeration in the media. This is an amusing part of our work, and a lot goes on that you never see, for we don’t want to bore you with it. However, with some hesitation, we offer the following for your amusement or forgiveness.


Dear Editor:

Dr. Dhand should be less smug and gratuitous in forgiving Churchill’s “racism,” since his understanding is superficial and his accusations smack of what William Manchester called “generational chauvinism.”

Churchill for his time was not a racist, although he could say startling things about Asians and Africans on occasion. His oft-quoted remark, “I hate Indians,” in response to disputation bureaucracy in Delhi in the midst of a battle for survival, was ably described by one of our speakers: “I have no doubt that the famous gleam came to his eyes when he said this, with mischievous glee—an offense, in modern convention, of genocidal magnitude.”

Churchill hated Indians? His early books are filled with accounts of the bravery and steadfastness of Indian troops, particularly Sikhs, whom he ardently admired. As Geoffrey Best wrote, Churchill did share the conviction of his era that white Westerners were the most advanced peoples. But that belief was tempered by a fundamental fairness that led him to defend non-white subjects as early as 1899, when he took issue with the violent racism of his Boer captors at Pretoria; or 1906, when from the Colonial Office he defended the rights of the Indian minority in South Africa.

Churchill did have a tic about the early Indian independence movement, with its Brahmin roots. Yet after the India Act had passed, in 1935, he declared that Gandhi had “gone very high in my esteem since he stood up for the Untouchables,” and sent Gandhi encouragement through G.D. Birla, a mutual Indian friend, who lunched at Chartwell. Gandhi replied: “I have got a good recollection of Mr. Churchill when he was in the Colonial Office and somehow or other since then I have held the opinion that I can always rely on his sympathy and goodwill.”

There was also his famous regard for Nehru, whom Churchill called “the Light of Asia,” after he learned that he and Nehru were both Harrow Old Boys.

Churchill’s generally positive views toward India are still relevant to certain Indians who have written in our pages. As one of them, Inder Dan Ratnu, put it, the Axis Powers had quite different ideas in mind for India than the old British Raj.

Winston Churchill is simply not easy to pigeonhole. He thought more deeply on these issues than most politicians, indeed most contemporaries. So did Thomas Jefferson, whom Dr. Dhand also forgives. As Paul Addison wrote, “It is rare to discover in the archives the reflections of a politician on the nature of man.”

“To: Dr. Matthew Ford, Editor


Churchill...narrated how, during the First World War, ‘the steadfast Indian Corps in the cruel winter of 1914, held the line by Armentieres.’

“In reality, Indian troops had served with distinction not only in the trenches of Northern France but also in Mesopotamia and each of the major theatres of the First World War. The seed of Churchill’s low opinion of Indian troops had been sown....”

Are we to infer that because he wrote of Indian troops’ steadfastness at Armentieres, but not elsewhere, he had a low opinion of them?

“...in 1939, Churchill...recommended that the ‘only way in which our forces in France can be rapidly expanded is by bringing the professional troops from India, and using them as the core...”
upon which the Territorials and Conscripts will form.’

“What Churchill alluded to was that it was the British officers of the Indian Army, and not the Indian officers, who were the professional soldiers. In one sentence he had cast aspersions about the nature, ability and professionalism of the small number of Indian Officers that existed, let alone the lower Indian ranks.”

One fails to see the aspersions, but how does Ms. Wilson know to whom he was alluding?

“Judging Churchill’s racism by twenty-first century standards is mismatched, especially as it was then bolstered by spurious eugenic theory, but it was also a view that was shared, albeit to varying degrees, by the majority of his contemporaries.”

Churchill’s brief (pre-Great War) fling with eugenics hardly applies to World War II, but Ms. Wilson is certainly right about judging past figures in today’s light. Yet her article goes on at great length over Churchill’s “racism,” which rather spoils the point.

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There followed a summary of Churchill’s statements to Birla, Gandhi, Nehru, and his “shock” outburst about hating Indians, as per our letter to the International Business Times.

Mars & Clio is a curious journal, seemingly reserved only for members of the British Commission for Military History; they seemed a bit miffed that outsiders had accessed their article site (we were tipped off). So the URL addresses cited above may not work when you search on the web.

The author replied at length—so great a length that we were unable to get through it. A copy of her reply is available from the editor by email.

However, for a “fair and balanced,” well-crafted appraisal of Churchill and the Indian Army, which is anything but uncritical of WSC, see Raymond A. Callahan, “The Leader as Imperialist: Churchill and the King’s Other Army,” Finest Hour 158: 25-27.

Inside the Journals:
The Soviets and Japan

ANTOINE CAPET


The Anglo–American alliance during World War II became less cohesive on the political side than the military. By 1944 there were widening divergences between Britain and the U.S. over how to cooperate with the Soviets. Though they shared assumptions about the motivations of Soviet goals, British and American policymakers not only formulated different approaches, they consistently viewed theirs as more successful than those of their ally. There was an opportunity to coordinate policies during the visit to London of American Undersecretary of State Edward Stettinius in April 1944; but the issue was barely discussed, which is symptomatic of the situation. The British Foreign Office, with the backing of Winston Churchill, wished to forge ahead with pragmatic arrangements with the Russians. Self-satisfaction with their own efforts on both sides meant that the British and American bureaucracies made no serious and sustained attempts to unify their outlook on the Soviets, in contrast to the closeness of cooperation in other areas.

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As Chancellor of the Exchequer during the late 1920s, Churchill was at the center of British strategic decision-making about how to respond to the naval challenge posed by Japan’s rise as a rival sea power. Churchill downplayed the likelihood of war with Japan. The leadership of the Royal Navy disagreed: they saw Japan as a dangerous threat to the security of the British Empire. Examining this dispute between Churchill and the Admiralty highlights the awkward political, economic, and strategic tradeoffs confronting British leaders between the world wars.

Dr. Capet is Professor of British Studies at the University of Rouen, France, and editor of several collections on Britain’s 20th century diplomatic and military policy.
**MICHAEL McMENAMIN’S**

**ACTION THIS DAY**

125 YEARS AGO

Summer 1888 • Age 13

“Phenomenal Slovenliness”

Winston’s early enthusiasm for Harrow was not reciprocated by the school. While he was allowed to return home for a visit in mid-July, his housemaster, Henry Davidson, wrote to his mother that “[H]e has not deserved it. I do not think, nor does Mr. Somerville, that he is in any way willfully troublesome; but his forgetfulness, carelessnes,, un punctuality, and irregularity in every way have really been so serious, that I write to ask you, when he is at home to speak very gravely to him on the subject.”

Davidson gave examples: the boy was “constantly late for school” and frequently “losing his books and papers.” What frustrated Davidson about young Churchill was that “as far as ability goes he ought to be at the top of his form, whereas he is at the bottom. Yet I do not think he is idle; only his energy is fitful, and when he gets to his work it is generally too late for him to do it well….I do think it very serious that he should have acquired such phenomenal slovenliness….He is a remarkable boy in many ways, and it would be a thousand pities if such good abilities were made useless by habitual negligence.”

100 YEARS AGO

Summer 1913 • Age 38

“Not a bad performance”

Writing to his wife from the Admiralty yacht Enchantress on 23 July, Churchill sent his love to “you my sweet one and to both those little kittens & especially that radiant Randolph.” Immediately thereafter, he wrote that “Diana is a darling too; & I repent to have expressed a preference.” He closed the letter by telling his wife “you are yu precious to me and I rejoice indeed to have won and kept your loving heart. May it never cool towards me is my prayer, and that I may deserve your love my resolve.”

During August, Churchill became involved in a protracted dispute with the King over the names of new battleships. While the King approved Churchill’s proposed names of Hero, Agincourt and Raleigh, he vetoed Pitt and Ark Royal. His reasons for doing so were peculiar.

His Private Secretary, Frederick Ponsonby, explained on 3 August that Pitt was not “dignified” and that the ship’s crew might give it “nicknames of ill-conditioned words rhyming with it.” As for Ark Royal, the King opposed it because it would eventually be known as the Noah’s Ark.”

Churchill was not persuaded and replied the next day by sending the past history of vessels named Pitt and Ark Royal to Ponsonby, who replied just as promptly that the King was “well aware” of the history but still disliked the names. Two more longer letters from Churchill followed, including one suggesting that “the custom” of seeking Royal approval of the names of battleships “did not exist during the reign of Queen Victoria, the King’s grandmother.” The King remained obdurate.

Churchill also took up more weighty issues, writing a lengthy memorandum on what would be required to determine the War Fleet of 1920 (see Christopher Beckvold’s article, page 36). This was soon followed by another long memorandum to Prime Minister Asquith on the “general question of British trade protection in time of war.” Maintaining that the best naval strategy was a blockade of Germany, WSC wished to eliminate the long naval tradition of capturing an enemy vessel and distributing the value of its cargo as “prize money” to sailors on the British victor: “I see no reason why sailors at sea should do what it has long been considered dishonourable for soldiers on land to do, viz. enrich themselves by pillage.” Churchill proposed instead that in wartime all sailors should be given “a substantial quarterly bounty as compensation for the prize money they would have received.”

Home Rule for Ireland was still cause for hot debate. In August, the House of Commons was set to pass a Home Rule Bill for the third time, which the House of Lords could no longer reject. Ulster leader Edward Carson, supported by Bonar Law and most Tories, was again threatening civil war. Law urged the King to dissolve Parliament and order new elections, but Asquith believed the King had no right to dismiss an elected majority government.

Since Churchill was about to visit the King at Balmoral for a hunting holiday, Asquith deputized WSC orally to reiterate Asquith’s recent memorandum to the King on the “functions of a Constitutional Sovereign in regard to legislation,” emphasizing at the same time that “an ungovernable Ireland is a much more serious prospect” than rioting in four Ulster counties. Churchill did so with the King, and with Bonar Law, who was also a guest at Balmoral. He also shot four stags, “Not a bad performance,” he wrote to his wife, “for I have not fired a shot since last year….I cd have shot more—but refrained, not wishing to become a butcher.”
Churchill's mood leading up to Munich was summarized by his 13 August letter to Lloyd George: “Everything is overshadowed by the impending trial of will-power which is developing in Europe. I think we shall have to choose in the next few weeks between war and shame, and I have very little doubt what the decision will be.”

Though out of power, Churchill was exerting every effort, publicly and privately, to secure a positive outcome. The government was not. Hitler was watching with interest. He told General Keitel on 18 June that he would take action against Czechoslovakia only if he was “firmly convinced...that France will not march, and that therefore England will not intervene.” He was soon convinced.

Churchill intuitively understood Hitler in a way that Chamberlain did not. On 23 June in the Daily Telegraph, he wrote that a German attack on the Czechs would draw in help from France, Russia and Britain. He followed that with a 6 July article on “The Rape of Austria,” documenting Germany’s oppression of 300,000 Austrian Jews: “The tale of their tribulation spreads widely throughout the world, and it is astonishing that the German rulers are not more concerned at the tides of abhorrence and anger which are rising ceaselessly against them throughout the heavily-arming United States.”

On 18 August he wrote optimistically of “a practical working compromise” to give “the Sudeten-German a free and equal chance with other races inside a more broadly based Czechoslovak Republic.” But he also warned that “the trampling down of Czechoslovakia by an overwhelming force would change the whole current of human ideas and would eventually draw upon the aggressor a wrath which would in the end involve all the greatest nations of the world.”

Churchill conveyed his message to the Nazis privately through the channels available to him. One occasion was on 14 July, when he met with the Nazi Gauleiter of Danzig, Albert Foerster, and his interpreter, Professor Ludwig Noe. Foerster assured Churchill that nobody in Germany was thinking of war and that the Nazis had “immense social and cultural plans which would take them years to work out.” Unconvinced, when Noe wrote Churchill to thank him for the Foerster meeting, WSC reiterated the message he had personally delivered earlier to the Sudeten leader Conrad Henlein: “I am quite certain that any crossing of the Czechoslovakian frontier by German troops would lead to a general war. The French would certainly march and, in my opinion, England would be drawn in. Such a war would be a most terrible catastrophe, as it would last until all the great nations were utterly ruined and exhausted.”

Unknown to Churchill at the time, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of the Abwehr (German military intelligence) had conceived a plan to send a secret message to the British that the only way to prevent war was to persuade Hitler that Britain would fight if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia. The envoy chosen was an anti-Nazi lawyer, Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin (hanged by Hitler in 1945 in the wake of the Stauffenberg assassination plot), who was briefed personally by General Beck, chief of the German General Staff. Beck told Kleist-Schmenzin that if he was assured Britain would fight for Czechoslovakia, “I will bring about an end to this regime.”

Kleist-Schmenzin travelled to England on a false passport provided by Canaris. Alerted by Neville Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin, Foreign Minister Lord Halifax ordered that “no government official should take the initiative to see him.” But Robert Vansittart did meet with Kleist-Schmenzin on 18 August, as did Churchill the following day at Chartwell. The secret envoy told them an attack on Czechoslovakia was imminent, but that only Hitler wanted war. The Army opposed it, but needed assurances that Britain and France would fight. With Halifax’s acquiescence, Churchill wrote a letter entitled “Dear Sir,” to protect the German’s identity:

“I am sure that the crossing of the frontier of Czechoslovakia by German armies or aviation in force will bring about a renewal of the world war. I am as certain as I was at the end of July 1914 that England will march with France...Do not, I pray you, be misled upon this point. Such a war, once started, would be fought out like the last to the bitter end, and one must consider not what might happen in the first few months but where we should all be at the end of the third or fourth year.”

Churchill sent a copy of the letter and notes of his meeting to Halifax, who replied: “I think, if I may say so, both your language in conversation and your letter are most valuable.” As no British official ever made such a comparable public statement at any time. On September 15th, Neville Chamberlain announced he was flying to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden.
Literature’s long-standing, obsessive self-absorption by authors has crept into the book review game. Few reviewers seem able to write a review of this book without resorting to the first person singular: I knew the author personally, watched him suffer from writer’s block; tried to help, etc., etc., ad nauseam. An egregious example was Deborah Baker’s review in the Wall Street Journal, barely ten percent of which was about the book. The rest was a memoir of her personal relationship with “Bill” Manchester.

Why should Manchester matter? He wrote two volumes on Churchill; then, over a longue durée, he compiled frightfully disorganized notes in preparation for the third and final volume, then sadly died. Why depend on his outdated notes and inadequate research, or follow his arrogant injunctions against so-called academic histories? What Paul Reid has written is his book, whatever the rampant rumors of restrictions by the Manchester estate.

Reid’s narrative skills are obvious. At his best he is succinct and enlightening; other times, he rambles on about details that matter little to the big picture. Does naming British regiments (the King’s this or the Queen’s that or, even sillier, the 2nd Sherwood Foresters or various Hussars) really matter? Nazi reactions are exaggerated. Josef Goebbels’ diary seems quoted almost as often as Churchill’s war memoirs. Battle details are laid out like case studies at Sandhurst.

For the most part, this is a narrative about the Second World War—with Winston Churchill playing the lead role—a war that always threatens to overwhelm the narrative. Martin Gilbert has already given us a meticulous, good-to-the-last-detail chronology of Churchill during WW2 (cited less frequently than I expected). We have many broad surveys of the war viewed from the top. What does this book add?

The slings and arrows of inaccurate history are best left to the sharp and spot-on ripostes found in the Churchill Centre web page, “Leading Churchill Myths.” Reid, ostensibly aloof from such debates, does a nice job of addressing them, without, curiously, mentioning the arguments. (How ever did he know about them without reading recent studies?)

Some examples: Reid argues persuasively that Churchill, wisely, convinced Roosevelt that an invasion of western Europe could not work in 1942 or even, perhaps, 1943. To determine Churchill’s commitment to OVERLORD requires gathering bits and pieces throughout the book. But overall, Reid concludes that Churchill believed in OVERLORD only if Germany was “on the ropes” because of the Red Army, the RAF, and the success of the Italian campaign.

In January 1943, during the Casablanca talks, Churchill went for a walk on the beach with his bodyguard. Taking a shortcut, they ended up outside the perimeter wire. When Churchill tried to step over, rifle chambers clicked, voices called HALT, and the bodyguard yelled, “It’s Churchill.” To quote Reid, “the soldiers lowered their weapons, cursing at having almost shot at the prime minister, and cursing the


Prof. Kimball edited the Churchill-Roosevelt correspondence and is the author of several books about those figures and World War II. We wish to note that this review differs from more general reviews in the popular press by requiring the broader knowledge of Churchill which most FH readers possess.
prime minister for almost forcing their hand” (623-24).

That irrepressible and irresponsible confidence was in many ways the essence of Churchill—and is how Paul Reid depicts his protagonist. WSC’s overriding obsession, his unwavering focus, was on the defeat of Hitler’s Germany. Yet victory was not the only high stake, albeit the necessary first step.

Reid generally fails to note the long-term effects of Churchill’s blinkered focus, but the point comes home with undeveloped throw-away lines: “The topic, for the first time [March 1943] during his premiership, was the postwar world” (652). The first time? Whatever the lack of leverage available to any British leader then or later, not to think seriously and persistently about the purpose of victory is self-defeating. As indeed it proved for Churchill.

Of course the inconvenient postwar uncertainties would not go away. Reid’s descriptions of the all-important wartime summit meetings, which so determined the makeup of the postwar world, are deft if sketchy. They create the mood and some of the details. Excerpted and printed together they would provide a readable and valuable primer on summity.

Reid summarizes the Second Front discussions at Teheran in pithy fashion: “Roosevelt had given Stalin an opening, and the marshal had marched right through” (757)—a clever but misleading phrase. Of course Stalin wanted the Anglo-Americans to fulfill their promise of a cross-Channel invasion. Reid speculates that the dismissal of a Balkan “thrust,” Churchill’s unworkable notion of an invasion though the so-called Ljubljana gap, which FDR threw out as a sacrificial lamb, indicated that Stalin had a political strategy regarding Eastern Europe. Wow! Some surprise.

True, FDR left it up to Stalin to choose which “second” front, and “Uncle Joe” did just what Roosevelt expected—insisted on the cross-Channel attack. Why did FDR do that? Because he believed the only hope, short or midterm, for Eastern Europe was a Soviet Union that felt secure. Reid describes the late night, private offer to Stalin to move the Polish-German boundary westward, quoting Churchill: “If Poland trod on some German toes, that could not be helped...Boundaries were drawn by the strong.” This may be accurate. But leaves Churchill as willing to recognize Soviet territorial expansion (760).

“Paul Reid has not written a biography, but rather an old-style ‘life and times’ narrative with guns and bullets, political conniving, oft-repeated (but worth repeating) anecdotes, lovely touches of the personal, and the most important asset—a hero...who, flawed though he was, remains a hero.”

Does Reid present Teheran as what it was, the most formative of the wartime conferences? No, but he does catch the essence of Churchill’s instincts: “With a growing awareness of his diminishing role within the alliance, Churchill departed Teheran fully intending to find the right way home. As always, the path led through the Mediterranean” (771). So American suspicions were on the mark. In Reid’s words, Churchill “sought no financial gain; Roosevelt did. Churchill sought no territorial gain; Stalin did” (812). That’s a clever defense, which doesn’t add that Churchill’s efforts to preserve the Empire were beyond his grasp. Is political gain somehow more admirable and less selfish?

Coverage of the remarkably revealing TOLSTOY talks in Moscow (Autumn 1944) between Churchill and Stalin (878-81) is oddly inadequate. No mention is made of the ugly banter between Stalin and Churchill about the Poles; no mention of Stalin’s support for a harsh peace imposed on Germany (later denied by Moscow); no mention of the extraordinary discussions between Molotov and Eden, who tried to spell out the details of the percentages deal. Are details of battles more important?

With Averell Harriman absent from the first of the TOLSTOY talks, Reid considers that Roosevelt did not understand the “spheres of influence” deal that Churchill was making with Stalin. This ignores the clarity of Harriman’s reports to FDR. Harriman knew what his two allies were doing, and provided accurate though not detailed information to the White House. (Perhaps a look at the volumes of Foreign Relations of the United States, not cited anywhere, would have filled in that blank.)

Reid wonderfully suggests what Stalin was thinking (here and in other situations), without indicating any knowledge of recent or current Russian scholarship from the Soviet-era archives. Mention of Churchill’s support for concessions to Russia in the Far East (a precursor to the much-criticized Far Eastern Protocol agreed to by Stalin and FDR at Yalta) is missing.

Reid does drive home a key point—by the time the talks had ended, Churchill could no longer support the exiled Polish government in London, which was unwilling to make any compromises on territorial disputes. Sounding like FDR, the Prime Minister told the House of Commons that “the future depends upon the union of our three countries [UK, Russia, USA]. If that fails, all fails” (881). >>
That irrepressible and irresponsible confidence was, in many ways, the essence of Churchill—and is how Paul Reid depicts his protagonist. Churchill’s overriding obsession, his unwavering focus, was on the defeat of Hitler’s Germany. Yet victory was not the only high stake, albeit the necessary first step."

The Last of The Last Lion...

Summing up the Teheran conference, Reid creates one poignant and amusing image (such “creations” pop up frequently). After noting that FDR intended to bring American forces back to prepare for a massive invasion of Japan, Reid has Eden and Churchill gazing “across the Channel,” realizing “that Roosevelt’s decision would leave in Europe an undemanded and ill-equipped French army of barely eight divisions, an exhausted British army, and the Red Army.”

Reid’s imagining may be accurate, but it cries out for context. The Red Army was huge, but also war-weary. Soviet-era documents show that Stalin had no plans for military expansion into western Europe. In fact, in autumn 1944, Stalin was still hoping for a cooperative relationship with the West, albeit one that left Russia in control of what became the Soviet empire. Historians who rely on old Cold War histories can be overpowered by old Cold War fears.

Yalta, quite properly, gets less coverage than Teheran. The analyses of Churchill’s apparently inconsistent views about Stalin and the Soviet Union are incisive and insightful—worthy of a full review in themselves. I do not have space here to describe the way in which the minor roles played by Charles de Gaulle and France get far more attention than they deserve.

Sometimes a throw-away line needs elaboration. One is Reid’s astonishing analysis of Heinrich Himmler’s proposal to a Swedish diplomat at war’s end that the Germans surrender to the Anglo-Americans in the west while continuing to battle the Russians until the Allies and Eisenhower could take up the struggle against the Bolsheviks—“an astoundingly naive yet not unsound concept” (915). Not unsound? Go to bed with the Nazis to achieve what?

In the same vein, Reid makes much of Ike’s reassurances to the Russians that the Allied armies would withdraw some 140 miles to the zones agreed upon at Yalta, ominously writing that in April 1945, Churchill was “as yet unaware of Eisenhower’s pledge.” Wasn’t Churchill at Yalta? If the time had come to confront the Soviet Union, what was there to prevent the Soviets from swinging around north of Berlin and “liberating” Denmark and northwestern Germany?

Once Churchill leaves office late in July 1945, the narrative takes off like a race-horse heading for the finish. During his five years back in the wilderness, he “sent into battle” (Reid’s phrase) more than 200 speeches attacking Attlee, the Labour Party and socialism, defending the Empire and supporting his version of European unity (“We are with them, but not of them”). If this was a “battle” worthy of the Last Lion, it is not debated. But Churchill’s out-of-office style prompts Reid to raise a verbal eyebrow: “Whether he was in gentlemanly form was not of any concern to him.” That hints at an answer to oft-asked questions about seeming inconsistencies in Churchill’s controversial positions throughout his career: high office can, and should, bring out the best in a statesman.

The entire book suffers from “historical isolationism”: the failure or refusal to consult the vast body of historical works, something even more apparent for the postwar years. Eisenhower’s diaries would have divulged the reasons for Ike’s angry, dismissive reaction to Churchill’s 1953-55 proposals for a summit; Klaus Larres’ Churchill’s Cold War would have offered a far deeper exploration of Churchill’s thinking on atomic and thermonuclear weapons. Reid missed a wonderful opportunity to make corrections to Churchill’s war memoirs, ignoring David Reynolds’ definitive account of writing those memoirs, In Command of History, published eight years before Defender of the Realm.

Whatever the reasons, the truncated, high-speed treatment of Churchill’s final ministry is a disappointment. Reid is right to claim that Churchill’s search for detente during his second premiership found him at his most heroic; but that heroism is not apparent from the speed-dialed postwar narrative.

So what is this book all about? Reid admires Churchill but recognizes him as a “flawed giant.” There are explanations for mistakes, but few acceptable to Reid. An honest report that the British Navy failed to rescue German sailors from the sunken Bismarck, while the Luftwaffe killed defenseless British sailors trying to swim to safety during the battle of Crete, prompts a sad but prescient observation: “both sides, it appeared, had jettisoned any pretense to gentlemanly rules of engagement” (364).

Recounting the loss of HMS Repulse and Prince of Wales in December 1941, Reid scoffs at Churchill’s excuse: “chance played so fatal a part.” Chance, adds Reid, “was aided and abetted by Churchill adhering too long to his notions of battlewagons and their mythic prowess” (437). He deftly describes Churchill’s failure to understand the vastness of the Pacific (less of a self-inflicted wound than Hitler’s ignorance of the vastness of Russia).

Churchillians will wriggle with delight at Reid’s literate and emphatic discourse on Churchill as both defender of the Empire and of democracy; and squirm in discomfort reading Reid’s col-

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lection of ethnic and racial slurs. A discussion of racial tensions among black and white Americans stationed in England leads to a brief but pungent description of British and Churchill’s racial attitudes. Whatever the examples of a general, if benign, British attitude—Frogs, Wops, Japs…foul, nasty, filthy and wretched—the most revealing comment is that of Churchill in the 1950s when he proposed that England’s national motto be “Keep England White.” In the spirit of the non-judgmental chronicler, Reid simply reports the statement and passes on (573).

But let us not be generationally chauvinist (Manchester’s term): this same Churchill condemned as repugnant the U.S. Army’s insistence that the British accept segregation of black American military personnel in Britain.

Paul Reid has not written a biography, but rather an old-style “life and times” narrative with guns and bullets, political conniving, oft-repeated (but worth repeating) anecdotes, lovely touches of the personal, and the most important asset—a hero. It is a nice cruise down a rather lengthy river that you’ve sailed before. There is nothing new or exciting; it is reassuring rather than challenging. Still, it is a lovely and literate view of familiar territory that massages old stories, nurtures legends, and points gently to miscalculations and mistakes of the hero—who, flawed though he was, remains a hero.

Reid chose, or was forced, to pretend ignorance of the dogged efforts of a multitude of academics who, in the last four decades, pushed forward the frontiers of scholarship and intellectual inquiry into the history of the Second World War. Not only is his historical isolationism rude; it is a shame, particularly since he is a superb writer. He makes a familiar history come alive, though you’ll have to manage a huge cargo of extraneous material in a book this long (with strikingly narrow margins), that takes Churchill only from 1940 until his death. #

Rethinking Your Assumptions

RICHARD M. LANGWORTH

A Swiss student, Cindy Kläy, recently asked: “According to what I have read, Chamberlain seemed to hope World War II could be avoided, while Churchill thought war was unavoidable. Who was right? With access to all the history, it is easy to say that war could not have been avoided. But was that so obvious in the 1930s?”

That is a very incisive question. To answer it I referred Miss Kläy to the final chapter of Churchill and Company: “‘Historians are Dangerous’: Churchill, Chamberlain and Some Others.” What may we judge from this? Perhaps that until 1937, Chamberlain and Churchill both hoped or thought war might be avoided—but pursued their hopes differently.

Chamberlain, prudent and pragmatic, thought first that Germany’s grievances could be met short of war. Churchill, equally pragmatic, thought addressing those grievances must be preceded by collective security and major rearmament. Both were frustrated in their hopes, for different reasons. Chamberlain was blamed for Appeasement, which Britons supported through 1938. Yet Britain was rearming under Chamberlain, and even Baldwin. If she were not, there would have not been enough aircraft to win the Battle of Britain in 1940. The question about rearmament was one of degree.

Chamberlain acted reasonably, according to his lights, to avoid another war. Unfortunately, he was up against a less reasonable opponent who had wanted war from the start. When war came, Hitler was elated, while Chamberlain felt that everything he had worked for had failed.

Churchill believed British rearmament should have been more robust, particularly in the air, and doubted the abilities of those Chamberlain placed in charge of it. He had good reason, being >>
Churchill and Company...

quietly advised (with Chamberlain’s knowledge) by inside sources about Hitler’s hectic rearmament. But contrary to his prewar image as a warmonger, Churchill believed for some time that peace might yet prevail. In his 1937 article, “Will There Be War?” (last issue), he was still searching for peace through a “coalition of the willing.”

For support Churchill looked first to France, then to America, then to Russia. But France had no real will to fight, America remained aloof, and Stalin opted for a pact with Germany—perhaps because Chamberlain sent low-level negotiators to Moscow, while Hitler sent his foreign minister.

After the war, in his famous 1946 speech at Fulton, Missouri, when Churchill was warning of the new Soviet threat, he called WW2 “the unnecessary war.” But as Miss Klay astutely suggests, that was his opinion after the fact. At the time, from 1937 on, Churchill like Chamberlain found war much harder to avoid because the things he strove for never came to be.

“I doubt whether Chamberlain believed in any consistent way, at any rate from 1937, that Germany’s grievances could be contained without war,” Professor Dilks wrote to me. “He hoped that such grievances could be met in a way which would not involve a second disaster in twenty years, and which would not invite Italy and Japan to join in the fray; but he knew perfectly well that disaster might occur. Which is why the British government by the later 1930s was spending enormous amounts of money on warlike preparations—far more than had been thought necessary by Churchill’s Liberal colleagues before 1914.” (For Churchill’s views on pre-WW1 preparedness, see Christopher Beckvold’s article, page 36.)

Thoughtful readers of Churchill and Company may conclude that both Chamberlain and Churchill have one-dimensional images: Chamberlain as an appeaser to the point of national suicide; Churchill as an unredeemed warmonger. While respecting Churchill’s views, Dilks provides perspective on Chamberlain’s and Baldwin’s policies that is not widely understood, yet must be considered.

The same balance obtains in this book’s eight other essays: Churchill’s politics, his view of Britain and the Commonwealth, his affinity for France, Anglo-French postwar rivalries, Eden and Stalin, Britain and Poland, and the “Unthinkable Operation”—rearming the Germans for a possible showdown with Russia in mid-1945.

These essays, Dilks writes, are “intended to illuminate Churchill’s activities among friends and enemies”—two hard-to-separate categories. For instance: “Churchill thought of Stalin as a friend or at least a comrade-in-arms, and only with extreme reluctance did he come to look upon the new Czar of all the Russians as an enemy. He regarded Roosevelt with admiration and gratitude, whereas the balance of the evidence suggest that the President felt less warmly towards him, especially from 1943.”

Our free-thinking author challenges preconceived notions. The much-feared onrush of the Red Army in 1944-45, for example, was owed to more than Anglo-American supineness at Teheran: “…if the attempt on Hitler’s life in July [1944] had succeeded, or if the Allies had been able to break out more swiftly and decisively from their bridgehead in Normandy, [the war’s end would have found] the Red Army far to the east of the line which it eventually reached” (202). As for WSC’s Russian approach: “In public and in private, [Churchill] was far more favourably disposed towards Stalin and Russia than ever Chamberlain had been to Hitler” (261). Cynics might wonder if absent Hitler, those wonderful Prussian generals would have come straight to the peace table. They might also point out that the zones of occupation had been pretty much agreed at Teheran in 1943.

But other cynics might reply that the military situation on the ground trumps everything. It’s part of the fascination of history—or alternate history.

David Dilks can teach you more about how to appreciate Winston Churchill than most, because he makes you think. Circumstances do matter. Things then were not so straightforward as we imagine in hindsight. Judging the past by what we know now, we are obliged to consider how the players of those times had to look at things, based only on what they knew then. ✽

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Old Tales Retold

CHRISTOPHER H. STERLING

The Hopkins Touch: Harry Hopkins and the Forging of the Alliance to Defeat Hitler, by David L. Roll. Oxford University Press, hardbound, illus., 510 pp., $34.95, member price $27.95.

Harry Hopkins has faded from the public memory over the years, but during World War II he was never far from Roosevelt’s side in Washington or abroad, unless he was on a long and arduous trip, carrying messages on the president’s behalf, often to Winston Churchill, who dubbed him “Lord Root of the Matter” for his direct style of discussion. Hopkins was always in the news and attracted plenty of negative political and press comment from those seeking to attack the president or his policy positions.

Self-effacing to a fault, Hopkins (1890-1946) was probably FDR’s closest confi-
dant from 1940 to early 1945. Before that he’d served briefly as Secretary of Commerce, and more importantly as head of the massive Works Progress Administration (WPA), the signature recovery agency of Roosevelt’s New Deal. But this book’s focus is on the war which occupied the final years of both men’s lives: they died within months of one another.

Washington attorney David Roll’s book is the first serious study of the relationship between the president and his key adviser since Robert Sherwood’s Roosevelt and Hopkins, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1948. Roll relies heavily on the earlier book, but adds many new details from dozens of sources which have become available since.

Unable to travel freely because of his handicap, Roosevelt relied on others to be his eyes and ears in places he could not go. Hopkins was central to this process, developing the initial communication link with Churchill, and later Stalin. He made numerous long flying trips (when they were unusual, and far more dangerous than now) to build ties among the Big Three and lesser players such as Charles de Gaulle. One of the first of Hopkins’ trips was in early 1941 when Roosevelt sent him to size up the Churchill government’s chance of survival against Germany. He stayed for several weeks, meeting all the key people in the British government, and spending hours with the Prime Minister, whom Roosevelt had not met save for a brief encounter in London in 1919. Hopkins and Churchill developed an excellent working relationship.

Hopkins continued to travel on behalf of the president or to attend the allied summit conferences. Sometimes he did both simultaneously, as when he flew to London in mid-1941 for more talks with Churchill, then on to Moscow to meet Stalin before traveling by sea to join Churchill and Roosevelt in Newfoundland for the Atlantic Charter meeting.

Those long trips were exhausting for a man in weak health, who pushed himself to the exclusion of medical concerns. Time and again in this well-written account, Hopkins ends up recovering for days in bed or in hospital. And from May 1940 until late 1943, he literally lived in the White House, readily available at any hour of the day or night. Only after his third marriage did he find a home in Georgetown, a shift that, with his deteriorating health, began to change the once-easy working relationship with Roosevelt. Hopkins again joined the president before and during the Yalta conference. Missing Potsdam, he made a final trip to Moscow in mid-1945 on behalf of President Truman.

Drawing on the books and archives of many of who were there (though with perhaps a bit too much reliance on Lord Moran’s disputed “diaries,” which suggest the doctor was more centrally involved with people and events than was the case), Roll provides a fine sense of the people, places, and issues, forthrightly criticizing Hopkins’ actions (his personal life was sometimes a shambles). While the president relied heavily on him during the crucial war years, FDR didn’t get too close to anyone. Yet Hopkins’ role was often central—particularly because, at Roosevelt’s insistence, the State Department was rarely represented at the many meetings with allies.

This is a well-written and balanced account of a central player during a fascinating time. Hopkins became close to Churchill, yet understood his faults and often had to reason with him at FDR’s behest (as on firming up the dates for the invasion of France). Churchill in turn admired Hopkins’ style, his role as the president’s righthand man, and his courage in the face of his weak constitution. Roll has given us a stellar modern portrait of the right man in the right place at the right time. 

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The first fifteen years of the 20th century are the focus in this new study of well-trodden ground. Starting with Churchill’s initial election to Parliament, and ending with the bitter aftermath of Gallipoli, the author examines the public politician and private man during his formative political years.

Seasoned readers know of numerous studies of Churchill’s pre-1916 career, notably four “partial lives.” Peter de Mendelssohn’s *The Age of Churchill: Heritage and Adventure, 1874-1911* (1961) took the story to Churchill’s arrival at the Admiralty, the only volume of an intended trilogy. Violet Bonham Carter’s *Winston Churchill: An Intimate Portrait* (1966) covers 1906-16, as seen by a prime minister’s daughter, who knew her subject well (and is a major figure in Shelden’s account). Ted Morgan’s *Churchill: Young Man in a Hurry, 1874-1915* (1982) offers a well-written and -documented work. The Earl of Birkenhead’s *Churchill 1874-1922* (1989) is based on the memories of Churchill’s godson.

Shelden was able to build on these and previous authors. An English professor at Indiana State University, he melds these and other published materials with some archival sources, dwelling heavily on the class-driven British society of the period. But given what already exists, is there anything new? Here and there, yes. And it’s engagingly and even breezily written.

Shelden suggests that Violet Asquith was much closer to Churchill in 1907-08 than other sources (including both principals) have suggested—and that in despair a week after Churchill married Clementine Hozier, Violet may have tried to take her own life (*Datelines, FH* 158). She took a walk along a high >>

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Dr. Sterling is associate dean at Columbian College of Arts & Sciences, George Washington University.
Young Titan...

rocky cliff overlooking crashing waves—a path she and WSC had walked just weeks earlier—and went missing, later claiming to have fallen and hit her head on a rock. But when found on soft ground, she showed no signs of injury.

Just two endnotes provide references for this event and both cite unpublished sources: Margot Asquith’s personal diary and letters between Violet and her close friend Venetia Stanley, all now held in the Bodleian Library. Without taking a trip to Oxford to examine these documents, it’s impossible to say for sure what Shelden is reading: solid evidence or surmises appears in no other published source. (See sidebar at right.)

Shelden also concludes that Churchill initially led (or pushed) Lloyd George (not the other way round as is often presumed, given their age difference) to radical social legislation concerning employment and working conditions. Churchill always claimed he was Lloyd George’s “faithful lieutenant,” but Shelden argues that Lloyd George became radical in response to Churchill’s rising political star. By the time of the famous budget battle of 1909-10, Lloyd George was leading the fight against the House of Lords.

At the famous Sidney Street shoot-out in 1911, when Churchill was widely criticized—even ridiculed—for showing up in his top hat amid the confrontation, he turned out to be one of the few leaders present experienced with the rapid-fire Mauser guns the cornered anarchists were using. Here as elsewhere, Shelden’s endnotes comment that other historians have glossed over such details.

The book ends as Churchill moves to the Admiralty in late 1911 and war breaks out in 1914. The Dardanelles disaster and Churchill’s ouster is dispatched in fewer than ten pages. Almost no one stood by Churchill, even Asquith and Lloyd George, whose political fortunes he had saved earlier. Seemingly, Churchill’s career was over; of course this wasn’t the case. ⚜

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**Young Titan: Two Observations**

Richard Marsh (“Churchill and Flandin,” FH 158: 22) sent Dr. Shelden and us a letter in his collection from Churchill to H.H. Asquith dated 14 August 1908, which is relevant to the alleged romance between Violet Asquith and Churchill.

WSC begins by thanking Asquith for his congratulations on his engagement: “I was sure that as an old friend of my father’s & a kind one to me you would rejoice in my great happiness & good fortune, which has broken upon me with such sudden wonder.” The letter then clearly reveals that Clementine as well as Winston had been invited to Slains Castle by the Asquiths: “Clementine has to buy all sorts of important things, so that she cannot accept your pleasant invitation. But I will keep my tryst & propose to travel North by the night train of Tuesday.”

Mr. Marsh writes: “It is interesting that Churchill used the word ‘tryst’ in describing his upcoming visit, although I am sure that he was not describing a meeting of lovers, Churchill ends interestingly: “Please thank Mrs. Asquith & Miss Violet for including themselves as I am sure they did in your congratulations.”

Who said, “The first time you meet Winston you see all his faults, and the rest of your life you spend discovering his virtues”? Shelden and others attribute this to Edith, First Countess of Lytton (1841-1936). In fact it was said by her daughter-in-law Pamela, Second Countess of Lytton (1874-1971), Churchill’s early love, to Eddie Marsh, who had asked her whether he should be WSC’s private secretary.

Marsh’s biographer, Christopher Hassall, caused the confusion by identifying Edith as the speaker (Edward Marsh, 1959, 120). But Marsh himself (A Number of People, 1939, 49), identified the speaker as Pamela: “I betook myself to Lady Lytton, who was a great friend of his as well as of mine….Her answer was one of the nicest things that can ever have been said about anybody.”

Both Marsh and Hassall agree that it was Pamela who urged Churchill to hire Marsh, at a party given by Lady Granby on 14 December 1905. Marsh’s text refers only to “Lady Lytton”; but he goes on to identify this Lady Lytton as the selfsame Pamela who had urged Churchill to hire him—and his index entry names Pamela, not Edith, as the “great friend” in question.

There were numerous letters and meetings between Eddie Marsh and Pamela, who were contemporaries, but not Eddie and Edith, who died three years before Marsh published his memoir, in which Marsh does not refer to “the late” Lady Lytton. The evidence is unequivocal. —Editor, FH 131: 32

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**Chameleons and Crossroads**

ERIKA L. CHENOWETH

Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads, by Fraser J. Harbutt, Cambridge University Press, hardbound, illus., 468 pp., $42.

The Yalta Conference of February 1945, laden with secret dealings viewed as “the foundational sin of the postwar era” (9), is given a make-over by diplomatic historian Fraser Harbutt, who believes that “Yalta has been hopelessly misunderstood,” a symbol “chameleonic in every sense except its fixation on Roosevelt’s performance”

Ms. Chenoweth, a fishery biologist for the state of Alaska, is co-editor of a new edition of Churchill’s Great Contemporaries (ISI Books, 2012) and wrote “Churchill and the Theater” in FH 152.
in the end he meaning (257), despite private assurances. But he contrasts the all sw eetness and light, and it was never intellectual vitality” (122) by giving tribute to the pockets of resistance in W estern Europe. He understands that “the Anglo-Soviet Relationship was not all sweetness and light, and it was never intimate” (192). But he contrasts the strength of Anglo-Soviet diplomatic relations and their few shared interests with Roosevelt’s remoteness and tactics of “evasion or procrastination” when it came to any discussion of postwar settlements (257), despite private assurances. Harbutt is evenhanded with the central characters, but in the end he presents a narrow view of Churchill’s most obvious diplomatic flaws and fears. Stalin’s intentions remain obscure, due to the lack of evidence and the tight-fistedness of Soviet archives. Harbutt argues that the persistent geopolitical bargaining between the British and Soviet governments, combined with FDR’s abstinence, solidified boundaries more than most wish to believe, ultimately defining early on what land was to fall behind the Iron Curtain. Yalta was therefore positioned at a critical “crossroads” in relations between Europe and America. He believes there is evidence for an “Anglo-Soviet road not taken” that, among other things, might have prolonged Britain’s status as a Great Power” and avoided or diminished the Cold War (xxii).

We are vividly reminded of the rem oteness of Yalta and the Russians’ discom fiting habit of being “relentless ly hospitable” (281). Harbutt adroitly analyzes the political dynamics at work between the players, seeking to reveal the “deeper impulses” (284) that worked to undermine conference goals and allowed the spiral into a crisis less than two weeks after its conclusion. Roosevelt is trapped in the dilemma of his own making, being forced to “make some kind of choice” between his declarations to the American public and his compromising private assurances at past conferences to Stalin (285). Roosevelt, Harbutt writes, “chose finesse and deception, with consequences that would contribute to the breakdown of the Grand Alliance” (285).

The days of the conference are carefully traced. Roosevelt, the book argues, sacrificed almost all to guarantee the survival of the fledgling United Nations and his own domestic success, refusing to engage in any practical geopolitical disputes with Stalin, sweeping the rug out from under the British and sacrificing any practical involvement with postwar governments in lands occupied by the Soviets.

Harbutt does not refute the claim that President Roosevelt caused a diplomatic debacle. He does conclude, again by looking at “less obvious levels” of operation, that FDR’s actions were more intentional than many have supposed. The president, he writes, invented and engaged in a new kind of radical public diplomacy.

The final chapters follow the rapid disintegration of relations between the Big Three, as Russia reacted poorly to public pressure and Churchill strove to unite with America in the new Cold War. The Allies, Harbutt contends, soon faced a very different postwar order from the one they had anticipated, mainly through confusion, misunderstanding and miscalculation.

The book is well-written, with only a handful of typos, and is worth reading even if the thrust of Harbutt’s thesis—that the Cold War might have been avoided if Europe had been left to its formerly arranged practical geopolitics, rather than being severely disrupted by Roosevelt’s well-intentioned universalism—is not entirely convincing. It is a well-researched and eyebrow-raising contribution to the continuing conversation on tripartite relations in the late Forties. 

Mr. King and the Prime Minister

JOHN G. PLUMPTON

Winston Churchill and Mackenzie King: So Similar, So Different, by Terry Reardon. A.J. Patrick Boyer, hardbound, illus., 432 pp., $35.

Canadians are justifiably proud of their role in the great wars of the 20th century. Their contributions went beyond the “call of duty.” But what was their duty?

In 1914 it was clear that Britain’s declaration of war >>
Churchill and King... 

included Canada. Constitutional changes in the interwar years altered that, but most Canadian historians argue that Canada still went to war because Britain was at war.

Terry Reardon concludes that in 1939, Canada declared war by the decision by one man, Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Although King is the Commonwealth’s longest-serving prime minister, he is unknown outside—and even sometimes inside—Canada.

Canada almost split apart over conscription (“the draft”) in 1917, and had it not been for King’s political ruthlessness and astuteness it might have again happened in 1944. Domestic politics is the focus of most biographies of King; but Reardon has written a much-needed book about King’s foreign policy, focusing almost exclusively on his relations with Churchill and Roosevelt.

The King-Churchill relationship, which began in the early years of the century, was a rocky affair for almost forty years. A strong Chamberlain supporter, King had considered Churchill one of the most dangerous men in Britain. Churchill almost never thought of King at all. In Churchill’s The Second World War, there are more references to Admiral Ernest King, chief of U.S. Naval Operations, than to the Canadian Premier.

Yet in 1940 King joined the rest of the free world in viewing Churchill as the rock upon which its liberties depended. This we know from the detailed daily diary King kept during the war. He was a bachelor, and it is almost as if the diary was the spouse to whom he imparted his innermost thoughts about events and people.

Reardon places the King-Churchill relationship in the context of their political lives and there is little new about the Churchill story, except as it pertains to King. There is, however, a good overview of Canadian political history, at least as seen by King. This, of course, has the inherent weakness of any work dependent on a single source. For example, King takes credit for motivating the concluding words of WSC’s “fight on the beaches” speech, but we have no other supporting sources.

The meat of the book is the little-known story of how King supported and worked with Churchill to prod and assist the United States into war— notwithstanding King’s and Churchill’s concerns that prior to Pearl Harbor the U.S. “was trying to get the British Empire without Britain” (Churchill’s words). This book should be read in conjunction with Lynne Olson’s Those Angry Days to understand the resistance of Roosevelt that frustrated them.

It is hard for today’s advocates of the Anglo-American special relationship to believe that there was a time when the U.S. and Britain could not talk directly to each other about substantive issues without an intermediary. That linchpin (again a Churchillian term) was not Canada; it was Mackenzie King.

King described his role at the Quebec Conferences, where Churchill and Roosevelt met in 1943 and 1944, as akin to that of “the general manager of the Chateau Frontenac.” In this reviewer’s opinion, that was exactly his role vis-à-vis the two giants throughout the entire war. This is not to disparage King; he was an essential counterpoint to the dance of egos of the British prime minister and the American president.

Reardon subtitles his book about Churchill and King, So Similar, So Different. After reading it in both draft and published versions, it appears to me that the differences greatly dwarf the similarities. Those differences are illustrated in the two men’s comments about their roles as national leaders. King thought successful leadership was often in what one avoided. Churchill once said: “I do not need to be prodded. If anything, I am a prod.” But in their case, opposites definitely attracted.

Thanks to Terry Reardon and David DILKS, we now have fine studies of Churchill and King: thanks to Jon MEACHAM and WARREN KIMBALL, we have equally good works on Churchill and Roosevelt. But the North Atlantic alliance was a three-way partnership, so now we need a study of Roosevelt and King: “Mackenzie and Mr. President.” That suggested title pretty well describes their relationship.

The Private Enterprise Empire

ANDREW ROBERTS


Such has been the tenacity of the Marxist interpretation of history that twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, books are still being published to explain phenomena like the British Empire in terms of dialectical materialism, bourgeois exploitation of the proletariat, and so on. How refreshing it is, therefore, when as distinguished an historian as John Darwin of Nuffield College, Oxford, writes something as thoughtful, well-researched and persuasive as Unfinished Empire, which explains the half-millennium-long explosion of Britain across the globe in terms that genuinely make sense.

Of course Darwin doesn’t for a moment deny the vital importance of the capi-

Mr. Roberts is author of numerous books on British history, among which our favorite is his pithy and potent early work, Eminent Churchillians. This review was first published in the Daily Telegraph.
talist ethic in the process, readily acknowledging how the British Empire was a largely private enterprise empire; the creation of merchants, investors, migrants and missionaries and many others.” Yet there’s no tone of sneering negativity. Indeed in examining the apogee of the Empire, which he puts from the 1830s to 1940, he argues that the British succeeded “because they exploited the opportunities of global connectedness more fully than their rivals.” The exploitation was of global connectedness, not subject peoples.

Maps of the world emphasizing the extent of Atlantic commerce in the 18th century, the submarine cable system connecting the Empire in 1929, the huge levels of foreign investment up to the outbreak of World War I, and so on, all underline Darwin’s point that although it was haphazard, the Empire came about as the result of the deployment of unimaginable amounts of energy, risk-taking, farsightedness and self-confidence. “The hallmark of British imperialism,” he concludes, “was its extraordinary versatility in method, outlook and object.”

With one major exception—the government replacing the East India Company when it got into trouble around 1860—the State generally stayed out of the way, except to guarantee the freedom of the seas for trade. With government regulation kept to a minimum, private enterprise built the greatest empire the world had ever seen (and doubtless now will ever see, in this post-imperialist age).

Darwin looks carefully at the various accidents of history and geography that also led to British success overseas in the five centuries—almost to the day—that separated John Cabot’s landing in Newfoundland in June 1497 from Chris Patten leaving Hong Kong in June 1997. Britain’s offshore position—to but not attached to Europe, not far from the Mediterranean and Africa, athwart Scandinavia’s sea-lanes and an ocean-width from the Americas—meant that she was extremely well-placed strategically and commercially. So long as she maintained a strong navy, she could escape the expense of a large standing army, which most of her continental rivals were forced to maintain.

Coming relatively late to imperialism, the British found a useful trail that had already been blazed by the Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch, who had explored the trade routes and supplied much of the apparatus of empire that Britain went on to perfect (and very often purloin altogether through naval superiority). Every invention in the particularly inventive Victorian age was put to use, and in particular, as Darwin shows, “Railways turned the British, hitherto mainly a sea power, into a land and sea power, a huge increase in capacity.” The author’s deep familiarity with all the key sources of this vast subject allows him to pluck examples for his arguments from across the centuries and continents, being as much at home with Lord Salisbury’s South African goals and policies, say, as with Winston Churchill’s unfortunate prediction of December 1924: “Why should there be a war with Japan? I do not believe there is the slightest chance of it in my lifetime.”

Britain’s pluralistic society—which always included a deeply anti-imperialist minority—her relative religious tolerance, her flexible political system, her open markets, free trade policies and ever more sophisticated financial instruments, as well as the City and docklands of London itself, meant that she was perfectly adapted to run an empire that Darwin sees as “less a recognizable bloc with borders and limits than a vast archipelago, strewed across the world.” Some possessions were jewels, while others were “a sprinkling of minnows acquired for no discernible reason but hard to abandon.” It was also vital that no fewer than 19 million Britons were willing to emigrate between 1815 and 1930—twice as many as from any other part of Europe. (The Italians came next with 9 million, but most of them wound up in America.)

On top of the directly-ruled jewels and minnows, Britain also enjoyed hegemony over a widespread informal empire which, in places like Argentina, Uruguay, and Egypt, were important to her. This “invisible” empire formed the template for the kind of influence that the United States has enjoyed in many places around the world since 1945.

Nor did the Empire fundamentally alter Britain: Darwin takes issue with those historians who argue that Britain was “constituted by empire,” which he calls “a modish but vacuous expression.” Because Britain had been a strong, well-funded fiscal-military state long before acquiring an empire beyond Europe, she was able to enter her post-imperial phase without suffering any collective national mental breakdown. For Britain, the Empire was “only a phase, an exceptional moment.”

Darwin is unsparing about the violence and the failures; it’s encouraging to see the Attlee ministry and its viceroy Lord Mountbatten rightfully blamed for “at least one million” deaths in the Partition of India, rather than the fraction of that figure often attributed by historians to that terrible period. Best of all, though, is the thought that Darwin’s book might at long last herald the victory of the post-Marxist phase of imperial historiography. And not a moment too soon.
Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic

At the Going Down of the Sun, and in the Morning, We Will Remember Them.

The Battle of the Atlantic was the only campaign of World War II that gave Winston Churchill sleepless nights. As he said at the great moment of crisis in June 1940: “Without victory there is no survival.”

The Battle began on 3 September 1939 and lasted 2074 days until 8 May 1945, when Germany surrendered. The heroes on both sides were the men, the heroines were the ships, and the enemy was the sea: the cruel sea.

Canada’s contribution to the Atlantic battle was inextricably linked to that of Britain’s Royal Navy. Victory in the Atlantic would not win the war for the Allies—but losing it most certainly would have lost the war in Europe.

Both Germany and Britain made strategic mistakes in the 1930s which affected the Atlantic battle. Germany gave priority to building battleships, but would eventually have to turn to the U-boat as its main weapon to starve Britain into surrender. For the Allies, the tide did not turn until they recognized the importance of aircraft in fighting U-boats. Early on, they had placed too much confidence in ASDIC (Allied Submarine Detector Investigation Committee) or, as the Americans knew it SONAR (Sound Navigation and Ranging).

As vital as ASDIC was in the U-boat war, the Germans mostly attacked convoys on the surface at night, rendering its services useless. Escorts guarding Atlantic convoys needed radar to detect U-boats on the surface.

Churchill would later write that he was mistaken in placing so much faith in the system: “I overrated, as the Royal Navy did, the magnitude of their achievement in inventing ASDIC, and forgot, for a moment, how broad are the seas.” He added a Churchillian flourish: “However, while ASDIC did not conquer the U-boat, without ASDIC the U-boat would not have been conquered.”

In the British and Canadian Royal Navies, professional careers were made in “big ships.” On smaller ships, newly trained reservist officers only took up their appointments when the ships were ready. Regular Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) officers were kept on shore during the early convoy battles, waiting for the larger cruisers and fleet destroyers to be built and delivered to the “professional” navy.

Captains of British and Canadian convoy escort vessels were mostly officers from merchant ships who were members of their respective naval reserves, or had come from reserve naval units such as the training establishment HMCS York in Toronto. Very
few regular RN or RCN officers were in command of escort vessels.

British and Canadian escort ships started the war without radar, and only a handful had a primitive system for locating U-boats. For hunting submerged U-boats they relied on ASDIC, using depth charges to destroy them when found.

Much has been made about the British breaking the German naval codes at Bletchley Park in England, but virtually throughout the war, German cryptanalysts were also breaking British merchant navy codes. The Germans also broke Royal Navy codes on and off into 1943, with disastrous consequences for the Allies.

Despite Canada’s two very long coastlines, it is surprising that in 1939 the RCN had only 1800 regular naval officers and sailors, and the same number of volunteer reservists, with a mere six destroyers and a handful of coastal craft. By 1945, 110,000 men and women had served Canada in what became the world’s third largest navy. It is hardly surprising that such a phenomenal expansion brought severe growing pains which subordinated quality to quantity on too many occasions.

The expansion of the Royal Canadian Navy proceeded at such a pace that any experience gained was promptly diluted by the arrival of new ships, and new, green and untrained crews. Indeed HMCS Chambly, a Canadian corvette which would normally carry a crew of fifty, had 259 men serve aboard during a two-year period: as men gained experience in Atlantic convoys, they were transferred to the new ships being added to the Navy, or posted ashore to train the thousands of new recruits.

Let us now consider the corvette, a major factor in the Atlantic battle. At the outbreak of the war there was a desperate shortage of escort vessels. To fill it, the British Admiralty turned to the 925-ton corvette, based on a design for a whale catcher, originally intended for coastal defence assignments. So desperate was the shortage of destroyers that the corvette was pressed into North Atlantic service, where it soon became the main workhorse for convoy defense.

These small ships were originally designed with a range of 4000 miles and a top speed of 16 knots—critically, not fast enough to outrun a U-boat on the surface. Their armament was a four-inch gun, along with a handful of depth charges.

Corvettes were inexpensive and simple to build, so Canadian shipyards began grinding them out for the Canadian and British navies. The Admiralty named them after flowers, the Canadian navy after cities. Winston Churchill had another name for them: “Cheap and Nasties.” They were cheap to build, and nasty to the enemy.

The first ten Canadian-built corvettes were sailed across the Atlantic to Britain. Such was the shortage of weapons that they sailed without their four-inch deck guns. Some actually had a dummy wooden gun, placed where the real gun would go, no doubt in the hope that it would frighten any U-boat that surfaced in their vicinity.

Corvettes pitched and rolled like corks on the waves. Those who sailed in them said they would roll on wet grass—but they were seaworthy. Their crews were young: both officers and sailors were often just out of high school. From 1941 to the end of 1943, the bulk of the RCN’s war against U-boats was carried out by some seventy of these vessels.

After delivery of the first meaningful number of corvettes in 1941, the RCN’s contribution to the Atlantic battle gained traction. This was abetted by the Newfoundland Escort Force, established under Canadian command.

In his memoirs of the First World War, Churchill wrote that in terms of equipment and armaments, in the first year of the war the armed services would get nothing; in the second year, a trickle; in the third year, nearly all they wanted; and in the fourth year, more than they needed. So it was with the British and Canadian navies in World War II: nothing in 1940; a trickle in 1941; not enough in 1942; all that was needed in 1943, when the backbone of the U-boat fleet was at last broken.

The Allies realised early that anti-submarine aircraft patrols by RAF and RCAF coastal command, their planes equipped with radar and depth charges, were an effective part of convoy defence; but only very slowly were these patrols expanded. There were no very long range (VLR) aircraft available to close what was known as the “Atlantic Gap”—that part of the ocean beyond the range of shore-based aircraft, where U-boats at first operated with impunity.

In May 1941 a German Enigma coding machine, with all its rotors and code books, was captured by a British destroyer from U-110. As a result, U-boat messages were decoded in real time, and for the rest of 1941 the Admiralty was able to re-route convoys away from known U-boat concentrations, significantly reducing losses.

In July 1941, end-to-end escort of convoys across the Atlantic became possible. American warships escorted them a third of the way, Canadians the >>
middle part of the journey, and British and Canadian vessels covered the remainder of the route to UK ports. Warships were refuelled (dangerously) from tankers in mid-ocean.

U-boats were grouped together in “wolf packs” to attack convoys in larger numbers. Corvettes, and their new lengthened sisters, called frigates, were formed into escort groups to counter the German pack tactics.

One benefit of the Churchill-Roosevelt “Atlantic Meeting” in August 1941 was that the Americans agreed to extend eastward the line behind which they assumed responsibility for the defence of shipping. This gave Canadian and British escort vessels a much-needed respite. Ultimately, the line would extend south from Iceland, turning America into the “neutral belligerent” Churchill hoped would eventually lead the U.S. to enter the war. Ironically, this meant that Canadian warships fighting Germany came under command of the officially neutral U.S. Navy: a risk for which Roosevelt deserved credit.

Even more important was the need for more air support of the convoys. The VLR B-24 Liberator bomber was crucial to the battle, but only a handful were at first used in the anti-submarine role; the majority were used by RAF Bomber Command to attack Germany.

The absence of these aircraft was keenly felt, especially after February 1942, when the Germans added another rotor wheel to the Enigma coding machine, making it impossible to decipher U-boat wireless messages. Intelligence dried up overnight and again the Allies were blind.

During that year, as U-boat strength increased, a number of Canadian-escorted convoys suffered massive losses. The Royal Navy reported to the Canadian Admiralty: “A grave danger exists of breakdown in health, morale and discipline.” Simply put, there were not enough trained men to provide relief; the Canadians were exhausted and their ships had been stretched to the breaking point.

The training base at Halifax left much to be desired. As the Germans moved many U-boats further into the South Atlantic, the British pursued them, and the Canadians were left with yet more responsibility in the North Atlantic. The latter part of 1942 became a slogging match: sometimes the U-boats, and sometimes the escorts, got the upper hand. Losses spiraled, and one Allied convoy lost more than three-quarters of its ships.

As the British Admiralty began looking for ways to improve the quality of escort forces, it considered the RCN the weakest link in its defences. The Canadians were providing 48% of the escorts, but in 1942 Canadian-escorted convoys were suffering 80% of the shipping losses. In fairness, Canadian escorts were mostly allocated to the slower convoys, exposing them to greater risk. And the Canadians also had their successes: half the U-boats sunk in mid-Atlantic in 1942 were sent to the bottom by Canadian warships.

Canada, too, was new to large-scale shipbuilding, and to the manufacture of vital equipment such as radar. Canadians were always at the back of the queue for the latest technical advances. They were given no VLR B-24 Liberators or radar sets, most of their destroyers were old, and their corvettes had not been much improved from the original design, which was highly uncomfortable to the crews.

Very slowly, Canadian escorts were refitted with
modern equipment needed to fight the U-boats successfully. They were also temporarily reinforced by British destroyers, and increasingly were given fast convoys to protect, reducing their exposure to risk. By March 1943, the four Canadian groups based in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, were receiving individual and group training between convoy duty at sea. They returned to the Atlantic battle in time for its climax that May.

A turning point was reached in December 1942. After a year of being unable to read U-boat wireless messages, British cryptanalysts broke the new German code (called “Shark” by the British and “Triton” by the Germans). Again the Allies were able to read U-boat messages in “real time.” The crux of the U-boat war was at hand. Which side would prevail?

The issue was in doubt: In the winter of 1942-43, a quarter of the ships in four full-laden eastbound convoys were torpedoed and lost in a howling gale. Early 1943 saw the heaviest losses in the war: 22% of all merchant ships sailing in January-May failed to arrive at their destination. These were critical losses.

Canada’s contribution to the Allied naval effort—unglamorous, hard and costly—was rewarded by the creation of the country’s first independent operational command, “Canadian North West Atlantic,” under a Canadian Admiral.

A continuing problem in 1943 was the shortage of Liberators to close the mid-Atlantic air gap, placing thousands of merchant ships in grave danger. But at Casablanca in January, Roosevelt and Churchill decided to divert aircraft from other theaters, and by May 1943 their move had proven decisive. Forty-three U-boats, with an average crew of forty, were sunk by aircraft and warships.

The German U-boat arm was now doomed. The air gap was closed; ships and aircraft now had sophisticated radar and radio direction finders and better armaments; there were sufficient escort ships with well-trained Canadian, American and British crews; and Enigma messages were being read to good effect.

In June, the Germans ordered all submarines back to their French bases. When they did venture out again, their losses were unsustainable.

Air power, ships and technology had rendered the U-boat fleet obsolete. Admiral Doenitz, by then head of the Germany Navy, would have been dismayed to have learned that in October 1943, Allied ship-building (now overwhelmingly American) had finally exceeded the tonnage lost to U-boats. The Americans were building Liberty ships from start to finish in ten days, launching three a day.

In the last two years of the war, Canadian frigates and corvettes were conceded to be the best afloat, and the Maple Leaf funnel emblem indicated new pride in their nationality. By 1944, wrote then-Commander, later Admiral Peter Gretton, “the RCN was carrying the main burden of the mid-Atlantic war, and well she did it.”

By then the Royal Canadian Navy had fulfilled many long-cherished dreams, with modern cruisers, fleet-class destroyers, and light aircraft carriers. But the Canadian Admiralty had maintained that attacking U-boats and guarding convoys was suitable work only for reservists and wartime volunteers—and that work was indeed left to them.

Between 1940 and 1945, Canadian warships escorted more than 25,000 merchant ships carrying almost 200 million tons of food and war materials from North America to Britain. In the process, the Allies lost 2600 merchant ships, of which nearly 13.5 million tons was to submarines.

Canadian merchant seamen suffered heavily, losing one in ten among the 12,000 who had served. Combined, the Allied navies had lost about 20,000 officers and men in convoy escorts. The RCN sustained 1965 casualties, with the loss of twenty-four warships in the North Atlantic and Gulf of St. Lawrence.

On the German side, of 1162 U-boats involved in the Battle of the Atlantic, 784 were destroyed—a staggering 70%. Of the 40,000 Germans who sailed on wartime voyages, more than 30,000 became casualties, a loss approaching eight out of ten. One calculation holds that the RCN and RCAF jointly sank forty-seven U-boats in the North Atlantic.

Canada clearly made an enormous effort in this grave and portentous battle for supremacy. It is left for us today to pay tribute to all the brave Canadians who fought, particularly the 2000 who died. We should remember that they were volunteers—as were the Canadian fighter pilots who fought in the skies above Southeast England in the Battle of Britain; the thousand Canadian boys who died on the dreadful shingle beach at Dieppe in 1942; who fought up the spine of Italy and fell storming Ortona in 1943; who died on sandy Juno Beach on D-Day, and the subsequent, very bloody Normandy campaign; who perished on the cusp of victory in March and April 1945 while liberating Holland and Belgium.

All volunteers. Honour to their bravery, their courage, their sacrifice. ☠
King, Canada and the Iron Curtain Speech

When Hitler fatefuly turned on Russia in the summer of 1941, Churchill embraced the necessity of accepting Stalin as an ally. In the end, this uneasy bargain helped turn the tide against the Axis powers.

But the world was not rendered free from tyranny. Stalin was already betraying the undertakings he had made at Teheran and Yalta when he, Churchill and Truman met at Potsdam in July 1945.

Churchill believed that if he could spend more time with Stalin he could right those wrongs, but he lost the 1945 election. After a period of gloom, Churchill realized that he still had two potent weapons, his pen and his voice, to warn of a new “Gathering Storm.”

Enter Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who visited Churchill in London on a rainy October 26th, 1945. King had offered unwavering support to Churchill in World War II despite a conscription debacle that had split his nation. They dined on caviar and a snipe, conferring on the lamentable influence of far-left politics, Churchill telling King that Labour would redistribute wealth by “destroying the rich to equalize the incomes of all.”

Though he relished coming battles with the Attlee government, Churchill was preoccupied with the state of the world. As King recorded:

He said that Russia was grabbing one country after another...all these different countries, naming a lot of the Balkans, including Berlin, would be under their control. He thought they should have been stood up to more than they were. He spoke about the Russian regime as being very difficult but said there was nothing to be gained by not letting them know we were not afraid of them. He said that they would be as pleasant with you as they could be, although prepared to destroy you. That sentiment meant nothing to them—morals meant nothing...you must remember that with the Communists, Communism is a religion....He felt that the Communist movement was spreading everywhere.1

King, though he was used to Churchillian monologues, was ready to give his own opinion:

I said to him that I did not think the British Commonwealth of Nations could compete with the Russian situation itself, nor did I think the U.S. could. That I believed that it would require the two and they must be kept together. He said to me, 'That is the thing you must work for above everything else if you can pull off a continued alliance between the U.S. and Britain...if you can get them to preserve the Joint [Combined] Chiefs of Staff arrangement...you will be doing the greatest service that can be done the world.'2

This conversation shows Churchill’s great appreciation for King, and for the sacrifices that Canada had made in the war. He would air these views, he told King, during his trip to the United States early in the New Year.3

The themes Churchill explored with King that day formed the bedrock for WSC’s conversations with U.S. Secretary of State James Byrnes and financier Bernard Baruch while Churchill was holidaying at the home of Canadian Colonel Frank Clarke in Miami during January and February 1946. Churchill had already planned a trip across the Atlantic, but his invitation to speak at Westminster College in Fulton, endorsed by Truman, who offered to introduce him, was a golden opportunity to voice his concerns.4

We are all aware of the “Iron Curtain” metaphors Churchill voiced at Westminster College in 1946.5 It was certainly an apt description of the ideological divide. He also warned against complacency, saying the times marked “a solemn moment for the American democracy” and its allies.6

Aside from Russia’s near-hegemony in Eastern Europe, there were other grave challenges. The Canadian authorities had recently broken up a spy ring, which hinted at the infiltration of the Manhattan Project by Stalin’s agents.7 While the secret of the atomic bomb rested with America, the

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Canadian spy bust had brought a fear of proliteration. Churchill hoped, but wasn’t sure, that the U.S. would retain its atomic secrets.8

The old imperialist was concerned too over the crumbling of the British Empire, whose engine, the British economy, had seen almost a quarter of its wealth drained by the war. Britain now could scarcely stand on her own battle-weary feet, let alone fulfill her obligations to far-flung colonies. When Churchill at Fulton talked in rousing terms of the British Commonwealth, he was trying to preserve the concept of unity.

Churchill was the first statesman to show that the divide between the democracies and the communist bloc were not just those of geography or government, but one of belief systems. His words at Fulton complemented George Kennan’s February 1946 “Long Telegram” from Moscow, and the views of Averell Harriman. They did spur Secretary of State Byrnes to intensify demands for Russia to leave Iran—which she eventually did. They also enabled Truman to send up a “trial balloon” for the containment philosophy later represented by the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO.9

Churchill’s call for active diplomacy at Fulton cannot be underestimated, for it affected the thought of future leaders for a generation: Nixon and Kennedy, and later Reagan, Thatcher, and even Gorbachev.10

In proposing closer bonds between the U.S. and Britain, Churchill gave the example of the Joint Defense Board forged by the U.S. and Canada. This showed how a coordinated military arrangement could be effective without compromising sovereignty, a principle dear to Churchill and, he knew, to his North American allies.

The “special relationship” and the democratic tenets it was based on meant far more than arms. It involved Churchill’s lifelong themes of the shared heritage, language and traditions of the English-speaking peoples. As the Conservative Party thinker Daniel Hannan has pointed out, Churchill rhetorically created what we now call “the Anglosphere.”11

Thus, long ago, in that Westminster College gymnasium, Churchill reminded his listeners of democratic values: the values that he thought imperiled by Stalin and the Kremlin. His exhortations of what he called “the title deeds of freedom”—unfettered elections, an independent judiciary, freedom of speech and thought—are timeless. And they certainly outlasted the divisions of the Cold War.12

If leaders today are conscious of anything, they should know what we stand for and why—what we must celebrate in our own “anxious and baffling times”: the traditions, values and heritage of the Anglosphere.13 It is a different age. We face threats now from rogue states, international terrorism and other enemies that even Churchill did not anticipate. Tyrannies have erected digital Iron Curtains, attempting to keep their abuses, and their peoples from the world.

Despite these dangers we can and will endure—if the Great Democracies uphold the principles Churchill spoke of at Fulton, principles he gave everything to defend. Then perhaps, as he said in Fulton, “the high roads of the future will be clear, not only for us, but for all, not only for our time, but for a century to come.”14

Endnotes


2. Mackenzie King Diaries, 26 October 1945.

3. Ibid.

4. Franc McCluer toWSC, 3 October 1946, McCluer Family Papers, provided by Richmond McCluer, Jr.


6. Ibid., 94.

7. Mackenzie King Diaries, 28 February 1946.


13. Ibid., 93.

14. Ibid., 105.
Ea ch quiz offers questions in six categories: Churchill contemporaries (C), literary matters (L), miscellaneous (M), personal details (P), statesmanship (S) and war (W), the easier questions first. Can you reach Level 1?

LEVEL 4
1. In which of his books did Churchill write: “War, which used to be cruel and magnificent, has now become cruel and squalid?” (L)
2. When did he say: “Our comradeship and brotherhood in war were unexampled. We stood together, and because of that fact the free world now stands”? (P)
3. “The Almighty in His infinite wisdom did not see fit to create — — — — in the image of Englishmen.” (10 December 1942). Fill in the blank. (M)
4. Who cabled Roosevelt in January 1941: “I cannot emphasize too strongly that he [WSC] is the one and only person over here with whom you need to have a full meeting of minds”? (C)
5. One of the “Morals of the Work” in The Second World War was “In Victory: — — — —”. Fill in the blank. (S)
6. How many elections did Churchill win? (M)

LEVEL 3
7. “Eddie stripped himself naked and retired to the Bush, from which he could only be lured three times a day by promises of food.” (WSC in Uganda, December 1907). Who was Eddie? (C)
8. Churchill was named Winston after whom? (P)
9. When and where did Churchill say: “Now that we are together, now that we are linked in a righteous comradeship of arms, now that our two considerable nations, each in perfect unity, have joined all their life energies in a common resolve, a new scene opens, upon which a steady light will glow and brighten”? (W)
10. “He is going to get from the British people the greatest reception ever accorded to any human being since Lord Nelson,” Churchill was about to speak in 1944 about whom? (S)
11. In which of his books did Churchill write: “The fading light of evening disclosed in the far distance the silhouettes of two battleships steaming slowly out of the Firth of Forth. They seemed invested with a new significance to me”? (S)
12. In what book does Churchill open a chapter with lines from Rudyard Kipling’s The Merchantmen (1893)? “Coastwise—cross-seas—round the world and back again/Whither flaw shall fail us or the Trades drive down.” (L)

ANSWERS

LEVEL 2
13. Churchill visited Bermuda on which two dates (month and year)? (M)
14. On 20 June 1942 in Washington, Churchill received “One of the heaviest blows I can recall during the war.” What was the bad news? (W)
15. What is the distant Churchill connection with the Jockey Club in New York? (P)
16. Eleanor Roosevelt met Churchill during her visit to Britain during WW2. What was the year and month? (C)
17. To whom did Churchill cable on 6 November 1940: “Things are afoot which will be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe, and in expressing the comfort I feel that the people of the United States have once again cast these great burdens upon you, I must avow my sure faith that the lights by which we steer will bring us all safely to anchor”? (C)
18. To whom did Churchill say: “Cultured people are merely the glittering scum which floats upon the deep river of production!”? (M)

LEVEL 1
19. Churchill’s uncle, Moreton Frewen, travelled the world starting wild schemes for making money, most of them unsuccessful. What were his two family nicknames? (P)
20. Which of WSC’s contemporaries wrote: “In the whole of The First World War there was only one brilliant strategical idea—and that was Winston’s: the Dardanelles”? (W)
21. In what year did Churchill first use “Gathering Storm” as the title for a publication? (L)
22. When did Churchill first use the phrase “Iron Curtain”? (S)
23. About whom did Churchill write in March 1939: “There plays around him for ever the glint of an enchanted sword”? (W)
24. When did Winston Churchill first publish an article in an American periodical? (L)
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The Military Churchill

Right: Dating from the 1940s is a high-relief bust in gold-painted cast iron mounted on an oval plaque measuring 6 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches. It was manufactured by John Needham & Sons, Ironfounders and Engineers, Stockport, Cheshire.

Left: Undoubtedly the best portrayal of Churchill as a soldier is this splendid china figure by Michael Sutty, a prominent military modeller, produced in 1988. Eighteen inches tall, it depicts the twenty-one-year-old Churchill in 1896 in the full dress uniform of a Second Lieutenant of the 4th Hussars. Hand-painted and entirely accurate, it was priced at £500 and limited to 250 (the edition was not completed). Prices have since increased somewhat. Lady Thatcher acquired one of the earliest examples, and went on to collect twelve Sutty military models. Unfortunately the artist’s Burlington Arcade shop was forced into liquidation in 1993 and he returned to Stoke-on-Trent, working as a freelance modeller. There was an eager queue of Churchillians hoping that one day he might be able to complete the edition of “2nd Lieut. Winston S. Churchill 4th Hussars.”

Right: Oddly bearing the legend “Winston Churchill, Jnr.” is this 1995 polished pewter figurine by Royal Hampshire Art, portraying Churchill as a Lieutenant attached to the 21st Lancers in the Battle of Omdurman. It was mated with another pewter figurine of WSC in wartime naval uniform, wearing his Royal Yacht Squadron cap. Each well-detailed figure sold for £30.

The late Douglas Hall was a FH contributor and author of the comprehensive documentary volume, Churchilliana.