Great Contemporaries

Franklin D. Roosevelt • Eleanor Roosevelt • Clementine Churchill
Dwight D. Eisenhower • Anthony Eden • Aneurin Bevan • John Wayne

Centenary of Jutland and the Somme | The Pentagon Bust

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On the Cover

British Chief of Defence Staff Sir Nicholas Houghton admires new bust of Sir Winston Churchill in the Pentagon. Story on page 27
FROM THE EDITOR

Great Contemporaries

Churchill's collection of essays Great Contemporaries remains one of his most enduringly popular books. New editions continue to be produced, and this year's International Churchill Conference in Washington, D.C. (see back cover for details) will have as its theme “Churchill: Friends and Contemporaries.” Accordingly, for this issue we invited leading scholars to contribute fresh looks at major personalities in Churchill's era.

Undoubtedly Churchill’s most important contemporary was President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Alonzo Hamby surveys the partnership between “Democracy’s Champions.” Sonia Purnell looks at the corresponding relationship between Clementine Churchill and Eleanor Roosevelt and concludes it was more important than has been understood. Churchill’s other key American partner in the Second World War was Dwight D. Eisenhower, as Lewis Lehrman reminds us.

Two of Churchill’s most important contemporaries in the 1940s and 1950s were very different characters—and on opposite sides. D. R. Thorpe examines the trials and tribulations of Churchill's long-suffering but loyal heir apparent Anthony Eden. And although Aneurin Bevan is best remembered today as the founder of Britain’s National Health Service, John Campbell explains that the finest hour of Churchill’s bête-noir also came during the war.

Not all of Churchill’s great contemporaries were people that he knew or even met. In our autumn issue we looked at Anne Frank’s admiration for Churchill. Another fan was the biggest movie star of the century. Aisssa Wayne tells us how her father, John Wayne, considered Churchill to be one of his heroes.

We continue to follow the centenary of the events of the First World War. This spring and summer mark the hundredth anniversaries of two of the largest British operations of the Great War, one on sea and one on land. Churchill was involved in neither but wrote about both in his mammoth history The World Crisis. We asked two military historians to evaluate how he did. Stephen McLaughlin looks at Jutland, and Robin Prior examines the Somme.

And the books keep coming. Catherine Katz reports on the rising phenomenon of books published exclusively in electronic format and finds both strengths and weaknesses. Print still endures, however, and we have reviews of a dozen new books to prove it. Chief among these is Churchill's Trial by Larry Arnn, the President of Hillsdale College. Finally, Robert Courts reviews the newest dramatization of Churchill on film and discovers “hope is what makes the difference.”
Dervish Drawings
FOLSOM, CA—I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the latest issue of *Finest Hour*. I was very struck by Angus McNeill’s period artwork on the cover of a Dervish spearman. I loved it as well as seeing more inside. Once I receive a copy, I read it from cover to cover and enjoy every minute. I learned two new things: that Leo Amery also was a correspondent during the Boer War and that WSC went back to Cuba in 1946. I also enjoy the *Chartwell Bulletin*, which now includes the Churchill Quiz.
—Beth Krzywicki

“Books in All Their Variety”
MONT-SAINT-AIGNAN, FRANCE—Thank you for the increasingly comprehensive coverage of new Churchill books. I have just gone through those in *FH* 171 and found great pleasure and interest reading them. How informative to read reviews of biographies of Churchill’s colleagues!
—Antoine Capet

Churchill in Schools
LONG ISLAND, NY—I teach global studies at Longwood High School in Middle Island. I really, really like Churchill. I share my obsession with my students as I teach about his speeches, decisions, and career. He is the epitome of how one person can set in motion a chain of events for good in the face of very evil men and very bad odds. He made sure that Britain had its finest hour during its darkest time.

Thank you, too, for the lessons, video clips, articles, and speech excerpts that are readily available on the The Churchill Centre’s website. I have used many of them with my high school students.
—Jeanne Knudsen

The Churchill Archives Online published by Bloomsbury Press is made free to schools around the world thanks to a generous donation by The Churchill Centre’s Chairman

Laurence Geller CBE
Their first meeting was not promising. In the summer of 1918, fifteen months after the United States had entered the First World War, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the American Assistant Secretary of the Navy, crossed the Atlantic to undertake an inspection tour of US naval bases and Marine combat in Europe. His first stop was London. On the evening of 29 July, he was one of the guests at a formal dinner in honor of the British war ministers. It was there that he had his first personal encounter with Winston Churchill.

Exactly what transpired is unclear. One has an impression of two big egos competing for attention. Churchill quickly forgot the event. Roosevelt nursed his annoyance. Twenty-one years later, he told Joseph P. Kennedy that Churchill had “acted like a stinker” toward him.1

Their contacts over those years were few and perfunctory. Most notably, Churchill gave President Roosevelt a copy of his multi-volume biography of the first Duke of Marlborough. Roosevelt thanked him and seems never to have gotten around to reading it. Surely, however, the president sympathized with Churchill’s opposition to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s policy of appeasing Nazi Germany. In September 1939, a few days after the Second World War broke out in Europe, Roosevelt sent messages to Chamberlain and Churchill, who was back in the government as First Lord of the Admiralty, inviting them to stay in touch on matters of mutual concern. Chamberlain did not respond. Churchill, who asked for and received permission from the Cabinet, did. Neither man could have imagined that an initial brief exchange was the first of nearly 2,000 communications that would pass between them over the next five and a half years. Nor could they have foreseen the way in which an alliance of necessity would develop into a fruitful but ambiguous personal relationship.2

Alliance Emerging

An indication of the developing alliance came in mid-1940 after Churchill had replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister. Roosevelt remarked to a Cabinet meeting that “he supposed Churchill was the best man England had even if he was drunk half of his time.”3 The new British leader pressed hard for major military assistance in the form of a transfer of American destroyers to the British navy. That September he and Roosevelt consummated the “destroyer deal” which gave the British fifty modernized, but old, destroyers in return for ninety-nine-year leases on eight British military bases in the Western hemisphere.

Sensational and controversial at the time, the destroyer deal was actually a symbolic band-aid. The more urgent crisis had to wait until Roosevelt won election to a third term that November. Britain was running out of dollars to pay for American supplies. On 8 December 1940, Churchill formally told the president: “The moment approaches when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies.” The news was anticipated. Roosevelt quickly responded with a program to “eliminate… the silly foolish old dollar sign” by lending or leasing military supplies to Britain.4

The destroyer deal and Lend-Lease were critical in keeping Britain afloat through 1941. That August, Roosevelt and Churchill staged a personal meeting on warships just off Argentia, Newfoundland. The most memorable public side of the meeting was Churchill’s idea—a religious service held on the deck of the British warship Prince of Wales. Newsreels showed FDR and the Prime Minister leading American and British sailors in the great hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers.” It left an

By Alonzo L. Hamby

Democracy’s Champions: Churchill and Roosevelt

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impression of warriors joined in a crusade against the forces of evil.5

The two leaders proclaimed a joint declaration of common liberal principles that a British newspaper dubbed “the Atlantic Charter.” It rejected territorial aggrandizement, affirmed national self-determination, and promised “improved labor standards, economic advancement, and social security.” Churchill had his doubts about it. Roosevelt knew that the American public needed grand objectives to justify the war toward which he was guiding America.

The main purpose of the rendezvous was to bring the two leaders together on a personal basis. In this it was a grand success. Privately writing to his cousin Daisy Suckley, Roosevelt wrote of Churchill: “He is a tremendously vital person….I like him.”6 The personal rapport obscured important differences of opinion about the nature and objectives of the war. Churchill wanted the preservation of an old order in which the sun never set on Britain’s vast and (as he saw it) benevolent empire. Roosevelt envisioned a world liberated from (as he saw it) exploitative European imperialism and responsive to American influence.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that December brought the United States fully and openly into the war. It also brought Churchill to the United States, eager to formalize the relationship that had been developed and hoping to seize control of the conflict’s grand strategy. Traveling across the Atlantic, he hoped to steer direction of the war. He wrote strategy papers that placed a priority on clearing the Atlantic and the Mediterranean (Britain’s lifeline to Suez and its South Asian empire), called for a delaying action against Japan in the Pacific while building an enhanced naval capability there, and projected 1943 as the target year for an invasion of the European continent.

By and large, American planners agreed with Churchill’s priorities but hoped unrealistically for an invasion of the continent in 1942. The two nations agreed to a unified military command structure that would be based in Washington. They also pulled together an alliance of twenty-six countries actively at war with Germany or Japan, several governments-in-exile, and a number of Caribbean republics. On 1 January 1942, the alliance, calling itself the United Nations, issued a declaration reaffirming the principles of the Atlantic Charter.

Churchill spent three weeks in the United States. At a personal level, he and Roosevelt liked each other, but Roosevelt remained convinced that the British Empire was an exploitative enterprise that victimized subjugated peoples. On 13 January 1942, the president hazed him at a small White House dinner party. One of the guests, the noted liberal author Louis Adamic, recalled the president’s words a few years later: “You know my friend over there doesn’t understand how most of our people feel about Britain and her role in the life of other peoples…. [W]e’re opposed to imperialism—we can’t stomach it…. ” Churchill took it all, jaw clinched, silent, and impassive.7

The next day, as Churchill departed for England, the president said “Trust me to the bitter end.”8 Whatever their differences, he continued to be a generous and supportive ally. The professional military relationship between America and Britain would function smoothly for the duration of the war. The personal respect and affection between their leaders would ebb and flow but would never be in danger of collapse.

Alliance Forged

Churchill returned to America in June 1942, to settle a squabble between American and British military leaders over whether to attempt an invasion of Europe in 1942 or stage a peripheral attack in North Africa. The conferences that followed in Washington won Roosevelt over. He settled on North Africa and firmly brought his military chiefs into line.
Roosevelt and Churchill met again two months after the American invasion of North Africa in January 1943, at Casablanca. With German submarines still infesting the Atlantic, both men flew to their destination—Churchill directly from England, Roosevelt far more circuitously to Brazil, then across the Atlantic to the British colony of Gambia before making a hop to his final destination. He saw nothing of Gambia beyond a car ride through its capital, Bathurst, but someone had done research for him. He wrote to a friend that Bathurst was a “hellhole.” He told his son Elliott that its native people were treated worse than livestock. In the postwar world, he continued, a new international organization would force the Europeans to treat their colonial subjects decently and lay the groundwork for their eventual independence. In Churchill’s presence, he told the sultan of Morocco to beware of European imperialists. As before, Churchill refused to take the bait. 

At the end of the conference, Roosevelt, without consulting his partner in advance, told the press that the Allies were committed to a policy of “unconditional surrender.” Then, at Churchill’s instigation they drove to Marrakesh, had a pleasant dinner, and enjoyed a view of the Atlas Mountains. Early the next morning, as the president took his leave, the prime minister, roused from his sleep, donned a heavy robe emblazoned with a large dragon, and saw his friend off at the airport.

The tide of the war in North Africa was turning. A British offensive from El Alamein in the east and a three-pronged American invasion from the west would push Axis armies off the continent by early May. A British-American invasion of Italy would follow in July. Churchill and Roosevelt met again that August in Quebec to discuss the progress of the war. By then, they also were sparring a bit over Roosevelt’s interest in developing a close relationship with Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Roosevelt denied (falsely) that he had attempted to arrange a private meeting with the Russian leader.

The Soviet victory at Stalingrad had been followed by a steady Red Army push westward. By late fall, Churchill and Roosevelt needed to settle grand strategy for the war against Germany in the west and to coordinate with Stalin on the fight in the east. Conferences at Cairo and Teheran dealt with both imperatives.

The meetings at Cairo, before and after Teheran, largely confirmed Churchill’s immediate objective of consolidating the Allied grip on the Mediterranean. The major accomplishment of the conference was agreement that American and British forces would stage an invasion of Northern Europe in the spring of 1944.

Churchill, long a vocal foe of Bolshevism, already had met Stalin personally, taken his measure, and forged a wary alliance with him. Roosevelt, much more friendly in his attitude toward the Soviet Union, had pursued a lengthy correspondence with Stalin and wanted to be the linchpin in a relationship with both the Old Tory and the Old Bolshevik. At Teheran in November 1943, he met privately with Stalin and seized on opportunities to needle Churchill.

Alliance in Decline

After Teheran, the Allied war effort moved vigorously and successfully. The Red Army pushed the Germans back in the east and the US-British invasion of Normandy in June 1944 initiated an Allied offensive in the west. That October, Churchill, still strongly concerned with British hegemony in the Mediterranean, was back in Moscow negotiating a sphere-of-influence agreement with the Russians. It essentially conceded Soviet control of most of the region. Two exceptions were Yugoslavia, in which the two nations would exercise equal influence, and Greece, which Churchill deemed vital to British dominance in the
United States for the funeral. On 17 April he delivered a tribute in the House of Commons: “In Franklin Roosevelt there died the greatest American friend we have ever known, and the greatest champion of freedom who has ever brought help and comfort from the new world to the old.”¹³ His remarks simplified a complex and occasionally difficult relationship, but also voiced a larger truth that transcended the disagreements between democracy’s two greatest statesmen.

Alonzo Hamby. Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at Ohio University, is the author most recently of Man of Destiny: FDR and the Making of the American Century (Basic Books, 2015), from which this article is excerpted.

Endnotes
3. Ickes, Diary, 12 May 1940, Library of Congress, quoted in Meacham, Franklin and Winston, p. 47. This quote was omitted from the published Ickes diaries.
Winston Churchill was, of course, half-American—an accident of birth that at times (notably during the Second World War) came in rather useful. The relationship with the United States of his Scottish-born wife Clementine was perhaps more complicated but at times also remarkably influential.

As a young woman, Clementine had harboured reservations about America. In the 1920s, she had been wary of the way it was displacing Britain as the world’s greatest superpower and was put out by President Coolidge’s refusal to forgive Britain’s debts from the Great War.

She had taken a detailed interest in politics and the international stage ever since her high society marriage of 1908. Since then her ever-increasing understanding of international affairs, close involvement in her husband’s career, and canny judgement of people had seen her become Churchill’s de facto chief adviser and strategist during the First World War. She continued to play a role demonstrably far greater than any other political wife in Britain for the rest of Winston’s career, but in the 1920s she was clearly no supporter of a great Anglo-American alliance.

Coming to America

It was only when she came to the United States in 1930—initially to convince her impetuous nineteen-year-old son Randolph that he was too young to marry a certain Kay Halle from Cleveland, Ohio—that she began to change her mind.

Once she had untangled Randolph from Kay, she decided she was having too good a time to rush back to Britain. She wanted a taste of American life, and to hear more about New World thinking. She attended speakeasies with her son, and rather more sedate luncheons with senators. She visited the White House—or rather gazed at it from the outside—and swam in the warm waters of the deep South. One of her favourite times was spent shopping in New York (soon referring to Fifth Ave just like a local), where she also indulged her passion for looking at art.
Soon she was reporting back to Winston that many Americans were actually “extremely nice,” and she was entranced at a newfangled idea of female “networking,” a term she had not come across before. It was clear that American women were more emancipated than their British cousins, and Clementine—who had been a suffragette supporter in her youth—came away smitten. Look at what women could do independently of their husbands!

Of course, when she returned to New York with Winston soon after, their visit was marred when he was knocked down by a taxi on Fifth Avenue. When news reached her of his injuries in her room at the Waldorf Astoria Towers, she was so upset she rushed off to the hospital forgetting to put on her shoes. She did not forget, however, the many kindnesses shown to her at that time and began to understand much better what made America and Americans tick.

That was just as well, for when Churchill became prime minister less than a decade later the British Commonwealth stood alone against the full might of Nazi Germany. France was falling, the Benelux countries had already gone, and now the forces of the Third Reich were preparing for an invasion of Britain, a country that had neither the money, the men, nor the armaments to defend itself for long. One minister of the time described Britain’s position in those dark times as one of unimaginable peril.

One morning in the summer of 1940, Churchill was shaving when Randolph entered his father’s bathroom in Downing Street to ask about Britain’s chances of survival. The elder Churchill said he had thought of the way through; that he had identified the only light that could shine the way. “I will,” he said as he swung round throwing his razor into the basin to dramatic effect, “drag America in.”

From then on, this was the mission of both Churchills, acting, as they always did in a crisis, as a team. Together they entertained, persuaded, and ultimately almost bewitched a number of influential Americans who had President Roosevelt’s ear—Harry Hopkins, Averell Harriman, and Gil Winant were but three. The journalist Ed Murrow was another who came to believe fervently that Britain could be saved and was—equally importantly—worth saving. Sure, America did not enter the war as a combatant until Pearl Harbor some eighteen months later in December 1941, but it started supplying vital hardware and all sorts of other support in large part as a result of the Churchills’ combined force of personality.

**The First Lady**

Eleanor Roosevelt was another American visitor, who had to be charmed when she came to Britain in October 1942 to see for herself what war was like on the Home Front and to visit US troops. It was the first time the two women had met, and it was to have a significant impact on both of them—and the countries they served.

Clementine took the chance to observe her American counterpart carefully and learned much from how Eleanor received an ecstatic welcome everywhere she went. Eleanor could reach out in a way that politicians rarely managed; her informal but pragmatic style somehow oozed empathy; she took a concerned interest in everyone from all walks of life and the people, who were suffering greatly from the privations of war, were loving her dearly for it. Clementine was moved by her visitor’s success and inspired by how Eleanor used her own popularity to further the causes she believed in.

Ever eager to cement Anglo-American ties, Clementine wrote a gushing letter to FDR (whom she had not met at that point) about the vital effect Eleanor had had in boosting the morale of women and girls in particular. Certainly, part of her motive in writing was strategic, but the sentiments she expressed were genuine. “When she appears,” she wrote, the people’s faces “light up with gladness and welcome.” And on Eleanor’s handling of the press, Clementine added: “I was struck by the ease, the friendliness and dignity with which she talked with the reporters, and by the esteem and affection with which they evidently regard her.”

**A New Woman**

From that point on, Clementine realised that she too could do more to help win the war by reinventing herself, by conquering her natural shyness and pushing herself forward.

The following year, 1943, she broke with all traditions and accompanied her husband to the Quebec conference with President Roosevelt. Eleanor was not there—FDR had sent her on a mission to visit US troops in the Pacific. In fact it would seem that the President was rather taken aback by the entirely novel idea of a leader’s wife attending one of these conferences—
but Clementine was no ordinary wife. She did much to support and counsel her husband during the days and nights of meetings—as she so often did. Indeed, her influence behind the scenes was exceptional. But she also invoked Eleanor Roosevelt’s spirit in her absence with her first solo press conference.

Held after the end of the conference, in Washington, D.C., it was a triumph that helped install Clementine as a favourite with the American people. She was hailed by the US press for being a brilliant platform speaker, as well as being “witty, daring, and direct.” They had even—although she was by this point in her mid-fifties—decided that she was one of the prettiest of English women to be found, and in possession of engaging dimples.

She handled the journalists with aplomb, being by turns serious and humorous and doing much to boost the British cause. In fact, her press conference was almost certainly a deliberate ploy at bypassing an increasingly distant president to woo public opinion directly, a move essential at a time when British interests were clearly losing ground in the White House. And Clementine did just that. Indeed the *Washington Times* was just one paper declaring the next day that Clementine was Churchill’s greatest asset.

And yet these admiring journalists knew only half of it. They certainly did not know how powerful she was behind the scenes, how she knew more about the conduct of the war than the British cabinet, or how she was in fact Churchill’s greatest influence, his closest adviser, spin doctor, vetter of his speeches, and in some ways even de facto deputy. She was also showing what a wonderful ambassador she was generally for her husband and her country.

Nor could the journalists present have guessed that the media maestro before them was deep down a naturally timid woman from an aristocratic but broken home, who was never quite sure who her father was and was haunted by fears of being penniless and homeless. She had learned to handle such a challenging public occasion with exquisite skill by scrutinising the methods and style of one Eleanor Roosevelt.

Diplomacy then was so personal; the fate of the world relied heavily on the chemistry between two men, FDR and Churchill. And at times, they fell out; they had radically different outlooks, not least on empire and Soviet Russia. Clementine worked hard to paper over the cracks by strengthening her relationship with Eleanor whenever she could.

**Differences**

And yet until now the rapport between these two exceptional women has never been properly explored. They were married to the two men tasked with saving the free world from Hitler—but
neither FDR nor Churchill thought much of the other’s wife. And neither did these very different women much like the other’s husband.

Eleanor was not Churchill’s type. He thought her an unappealing mix of opinion and disapproval who seemed to be frequently absent even at the height of war, was not bothered by dress or decor, and ran a White House notorious for unappetising food. Some have even said that Eleanor served such unappetising fare as a long drawn-out revenge for FDR’s affair with Lucy Mercer.

Churchill was particularly unimpressed that Eleanor’s cook Mrs. Nesbitt repeatedly served him creamy soup, even though he famously detested it. By contrast, Clementine kept files on the preferences of her guests and went to enormous lengths to serve them their favourite dishes, even in ration-struck Britain. Many a visitor was bowled over by what one called her “ambrosial” meals.

Eleanor meanwhile thought Churchill a drunken warmonger in danger of leading her husband astray and with offensive views on, among other subjects, women and the Spanish civil war.

Clementine (who could be a little rigid at times) disliked how FDR presumed to call her Clemmie on their first meeting, a privilege normally earned by years of devoted friendship. She fretted that Churchill was too enamoured of the president and too emotionally transparent with a man who ultimately valued tactical advantage above any friendship. She knew FDR needed to be handled carefully and more than once intervened when she thought her husband in danger of alienating the American leader altogether. She knew how important US support was for Britain—and how such a precious asset could be thrown away by Winston’s romantic monarchist sympathies.

FDR—initially star-struck by Churchill—came to resent his legendary status, and he would eventually choose Stalin over Churchill when he thought it in America’s interests. He also thought Clementine difficult and resistant to his charms, when he much preferred unquestioning female adoration of the sort she was not prepared to give.

**Similarities**

The two women, however, grew to trust and admire each other more and more despite their contrast in style. They looked different—Clementine beautiful and immaculate; Eleanor a little plain and on occasion slightly windswept. But there was much they had in common.

They were of a similar age and aristocratic background. They shared a concern for the poor and a dislike of gambling and extravagance that led some to consider both of them to be crashing bores. Both had been schooled in England, and each had been taken in hand by an inspirational headmistress. They had each endured difficult and fearful childhoods and been considered plain when young. Both had lost an infant child and were married to egotistical men unwilling to impose discipline on their broods, at least some of whom were unhappy and sometimes unpleasant. Both felt inadequate as mothers but enjoyed being grandmothers; they both adored Christmas and excelled at planning for it. Both were prone to depression. The two brave and stoical women were also keepers of their husbands’ consciences.

Eleanor found Clementine just as fascinating. She thought her attractive, youthful and charming but initially constrained by her husband’s notion that women should remain in the background. She was consequently difficult to get to know. “She has had to assume a role because of being in public life,” Eleanor noted in her diary after their first meeting. “The role is now part of her but one wonders what she is like underneath.”

Yet they relished each other’s company—who else could understand what it was like to be them? The bond between them grew even stronger after a poignant trip to Canterbury during Eleanor’s tour of Britain in October 1942, where as usual excited crowds of women and children surged forward to greet them. The next day the Germans bombed the city, and it was more than likely that some of those who had beamed at them so cheerfully were among the casualties. Badly shaken, Eleanor wrote to FDR that the “spirit of the English people is something to bow down to.”

**Changing Behaviour**

Clementine slowly lowered her guard. There were glimpses of what she perhaps really believed (most of which chimed with Eleanor’s views)—and even a certain female solidarity. At a small dinner party held in Downing Street in Eleanor’s honour, Churchill brought up the subject of the civil war in Spain. The American visitor annoyed her host by criticising the fact that more had not been done to help
the republicans. Churchill was furious and rose from the table, but Clementine leaned across the table and said pointedly: "I think perhaps Mrs Roosevelt is right." Astonished, Churchill signalled that dinner was over.5

Clementine may have welcomed Eleanor being willing to challenge her husband (few others did apart from her). Or maybe she foresaw trouble with the Americans if Eleanor left Britain angry with her hosts. In any case, it was evident that Clementine had her own mind and was not afraid to speak it—and this clearly impressed her guest. Perhaps Eleanor was more influential over Clementine, but it is also clear that during the war years at least Clementine was more powerful than she was. Clementine was immersed in every aspect of the war. Churchill took it for granted that she was his political as well as personal partner and once expressed surprise over drinks at the White House that FDR did not involve his wife more in government. "I tell Clemmie everything," he told the president, who replied that he could not do the same with Eleanor because she might accidentally reveal vital information in her newspaper column if he did.6

Indeed, Eleanor had noticed how she had been sidelined since FDR had diverted his attention from welfare to weapons, writing sadly in one letter to her daughter that she thought it better to absent herself altogether from the White House so that what she called "important people" could take all the decisions.

Clementine’s importance merely grew and grew, however. After her D.C. press conference, she made more broadcasts on both sides of the Atlantic (some in tandem with Eleanor) and put more of herself into what she said. She lowered her reserve when meeting people on her tours of bomb sites or factories—becoming more chatty and informal. Her popularity began to soar, her mailbag bulged with letters, her personal power was becoming a force in its own right.

She exploited this new celebrity by raising the equivalent of $500 million—an astonishing sum from an effectively bankrupt country—for her Aid to Russia Fund to re-equip Russian hospitals damaged by the Nazi invasion. As one would for a Live Aid concert today, she recruited celebrities and sports stars to help her. Gradually she became the human face of Churchill’s government.

Previous critics became gushing fans of the new Mrs. Churchill. When her husband’s own popularity began to fall as the war ground on, hers only rose. American visitors found something familiar in her manner. “The dame is unbelievable,” noted the US Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau on a visit to Britain in 1944. “She is just like Mrs Roosevelt.”

Delayed Recognition

After the war, of course, Eleanor was a widow and pursued her own highly successful career. Perhaps what she did at the United Nations on human rights was her life’s greatest work. In 1952 she was even touted as a possible presidential candidate.

Clementine meanwhile retreated into obscurity, and Churchill’s admittedly very large shadow, and is barely known today. Her role in helping Churchill during the war was so great, her involvement so vital, that it is bizarre and sad that her talents were not put to further use in aid of her country and the world as Eleanor’s were. I suspect Clementine may have felt a tinge of envy at Eleanor’s global success at a time when she found herself largely redundant. Churchill himself said that his life’s work would not have been possible without her.

The fact that Clementine did so much to help cement relations with Washington and its key figures was just one part, if a crucial one, of what she achieved. It is time that this is more widely understood.6

Sonia Purnell is author of First Lady: The Life and Wars of Clementine Churchill, which is now available in paperback in the UK. It is published in the US as Clementine: The Life of Mrs. Winston Churchill.

Endnotes

2. Clementine Churchill to Franklin D Roosevelt, 1 November 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, hereafter cited as FDR Library.
3. Eleanor Roosevelt’s diary, 20 October 1942, FDR Library.
5. Diary of Mrs. Roosevelt’s trip to London, Box 1364, FDR Library.
Despite different backgrounds, the Prime Minister and Eisenhower had much in common. The General was a good writer. He enjoyed the writer’s art. He once turned down an offer to be a military correspondent that would have paid nearly seven times his army salary. Like Churchill, Eisenhower would write important memoirs of the history of the Second World War. The two had first met at the White House on 22 June 1942, when the Prime Minister also met General Mark W. Clark. “I was immediately impressed by these remarkable but hitherto unknown men,” recalled Churchill.\(^1\) The British would have their own reasons to be impressed by the American Commander over the next three years. Eisenhower, as the Prime Minister would affirm, embodied Anglo-American cooperation during the war.

By war’s end, both leaders were heroes. “Humility must always be the portion of any man who receives acclaim earned in blood of his followers and sacrifices of his friends,” Eisenhower told a Guildhall audience on 12 June 1945. “My most cherished hope is that, after Japan joins the Nazi in utter defeat, neither my country nor yours need ever again summon its sons and daughters from their peaceful pursuits to face the tragedies of battle. But—a fact important for both of us to remember—neither London nor Abilene [the general’s hometown]…will sell her birthright for physical safety, her liberty for mere existence,” the Kansas native told the London crowd.\(^2\)

During the war, the General and the Prime Minister had collaborated to build up American troops in Britain for the cross-channel invasion. They worked together to launch the invasions of North Africa, Italy, and France. Churchill often invited the Allied commander to lunch at 10 Downing Street on Tuesdays and to Chequers for weekends. They did not always agree but they always worked in tandem.

Early on, Churchill worried about the consequences of a premature D-Day landing, which Eisenhower would command in June 1944. The British Prime Minister told the American general: “When I think of the beaches of Normandy choked with the flowers of American and British youth and when in my mind’s eye I see the tides running red with their blood I have my doubts—I have my doubts, Ike, I have my doubts.”\(^3\)

The Prime Minister proved correct in opposing a premature invasion in 1942 or 1943. In his war memoirs, Eisenhower observed: “While Winston
might at times express his doubts in the close confines of an intimate meeting, he would never show pessimism or hesitancy in public.” Eisenhower wrote that “among ourselves, the Prime Minister would add, following his expression of doubt, ‘We are committed to this operation of war. And we must all, as loyal Allies, do our very best to make it a success.’”

The General would listen to the Prime Minister, but ignore him when necessary. Ike knew he could count on the full backing of President Roosevelt and US Army Chief of Staff, George Marshall. At key points Churchill would come to Ike’s defense. During the climactic Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, Churchill called Eisenhower to say he was releasing a press statement as “a mark of confidence in you.” Churchill would listen to Eisenhower, but he ignored Ike’s cautious orders when the Prime Minister insisted upon getting too close to the German front in 1945. Eisenhower would block the Prime Minister’s attempts to cross the Rhine personally in late March. After the General departed, Churchill declared: “I’m now in command. Let’s go over.”

Churchill differed with Eisenhower about the importance of capturing Berlin ahead of the Russians. “The idea of neglecting Berlin and leaving it to the Russians to take at a later stage does not appear to me to be correct,” Churchill wrote. The Prime Minister was practiced in the art of “judge-shopping.” If one American official did not give him the answer he sought, Churchill would find another. But he usually discovered he could not undo Eisenhower’s military decisions. After his election defeat, Churchill left office at the end of July 1945. Eisenhower then arranged for him to use a villa near Cannes to decompress from five years of strenuous war leadership. Eisenhower’s son noted: “Ike was always conscious that the Prime Minister was a piece of history.”

Nearly two decades later in his BBC eulogy for Churchill, Eisenhower said: “With no thought of the length of time he might be permitted on earth, he was concerned only with the quality of the service he could render to his nation and to humanity. Though he had no fear of death, he coveted always the opportunity to continue that service.” Eisenhower declared of the Prime Minister: “Among all the things so written or spoken, there will ring out through the entire century one incontestable refrain: Here was a champion of freedom.”


Endnotes
5. Ibid.
The Conscience of Politics:
Sir Anthony Eden as Heir Apparent

By D. R. Thorpe

“If you want to succeed in politics,” Lloyd George is said to have observed, “you must keep your conscience well under control.”

As Churchill approached the twilight of his final Premiership in his eighty-first year, it proved an apt precept. His relationship with the two figures who were eventually to follow him as Prime Minister—Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan—became increasingly fractious.

In 1955 it was fifty-five years since Churchill had first entered Parliament, and he did not find enticing the prospect of going gently into the political night. Eden and Macmillan, respectively Foreign Secretary and Minister of Defence, both felt that Churchill had overstayed his welcome, and were increasingly seen by the aged Prime Minister as rivals, rather than colleagues.

Crown Prince

How different things were in 1938 at the time of Chamberlain’s meeting with Hitler at Munich when Eden and Macmillan were staunch opponents of appeasement. Churchill regarded them both as loyal, even heroic, figures, famously describing Eden as “the one strong figure standing up against long dismal, dreary tides of drift and surrender.”1 On 16 June 1942 Churchill advised King George VI that in the event of his death, “He should entrust the formation of a new government to Mr Anthony Eden.”2 Eden ruefully stated in his memoirs: “The long era as Crown Prince was established, a position not necessarily enviable in politics.”3 The Treasury benches are full of the bleached bones of future Prime Ministers. It would be thirteen years before Eden succeeded Churchill in Number 10.

As Foreign Secretary from December 1940 to July 1945, Eden was Churchill’s closest political ally. The relationship had its differences, and Eden was often exasperated by Churchill’s intransigence. Privately, he was mortified by the way Churchill treated the Poles at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, nor did he share Churchill’s confidence that Stalin “meant well to the world and to Poland.”4 At the subsequent Potsdam Conference in July 1945, Eden was not confident that Churchill would have command of all the technical detail and sent him a detailed summary of the issues that Stalin would seek to control.

On 25 July 1945, Churchill and Eden returned to England for the result of the General Election, believing that they would come back later in the week. As the Labour Party won a landslide victory, this was not to happen, and they were replaced by Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin. The central question for the Conservative Party now was the whether Churchill would resign as leader. His wife, Clementine, had “longed for him to retire.”5 Many in the Conservative Party, both in the depopulated Parliamentary ranks, and in the country, thought likewise. Churchill was conscious, however, that, as with Neville Chamberlain (and Arthur Balfour from an earlier era), he had never been elected as Prime Minister, and now, to exorcise that particular demon, he wanted to remain and fight on.

Churchill’s promise to Eden that he would not make Lloyd George’s mistake of staying on after the war soon had a very hollow ring. This was doubly unfortunate for Eden. Not only did he have to wait—and wait and wait—to become prime minister, but also on him devolved the daily grind of Opposition leadership during these years of austerity, whilst Churchill wrote his war memoirs, relaxed with his painting, and made global utterances. Eden found the famous Iron Curtain speech at
Fulton in 1946 inflammatory and unhelpful, and the question of “Europeanism” that Churchill spoke of in Strasbourg in 1949 too ambiguous. Of Churchill’s possible retirement there was no sign. “I rather feel,” Eden wrote, “that his present inclination is to go on with everything for as long as he can.”

Staying On

When Churchill became Prime Minister again after the October 1951 General Election, Eden was reappointed Foreign Secretary, even though much of his reforming work in Opposition had been on domestic issues, such as property owning democracy. The mistaken assumption was that Churchill would step down before too long in favour of Eden. It was not to be, even though Eden married Churchill’s niece Clarissa in August 1952.

Many commentators believed that marrying Clarissa would give Eden political advantages, thinking that Churchill’s heir apparent had underlined his claims now that he was Churchill’s nephew-by-marriage. Things were not so simple. Becoming “family” had added a further layer to Eden’s already complex relationship with “Uncle Winston.” Business and family do not always mix, and Eden felt a degree of reserve, as Churchill clung limpet-like to office, over the extent to which he could press his claims to the succession.

There was always some new pretext for Churchill remaining. King George VI died unexpectedly in February 1952 so Churchill felt it incumbent to “see in” the new, young Queen Elizabeth II. Then, of course, there was the Coronation in June 1953, which Churchill had no intention of missing. By this time Eden had suffered a near fatal botched gallbladder operation and was receiving remedial surgery in Boston. Shortly after the Coronation, Churchill suffered a stroke and was confined to Chartwell until the autumn, press secrecy being maintained by Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere. Had he not recovered, the Premiership could well have passed to Rab Butler, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Churchill was determined to celebrate his eightieth birthday in Number 10 in 1954. After all, Gladstone had been Prime Minister in his eighty-fifth year. Even when Churchill had tentatively agreed to step down in 1955, there were always further reasons for staying on and reneging on his promise, notably his belief that he was the only Western politician able to organise a summit with the Russians. Eden, remembering Churchill’s ill-preparedness at both Yalta and Potsdam, had long been wary of such a prospect, and on the eve of traveling to Boston for further operations, he warned: “Don’t appease that Russian bear too much in my absence.”

The Unkindest Cut

Various theories have been advanced in regarding Churchill’s motives in delaying his ultimate retirement. First, it was felt, he believed that Eden deserved his turn as Prime Minister, having been Crown Prince for so long and stayed on to allow him to recover his full strength. Others, though, think he had already decided that Eden, in his current parlous state of health, no longer had the necessary energy and dynamism to be Premier, and as a result he needed to remain and await the emergence of a younger figure from a new generation, a parallel with Attlee’s contemporaneous treatment of Herbert Morrison. After Stalin’s death in 1953, there was always the prospect of a summit with the new Russian leadership, for which Churchill considered himself indispensable. His daughter Mary Soames accepted that he just could not bear the thought of leaving the green room of politics.

In his last two years in Number 10, Churchill became increasingly tetchy, even cruel, towards Eden.
When the severe foot-and-mouth plague occurred in 1953, while Eden was away in Boston, Churchill said in Cabinet to Thomas Dugdale, the Minister of Agriculture, “I’m very worried about this myxomatosis. You don’t think there’s any chance of Anthony catching it?”

After Eden had negotiated the Suez Canal Base Agreement in 1954, Churchill observed that he did not know that Munich was situated on the Nile, one of the cruelest rebukes imaginable to Eden, who had been such a stalwart anti- appeaser before the war. And later in 1954, with Eden beside him in Cabinet, Churchill explained solemnly that Selwyn Lloyd was away at his father’s funeral. “Quite young too,” he added, “only 90.”

Selwyn Lloyd was a close observer of Churchill’s deteriorating relationship with Eden. “He and Winston had continued arguments,” Lloyd wrote. “The most painful incident between them was when Anthony was in Geneva for the Indo-China conference. Churchill stalked up and down saying that Anthony was the most selfish man he had ever known, a prima donna, quite impossible to work with.” It was not much comfort to Eden when Churchill assured him that if he stepped down as Prime Minister before the General Election (though there was no guarantee of this), he would still stand at the polls, “probably as a Conservative.”

**Starter’s Orders**

By this time, the Cabinet, and many in the parliamentary party, were despondent about any resolution to the question of the succession. In the end, Macmillan bravely saw Churchill and told him bluntly that the time had come to step aside. This did not go down well. Churchill subsequently asked Eden how he got on with Macmillan. “Very well, why?” came the response. Churchill replied, “Oh, he is very ambitious.”

Eventually, 5 April 1955 was decided upon as the date when Churchill would finally tender his resignation to the Queen. The evening before, Churchill hosted a farewell dinner, attended by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, at 10 Downing Street. After the dinner, sitting on his bed and still bedecked, Churchill said to his long-serving secretary John Colville, with some passion, “I don’t believe Anthony can do it.”

Macmillan thought that Churchill bore much responsibility for this situation. Eden had been Crown Prince for too long in the shadow of Churchill, whilst doing so much of the work, especially during the period 1945–51. Serious, almost fatal, illness had sapped much of his energy. How different the post-war history of Britain would have been if Clementine Churchill had indeed persuaded Churchill to retire in 1945. “The trouble with Anthony Eden,” Macmillan summed up later, “was that he was trained to win the Derby in 1938; unfortunately, he was not let out of the starting stalls until 1955.”


**Endnotes**

2. Winston Churchill to King George VI, 16 June 1942, PS GVI C 069/17, Royal Archives, Windsor.
4. War Cabinet Minutes, 19 February 1945, CAB 65/51, National Archives.
7. Butler did miss out on the Premiership in both January 1957 and October 1963 but always believed his best chance of becoming Prime Minister was in the summer of 1953 if he had pushed for it. Lord Butler to the author, 20 November 1975.
11. Ibid., p. 419
The conventional narrative of the Second World War tends to assume that from the moment he succeeded Chamberlain in May 1940 and rallied the nation with his heroic defiance when Britain stood alone against the Nazi threat, through to the eventual victory of the Allies five years later, Churchill’s ascendancy within Britain was unquestioned.

It is true that he never faced a serious parliamentary challenge nor, even in the darkest days of 1941–42, any plausible rival who might have displaced him, as Lloyd George supplanted Asquith in the middle of the First War. Nevertheless there was a good deal more grumbling, and more unrest in many parts of the country, than is generally remembered in the warm myth of national unity. During the period of electoral truce between the major parties the coalition government lost ten by-elections to a variety of mainly left-leaning Independents: a little-noticed undercurrent of dissent that accurately presaged Labour’s landslide victory in 1945, which so shocked observers who assumed that the electorate would naturally, as in 1918, register its gratitude to the great war leader.

If there was one man who not only anticipated this historic upset but, by his persistent criticism of Churchill’s leadership, contributed to it more than any other, it was the left-wing Labour MP Aneurin “Nye” Bevan. These days Bevan is remembered primarily as the architect of the National Health Service and, on the left, as the socialist hero to whose mantle Labour leaders still lay claim, even when they have long rejected socialism as Bevan understood it.

It was as a determined critic of Churchill’s war leadership, however, that Bevan first achieved national prominence. Elected Member of Parliament for Ebbw Vale in 1929, he was largely self-taught with an essentially Marxist view of history. But he was also an unshakeable democrat who believed that socialism in Britain would be achieved peacefully and democratically. It was with this confidence that he saw the war against Hitler not simply as a fight for national survival but as an opportunity to advance the victory of socialism at home and abroad.

A People’s War

At first Bevan welcomed Chamberlain’s replacement by Churchill in May 1940. A spell-binding orator himself, he could not but admire Churchill’s great speeches after the retreat from Dunkirk. But already his view of Churchill’s limitations was caustic. For all the magnificence of Churchill’s language, Bevan believed, the Prime Minister was rooted in the past:

What he did not do, and what he could not do, was to summon the future. For Mr Churchill is the spokesman of his order and of his class, and that class and that order is dying. That is why Mr Churchill ennobles retreat and can rally the nation to make its stand here in this island, but he cannot unfold for us the plans for victory, because there is not another victory left in the order to which he belongs, and of which he is the last distinguished representative.1

Bevan wanted a “people’s war,” leading to the replacement of the old order. He supported Labour joining Churchill’s government, but thought it should do so only on its own terms, by insisting on the immediate nationalisation of basic industries in order to put the economic resources of the country wholly at the disposal of the state. “War aims begin at home,” he declared. “If the Tory members of the Government carry their defence of private property rights to the extent of refusing the public ownership of the industries I mentioned last week, then we shall lose the war.”2 He opposed the electoral truce, and throughout the war castigated his
own leaders for failing to fight hard enough for Labour’s distinctive aims.

But his main fire was increasingly directed at Churchill, in particular his combining of the roles of Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. This gave Churchill a position far stronger than Lloyd George in 1917–18. But his dominance should not put him beyond criticism:

In a democracy, idolatry is the first sin. Not even the supreme emergency of war justifies the abandonment of critical judgement....

To surrender all to one man is to risk being destroyed by him.3

Bevan particularly condemned Churchill for having himself elected Conservative leader after Chamberlain stepped down in October 1940. "Once more," he raged, "the Tory caucus drapes itself in the national flag."4 Henceforth he regarded Churchill merely as a party leader, not as the leader of the whole nation.

When Hitler’s invasion of Russia brought the Soviet Union into the war in June 1941, Bevan immediately demanded a second front to take the pressure off "those lion-hearted Russians."5 If after two years of war Britain was unable to launch a second front, then that was a disgrace, which he blamed on Churchill—"a Prime Minister who is completely illiterate in all matters connected with industry and who has come to think in terms of perorations and rounded verbiage."6 People, he alleged, were "beginning to say that he is undoubtedly a superb defence Prime Minister, but he shows no signs of being a victory Prime Minister."7 He condemned what he called Churchill’s "one-man government" and called for a proper War Cabinet—"a War Cabinet of ministers without departmental responsibilities, who can talk back to the Prime Minister."8

Bevan constantly defended the right and duty of Parliament to criticise the Prime Minister—"Social institutions, like muscles, depend upon their use. If they are not used they become atrophied"—and rejected the idea that "amateur" strategists like himself had no credentials to criticise the conduct of the war.9 "These gibes are silly....Strategy is merely applied common sense."

It is the obligation of this House to discuss major strategy and for hon. Members to say otherwise means that they are undermining the very foundation of representative government.... Representative government is government of the experts by the amateurs and always has been.10

Parliament’s job, in war as much as in peace, was to hold the Government to account: "The right hon. Gentleman has become irresponsible, because he has not been sufficiently kicked in this House."11

Trying Times

Despite the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor bringing America into the alliance in December 1941, the war continued to go badly for Britain for most of 1942. In North Africa, Auchinleck was driven back by Rommel, while Japan established naval superiority in the Pacific and captured Singapore. Bevan pinned the responsibility for these losses on Churchill’s strategic blunders. The Prime Minister might be the symbol of national unity:

But he is not the sole residue [sic] of wisdom and knowledge as to how that unity should be directed. The building up of this man’s reputation has gone as far as the safety of the country warrants....If the Prime Minister insists on making himself responsible for all questions of higher military strategy,
then he must be ready to face accusations directed against that strategy....How long can we afford a succession of oratorical successes accompanied by a series of military disasters?12

In July, following the fall of Tobruk, Churchill faced his most serious parliamentary challenge. The debate quickly collapsed in ridicule when the mover of the critical motion proposed that the Duke of Gloucester be appointed commander-in-chief, and it attracted only twenty-five votes. But the most powerful speech was made by Bevan, with a detailed and well-informed critique of the strategy and weaponry of the North African campaign, which he alleged was too defensive because British staff officers were not trained in the Germans’ Blitzkrieg technique of coordinating land and air forces in a war of movement. He repeated the taunt, which he claimed was “on everyone’s lips,” that if Rommel had been in the British army he would still be a sergeant; and called for a purge of the War Office, beginning at the top: “The fact of the matter is that the British Army is ridden by class prejudice....If the House of Commons has not the guts to change it, events will....It is events which are criticising the Government. All that we are doing is giving them a voice.”13

Two months later Bevan made his most personal attack on the Prime Minister. He mocked what he called his “turgid, wordy, dull, prosaic and almost invariably empty” speeches. He objected to Churchill’s habit of wearing of military uniforms: “I wish he would recognise that he is the civilian head of a civilian government, and not go parading around in ridiculous uniforms.” And he castigated Churchill’s complaint that the press gave too much space to his critics.

I say that this amounts to political intimidation without precedent in the history of this country and is evidence of the increasing paranoia of the Prime Minister’s psychology, for which the docility of the House of Commons is responsible. The time has come when we should make this man realise that the House of Commons is his master. 14

More substantially, he continued to criticise the conduct of the war, in terms that many military historians have subsequently upheld. He condemned the so-called “strategic” bombing of Germany: “I have found no reason at all why the German population should be more ready to succumb to night bombing than the British public....The idea of sending out thousands of bombers every night to bomb Germany just will not work.”15 And like many others in 1942, impatient for the opening of a second front in Europe, he derided the diversion of effort to North Africa as irrelevant and futile. Finally, he demanded that Churchill should go:

We must recognise that a change in Government...is necessary if our people are to sustain a fourth winter of war with the same courage and buoyancy as they did the first, second and third winters....I do not conceal from the Committee that the Prime Minister’s continuance in office is a major national disaster.16

He did not, however, suggest who might take Churchill’s place.

“A Gift to Goebbels”

When the tide finally turned with Montgomery’s victory at Alamein, Bevan naturally rejoiced. But he nevertheless criticised Churchill’s order that church bells be rung in celebration as premature and foolish. He attributed the belated success to the correction of precisely those faults of weaponry and tactics that he had condemned in July; and he still denied Churchill the credit: “The Prime Minister always refers to a defeat as a disaster as
though it came from God, but to a victory as though it came from himself.” Even in Churchill’s hour of vindication Bevan could not refrain from carping.

During the latter part of the war, after the Russian victory at Stalingrad and the full commitment of the Americans had made the ultimate defeat of Hitler certain, Bevan never let up his criticism of Allied strategy. He dismissed the Italian campaign as strategically misconceived—far from Italy being the “soft underbelly” of the Axis, he claimed, “we are climbing up his backbone.” Bevan suspected Churchill’s true motivation, in both Italy and Greece, as being to restore the monarchies instead of supporting democracy: “Wherever he sees a king he wants to put him on his throne, and if he sees one tottering he wants to prop him up.” He condemned the statement that the Allies would accept nothing less than “unconditional surrender” as “a gift to Goebbels” which would only encourage the Germans to fight to the last man, instead of undermining their will to fight by offering them a better future. And as the war came to an end he mocked Churchill’s posturing as the equal of Roosevelt and Stalin, warning that Britain after the war would be a second-rank military power and should take on the leadership of Western Europe instead. He opposed the Labour leadership’s wish to prolong the coalition because he confidently—and almost alone—anticipated Labour’s victory in 1945. He was determined to reassert Labour’s independence, insisting that the election was about building a new future, not a vote of thanks to the Prime Minister. He even claimed that if democracy survived it would be “in spite of Winston Churchill,” not because of him.

Churchill called Bevan “a squalid nuisance,” and his sustained carping was widely condemned as unpatriotic, if not positively treasonable. A rhyme expressing this view was attributed to A. A. Milne:

Goebbels, though not religious, must thank Heaven,  
For dropping in his lap Aneurin Bevan.

**Principled Opposition**

Some of Bevan’s pursuit of Churchill was indeed offensively personal and wide of the mark. Right or wrong, however, he played an honourable role in the war which deserved to be acknowledged with more grace, at least when it was all over, than Churchill allowed. In a war for democracy, it was healthy that not merely democratic forms but a real clash of argument should be maintained. There was something heroic in the persistence with which Bevan—and others, but Bevan was the most persistent and principled—insisted on providing critical opposition at a time when the official Opposition interpreted their function principally as to give loyal support to the Government. Naturally hard-pressed ministers did not appreciate it; but Bevan, by his relentless questioning and his forcefulness in debate strove—successfully—to keep parliamentary government a reality.

Bevan was wrong only in imagining that the yearning he correctly felt in the country for a new settlement after the war would lead on after 1945 to the establishment of a fully socialist society. His confident expectation of the march of history was to be thwarted by the enduring adaptability of capitalism, and he died in 1960 a disappointed man. But his role during the war in providing principled parliamentary opposition to what might otherwise have been an overweening Government deserves recognition and respect. For all his later achievements, 1940–45 was not only Churchill’s but paradoxically also Bevan’s “finest hour.”

As well as biographies of Margaret Thatcher, Edward Heath, and Roy Jenkins, John Campbell’s books include Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987).
Due to his public image as a laconic cowboy, few people knew that my father enjoyed intellectual pastimes. He played chess extremely well, and he read avidly. For pure escape he favored mysteries: Agatha Christie, Rex Stout, and Raymond Chandler. He was also a fan of Ernest Hemingway.

Besides Hemingway, mysteries, and novels he thought might translate well to the screen, my father stuck mostly to nonfiction: political histories, military biographies, and anything at all by Winston Churchill, the public figure he most revered. In a March 1971 interview with Playboy, when the questioner asked him who he would most like to spend time with, my father replied, “That’s easy: Winston Churchill. He’s the most terrific fella of our century….Churchill was unparalleled. Above all, he took a nearly beaten nation and kept their dignity for them.”

My father’s interest in Churchill began long before he spoke with Playboy. In the summer of 1951 he was on location in Ireland filming The Quiet Man, one of his most beloved classics. Andrew McLaglen—an assistant director on the film as well as the son of movie co-star Victor McLaglen, who played Squire Danaher—remembered seeing my father on the set reading Churchill’s war memoirs. Andrew did not recall which volume, but it may have been the fourth, The Hinge of Fate, which had been published in the United States the previous year but which was not yet available in Britain.

Two decades later, around the time the Playboy interview was published, my father was in New Mexico filming The Cowboys. He stayed in a rented home (his preferred accommodation when shooting on location), where he liked to mix up a chili soufflé in the kitchen and then go to bed early in order to read his way yet again through Churchill’s books.

As a young girl I knew little about Churchill since I was born after the war. I can remember, though, my father telling me about the Second World War and his admiration of Churchill’s doctrine of peace through strength. He could even quote Churchill’s writings from memory.

Three Connections

Although John Wayne and Winston Churchill never met or even exchanged letters, there were connecting threads between them. First, although my father did not know it, he was related to his hero three times over. As is well known to readers of Finest Hour, Churchill’s mother, Jennie Jerome, was American. The Jeromes were distantly related to the Morrisons. My father’s real last name was Morrison.

According to Gregory Smith, the leading authority on Churchill’s American ancestry, John Wayne and Winston Churchill share descent from three—unrelated—common American ancestors: Jonathan Murray, George Way, and Francis Sprague. By the closest of these relations, my father was a fifth cousin twice removed to his hero. Looking at it another way, I recently learned that I am an eighth cousin of Sir Winston’s great-grandson Randolph. I know this would have pleased my father more than anything.
The Family Jewels

Another connection binding the Wayne and Churchill families is that Sir Winston and I both featured on the cover of the March 1961 issue of *Cosmopolitan*. I was not even five years old when my father took me along on a business trip to New York, where we were both photographed for the magazine. Unlike my father, though, I was draped in jewelry.

The cover featured my smiling image over the caption, “John Wayne’s daughter, Aissa, and $850,000 in Cartier diamonds.” To the left of my picture, the cover boasted a line-up of authors contributing to the issue. At the top of the list was Winston Churchill. Further down was Ernest Hemingway. My father had hit the trifecta!

My father framed the cover and put it on the trophy wall of his office in our home. He would stop before it and say to me, “Your smile is brighter than any diamond, Aissa.” I am sure the Churchill connection also made him proud.

For those who are curious, the article by Churchill was a re-print of one that first appeared in *Cosmopolitan* thirty-five years before in 1926 called “I Ride My Hobby.” This story was included in the anthology *Thoughts and Adventures* (1932) and later combined with an essay on painting to produce Churchill’s short work *Painting as a Pastime* (1948).

The Alamo

A third connection between my father and Churchill is more tenuous and even a bit of a mystery. In 1960 my father released his film *The Alamo*. The project had been the greatest ambition of his career. He produced, directed, and starred in the movie and even invested almost every dollar our family had.

My father, however, did not think the film's distributor, United Artists, would do enough to publicize the release. At his own expense he hired the legendary publicist Russell Birdwell, the same man who had run publicity for *Gone with the Wind*. Birdwell was not a man to let the truth get in the way of the claims he made on behalf of his clients.

Putting together a souvenir program to be distributed with the film, Birdwell sought out contributions from famous people. A faded sender’s copy of the Western Union telegram that Birdwell sent to Churchill has survived. It reads in fractured syntax:

Dear Sir,

As you may know by now John Wayne has produced and directed a twelve million dollar picture entitled *The Alamo*. Based upon the great chapter in Texas early history which was made possible by seventeen men from England who were among the 183 who fought to their deaths against the seven thousand enemy troops of General Santa Anna. We are planning to issue a souvenir program with great dignity with historic scenes, and Mr. Wayne and I would be most grateful if you would consider writing a hundred word forward [sic] for this book. We would be most happy to pay a fee to any charity that you would like to name. Few people know or remember that once, just 124 years ago, seventeen men came from your great country to take their stand at the Alamo to set an example and a pattern for free men everywhere. John Wayne and I would be most grateful if we might hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Aissa Wayne graces the cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine
The telegram was sent to Churchill care of the House of Commons on 8 July 1960, but the Churchill Archives Center has no record of the communication. Certainly no reply from Churchill was ever received.

Of course, my father also received many such requests every day, and he always tried to answer each one personally even if it was with just a short note. Churchill, however, was eighty-five in 1960, and his secretary had to deal with all unsolicited communications, which frequently meant never showing them to the addressee. There is no mystery, then, as to why Churchill did not reply, but the fate of the intended recipient’s copy of the telegram remains unknown.

Go-to Men

My father made many films set during the Second World War. Most of them were fictional stories, but The Longest Day depicted actual events from the D-Day landings with which Churchill was so closely connected. Dad played a real-life hero, Benjamin Vandervoort, a lieutenant colonel in the 82nd Airborne Division given the assignment of capturing the strategically important village of Ste.-Mère-Église. In a scene with the commanding officer, Brig. Gen. James Gavin (played by Robert Ryan), Gavin emphasizes to Vandervoort that the village “has to be taken and it has to be held. That’s why I gave you the job.”

Producer Daryl F. Zanuck paid my father a lot of money to appear in that scene. The Fox studio chief had recently antagonized my father with some ill-judged statements in an interview, and Dad was not inclined to accept the part. But Zanuck swallowed his pride and offered Dad a small fortune because he knew that he needed an actor whom the audience would identify as a go-to personality in a critical situation. He needed John Wayne. My father believed that in 1940 people needed—and got—an authentic go-to personality. They needed Winston Churchill.

Aissa Wayne is a daughter of John Wayne and a family practice attorney in Los Angeles, California. She is the author of John Wayne: My Father (1991) and wishes to thank Ron Cohen, Heidi Egginton, Scott Eyman, and John Farkis for help in researching this story.
On The Cover: The Pentagon Bust

On 6 May 2015 a new bust of Sir Winston Churchill was officially dedicated inside the Pentagon. Finest Hour Senior Editor Paul H. Courtenay is a friend of the artist and provides the following background.

I live in a small Hampshire village about a five minutes’ walk from the workshop of the artist Vivien Mallock. We have been friends for a long time, as I first served in the Army with her husband Ross some fifty years ago. Vivien is a leading sculptress, and I had often seen her at work and marvelled at her skill when in September 2010 I casually asked what she would create as her next project. She replied that she had recently submitted a detailed application to be chosen for a commission to create a bronze bust of Sir Winston Churchill. I rather brashly said: “I haven’t heard anything about this!” Equally surprised, she replied: “Why should you?” Clearly, she knew nothing of my Churchill interests, so I told her about them, which led her to say: “I wish I had known that months ago: it would have saved me a lot of research work.”

Not long afterwards, in November, Vivien heard that she had been selected for the commission. She then told me that this was from the UK Ministry of Defence, which wanted to present the bronze to the US Department of Defense for permanent display in the Pentagon. The bronze would be one-and-a-half times life-size and extend from the top of Sir Winston’s head to the bottom of his waistcoat. At about this time I thought I should find out if the Churchill family was aware of what was in the wind; it was a complete surprise to them all. Finally, I was able to introduce Ross and Vivien to Lady Soames, the Hon. Celia Sandys, and Randolph Churchill. The work was finished in September 2013.

In December 2013 the bronze made its first appearance, when it was unveiled before Randolph Churchill at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), next to the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall. This was a temporary waiting room until Sir Winston was ready to cross the Atlantic. At length the RAF was able to give him a flight to Washington (presumably First Class), where he took up residence at the British Embassy for a few months until a suitable opportunity for a dedication ceremony arose. This at length took place in the Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes. The final unveiling was jointly carried out by US Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work and British Chief of Defence Staff General Sir Nicholas Houghton in the presence of the Chiefs of Staff of both nations. ☞
Mr. Churchill spent a blissful two hours demonstrating with decanters and wine-glasses how the Battle of Jutland was fought. It was a thrilling experience. He was fascinating. He got worked up like a schoolboy, making barking noises in imitation of gunfire and blowing cigar smoke across the battle scene in imitation of gunsmoke.

—James Lees-Milne, describing an experience at Chartwell in January 1928

Churchill’s improvised table-top recreation of one of the most complex battles in naval history was remarkable not only for the fascination it held for Lees-Milne, but also because just a few years earlier Churchill had admitted to his friend, Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, that he had “only the vaguest idea of what had taken place” at Jutland. The indecisive battle had been fought on 31 May 1916, a full year after Churchill’s forced resignation from his position as First Lord of the Admiralty, and his only connection with it came when he was asked to make a morale-boosting statement for the press to compensate for an earlier, and depressingly honest, Admiralty communiqué. Though an effective piece of propaganda, his statement was not based on a deep knowledge of the events of the battle.

Two Admirals

But by 1924 Churchill’s work on his history of the Great War, The World Crisis, was approaching the point where he would have to provide some account of the battle. By this time the “Jutland controversy” was already in full swing, an unseemly quarrel between the supporters of the two chief British commanders at Jutland, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe and Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty. Although he had not previously studied the battle in detail, Churchill was by no means a disinterested party in this debate. Beatty had served as his naval secretary for fifteen months in 1911–13, and the young admiral had impressed him deeply; in a navy that, in Churchill’s famous phrase, “had more captains of ships than captains of war,” Beatty seemed to him a man possessing “shrewd and profound sagacity” who “viewed questions of naval strategy and tactics in a different light from the average naval officer.” As a result of his highly favorable assessment, in the spring of 1913 he had appointed Beatty to the command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron, a force which, by the time of Jutland, had been greatly augmented and redesignated the Battle Cruiser Fleet. Churchill was satisfied with Beatty’s performance during the first two years of the war, despite some confusion in his signals that foreshadowed events at Jutland, and called the admiral “the most daring of our naval leaders.”

His views on Jellicoe, on the other hand, were mixed. Jellicoe’s performance during prewar maneuvers had been little short of brilliant, and Admiral Sir John Fisher, who often advised Churchill on naval matters, had insisted that Jellicoe had “all the Nelsonic attributes” and was “the best officer the Navy has ever had since Nelson.” As a result, Churchill had appointed Jellicoe Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet—Britain’s most important naval force—upon the outbreak of war. But the admiral’s wartime performance had been less to Churchill’s liking. He would later note that Jellicoe “continually dwelt upon the weakness and deficiencies of the force at his disposal, and at the same time magnified the power of the enemy.” Moreover, Jellicoe had been one of the senior officers who rejected Churchill’s schemes for seizing islands off the German or Dutch coasts and using them as bases for blockading the German fleet in its harbors.

The contrast could not have been more plain—the bold, aggressive Beatty versus the cautious, fretful
Jellicoe. Small wonder that Churchill, always offensive-minded, was predisposed toward the Beatty camp long before he entered the Jutland controversy. This inclination was reinforced by the first serious study of the battle he read, the Naval Staff Appreciation of Jutland. This was a highly controversial account of the battle prepared in 1921, but its extremely pro-Beatty tone had led the Admiralty to suppress it because, as Admiral Keyes and his colleague Admiral Chatfield—both ardent supporters of Beatty—had noted in a joint memo, it was liable to “rend the Service to its foundations.” But having been instrumental in the book’s suppression, in 1924 Keyes loaned this explosive study of the battle to Churchill, who found it “admirable.” He apparently retained it for more than two years, throughout the long gestation of volume III of The World Crisis.

Churchill also took advantage of another naval contact—none other than Beatty himself, now Admiral of the Fleet the Earl Beatty and First Sea Lord, the professional head of the Royal Navy. Beatty responded to Churchill’s request for assistance by placing Captain Kenneth Dewar at his disposal. Dewar was one of the authors of the Naval Staff Appreciation (the other author was his brother, Captain Alfred Dewar), so Churchill’s main written source and chief naval adviser were to all intents and purposes identical. Churchill and Dewar were certainly in contact by August 1926, when the latter was invited “to luncheon & stay the night” at Chartwell. Thus, although Churchill’s stated intention was “to steer a faithful and impartial passage” through the “reproaches and recriminations” resulting from the battle, all of his advisers were Beatty’s men—Dewar, Keyes, and Beatty himself; there is no evidence that he sought the views of anyone in Jellicoe’s camp.

Throughout his two Jutland chapters we see Churchill’s descriptive powers in full measure, and his ability to turn a phrase still resonates—almost without exception every account of the battle since has repeated his observation that Jellicoe was “the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon.” But he fails any reasonable test for impartiality, skipping lightly over Beatty’s errors while criticizing Jellicoe for every perceived mistake. For example, Beatty’s most controversial actions centered on his handling of the 5th Battle Squadron, four fast battleships commanded by Rear-Admiral Hugh Evan-Thomas that were temporarily attached to Beatty’s Battle Cruiser Fleet. When Beatty took off in pursuit of the German battlecruisers, the only signal made was by flags, which could not be read from the 5th Battle Squadron, stationed five miles from Beatty’s flagship. As a result, Evan-Thomas did not immediately follow Beatty, and a gap opened up between the two forces, delaying the 5th Battle Squadron’s subsequent entry into action. In discussing this incident, Churchill stacks the deck heavily against Evan-Thomas, advancing only one reason for his failure to follow immediately (that he received no signal to do so), but no fewer than six
reasons why he should have done so despite the lack of a signal. The result is that blame is deflected from Beatty’s sloppy signalling and placed squarely on Evan-Thomas’ shoulders.

Another instance comes when Beatty, having pursued the German battlecruisers in what has become known as the “run to the south,” found himself face-to-face with the entire German High Seas Fleet—Beatty had been led into a trap. Realizing the danger, he immediately turned about, now leading the enemy’s fleet toward Jellicoe’s Grand Fleet in the “run to the north.” And here Churchill again passes lightly over Beatty’s lapses, first in ignoring a second signalling failure by Beatty’s flagship that left the 5th Battle Squadron steaming straight for the German fleet longer than was necessary, and then giving the impression that the battlecruisers were in continuous action with the enemy as he led them northward, when in fact for long periods of the chase his ships were out of range, leaving the four battleships of the 5th Battle Squadron to hold off the entire German fleet unaided.

In contrast, Jellicoe is criticized on almost every level. Churchill begins by stating: “The dominant school of naval thought and policy are severe critics of Sir John Jellicoe.” He goes on to note that his tactics were inflexible, centralized, and cautious; “divisional” tactics, in which a fleet would be divided into a number of smaller, independently maneuvering units, would have been better. Jellicoe’s method of deployment on the left wing, rather than on the center column, was bad, and he was overly cautious, retiring from German torpedo attacks that were in fact not very dangerous. Churchill paints Jellicoe as an able administrator, but in his telling the admiral was clearly unfit to serve as a leader in battle.

Every one of these points for Beatty and against Jellicoe had been set forth by Dewar in the Naval Staff Appreciation of Jutland; sometimes even the wording in The World Crisis is very close to that of the Appreciation. For example, the latter describes Jellicoe’s main tactical precepts in these terms: “(a) The single line and the parallel course; (b) Long range; (c) Defensive action against the torpedo.” In The World Crisis Churchill sums up Jellicoe’s tactics in an almost identical manner: “the single line and the parallel course; a long-range artillery conflict; and defensive action against torpedo attack.”

Churchill’s Conclusions

So is Churchill’s account simply a rehash of the Naval Staff Appreciation? The answer must be a decided “no.” It would be more accurate to say that the Appreciation confirmed his earlier assessments of Beatty and Jellicoe, and for that reason he no doubt found it a congenial guide to the technical details of the battle. But he by no means accepted its views uncritically. In one letter to Keyes he noted that he and Dewar had been having “some lively arguments,” and evidence of these disagreements can be found in The World Crisis, reflecting the different natures of Kenneth Dewar and Churchill. A longtime friend and correspondent, Reginald Drax, would later describe Dewar as “a disappointed, angry man and much inclined to be hyper-critical.” He was in fact a disappointed reformer; he had been determined to reform the Royal Navy’s strategy, tactics, and educational system, but his single-minded zeal and harsh criticisms undermined his efforts. Thus, although formidable, his was not a balanced intellect. As a statesman, Churchill possessed a broader outlook that could accommodate a more nuanced view of men and events. He could write of Jellicoe’s deployment decision, “The Commander-in-Chief chose the safer course. No one can say that on the facts as known to him at the moment it was a wrong decision.” Dewar could never have written that sentence; throughout the Naval Staff Appreciation, Alfred and Kenneth Dewar had held Horatio Nelson up as an ideal, and it is clear that in their view Jellicoe had fallen well short of that ideal.
Churchill agreed that Jellicoe was no Nelson. He could find fault with Jellicoe’s leadership methods, he could criticize his actions in battle, but in the end he could not condemn him for falling short of the Nelsonic ideal. Churchill’s account of Jutland, while influenced by Kenneth Dewar and the Naval Staff Appreciation, is still very much his own work.

Postscript

Jellicoe died in 1935, Beatty the year after, and with their passing the Jutland controversy subsided to such a degree that the Royal Navy decided to name two new battleships after them—perhaps as a sign of reconciliation within the Service. These ships were still under construction when Churchill returned to the post of First Lord of the Admiralty in September 1939. In February 1940 he minuted that these names were undesirable since “the controversies in which they played a part are still living issues in the Fleet.”29 The two ships were therefore renamed after two illustrious—and uncontroversial—admirals of the eighteenth century, Anson and Howe. Although the Jutland Controversy had abated within the Navy, it was apparently still very much alive in Churchill’s mind.

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Endnotes


5. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 137.
17. For a complete discussion, see Prior, Churchill’s ‘World Crisis’ as History, pp. 188–209.
The Battle of the Somme raged from 1 July to mid-November 1916. It was the largest battle the British Army has ever fought—or is ever likely to fight. When Winston Churchill came to write his history of the First World War (which he called The World Crisis) it was inevitable that he would pay considerable attention to this—particularly since he held very strong views about the manner in which it had been fought.

However, Churchill faced a particular difficulty in writing about the Somme. Earlier in the war, he had been First Lord of the Admiralty, during which time he had accumulated plentiful contemporary documents. These materials formed the basis of the first two volumes of The World Crisis, which covered the period from 1911 to 1915. Indeed, one-third of the material on this period consists of these papers and memoranda.

But the Dardanelles fiasco forced Churchill to resign. The period of the Somme saw him out of office and cut off from all official government communications. So when he came to write his narrative he lacked the foundation on which his earlier chapters had been based.

Finding the Sources

Nevertheless, Churchill was not without resources. He had been following the course of the Battle of the Somme closely, and in August, when the battle had been underway for a month, he sent the War Committee (the Cabinet Committee that oversaw the war) a memorandum which challenged the prevailing views of the conflict. He argued that the British army had made no substantial gains and suffered many more casualties than they had inflicted on the Germans. He backed up his claims with a highly detailed breakdown of casualty statistics, which had clearly been provided by sources inside the War Office or GHQ in France.1 The War Committee dismissed the paper without even giving it due discussion, preferring the statistics offered by General Robertson (Chief of the Imperial General Staff). He claimed, ludicrously, that the Germans had lost 300,000 men for every week of the battle—suggesting a total for the month exceeding one million men, a figure greater than the entire German army that was fighting at the Somme.2

So Churchill had two tasks in writing his chapter on the Somme: he had to find sufficient documentary evidence to meet his exacting historical standards, and he sought to vindicate his wartime position about respective British and German casualties.

To solve the first problem Churchill approached Sir James Edmonds, who had been appointed British Official Historian for a series of books about military operations on the Western Front.3 This was not an obvious move. Edmonds had served on the staff of the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, during the war and, as official historian, was hardly likely to adopt an anti-Haig line. But that of course was clearly the line that Churchill would be taking with his well-known views on the battle and on the casualty statistics in particular.

Despite their different views, however, the partnership flourished. Edmonds supplied Churchill with accounts of the battle from the German side that he particularly wanted. These included the account of the German defence of the Schwaben Redoubt and the actions of the 27th German Infantry Division that Churchill used in The World Crisis.4 Moreover, Edmonds supplied his own account of some British actions as well. The material used by Churchill on the failure of the 8th Division against Ovillers on pages 1044–47 of the Somme chapter actually uses Edmonds’ words.5 There is a long account of the first hours of the battle from the British point of view on page 1044. The paragraph which starts “Very different were the fortunes of the British” down to “practically no damage to the German defences having been done...
in the long bombardment” was entirely written by Edmonds and incorporated into *The World Crisis* by Churchill without amendment. What is particularly interesting about this passage is that it does not reflect well on the British High Command.

**The Right Tone**

Despite the large amount of critical material he had himself contributed, however, Edmonds was not satisfied with the tone of the final product. When Churchill sent him the chapter for comment before publication, Edmonds was moved to reply: “in view of your high & esteemed position in the hearts of your countrymen I think you might cut out some of the sarcasm about the military leaders.”

Churchill replied at length:

Of course the sarcasms and asperities can all be pruned out or softened. I often put things down for the purpose of seeing what they look like in print. Haig comes out all right in the end because of the advance in 1918. Without this the picture would be incomplete….But this Somme chapter certainly requires a strong addition showing the undoubtedly deep impression made upon the Germans by the wonderful tenacity of our attack. If you have anything that bears on this, perhaps you could bring it along with you.

Edmonds did have some additional material. He provided Churchill with a quotation from Ludendorff’s memoirs to the effect that the German army was never the same after the Somme, and he drew Churchill’s attention to a passage from the history of the 27th German Division that highlighted the terror of holding the line against an intense British artillery bombardment. Both were incorporated in a new draft of the chapter by Churchill.

In the end, despite the “pruning and softening,” the chapter as a whole is a savage indictment of Haig and the High Command. Churchill is critical of where the battle was fought (against the most formidable defences on the Western Front), the lack of surprise, the vagueness as to the objectives, the insouciant response to the loss of 60,000 casualties on the first day, and, in the later stages of the battle, the premature disclosure of the tanks in mid-September.

Churchill was also the first to draw attention to the continuing high casualty rates in the middle stages of the battle, when the Somme degenerated into “bloody but local struggles of two or three divisions repeatedly renewed as fast as they were consumed, and consumed as fast as they were renewed.” He recognised that the casualties suffered by these divisions were as high (50%) as those suffered on the disastrous first day. The numbers might be smaller than for 1 July, but the attrition of the British army was continuing at the same rate.

**Assessment**

There is no consensus among historians about many of these matters, but the fact that so many were lost on the first day for such derisory gains stands as a condemnation of Haig’s plan and its ludicrous objective of sending a massed cavalry force through in the conditions then prevailing on the Western Front. Nor was Haig’s reaction to the first day (“varying results must be expected on a wide front of attack”) worthy of the sacrifice of his troops. Haig was not the “butcher” of legend, but in this regard his response fell well below the level of events. And as for the overall plan, Churchill was certainly more aware than Haig (and some historians since) that the days of cavalry charges were over and that the war had to be won by technological means. (As Minister of Munitions in the latter stages of the war, he was able to supply some of those means.)

Other criticisms made by Churchill would not be accepted by most historians today. The British offensive was certainly directed against formidable defences, but it is not clear where else along the Western Front a campaign might have prospered. The French had launched
unsuccessful battles in the Champagne and Artois in 1915; the British had fared no better at Aubers Ridge and Loos. The low-lying ground around the Ypres Salient in Belgium also had little to recommend it, as the campaign in 1917 was to demonstrate. There were no good options in 1916 and the area of the Somme was as good as any.

Nor should the lack of surprise be a matter for condemnation. Before the time when methods such as sound ranging had increased the accuracy of artillery fire, a long bombardment was required to neutralise enemy defences wherever the battle was fought. That this bombardment revealed the area of attack was unfortunate but also in 1916 unavoidable.

As for the tanks, Haig was undoubtedly correct in using them as soon as they became available. He wanted his army to obtain the best advantage from this surprise weapon, and he was rightly cautious in using small numbers in the first instance and making an offensive dependent absolutely on the performance of an untested weapon. As it was, 50% of the tanks broke down before they reached the start line. If this had happened in a large-scale battle, the result might well have been a fiasco.

Despite these strictures, Churchill’s final draft drew a positive response from Edmonds. He wrote: “I can find nothing against your general line of argument...the Somme chapter is a work of art, it takes up every important factor and shows extraordinary insight and is perfectly fair.”

This was astonishing praise coming from an historian who would devote most of his life to the argument that the Somme was a British victory and was brilliantly planned. To which of these views Edmonds adhered remains a mystery.

Casualties

On one point Edmonds and Churchill would never agree, however: that of casualty statistics. Churchill had built his wartime indictment of the high command largely on the fact that the British suffered more casualties at the Somme than did the Germans. During 1923, when he was writing *The World Crisis*, he went to great lengths to investigate whether those earlier figures were correct. He requested detailed information from the British Embassy in Berlin about German casualties. The figures supported his wartime paper and he wrote in some excitement to Edmonds: “They [the figures] absolutely confirm the argument but with the most surprising features. I have in consequence recast the first three chapters with a new chapter full of graphics called ‘The Blood Test.’”

Edmonds was not convinced. He warned Churchill that 30% should be added to all German casualty figures because they did not include the lightly wounded while the British figures did, and he supplied Churchill some statistics from the German VII Army Corps, which he claimed proved his point. Churchill did not accept this
argument. He told Edmonds that if 30% were added to the German figures it would destroy the one soldier killed for every two wounded, which was deemed common for all three armies on the Western Front throughout the war. Nevertheless, Churchill was sufficiently worried by Edmonds’ argument to write again to the Berlin Embassy. He told them: “I am founding a considerable argument on these figures which in their present form bear out all I thought and wrote at the time in Official memoranda about what was taking place at the front. I am extremely anxious to be on the right side in all these calculations to make assurance doubly sure.”

The Embassy replied a few days later enclosing a letter from the statistical experts at the German Reichsarchiv. In that letter they emphatically denied that the lightly wounded had been excluded from the figures. In response Churchill sent his figures to the Reichsarchiv for verification and they assured him that they were as accurate as any likely to be obtained. Hence Churchill’s conclusion in The World Crisis was that “in all the British Offensives the British casualties were never less than 3 to 2 and often nearly double the corresponding German losses.”

These figures are still the subject of fierce debate today. They have been subjected to close scrutiny, however, by M. J. Williams in two seminal articles in the 1960s. I checked them again in my doctoral thesis in 1980, and in recent times an American historian and an economist have had a new look at them. The result is a complete vindication of Churchill’s stance. Attrition was at work at the Somme but it was working in favour of the Germans. Haig’s claim that he was wearing out the German army overlooked the point that he was wearing out his own army at a faster rate. Unless a completely new set of figures comes to light, we must conclude that Churchill’s wartime paper was substantially accurate and it seems derelict of the War Committee that it dismissed it without investigation.

Endnotes
1. This document is found in Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (London: Odhams, 1939), pp. 1054–59. There are many editions of The World Crisis available. The references used here can easily be located by looking for the chapter “The Battle of the Somme” in the particular editions.
2. See General Robertson’s paper for the War Committee dated 1 August 1916 in the Cabinet Papers, Cab 42/17/1, The National Archives, London.
3. The Churchill-Edmonds correspondence can be found at the Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge in CHAR 8/203. The on-line version of that archive by Bloomsbury Press has been used here.
4. CHAR 8/203.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
8. Churchill to Edmonds, 7 June 1926, CHAR 8/203.
10. Edmonds to Churchill, 8 July 1926 and 6 August 1926, CHAR 8/203.
11. Lord D’Abernon (British Ambassador to Germany) to Lord Curzon (British Foreign Secretary whom Churchill used as a go-between), 26 July 1921, CHAR 8/188.
12. Churchill to Edmonds, 29 August 1923, CHAR 8/188.
13. Edmonds to Churchill, 14 October 1926, CHAR 8/188.
15. All this correspondence can be found in CHAR 8/204.
16. The World Crisis, p. 936.
In April, Winston came down with “an awful toothache” and wrote to his nanny Mrs. Everest to make an appointment with the dentist, which she promptly did. He wrote to his mother that his face was “swelled up double its natural size” and signed the letter, “Your tooth tormented—but affectionate—son.” His mother’s reply indicated this was not the first time Winston’s dental hygiene—or lack thereof—had been addressed by her. “I am so sorry,” she wrote on 29 April 1891, “to hear you have a toothache….I don’t want to lecture on the subject—but I am sure if you wd take a little more care of yr teeth you wd not suffer so much. Quite apart from the ‘pigginess’ of not brushing them!!”

Winston wrote his mother on 19 May that he and four of his Harrow classmates “have just been in a deuce of a row for breaking some windows at a factory…and only 2 of us were discovered. I was found, with my usual luck, to be one of those 2.” Lord Randolph was on his way to South Africa in May and, in a long, chatty letter to him, Winston surprisingly elaborated on what he had told his mother about the factory incident:

Notwithstanding the wise political counsel to the contrary from Clementine, Churchill had decided in the spring to leave the Army and return to political life. The only question for him was when to do so. The politically perceptive Clementine was more concerned with him explaining why he did so. In a 24 March letter she wrote that “When you do return, the reason should be apparent to the man in the street, tho’ he need not necessarily agree with it.”

Late in March, Clementine raised a non-political issue that caught Churchill flat-footed—their love life or lack of it. “When next I see you,” she wrote, “I hope there will be a little time for us both alone. We are still young, but Time flies, stealing love away and leaving only friendship which is very peaceful but not very stimulating or warming.” Taken aback, Churchill promptly replied, assuring her of his continuing ardor for her: “Oh my darling do not write of ‘friendship’ to me—I love you more each month that passes and feel the need of you and all your beauty. My precious charming Clemmie—I too feel sometimes the longing for rest & peace....”

Churchill received a letter in early April from Sir George Ritchie, the Chairman of the Dundee Liberal Association that, he told his wife, “makes a serious impression upon me.” Ritchie had written that Churchill’s constituency regarded his call last winter for the return of Fisher to the Admiralty to have been “unfortunate” and that they would look with disfavor on any attempt by Churchill to “endanger the stability of the present [Asquith-led] government.” With this in mind, Churchill wrote to his wife, “I am not in any hurry now, & will certainly ‘wait & see.’” In fact, Churchill was very much in a hurry. For the rest of that month, Martin Gilbert writes in the Official Biography, “Churchill tried to discover what issues would threaten to bring Asquith’s government down, who were the politicians willing to exploit them, and whether they would be willing to let him work with them and join them in any new administration.”

Knowing this doubtless caused his wife to renew her advice. Churchill had written to her saying that she was “deluded if you think that by remaining here and doing nothing I shall regain my influence on affairs.”
No, Clementine promptly wrote back, “That is not what I think. What I do think is that remaining there you are in an honourable, comprehensible position until such time as a portion of the country demand your services for the state. If you come back before the call you may blunt yourself.”

Churchill was not buying it. Late in April, the “why” for leaving the Army presented itself, and he wasted no time in taking advantage of it. His understrength battalion of The Royal Scots Fusiliers was combined with another understrength battalion commanded by a regular officer who was to be given overall command, leaving Churchill without an assignment. Churchill then went to see General Douglas Haig, commander of British forces in France, who offered him a promotion to Brigadier General and command of a Brigade. Churchill recounted to his staff that Haig then had told him that he believed Churchill “could do so much more for the war effort by returning to Parliament and using his energy and skill to get conscription through the House.” It was just the fig leaf the politically ambitious Churchill had been looking for, and he told his staff that he “had seen the force of Haig’s arguments and had reluctantly agreed to return to England.”

75 YEARS AGO
Spring 1941 • Age 66
“Quite the Most Wonderful Man I Have Ever Met”

Roy Jenkins wrote in his Churchill biography: “It was a dreadful spring for Churchill and the British war prospect.” Air raids were killing thousands at home. U-boats wreaked havoc in the Atlantic. HMS Hood was sunk by the Bismarck, the world’s newest and most powerful battleship. Germany invaded Yugoslavia. Rommel’s Afrika Corps continued to push back British forces and approached Tobruk. Greece surrendered to Germany, and British troops were driven out of Crete.

In addition to these defeats, Churchill and others in his government were not always on the same page. On 3 April, based on Enigma intercepts, Churchill sent Stalin a message about German troop movements to its border with Russia in Southern Poland. Incredibly, the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir Stafford Cripps, refused to deliver the message because he thought it might provoke hostilities between Russia and Germany, which, of course, was Churchill’s intent. He ordered Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden to deliver the message, saying, “The Ambassador is not alive to the military significance of the facts. Pray oblige me.” Eden did, and Cripps delivered the message not to Stalin but to the Soviet Foreign Minister. Churchill later wrote to Eden that “It was astonishing that the Ambassador should have had the effrontery to delay this message for sixteen days and then merely hand it to” the Foreign Minister.

On top of Cripps’s insubordination, Churchill was also angered to discover that others in his government were undercutting his cherished goal of pulling the United States into the war. In late April, the Foreign Office had refused a request from the United States for British warships to escort US troops to Iceland because it “would inconvenience British shipping schedules.” Churchill was livid. “What does the convenience of our shipping mean,” he scolded Eden on 29 April, “compared to engaging the Americans in the war?” A few days later, the head of the British naval mission in Washington declined an official United States suggestion to move a substantial portion of its Pacific fleet to the Atlantic. Churchill told the Defence Committee on 1 May that Britain’s “chance of victory was almost certainly bound up with American participation” and that he thought it “disturbing” that the American suggestion of “an advance into the Atlantic…had been received with a cold douche.”

Positive developments were few and far between. The United States did occupy Iceland and extended its naval patrols in the Atlantic to the 25th meridian. On 7 May, despite the setbacks in Yugoslavia, Greece, and Crete, Churchill won an overwhelming vote of confidence in the House by 447 to 3. On 11 May, to the German government’s great embarrassment, Hitler’s deputy Rudolf Hess flew to Scotland on an unsanctioned peace mission. On 27 May, the Royal Navy sank the Bismarck.

Churchill held a meeting of the Defence Committee on 27 May. General Alan Brooke, later appointed Churchill Chief of the Imperial General Staff, frequently wrote critically of Churchill in his diary. He did not do so on this occasion: PM in great form and on the whole a very successful meeting. It is surprising how he maintains a light-hearted exterior in spite of the vast burden he is bearing. He is quite the most wonderful man I have ever met, and it is a source of never-ending interest studying him and getting to realize that occasionally such human beings make their appearance on this earth—human beings who stand out head and shoulders above all other.

On page 50 of this issue, Michael McMenamin reviews the novel The Finest Years & Me.
**To Protect and to Serve**


*Review by John H. Maurer*

Churchill’s Trial by Larry Arnn is a must-have book for anyone who wants to know more about Sir Winston Churchill, the challenges he faced as a leader in public life, and the values he upheld as a statesman. Arnn has achieved much in this volume: he has written a serious, learned book, without being tedious; a thoughtful meditation on leadership, without losing sight of the ugly realities and the difficult choices that confront leaders living in dark, troubled times.

To Arnn, Churchill is a heroic figure, a champion of the cause of freedom, who changed the course of history, despite sometimes having to fight against fearful odds. Hence, understanding what motivated Churchill to take up the challenges before him, to fight the trials of his era, is of great value for us in facing the dangers of our own times.

The international environment in the first half of the twentieth century presented a deadly trial for Churchill and Britain. In Nazi Germany and the Russia of Lenin and Stalin, the liberal world order was menaced by well-armed extremist regimes bent on spreading their tyrannical creeds. Arnn writes: “Nazism is understood to be a movement of the Right. There was also a growing tyranny in Europe, and eventually on other continents, of the Left. Churchill did not think this distinction between Left and Right so important: he said that the two tyrannies differ as the North Pole differs from the South” (xxvi).

In these struggles against the Nazi and Soviet tyrannies, Churchill would have preferred to avoid war. Arnn writes: “Churchill believed it tragic when the purposes of politics must give way to the urgencies of war” (53). Churchill, as a young man, had experienced firsthand the lethality of the modern battlefield. Early in his political life, he predicted with uncanny accuracy the high cost of warfare in a scientific age, in which the victors would not emerge unscathed from war’s violence and horrors.

Of course, wanting to avoid war did not mean that Churchill was willing to pay any price for the preservation of the peace. He understood that a secure peace required strength on the part of those countries intent on preventing aggression. Arnn writes: “Churchill taught that when... free peoples are threatened by armed despotism, they should seek unity and also overwhelming force, including especially military force” (247).

By concerted action, the Western democracies would not be eaten “course by course”—divided and defeated one at a time—by the tyrants seeking to devour them. Arnn rightly emphasizes that at Fulton, in 1946, Churchill spoke about the importance of alliance solidarity to prevent a third world war, as well as Stalin’s imposition of an iron curtain on Eastern Europe in violation of the Yalta accords.

Churchill’s actions to defend a liberal constitutional order at home present another trial explored by Arnn. The rise of socialism as a force in British politics and society, in Churchill’s eyes, went against that order. In this political trial, Churchill faced strong opposition. Churchill was unrepentant in his opposition to socialism’s siren calls to restructure society. Arnn tellingly notes: “Churchill was as relentless in resisting socialism as were its supporters in advancing it” (141). The general election debacle of 1945 showed just how strong was the socialist impulse in British life.

Despite election setbacks and political ostracism, Churchill remained committed to the rule of law, the principles of limited government, and the enterprise made possible by the free market. He also understood that, after the hardships and sacrifices suffered by the British people during both world wars, socialism’s allure would prove even more seduc-
tive. “When they [that is, the British people] rejected him,” Arn writes, “he carried on their service, according to his own lights, seeking agreement with them” (240).

Larry Arn has brought to the forefront these important questions about statecraft and ethics, the trials of war, and the demands on leaders of a political life in an open society. To those who would mock Churchill and the values for which he fought, Arn comes to the defense and offers a rebuke. Arn’s book provides insight not only into Churchill’s leadership, but into the enduring problems that confront today’s leaders in the liberal democracies, engaged as we are in new trials against extremist non-state terrorists and authoritarian challengers, intent on destroying the global order underwritten by the United States since 1945. Churchill’s Trials deserves wide attention and will richly repay those who read it.

John H. Maurer is the Alfred Thayer Mahan Professor of Sea Power and Grand Strategy at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, where he teaches a popular course on Sir Winston Churchill as a statesman, strategist, politician, soldier, and war leader. A longer version of this review can be read on The Churchill Centre website in the March 2016 edition of the Chartwell Bulletin.

Picture This

ISBN 978-1844038596

Review by Paul Addison

Churchill’s life was extraordinarily rich in visual imagery. He loved the camera and the camera loved him, as did cartoonists and portrait painters. His face exhibited a range of deep emotions that others preferred to conceal behind a stiff upper lip. His eccentricities of dress and theatrical gestures were the work of a great actor who could play Falstaff one day and Henry V the next. It is no wonder that his life has always lent itself to pictorial treatment, nor that so many photographs and portraits of him have achieved iconic status over the past fifty years. Most readers of Finest Hour will therefore probably be familiar with the majority of pictures in Max Arthur’s new compilation. He has, however, been at pains to vary the menu by including a number of hitherto unpublished pictures together with reproductions of original documents and a bonus item: specially commissioned shots of such Churchill memorabilia as his gramophone record of HMS Pinafore. He has also embedded the pictures, which are beautifully produced, in the text of a brief biography.

Arthur is best known as an oral historian collecting the “lost voices” of soldiers, sailors, and airmen in the two world wars. He normally writes about history “from below,” with little reference to Whitehall and Westminster, and his comparative lack of interest in the nuts and bolts of politics does reveal itself from time to time. He confuses Churchill’s maiden speech with his subsequent attack on the government’s proposals for Army reform (56). Thomas Jones was not as he claims (160) a member of Baldwin’s Cabinet. There are virtually no political cartoons here, no photograph of the Churchill War Cabinet, no glimpse of the General Election of 1945. The admirals, generals, air marshals, and chiefs of staff are almost as elusive. As a chronicle of his military and political life Martin Gilbert’s Churchill: A Photographic Portrait (1973) is more satisfactory.

Arthur puts more of an emphasis on Churchill’s life beyond Whitehall and Westminster. His family life and leisure activities feature strongly. The pictures of him with Clementine and the children convey a charming if exaggerated impression of a domesticated husband and father. His painting and bricklaying, holidays and travels, polo playing, and love of animals reveal a broad hinterland of humanity that makes him easier for most of us to relate to than the Olympian statesman. As we gaze at photos of him feeding a kangaroo at the London zoo or a deer in Richmond Park, it is easy to forget that this tender-hearted old gentleman was at about the same period contemplating a nuclear strike against Russia. Churchill’s darker moods were rarely captured on camera. Nevertheless this fine portrait gallery captures one of the essential truths about Churchill, the protean character (to quote John Dryden) of “a man so various that he seemed to be not one, but all mankind’s epitome.”

Paul Addison is emeritus Professor of History at the University of Edinburgh and the author of several books about Churchill, including Churchill on the Home Front (1995).
R ead, a former California journalist born in England, begins his book with a clear disclaimer: “I don’t consider this a biography or a work of history—though it contains elements of both. It is, instead, a true tale of adventure featuring Winston Churchill in the starring role. When writing the book, I described it to friends as ‘Winston Churchill as Indiana Jones’” (ix). And therein lies both the appeal and drawback of this latest addition to the ever-growing “Churchill and _____” shelf.

Read’s breezy style stitches together the adventurous story of Churchill’s first four wars on which the initial newspaper columns and several of WSC’s early books are based. These include his trip to Cuba to observe Spanish forces fighting rebels (1895–96), the fighting role of the Malakand Field Force in what is now Pakistan (1897), the “river war” in Sudan (1898), and the bitter South African Boer War on which Churchill reported (1899–1900). In all save the first, Churchill was also a serving officer in the British Army, an odd combination that raised eyebrows.

Churchill’s “lucky” placement in four such widespread conflicts over less than five years was no mere happenstance. His well-connected mother Jennie opened the right London doors to reach key government and army officials who surrendered to her charm and persuasion, often against their own better judgment. The seeming Churchill luck created more than a bit of envy and jealousy among many of the soldiers with whom he served.

Read provides a rollicking tale as promised, better in some places than others—indeed often best when closely paraphrasing the newspaper columns that Churchill sent back to London newspapers from his various army postings. To access those, readers may want to have close at hand the second edition of Frederick Woods’ excellent anthology of Churchill’s early wartime writing, *Winston S. Churchill War Correspondent, 1895–1900* (Brassey’s, 1992). The two books are ideal companions—Woods providing the published work from which Read has drawn part of his tale. The other primary source, of course, is the first volume of the official biography and its “companions.”

The drawback is, in the end, twofold: some things are left unexplained, and there is little new here amongst the dashing and derring do. Put another way, this is a Churchill book for readers new to the stories it tells.

And the unexplained? I wonder how many readers (Churchill aficionados or not) know what a heliograph is (31)? For the record, it was a late nineteenth-century signaling device that reflected sunlight with a system of mirrors. And in a way all too typical in popular books, we read about amounts of money (as was required, for example, to take care of a horse) with no sense (save in a few cases) of what that 1890s cost is in current-value dollars. This is no minor oversight: inflation of the British pound over the last century is more than a hundredfold. So when Jenny Churchill complains about the costs of keeping Winston in the style to which he aspired (and had already grown accustomed), we lack any sense of the modern comparative value (and thus financial pressure on both of them) involved.

To his credit, Read provides five outline maps that include most of the locations discussed. While not faultless (for example, I could not find Atbara—mentioned several times in the chapter on the River War—on the map of Egypt and the Sudan), they provide real help for readers unacquainted with the regions in question. And close to fifty pages of notes at the end allow those interested to pursue the source of quotes and other information.

Read (and Churchill) make clear the ways in which the four wars differed—in whom the British colonial forces were fighting, of course, but especially in the varied battlefields. The fighting grounds all shared an oppressive sticky (or in Egypt and the Sudan, dry) heat. The incipient colonial racism of the time (that the enemy were “savages” is but one example) is made clear. The chapter relating the famous “last” British cavalry charge at Omdurman in 1898 is grippingly told, drawing in part on Churchill’s own telling of the event in *The River War.*

Summing up, Read generally succeeds in presenting a true Churchillian adventure tale. Many of my concerns are quibbles of detail. Churchill’s reporting and fighting roles in these late Victorian colonial wars comes through well.

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**BOOKS, ARTS, AND CURiosITIES**

Our Man at the Front


ISBN 978-0306823817

**Review by Chris Sterling**

**Review by Chris Sterling**

Long interested in both airship history and Churchill, I had high expectations for this book that melds both topics. To a great extent they were met, though with a few frustrations along the way.

Leon Bennett’s book centers on the German Zeppelin (airship) bombing raids against England (and especially London) during the First World War and the defense measures taken to meet the new air threat. German fliers tried to bomb the city for months after the war began in August 1914, but initially managed only sporadic raids against easy-to-find coastal towns. Weather was often the chief culprit—especially capricious winds that could push the huge rigid airships miles off course. Crude nighttime navigation was hit or miss, often the latter. British airships (also covered here) faced the same limitations—a key reason that Churchill, after initial enthusiasm, became a consistent critic of the technology. Despite his misgivings, however, the British continued their expensive airship program after the war until the R 101 tragedy in 1930 shut down the effort.

When the huge and clumsy Zeppelins succeeding in hitting something in the Great War, public panic far exceeded the casualties or physical damage. For here was an invasion for which, at first, there seemed no defense. Gradually the fledgling British Royal Flying Corps and Naval Air Service developed methods of fighting the floating “baby killers,” including the use of searchlights and anti-aircraft guns, plus slowly improving fighter aircraft. The airship’s chief weakness was its reliance on highly flammable hydrogen gas to provide lift. Incendiary bullets or even small bombs dropped from above a Zeppelin’s flight path could lead to flaming death for all on board (no parachutes were carried). Indeed, more than half the German airship crews died (from all causes). The cost and loss of Zeppelins finally turned the Germans to what were really the first strategic bombers—huge (for that time) twin- and four-engine bomber aircraft that proved far more deadly weapons in the last two years of the war.

When the first Zeppelin raids reached London at the end of May 1915, Churchill had been forced out of his Admiralty leadership post (over Dardanelles policy, not airship raids), and was given little say on British air defense policy. But Bennett does a creditable job assessing the ongoing raids from both sides—the weather and navigation issues faced by Zeppelin captains and the many approaches considered (only a few were taken) by the British to bring down the aerial raiders. For despite their size and relative fragility, Zeppelins were very hard to hit given the technology of the time. In text and diagram, the author makes those difficulties all too evident (locating the airship, aiming searchlights and ground guns, directing fighter aircraft, and accounting for the raider’s speed, direction, and altitude).

And those frustrations? Most serious is that Bennett too often takes his reader off on a trail of unrelated details. He devotes three pages to the pre-war Marconi scandal, for example, and more than fifteen to assessing the Kaiser’s personal psychology. In fact Bennett does not really focus on Churchill and rigid airships until he reaches page 104! An alert editor should have trimmed such tangents and corrected the author’s irritatingly consistent use of “Winston” while referring to everyone else by surname. Consistent conversion of century-old British monetary figures is essential to give readers a real sense of relative value. Some numbers receive this treatment but too many others do not. There are other nuisances: one need not capitalize “naval” or “government,” and page 120 has underlines in place of the intended pound signs in at least four places. Finally, the publisher’s sales aim seems all too clear when the cover spells out CHURCHILL at twice the font size of the title’s remaining words.

Period illustrations, on the other hand, are a strong point—including a host of Churchill-themed cartoons from Punch and other contemporary publications. Diagrams (many by the author) help to explain technical aspects of Zeppelin development, operation, and destruction. Photos are also used well, though many suffer from the poor quality of their time.

Bennett makes clear that both sides in the Great War were pushing available technology to the limits—merely hinting at what the next world war would bring. But much of that story does not involve Churchill directly—and thus he disappears from the narrative for pages at a time. In the end, the cost, complexity, and comparative fragility of the Zeppelin airship gave way to the increasingly efficient capability of the airplane.
Une Grande Dame


**Review by Antoine Capet**

By coincidence, two new books on Clementine Churchill appeared, one on each side of the English Channel, in 2015. In addition to Sonia Purnell’s *First Lady: The Life and Wars of Clementine Churchill* (Aurum, 2015), the first-ever biography in French also appeared in the same year, written by two well-known journalists. The difficulty for English-language authors is to appear not to rely too much on Mary Soames’s standard life, *Clementine Churchill* (1979, revised 2002). But French buyers of *La femme du Lion* (*The Lion’s Wife*) are unlikely to be familiar with Lady Soames’s book, which is an advantage since the authors can—and do—draw freely from it. The intended readership is not clear—probably le grand public (the general public) since there are no footnotes. A large proportion of the book reminds one of the Court Circular in the quality press, and an even larger one of the People & Celebrities gossip columns of the popular press.

The Churchill circle of family, friends, and professional acquaintances is of course enormous, and the authors have made a commendably thorough investigation of the various people and places which featured in the Churchills’ world at some stage or other of their long lives. The name-dropping aspect of the text is absolutely remarkable for its extensiveness. Inevitably—and most often, interestingly—the book offers mini-biographies of the *dramatis personae*, for instance Blanche Hozier, with fewer paragraphs devoted to Clementine’s father. The description of Dieppe and its British colony around 1900 is excellent.

Some fascinating characters keep recurring in the narrative: Lady St Helier in Clementine’s youth, Venetia Stanley / Montagu (the index, probably generated automatically, has two entries for her) and Lady Diana Cooper later. Clementine’s sister Nellie and sister-in-law Gwendeline (“Goonie”) were also constant companions for Clementine, whose complex (to say the least) relationship with her husband’s cronies—Beaverbrook, Birkenhead, Bracken (“The Three Terrible B” as they are called in faulty English on page 159)—is well covered. So are her likes (Walter Guinness [curiously listed as “Brian Guinness” in the index], Eleanor Roosevelt, the Ismays, the Portals) and dislikes (the Reveses’ *ménage*, especially Wendy), though the authors omit Paul Maze among the latter: they simply mention his occasional presence. The *passion romantique* (204) with Terence, variously spelt Philip or Phillip, is of course described in lyrical tones.

Naturally, there is a full treatment of Clementine’s five children, with an emphasis on the sad events associated with the first four and the brilliant success of the last one. The reader will learn all about their love affairs and those of their spouses. Not surprisingly, the authors dwell on Clementine’s love for Paris and how she took full advantage of Mary’s position as the Ambassador’s wife to visit the Residence three or four times each year in the late 1960s.

I was particularly intrigued by two points, which I had never seen before. They write that she read her newspapers every morning wearing white gloves (384). It may be in Mary Soames’s biography, but I do not remember seeing it. Much more puzzling, they say on page 252 that Churchill’s nickname, “Winnie,” as used by the crowds in the autumn of 1940, is derived from “to win” and “winner.”

So, evaluating the book is a difficult task. The proofs were evidently not read—there is an irritating number of spelling mistakes: Evelyn Vaugh, Harold Nicholson, Sonia Purnelle, Eping, *Thank’s God, Personnal Guide*, lybien (for libyen [Libyan]). The index was obviously not scrutinised by a human eye. Many or most readers will perhaps not care, because the volume does have a very attractive section of photographs, some uncommon (and not in Mary Soames’s selection) and one in colour (a portrait with Sarah by Lavery, 1916). *Finest Hour* readers may want to acquire the book if only for this reason. And all will no doubt agree with the tribute in its concluding sentences, which one can translate as:

Whereas the wives of heads of state find it so hard to get the balance right between unobtrusiveness and arrogance, from the day of her marriage, aged 23, Clementine held the right position. She always remained incredibly true to her convictions, her certainties, her ambitions. From the Churchill legend, she knew all the secrets, all the shadows. The truths behind the myths. All that history will never know and she wanted to conceal. Because from the first day, imperturbable and proud, she never ceased to believe in him.

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At the time, however, it did not feel so easy. Privatisation was less the carefully planned rolling-out of an ideological programme than a series of risky ad hoc expedients, which flunked the opportunity to introduce more competition. Unemployment remained shockingly high, while the crucial confrontation with the coal-miners turned into a violent and divisive year-long confrontation, which could easily have ended in defeat for the government if the miners’ leader, Arthur Scargill, had played his cards less crassly. Irish republicans came close to assassinating the Prime Minister with a massive bomb planted in her hotel at the

Tory party conference in 1985; and a trivial turf war over a small helicopter company blew up into a crisis of trust which very nearly brought her down in 1986.

Nevertheless, she was emerging as a major player on the international stage, where by 1983 she was already the longest-serving leader among the G7 nations. While consolidating the close political and personal alliance she had already forged with Ronald Reagan, she simultaneously developed a combative but fruitful relationship with the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, thereby helping to broker the nuclear disarmament talks which eventually—after some alarm when she thought Reagan was willing to

bargain away Britain’s nuclear deterrent—enabled the West’s bloodless victory in the Cold War.

The main outline of all these big stories was already known from previous biographies and memoirs. Compared with his first volume, where Moore had access to genuinely new material about Margaret Roberts’ early life, there is surprisingly little in this second volume that is really revelatory. What gives his account its fascination and authority is the exceptional level of vivid detail about the processes of diplomacy and decision-making that his status as the official biographer has enabled him to deploy.

The portrait that emerges is not wholly admirable. Her treatment of colleagues was often appalling, making it easy to see why they eventually threw her out: she could be maddening, stubborn, unreasonable, and contradictory. But against that, her clarity of purpose, her ability to combine broad vision with mastery of detail, her work rate, and her unswerving dedication to the job as she saw it are nothing short of mind-boggling, and Moore’s meticulously constructed narrative—admirable but not uncritical—does her qualities full justice. If anything is lacking, it is any recognition of the ever-widening gulf of inequality that increasingly disfigures British (as it does American) society: but maybe that is a subject for his concluding volume. The more she recedes into history, however, the more phenomenal Margaret Thatcher appears, compared with her bland successors—or indeed most of her predecessors.

Charles Moore’s eagerly awaited third volume will complete a great biography of an exceptional life.
The Top Tories


**Review by David Hudson**

This study of the leadership of the British Conservative Party illustrates what happens when political scientists are permitted to forage in pastures historians have long tended to consider their own preserve. The authors use several straightforward criteria to determine the relative effectiveness of leaders of the British Conservative Party from the time of Sir Robert Peel onwards. Charts, tables, and graphs lend a statistical verisimilitude to the overall conclusions and invite the reader to ponder whether there might not be a solid evidentiary basis both for and against commonly held judgments about political success and failure. Most of the Conservative party leaders under consideration became Prime Minister at least once, and in many (but not all) cases this study tends to confirm the generally held verdict as to whether a particular leader was a success or a failure in the position of party leader.

The authors seek to assess the effectiveness of party leaders in terms of electoral success, at both national and constituency level, and attempt to link electoral success with the leader’s ability to craft an attractive and unifying message as Britain emerged into a new democratic age. The exigencies of mass politics and party unity may have left reduced scope for a certain kind of charismatic leadership, though leaders such as Robert Peel and Benjamin Disraeli were able to reconfigure the party message effectively for the masses who were Britain’s new masters by the end of the Victorian Age. Under their skilled leadership, a political philosophy emerged that was visceral, traditional, and at the same time forward-looking.

By contrast, leaders such as Arthur Balfour, Anthony Eden, Austen Chamberlain, and William Hague emerge as much less successful leaders both because they (for the most part) failed to win elections, and also because they failed to communicate effectively with either the party or the general public. In fact the hapless William Hague and his two successors in the Conservative leadership, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Howard, were all unable to make headway against the savvy image makers of New Labour. The authors are willing to concede that “[A]ssessing political leaders is difficult,” and they acknowledge that “achieving these tasks is much easier for some than for others” (29).

Surprisingly, Winston Churchill is found among the latter group, party leaders who performed statistically poorly in the study. John Charmley damns him with faint praise, assessing that he was “pretty much a failure” as party leader (238). In Churchill’s case, however, his stature as national leader between 1940 and 1945 enabled him to transcend party divisions. This fact, together with the massive leftward shift in European politics at the end of the Second World War, goes far to account for the Conservatives’ electoral catastrophe of July 1945. Charles Clarke concedes that when “only the results of 1950 and 1951 are considered, Churchill is the most successful twentieth-century Conservative leader in terms of seats gained, and the second most successful (after Baldwin) in terms of share of the vote increase. His case is perhaps the starkest example of the distinction between the national political leader (of a coalition), which Churchill patently was, and the leader of a political party, which, in a sense, Churchill did not become until after he had lost in 1945—if then” (52).

By contrast, Stanley Baldwin, who spent his later years as a member and subsequently the leader of a national coalition government, is (statistically at least) far the most successful of all Conservative lead-
Churchill Old and New in the Digital Domain

All of the books described in this review can be found through online sites such as Amazon.

Review by Catherine Katz

There are various statistics floating around in the public domain that predict the demise of print books. In 2011, Amazon reported that e-books outsold print books for the first time. There is likely a ceiling, however, on the number of people who prefer e-books to print books, and as a result the print book industry remains healthy and has more recently outpaced e-book sales. Given this audience’s historical inclination and sympathy for the traditional, most subscribers to Finest Hour likely fall into the camp that prefers print.

Despite this preference, e-publishing is not just a wilderness of insipidity. It can provide the Chur-chillian experience, the reader is somewhat unable to grasp his enormous historical stature. It is almost more intimidating to read about him in this way. With an e-book, it feels as if the history of such a colossus stretches on for eternity and you will never be able to finish it since you cannot physically see the end of the book. Perhaps a more modern biography might not be as challenging to read on a Kindle, as there is something about the relatively antiquated prose of the 1940s that can only be truly absorbed when you can smell the musty paper that is supposed to accompany supremely flowery language.

The e-publishing industry is one that broadens the Churchill universe in two directions. While it rejuvenates out of print works for an audience that is not routinely spelunking in library archives, it also draws in new Churchillians who have not heretofore engaged with Churchill because picking up a Martin Gilbert tome is simply too daunting.

In the last year, a variety of enthusiastic (if not exactly scholarly) new authors have contributed to Churchill’s digital conversation. As it is this institution’s mandate to review any and all publications that bubble to the surface of Oceana Churchil-lium, these authors will receive a few words for their efforts.

Gregory Watson’s The Inspirational Life Story of Winston Churchill (May 2015) and Tristan Clark’s Churchill: The Greatest Briton (June 2015) are two short, self-published works about Churchill’s life and legacy. While there is definitely room for summarized histories within the publishing industry, Wikipedia probably provides a more reliable (and typo-free) biographical overview for those with casual interest in the subject. Patrick Bishop’s Churchill’s Funeral: The End of Empire (May 2015) is another short work of somewhat higher quality. It examines a narrow, unique moment in Churchillian history—an appropriate use of digital self-publishing—and startlingly reminds the reader that Churchill and the Beatles were contemporaneous forces in the early 1960s. Finally, there is Madison Brown’s The 33 Golden Rules: Successful Life by Winston Churchill (June 2015). While the knee-jerk reaction to this is probably one of skepticism, as is the case with most self-help books, it is at its heart an amusing collection of Churchillian quips made friendly for the yoga and cleanse-diet crowd.

The low cost of e-publishing has expanded the media in which one can engage with Churchill, and this is a net gain. If Churchill is to have enduring relevance for future generations, he must be an approachable and democratic figure. Though not all e-books about Sir Winston are created equal, it is a medium that exposes newer audiences to now scarce classics and provides these newcomers with a way in which to take a personal stake in the conversation. Making Churchill accessible on Kindle helps to welcome a previously untapped demographic of Churchillians into the fold, which at its heart can only be a good thing.

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The Long Struggle


Review by Kevin Matthews

A young Winston Churchill wrote in 1901: “The wars of peoples will be more terrible than those of kings.” The next fifty years proved he was right, and it is fitting that Ian Kershaw opens his history of twentieth-century Europe with Churchill’s prediction. The first of a projected two–volume work, this book, like the years it covers, is dominated by war, a period when Europeans sank “into the pit of barbarism” (1).

Readers of Finest Hour may be disappointed that Churchill plays only a walk-on role here and there in Kershaw’s account of these events. To Hell and Back is part of a trend that has refocused the telling of these years on central and eastern Europe, what he calls the continent’s “killing grounds” (19). Even so, most will find it a worthy addition to their bookshelves.

In many ways, To Hell and Back echoes the observation made by Churchill long ago that, between 1914 and 1945, Europeans waged a second Thirty Years’ War. Others call it a “European Civil War,” an ideological struggle between liberal democracy, Soviet-style communism, and fascism in which, until the very end, it looked as if liberal democracy would come out the loser. Kershaw’s contribution is in the way he constructs this story. In this telling, Europe’s near-suicide can be explained by four inter-related causes: “an explosion of ethnic-racist nationalism,” “bitter and irreconcilable demands for territorial revisionism,” “acute class conflict” further inflamed by Russia’s Bolshevik Revolution, and “a protracted crisis of capitalism” (2). While these elements, alone or in combination, could be found in most of Europe, all four came together in one place: Germany. The result took Europeans “the closest they came to hell on earth” (346).

It was not supposed to be that way. Despite the all-too-evident gap between rich and poor, the near feudal conditions found in eastern Europe’s countryside, not to mention a growing trend in which nationalism was becoming hard to distinguish from racism, and especially anti-Semitism, at the dawn of the century most Europeans looked forward to an ever more stable, prosperous future. Memories of a “golden age” before 1914, Kershaw argues, were no postwar illusion. “The old world in its sunset,” to use Churchill’s poetic turn of phrase, “was fair to see.”

The Great War, of course, changed all that. Even though the 1939–45 conflict was far more destructive, the struggle of 1914–18 set in train all that was to follow. Again, it was not supposed to be that way. However much the victors deserve to be condemned for the Treaty of Versailles, Kershaw points out that their goal was laudable: namely, a new Europe founded on democracy. Indeed, after the experience of the war, Europeans demanded nothing less. But, there was a paradox. Mass-participation politics when coupled with new forms of communication, notably radio and film, also could be used by extremists on both left and right to cripple and then destroy the very governments on which so many set their hopes.

Never far from the picture is Adolf Hitler’s looming presence. The question of whether his drive to war could have been stopped is impossible to answer. For his part, Kershaw maintains that Churchill’s pleas for a “grand alliance” of Britain, France, and the Soviet Union never stood a chance because leaders in London and Paris loathed the Soviets at least as much as they did the Nazis. Even so, he agrees that Churchill’s grand alliance was the “best option” for averting the catastrophe many saw coming (334). In that sense, the Second World War really was “the unnecessary war.”

Kevin Matthews is a Professor of History at George Mason University. He is the author of Fatal Influence: The Impact of Ireland on British Politics, 1920–25 (University College Dublin Press, 2004).

The War at Sea


Review by Kevin D. McCranie

The Battle of the Atlantic, the longest sustained campaign of the European theater in the Second World War, began with the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939. It continued to rage right up to the German surrender in 1945. Yet, the term “Battle of the Atlantic” is a misnomer, according to Jonathan Dimbleby. Rather than a traditional Trafalgar-like battle, the Atlantic struggle encompassed a series of naval campaigns over an expansive geographical region from the icepack in the Arctic deep into the vastness...
of the South Atlantic. The primary German weapon was the U-boat. The desired victim was merchant shipping with the object of attacking Britain’s greatest vulnerability: its critical dependence on resources coming from overseas.

The subtitle of Dimbleby’s book, *How the Allies Won the War*, is certainly provocative but reflects his thesis that the Atlantic battle was the decisive struggle in the war. To prove his point he quotes President Franklin Roosevelt: “I believe the outcome of this struggle is going to be decided in the Atlantic” (xxvi). Nothing, to Dimbleby, more clearly explains the battle’s significance. He maintains that nearly everything else in the war was contingent upon the grinding, attritional campaign occurring in the stormy waters of the Atlantic.

The quality of Dimbleby’s prose makes this enjoyable reading. He describes issues and events both large and small from the impact of rationing in Britain to the terror of being in a U-boat under attack by a deluge of depth charges. Particularly, Dimbleby’s use of quotations from those who were there allows the reader to begin to feel the suffering, suspense, and even fear associated with the Battle of the Atlantic.

Dimbleby adopts a largely chronological approach but mixes in thematic chapters to describe things such as the impact of the Battle of the Atlantic on British society, the significance of Allied code breaking, and the arduous PQ convoys destined for the Arctic ports of the Soviet Union. Through all of this, the thesis of Dimbleby’s narrative is clear: this is the struggle that is key to understanding the outcome of the Second World War.

Churchill serves as the prime protagonist. As First Lord of the Admiralty in the opening stage of the conflict and later as Prime Minister, he made decisions that had significant influence on the outcome of the campaign. These included assessments about the allocation of resources, the direction of the war effort, the need to support the Soviets with Arctic convoys, and the availability of long-range aircraft to search for and attack U-boats in the Atlantic. Churchill both influenced the battle and was influenced by it.

Dimbleby has written a page-turner aimed primarily at general readers interested in history and particularly the Second World War. But there are scholarly attributes. The extensive bibliography and endnotes, including numerous citations of British archival sources, prove the author did his homework.

There are, however, several factors that limit the book’s utility. It is written from a primarily British perspective. Dimbleby does not ignore other participants but relegates them to a supporting cast. American efforts, particularly failures to combat U-boat attacks in 1942, are described in detail. He shows German U-boat operations from the perspective of the men behind the periscope. And if there is a counterpart to Churchill on the German side, it is Admiral Karl Dönitz, who oversaw the U-boat war. Rather than consulting the original German sources, however, Dimbleby relies on English translations as well as what English-language historians have written about the German effort.

Denying the Germans success in the Atlantic was key to keeping the British fed, their war industries producing, and their military fighting. But was it, as Dimbleby claims, “how the Allies won the war”? Though he makes a clear and impassioned argument while astutely setting the Battle of the Atlantic in the broader context of events, Dimbleby never entirely convinces the reader that this was the key struggle. Too many other factors contributed to Allied victory. Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the professional head of the Royal Navy, put it bluntly: “If we lose the war at sea, we lose the war” (436). Perhaps a better subtitle, then, would have been *How the Allies Avoided Losing the War*. That said, this is still a brilliant description of an epic campaign.

Kevin D. McCranie teaches history at the United States Naval War College.

**The Finest Hour Revisited**


**Review by Robert Courts**

When I was young, I remember a book by Herbert Agar, *Britain Alone*, left lying on the stairs by my parents. I was intrigued by the picture of the Tommy on the cover staring in defiance at the clouds of aircraft swarming over the cliffs of Dover. I became dimly aware that this was something that had happened to my country, not so long ago, and that it was a “big deal.” When older, I read the book, which told in ringing tones what is still one of the most stirring stories in all history: the lonely, vital stand of Britain and the Commonwealth between the fall of France and Hitler’s invasion of Russia. This is the story that Robin Prior tells here, and it is told in equally memorable style.

This is an accurate, straightforward, narrative history of a compelling story. It is predominantly a military history, describing the Battle of France, the evacuation of Dunkirk, and of Fighter Command’s immortal
in 1940, Britain, led by Winston Churchill, refused to lose, and that stubborn refusal kept hope alive. It is refreshing to see someone speak openly of what is now an unfashionable concept: that of the West, and of Britain saving it. Perhaps it is significant that Agar was American, and Prior is Australian; maybe it takes an Anglophone friend to remind Britain of what she achieved in those stern, great days. But the story remains as stunning now as it did in the 1980s, and Prior’s book is a great place to start. Perhaps it will inspire those who will be reviewing in the pages of Finest Hour in the 2040s.

Robert Courts is a barrister living within sight of Churchill’s grave at Bladon.

Divine Intervention?


Review by Robert Courts

When St Martin’s Church, Bladon decided to install a stained glass window to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Churchill’s death, the most thorny question was how to commemorate—in a Church—a man who, whilst undoubtedly the saviour of Christian civilisation, was in no intellectually honest sense a Christian. In trying to grapple with that question, the authors of this book make two radical, but ultimately unconvincing, arguments.

First, the authors appear to argue that Churchill was—sort of—a Christian. It was just that he did not realise it himself. Sandys develops this argument more candidly on his blog, http://leadlikechurchill.org/blog/ where he makes the startling claim, “Churchill not only believed in God and the words in the Bible...his faith was foundational to his character and leadership.” Thus, Churchill quoted the Bible because it formed part of his psychological foundation. Perhaps it did, but he also quoted Shakespeare and Tennyson; because he loved literature. Further, it is counterintuitive to suggest that Churchill’s opposition to Nazism was because of Mrs. Everest’s Biblical lessons, rather than a long-established humanity and geopolitical understanding. Churchill simply valued the morality that underpinned Western life and recognised that as stemming from Christianity. But that did not make him a Christian, be that as a “religious pietist” or otherwise.

Secondly, the authors argue that Churchill was an agent of God’s will, and that the story of his life reveals the hand of divine destiny. Thus when Churchill narrowly missed being shot in Cuba, it was because he was being spared. Or when he dislocated his shoulder in India, it was to ensure that he fought with gun, not a sword at Omdurman, and thus avoided death. The authors can of course argue that, if you believe in God’s omnipresence and divine plan, who is to say that was not the case? It is of course impossible to prove a negative. But narrowly avoiding being shot in battle is a story that every soldier can tell, and it does not prove that God was sparing Churchill. Further, if we are to accept that God’s hand brought Churchill into being and sustained his existence to deal with Hitler, then we also have
to grapple with the uncomfortable fact that He appears also to have sustained Hitler—who also had many close brushes with death—simply to give Churchill someone to defeat. That may appear to be rather a twisted game to the sixty million who died in the Second World War. Further, this leaves aside the even more uncomfortable fact that Stalin—as close to a human Antichrist as it is surely possible to invent—had just as much a leading role. Why was not Stalin the man sent by God to prepare the way for “the ultimate Deliverer”?

In these twin points lies the ultimate weakness of this book. The “moments of destiny” do not justify the authors’ claims, and there is little attempt at serious theology herein, apart from some references to the Bible in the central section with tendentious references to Churchill’s character.

It is painful to criticise a book that clearly means so much to the authors. Sandys in particular states that he has suffered “setbacks, that shattered [his] innocence about the World” and that “something had to change to get [his] life back on track. That change began…when I ‘met’ Winston Spencer Churchill….” Clearly, if a person wishes to believe the romantic notion that, through the smoke and dust of 1940, we can see the goodness of God’s hand at work, then that is insufficient. Certainly, to overcome personal difficulties by following Churchill’s example is something every Churchillian would endorse. However, to enlist Churchill as some kind of unwitting Christian, a “God-haunted” man, is against anything that he ever wrote or said. Churchill never went any further than a vague belief in some kind of Higher Power, and in the value of “Christian ethics.” It is a bridge too far to argue that, simply because he did good work, “Winston Churchill was a deliverer prepared and brought onto the human scene through a sovereign act of God to counteract the work of Adolf Hitler.”

All about Hope

Churchill's Secret. First broadcast by ITV on 29 February 2016

Review by Robert Courts

Churchill’s Secret is an adaptation of Jonathan Smith's 2015 novel The Churchill Secret, KBO (reviewed FH 168), with an all-star cast, and shot in part on location at Chartwell.

It tells the story of Churchill’s 1953 stroke, suffered whilst entertaining an Italian delegation at 10 Downing Street, his struggle to recover before the Conservative Party conference that year, and the extraordinary conspiracy between the press, politicians, and Churchill’s family to keep his critical condition a secret.

The film is beautifully shot, taking full advantage of a pristine sun-dappled Chartwell in June. Like a soft-focus Downton Abbey, the camera lingers on the rooms of the house, the wooden panelling, and the sun shining in brilliant beams through small windows illuminating dust and the busts on Churchill’s desk. And this superb set is not Chartwell; the external shots are, but the internals are incredibly good representations of the originals.

Sir Michael Gambon’s portrayal of the aged Winston is sublime: we see what was really remarkable about this maddeningly lovable man: the stubborn refusal to give in to difficulties, personal or political, the irresistible charm, the increasing cantankerousness as his health improves, the concern for his conference speech, and above all the burning desire to do something for peace before it is all too late. There is no doubt that audiences will be eternally grateful that Gambon decided not to focus on the tics of speech, unlike some recent ghastly portrayals of Winston.

Speaking of ghastly, the show was almost stolen by the children, particularly Matthew Macfaddyen’s splendidly unpleasant portrayal of Randolph: insufferably loud, unstable, drunken, rude, unthinking, but also loving and loyal. The overall effect is probably unfair to those concerned, but it does convey the sense of how difficult it would have been to be Winston’s children, psychologically creaking as they struggle to live up to his name, his expectations—and their own. Macfaddyen’s Randolph expresses this torment perfectly: exploding in frustration that they were all “moons to the big planet” before...
busting into tears at the thought that the planet might be at the end of its life.

Lindsay Duncan’s portrayal of Clementine is excellent; the viewer will long remember her haunted face as her family bicker and her husband lies ill upstairs. All the while, she knows that she is married to the Greatest Man of All Time; even if he recovers, he will not come home and live the quiet family life that she so desires.

This TV film is not only beautifully shot and acted, but respectful of its subject at a difficult time, dramatic from the start—and above all a story of moral and physical courage that is deeply moving. There is a palpable sense of relief and growing triumph as we see Chartwell coming alive, dust sheets thrown off, and the house staff mobilised: then Winston wakes, speaks, demands a cigar, moves—and overcomes. It is ultimately, as Winston says, all about hope, and “hope is what makes the difference.”

One major error: a character opines to the aged statesman that her father had been no fan of his “since you sent in the army on those Welsh miners.” Sir Winston’s lack of response to this urban myth can only have been due to his condition. Well, we cannot have everything.

A companion review by Dr. John H. Mather focusing on the depiction of the medical aspects of the drama can be found in the March 2016 edition of the Chartwell Bulletin on The Churchill Centre website.

**Churchill as a Literary Character: WSC in Fiction**


ISBN 978-1908853561

*Review by Michael McMenamin*

*The Finest Years & Me* is a sequel of sorts to Mark Woodburn’s excellent first novel *Winston & Me* [reviewed FH 160] that featured a young fifteen-year-old Scottish hero Jamie Melville, who lies about his age to enlist in the Army and ends up in Churchill’s battalion in 1915. Jamie and his age eventually come to Churchill’s attention in an unfortunate way when Churchill’s batman is wounded and Jamie is chosen to take his place. Churchill takes the young man under his wing, and Jamie repays the kindness by saving Churchill’s life when he gets entangled on barbed wire in No-Man’s Land. When Churchill returns to politics in 1916, he takes Jamie with him as an assistant, a position he holds until 1919, when he left to join his brothers in the family business.

Flash forward to February 1942, where *The Finest Years & Me* begins. We learn through flashbacks that Jamie has remained a close friend of Churchill and Clementine over the years and that he is a widower with three daughters. America is in the war, but things are not going well for Churchill. Hong Kong and Singapore have fallen and, at home, Beaverbrook and Cripps see themselves as Churchill’s replacement. Winston’s spirits are at low ebb, and Clementine decides that her husband needs at his side a loyal friend—someone not named Bracken—whom she can trust. She tells her son Randolph: “He needs someone that cares for him but isn’t frightened of him. Who can tell him when he has to stop!” Someone who can remain behind the scenery but has the personality and will to impose himself when it matters...someone who wants nothing or needs nothing from him, but who has affection for him and understanding. Most of all, understanding!” Clementine smiles, and when her son asks, “Why the big grin?” she says, “I know who that someone is.”

Enter Jamie Melville who is persuaded to work once more for the man he still refers to as “Colonel.” Most of the book takes place during 1942, and Jamie is at Churchill’s side throughout from London to Washington, D.C., and back again. Woodburn’s portrayal of Churchill is once more first-rate, as is his portrayal of other historical characters like Clementine Churchill, Brendan Bracken, Lord Beaverbrook, Harry Hopkins, Alan Brooke, FDR, George Marshall, Admiral King, Eisenhower, and a host of other lesser characters. Like its predecessor, it is more a historical novel than a historical thriller, but, as the blurb on the cover says, “Jamie is at the centre of high-end decision making, intrigue, treachery and betrayal,” including a blonde femme fatale.

If you enjoyed *Winston & Me*, you will find *The Finest Years & Me* equally satisfying.

Novels are rated one to three stars on two questions: Is the portrayal of Churchill accurate and is the book worth reading?

*Michael McMenamin* writes the Finest Hour feature “Action This Day” and is a member of its editorial board. He and his son Patrick are co-authors of the award-winning Winston Churchill Thriller series *The DeValera Deception, The Parsifal Pursuit, and The Gemini Agenda*, set during Churchill’s Wilderness Years, 1929–1939.
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