The Dardanelles: 100 Years On

The Fall of Singapore | Defending Lawrence of Arabia

Twentieth-Century Fighting Sail | Churchill at The Telegraph Reviewed

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The Dardanelles: 100 Years On

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On the Cover

This striking terracotta maquette was created by Dutch artist Willem Verbon. The finished bronze is in Rotterdam. See story pages 26–27. Photo courtesy Philip Mould & Co.
“The Dardanelles: 100 Years On”

A full century has now elapsed since one of the darkest, most controversial, and most written-about episodes in Churchill’s career. What more is there to say about the Dardanelles? Much. This year’s International Churchill Conference included a full panel on the topic. The three excellent papers presented are published here.

Little has ever been written about the French involvement at the Dardanelles. Antoine Capet closes the gap and explains why. Much has been written about Australian troops on Gallipoli, and Harry Atkinson explores this sensitive topic. W. Mark Hamilton surveys what has been written about the whole operation in recent times, and John C. McKay compares Churchill’s Eastern Strategy in the First World War with his Mediterranean strategy in the Second.

As First Lord of the Admiralty for a time in both World Wars, Churchill had responsibilities around the world. Terry Reardon looks at the importance of the naval base at Scapa Flow in both conflicts, while Fred Glueckstein examines the ill fate of the base at Singapore.

Beginning with this issue, we introduce a new department, “Churchill’s World.” The articles placed here will illustrate the world in which Churchill lived and worked. Staying with our themes of the Royal Navy and the First World War, we launch this column with an enthralling account by Keith Dovkants of the use of sailing vessels to decoy German U-Boats, a plan supported by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill.

We are very pleased to have our first contribution from Jeremy Wilson, the authorized biographer of T. E. Lawrence. Indeed Wilson is to Lawrence what the late Sir Martin Gilbert was to Churchill, having produced not the only the definitive biography but several monographs and many volumes of documents. He writes here about Churchill defending the memory of his enigmatic friend.

A recent inquiry to The Churchill Centre led to an investigation of primary documents that disclosed rather irregular behavior by a well-known and influential historian. Ronald I. Cohen exposes a flagrant case of misquoting Churchill for dubious purposes.

Finally, we have another generous helping of book reviews and an analysis of a not-so-good television documentary proving that the magic name of Churchill can always sell books and attract viewers. We also welcome three distinguished scholars to our review pages for the first time: John Campbell, Alonzo Hamby, and Catherine Katz.

David Freeman, August 2015
Finest Hour

Not So Grand
PENDER ISLAND, B.C.—Congratulations on another good issue; but please forgive a quibble with your reviewer of Churchill in North America, 1929 who on page 40 retails the legend that WSC got £40,000 for what he wrote about his American journey in 1930. Roy Jenkins says it; Martin Gilbert says it; but it is still totally unfounded, as I pointed out politely on pp. 133–34 of my book Mr. Churchill’s Profession [Bloomsbury, 2012, reviewed in FH 155].
—Peter Clarke

General Disagreement
BARCELONA—I was struck by Paul J. Taylor’s effort to find “common threads” between Churchill and the author’s distant cousin Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. in “The British Lion and Old Blood and Guts.” The truest line in the piece came at the end, where he says, “Patton was no Churchill.” By a long shot!
—Andrew Lluberes

True Patriot Love
TORONTO—Professor Callahan writes in “Churchill and the Empire’s Armies” that “Canada’s army was not committed to battle apart from Mountbatten’s fiasco at Dieppe until 1943....” The truth of that statement depends on how one reads “army” and how one reads “committed.” Elements of Canada’s army participated in the invasion of Norway and reinforced the retreating Allies in France before the Dunkirk evacuation.

And Europe, of course, was not the only theatre of war. Although Churchill believed that there was “not the slightest chance of holding Hong Kong or of relieving it,” the Chiefs of Staff had a change of heart and the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers were dispatched to defend the island, where 290 Canadians were killed and more than 1,600 captured after the surrender on Christmas Day 1941.

The article is about armies, but we should not forget that more than 100 Canadian fighter pilots fought in the Battle of Britain and even more in the very early efforts of Bomber Command. Canadians were major players in the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest campaign of the war, and hosted both the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and Camp X, established in December 1941 just east of Toronto, as the training ground for Allied Special Forces units.

To Canadians being committed meant support for Britain in a myriad of ways from the very beginning. Certainly Britain never “stood alone.” I thank Professor Callahan for explicitly stating that this description (notwithstanding its source) “was not, in fact, accurate” and for telling readers that “it is a deserving story historians are only beginning to investigate.”
—John G. Plumpton

Cover Art
NEWPORT BEACH, CA—My son Grant and I have been overwhelmed by the heartfelt responses we have received since his artwork appeared on the cover of Finest Hour. In the last few weeks, Grant has received many interesting letters from people, some of whom he has never met.

Grant is incredibly grateful for the willingness of people to reach out in this way. Perhaps the key factor is his age, twelve. At this year’s conference Allen Packwood said, “We must look to the next generation, or surely the Churchill Centre will die.” This connection between the generations is how we move the legacy of Winston Churchill from active memory to active history.

To quote Grant: “My hero for peace is Winston Churchill because he saved the world.”
—Dana Agamalian

Editor’s Note
The flags included in Grant’s cover art for Finest Hour 168 were selected for illustration only and not intended to enumerate or recognize all the Allied nations that participated in the Second World War. Nevertheless we apologize to nationals of any countries that were omitted, especially those of the British Commonwealth and Empire, including Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

Erratum
MOULTONBOROUGH, NH—Finest Hour founding editor Richard M. Langworth writes to correct the record on FH 164, page 36: “Mea culpa: Lady Soames’s confrontation with the entertainer occurred at the 1998, not 1991, Williamsburg Conference, and friends present tell me he was not impersonating Jefferson. I was not referring to the Jefferson impersonator at the dinner of 6 November 1998, who was very well received.” ☉
The French and the Dardanelles Expedition

By Antoine Capet

French forces contributed significantly to the Dardanelles campaign, but this has largely been overlooked by historical accounts both in English and in French. Professor Antoine Capet examined the existing record at the Thirty-second International Churchill Conference in May 2015.

The French Army Museum at the Hôtel des Invalides, Paris, has a small section devoted to the Dardanelles. A wall text in French indicates that, "Essentiellement britannique, l’opération reçoit un concours français." The translation offered below reads: “Although essentially a British operation, it is supported by the French.” Thus the idea that France only played second fiddle in the campaign is perpetuated to this day by the official historians of the French Army.

In 1931, the well-known journalist and commentator Edmond Delage wrote in his classic French account of the campaign: “La France ne joua là, glorieusement il est vrai, qu’un rôle de comparse docile” (There, France only played, admittedly with glory, the role of a docile accomplice).

The Background

Probably the first comprehensive account on the French side for the general public came with the Larousse series, La France héroïque et ses Alliés, published in instalments immediately after the war. Number 28 was simply entitled Aux Dardanelles (To The Dardanelles). The mastermind behind the operation is squarely identified as “M. W. Churchill,” who is described as overriding the objections of those who considered the straits impassable by a fleet which did not control the shores. “He believed that the fall of fortresses such as Liège, Namur, Maubeuge, Antwerp proved the inferiority of fixed defences when attacked by a superior artillery,” the editors point out and note, when discussing the composition of the fleet eventually sent, that “the total of 280 naval guns was more than sufficient, according to M. Churchill’s theory, to obtain a result.”

A volume of the semi-official History of the Great War published by Payot in 1932 devoted to the Armée d’Orient (Army of the East) and written by an army colonel also blames Churchill and his forceful pleading before the War Cabinet in January 1915: “Winston Churchill is eloquent and he has a blind faith in his grandiose project; he sees the enormous impact of his enterprise, but does not perceive its immense difficulties.”

Yet, in his war memoirs published in 1935, General Marie de Lardenelle, who was a colonel and Chief of Staff of the French Fifth Army in 1914, claims that in November of that year he sent a memorandum to his superior, General Franchet d’Espérey, suggesting the opening of a Balkan front with the following notes in telegraphic style: “Gather all the Balkan people around us. Create a Danubian front. Secure our direct communications with Russia. The rest will follow!” These words are of course remarkably similar to those of Churchill.

It is also of interest to note that General Joseph Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief on the Western Front at the time, even though he was unconvinced and hostile to the idea of depleting his own forces, ordered the French General Headquarters to study the feasibility of the project in February 1915. The conclusions were that a campaign in the Orient, i.e., southeast Europe or the Near East, was not a practical proposition due to a lack of adequate communications.

There is absolutely no mention in the Larousse account of any Anglo-French negotiations on the desirability or otherwise of launching the expedition. We simply learn out of the blue that the French Navy agreed in February 1915 to contribute a substantial fleet. Yet the reasons for the decision of the French Government to back the proposal of the British War Cabinet are not difficult to see.

The British First Lord of the Admiralty repeated that no land forces would be needed, which meant there would be no removal of British troops from the Western Front. At the same time the French Navy, unlike the French Army, was underemployed in the war effort. There was no reason then for France to displease its British Allies, whose land army was crucial in
France, by refusing to lend support in a purely naval operation, which did not reduce the defences of the Western Front in any way.

It seems therefore that Churchill’s opposite number, the Minister of Marine, Jean-Victor Poincaré, was easily won over to an idea that found no resistance in the rest of the French Government, including the Minister of War, Alexandre Millerand. Poincaré declared that the British idea was “sensible and reasonable.” The President of the Republic, Raymond Poincaré, oscillated between warnings that he had received from knowledgeable people and the firm assurances of the British Admiralty—probably from Churchill himself. Admiral Emile-Paul-Aimable Guépratte, who was to command the French fleet under British Admiral Sackville Carden, stated: “I agree with Admiral Carden on every point, and I have absolute faith in complete success, whose consequences will be incalculable.”

The Naval Battle

So a French fleet was sent to the Dardanelles from southern France and French North Africa under Guépratte to join the Anglo-French force commanded by Carden. The proportion was three British divisions against one French. Altogether there were twenty warships and heavy cruisers, eighteen destroyers, and six torpedo-boats, which started to bombard the Turkish forts on 19 February 1915. On 5 March, it was realised that it would never be possible to destroy or neutralise all the forts guarding the straits by naval bombardment alone; raids on land would have to be launched to reduce them one by one. On 12 March, General Sir Ian Hamilton was appointed Commander-in-Chief of these land forces and sent to the area. But it was decided to proceed with the naval attack without waiting for the arrival of the troops.

On 17 March, on board HMS Queen Elizabeth, moored at Tenedos, the French commanders, Guépratte and General Albert d’Amade, met the British commanders, Hamilton and Admiral John de Robeck, who had just replaced the recently taken-ill Carden. Guépratte requested and was granted the honour of commanding the French fleet under British Admiral Sackville Carden. The proportion was three British divisions against one French. The land forces would now be called upon to play a major role in the whole operation. Yet, as we know, there was to be a further delay due to the need to reorganise the troops and their equipment at Alexandria before they could actually reach the theatre of war. It was only on 18 April that the Expeditionary Force, with about 80,000 British men and 18,000 French, reached the Dardanelles. The attack was due to start exactly a week later.

The Landings

Before the battle, on 21 April, Hamilton issued a curious Order of the Day—or rather a proclamation with a curious beginning: “Soldiers of France and of the King.” The task assigned to the French contingent was to land on the Asian coast and neutralise the Turkish defences at Kum Kale. This was successfully done, but there was no way to exploit this lodgement. Consequently the French received the order to leave and make their way towards the eastern tip of the Gallipoli peninsula. So, they crossed again, landing around Seddul-Bahr on 27 April. The next day the first Anglo-French offensive on the peninsula resulted in a deadlock—a situation replicated on 1–2 May, when a division commanded by General Maurice Bailloud suffered heavy losses, and again on 5 May. By 3 May, Bailloud had lost forty percent of his men and sixty percent of his officers and NCOs. After two weeks of fighting, the Allies’ casualties amounted to 38,000 killed, wounded or missing—among them 5,000 Frenchmen. The first to bear the blame were the French commanders.

On 6 May d’Amade, officially taken ill, was asked to leave for France and surrender his command to General Henri Gouraud, chief of the Colonial troops. The French Expeditionary Force was largely composed of West Indians from Martinique, Zouaves from North Africa, Tirailleurs from Senegal, and men from the Foreign Legion. On 9 May, Guépratte was also dis-

“...I have absolute faith in complete success, whose consequences will be incalculable.” — Admiral Emile-Paul-Aimable Guépratte
missed and replaced by Admiral Ernest Nicol. These changes of command, however, appear contradictory. An unspoken reproach against d’Amade was his poor contact with the navy and his British opposite numbers. By contrast Guépratte was widely seen as an Anglophile—an exception in the French Navy. Also, it seems that d’Amade was criticised for his lack of pugnacity, but Guépratte, who had no such lack and joined forces with Commodore Roger Keyes, de Robeck’s Chief of Staff, to push de Robeck to the offensive, was succeeded by Nicol, who soon showed his timidity. It is therefore extremely difficult to see any consistency in the decisions taken in Paris.

Assessing the situation on his arrival, Gouraud argued that the only solution to the deadlock was an invasion of the Asian part of Turkey. This was immediately dismissed by Joffre, who repeated that he could spare no large numbers of troops. All through June, Joffre noticed that the death toll was much higher among officers on the peninsula than on the Western Front. Brigadier Marie Ganeval, serving in Bailloud’s division, was killed by a Turkish marksman on 7 June. The French forged a new phrase, “tireurs de chefs” (shooters at chiefs), to designate the Turks who specifically targeted the officers. On 21 June, a French regiment saw twenty-three of its fifty-six officers killed in just one day. Gouraud himself fell victim to the blast of a shell shot from the Asian coast while he visited wounded troops. The explosion hoisted him onto the branches of a fig-tree, and he had to have an arm amputated. He became affectionately known as the “Manchot des Dardanelles” (the one-armed man of the Dardanelles). General Joseph Masnou, commander of the First Infantry Division, died of his wounds on 12 July.

Thus the peculiar conditions of the Dardanelles, with no resting places at the rear, exposed the officers—even the generals—to the same dangers as the rank-and-file, a situation unknown on the Western Front. Yet this unwonted solidarity across all ranks was insufficient to maintain a high morale in the face of the constant physical stress suffered by the combatants due to insects and vermin of all kind, poor food, and—above all—the strictly rationed water supplies. One major difference from the British was that the French force, composed of large numbers of West Indians and Africans, bore the terrible summer heat far better.

### The Fallout

Naturally, the political events in London in May 1915 that forced Churchill from the Admiralty did not go unnoticed in Paris. An indirect comment came from Joffre, who remarked to the French Government on 24 June: “The general impression is spreading that, on the Allied side, the war is not conducted with sufficient firmness.” Joffre was evidently suggesting that his hostility against the Dardanelles expedition had been vindicated by events,
and that amateurish politicians in London and Paris would have been well advised to listen to his professional opinion.

The complex political game in France in August and September 1915 led not to the abandonment of the Front d’Orient as such but to the substitution of the Salonica expedition for the Dardanelles deadlock. His political masters imposed on Joffre—still unconvinced of the value of a Front d’Orient in whatever form—the appointment of General Maurice Sarrail with a new remit: a landing in Greece. Sarrail had initially advocated an invasion of Turkey but finally decided against it when his staff demonstrated the difficulty. From the late summer of 1915, the fate of the Dardanelles expedition was sealed as far as the French Government was concerned. With Joffre refusing to give fresh troops to Sarrail for his Salonica expedition, Sarrail could only count on the “Poilus d’Orient” (as they were now called) transferred from the peninsula. The first transfer took place on 29 September, under General Bailloud.

The French presence was reduced to a colonial division under General Jean Brulard, who warned the French authorities on 12 October: “The consequence will inevitably be a surge in the morale of the enemy, a revived confidence and a renewed fighting spirit.”

Events then went relatively fast in Britain and France. On 31 October, General Sir Charles Monro, who had replaced Hamilton two weeks earlier, reported to London that all hope of quick success was gone and advised evacuating the peninsula. Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, after inspecting the theatre earlier in the month, cabled to London to recommend evacuation on 22 November. Meanwhile, in Paris, General Joseph Gallieni—an early advocate of the Dardanelles campaign—succeeded Millerand as Minister of War on 29 October and almost immediately asked Brulard to prepare plans for evacuation. The French Government approved his plans on 24 November. Gallieni appointed Joffre generalissimo of all the French armies—including therefore the Armée d’Orient—on 3 December, and Joffre considered the evacuation of the Dardanelles a priority. An Interallied Conference held at Chantilly from 6 to 8 December gave its sanction to the abandonment of the Dardanelles theatre. The success story of this evacuation is well known. The last two French regiments left the peninsula on two successive nights, 2 and 3 January 1916, with only a small rear guard remaining until the morning of the ninth, when the evacuation was completed.

The Aftermath

There is no unanimous agreement on casualty figures, but it is generally accepted that slightly fewer than 80,000 men were engaged at some stage or other on the French side. Of these, 3,700 were killed, 6,000 went missing, and more than 17,000 were wounded. No quarter was given in the battles, and the “missing” figure covers the prisoners who were executed. Interestingly, the Larousse account gives absolutely no casualty figures. It only publishes a poor photograph of the French military cemetery at Seddul-Bahr. Modern Internet sources tell us that the cemetery contains 2,236 French graves and lists all the names—confirming the diversity of the men’s origins from all over the French Empire.

It was left to Joffre in his Mémoires to accept that Churchill’s conception of the operation as potentially decisive had been right but to demolish its planning and execution: success “would probably have changed the face of the war,” but its “defective organisation and later development had led to failure.” Delage’s conclusion seems to sum up the consensus which prevails in France to this day:

Fine volunteers rushing in from Australia and New Zealand, agile Gurkhas, smiling Senegalese, sailors of Guépratte and de Robeck, soldiers from France and from all the counties of Old England—how heroic you all were! But what did you die for?“

Endnotes

7. Ibid., p. 44.
8. Geffroy et al., p. 16.
10. Schiavon, p. 85.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 102.
15. Delage, p. 266.

Antoine Capet is Professor Emeritus of British Studies at the University of Rouen.
“The British Empire itself seemed knit together by ties which none but its citizens could understand. What combination of events could ever bring back again to France and Flanders the formidable Canadians of the Vimy Ridge; the glorious Australians of Villers-Brettonneux; the dauntless New Zealanders of the crater-fields of Passchendaele; the steadfast Indian Corps which in the cruel winter of 1914 had held the line by Armentieres?”

—Winston S. Churchill, 1948

Australians, with a sense of humility, reverence, and overwhelming pride, pause each year to remember the Dardanelles campaign. It is now 100 years since the campaign began and Gallipoli became a part of Australian folklore. Many raise the question, why Gallipoli? Why did a campaign that was such a major failure, tragedy, and mistake become such a poignant symbol for Australia and Australians?

On 25 April 1915, Australia as a self-governing nation was only fourteen years, four months, and twenty-four days old. The country was still going through puberty, its people still learning what it meant to be Australian and what mark they could make on the world. Instead of having time to discover these things in peace, the young nation found itself quickly through war. The Dardanelles, specifically Gallipoli, was the premature turning point. Britain, the doting old mother, turned to the scruffy young boy and said, “stand up, you are a man now.”

Gallipoli will always be regarded as the event in which Australia was forged as a nation, forged in a war that many, especially today, believe should not have involved their country at all. Unlike today, however, Australians in 1915 did not consider themselves more Australian than British. Australians were patriotic members of the British Empire. The majority of people were either first or second generation Australian, and their connections with the mother country remained strong. The servicemen who signed up for the war did not join to fight for Australia. They joined to fight for the British Empire.

The enthusiastic young men and women who clambered onto the steamers, heading northwards, were excited. This trip was an adventure. They had grown up listening to stories told by their parents and grandparents about Britain and Europe. Many believed that they would not be gone for long and that they would be giving “‘Jerry’ a good hidin’!”

Australian soldiers first went ashore in Egypt, where they started to train around Cairo. At first the British did not know what to do with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). Left in limbo for quite some time, the young soldiers grew restless, and incidents followed.

The naval battle, like the entire subsequent campaign, was a complete disaster. Many British, French, and Commonwealth warships were sunk in the process. However, one Allied vessel was able to duck and weave through the Turkish defences within the passage: an Australian submarine called AE2. The boat sank a Turkish destroyer and was able to reach the sea of Marmora. AE2 remained in the fight for five more days before she took irreparable damage. The captain, Lieutenant Commander Stoker RAN, was forced to scuttle the boat and surrender.

To support the naval forces, the overlords decided a land invasion of the Gallipoli peninsula was vital. The AIF was the first on shore, landing at a place now known as ANZAC Cove. This beach, however, with its razor-sharp cliff tops and jagged rocks, was not the area where the Australian soldiers were meant to land. The rowing boats they were given drifted, and they found themselves in a dangerous and difficult situation. Quickly they started to take casualties, and this is where the Australian story truly begins. In the battle, Australian soldiers began to show uniquely Australian traits. They had

**The Dardanelles: An Australian Perspective**

By Harry Atkinson

Then, as battle raged on the Western Front, Winston Churchill and others searched for ways to break the deadlock. The Dardanelles plan was brought forward, and the naval battle began.

**Into Battle**

The naval battle, like the entire subsequent campaign, was a complete disaster. Many British, French, and Commonwealth warships were sunk in the process. However, one Allied vessel was able to duck and weave through the Turkish defences within the passage: an Australian submarine called AE2. The boat sank a Turkish destroyer and was able to reach the sea of Marmora. AE2 remained in the fight for five more days before she took irreparable damage. The captain, Lieutenant Commander Stoker RAN, was forced to scuttle the boat and surrender.

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a certain way of going about their business. In place of
the British stiff upper lip, Australians exhibited what is
called larrkinism, an Australian word for acting with
apparent disregard for social or political conventions.
Loyalty to one’s mates solidified into what it meant to
be an Australian.

**The Home Front**

As the boys fought tooth and nail for every inch of
land on Gallipoli, life in Australia at first carried
on much as normal, though news of what was
happening with the AIF was on everybody’s mind. Then,
the first telegrams with casualty lists began to come
through. As the list of those killed in action began to
grow, it became clear that entire communities had been
destroyed. Brothers, husbands, sons, and lovers were all
gone, and they all had one thing in common, Gallipoli.

Australians on the Home Front also came together
through hardship. Communities kept busy creating
care parcels for the AIF. In their letters home, the
men at Gallipoli complained of the constant meal of
dried biscuits and bully beef. Since Australia was so
far away, a food had to be designed that would last the
long journey to Gallipoli. Soon care packages began to
contain a new type of biscuit. From rolled oats, flour,
desiccated coconut, sugar, butter, golden syrup, baking
soda, and boiled water came the famed ANZAC biscuit.

To this day ANZAC biscuits are a staple in every
Australian kitchen, as Australian as custard creams
are English. While they may no longer be savoured
in a trench with Turkish bullets whirling overhead,
ANZAC biscuits are an everlasting memory of Australia’s
involvement at Gallipoli.

The loss of life was truly incomprehensible for
Australians. More British and French may have died
at Gallipoli, but relative to its population Australia’s
losses were immense. As returning troop ships entered
the port of Fremantle on the West Australian coast,
the true scope of the horror began to be seen. Young
men who had left filled with excitement and energy
came home broken mentally and physically. Bitterness
and anger swept over the Australian people. Emotional

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Australian and New Zealand soldiers landing at ANZAC Cove in April 1915 as depicted by Charles Edward Dixon
attachment to Britain and the Empire started to diminish, although ties remained firm until the Second World War.

Australians continued to fight in the First World War until the end. They fought in the deserts of the Ottoman Empire and in soggy trenches on the Western Front. The Royal Australian Navy patrolled the oceans from the Far East to the Mediterranean in search of German adversaries, and pilots in the Flying Corps supported their British counterparts in skirmishes over the Middle East and Europe.

But the men who came back from Gallipoli were truly scarred. The few who managed to survive the campaign unscathed were tested again elsewhere and considered the lucky ones to have been the wounded who were returned home to Australia.

Churchill’s Reputation

In Australia, Churchill is blamed for many of the mistakes that transpired during the dreadful months the AIF struggled at Gallipoli. As an Australian myself, however, I regard this as an uninformed view. There were many reasons why the Dardanelles campaign failed. First among these was the inadequate command and control structure that existed within the British government and its military. The Prime Minister, Asquith, did not create a suitably coordinated framework for directing the war. Churchill did not make the same mistake in 1940.

Winston Churchill for me will always be an inspiring character, a man who defended the Western world from tyranny and all his life showed great courage. He may not have been perfect, and he did make mistakes, but he fought for what he believed and always tried to do right.

Under any circumstances, the Dardanelles campaign was a risk but one that might have shortened the war. The failure of the effort led to a dark time in Churchill’s life when he was forced out of the Admiralty. Not many Australians know that Churchill then secured a commission as a lieutenant colonel in the British Army and fought in the trenches as a Battalion Commander with the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

Australia Today

As Australians look back on the events of 100 years ago, they should reflect on how far their nation has come. Today Australia is clearly a country that stands on its own and is no longer a boy holding his mother’s hand.

For most of the past century Australia has commemorated 25 April 1915. On ANZAC Day veterans and current members of the military don uniforms and medals to march through cities and towns all over the country. During the sombre parade, Australians clap and cheer as the servicemen pass. Afterwards takes place a truly Australian experience, as everyone raises a glass and remembers the men who fell in times of conflict. Remarkably, a battle that took place 100 years ago, and which no longer has any living survivors, still takes centre stage on ANZAC Day.

In the past few years there have been legitimate efforts to introduce new elements to ANZAC Day. Veterans of more recent conflicts have pushed for more support in the struggles that they will continue to have because of their service. Naturally, as a serviceman I hope that the government will dedicate sufficient funds to these needs.

Gallipoli can be a politically sensitive subject. The men and women of 1915 are suitably honoured for the losses they suffered. We should remember this as we go forward and honour all soldiers, sailors, and airmen who have worked to defend Australia over the past 100 years.

Harry Atkinson serves in the Royal Australian Navy.
A small library has been written during the last 100 years addressing the Dardanelles campaign in 1915 and the role and actions of Winston Churchill.

The focus of this article is to review historiographically the most recent secondary literature on this subject. You might ask: What is historiography? The short answer is that it is the study of historical writing. Robin Winks in The Oxford History of the British Empire provides a more nuanced definition: “History is what happened in the past, what people believe happened in the past, and what historians say happened in the past.” Winks claims that the last two matter most.

Above all, history reflects the period in which it was written, which is good news for historians and their publishers because each new generation rewrites history. As a professor once reminded my fellow graduate students and me, “You are live dogs barking at dead lions.”

The Churchill Perspective

The toll that the failure of the Dardanelles campaign took on Winston Churchill can hardly be overestimated. The late Sir Martin Gilbert, the official Churchill biographer, quoted Lady Churchill as saying that she thought her husband would never recover from his grief at the failure of the Dardanelles campaign, and might even die from it.

The 5 February 2015 New York Times obituary of Gilbert quotes Gilbert’s response to being asked in 2007 if he had often dreamed about Churchill over the years. “I’ve only twice dreamt about him,” he replied—and one dream related to the Dardanelles campaign!

In his memoir The World Crisis, Winston Churchill wrote, “Upon me more than any other person the responsibility for the Dardanelles and all that it involved has been cast. Upon me fell almost exclusively the fierce wartime censures of press and public.” Churchill was correct.

As with most memoirs, Churchill attempts to justify his actions. He complains bitterly about the delays and paralysis of government planning he saw as First Lord of the Admiralty and sees many situations that, decided differently, would have brought a Dardanelles victory, as opposed to total defeat. He is critical of the initial refusal of the War Minister, Lord Kitchener, to allow substantial troops in the campaign. Churchill laments that he did not have sole control of decisions, but instead had to defer to the War Council and the views of Prime Minister Asquith. Churchill was bitter over his removal before the campaign was concluded—as if that would have made a difference to the final outcome.

The Professional Historians

In his magisterial biography of Churchill, Sir Martin Gilbert is critical of Churchill’s defensive tone. Gilbert writes, “The attacks at the Dardanelles and Gallipoli convinced many of his contemporaries that Churchill was a man of blood, lacking sound judgment, and unfit for high office.” Churchill had dreamed that victory at the Dardanelles would “mean encouragement for France, food for India, salvation for Serbia, doom for Austria-Hungary, isolation for Germany, and new territory for the victors.”

The American naval historian Arthur J. Marder, in From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow (1965), comes to the defense of Churchill as the “Dardanelles public scapegoat” and reminds his readers that in many historians’ view, the Dardanelles plan was the most brilliant
strategic concept of the entire First World War. Marder contends that Churchill did not constantly overrule his naval expert advisers, despite his reputation as a young man in a hurry. As a more calm Clement Attlee later observed, “He did not like to wait for the pot to boil!” Marder is critical of Churchill for his over-valuing of the older British warships available to the Dardanelles campaign, the warships’ ineffective guns against the Turkish forts, and Churchill’s underestimation of Turkish fighting ability.8

In Churchill: A Biography (2001), Roy Jenkins is rather negative toward Churchill, both in terms of Churchill’s self-justifications in The World Crisis and of Churchill’s actual decision-making. In Jenkins’ view, it was Churchill who pushed for a naval-only attack, even against the concerns of Admiral of the Fleet “Jacky” Fisher.9

Canadian historian Christopher M. Bell, in Churchill and Sea Power (2012), is also critical of the role Churchill played in the Dardanelles disaster. For Professor Bell, the Dardanelles campaign demonstrated Churchill’s shortcomings as a war manager and strategist. Bell suggests Churchill was too optimistic and ignored the early warnings of disaster. Bell balances his criticism with the reminder that Churchill was not the sole decider of policy on the War Council, and in Bell’s view he lost control of events over time. One might say he was “swept up” by events or (in today’s terminology) tripped up by “mission creep.”

Bell defends Churchill’s boldness, imagination, and strategic insights, which he sees as vastly superior to those of his civilian ministerial counterparts. Churchill’s failures at the Dardanelles in 1915 pale beside the huge losses on the Western Front and blunders made there by senior military officials.10

In Peter Hart’s Gallipoli (2014), Churchill comes under heavy criticism as an “adventurer,” and Hart concludes that the Dardanelles campaign was neither a justifiable operation of war, nor did it have a realistic chance of success. He contends that Turkey was an unthreatening opponent and any thought of a possible Balkan alliance by many of the planners was nonsense, given the deep and ancient rivalries and hatreds in the Balkans.11

Sean McMeekin’s The Russian Origins of the First World War (2011) primarily focuses on the role of Tsarist Russia. Observing that no great power had a more historic interest in the Dardanelles than Russia, he avers that Churchill expected Russian participation in the campaign and contends that this was never Imperial Russia’s plan. Turkey was a formidable enemy, and Russians were irritated by the lack of Anglo-French consultation. Ultimately, McMeekin dismisses claims that Churchill was a scapegoat and judges him justifiably responsible for the failure.12

Tim Travers, in Gallipoli 1915 (2009), draws from Turkish source materials more than most historic accounts of the battle. He believes that Turkish fighting morale was high and strongly nationalistic. Travers’ unflattering verdict of the Dardanelles battle plan is that it could be characterized as “imaginative and grandiose ideas by a confident and optimistic ruling class, with an eye to their own reputations.”13

One of the more recent books on Churchill’s action is The Dardanelles Disaster (2009) by Dan Van Der Vat, who charges Churchill with being a “hands-on” micro-manager of the campaign. For this historian, Churchill’s greatest mistake was in forcing the campaign to be solely a naval operation. This book is especially useful, including a chapter on the 1916 report of the Dardanelles Commission.14

Graham T. Clews, in Churchill’s Dilemma: The Real Story Behind the Origins of the 1915 Dardanelles Campaign (2010), contends that Churchill’s main focus was always on a Baltic campaign and not the Eastern campaign in Turkey. Clews is extremely critical of scholars who have ignored the Borkum Island plan in the Baltic Sea, which Clews believes was the “holy grail” of Churchill’s offensive strategies. History would both deny Churchill a Baltic campaign and bring disaster at the Dardanelles.15

Perhaps the most critical book on Churchill’s actions in the Dardanelles is John Charmley’s Churchill: The End of Glory (1993). For Charmley, Churchill was the key promoter of the Dardanelles campaign and was misled by lots of wishful thinking. Charmley paints a picture of an angry Prime Minister Asquith, whose tolerance for Churchill’s actions continually diminished over time.16

Eugene Rogan, in his just-published book The Fall of the Ottomans (2015), takes some of the blame off Churchill’s shoulders, viewing Lord Kitchener as the ultimate decision-maker, noting that it was Kitchener to whom all of the War Council deferred.17

In another recent book, The Churchill Factor (2014), Boris Johnson concludes, “Churchill was unlucky in his

“Upon me...the responsibility for the Dardanelles...has been cast. Upon me fell...the fierce wartime censures of press and public.” — Winston Churchill
admirals, unlucky with colleagues, and unlucky in not being able to control the timing, but the Dardanelles concept was flawed and wildly over-optimistic!”18

**Conclusion**

The last twenty years of scholarship have not resulted in a positive revisionist school of history either for the Dardanelles campaign or Winston Churchill’s role and responsibility for the calamitous outcome. The assessment of the Dardanelles campaign, both as an operation and in its execution, can be seen only as a disaster. And Churchill has to be seen as a prime planner and mover.

Given his ministerial responsibility, it is reasonable for Churchill to be given most of the historic blame. The fact that he was young, energetic, and determined to succeed cannot obscure the catastrophic results—tens of thousands killed on both the Allied and Ottoman sides, and thousands more wounded.

David Fromkin also has harsh words for Churchill in *A Peace to End All Peace* (1989): “Churchill was insensitive to the moods and reactions of his colleagues, and oblivious to the effect he produced upon others.”19

Still, some positive factors should be noted on Churchill’s Dardanelles “balance sheet.” In his favor, it must be said that he was not the sole decision-maker on the War Council and that he did have to defer to Lord Kitchener and Prime Minister Asquith. For Churchill to have been made the sole scapegoat was not completely fair. Most historians have noted that the Dardanelles campaign strategy was a brilliant idea, even if seriously flawed in planning and execution. There was stalemate on the Western Front and there needed to be an Allied alternative to sending England’s armies, as Churchill famously said, “to chew barbed wire in Flanders.”20

To Churchill’s everlasting credit, few individuals could have had the resilience and ability to “bounce back” as Churchill did—even if the Dardanelles failure was a life-long torment for him. Recent scholarship has given more attention to Churchill’s lasting personal torment given the huge cost in human lives on both sides of the Dardanelles–Gallipoli disaster.

Perhaps Michael Shelden, in *Young Titan: The Making of Winston Churchill* (2013), best sums up the impact of the Dardanelles–Gallipoli campaign on the forty-year-old Winston Churchill: “He had a spirit that once served him well from crisis to crisis. But it flickered and went out in 1915 and Churchill was never the same. He remained a romantic at heart, a great patriot, and a courageous fighter, and he persevered in politics until his moment in the sun came again in 1940. But by that time he was a harder, much less exuberant character, whose boyish innocence and earnestness survived only in an occasional mischievous smile and thoughtful frown.”21

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**Endnotes**

4. Ibid., p. 545.
6. Ibid., p. 350.
8. Ibid., p. 260.
20. Churchill to Asquith, 29 December 1914, Churchill Papers, 26/1.
Pragmatism is the essence of strategic thought. Dependent on the realities of geography, society, economics, and politics, as well as on other intangible (often fleeting) factors, it cannot be otherwise. Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, 1911–15, then as Prime Minister, 1940–45, embodied the essence of the strategic thinker in both World Wars. In the early stages of the First War Churchill grappled with possible operational means with which to maneuver around the deadlock on the Western Front. During the early stages of the Second War, his theory of waging war on the Continent relied on a peripheral strategy, which given the strategic balance at the time was both shrewd and prudent.

In both conflicts coalition warfare was an undeniable prerequisite. Intimately exposed to the fundamentals and actualities of coalition warfare during the Great War, in the inter-war years Churchill honed his understanding of its vagaries, pitfalls, and compelling necessity in writing of his ancestor, John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough. His 1914–18 experience, writing about his great ancestor, and an assiduous and perspicacious understanding of history marked Churchill as an exceptional individual whose knowledge and understanding were crucial in charting the course of the Allied coalition to victory in 1945. Churchill’s counsel, frequently seconded by President Roosevelt, prevailed up through the Tehran Conference in late 1943.

During his first tenure at the Admiralty, Churchill developed into what Gordon Craig calls the “political leader as strategist.” Apart from Lloyd George and Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the War Council, Britain’s First World War Cabinet lacked strategic thinkers. On 13 August 1911, following the Agadir Crisis in April, Churchill as Home Secretary wrote, unsolicited, a memorandum for the Committee of Imperial Defense in which he presciently laid out the probable course of a German invasion of France. By contrast, A. J. P. Taylor observed of Prime Minister Asquith, “Though resolved on victory, he supposed the only contribution that a statesman could make was to keep out of the way, while free enterprise supplied the arms with which the generals would win the battles.”

From the opening operations of the Great War in August 1914 emerged a state of strategic stalemate that dominated the conflict until the end. The plan for a short but undoubtedly violent war was laid to rest by the end of 1914. The numbing toll of casualties, the drain on the national treasure, and the incipient strains on national social cohesion caused Churchill to explore possible military operations on the northern fringes of Germany, in the Middle East, and in the Balkans. Churchill’s fecund mind and combative personality did not lend themselves to acquiescence or passivity. In a memorandum to Asquith dated 29 December 1914, he famously made his point: “Are there no other alternatives than sending our armies to chew barbed wire in Flanders?”

The Dardanelles was not Churchill’s first choice of an operation through which to affect maneuver around the slaughter on the Western Front. A month before the assassinations in Sarajevo that led to the conflict, Churchill had his Admirals and staff revive and examine plans for seizing islands lying close to the continent to serve as forward operating bases for an envisaged blockade of Germany. Four days following the declaration of war, Churchill proposed the seizure of a Dutch island close to the coast, in violation of Dutch neutrality. The Cabinet and Foreign Office overruled him. Nevertheless, the Royal Navy at the end of 1914 was in a commanding position. It had successfully transported the British Expeditionary Force to France without incident, all but eliminated German maritime trade from the seas, and annihilated the Imperial German Navy’s East Asiatic Cruiser Squadron at the Falkland Islands.

By 1915, however, Churchill, was impatient with what he saw as the passivity of the Royal Navy. He was the impetus in setting afoot various schemes to outflank the Germans or bottle up their High Seas Fleet. Turkey, even before it entered the war in October 1914, had not escaped Churchill’s mind, though he considered “a
Dardanelles offensive as a minor and subsidiary operation. However, with the Russians hard pressed in the Caucasus, the Turkish attack on the Suez Canal in early 1915, the absolute necessity of ensuring unimpeded passage of Dominion troops from East of Suez, and the pressing need for Russian wheat via the Black Sea and the Dardanelles—and arms shipments in the opposite direction—the Dardanelles operation took on a certain operational logic of its own. Protection of and unhindered access to the emergent oil fields in Persia were equally critical. The Royal Navy was in the later stages of converting the fleet from coal to oil-fired boilers.

Concurrently, intense Entente diplomatic activity focused on the Balkans and Italy. As a member of the Triple Alliance—a defensive arrangement—Italy was bound at most to benevolent neutrality in the circumstances of 1914. Excluding the belligerent states of Serbia and Montenegro, the Balkan Peninsula remained generally quiescent in the period bracketed between Japan’s declaration of war on Germany (23 August 1914) and Russia’s declaration of war—quickly followed by the other Allies—on Turkey (2 November 1914). Two previous Balkan Wars had left their mark regionally: Serbia, Rumania, and Greece emerged victorious, while Turkey and Bulgaria suffered humiliation. The Entente and the Central Powers exploited grievances, real or imagined, in wooing all non-belligerent parties to one side or the other. Circumstances in the Balkans at the time affected the decision to force the Dardanelles, conceived initially as an exclusively naval undertaking. The consequences of the 1915 campaign, however, far exceeded those of the earlier Balkan Wars.

Churchill alone cannot fairly be blamed for the failure of the Dardanelles campaign. He was an energetic First Lord who despite his strategic foresight was badly served by “the loose and redundant committee system of Asquith-Kitchener” responsible for the conduct of the war. This failing Churchill immediately and efficiently addressed during the Second World War by making himself “both head of government and supreme commander of the armed forces.” A plausible case can be made for the soundness of the concept of operation of the Dardanelles campaign. Failure arose in execution. In the latter Churchill was mere advocate and part-time player rather than director. The operation morphed from a navy-only operation into a joint land force-maritime operation over which Churchill did not, indeed could not, exercise command and control. The initial naval operation lacked aggressiveness, and the existing command arrangements were poor auguries for ultimate success. The concept need not be, nor was it, invalidated by poor execution.

“Modern war is total, and it is necessary for its conduct that the technical and professional authorities should be sustained and, if necessary, directed by the heads of government who have the knowledge which enables them to comprehend not only the military but the political and economic forces at work and who have
the power to focus them all upon the goal.”

Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940 having learned the lesson well. Eliot A. Cohen notes that “Churchill brought to the Second World War an exceedingly rich knowledge, direct as well as vicarious, of military affairs. Indeed, unique among statesmen, he experienced many of the great wars of his lifetime twice—once in reality, a second time in study, as he reflected upon their structure and meaning.” But mistakes were made, some of which had long-term implications for the British Empire. That Churchill has been criticized for reordering Egypt on Britain’s list of strategic priorities from fourth to second, over Malaya and the Cape of Good Hope—the home islands naturally coming first—can credibly be argued to have contributed to the fall of Singapore.

In the same month that the United States declared war on Imperial Japan, General Sir Alan Brooke replaced Field Marshal Sir John Dill as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, thenceforth tempering some of Churchill’s more exuberant schemes and paving the way for future close cooperation between Brooke and his US counterpart, General George C. Marshall. Thus was the stage set for the emergence of the Grand Alliance, and a never-close if not at times fraught relationship with the Soviet Union. The common core that bound all three was the defeat of Nazi Germany. The secondary strategic goal, the defeat of Imperial Japan, was entirely an American and British Empire labor. The Soviet Union and Japan had concluded a Neutrality Act on 12 April 1941, which remained precariously in effect until the Soviet Union declared war on Japan on 9 August 1945, following the first use of the atomic bomb.

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hough Churchill and Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany until 22 June 1941, the groundwork for the basic strategic underpinnings of the Grand Alliance was laid out during the secret ABC [American-British-Canadian] Conference in late December 1941 and early January 1942. Though the essentials of ARCADIA held throughout the war, the interpretation and best application of the means to achieve the desired ends continued until termination of hostilities. Given Britain’s predominant interests in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and on the Continent, Churchill came early on to rely on blockade, bombing, subversive activities, and propaganda. An emphasis was to be placed on mobile, striking armored units on the periphery of the Reich rather than an immediate confrontation with Hitler’s main military strength. At the same time, the British and Americans had to preserve the Soviet Union as the vital ally in the war against Nazi Germany. Indeed, statistically and strategically the Eastern Front dominated the Second World War.

Churchill’s strategy was based on pragmatism culled from his First World War experience and the reality of Britain’s pull within the Grand Alliance. Though he benefited greatly from a close personal relationship with Roosevelt, that relationship shifted as the industrial might and manpower of the United States was brought to bear. As early as 1942, American military planners, with the backing of Secretary of War Stimson and General Marshall, advocated an invasion of the Continent in 1943, the BOLERO plan. Churchill and Roosevelt conferred during the Second Washington Conference in June 1942, with the result that BOLERO was scrapped. During a subsequent conference in London, agreement was reached to launch Operation TORCH, the invasion of North Africa. Though Stimson and Marshall were disappointed, both recognized the advantages of TORCH. A more potent factor was the displeasure of the Soviets, and Churchill bore the full
brunt of Stalin’s disapproval when delivering the news in Moscow in August 1942.

Operation TORCH led to a major debate on European strategy within the Grand Alliance, specifically between the British and the Americans. The debate lasted until the summer of 1944. The Americans were eager to end the war as soon as possible, believing this best achieved by a major invasion of France. Churchill, growing suspicious of the Soviet post-war intentions, urged the continuation of a Mediterranean strategy resulting from victory in North Africa. He saw the conquest of Sicily and the invasion of Italy as the way to get at the Germans from their “soft underbelly.” By the time of the 1943 Casablanca Conference, though, the dynamics within the Grand Alliance had shifted. The Russians had prevailed at Stalingrad, the Americans prevailing in the Pacific, and the manpower pool of the former, like the industrial might of the latter, was unmatched.

The 1915 campaign in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli and the 1943 Italian campaign remain controversial subjects. Churchill was a, if not the, key strategist in both and has been vehemently denounced and staunchly defended for his decisions ever since. What often is overlooked is that Churchill in his thinking, in his oratory, in his actions, and in his writing amply displays those traits that closely identify him as an excellent strategist—not a master strategist, which is a mythical title. But, to be an excellent strategist one has to be a superb political leader. Churchill understood this. The survival of the British Empire had to be paramount in both World Wars. Churchill understood the salient features of both conflicts—the political and the military—and how they might be influenced. Otherwise, he would not have supported the intent of the Dardanelles operation. Nor would he have insisted and prevailed, successfully until the Casablanca Conference and even afterward, upon the peripheral strategy. Hannah Arendt observes in The Human Condition, “Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.” These are fitting words for Winston Churchill, the pragmatic strategist.

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Endnotes
3. Churchill to Asquith, 29 December 1914, Churchill Papers, 26/1, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge.
Two ships of war are locked in a duel to the death. One swiftly tacks. Her guns come to bear. Her broadside hurls hot metal into her adversary’s hull....

A scene from the era of fighting sail? Indeed, but not so long ago as you might think. This action took place on the cusp of living memory, in 1917. The sailing ship was Fresh Hope, a wooden three-masted schooner commanded by Lieutenant J. Martin, an officer in the Royal Navy’s Special Service. Fresh Hope was a Q-ship, a merchant marine vessel secretly armed with guns and sent out to lure the Kaiser’s marauding U-boats into a trap. Martin scored at least four direct hits on the German U-boat in one of many encounters between Q-ships and submarines during a campaign now almost forgotten. Yet, during the Great War when the apparently unstoppable U-boats did their utmost to starve Britain into defeat, Q-ship officers and crews seemed, to an anxious population, like a reincarnation of the heroes who had fought off Spain’s Armada centuries before.

The Problem

In 1913, Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, said he was “not convinced” that Germany’s fast-growing fleet of technically excellent submarines would be used against merchant ships and civilians. “I do not believe this would ever be done by a civilised power,” he said in response to a warning from his own staff. Churchill was wrong. Even as the carnage of the Western Front began, the U-boats were quietly slipping their moorings, intent on bringing the horror of war to Britain’s doorstep.

By Christmas 1914, the Royal Navy had declared the North Sea a closed military area, stopping and seizing vessels carrying anything that could help Germany’s war effort. To the outrage of the Germans, that included food. As the blockade took hold, Admiral Hugo von Pohl, Chief of the Naval Staff, issued an order that was to change profoundly the waging of war at sea. From 18 February 1915, he declared, the waters around Britain and Ireland were to be treated as a war zone, and any vessel in this zone would be treated without warning, regardless of nationality or flag.

The Solution

Winston Churchill was credited with the notion of pursuing U-boats with Mystery Ships, as they were first called. The war was only a few months old when he sent a telegram to Sir Hedworth Meux, Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, asking him to send a disguised steamer to “trap” a submarine preying on shipping off Le Havre. There is no record of a Mystery Ship gaining success this early in the war, but the idea gained favour and the navy began assembling a small fleet of trawlers, coasters, tramp steamers, and sailing merchantmen.

The plan was for them to present an attractive target to a submarine and then, when the enemy was close enough to hit, drop the pretence and attack. For this to work, the disguise had to be perfect in every detail. Many U-boat crews included an ex-North Sea pilot or a man who had served aboard British merchant ships, and deceiving such experienced sailors would not be easy. Elaborate measures were taken. Guns were hidden behind the false sides of dummy cabins or bulwarks. Lifeboats were made to crack open like walnuts, revealing a ready loaded twelve-pounder. Even a hencoop could hide a Maxim gun. These disguised men o’ war were usually rather lowly ships, which would not have been expected to carry wireless; so aerial cable had to be concealed among other rigging, with wires painted to resemble manila rope. Later Q-ships were stuffed with timber to enable them to stay afloat and carry on fighting even after they were hit.

Officers and crew had to look the part too. Saluting was forbidden, and each man was given an allowance to buy civilian clothes of a type worn by merchant sailors. There was a little extra money for underwear, because crews on cargo ships usually dried their laundry around the deck, and a sharp-eyed U-boat commander would be certain to spot the distinctive Royal Navy issue...
flannel vests and drawers. Many Mystery Ships also had a “captain’s wife.” This was often some fresh-faced rating who dressed up in a wig and women’s clothes.

Tactics devised for the decoy vessels also demanded a high level of acting ability. The strategy was for a ship challenged or attacked by a submarine to appear as if it had been abandoned in a panic. Men would take to the boats and row for dear life. This “panic party,” as it was called, was crucial to convincing a U-boat commander the ship he was targeting had been left to her fate and was no threat, while her officers and gunlayers would be in their hiding places waiting to spring the trap. Panic party duty was no soft option. There was a real risk the men in the boat would be machine-gunned when the U-boat learned their true purpose. Even if the U-boat did not seek revenge, the job necessarily involved being in the crossfire.

Like actors, Mystery Ship men had to learn their lines. A blackboard was provided carrying details of the ship’s fictitious name, port of registry, and cargo details so they could convincingly answer questions posed by U-boat commanders, who usually demanded a merchant vessel’s papers before they sank her. Inevitably, perhaps, it was known as “the board of lies.”

Many in the Royal Navy, especially shellbacks who had served under Queen Victoria, thought the whole business was barmy. The little fleet of decoys was derided and dubbed “the Gilbert and Sullivan navy.” But the project had some powerful backers, including Churchill and Admiral David Beatty. And for the men who served aboard the disguised ships it was a deadly serious affair. All were volunteers. It was made clear they were expected deliberately to place themselves in harm’s way.

There were compensations for the unusual risks. A bonus in the form of hard lying money was paid, and there was prize money. The bounty for sinking an enemy submarine was £1000, divided into shares of £1 18s 1d, worth just under £100 today. An officer who played a significant role in an action might be awarded fifty shares.

Unlike men in the regular service—and soldiers at the front—there could be no surrender for the Q-ship crews. When the German Navy learned about the decoys it declared the men aboard them pirates who would be shot out of hand. The British soon discovered that on this point the Germans were—at least technically—right.

**Deployment**

In July 1915, Admiral Sir Stanley Colville, commanding Orkney and Shetland, sent the three hundred and seventy-ton collier *Prince Charles* to seek out submarines. Colville, like Beatty, was enthusiastic about the use of decoys. His considerable influence was later crucial in what became the Q-ship campaign.

*Prince Charles* was a rather shabby ship, built in 1905 to carry coal around the coast—a small but tasty morsel for a U-boat. On 20 July the collier spotted *U 36* on the surface off North Rona Island in the Outer Hebrides. As *Prince Charles* drew near, the submarine fired a warning shot. The decoy vessel’s captain, Lieutenant William Mark-Wardlaw, ordered away the “panic party” and hid aboard with his gun crews. The U-boat closed in to sink the apparently abandoned collier. At six hundred yards, Mark-Wardlaw brought his concealed guns into action. *Prince Charles* was lightly armed, with a three-pounder and a six-pounder, but inflicted heavy
damage. Out of control, the submarine presented its entire flank to Mark-Wardlaw, who steamed towards it at full speed. After another salvo from Prince Charles’s guns the submarine sank with more than half her crew. Fifteen, including her captain, were rescued.

The action electrified the navy’s high command. It came after two stunning successes where decoys were used in partnership with a submarine. In June, Taranaki and C 24 sank U 40 off Aberdeen. Then, four weeks later, Princess Louise and C 27 accounted for U 23 near Fair Isle. It seemed a weapon had been found at last to combat the U-boat threat. There was just one problem. Prince Charles had flown her red ensign throughout the engagement. This led the War Staff to make an inconvenient discovery: not one vessel in the Mystery Ship fleet had been commissioned as one of His Majesty’s ships of war. Under the terms of the Hague Convention, they were operating outside international law; so they were pirates indeed.

This unfortunate oversight was hastily corrected, and the decoys were commissioned as tenders to naval vessels. At this time they were also given secret numbers, beginning with the letter ‘Q’—possibly because their main base was in Queenstown (now Cork), although the precise origin of the letter appears not to have been recorded.

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**Controversy**

The summer of 1915 saw numerous Q-ship successes. It was also a time of grave controversy. In August, a Q-ship was accused of a war crime, a charge that might well have been justified.

It happened the day a German U-boat sank the White Star passenger liner Arabic off the southwest coast of Ireland, killing forty-five civilians. The decoy ship Baralong, a small steamer flying the then-neutral Stars and Stripes, was in the area, and began scouring the sea for the submarine. Then Baralong’s wireless operator picked up an SOS message: a freighter, Nicosian, was being attacked just nine miles away.

Baralong was commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Godfrey Herbert, an experienced submariner who had volunteered for the Special Service. He immediately ordered full speed towards the Nicosian’s position. He and his officers and crew thought the freighter’s attacker had to be the U-boat that had (in their eyes) murdered the people aboard Arabic. This was to prove an important element in what happened next.

As Baralong came up with the stricken steamer, her people saw men in boats and a submarine, U 27, shelling the ship. Herbert quickly altered course to starboard, placing the Nicosian between him and the U-boat. He knew U 27 would appear from behind Nicosian’s bow ready to fire at him, so he posted Marines with rifles in Baralong’s bow. When the submarine cleared Nicosian the Marines were ready. “The Marines kept up an incessant rifle fire from the start and accounted for several of the gun’s crew before it was possible for them to retaliate,” Herbert noted in his report.

Then Baralong’s hidden twelve-pounders spoke. No fewer than thirty-four shells were fired, “mostly taking effect,” as Herbert laconically noted. The submarine sank in just over a minute, leaving her commander and a number of men in the water. These men swam to the pilot ladder dangling from the side of the abandoned Nicosian, clambered aboard and disappeared.

Herbert brought Baralong alongside and sent a party of Marines aboard Nicosian to find the Germans. In his report, Herbert said the Marines found six men who had been mortally wounded by lyddite shells. They were buried at once, he added.

Another version of events was soon to emerge. Witnesses, including one who claimed to have been
aboard Baralong, said the Germans were shot dead in cold blood. One said the U-boat commander escaped the massacre by jumping into the sea, raising his hands in surrender. According to this account he was shot at least twice, in the mouth and neck.

Significantly, the official Royal Navy account did not exonerate Baralong. It concluded: “...the Germans were found in the engine room and the Marines, in hot blood, and believing they had to do with the men who had so wantonly sunk the Arabic in the morning, shot them all at sight.” Herbert went on to have a successful naval career and, in a later memoir, confirmed the truth of this account.

**A Booby Prize**

The Baralong affair did little to diminish the public’s admiration for the plucky little Q-ships and their crews of “live human bait,” as one senior officer put it. And in 1917, a few months after the slaughter of the Somme, the heroism of the decoys gave Britain a much-needed boost to morale.

On 30 April, Prize, a three-masted schooner of two hundred and twenty tons, was sailing slowly in a light breeze in the Western Approaches, the U-boat commanders’ favourite hunting ground. Prize was under the command of Lieutenant William “Willie” Sanders, a merchant officer from New Zealand who had volunteered for the Royal Navy soon after war broke out. On being promoted to lieutenant in February 1917, he was given command of Prize, a German trading vessel captured early in the war. When Sanders took her over she was Q 21, armed with three very well-hidden twelve-pounders.

As she ghosted along, the lookout sounded the alarm. A U-boat was in sight. It was U 93 commanded by Kapitänleutnant Adolf Edgar, Freiherr von Spiegel und Peckelsheim. Baron von Spiegel was having a successful patrol and had already dispatched twelve ships. His first inclination was to let Prize go, but his first officer changed his mind. The gunners aboard U 93 fired two warning shots and seven men aboard Prize hastily shoved off in the whaler, a perfect panic party. The U-boat then set about destroying the schooner, pouring round after round into her. As the shells crashed around them, Sanders, his officers and his gunlayers stuck at their posts, watching and waiting. Prize was sinking. Her mainmast had taken two direct hits; the living quarters and wireless room were on fire. Still Sanders waited. The U-boat closed to within one hundred yards for a last look at its victim.

Sanders had been watching the submarine through a spyhole, relaying its movements to his twelve-pounder crews as it approached. When he gave the order “Let go!” the gunlayers already had their sights accurately set. In their first salvo the forward gun on U 93 was annihilated. The submarine replied with a shot that hit Prize on the waterline, deflected upwards and crashed through the deck. Another round carried away part of the superstructure, badly wounding three men. But Prize managed to manoeuvre to bring her stern twelve-pounder into play. The submarine was taking a hammering. Von Spiegel joined his men at the guns. A shell from the schooner took off the head of a German gunner whose body smashed into von Spiegel, knocking him over the side. He saw U 93 “vanish into the depths of the ocean,” as he later recalled.

Von Spiegel and a handful of his crew were picked up by Prize, where men were stuffing mattresses and hammocks into the holes in her hull. Prize made it back to port, entertaining the German prisoners with cigarettes and cocoa. “After the war we can be friends,” von Spiegel told Sanders. “I am fighting for my country and you are fighting for yours. That is right and proper for both of us.”

Alas, it was not to be. On 13 August, Prize was back at sea in company with a submarine, D 6. Sanders and his men spotted a U-boat, U 48, and engaged her, scoring five direct hits at close range. The U-boat dived, listing heavily. The following day, Prize blew up with the loss of all hands. It was assumed her quarry had successfully escaped and returned to carry out a torpedo attack unseen. Nor had U 93 suffered the fate her captain feared. Her first officer managed to get her back to Germany. Still, Sanders was awarded the Victoria Cross.

**Envoi**

Fighting decoys are probably as old as sea war itself. They played a role in various campaigns against Barbary pirates and the captain of a privateer would have quickly found himself at home aboard a Q-ship. But the First World War marks the pinnacle of their achievement. More than two hundred were commissioned, sixty of them sailing vessels. Churchill wrote that they “afforded opportunity for some of the most brilliant and daring stratagems in the naval war.”

Keith Dovkants is the author of A Combat of Devils, a novel about Q-ships in the First World War published by Matador in 2012. The full-length version of this article originally appeared in the winter 2012 issue of The Marine Quarterly and is reprinted with kind permission.
Winston Churchill remains a source of frequently quoted quips and aphorisms. Most of the best of these can be found in Richard Langworth’s *Churchill in His Own Words* (2012). Of course many more quotations than ever passed his lips are attributed to Churchill because they were wise, clever, humorous or witty, or simply sounded like words he would have spoken. These may have a longer or more credible life if attached to him.

Often, misattributed quotations are simply clever or amusing and do no further harm. The Winston-Nancy Astor “poison in your coffee” exchange is a delightful example. Occasionally, though, a genuine quotation is wrongfully, apparently purposefully, but at best carelessly, adapted to say something very different from what Churchill intended.

Howard Zinn, who died in 2010, wrote the extremely successful *A People’s History of the United States*, which was first published in 1980 and last revised in 2005. As of this date, more than two million copies have reportedly been sold. Consequently, we can expect that what Zinn attributed to Churchill in that book has been read by many. Writing about the Cuban insurrection, Zinn said (at p. 303):

> There seems also to have been another kind of fear. The Cleveland administration said a Cuban victory might lead to “the establishment of a white and a black republic,” since Cuba had a mixture of the two races. And the black republic might be dominant.

With the apparent intention of bolstering his argument, Zinn enlisted a young reporter on the conflict, who had become rather better known by the time Zinn’s work was published:

> The idea was expressed in 1896 in an article in *The Saturday Review* by a young and eloquent imperialist, whose mother was American and whose father was English—Winston Churchill. He wrote that while Spanish rule was bad and the rebels had the support of the people, it would be better for Spain to keep control:

> A grave danger represents itself. Two-fifths of the insurgents in the field are negroes. These men...would, in the event of success, demand a predominant share in the government of the country...the result being, after years of fighting, another black republic.

A diligent father, Ted Schwartz, recently contacted The Churchill Centre to say Zinn’s book “was assigned as summer reading as part of my son’s high school U.S. history class.” Concerned as Schwartz was by the foregoing extract, he sought the full text of Churchill’s article from TCC. He was right to do so.

The full article was included in the scarce, four-volume *Collected Essays*, which is an excellent source for Churchill’s periodical
contributions, but, having itself been edited in the compilation exercise, ultimately needs verification against the originally published text. Doing so in this case reveals that the text of the relevant portion of the 15 February 1896 article (Cohen C2) is radically different from Zinn’s cited text.

“In Under such a Government revolutions would be periodic, property insecure, equity unknown.”

In Zinn’s version of Churchill’s report, there are two ellipses. The excisions amount to thirty-two words, a good number of which are material and ought not to have been excised at all. In addition, though—with no literary excuse or justification—Zinn misleadingly dropped another twenty-five words without alerting the reader that he had done so. Here is the original Churchillian text with all the Zinn-excised portions italicized and the undisclosed excised words also bold-faced:

A grave [graver in the original] danger presents [represents in the Zinn version] itself. Two-fifth of the insurgents in the field, and by far the bravest and best disciplined part of the rebel forces, are pure negroes. These men, with Antonio Maceo at their head, would, in the event of success, demand a predominant share in the government of the country. Such a claim would be indignantly resisted by the white section, and a racial war, probably conducted with bitter animosity and feroxious cruelty, would ensue, the result being, after years of fighting, another black republic, or at best a partition of the island as in San Domingo.

In other words, of the original ninety-nine word text, Zinn only used forty-two words, arguably seriously distorting Churchill’s original intentions. His distortion is greater yet, when one considers that he has totally ignored the paragraph in the Saturday Review piece that preceded the (mis)quoted paragraph, as it sets the context for Churchill’s fundamental view regarding the important role of what he hoped would be a predominant Spain following the Cuban revolution.

...The rebel victory offers little good either to the world in general or to Cuba in particular. With Cuba as a Spanish colony, Spain is responsible for its behaviour toward foreign States and its respect of international law; but with “Cuba Libra,” instead of dealing with a traditional friendly Power, we should have to prepare ourselves for another irresponsible firebrand of the South American type. That is not an inviting prospect for the outside world; nor does independence offer much to the islanders themselves. All impartial residents in the island are agreed that, though the Spanish Administration is bad, a Cuban Government would be worse—equally corrupt, more capricious and far less stable. Under such a Government revolutions would be periodic, property insecure, equity unknown.

Good for Ted Schwartz for noticing the unlikely Churchillian content and for bringing it to TCC’s attention. Too bad that none of the other two million purchasers of Zinn’s book are aware of this unjustifiable misquotation.

Ronald I. Cohen is President of the Sir Winston Churchill Society of Ottawa. In 2014 he was awarded the MBE for services to history, including A Bibliography of the Writings of Sir Winston Churchill.
The cover image of Sir Winston Churchill was created from life in 1953 at the behest of the city of Rotterdam. Sculpted by Willem Verbon (1921–2003), the impressive, finished bronze (above) stands in the Dutch city to this day.

The terracotta maquette for the sculpture seen here (at right) remained in the artist’s studio until his death. Recently it was sold by Philip Mould OBE, an expert in British portraiture. The buyer then donated the bust to Harrow, Churchill’s old school.

Churchill’s importance to Rotterdam was confirmed in 1946 when he was granted honorary membership of the town council, which this bust was created to commemorate. Already held in high regard as a civic sculptor, Verbon received the commission.

Verbon sought to remain loyal to the truth by portraying his subjects, as he put it, “neither prettier nor uglier” than the reality. It was an approach that suited the subject: Verbon’s Churchill is dressed as he was for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. His uniform of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports is just visible beneath the mantle of a Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter with the gold collar of the Order draped across his shoulders.

According to the artist’s biographer, Verbon imitated Churchill’s gruff voice, recalling the Prime Minister saying “I think I belong to a kennel now, but I must say, a very distinguished kennel” when receiving his honorary medal of membership from the Rotterdam council.

Churchill compliments the artist on “the remarkable result” achieved for which he was “indeed obliged for the trouble” he had taken. Verbon throughout was punctilious about his artistic requirements, using the services of those close to Churchill to assist with the logistics. At his request, he was given special access to the chamber of the House of Commons in order to observe and sketch Churchill first hand.

Following a viewing of the bust at Downing Street, Churchill sent Verbon a signed copy of his book *Painting as a Pastime*, believing it to be a more meaningful gift for a friend and fellow artist than his customary signed photograph.

“It is magnificent, but you credited me with more character than I think I’ve got.”—Winston Churchill to Willem Verbon in response to viewing the bust at 10 Downing Street, 1954.
Companion of the Most Noble Order of Garter with the gold collar of the Order draped across his shoulders.

According to the artist’s biographer, Verbon imitated Churchill’s gruff voice magnificently recalling the Prime Minister saying “I think I belong to a kennel now, but I must say, a very distinguished kennel” when receiving his honorary medal from the Rotterdam council. In the letters exchanged between Churchill’s secretary Anthony Montague Browne and the Dutch Embassy, Churchill complimented the artist on “the remarkable result” achieved for which he was “indeed obliged for the trouble” he had taken.

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“I think I belong to a kennel now, but I must say, a very distinguished kennel” — Winston Churchill to Willem Verbon in response to viewing the bust at 10 Downing Street, 1954

Photo courtesy Philip Mould & Co.
Strategically poised just off the north coast of Scotland, the Orkney Islands almost totally encircle the bay known as Scapa Flow—312 square kilometres (120 square miles) of cold salt water. Historically, the British Home Fleet had been located near the Channel Islands to keep it in close proximity to its old maritime adversaries France, Spain, and the Netherlands. In 1904, however, in response to the buildup of the German Fleet, the Admiralty decided that a northern base was needed to control defences in the North Sea.

The First World War

On the night of 29–30 July 1914 the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, convinced that war was inevitable, requested and received approval from Prime Minister Asquith to send the Grand Fleet from Portland through the English Channel and the Straits of Dover to the safety of Scapa Flow. The First Lord received the news of the Fleet’s arrival with relief. The Royal Navy was ready for action when war was declared on 4 August.

In early October the Admiralty yacht Enchantress dropped anchor off Scapa Pier. On board were Asquith and Churchill. A meeting was held with the principal naval personnel, including the First Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg, and the new Commander of the Home Fleet, Sir John Jellicoe. The outcome was a detailed memorandum on the necessity of defending Scapa Flow from submarine attack.

Although Scapa Flow was unfortified, Churchill was satisfied that the Fleet was safe. As he later wrote, it was “protected by its currents from submarine attack. Destroyers no doubt could attack it—if they cared to run the very serious risk of the long daylight passage, to and fro, across the North Sea: but no one, we had believed, could take a submarine submerged through the intricate and swirling channels.”

The British Admiralty were also comforted by the opinion that Scapa was beyond the effective range of German U-boats.

Jellicoe, however, was not convinced. On 30 September he wrote to Churchill, “I long for a submarine defence at Scapa. It would give such a feeling of confidence. I cannot sleep half so well inside as when outside, mainly because I feel we are risking such a mass of vulnerable ships in a place where, if a submarine did get in, she practically has the British Fleet at her mercy up to the number of torpedoes.” According to Churchill, Jellicoe telegraphed a report on 17 October that a German submarine had been reported entering Scapa: “Although he [Jellicoe] thought the report false, he took the whole fleet to sea forthwith. He appealed for submarine obstructions, as he had ‘no safe base at present’. . . . On the 18th he stated that Scapa Flow should not be used till the Submarine Defence was placed.”

Churchill thought that Jellicoe was overreacting, but on 23 October he wrote to him, “Every effort will be made to secure you rest and safety in Scapa and adjacent anchorages.” So to placate the fears of the Commander, defence improvements were made, although not so fast as Jellicoe would have liked. The improved defences included nineteen old ships being sunk across the five most vulnerable channels leading into Scapa Flow.

Nevertheless, German U-boats did attempt to enter the sound. On 23 November U 18, commanded by Kapitan Leutnant Heinrich von Hennig, entered Hoxa Sound on the surface. Hennig, though, was disappointed to see that the Grand Fleet had gone. He could have gone after “smaller fry” in the harbour but decided that this was not worth the gamble. Instead he undertook the tricky operation of returning to open sea.

Although no successful enemy action was ever launched in Scapa Flow during the First World War, the German Fleet was in evidence in the area. On 5 June 1916, the British cruiser Hampshire sailed out of the Hoxa Boom with an important passenger, the War Minister, Lord Kitchener. He was being taken to Archangel in northern Russia to confer with the Tsar’s government. The weather was bad, but Kitchener was anxious to reach his destination as soon as possible. Jellicoe and his staff decided that the ship would take the inside passage, on the west coast of the Orkneys, to give some protection. Because of the bad weather, however, minesweeping had not been possible for four...
days beforehand. Tragically, Hampshire struck mines and all on board perished, including Kitchener.

The Armistice of 11 November 1918 ended the war; but what to do with the German fleet? After discussions among the Allies, it was agreed that seventy-four German warships would be sailed to Scapa Flow. But it was not until 23 June 1919 that the Versailles Treaty was signed. With the real possibility that the German Government would reject the terms—even days before the actual signing—the German Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Ludwig von Reuter, concerned that the Allies would seize his ships, took a fatal step on 21 June to scuttle his fleet. The “Abandon Ship” signal was given. One after the other the seacocks and flood valves of the German ships were opened as the sailors took to lifeboats. In all, fifty-two vessels went down.

Between the Wars

The inter-war years saw the removal of the obstructions that had been installed in the war. But this was child’s play compared to the daunting task of raising the sunken German fleet. However, various firms were attracted to the potential profits from the scrap metal. Some backed off when unexpected problems ensued, but the London steel-and-iron merchants Cox and Danks undertook what has been called the greatest salvage feat in history. With the assistance of other firms, they were successful in raising all but seven of the German vessels.

In January 1939, with war clouds looming, Scapa Flow was once more front and centre in the eyes of the British Admiralty and was again designated home base of the Fleet. The first priority was given to protection from the German Luftwaffe. Twenty-four Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns were installed, and two fighter squadrons were stationed nearby at Wick on the Scottish mainland.

Despite the precautions, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, Admiral Sir Charles Forbes, had the same anxieties as had Jellicoe twenty-five years earlier. He was not alone. On 24 March, the Commanding Officer Coast of Scotland reported to the Secretary of the Navy Admiralty, “It is now disclosed for the first time navigable channels still exist through Kirk Sound.” He requested a comprehensive survey of these channels. This was duly carried out, and on 26 May the Admiralty reported that “no risk at present exists of submerged entry by Holm or Water Sound and that entry on the surface will be extremely hazardous.” The Admiralty concluded that it “doubted if the further proposed measures would be found to provide 100% security against a determined attempt at entry by enemy craft on the surface though such an attempt is considered extremely unlikely,” and that “further expenditure on blocking cannot be justified.”

Forbes was not satisfied with this decision, and he wrote to the Admiralty quoting a letter written to him by another senior officer, Admiral Sir William French, the Admiral Commanding Orkney and Shetland, who visited Scapa in June. This pointed out that French had informed him that he would have no hesitation in transiting Kirk or Skerry Sounds in either a submarine or a destroyer. Forbes asked for urgent reconsideration of the Admiralty’s decision not to block the channels, and he concluded—again echoing Jellicoe’s feelings in
the prior war—that “Unless these channels are effectively blocked, the C-in-C cannot be free from constant anxiety as to the safety of his ships from submarine or destroyer attack.” Eventually, on 4 July the Admiralty agreed that three more ships would be sunk in Kirk and Water Sounds; but this action, alas, was not completed in time to save HMS *Royal Oak*.

**The Second World War**

War was declared on 3 September 1939 with forty-four ships of the Fleet in Scapa Flow. On 15 September the new First Lord, Winston Churchill, left London for Scapa accompanied by Sir Archibald Sinclair, Brendan Bracken, and the Admiralty Flag Lieutenant, Lieutenant-Commander “Tommy” Thompson. “With Churchill in his locked box of papers,” Martin Gilbert documented, “were the secret minutes of a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee...at which the defence of Scapa had been discussed. It was clear from these minutes that the full scheme of defences would only be ready ‘by the spring of 1940.’”

Gilbert continues:

In naval matters, reflecting on his visit to Scapa Flow, he [Churchill] advised that the Fleet should not be “tethered,” as he had seen it. “These next few days are full of danger.” His warning was timely, but not acted upon in time. Two days later, on October 14, a German submarine penetrated the Scapa Flow defences and sank the battleship *Royal Oak* then at anchor; more than eight hundred officers and men were drowned.

One of Churchill’s private secretaries, John Higham, recalled, “When I brought the news to Churchill, tears sprang to his eyes and he muttered, ‘Poor fellows, poor fellows, trapped in those black depths.’”

Later that day Churchill reported to the War Cabinet that “HMS *Royal Oak*, a battleship of the ‘R’ class, had been sunk between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. that morning. She was moored in Scapa Flow at the time, and it was believed that she had been attacked by a submarine which, by some unknown means, had penetrated the defences....All ships in the Flow had immediately been ordered to raise steam, and put to sea.” There followed a cold statement recognizing that in war tragic losses had to be expected: “The loss of this ship, though an extremely regrettable disaster, did not materially affect the general naval position.”

Two days later, on 16 October, Churchill reported again to the War Cabinet:

The Germans still did not appear to have any information as to how the *Royal Oak* had been sunk; he therefore did not propose to publish any further information for the time being. He thought, however, that it was only a question of time before the news became known, and he therefore proposed to make an announcement in the House...
of Commons the next day....The Prime Minister asked what steps had been taken to prevent another enemy submarine getting in Scapa Flow. The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the Admiralty were satisfied that the enemy submarine had got into Scapa Flow on an occasion when the gate had been left open for a considerable time, owing to certain ships which were due to enter the harbour having been three-quarters of an hour late. There had been over-confidence in the immunity of the Flow to submarine attack. The Flow would be made thoroughly safe by the 7th of November.  

In his report to the House of Commons on 17 October, Churchill spoke of the loss of the Royal Oak and of merchant shipping. “There will not be in this war any period when the seas will be completely safe,” Churchill said, “but neither will there be, I believe and trust, any period when the full necessary traffic of the Allies cannot be carried on. We shall suffer and we shall suffer continually, but by perseverance, and by taking measures on the largest scale, I feel no doubt that in the end we shall break their hearts.”

Due to Churchill’s short time back at the Admiralty, he was given “slack” by the opposition, with a former (and future) First Lord, A.V. Alexander, politely asking “the First Lord whether he is aware, as I’m sure he must be, that the circumstances which he has been bound to report are very disturbing, and that perhaps we ought to know whether at the outbreak of the war, there was or was not a systematic survey carried out at the place quoted to ensure that it still remained a safe naval anchorage.” Churchill responded: “Yes, Sir. The boom defences have been maintained and, of course, they are not the old defences from the last war; they have been newly placed in position. There is an inquiry sitting, which will not take very long, and I should like to have the advantage of reading its report before I go into details of this kind.”

On 28 October, Churchill received the Admiralty report on the sinking, and he informed the War Cabinet that day that the U-boat had in fact entered the Flow through an unguarded entrance. He further stated, “The lesson was clear that we could not take anything for granted, and must be continually on the watch and guarding against every conceivable contingency in our defences.” His War Cabinet colleagues discussed the statement that the First Lord would have to make in the House of Commons, concluding, “It would have to be admitted that the anchorage at Scapa had been unsafe against submarine attack, but it should be made clear that the necessary defences were being provided.”

On 31 October Churchill went to Scapa again, accompanied by Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the First Sea Lord, where a second conference was held on Admiral Forbes’s flagship. “The scale of defences upon which we now agreed included reinforcement of the boom and additional blockships in the exposed eastern channels, as well as controlled minefields and other devices.”

On 12 March 1940 Scapa Flow was deemed safe, and the Fleet returned. Churchill wrote, “I thought I would give myself the treat of being present on this occasion in our naval affairs.” When he arrived in Scapa he was comforted that

More than six months of constant exertion and the highest priorities had repaired the peace-time neglect. The three main entrances were defended with booms and mines, and three additional blockships, among others, had already been placed in Kirk Sound through which [the] U-boat had slipped to destroy the Royal Oak. At last the Home Fleet had a home. It was the famous home from which in the previous war the Royal Navy had ruled the seas.

Terry Reardon is Vice-Chairman of the International Churchill Society Canada and author of Winston Churchill and Mackenzie King: So Similar, So Different.

Endnotes
2. Ibid., p. 349.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., pp. 351–52.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 211.
10. Ibid.
12. Ibid., pp. 244–45.
15. Ibid., p. 305.
17. Ibid., p. 568.
18. Ibid., p. 571.
During the last week in March 1941, as a result of Britain’s capability to read Japanese top-secret diplomatic telegrams, Winston Churchill was able to follow the travels and discussions of the Japanese Foreign Minister, Yosuke Matsuoka, in Rome, Berlin, and Moscow. While Matsuoka was in Berlin, he was pressed, on Hitler’s authority, to agree to a Japanese attack on British possessions in the Far East as soon as possible. Matsuoka was told an attack on Singapore would be a decisive factor in the speedy overthrow of England.

After reading Matsuoka’s own top-secret account of the German pressure, Churchill sent him a message with eight questions designed to make Japan pause before committing its fleets and armies against Britain. With respect to an attack on Singapore, Churchill initially had little real concern about a Japanese assault. Between the World Wars, he and the British public, through the press, were convinced that the colony, an island off the tip of the Malay peninsula in Southeast Asia, was an invincible fortress. Churchill touted it as the Gibraltar of the East.

Churchill and the Admiralty believed Singapore impregnable because the Naval Base protected the city from attack by sea, while to the north of the island, on the mainland, hundreds of miles of dense jungle

Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival signs the surrender at Singapore. The Japanese leader is Lieutenant-General T. Yamashita.

Churchill and the Fall of Singapore

By Fred Glueckstein
appeared to be impenetrable. Furthermore, stationed on the island were almost 100,000 British, Canadian, Australian, Indian, and a few Malayan troops.

**Fortress in Jeopardy**

Churchill’s attention did turn to Singapore when the Japanese were in a position to threaten the Malay Peninsula in January 1942. On the fifteenth he wrote General Wavell, Commander-in-Chief of ABDACOM (American-British-Dutch-Australian Command), about Singapore. “Please let me know your idea of what would happen in event of your being forced to withdraw into the island,” requested Churchill. “How many troops would be needed to defend this area? What means are there of stopping landings (such) as were made in Hong Kong? What are defences and obstructions on landward side? Are you sure you can dominate with fortress cannon any attempt to plant siege batteries?” Churchill continued: “Is everything being prepared, and what has been done about the useless mouths? It has always seemed to me that the vital need is to prolong the defence of the island to last possible minute. But of course I hope it will not come to this….**2

On 16 January, Wavell wrote him a most disturbing reply: “I discussed the defence of island when recently at Singapore, and have asked for detailed plans. Until quite recently all plans were based on repulsing seaborne attacks on island and holding land attack in Johore [located in the southern portion of the Malay Peninsula] or farther north, and little or nothing was done to construct defences on north side of the island to prevent crossing Johore Straits, though arrangements have been made to blow up the causeway.”

Wavell went on to say: “The fortress cannon of heaviest nature have all-round traverse, but their flat trajectory makes them unsuitable for counter-battery work. Could certainly not guarantee to dominate enemy siege batteries with them.”**3

Churchill was clearly astounded, and greatly troubled, by Wavell’s message. He responded: “It was with feelings of painful surprise that I read this message on the morning of the 19th. So there were no permanent fortifications covering the landward side of the naval base and of the city! Moreover, even more astounding, no measures worth speaking of had been taken by any of the commanders since the war began, and more especially since the Japanese had established themselves in Indo-China, to construct field defences. They had not even mentioned the fact that they did not exist.”**4

On 19 January, Churchill wrote to General Ismay, his military adviser and link with the Chiefs of Staff Committee, about Singapore. “I must confess to being staggered by Wavell’s telegram of the 16th and other telegrams on the same subject. It never occurred to me for a moment...that the gorge of the fortress of Singapore, with its splendid moat half a mile to a mile wide, was not entirely fortified against an attack from the northward.”**5

Churchill asked Ismay that a plan be made at once while the battle in Johore was going forward. He outlined what the plan should comprise. Among the ten elements of the plan, Churchill included: “(i) Not only must the defence of Singapore Island be maintained by every means, but the whole island must be fought for until every single unit and every single strong point has been separately destroyed. (j) Finally, the city of Singapore must be converted into a citadel and defended to the death. No surrender can be contemplated, and the Commander, Staffs and principal officers are expected to perish at their posts.”**6

In his memoirs, Ismay told of reporting to Churchill on the morning of 19 January: “I found him in a towering rage. Why had I not told him that there were no defences on the north side of Singapore Island? Before I could protest that he must have been misinformed, he thrust into my hand a telegram from Wavell reporting that little or nothing had been done in the way of constructing defences to prevent the crossing of the Johore Straits. I could scarcely believe my eyes.

“The Prime Minister continued: ‘You were with the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) for several years before the war broke out. You must have known the position. Why did you not warn me?’”

Ismay wrote that he was tempted to explain to Churchill that the CID had concerned itself with the installation of the heavy guns to meet a sea-borne attack and with the period for which the fortress had to be prepared to hold out until relief arrived. In addition, it had been taken for granted that the commanders on the spot would see to the local defenses against land attack from the north. “But I remained silent,” Ismay wrote, “What did my own feelings matter when so ghastly and humiliating a disaster loomed ahead?”**7

On 3 February, Churchill had lunch with King George VI at Buckingham Palace. Among the discus---

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“But of course I hope it will not come to this....” — Winston Churchill
sions was Singapore. The King entered the following entry in his diary: “The PM is worried & angry over events in the Far East. Singapore has not been fortified from the land-ward side even with tank traps & pill boxes hidden in the jungle. These could have been done by the troops themselves. 15 [inch] gun emplacements pointing out to sea are no form of defence. He fears great loss of life by air bombardment.”

In *The Hinge of Fate*, Churchill ultimately took responsibility for the lack of permanent fortifications: “I do not write this in any way to excuse myself. I ought to have known. My advisers ought to have known and I ought to have asked. The reason I had not asked about this matter, amid the thousands of questions I put, was that the possibility of Singapore having no landward defences no more entered into my mind than that of a battleship being launched without a bottom.”

Churchill continued: “I am aware of the various reasons that have been given for this failure: the preoccupation of the troops in training and in building defence works in Northern Malaya; the shortage of civilian labour; pre-war financial limitations and centralized War Office control; the fact that the Army’s role was to protect the naval base, situated on the north shore of the island, and that it was therefore their duty to fight in front of that shore and not along it. I do not consider these reasons valid. Defences should have been built.”

**The Attack Begins**

Japan’s Malayan campaign started on the night of 7 December 1941, when elements of the Twenty-fifth Japanese Army under Lieutenant-General Yamashita invaded northern Malaya and southern Thailand. The fall of Singapore was Yamashita’s ultimate objective. The Japanese captured all of Malaya during the campaign in little more than two months.

By attacking Malaya first, the Japanese, as feared by Churchill, were poised to assault Singapore from the landward side of the naval base and the city. On 8 December at 4 AM, Japanese aircraft began bombing Singapore. The same day the Japanese invaded Hong Kong and the Philippines and attacked Pearl Harbor, though the date across the international dateline was 7 December. Later that day in Singapore, the British commander-in-chief of the Far East, Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham, issued his Order of the Day, which began, “We are ready...Our preparations have been made and tested; our defences are strong and our weapons efficient.”

On 5 February 1942, down to eighteen tanks and lacking ammunition and food, a small force commanded by Yamashita attacked the island of Pulau Ubin off Singapore’s northeast coast. This diversion deceived General Percival, commander of the forces in Singapore, who moved his major ammunitions stores to the east. The main Japanese attack came later from the northwest.

On 8 February, the actual attack on Singapore started with the landing of troops on the northwest coast. Australian troops fought off initial landing attempts while inflicting enormous casualties on the Japanese. However, the Australian troops retreated unnecessarily amidst the confusion of battle, allowing the Japanese to gain a strong foothold at the shore defense installations. Subsequent landings by the Japanese were unopposed. The military situation for the British under Percival worsened.

Recognizing that the situation in Singapore was deteriorating, Churchill sent a telegram to Wavell on 14 February: “You are of course sole judge of the
moment when no further result can be gained at Singapore, and should instruct Percival accordingly.”

General Percival was issued his orders.

The next day, 15 February, Wavell informed Churchill of the following: “Have had two telegrams from Percival in the last 48 hours indicating that due to shortage of water in the town and other difficulties his powers of resistance are now much diminished. On both occasions have ordered him to fight on to the last.” The second telegram from Wavell to Percival read: “So long as you are in position to inflict losses and damage to enemy and your troops are physically capable of doing so you must fight on....When you are fully satisfied that this no longer possible I give you discretion to cease resistance....”

On 15 February, Percival sent his last telegram to Wavell: “Owing to losses from enemy action, water, petrol, food, and ammunition practically finished. Unable therefore to continue the fight any longer. All ranks have done their best and are grateful for your help.” That day, 15 February 1942, the garrison defending Singapore unconditionally surrendered to General Yamashita; it was only a week after the invasion of Singapore had begun.

The Aftermath

To Churchill’s shock, among those taken prisoner were 16,000 British, 14,000 Australian, and 32,000 Indian soldiers. About 30,000 had already surrendered in Malaya from December 1941 to February 1942. Churchill called the shameful fall of Singapore to the Japanese the “worst disaster” and “largest capitulation” in British military history.

That day, Churchill broadcast the tragic news about Singapore to the British people and the world. The Prime Minister said in part: “I speak to you all under the shadow of a heavy and far-reaching military defeat. It is a British and Imperial defeat. Singapore has fallen….This, therefore, is one of those moments when the British race and nation can show their quality and their genius. This is one of those moments when it can draw from the heart of misfortune the vital impulses of victory. We must remember that we are no longer alone.”

Churchill went on to urge fortitude: “Here is the moment to display the calm and poise combined with grim determination which not so long ago brought us out of the very jaws of death. Here is another occasion to show—as so often in our long history—that we can meet reverses with dignity and renewed accessions of strength.” Yet Churchill was inconsolable about Singapore.

Lord Moran, Churchill’s physician, wrote: “The fall of Singapore on February 15 stupefied the Prime Minister.” In particular, the surrender of the British troops bewildered him. “How came 100,000 men (half of them of our own race) to hold up their hands to inferior numbers of Japanese? Though his mind had been gradually prepared for its fall, the surrender of the fortress stunned him,” wrote Moran. “He felt it was a disgrace. It left a scar on his mind. One evening, months later, when he was sitting in his bathroom enveloped in a towel, he stopped drying himself and gloomily surveyed the floor: ‘I cannot get over Singapore,’ he said sadly.”

History would consider the capture of the Malayan Peninsula and Singapore among the Japanese Army’s greatest wartime achievements. For Churchill it was among Britain’s worst Far Eastern defeats. Without a doubt, the tragic loss of Singapore in 1942 remained in Churchill’s memory for years to come.

Fred Glueckstein is a member of The Churchill Centre and author of Churchill and Colonist II: The Story of Winston Churchill and His Famous Race Horse (2014).

Endnotes

3. Ibid., p. 43.
4. Ibid., p. 46.
6. Ibid., p. 211.
10. Ibid., p. 94.
13. Ibid., p. 250.
14. Ibid.
16. Asia 1939–1945: Singapore. The National Archives Kew, Richmond, Surrey. Note: Some of the prisoners were held in Singapore at camps like Changi. Thousands more were shipped out to Thailand to work on a railway for the Japanese forces, as well as other projects. The death rates in Japanese prison camps were extremely high. Estimates vary from around thirty to thirty-seven percent.
18. Ibid.
125 YEARS AGO

Spring 1890 • Age 15

“I Will Get Papa to Get You a Gun and a Pony”

On 10 July 1890, Winston received a letter from J. W. Spedding, the Secretary of the London Habitation of the Primrose League, enclosing his diploma as a “knight” of the League. Spedding explained that, since he was resigning as Secretary, Churchill was likely “the last member I will make. I am proud to add such an illustrious name to the register.”

The Primrose League was founded in 1883—ostensibly named after Benjamin Disraeli’s favorite flower—to “support...the Conservative Cause” and “to fight for free enterprise.” Lord Randolph Churchill was instrumental in its founding and held the Number 1 membership card. At the insistence of his wife and mother, women were full members. The full members—knights and dames—paid annual dues of half a crown and associate members a few pence. In 1890, when Churchill became a member, there were a total of 910,852 members, including more than 60,000 knights and 48,000 dames. Twenty years later, the League had more than two million members.

Seven years after he became a member, Churchill gave his first political speech to the Bath Habitation of the Primrose League on 26 July 1897.

Winston’s mother, in a letter to him at Harrow on 19 September 1890, attempted to bribe him into not smoking: “Darling Winston, I hope you will try & not smoke. If only you knew how foolish & how silly you look doing it you wd give it up, at least for a few years. If you will give it up & work hard this term to pass yr preliminary I will get Papa to get you a gun & a pony.” In reply, Churchill agreed to do so, but for only half a year: “I will leave off smoking at any rate for 6 months because I think you are right.”

100 YEARS AGO

Spring 1915 • Age 40

“There Was a Great Deal of Truth in What Mr. Churchill Had Said”

Churchill was out at the Admiralty in May and accepted Prime Minister Asquith’s appointment to the ceremonial Duchy of Lancaster, but he stayed in the Cabinet. More importantly, he stayed on as a member of the War Council, the body responsible for directing the overall war strategy. He believed this position would enable his voice to be heard and his opinions taken seriously by the ministers of the new coalition government. But with no staff and no ministerial duties, Churchill’s advice fell on deaf ears.

In July, Lord Kitchener, the Minister of War, suggested that Churchill visit the Dardanelles and report to the War Council on conditions there and prospects for the future. Churchill was eager to go, and both the Prime Minister and Arthur Balfour, his Conservative Party successor at the Admiralty, supported him in this.

The Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, and the King were aware of Churchill’s mission and both approved. Unfortunately, except for Balfour, his new Conservative colleagues—and old enemies—in the Cabinet were not aware and, when informed, did not approve. The Conservative leader Bonar Law—whom Churchill had accused of near-treasonous activities during the Irish Home Rule Crisis the previous year—warned Asquith on 19 July that Churchill’s trip might provoke a “serious crisis” within the National Government. Faced with this opposition, Churchill decided not to go.

At a Dardanelles Committee meeting on 20 August, Churchill argued against a new offensive on the Western Front. In doing so, he clashed with Kitchener. The Committee’s minutes indicate that Kitchener “admitted that there was a great deal of truth in what Mr. Churchill had said, but unfortunately we had to make war as we must and not as we should like to.” Kitchener went on to say that trench warfare was “very irksome” for the French and that an offensive on the Western Front was necessary for “the morale of the French Army.” The Committee approved a new Western Front offensive, which meant there would not be sufficient troops available to take Constantinople—for which Churchill had argued.

Early in September, Sir John French, the commander of British troops in Europe, proposed that Churchill take command of a brigade on the Western Front. His advice increasingly being unheeded, Churchill was in favor of accepting and secured Asquith’s consent. Kitchener, however, vetoed the idea, doubtless recalling his clash with Churchill the month before.

Given the continuing Conservative hostility toward Churchill over
his treatment of them the year before, when many of them were encouraging, if not inciting, civil war in Ulster in response to the Irish being granted Home Rule, he received unexpected support in September from an old enemy, Sir Edward Carson, leader of the Ulster Unionists in the House of Commons, whom Churchill had also accused of a “treasonable conspiracy,” along with Bonar Law, over Irish Home Rule.

At the outset of the war, Carson had sent Churchill “a friendly line from an opponent” on 5 August 1914 expressing “my appreciation of the patriotic & courageous way you have acted in the present grave crisis.” Carson went on to assure Churchill “for whatever it is worth my present admiration of what you have done will not be transitory & I wish you every comfort & assurance in yr present anxieties that yr most devoted friends cd desire for you.”

Carson was true to his word after being appointed Attorney-General in the new National Government. Carson wrote Churchill on 19 September:

Are we going to allow everlasting drift on the policy of the Dardanelles?...

Now you know I speak vy plainly—I daresay rudely—but I am going to say that no one is held more responsible for the Dardanelles policy than yrself! Now if the clear policy of certain victory at any cost is adopted by the Cabinet, I will back it, but it must be no narrow margin nor estimates framed “to do the best we can.”

Churchill’s and Carson’s views on Asquith’s prosecution of the war would be shared by a growing number of MPs in the coming year and would lead in the latter part of 1916 to his replacement as Prime Minister by Lloyd George.

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75 YEARS AGO
Spring 1940 • Age 65

“What a Slender Thread the Greatest of Things Can Hang By”

Churchill told the House of Commons on 18 June to avoid looking for scapegoats in previous administrations whose decisions in the thirties had led Great Britain to the brink of defeat: “If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future.”

During this stressful period, Churchill’s propensity for not suffering fools gladly even in the best of times gained the upper hand, so much so that his wife Clementine wrote him about it in a letter on 27 June where she referred to his “rough, sarcastic & overbearing manner.” She went on to add that “if an idea is suggested, you are supposed to be so contemptuous that presently no ideas, good or bad, will be forthcoming.” She pointed out that with the exception of the King, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Speaker of the House of Commons “you can sack anyone & everyone. Therefore with this terrific power you must combine urbanity, kindness & if possible Olympic calm.”

Evidence that Churchill took his wife’s advice to heart is found in a 29 August letter from an American, Rear-Admiral Robert Ghormley, whom Churchill had taken the day before on a visit to coastal defense sites at Dover and Ramsgate. In it he thanked Churchill and expressed his thanks that "a man loaded with responsibility can at the same time be the genial host you were."

Churchill would have been on his best behavior with an American, however, because his private view of the United States at the time was that it “was very good in applauding the valiant deeds of others.”

His private view of the French at the time was no less bitter. After the Royal Navy had sunk three French battle-cruisers at Oran in a five-minute battle that killed more than 1,200 French sailors on 3 July, he praised in the Commons “the characteristic courage of the French Navy.” Privately, he said that “The French were now fighting with all their vigor for the first time since the war broke out.”

Churchill had no similar thoughts about the young pilots who were fighting the Battle of Britain in the air, privately telling dinner guests at Chequers on 11 August that Britain’s future rested entirely on the airmen’s shoulders: “What a slender thread the greatest of things can hang by.” On 16 August, Churchill was in the operations room at Uxbridge when all of Britain’s fighter squadrons were engaged with the enemy. As they left, Churchill said to General Ismay: “Don’t speak to me; I have never been so moved.” Then, after five minutes of silence, Churchill gave voice to the immortal words, “Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.”

From 26 August through 6 September, more than 600 German bombers a day attacked English cities and airfields. On 7 September, 200 bombers hit London, killing 300 civilians. When Churchill visited an air-raid shelter where forty people had died, the survivors and their relatives greeted him with cries of “We thought you’d come. We can take it. Give it ‘em back.” Churchill was so moved that he broke down in tears, prompting one woman to say, “You see, he really cares, he’s crying.”

With London’s weekly death toll close to 1,000, Churchill gave a broadcast to the nation in which he said that Hitler “has now resolved to break our famous Island race by a process of indiscriminate slaughter and destruction. What he has done is to kindle a fire in British hearts here and all over the world, which will glow long after all traces of the conflagration he has caused in London have been removed.”
Say “No” to Bad History

Said No. One can almost hear the voice of John Reith (the Beeb’s long-time, dictatorial Director-General and Churchill’s nemesis) saying, “I did my best to keep him off the air and now you’ve gone one better.”

With programs such as this, the BBC, once a source of admiration for Britain around the world, now seems more of an embarrassment. When Britain Said No belongs in the dustbin of history along with the nationalized industry that the Labour party introduced when it defeated Churchill in 1945.

The 1945 election results remain a puzzle, especially to American admirers of Churchill who, not appreciating Britain’s domestic politics, reacted (and still do) with “How-could-they?” shock.

When Britain Said No purports to explain the result and is described as containing “surprising revelations” (in reality, rehashing already widely-known Churchill controversies) and debating his “weaknesses as well as strengths.” Alas, while the actors are good (portraying Churchill is tricky), and the vintage film footage interesting, it does little of the sort.

In describing his own memoirs of the Second World War, Churchill admitted, “This is not history. It is my case.” But this program is no history either. Rather, to use the invective launched at Churchill by Evelyn Waugh, it is “a shifty barrister’s case.”

When Britain Said No is so one-sided and hysterical that it actually does a disservice to the revisionist cause. It certainly never utters a balancing word or phrase such as “even though” or “but.”

The program trots out so many Churchill clichés and selective, out-of-context quotes that a general viewer would easily be convinced that this most-admired Briton was a racist buffoon. And it picks easy targets.

Yes, Churchill was largely wrong about India, but, if nothing else, Churchill’s warnings about inter-cine violence in India after partition proved sadly true. Certainly his famous “half-naked Fakir” comment about Gandhi (like Churchill the subject of adulation years after death) haunted him since he made it in 1931. Yet the program fails to note that just a few years later Churchill also said:

Mr. Gandhi has gone very high in my esteem since he stood up for the Untouchables. I do not like the India Bill but it is now on the Statute Book...[so] make the thing a success. I did not meet Mr. Gandhi when he was in England but I should like to meet him now.

To which Gandhi remarked:

I have got a good recollection of Mr. Churchill when he was in the Colonial Office and... since then I have held the opinion that I can always rely on his sympathy and goodwill.

And how does Churchill’s “hatred” of Indians explain his later good relationship with Nehru?

Of course the “Gestapo” comment in the 1945 campaign speech was foolish and ill-advised. His wife Clementine told him so...
beforehand, and Churchill surely regretted it afterward—and paid the political price.

The program’s litany of other “revelations” about Churchill includes:

• “His policies as Chancellor had led to a disastrous economic collapse.” So he created the Great Depression all by himself? (Hardly, even if the 1925 return by Britain to the Gold Standard—widely-held conventional wisdom at the time—was seriously flawed.)

• He was a stubborn, difficult, and demanding boss. Long known, but one might wonder how well an easygoing and accommodating one would have served Britain in those challenging days. (“I never worry about action, only about inaction” seems a good mantra for fighting a war.)

• As First Lord of the Admiralty, Gallipoli was Churchill’s “master plan” and thus entirely his responsibility. Not a word is uttered about anyone else. The truth is that there is more than enough blame in the Gallipoli campaign to spread among several people.

Ironically, the program misses a few easy targets. For example, why not trot out Churchill’s 1920 article about Jews and Bolshevism and the one by a ghostwriter, Marshall Diston, from 1937 to prove he was anti-Semitic?

And surely Churchill must have been a secret communist sympathizer—just look at all the nice things he said about Stalin from 1941 to 1945.

The experts interviewed in the program (Sir Max Hastings and Anthony Beevor in particular) are well-regarded historians, although better known for their military than their political writing. But one largely unfamiliar name appears frequently, a Mr. Dave Douglass. While the program skips over his credentials, it turns out he is in his own words “a revolutionary Marxist on the Anarchist left.”

Mr. Douglass apparently worked in the coal industry some decades ago but hardly qualifies as having an objective opinion or, more importantly, any real knowledge about Churchill. He is a strange choice.

A more predictable presence is Prof. John Charmley, the revisionist dean. While Charmley is a successful historian, he seems to have gone off the deep end when the cameras rolled for this program. From Prof. Charmley’s barely suppressed smirk, we learn that Churchill was really a proto-fascist, “the equivalent of Nigel Farage,” and one step away from throwing in with Oswald Moseley and the Black Shirts.

According to Charmley, “Churchill’s ideas in the 1930s had been rather sympathetic towards fascism; at least until 1938 he’d said obliging things about Hitler as well.” A single line from a 1937 Evening Standard article by Churchill is brought forward to prove the point.

Well, if Churchill was a Nazi sympathizer that certainly was not apparent to Goebbels or Hitler. Prof. Charmley knows very well that a quick glance at the work of Churchill authorities such as Sir Martin Gilbert and Richard Langworth would put this nonsense to rest.

And Charmley cannot resist a last jest, informing us that in Churchill’s war memoirs, “every page…broke the Official Secrets Act,” thus apparently throwing Churchill in with Burgess, McLean, and the other British spies of the 1940s.

The first fifty-five minutes of the program work hard to dig the Churchill reputation a deep grave. The producers then apparently looked up and found themselves at the bottom of a discreditable hole of their own making.

What to do? Why, furiously spend the last five minutes reminding us, “Oh, by the way Winston Churchill was a great man and saved the world.” Even Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke said so.

When Britain Said No concludes with a screen shot, surely confusing to anyone who has just watched the program: In 1951 Churchill stood again for election—and won.

Which he did, even though (as the program surprisingly fails to note) Labour received some 250,000 more votes than the combined opposition.

The viewer might wonder: how could that be? The program offers no answer, and one is left to conclude that either Churchill was not so bad or that the British people having unwisely tossed out the Great Man in 1945 regained their senses and voted him back.

American conservatives often lament the perceived liberal bias of the Public Broadcasting System in the United States. But no PBS station would ever run a program about an American leader as unbalanced and inaccurate as this. The future response to critics of PBS may be, “It could be worse—look at the BBC.”

Lee Pollock is Executive Director of The Churchill Centre.
In the winter of 1940–41, shortly after the British had sunk the French fleet off Mers-el-Kebir, the newly exiled leader of the Free French, Charles de Gaulle, was a luncheon guest at Downing Street. When the subject arose of how to prevent the remaining French fleet from falling into German hands, Clementine Churchill said she hoped it would support the British effort to defeat the Nazis, whereupon de Gaulle replied that it would give the French more satisfaction to turn their guns on the British. Clementine was outraged and said so, and although Winston tried, diplomatically, to smooth over the outburst, she was not placated.

“Winston, it’s not that at all,” she continued in her impeccable French. “There are certain things that a woman can say to a man which a man cannot say and I am saying them to you, General de Gaulle.” The Frenchman apologised and the following day sent his hostess a large bouquet of flowers. This exchange, well into the latter half of their marriage, is a powerful example of Clementine’s earnest intelligence and noble sentiment, qualities which earned her Winston’s respect in the first place, even though her liberal political views, especially on women’s suffrage, were often at odds with her husband’s. Once she had overcome (more or less) the shyness and insecurity of her early years, she was the one person able to reprimand Winston—and she was not afraid to do so forcefully on occasion, as well as offering him the help, advice, support, and love that he craved. He was constantly demanding all of those, and she gave of herself unstintingly. Sex, although “a serious and delightful occupation” (as Winston told his mother-in-law on their honeymoon), does not appear to have been a driving force for either of them, although they quickly produced five children.

Sonia Purnell has written a highly readable, well researched, and insightful biography of a beautiful woman born into a rackety aristocratic family with no money, who never knew her own father and was terrified of the man she thought was her father. She suffered tragedy and hardship at a young age but quickly developed resilience, sympathy for those less fortunate, and an ability to earn her own living (rare for a girl of her class then), as well as a life-long terror of running out of money. When she married Winston in 1908, he was already a well-known politician, ten years older than she, who, she was soon to discover, was constantly overspending. In addition, he suffered bouts of depression, and for much of their married life experienced the pain of political isolation and unpopularity.

In painting a portrait of a highly unusual marriage, where the stresses and tensions threatened to snap on several occasions, Purnell excels. She does not shy away from revealing instances when both plates and tantrums were thrown and details several explosive occasions that ended with Winston apologising to Clemmie (the name reserved only for intimates), especially if he overstepped the mark in ordering her about. “I should like you to make the seeing of my friends a regular business,” he once told her. At other times he avoided making grave errors of judgement in his behaviour, thanks to her advice.

In 1943, when Winston was away in Carthage, seriously ill with pneumonia and a fibrillating heart, an exhausted Clementine agreed to fly out to see him by travelling in an unheated Liberator bomber during a foggy night in January. The visit had a most extraordinary effect on the sixty-nine-year-old patient. With Clementine on hand to provide the kind of food he liked, Winston was soon able to work, directing operations from his bed. As Mary, fortifying her mother, told her, “despite all his difficulties—his overbearing—exhausting temperament—he does love you and needs you so much.”

Sometimes living with Winston was just too difficult, and, sporadically, Clementine took herself away for weeks at a time. In 1935 a recuperative cruise resulted in a love affair, probably unconsummated, with a handsome art expert called Terence Philip, an episode that threatened the family equilibrium. Purnell shows, by pointing out how different was the marriage of US President Franklin Roosevelt (who often ignored his wife Eleanor, while a former lover—Lucy Mercer—was regularly on hand), that in spite of his often exasperating egotism, Winston was transparently honest in his love for Clementine. “I tell Clemmie everything,” he proudly boasted to Roosevelt.

Like any good biographer, Purnell is properly partisan in her responsibility to her subject, promoting her, bringing her out from the shadows and seeing events from her subject’s viewpoint. As the biographer of her mother-in-law, Jennie Churchill, however, I feel bound to say this could be at Jennie’s expense, in particular fol-
The catastrophe at Gallipoli when, although Clementine was quietly supportive, it was Jennie who, reacting with fury on her son’s behalf, motored down to see him in the country to bolster his self-belief and introduced him to influential journalists to explain his version of events. The two women were very different, and although Clementine came to admire Jennie’s courage in adversity, in the early years she found her extravagant mother-in-law interfering and overbearing.

This is an immensely enjoyable and deeply researched account of a woman who failed dismally as a mother (other than with her last-born child Mary) but who succeeded spectacularly with her main project in life, nurturing Winston in order that he became the great wartime leader both she and Jennie (who died long before in 1921) knew he could be.

Once, when Winston’s doctor Lord Moran shared with Clementine the seriousness of his patient’s heart condition, exacerbated by the long-distance flying necessary for him during the War, she decided not to share these worries with Winston, so that he was able to continue putting country above personal safety. Keeping silent was, Purnell argues, Clementine’s most decisive and courageous action of the war.


Churchill Through Many Lenses


Review by Erica L. Chenoweth

Thousands of words have been spilt in “the world of paper and ink” about Winston Churchill, but a good photograph may be worth as much as many of them. The photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson laments in The Mind’s Eye, “we cannot develop and print a memory” (27). So when, in England, Alison Carlson searched in vain for a souvenir book that married images of the great man with his words, she felt compelled to act.

To prevent the anguish of having her vision mangled by an overly intrusive publisher, Carlson sought out Inkshares, Inc., an independent, crowd-funded startup company in her home town of San Francisco. The result is The Man Within: Winston Churchill—An Intimate Portrait, a compelling showcase of 140 lesser-known black-and-white photographs of the great man across all phases of his life. It has been designated as the official commemorative book of The Churchill Centre on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, and a percentage of royalties from its purchase goes to the Centre and other Churchill organizations.

As Churchill grumbled in 1911, “It is the misfortune of a good many Members to encounter in our daily walks an increasing number of persons armed with cameras to take pictures for the illustrated Press which is so rapidly developing” (quoted in Langworth, Churchill by Himself, 540–41). Their persistence was Carlson’s gain as she trolled through collections of photographs, to include in her book while aiming to preserve, honor, and revivify his memory for many generations.

A professional photographer, Carlson selected revealing photographs with her trained eye which capture Churchill’s “kaleidoscopic” personality in thrilling, fleeting fractions of a second as he lived out his remarkable life. Nine sections divide the content thematically, from his early youth to his years as a soldier and statesman in war and peace, but presenting him also as husband, father, and passionate hobbyist when it came to polo, painting, and more.

The size and clarity of the photographs on the page succeed in impressing much about Churchill and his time for all readers. Of course one cannot understand history by studying only pictures, but, as Cartier-Bresson writes, a picture-story may confer a special understanding unattainable by text alone: “the camera is not the right instrument to provide the why and wherefore of things; it is, rather, designed to evoke, and in the best cases—in its own intuitive way—it asks questions and gives answers at the same time” (67).

Churchill’s writings never fail to nourish the thoughts of the reader, and it is a joy to track down sources of the quotations included by Carlson—which she rarely notes. They are drawn from some of his best books and speeches, family letters, personal conversations, and other sources.

Churchill’s words, despite the admission opposite the title page that their punctuation “may have been modernized to improve clarity,” retain their power to inspire and provoke thoughts that are most worthwhile. Errors and misquotations include misspelling “Soldier”
in the table of contents; misquoting Churchill’s tribute to his mother, who shone for him “like the Evening Star” (Venus), not “an evening Star” (7); and substituting “or” for “of” in Churchill’s account of his dream of entering Parliament at his father’s side (64).

These photographs preserve flashes of the personality of a great man. At a time when the study of greatness is too often undervalued, Carlson’s book makes an important contribution. It is not cumbersome, and one can enjoy it with or without the coffee table from which its genre takes its name. The beautiful presentation reminds us, as one of Churchill’s favorite Harrow songs did, “There were wonderful giants of old, you know, / There were wonderful giants of old….” With any luck, Carlson’s new book will help to humble and inspire the next generation of giants.

Erica L. Chenoweth is a fisheries biologist at the Gene Conservation Laboratory of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. She co-edited a new edition of Great Contemporaries (ISI Books, 2012) and serves as research assistant for several forthcoming editions of Churchill’s works.

A Spoiled Peace

Isaiah Friedman, British Miscalculations: The Rise of Muslim Nationalism, 1918–1925.


ISBN 978-1412847490

Review by Erica L. Chenoweth

With the centenary of the First World War and continued tumult in the Middle East, Isaiah Friedman’s British Miscalculations: The Rise of Muslim Nationalism, 1918–1925, is a timely read. Friedman, a professor emeritus at Israel’s Ben-Gurion University and author of two other books on the region, briskly but thoroughly covers these fateful years.

Friedman’s scholarship sharpens our picture of the dark, complex, and exciting times after the Great War. In his own account of these events, The Aftermath, Churchill wrote that “statesmen in crisis…have often to take fateful decisions without knowing a very large proportion of the essential facts.” With a cascade of memoranda, telegrams, letters, speeches, and other primary sources, Friedman shows how much was missing in the muddled handling of freshly-occupied regions by uncomprehending actors, both generals and statesmen.

Friedman focuses on Britain’s relations with the Ottoman Empire during and after the First World War, especially the new state of Turkey, but also touches on other predominantly Islamic regions, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Palestine, and Afghanistan. He argues that Britain and the Allies might have crafted a more friendly peace between themselves and the Middle East but for opportunities missed or mishandled.

The last chapter, a bit frazzled in presentation, suggests that peace between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was also possible for a time but bungled by the British. Instead, a “basic misconception of Arab sensibilities sparked a flame of religious / nationalist feeling that finally drove the European powers out of the Middle East” (17). When time was ripe for peaceful discussions between leaders of the region—when Churchill recognized that “every day’s delay in these loosely knit but inflammable communities was loaded with danger”—the Allies buried their heads in the soon-to-be stillborn Treaty of Sèvres, while “unfriendly elements loaded their rifles and made plans.” Britain failed to anticipate the shock to Muslims from dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and how quickly they would come to favor nationalist movements over administration by “infidel” Allied powers.

Friedman presents the facts with the blinding clarity of hindsight: his fourteen chapters recount misstep after misstep. Leaders of the Middle East, rebuffed or ignored in their attempts at renewed relations with Britain and the Allies, made secret deals and pacts with each other and with the Soviets, who eagerly insinuated themselves into the unstable region. The British government supported men unfit for senior positions, misunderstood the aims of Arab leaders, and ignored the best-informed and most insightful Britons, such as Churchill and “men on the spot” like Colonel Richard Henry Meinertzhagen.

Despite the diplomatic skill of Arab leaders, the British government fell into a grievous error: the “loosing of the Greek army into Asia Minor,” in Churchill’s words, which allowed “all the half raked-out fires of Pan-Turkism…to glow again.” Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Foreign Secretary George Curzon wanted to maintain a Greek foothold in Asia Minor. Friedman portrays them both as anti-Turkish backers of a new Hellenic empire, which they hoped would become a friendly, formidable power in the eastern Mediterranean. But the portraits of these men are incomplete; Churchill observed in Great Contemporaries, “you could hardly imagine two men so diverse as Curzon and Lloyd George.”

Friedman gives a more complete picture of Mustapha Kemal, the founder of modern Turkey, and...
the Emir Feisal, who was placed on the throne in Iraq. He casts Churchill as hero twice: as one of the few Cabinet members who gave thoughtful, though unheeded, advice on the region; and as the savior of British military forces in a chapter describing the tragic Mesopotamian campaign—which began in 1916, two years before the range of dates in the book’s subtitle. Friedman acknowledges Churchill’s position as War Minister starting in 1919 but fails to mention his move to the Colonial Office in 1921.

This book is suitable for a specialist or a diligent student. David Fromkin’s A Peace to End All Peace and Churchill’s own account provide needed ballast for the general reader. Each chapter of Friedman’s book has its own bibliography, but missing or weak transitions between chapters make them seem like separate articles instead of a book. Important characters and groups receive no introduction or feature Churchill in his usual role as statesman, but it also provides perspective on a man who played numerous roles throughout his life, including soldier, artist, author—and a man who loved his pets.

Winston Churchill at The Telegraph is less a scholarly endeavor than a celebration of his long-term partnership with one British newspaper. The book abounds with Churchillian insights and anecdotes and would make an excellent gift for a reader already familiar with Churchill and his influential, yet eclectic, life.

The often-entertaining selection of Churchill’s writing showcased in this new volume at times fills the reader with nostalgia for a bygone era. Who other than Churchill could write something so charming as the notion that polo—the sport of kings—is actually the great equalizer? He writes from India in 1898: “Polo has been the common ground of men and women, of races, of ages, of languages.”

Diplomats who were charmed by Churchill’s keen understanding of foreign affairs often lamented that his unheeded advice might have provided a better frame of understanding for the many facets of modern history’s most impressive character. Oddly, the most thorough chapter preface is not about Churchill’s statesmanship or writing, but rather about his fondness for his pets.

Dockter’s best editorial adroitness appears in the chapter “Churchill and Europe.” The selection of articles, especially those written by Churchill himself, reminds us of his enduring relevance in our own time, particularly now that the future of the European experiment is uncertain. The economic challenges posed by a single currency continue, and Britain itself faces a referendum that fundamentally questions whether Britons see themselves as Europeans. Churchill was an early champion of a pan-European governing body, united defense capabilities, and a single currency. He astutely recognized that “it may well be that everybody cannot join the club at once,” but “the beginning must be made. The nucleus must be formed in relation to the structure as a whole.” He describes this nucleus as a firm partnership between a reconciled France and Germany, a partnership that is currently questionable at best.

**The Statesman as Journalist**


**Review by Catherine Katz**
However, Churchill does not lay all the responsibility for future European peace and prosperity in the hands of Europeans themselves. Dockter’s inclusion of a 1946 article reminds us of Churchill’s early understanding of globalization and the knotted fortunes of Europe and the United States: “Isolationism is no more. The Atlantic Ocean is no longer a shield. The Pilgrim Fathers could now cross it in a day; but the troubles from which they fled and the tyrannies against which they revolted can follow just as quick.”

The realities of the globalized world, as Churchill and Dockter warn, unfortunately mean that localized problems very quickly cease to be local. Churchill’s words in the Telegraph in 1946 could have been written today: “The peace and safety of the United States of America requires the institution of a United States of Europe. It is better to write today: “The peace and safety of the United States of America requires the institution of a United States of Europe. It is better to face...the remote potential antag-

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ince stepping down as a Labour MP in 2001, Giles Radice has made something of a corner in group biographies of British politicians, with perceptive studies first of the rivalry of Roy Jenkins, Denis Healey, and Tony Crosland; then of the five leading figures of the 1945–51 Labour government (Attlee, Bevin, Morrison, Dalton, and Cripps) and of the three architects of New Labour (Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and Peter Mandelson). His latest covers some of the same ground by looking at seven pairs of rivals who set their differences aside to work constructively together in government. It is an attractive way of repackageing some familiar history, but the difficulty lies in finding an overarching theme to bind the case studies together.

Radice’s answer is that successful government usually depends on a partnership between an “initiator” and a “facilitator.” This works well enough with some of his pairings—with Harold Macmillan and R. A. Butler in the 1950s, or Margaret Thatcher and Willie Whitelaw in the 1980s—where the Prime Minister’s defeated rival genuinely accepted the role of loyal deputy. The experience of Blair and Brown can also be said to make this case, in that the Blair government was pretty successful so long as Brown accepted his subordinate role but began to fall apart as he became increasingly impatient to take over.

But Radice stretches the format a bit with his chapter on Ernest Bevin and Herbert Morrison, who could not stand each other and worked effectively together only because Attlee kept their areas of responsibility apart—Bevin as Foreign Secretary, Morrison minding the home front—under his own shrewdly unobtrusive chairmanship. And he busts it completely by pairing Harold Wilson and Ted Heath—political opponents and successive Prime Ministers of opposed parties, who never worked together at all. His rationale for linking them is that between them they were responsible for Britain’s membership in the European Community: Heath by leading the country into the Common Market in 1973 and Wilson by holding and winning a referendum to confirm that decision two years later. It may have taken both of them to achieve the result, but they certainly did not do it in partnership.

Neither does his first pairing, Churchill and Attlee, really fit the template. Britain’s war-winning coalition government was unquestionably an extraordinarily successful though unlikely combination, with the modest and self-effacing socialist serving as deputy to the rambunctious Tory warrior. But it worked largely for the same reason that Bevin and Morrison did: because they were operating almost entirely in separate spheres. Churchill conducted the military strategy and made the rousing speeches, while Attlee looked after the home front, kept the government machine running and
Perhaps the most impressive achievement of Michael Neiberg’s absorbing book is its description of what the Germans now call Stunde Null (“Zero Hour”). At the end of World War II, much of Germany was in ruins and in a state of social and political collapse, nowhere more so than in the eastern region, overrun by a Red Army that destroyed almost everything in its path and pursued a sanctioned campaign of rape. Much of what remained—from works of art to railroad rolling stock—was systematically looted as “war booty” by the Soviets, who claimed that their expropriations should not be counted against the reparations the Germans would have to pay. Berlin was a vast pile of rubble, but its most famous upscale suburb, Potsdam, had been largely bypassed. It was here that the Big Three leaders of the victorious Allies—Winston Churchill, Harry Truman, and Joseph Stalin—staged the final summit meeting of the global conflict and, however unwittingly, laid the basis for a nascent Cold War.

Mr. Neiberg, who holds the Henry L. Stimson Chair of History and Security Studies at the Army War College, attempts a rough analogy between the Potsdam meeting and the post-World War I Versailles conference, which had redrawn the map of Europe. It does not quite work. Versailles was a three-and-a-half month slog that produced a formal peace treaty and established an international organization, the League of Nations. In July 1945, the birth of a successor organization, the United Nations, was already moving along separately and satisfactorily. Most of the discussion at Potsdam was about matters already agreed upon at the Yalta conference—zones of military occupation, reparations, Soviet entry into the war against Japan. Why, one might wonder, could the details not be handled by a council of foreign ministers?

Part of the answer, no doubt, was simply the temptation to indulge in a victory lap on the enemy’s turf. Churchill, with an election in the offing, surely felt it most strongly. Stalin, loath to step outside the boundaries of the Soviet Union and determined always to remain within areas of Soviet control, was notably lacking in enthusiasm. Truman, still coping with his adjustment to the presidency upon Roosevelt’s death, 12 April 1945, was reluctant. But the wartime summit meetings at Casablanca, Teheran, and Yalta, along with face-to-face meetings between Churchill and Stalin, had compromised the authority of foreign ministers. The leaders at the top needed to take the measure of each other.

Potsdam met a second need. With victory approaching, the Grand Alliance was beginning to fray. Truman was a largely unknown quantity to both Churchill and Stalin. Taking pledges to establish independent democracies in Eastern Europe seriously, he had already clashed with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov. In the final weeks of the war, Churchill had privately urged the president to keep the US military offensive moving east of the Elbe into what was to be the Soviet occupation zone. Believing that the obligation to observe prior agreements was a two-way street, Truman had refused to do so.

What did the conference itself achieve? For the most part, it simply

In addition to major biographies of Edward Heath, Margaret Thatcher, and Roy Jenkins, John Campbell has written Pistols at Dawn: Two Hundred Years of Political Rivalry, from Pitt and Fox to Blair and Brown, published in 2009 by Jonathan Cape.
ratified facts on the ground and reaffirmed understandings taken at Yalta. The borders of Poland would be redrawn in a way that would allow the Soviet Union to retain the Polish territory it had acquired via the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, and Poland would be compensated with German land to a line established by the Oder and Neisse rivers. (The author admits a rough justice here; much of the area Poland lost was primarily Ukrainian in population, seized by the aggressively expansionist new nation after World War I.) The USSR would proceed in its effort, already well along, to establish a government dependent on Moscow in the new Poland. Zones of military occupation agreed upon in 1944 would be observed, the US and UK carving from their own zones areas of French control. The lack of agreement on reparations led to an understanding that each occupying power would extract reparations from its own zone. The effect, not understood at the time, would be to partition Germany into distinct western and eastern states.

Truman was most concerned with achieving a reaffirmation of the Soviet pledge, made at Yalta, to enter the continuing war against Japan in return for territory lost in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–05 and effective dominance of Manchuria. (He had received word of the successful test of the atomic bomb in the New Mexico desert, knew that it was a weapon of unprecedented impact, but probably did not grasp its full potential. When he told Stalin that the United States had just tested “a new bomb of extraordinarily destructive power,” the Soviet leader, who knew about the atomic project from his spy network, simply responded that the US should make good use of it. Privately, he may have seen it as an attempt at intimidation.) The USSR, formally still neutral, joined in a “Potsdam Declaration” that threatened “prompt and utter destruction” if Japan did not surrender. It would in the closing days of the war overrun Manchuria and claim its share of the spoils in East Asia.

The three delegations at Potsdam all left satisfied with the results and believing they had established the conditions for a relatively amiable period of stability in world politics. The biggest individual loser was Churchill, defeated in the British election and succeeded in the closing days of the conference by Clement Attlee, who, Neiberg reminds us, was more than Churchill’s caricature of him as a man who “has much to be modest about.” Still, he lacked Churchill’s stature and experience. It did not take a lot of foresight to see that Britain was a declining power that would be unable to maintain its empire, that the Soviet Union was emerging as a major global force, and that Harry Truman’s United States was the only possible counterweight. Potsdam set the stage for a new world of bipolar conflict.

Les Deux Tours


Review by Antoine Capet

There are many books of the Churchill and... variety, but on this topic Will Morrisey’s offering has only one important predecessor, François Kersaudy’s “old” Churchill and de Gaulle. Kersaudy’s monograph set very high standards, and Morrisey, Professor of Politics at Hillsdale College, therefore faced a difficult task.

Morrisey’s angle of attack is spelled out in his subtitle, The Geopolitics of Liberty. The introduction explains what he means by this—not an easy task, since it leads him into complex discussions of political philosophy, notably on the nature of the State: a guarantor or an enemy of liberty? For him, though—as for his two protagonists—there is no doubt: there can be no liberty without a strong State. He puts it vividly, “if your state fails, you won’t have Utopia but Afghanistan” (2). Having established that Churchill and de Gaulle were equally convinced of this, Morrisey justifies his use of “geopolitics” by pointing out the constraints which geography had always imposed on their countries.

Thus we have not simply another account of the personal relations between the two war leaders—though of course the book repeatedly alludes to them—but a discussion of how Churchill and de Gaulle did their best to further the political ideals in which they believed in the face of hostile forces, both geopolitical adversaries and unconvinced fellow-citizens and allies.

We have ten chapters in five complementary pairs: 1) The Greatness of Great Britain; 2) The Grandeur of France; 3) The Geopolitics of Great Britain; 4) ...of France; 5) How Churchill Understood the Geopolitics of the First World War; 6) ...de Gaulle...; 7) How Churchill Understood the
Geopolitics of the Second World War
8) ...de Gaulle...; 9) How Churchill Understood the Geopolitics of the Cold War; 10) ...de Gaulle...; with a conclusion, The Geopolitics of Liberty.

“The Greatness of Great Britain” is largely devoted to the message that Churchill wanted to convey to his fellow-citizens in A History of the English-Speaking Peoples: that of a slow, but relentless march forward towards “a genuinely civilized or political society” (33). Likewise, “The Grandeur of France” rests almost entirely on an examination of de Gaulle’s ideas in three pre-war publications: La France et son Armée, Vers l’Armée de métier, and Le fil de l’épée. Towards the end of the chapter, we have the first intersection between the thought of the two leaders: “Politically, both statesmen insist on political union as the indispensable foundation of greatness.”

In “The Geopolitics of Great Britain,” Morrisey cites Churchill’s Marlborough as also revealing its author’s conception of Britain’s place in the world. The defeat of Louis XIV cleared the way for the building of a British Empire. But Churchill always kept his options open: “If it were lost, Churchill had two strategic moves to make: the return to North America, not as emperor but as ally; the turn to Europe, not as conqueror or even necessarily as liberator but as federator” (92). In contrast, “The Geopolitics of France” continues to rely on the same three books by de Gaulle, who questions the “utility” of imperial conquest, since “the French heartland remains vulnerable, with or without empire” (119). For the author, the parallel with Churchill’s “flexibility” is provided by de Gaulle’s “rapprochement with West Germany” (119).

The pattern is established: Morrisey examines the position and evolution of Churchill and de Gaulle in the light of their writings and later action. Thus, “How Churchill Understood the Geopolitics of the First World War” is largely an examination of what Churchill has to say in The World Crisis, while the companion de Gaulle chapter draws heavily on La discorde chez l’ennemi. This interesting chapter ends on a far-reaching comparison between Churchill “the great parliamentarian who associated political authority first of all with speaking” and de Gaulle, who “located authority in the silence of the commander” (175)—a thesis that only holds good until 18 June 1940, when it can be argued that de Gaulle gradually established his “political authority first of all [by] speaking.”

Naturally, the Second World War chapters are based on Memoirs of the Second World War and Mémoires de guerre. The Churchill chapter understandably gives pride of place to the prime minister’s cultivation of the Special Relationship with President Roosevelt, “our best friend” (211). Conversely, the de Gaulle chapter, while mentioning that “Roosevelt did not understand de Gaulle and could extend him no sympathy” (248), dwells on the long-term calculations made by de Gaulle, first on how to maintain the alliance with Britain in spite of all the frequent disputes with Churchill (“De Gaulle would have preferred a closer alliance with the British,” 246), then how to ensure the Free French presence at the Liberation, and above all how to restore France’s position as a Great Power after the war. Morrisey notes that “de Gaulle’s absence from Yalta allowed him, and through him France, to condemn the settlement without sharing any responsibility for it” (251).

The sharing of the spoils of the vanquished at Yalta, and later at Potsdam, did not of course lead to a stable settlement of the war, but to a new form of war, the Cold War, which constitutes the object of the last two chapters. Churchill is described as having lost all his hopes—or illusory expectations—when he retired. De Gaulle never entertained any illusions that the power struggle between human groups could disappear in the predictable future. All his policy was dictated by what he saw as realistically possible, for France, for the former French Empire (in the process of liquidation), for Western Europe (in the process of political consolidation), and for the precarious peace of the world in the nuclear age. His years in power from 1958 are presented in a very favourable light.

My only negative comment—probably attributable to the publisher rather than the author—is the awkward system of references. The copious number of endnotes (a good thing in itself) makes constant manipulation tedious, and the abbreviations are not consistent: e.g., for The Hinge of Fate, we have now HOF, now THF (387)—even worse, TGS repeatedly appears on pp. 384 ff. and is not listed in the bibliography: could it be a misprint for TGA, The Grand Alliance? Yet the proofreading must have been meticulous, since I could not find a single mistake in the treacherous French accents and accents.

So this very attractive book is warmly recommended. Churchill and de Gaulle does not really reveal any new “facts.” Its value lies in the superbly informed interpretation of these “facts,” which constantly stimulates the reader’s quest for a balanced assessment of the real role at the time (and later legacy) of the two leaders’ action.

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**Mon Dieu!**

Frédéric Fenery, « Tu seras un raté, mon fils! Churchill et son père. 

**Review by Antoine Capet**

This strange book, whose title could be translated as “You Will Be a Failure, My Son!” Churchill and His Father, can be viewed from at least three angles: that of the French general public for whom it seems to be primarily intended,
What then of the Freudian approach? Readers will form different opinions depending on their adherence or otherwise to Freud's controversial theories about “killing the father” and so on. Throughout the book, Lord Randolph appears as the villain with no redeeming features—he in fact is presented as the real failure: the flaws in his character ruined his political career. Lord Randolph’s inability to relate to his son (as in most books on the subject, Jack is forgotten) put an unbearable strain on young Winston’s perception of the adult world, his only ally in that world being Mrs. Everest.

Why then should the mature Churchill always want to take his father’s supposed achievements (for Ferney, of course, there were none) as the unattainable benchmark? This question constantly recurs in the subtext of the discussion. Nobody will ever know, naturally, and this exercise in intellectual speculation, far from opening new perspectives (all the arguments will be familiar to Finest Hour readers), becomes tedious, in spite of the author’s sometimes exciting prose (though the repetition of English interjections mars it). Ferney naturally makes much of Churchill’s “black dog” (giving a useful reference to an interesting on-line article by Paul Foley, “Black Dog’ as a metaphor for depression”—easily found with Google); in fact, this metaphorical beast provides the title of his first chapter. Here again, the reader’s attitude to psychology and the validity of its conclusions will dictate the degree of enjoyment or scepticism derived from Ferney’s arguments.

This is a strange book also in that it is deliberately unbalanced: when we reach page 217, we have only reached the end of the First World War. We then jump to July 1945, at Potsdam, with the chapter ending on Churchill’s return to office in October 1951. The two final chapters are devoted to his retirement, with Chapter 16 comprising only a half-page. All in all, then, the period from 1918 to 1965—when Churchill demonstrably did not end as a failure—only occupies thirty-five pages.

Only those who must have everything published on Churchill should acquire the book, I am sorry to say.

Antoine Capet is Professor Emeritus of British Studies at the University of Rouen.

Cooking up History


Review by Barbara Langworth

It is 14 October 1940. London is being attacked. Churchill is dining with friends at 10 Downing Street. When a bomb hits Horse Guards Parade, Churchill has a “providential impulse.” He goes to the kitchen and prevails upon the cook, Mrs. Landemare, and the other servants to go to a shelter. He returns to the table only to hear a crash and realizes the house has been struck. Returning to the kitchen with his detective, they find deadly fragments of a large plate-glass window that has been blown to bits in a debris-strewed room.

With this dramatic scene Phil Reed, director of the Churchill War Rooms, introduces us to Georgina Landemare, theChurchills’ indomitable cook. Raised in Tring, Hertfordshire, she had been a kitchen maid in manor houses before marrying the well-known French chef Paul Landemare. From him she learned the fine art of cooking and after his death in 1932 became a much-desired cook for banquets and parties at homes of the Good and the Great. Hired at Chartwell for weekend house parties, she consistently impressed Clementine Churchill and the rest of the family with her delicious food and elegant presentations.
Mr. Reed’s introduction provides a concise review of Mrs. Landemare’s years with the Churchill family from the onset of war in 1939 until she retired in 1953 at the age of seventy. Five years later, Clementine Churchill prevailed upon her to write a cookery book. Recipes from No. 10 was published in 1958, containing “some 360 recipes...from pot-au-feu to a wedding cake,” as the jacket blurb stated. It sold very well but has long been out of print and can command a hefty price in the old book market.

The Imperial War Museum’s little volume has come to the rescue.

A tremendous amount of interest in things Churchill was generated by the fiftieth anniversary of Sir Winston’s death in 2015, and many commemorations involved dining as Churchill did. What better reference book could there be than his cook’s own recipes?

Churchill’s Cookbook is not a reprint but an abridged version of the original with about 100 fewer recipes. It also replaces the charming sketches by Selma Nankivell with more mundane illustrations (the stick of butter illustrating the chapter on “Biscuits” is distinctly American). Good additions are the interesting facsimiles of Mrs. Landemare’s handwritten recipe slips that line the endpapers, and a helpful conversion chart.

But beware! You are told to add many unfamiliar ingredients: live lobster spawn, William pears, oiled butter, blade of mace, ratafia biscuits, “two sets of brains,” juice from “undercooked ham.” While knowledgeable English cooks may have no trouble with these, they will be unfamiliar to others. American terminology can be quite different, for example: rasher (slice) of bacon, treacle (molasses), mixed (prepared) mustard, chicory (endive), rocket (arugula). Mrs. Landemare’s sugars need their own dictionary. Then there are her utensils: basin (bowl) and mincer (grinder), to name two. Would-be Landemarians may also puzzle over her oven temperatures, from “very slow” (250–300° F.) to “very hot” (450°+). Thankfully, with a little help from Google, you can decipher almost anything—even “flageolets” (the first recipe in the book).

Mrs. Landemare was praised for her simple but elegant presentations. I have never been able to discover contemporary photographs, so it is up to each cook’s imagination to arrange a dish worthy of Sir Winston.

Bon appetit! 🥰

Mrs. Langworth published selections from the original edition of Recipes from No. 10, edited and annotated for the modern kitchen with the help of Lady Soames, in Finest Hour 95–115.

Medaillons de Veau Paprika

Neck of veal; oiled butter; paprika pepper; 2 lb spinach; 2 tablespoons thick Béchamel sauce; 1 egg yolk; seasoning; few blanched leaves of spinach.

Cook the spinach in the normal way, but keep back a few large leaves, which should be blanched only. Pass the spinach through a coarse sieve, mix with a little thick Béchamel sauce, egg yolk, and seasoning. Place a tablespoon of this mixture into each blanched spinach leaf. Grease a fireproof dish well with butter and place in these subrics of spinach. Put the dish in the oven and cook slowly for 10 minutes under cover, to prevent hardening of leaves.

Remove the bones from the neck of the veal, and cut the meat into medium slices. Dip each slice in oiled butter, sprinkle well with paprika and fry them lightly in butter.

Arrange the veal on a dish with the subrics of spinach, and pour over a sauce made from cream mixed with juices in which the veal has been cooked.

Navets au Beurre

Turnips; butter; cream; black pepper.

Peel and shape some turnips in large olives. Cook in boiling, salted water for five minutes. Take up and put into another saucepan with melted butter, a little cream, and black pepper.

Delicious Cake

From Mrs. Landemare’s cookbook, we offer you three simple recipes to complement your own Churchillian meal. Feel free to send us photos of your results and we will post them on our social media platforms. You can reach us at: info@winstonchurchill.org
Defending Lawrence

While researching a forthcoming volume of correspondence, Jeremy Wilson, the authorized biographer of Lawrence of Arabia, was able to document the following story.

In 1954 Sir Basil Blackwell (the Oxford bookseller and publisher, 1889–1984) published The Home Letters of T. E. Lawrence and His Brothers. The project was the idea of Lawrence’s elder brother Bob and his mother, who wished to include as an introduction Churchill’s 1936 speech at the unveiling of the T. E. Lawrence memorial at the City of Oxford High School for Boys.

When I met Sir Basil, in about 1969, he gave me a copy of the book and told me about his negotiations for permission to include Churchill’s speech. Churchill was again Prime Minister at the time, and Blackwell wrote asking not just for permission to reprint the speech, but also if possible for some kind of prefatory note.

On 21 February 1954, Churchill’s secretary, Jane Portal, wrote to Blackwell agreeing to use of the speech. She added “With regard to the paragraph you suggest ‘introducing’ the tribute; it would be most helpful if you could send a draft of what you would think suitable, with what Sir Winston said on that occasion and he can then alter it if necessary and also sign it.”

Blackwell was surprised, but did his best in a brief note to mimic Churchill’s oratory style. He sent the requested draft with a covering letter to Miss Portal on 23 February. Shortly afterwards, he received back what he found to be almost exactly his draft, typed out on Downing Street notepaper and signed by the Prime Minister. The only difference between Blackwell’s draft and the version signed by Churchill and printed in The Home Letters is that WSC omitted a seven-word adaptation of a Shakespeare quote that Blackwell had put at the end.

Blackwell printed the letter in facsimile, leaving readers (except Blackwell!) in no doubt about its authenticity. Later, Blackwell realised that Churchill had, at the time, been struggling to keep abreast of his tasks as Prime Minister—but that the British public were unaware of this.

I found copies of the exchange between Blackwell and Portal while researching the Lionel Curtis papers in the Bodleian Library and also came across correspondence relating to this story. Of the original speech, Curtis wrote to Churchill on 21 February 1952: “I remember that as we drove down to the school you told me you had never before taken so much pains preparing a speech.”

There was a special reason for requesting the prefatory note, since there was a forthcoming attack on Lawrence by Richard Aldington (Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry). Blackwell felt that if Churchill added a note introducing his 1936 speech in which he stated that his view of Lawrence was unchanged, it would help preserve his friend’s reputation.

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The Churchill Centre has formed a partnership with the George Washington University, Washington, DC, to establish the National Churchill Library and Center, which will be housed on the first floor of the Estelle and Melvin Gelman Library. This will be the first major research facility in the nation’s capital dedicated to the study of Sir Winston Churchill.

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

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

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

For more information complete details and a video describing the project, go to: library.gwu.edu/ChurchillCenter