

CHURCHILL IN THE WAR ROOMS

by

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CHURCHILL IN THE WAR ROOMS

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

from *The Second Coming*, W.B. Yeats

IN our lifetime one story of warfare, the defense of the British island in 1940, ranks among the great legends of history. The Britons, once grandest of all imperial nations, faced a situation as old as civilization, awaiting at their shores a barbarous aggressor possessed of an apparently superior military technology. The German attack that year includes episodes remembered by the islanders as the Battle of Britain, the Blitz, and a beginning to the Battle of the Atlantic. Germany called their plan to invade England "Operation ScaLion."

In 1920 Walter Lippman wrote: "people are tired . . . of noise . . . of politics . . . of inconvenience . . . of greatness, longing for a place where the world is quiet." Nowhere was this feeling stronger than in Great Britain. British public opinion supported non-commitment in Europe, limited involvement with the League of Nations, and disarmament.

At the beginning of the next decade, economic collapse seemed to finish hope for the growth of democracy. Autocratic governments were on the rise in Europe. In the Far East the military specter of Japan had appeared. By 1932, the British Cabinet abandoned their Ten Year Rule, a postwar policy governing defense issues which had assumed war to be at least ten years in the future. In 1933 and 1934 the British government began in earnest the long process of preparing for defense.

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Winston Churchill, ordinary Member of Parliament, his political career in decline, gave his first warning of German intentions in the House of Commons, November 23, 1932:

... the demand is that Germany should be allowed to rearm. Do not delude yourselves ... they will then ask for the return of lost territories and lost colonies. ... Britain is weaker; and Britain's hour of weakness is Europe's hour of danger.

Churchill's militant tone seemed like the popular demagoguery on the continent as he spoke to the House, February 7, 1934:

... the crash of bombs exploding in London and the cataracts of masonry and fire and smoke will apprise us of any inadequacy which has been permitted in our aerial defenses. We are as vulnerable as we have never been before. ...

Later that year, November 28, 1934, Churchill again addressed the House of Commons: "... one could hardly expect that less than 30,000 or 40,000 people would be killed or maimed" in a week or ten days intensive bombing of London. He predicted three or four million people would leave the city.

Not long after the First World War ended, the British economy began to stagnate. Britain had spent nearly ten billion pounds in the war, over seventy percent borrowed. One of every eight members of the labor force was unemployed by 1926. World-wide depression finally brought an end to party government. A National Government was formed in 1931 by Ramsey MacDonald, a Labourite, but traditional and orthodox in his economic views. In 1935, Stanley Baldwin, cousin of Kipling, an industrialist and Conservative party leader, formed the Second National Government. Neville Chamberlain another Conservative, succeeded Baldwin in 1936. MacDonald, Baldwin and Chamberlain all represented the most rational and stable leadership for a country that only was concerned with social and economic problems.

By the early 1930's British military forces had become reduced to levels clearly not adequate to defend its traditional political interests. The Royal Air Force at the end of the First World War with twenty-two thousand aircraft had been the largest in the world, and now was ranked sixth in size. In

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1934 the R.A.F. consisted of less than 750 wooden biplanes. The Royal Navy was smaller than at any time in two generations. The British army, most depleted of all branches of service, consisted of a hundred fifty thousand men.

In starting to rebuild its defense, British leadership in the years from 1934 to 1938 made certain assumptions of air warfare. Everyone was highly concerned about aerial bombardment of the civilian population, including attack with gas. Initially the British believed a large bomber force would deter an aggressor. Two new bomber squadrons were authorized for every new fighter squadron until home defense was given a higher priority after the Munich Crisis war scare of 1938.

The British air force soon included modern fighter squadrons for air defense. By 1938 the Royal Air Force had over nineteen hundred metal monoplanes, seventy-five percent located in the British Isles. The Germans developed a different role for their air force, after experimenting in the 1936 Spanish Civil War. The Luftwaffe was to be used as a form of aerial artillery to fight in coordination with fast moving tanks and mobile personnel carriers.

By 1939 R.A.F. Fighter Command was equipped with new Hurricanes and Spitfires. Bomber Command with its larger long range aircraft already in production by 1939, was ready for their assignment to attack German cities. Radio Direction Finder stations were established throughout south-east and southern England. Radio Direction Finder would be renamed "radar" later in the war by the Americans. Approaching aircraft could be detected over the English Channel, although determining altitude was a problem. It was an important British secret weapon which would baffle the Luftwaffe.

As the clever hope expires
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

from September 1, 1939, W.H. Auden

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Early Sunday morning of the first day of September 1939, the Germans attack across the Polish border. Prime Minister Chamberlain interrupts the B.B.C. broadcast at ten A.M. to announce Britain is at war. Air raid sirens sound immediately in London, barrage balloons start appearing throughout the skies. No enemy planes are sighted. In the evening of the first day of war, Winston Churchill is invited back into the British Cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty. A short message is delivered to Royal Navy commanders throughout the world: "Winston is back."

Churchill immediately moves into his offices at the Admiralty and arranges to be brought up to date on all military activities. First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, is instructed to assign an officer to recreate a map room as used by Churchill in the First World War. Captain Richard Pim of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and a staff of officers invalided out of active service are assigned to map room duty. Captain Pim remains with this assignment throughout the war, setting up map rooms wherever Churchill is traveling. Churchill's map room is a news center, a visual display of the latest dispositions.

In the spring of 1939 after guaranteeing Poland's borders, the British had started military conscription hoping to expand their army to a million men by 1940. Most of this activity was still on paper in September when Germany crossed the Polish border. ~~On the second day of war British army units crossed the Polish border.~~ On the second day of war British army units crossed the Channel. Two British divisions, the only fully trained units, were moved to France within the first two weeks of September. Eight months later when Hitler finally attacked westward, British forces on the continent had been expanded to ten divisions.

Hitler subdued Poland in four weeks. Neville Chamberlain called the next six months "Twilight War." The press termed it the "Phony War." Little happened compared to what had been expected. British bombers were restricted to flying over German cities dropping propaganda leaflets. It was feared that actual bombing attacks would cause retaliatory air raids by the Luftwaffe.

Hitler planned to attack the western countries of Europe earlier, but was delayed by adverse weather and then in January when his battle plans were found in a plane crash. An unexpected threat developed in the north when the Russo-Finnish war brought attention to the Scandinavian countries. Hitler began to hear of British plans to occupy Norway and Sweden, under

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the guise of assisting Finland. Churchill was instrumental in bringing Scandinavia onto the war scene. He argued that the Royal Navy could close off the Baltic sea, and the loss of Scandinavian iron ore would shut down German war production.

Churchill's strategy of mining Norwegian territorial waters was finally authorized on April 3, 1940. Two German ships were sunk. Hitler attacks Denmark and Norway on April 9th. Denmark capitulates immediately, Norwegian resistance is virtually over by month end. British land forces are ineffective. The Royal Navy, contrary to Churchill's belief, cannot stop the invasion.

The Norwegian campaign was a great personal failure for Winston Churchill. It was exactly the kind of military action which Churchill's reputation from the First World War had led his detractors and even his friends to expect. It had strategic appeal but was handled in a slap-dash manner.

The defeat seemed a portentous disaster to Britain. The Luftwaffe and German navy now had coastal facilities which were an unexpected new threat. In a campaign which matched German air supremacy against British mastery of the sea, it was apparent that air power was more important.

The political consequences were significant. Churchill was aware that he should have been held responsible for the Scandinavian disaster. On May 7th and 8th the House of Commons debating the crisis exploded in hostility towards the Chamberlain government. It was a day of eloquence and drama with few parallels in the history of Parliament. Chamberlain's oldest friends deserted him. One says:

We are fighting today for our life, for our liberty, for our all. . . . You have sat here too long. . . .

Churchill describes the attack from the Opposition:

When they broke in upon me I retorted upon them and defied them, and several times the clamour was such that I could not make myself heard. Yet all the time it was clear that their anger was not directed against me but at the Prime Minister. . . .

The hand that signed the treaty bred a fever,
And famine grew, and locusts came;
Great is the hand that holds dominion over
Man by a scribbled name.

from *The Hand That Signed The Paper Felled A City*,
Dylan Thomas

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The Conservative government of Neville Chamberlain was replaced by a coalition government led by Winston Churchill on the evening of May 10, 1940. Lord Beaverbrook may have been correct when he said: "... not the King or the politicians wanted Churchill, but the people." Early that same morning the German army had crossed the Dutch border and was invading western Europe. News from the front lines were on the headlines of Britain's newspapers as Churchill began to form his Cabinet. A War Cabinet was formed consisting of five persons: Churchill, Chamberlain, and Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary from the Conservative side, Clement Attlee and Arthur Greenwood of Labour. War Cabinet members would be free of administrative responsibilities to concentrate on matters of war policy.

Other Cabinet members were appointed. The three service ministers were not members of the War Cabinet. Labourite A.V. Alexander became first Lord of the Admiralty, Anthony Eden was appointed War Minister (Army affairs), and the leading Liberal Sir Archibald Sinclair became Air Minister. Other posts included: Herbert Morrison as Minister of Supply; Ernest Bevin, who was to remain throughout the war as Minister of Labour; Duff Cooper, the only Cabinet minister who had resigned after Chamberlain's capitulation to Hitler in the Munich crisis became Minister of Information; and Sir John Anderson as Home Secretary. Lord Beaverbrook was given a newly created role which detached the supply responsibility of the Air Ministry, becoming Minister of Aircraft Production.

Morrison became Home Secretary in an October reshuffling of Cabinet positions. Considered political boss of London, he was well-suited to handle the responsibility in the Home Office for air raid precautions and fire-fighting during the Blitz.

Throughout the war Churchill's War Cabinet included a total of fifteen different people. His appointments to this war policy group were designed to keep party balance. During the course of the war forty-eight different people held posts of Cabinet rank outside of the War Cabinet itself. Generally Churchill kept distribution of these ministries in proportion to the balance of parties in the House of Commons. The initial group of senior government posts were held by fifteen Conservatives, four Labourites, and one Liberal.

Churchill's decision to make himself Secretary of Defense and exclude the armed service ministries from the War Cabinet was a clear indication to the rest of the government that the war effort was going to be firmly under

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his control. Churchill had long considered he had a better grasp of strategic military matters than his political associates and most military professionals. In his own words he described his feelings upon taking charge of the government:

In my long political experience I had held most of the great offices of State, but I readily admit that the post which had now fallen to me was the one I liked the best. . . . Power in a national crisis, when a man believes he knows what orders should be given is a blessing. . . .

Churchill addressed the House of Commons on May 13th, three days after he assumed leadership of the government. He had not yet received the enthusiasm of the Members that had endured his rhetoric for so many years. He tells the House: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat."

In later years, millions believed they heard Churchill use those words over the radio. Editor of the Times notes in his diary: "Quite a good little warlike speech from Winston. . . ." M.P. Harold Nicolson enters in his diary:

When Chamberlain enters the House, he gets a terrific reception, and when Churchill comes in the applause is less. Winston sits there between Chamberlain and Attlee. . . . Winston makes a very short statement, but to the point.

Winston Churchill was 65 years old when he became Prime Minister. He had been born in 1874, fifteen years before Hitler, eight years before Roosevelt. Churchill graduated from Sandhurst in 1895 and had served thereafter with his regiment in India. He began to study history as a young soldier, reading Gibbon and Macaulay. His first book the *River War* published in 1899, described Kitchener's Sudan campaigns. It was a popular success and in 1899 he resigned his commission and ran unsuccessfully as a Conservative candidate for Parliament.

With the outbreak of the Boer War, Churchill now an established writer as well as a military man, was able to obtain a job as a war correspondent. He managed to get involved and captured in a military affair. The British public, looking for any good news from South Africa, followed Churchill's fascinating escape story in the newspapers.

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Churchill became a celebrity. He was elected the next year as a Conservative M.P. in the Khaki Election of 1900. He was immediately compared to his father Randolph, a brilliant but erratic personality and Conservative leader who had been Chancellor of the Exchequer. Winston did not let his detractors down with the unusual step of resigning from the Conservative party to join the Liberals in 1902.

At age 37 in 1911 Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty. It was an assignment suited to his talents and he enjoyed this period of his life. During the pre-war years he was instrumental in developing British naval strength, including modernization of its equipment. In the early part of the war, Churchill led the Royal Navy to an important role requiring the German military to protect its positions along the North Sea.

In 1915 Winston Churchill supported the British attempt to force the entrance to the straits of the Dardanelles, relieve Russia, isolate the Turks, and perhaps break the stalemate of the western front. It was an audacious plan, ending as an embarrassing failure for Britain. First Sea Lord, Admiral Fisher, in his mid-seventies, an eccentric genius originally coaxed out of retirement by Churchill, suddenly resigned claiming Churchill had gone ahead with the Dardanelles operation over his disapproval. The assertion was only partially correct. Churchill remained the scape-goat and was removed from Admiralty.

After serving in France for a few months in early 1916 in command of a battalion, Churchill returned to his seat in Parliament. Lloyd George later brought him into an important role as Minister of Munitions. In 1919 Churchill became Secretary of State for War and for Air, a dual responsibility in restructuring the army and air force for peacetime.

Gradually returning to the Conservative party after the First World War, he became Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1924 to 1929 in Stanley Baldwin's Cabinet. Domestic and financial affairs were never Churchill's main areas of interest or knowledge. He was an energetic member of the government, taking strong and positive positions on many political matters. When labor unrest threatened, his combative nature was aroused and he was at his best.

Churchill was not invited back into a Cabinet post for another decade. He continued to write books, he learned to paint, did construction work at his country home Chartwell. Churchill had few political friends in Parliament, as he began to support unfashionable causes. He not only railed

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against the lack of military preparedness in Britain, but fought India's growing independence movement, and was almost the sole supporter of King Edward VIII in the 1936 Abdication crisis.

Having switched political parties twice, Churchill had alienated members of both Conservative and Liberal parties, and was always antagonistic to the growing Labour party. Churchill's lack of party loyalty had much to do with his exclusion from the National Governments of the mid-1930's. Among Churchill's most unusual traits was his lack of personal animosity towards his political opponents. He enjoyed fighting and challenging other politicians, but was not generally capable of hostile personal emotions towards adversaries. This fine quality was unfortunately a source of confusion to him. He could never understand why others might not like him, or want to associate with him.

In the last issue of *Time Magazine* before the Second World War, Winston Churchill not yet in the British Cabinet, is on its cover. The story describes:

One afternoon early last week a short, stout, chubby-cheeked gentleman wearing a black hat and smoking a black cigar entered the House of Commons and took his place on the Government benches. He was the Right Honorable Winston Churchill, most versatile member of the Conservative Party . . . now just plain M.P. for Epping, 17 miles northeast of London. . . .

To modern Britons up to last week Winston Churchill was less like a public figure than like some old-fashioned battered Gladstone bag stuffed full of the relics of Empire—pieces of prejudices, bits of old patriotic songs (music hall comedians used to call him "Winnie"), mementoes of old Imperial wild oats (and) mistakes. . . . An unabashed lover of the sound of his own voice, talking to himself very loudly when alone, he was never really popular. Moreover, as the years passed, a mighty collection of opponents assembled against him, though each had different reasons for dislike.

Hitler attacked western Europe in the morning of May 10th, 1940 with eighty-nine Army divisions and forty-seven more held in reserve. The Dutch surrendered in five days; the Belgians in seventeen days. The entire military campaign in the Low Countries and northern France was to end in twenty-five days. The evacuation of the British Expeditionary force from Dunkirk began towards the end of May and was completed on June 4th. By the end of June Paris had fallen to the Germans and the French surrendered to Hitler. The British had miraculously rescued most of the soldiers, their equipment left behind.

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Now the British first believed that an invasion of their homeland was possible. Great Britain had not had an enemy army on their soil for nearly a thousand years. But in May 1940 no one had stopped or even slowed the onslaught of the Nazi army.

Leslie Hollis, a senior Royal Marines staff officer attached to the Chiefs of Staff Committee since 1936, describes Winston Churchill's visit to the Central War Rooms beneath a massive Whitehall building overlooking St. James Park at Storey's Gate:

Late one evening in May, 1940 . . . when a German invasion was expected hourly, Mr. Churchill came into the War Cabinet Room with Sir Edmund Ironside, then Commander Imperial General Staff. . . . The complicated system of pointers and floodlit maps had still to be installed around the walls. . . . A few electric bulbs burned. . . . This bare unlikely room underneath London was at that time the most important room in the free world. . . . The little group stood for a moment in silence under the humming fans . . . and then Mr. Churchill took his cigar out of his mouth and pointed at the homely wooden chair at the head of the table. 'This is the room from which I'll direct the war,' he said slowly. 'And if the invasion takes place, that's where I'll sit—in that chair. And I'll sit there until either the Germans are driven back—or they carry me out dead.'

Of course, the entire effort is to put myself
Outside the ordinary range
Of what are called statistics. A hundred are killed
In the outer suburbs. Well, well, I carry on.
As long as the great 'I' is propped upon
This girded bed which seems more like a hearse.

from *Thoughts During An Air Raid*, Stephen Spender

The origin of the underground war rooms in Whitehall go back to 1936 and Churchill's suggestion to Prime Minister Baldwin that alternative centers of command be created in case of air attacks. By spring of 1937 the British Cabinet had instructed the Chiefs of Staff Committee to find, organize, and create a war-time headquarters. The Whitehall location was chosen after eliminating places which were more secure, because of its relative safety in terms of war technology existing in the late 1930's and because it was so accessible to the existing government offices.

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There are two massive government office buildings south of Downing Street reaching toward Parliament Square and bounded on the west by St. James Park and the east by Parliament Street, the continuation of Whitehall. King Charles Street runs between them. The buildings are stone faced, constructed in the Victorian-Italian palazzo style; the first dates from 1868-73, and the second facing Great George Street from Storey's Gate to Parliament Square from 1898-1912. This second building became the location of the underground Central War Rooms and home to Mr. and Mrs. Churchill during the Second World War.

The underground rooms were ready for use in 1937. During the Munich Crisis war scare of late September 1938, when hundreds of thousands of gas masks were distributed, trenches dug for air raid protection in public parks, the British Cabinet met for the first time in the underground rooms. After Hitler was appeased, the British continued to prepare for war. Recruiting posters, air raid drills, balloon barrages, and sand-bagged anti-aircraft batteries belied the "Peace in our time" slogan. Construction continued to reinforce the underground Central War Rooms.

The underground rooms were connected by a maze of corridors and doorways to other parts of Whitehall. From the building entrance facing St. James Park, there is a stairway down approximately forty steps to the first and main level of the Central War Rooms. One floor below the main level, bedrooms, dormitory rooms, mess facilities, and locker rooms were constructed, disregarding ceiling heights inadequate for men of average height. Duct work for air conditioning, mechanical and electrical systems, and the communications network was suspended over corridors, making passage through the lower level troublesome. Steel beams were not always available, even to protect government leaders, so large wooden timbers were used to support floors. A practice firing range was installed and later used by Churchill. (He usually carried his own revolver and was a superb marksman.)

There was a nautical flavor to the underground rooms. Doorways were constructed using watertight wooden and steel doors of the type used on naval vessels. The most common explanation for the use of those doors was to prevent flooding due to the low level of the rooms and its proximity to the Thames. Another reason may have been to seal the rooms against gas attack which was considered an important threat in the late 1930's. Pneumatic tubes of the type used on ships and in department stores of that period

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run overhead in the corridors to bring messages from various government offices. Royal Marines were on duty in the Central War Rooms during the war providing security and also fulfilling routine staff needs such as operating the mess facility and carrying messages.

The possibilities for invading Britain were reviewed with Hitler on May 21, 1940. Hitler evidently hoped that the threat of air attack and submarine blockade would be sufficient to turn British public opinion towards a negotiated settlement. On June 2nd, Hitler told a meeting of German generals that if Britain was prepared for a sensible peace, as he expected, he would be free for the more important task of destroying Bolshevism. Hitler marched into Paris on June 13th. In an interview with an American journalist in Paris, Hitler said: "All I have ever asked is that Germany should enjoy equal rights with Great Britain. . . . It has never been my intention to destroy the empire."

Churchill spoke in Commons five days later, June 18th; and broadcast to the nation that night from his underground office in the Central War Rooms:

. . . the Battle of France is over. I suspect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. . . . Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'

Harold Nicolson notes in his diary:

. . . when we bullied him into speaking last night, he just . . . read his House of Commons speech over again. Now, as delivered in the House of Commons, that speech was magnificent, especially the concluding sentences. But it sounded ghastly on the wireless. . . .

Two weeks late, July 2, 1940, Hitler orders preparations for an invasion of Britain, still withholding final approval. The code name "Sea Lion" is assigned to the invasion plans on July 16th. Six days earlier, July 10th, the Luftwaffe began bombing Britain's southern coastal ports and shipping in the English Channel. For the British that date is considered the beginning of the Battle of Britain.

Throughout July the two adversaries tested each other: the Germans exploring the extent of British air defense; the British hoping their Radio Di-

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rection Finder and observer network detect approaching German squadrons and their R.A.F. aircraft and pilots are effective. One early victim, the Stuka dive bomber which caused so much havoc in the Polish and French campaigns, is found vulnerable to fast British Spitfires and Hurricanes, and withdrawn from the battle.

Hitler assigned the task of developing invasion plans to the German Admiralty. They never really considered any other place to attack except directly across the Channel at its narrowest point. "Sea Lion" intended to land a quarter million men in the first invasion wave, south and east of London along a hundred mile front. While the German army was trained to attack across the large rivers on the continental mainland, crossing the Channel was quite different.

Hitler demanded that the German forces be ready in mid-August. Amphibious training began for the German army, the Luftwaffe was to regroup, and German navy assemble necessary invasion vessels. German Admiralty required that certain conditions be met before invasion: the strength of the Royal Air Force broken; Royal Navy neutralized by submarines and air attack; English Channel sealed on both sides of the invasion area by mines; and German coastal artillery controlling the landing sites.

The German Admiralty was highly skeptical of the plans as they were developed. General Franz Halder, commander of the invasion army, complained he "... might just as well put the troops through a sausage machine." Only Herman Goering of the Luftwaffe was confident. Churchill later wrote that Goering:

... felt assured that the bombing of England, and particularly of London, would reduce the ... British to a condition in which they would sue for peace, more especially if the threat of invasion grew steadily upon their horizon.

Adler Tag (Eagle day), August 13, 1940, was the beginning of the most serious stage of the Luftwaffe's air war on Great Britain. The Battle of Britain continued on for about twelve more weeks. At the end of October German air losses and deteriorating weather conditions caused the battle to subside. Only night bombing continued afterwards.

Air Marshal Dowding, head of Britain's Fighter Command, wrote afterwards how the battle evolved from early German attacks on convoys and

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coastal installations. The second principal objective of the Luftwaffe was inland R.A.F. airfields. Later they turned the attack upon London and certain industrial cities. Ultimately German aircraft approached England at altitudes so high that British fighters could not respond quickly enough to Radio Direction Finder reports, and had to maintain regular patrols fifteen thousand feet in the sky.

As the Germans became frustrated in their attempts to destroy the Royal Air Force, another priority developed, the attack upon the civilian population of England which became known as the "Blitz." On September 7, 1940, Goering announced he was taking personal command of the air war, and German tactics changed. Nightly bomber raids began. For the next fifty-seven nights the Luftwaffe sent an average of two hundred and often three hundred bombers over London.

The first three nights London was silent as the German planes rained down explosives. On September 10th anti-aircraft batteries and searchlight crews returned from the countryside. The R.A.F. was more effective, but sandbagged gun emplacements were visible to Londoners and gave them the satisfaction of firing back.

In the middle of September German bombers began dropping delayed action bombs and giant naval mines which floated down by parachute. After October 15th the enemy attack included a high percentage of incendiary bombs in addition to explosives. As Churchill later wrote:

Hitherto we had encouraged the Londoners to take cover . . . But now 'to the basements' must be replaced by 'to the roofs.'

Firewatching from a roof with an air raid warden's tin helmet became a nightly responsibility for thousands of men and women. The British reorganized the previously volunteer A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) existing since the mid-1930's into the Civil Defense Service. The local A.F.S. (Auxiliary Fire Service) units were standardized under the new National Fire Service.

Churchill described what it was like to conduct government affairs during the Blitz:

During the last fortnight of September, preparations were made to transfer my Ministerial Headquarters to the more modern and solid Government of-

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fices looking over St. James Park by Storey's Gate. These quarters we called 'the Annexe. . . ." Still, in the interval before the new apartments were ready, life at Downing Street was exciting. On might as well have been at a battalion headquarters in the line.

In the evening of October 14, 1940, Churchill was dining at 10 Downing Street during the evening German air raid. After several loud explosions nearby, followed by an enormous explosion on Horse Guards Parade, about 100 yards away, Churchill relates that he went into the kitchen, dismissed all the staff and ordered them into a bomb shelter. He returned to finish dinner with his guests. Shortly thereafter a direct hit on the old Treasury building across the back court of the Prime Minister's residence, and within 50 yards of the Prime Minister, completely destroyed the kitchen of 10 Downing Street.

After this close call, Churchill was compelled to move to safer quarters. The Annexe and underground rooms were still under construction, so from mid-October to near the end of November, Churchill and his wife slept in a facility seventy feet below a well-constructed office building in Piccadilly. They moved to the Annexe thereafter.

The Annexe was a suite created for Churchill and his wife above the Central War Rooms. It consisted of a dining room, two bedrooms, a drawing room and a large conference room, where Cabinet meetings were held on occasion. With the exception of steel shutters on the windows and the strong construction of the building itself, the Churchills had no special protection from bombing attacks. Mr. and Mrs. Churchill also had separate bedrooms below on the first level of the underground rooms.

Churchill wrote about the Annexe later:

Here during the rest of the war my wife and I lived comfortably. We felt confidence in this solid stone building, and only on very rare occasions went down below the armour. My wife even hung up our few pictures in the sitting-room, which I had thought it better to keep bare.

A detachment of Grenadier Guards were responsible for security of the Churchills in the Annexe, while underground the Royal Marines held sway. The underground rooms were originally designed to hold approximately 250 persons, but by the end of the war it was occupied by more than

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twice that number. Most of the small bedrooms were then divided into two smaller units. One of the permanent staff members remarked that they were used to living in prison cells in the event Hitler won and jailed them.

The Secretariat of the British Cabinet, largely appointed by Chamberlain, had been assigned to these underground War Rooms since 1937. Sir Edward Bridges, son of the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges, product of Eton and Oxford, decorated soldier of the First World War, career government employee, was Secretary of the Cabinet. "... There was an element of the schoolboy in this old warrior, and his usual reaction to meeting some other official in the (underground) passages was to punch him playfully in the tummy." Bridges never became a personal crony of Churchill, but sat to his right side in the underground War Cabinet Room, and was his painstaking guide to "matters Churchill found dull or confusing."

General Lord Hastings Ismay, military secretary to the Cabinet Secretariat, became a close personal friend and admirer of Churchill. Ismay's bedroom on the main underground level, preserved today, is about eight feet wide and fifteen feet deep, equipped with a small bed, two chairs, portable wash basin, radio, and two electric fans.

Churchill wrote a memorandum to Bridges, October 22, 1940:

We now know the probable limits of the enemy air attack on London, and that it will be severe and protracted. It is probable, that the bombing of Whitehall and the centre of Government will be continuous until all old or insecure buildings have been demolished.

I approved the provision of a substantial measure of overhead cover above the War Room and the Central War Room Offices. . . . This will take a month or six weeks with perpetual hammering. . . . But even when finished, it will not be proof.

The reinforcing that Churchill describes is approximately two to three meters of concrete over the main portion of the underground rooms. The main rooms protected were the Map Room and the underground Cabinet Room along the principal corridor. The underground rooms, while never considered absolutely bomb-proof, eliminated all sound of the enemy bombing attack. Anthony Eden told in his memoirs:

There seemed to me to be something unearthly about emerging from our subterranean chamber on a night when enemy aircraft were alive and the sky was lit with countless flashes.

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Churchill loved to go out on the roof of the Annexe building and watch the battle in the skies. Below he could not tolerate any noise. In the main corridor a sign was posted:

"THERE IS TO BE NO WHISTLING OR UNNECESSARY NOISE IN THIS PASSAGE"

Churchill's detective, Inspector Thompson reported later: ". . . (Whistling) sets up an almost psychiatric disturbance in him—immense, immediate, and irrational."

A shoe rack was placed at the end of the corridor, so military personnel could remove their noisy boots and don quieter footwear. A sign rack posted in the hallway reported the weather above. A choice of weather reports were preprinted: "FINE; FINE AND WARM; WET; SHOWRY; WINDY; SNOW; and FROST."

The Map Room was the active center of the underground rooms, operated by about a dozen military staffers at all times. Besides maps of the world on all walls, the most prominent feature of the room were the telephones mounted high over the middle of the work tables. These silent phones were equipped with large electric light bulbs in keeping with Churchill's desire for quiet. Phones connected directly to the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Ministry of Home Security, Foreign Office, to an observer's post at the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, and later to General Eisenhower's London headquarters. A scrambler system was installed several miles away in the basement of the huge Selfridge's Department store on Oxford Street. When the Duty Officer in the Map Room reported a very heavy air-raid on London, the Prime Minister would insist that any Cabinet meeting in progress be adjourned so that all might watch the proceedings from the roof. Inspector Thompson recalls the only enthusiastic sightseer was Churchill himself.

The underground War Cabinet Room, down the hallway and somewhat smaller than the Map Room, was equipped with a double entrance door, a Royal Marine guard posted between the doors. A special perk of his assignment was cleaning the room after the meeting, salvaging Churchill's cigar butts, reportedly saleable to collectors at L4.00 each. Twenty-one chairs were squeezed into this room, one for each Cabinet member, plus members of the Cabinet Secretariat such as Bridges, Ismay or Norman Brook. Edens described a Cabinet meeting in this room on July 29, 1940:

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I was already complaining of the stuffy atmosphere, for I always detested working there; not least because I sat in line with the Prime Minister and not opposite him as in the (Downing Street) Cabinet Room, where I could see his expression. I did not like to argue out of the side of my mouth.

On the table in front of Churchill's chair, three electric call buttons were installed to reach his principal private secretary, Inspector Thompson, and the Map Room. Dispatch boxes were used to send documents from the room. These attache type cases were designed with handles where the hinges were mounted, and the locking mechanism at the other end, so that they could not be carried away until they were locked. A secret escape route was designed in the Cabinet Room through one of the brick walls where access holes were drilled. When a special crowbar was inserted into these holes, the wall could be forced open.

Churchill's small bedroom on this level is not much larger than the other bedrooms. However this room was equipped with radio broadcasting equipment, and Churchill used it for some of his most important wartime speeches to the nation. A small sign was used to indicate "ON THE AIR." An electric buzzer system on his desk here is equipped to call Inspector Thompson, the private secretary on duty, or Churchill's butler Sawyers.

Down the main corridor from Churchill's bedroom is a very small double room, converted from a cleaning cupboard to a telephone facility, where Churchill would spend hours talking and preparing for his conversations with President Roosevelt. A small desk was installed for Churchill with a single telephone alongside a paper chart listing the comparative times of day in London and Washington. On one wall the famous "Clock With Four Hands" was mounted, showing minutes and seconds, and two hour hands: one red hand showing current Washington time; one black hand set to British Standard Time.

Churchill would leave London most weekends for the country. Usually the trip was to Chequers, an old historic English country house given to the nation for the use of the incumbent Prime Minister. It was a working weekend, in which Churchill was able to have lengthy meetings with military, political, and diplomatic people, and prepare important speeches.

Chequers was protected by a contingent of Coldstream Guards. Aircraft spotters were stationed on all the roofs, and sentries were posted throughout the grounds to protect against enemy raiders including parachute

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teams. Since the Germans were aware of the existence of Chequers, when a full moon was expected Churchill would spend the weekend at an alternative secret location, Ditchley Park in Enstone, two hours from London. On rare occasions Churchill would want to stay at his own country home Chartwell, where with the main house boarded up, he would live in the small cottage he had constructed personally in the decade when he was out of office.

The latest reports of war were transmitted to Churchill when he was away from London. One of Churchill's wartime secretaries wrote later:

As soon as any news was received for the Prime Minister by the private secretary on duty at the Annexe, he would ring through on the direct line to Chequers, one of us would be summoned to the telephone with book and pencil, we would go to Secret (Scrambled) and the telegram or whatever it was would be dictated by the private secretary, to be typed out at full speed at our end.

After the early days of the Blitz, Churchill began to make some of his radio broadcasts from Chequers, usually on Sunday night immediately before the nine o'clock B.B.C. news. General Alan Brooke, a frequent weekend guest at Chequers, was one of the many people who did not enjoy the opportunity. Churchill kept very strange hours, staying up until two or three o'clock in morning talking to his guests.

One Thursday evening November 14, 1940, Churchill in his automobile on his way to Ditchley Park for the weekend, received word from British Intelligence that a major German raid "Moonlight Sonata" was expected. Churchill cancelled his plans and returned to London. He spent most of the night on the Air Ministry' roof waiting for German planes which were scheduled to go elsewhere. Moonlight Sonata was the famous raid on the city of Coventry.

Lord Moran, his physician, wrote:

When the Prime Minister set out to inspire the country with his will to win he made up his mind that it must begin in his own bedroom. I have been with him there at all hours . . . not once did he look like a loser.

At school he was an underling, bullied and beaten. He grew up full of apprehension and he spoke with a stutter. But from the beginning, the will to conquer was there. 'Never'—they were his own words—'never give in.'

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In 1940, Britain became an angry land. The decline of their involvement in world affairs which had seemed sensible for two decades had left their own freedom on jeopardy. The British demanded Churchill's return from the back benches of Parliament not for his ability, but because he embodied defiance. The memoirs of Leslie Hollis, provide a revealing portrait of Churchill in command. Dressed ". . . in his slippers with pom-poms, wearing his magnificent mandarin dressing-gown embroidered in red and white dragons . . . his cigar clamped . . . between his teeth . . . he would stomp along the underground corridor towards the telephone."

Those spirited broadcasts from the War Rooms should not be interpreted as implying Churchill believed Britain and the Commonwealth could defeat Germany alone. He knew they could only resist. Historically Britain had created and defended an Empire with resolve, unified effort and courage, but also a "good show." No nation went to battle wearing brighter colors. As Churchill reported on radio near the end of the Blitz:

. . . London and our big cities have had to stand their pounding. They remind me of the British squares at Waterloo. They are not squares of soldiers; they do not wear scarlet coats. They are just ordinary English, Scottish, and Welsh folk . . . standing together . . . and, in the end, their victory will be greater than far-famed Waterloo.

Churchill was never necessary in the war effort after the invasion threat. In the next year Hitler began his campaign against Russia, at year-end America was in the war. Britain continued to resist, at sea, in North Africa, but it would only provide time for her more powerful allies to win the war. Britain's role became unimportant. By the war's end they were no longer a major power.

. . . There is fire in my eyes and I am blind.
And the red hollow shells in the white face
glared at the black sky and the hard ice of the stars
where still the burden of engines nagged in the brass
bowl of night, and the stiff white searchlights stalked;
while bombs raged down, streeling into the city,
and the guns mumbled and barked at the thunderous sky.

from *Cycle*, Sean Jennett