

# The Churchill factor

John & Fiona Earle

In June, a few of us will go up to Sele School where we will sit down with groups of schoolchildren.

We will talk about conditions in England during the last war, when the 65-year-old Winston Churchill was Prime Minister and from time to time spoke to us on the radio.

We will probably answer questions about rationing and show the children what a week's butter ration looks like. They may ask about the blackout and the danger from enemy bombs, air raid shelters.

We may describe the evacuation of children who lived in cities to the countryside.

Recently we read Boris Johnson's well-researched book on the life of Churchill. As a journalist, Churchill had reported on three different wars for different newspapers. He knew the value of information, particularly when he had better information than anyone else. As an MP he knew more about the growth of the Luftwaffe than Stanley Baldwin, the then Prime Minister.

Churchill had been to Sandhurst and was commissioned in the Queen's Own Hussars. He took part in a cavalry charge at the Battle of Omdurman in the Sudan. When he became Prime Minister he had seen more active service than any Prime Minister since Wellesley.

In 1911, after a period of intense study, he predicted the course of the first 40 days of the next war. He knew where the French would retreat. He submitted this as a long memorandum to the Committee of Imperial Defence. A general rejected it as 'ridiculous and fantastic'.

Every word that Churchill wrote came true.

In 1908 he had married Clementine, the love of his life. He wrote to her "I think a lot about you my darling Pussie, (they had pet

names for each other. He was Pug or Pig) and rejoice that we have lived together and still have some year's of expectation in this pleasant vale."

Could he have done what he did without her? It looks unlikely.

## The Second World War

Twenty-two years after the ending of the First World War, Hitler moved his troops into France, after he had moved into Scandinavia. When Hitler moved into Poland, he started the Second World War on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939.

On 28 May 1940, Churchill, and he alone, persuaded the Cabinet to fight the Nazis rather than negotiate with Hitler.

Churchill could see that the French fleet could be taken by the Germans and he ordered the attack on the French Navy by our Royal Navy on 3rd July. It was slaughter, but there was no other way as the House of Commons recognised.

A week later, the aerial Battle of Britain began. If Hitler was to invade the UK, he had to win the battle in the skies. It was an incredibly close-run thing. Our 'secret weapon' was RADAR that detected enemy aircraft before they could be seen.

Altogether, 5000 British and Allied pilots lost their lives before the Germans withdrew. (See also, 'First Light' by Geoffrey Wellum, one of the fighter pilots who survived).

Following this, Churchill wrote:

*"Never in the field of human conflict  
Has so much  
Been owed by so many  
To so few."*

The 'so many' refers to the English, the French, all who had no wish to be overcome by the Nazis.

The 'so much' referred to everything that meant 'England' from warm beer to village cricket, democracy and public libraries.

### **Contact with People**

Churchill knew that if he was to lead people, he must understand them. They must understand him. After a damaging air raid on London, Churchill would go to see and be seen.

He knew what went on in the way of codebreaking in Bletchley Park. They had direct access to him. He knew, and strongly approved of the sabotage that was taught at Brickendonbury. The extremely brave Norwegians who destroyed a 'heavy water' factory in Norway trained at Brickendonbury. There, a mock-up of the factory was built and the Norwegians rehearsed their moves time and again, by day and in the dark. Had this not been done, had this not been achieved, the Nazis would have made the Atom Bomb first.

Three years later, Field Marshal Rommel's army was defeated at the Battle of El Alamein. After this, Churchill wrote:

*"This is not the end.  
It is not even the beginning of the  
end,  
But it is, perhaps, the end of the  
beginning."*

### **D-Day**

We must move on now to D-Day. John heard a story that could well be true. A man who lived in the north of Scotland had been told to ring a London number around dusk, whatever time that might be. He was to say what the weather had been-that day, and what he expected on the next day.

One day, late in the afternoon, he looked at the sky. It had been a fine day and the sky looked clear. Suddenly he realised that he could not hear any bird song. The birds had gone away and this usually meant a storm was coming. He phoned the London number and his message was relayed to the

British Chiefs of Staff.

The next day had been designated as the day to invade France. This needed a day with only a gentle breeze. The Chiefs discussed their options. Could they, should they postpone D-Day by 24 hours. They spoke to Churchill. He said "I think we should act on what the birds have told us." The invasion was postponed.

The next day was stormy, but on the day after that the sea was calm and the invasion was successful after some very efficient reorganisation.

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