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Young Churchill: The Development of Greatness

Senior Honors Thesis by Kennedy Moehrs

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Introduction

Since the beginning of civilization, war and politics have been intertwined. Miriam Webster defines War as “a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations”.¹ Dr. Claudio Cioffi-Revilla in his study on *Origins and Evolution of War and Politics* (more commonly known as the Loranow Project) defined war as “an occurrence of purposive and lethal violence among two or more social groups pursuing conflicting political goals that results in fatalities, with at least one belligerent group organized under the command of authoritative leadership”.² The relationship between war and politics is direct, but complicated and messy. War has long been used as a way to feed the cravings of men hungry for conquest, honor, and land. This conflicting relationship is seen in the leaders, both military and political, who are forced into the situations caused by war. One such leader is the Right Honorable Sir Winston Churchill. There is no other recent historical figure in which military and political is so inherently intertwined. Winston Churchill’s relationship with both war and politics began at a very young age and through privileged circumstances.

Winston Churchill’s success and failure stemmed directly from the knowledge of his family ancestry. Churchill developed as a military leader and a political leader because of this knowledge and with the help of his last name. Without the incessant need to claim his birthright as a true nobleman of England, Churchill would not have become the “great savior of Britain” revered around the world today. In 1528, Baldassare Castiglione published *The Book of the Courtier*. His work served as an etiquette guide for the noblemen and women of the Italian Royal Court, but it quickly took hold around all of Europe. In the book, Castiglione’s characters

¹ Miriam Webster Online, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/war>, March 23rd.

² Claudio Cioffi-Revilla, “Origins and Evolution of War and Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 40 (1996): pg. 8.

worked to describe what makes a "perfect courtier".³ The traits thought to be the foundation of a true nobleman were mastery in the art of war, knowledge, wit, a comely shape of person and countenance, grace, and being born into a "good house". Winston Churchill fits into almost all of these categories, except he was not born into the great house that would have made him a true nobleman. Instead, he was born the cousin of a great Duke and would aspire to the same greatness as his close relative for his entire life.

Churchill is an iconic figure in British and World history, and for this reason he has achieved some form of greatness. Where that greatness came from is the reason for this study. Churchill's story is not that of an underdog but one of privilege, honor, nobility, and public arrogance. His relationship with both war and politics was formed very early on and was greatly influenced by his family history, which his father would remind him of daily. It was because of this knowledge of his background, the history of his great ancestors, and the constant reminders from his father of the privilege bestowed upon him, that Churchill became the man who found himself in a position to save Great Britain during World War II. Churchill provides an interesting study on the effects of military power, triumph, and failure, on the political aspirations of a great world leader who was fighting to uphold the tradition of his bloodline and the honor of his country.

Winston Churchill lived an astounding life finding himself involved in numerous major world events—so many that they cannot all properly be covered in this study without adding to the long list of biographies already available. In conducting this inquiry into the development of Churchill as a military and political leader, two major parts of his life formed the basis of this paper. First, the true developmental years of his life at Sandhurst and his first years as a soldier

³ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (London: Everyman's Library, 1528), 33.

and war correspondent in Cuba and the Boer Wars were analyzed. Second, Churchill's involvement in World War I as First Lord of the Admiralty were examined as well. These two parts of his life constitute the best examples of Churchill's development as a political and military leader. They both provide evidence of his ability to use his privilege for self-promotion. His attitude would change later in life as he grew to understand the world and those who inhabited it better.

In order to examine these two important periods in Churchill's life a list of both primary and secondary sources were used. The primary sources were comprised of Churchill's own work, as well as correspondence between Admirals and other government officials during his time at the Admiralty. His speeches were referenced and correspondence between his wife and himself was used as well. The secondary sources consisted of his official biography, started by his son, Randolph Churchill and finished off by Martin Gilbert, his official biographer, along with assorted other bibliographies by well-renowned historians and Churchill scholars. By using these sources, a well-rounded look into the early life and development of Winston Churchill is provided.

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born in the early morning hours of November 30th, 1874, at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire England.⁴ From the beginning of his life, Churchill aspired to nobility. Contrasted to what Castiglione would say, Churchill was not born a true nobleman and he would constantly be aspiring to the station of his cousin, the Duke of Marlborough.⁵ Churchill's father, Lord Randolph Churchill was the descendent of John Churchill, the First Duke of Marlborough who defeated French forces at the Battle of Blenheim

⁴ Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (Rosetta Books LLC, 2014), Kindle Edition, 1.

⁵ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby, 33.

in the early eighteenth century.⁶ Churchill's mother was Jennie Jerome, an American socialite and the daughter of Leonard Jerome, a successful New York stockbroker, financier and newspaper proprietor.⁷ While he may not have been born to nobility, Churchill was born into an elite family, and this fact was made clear to him very early on in life through his surroundings, the people with whom he interacted, and the correspondence between himself and his parents. This heritage would influence Churchill's beliefs about himself and his military and political aspirations.

The most important ancestor to influence the formation of Churchill's early military theory and familial pride was John Churchill, the 1st Duke of Marlborough. Churchill would become enamored with this great ancestor, obsessing over his battle plans and eventually writing a multivolume biography of the Duke during his wilderness years.⁸ John Churchill was a military man through and through. Being made a page of honor to the Duke of York at a young age due to his father's loyalty to King Charles II, John Churchill displayed his first inkling towards a military career.⁹ On one particular day while John was serving the Duke helping him direct two regiments of soldier, the Duke became intrigued by the way the young boy payed close attention to him and asked John what profession he would choose for himself. The young Churchill "threw himself down on his knees in front of his master and begged that he might be given a pair of colors in one of those fine regiments".¹⁰ At the age of sixteen, his wish was fulfilled and he was

⁶ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.* 2

⁸ Carlos D' Este, *Warlord: A Life of Winston Churchill at War, 1874-1945* (Harper Collins E-Books, 2008), Kindle Edition, 296.

⁹ Louis von Glehn Creighton, *Life of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1999), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=IDk-AQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP13>, 2.

¹⁰ Creighton, *The Life of John Churchill*, 2.

given his first military commission to Tangiers. During his time in Tangiers, he worked hard to display his talents and zeal for his chosen profession, but the Duke of York for more work in the Court called him back within the same year.¹¹ Six years later Churchill was sent away on his first real mission to fight alongside French forces in Holland.¹²

John Churchill's greatest military achievement was his victory at the Battle of Blenheim during the War of the Spanish Succession. Louis XIV yearned to take control of Vienna in order to knock Leopold, the Holy Roman Emperor, out of the war in order to "unify the crowns of France and Spain in the hands of two branches of the same family".¹³ John Churchill, by this time a Duke, sought to alleviate the threat to Vienna by marching his forces to help prop up Leopold in Vienna.¹⁴ Many historians argue that this battle shifted the tide of the war in the favor of the allies. To express her gratitude and admiration, Queen Anne presented the Duke with the Royal Manor of Woodstock on which she had built, at the royal family's expense, a palace to commemorate the Battle of Blenheim.¹⁵ The palace was called Blenheim Palace, and it is where Churchill was born and reared in the shadow of the First Duke of Marlborough.¹⁶ The stories of their great triumphs would serve as a reminder to Winston of what he longed to achieve and what he would spend the rest of his life fighting to acquire.

¹¹ Creighton, *The Life of John Churchill*, 3.

¹² Creighton, *The Life of John Churchill*, 4.

¹³ Hilare Belloc, *The Battle of Blenheim* (London: Stephen Swift & Co. LTD, 2010), <http://library.umac.mo/ebooks/b28124674.pdf>, 16.

¹⁴ Belloc, *The Battle of Blenheim*, 13.

¹⁵ Creighton, *The Life of John Churchill*, 19-21, 68-73. Anne Stuart was queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1707-1714. She came to power after her brother-in-law, William of Orange died of ill health. As a young woman Queen Anne became very good friends with Sarah Jennings who would later become Sarah Churchill after marrying John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough. Anne favored anyone that she could trust; making her relationships with Sarah and John beneficial for the Churchills who could easily bend her to their will. The two women would later fall out over political differences.

¹⁶ Creighton, *The Life of John Churchill*, 124.

Very early on Churchill displayed an inclination towards military service. In his memoir, *My Early Life*, he wrote that his first coherent thought was about the army. His grandfather was unveiling a statue of Lord Gough and Churchill recalled him using the phrase, “and with a withering volley he shattered the enemy’s line”.¹⁷ He noted, “I quite understood that he was speaking about war and fighting and that a volley meant what the black-coated soldiers used to do with loud bangs in the Phoenix Park where I was taken for my morning walks.”¹⁸ Churchill was three when he experienced this first sniff of gunpowder and he would be obsessed with the details and strategy of war for the rest of his life.¹⁹

Much of Churchill’s story parallels that of John Churchill, the 1st Duke of Marlborough. A particular scene in each life is almost identical. Churchill recalled that his display of military leadership began early in his life with his commanding of over 1,500 toy soldiers.²⁰ Churchill set his army in strategic positions in order to thwart incoming attacks made by his brother Jack. Churchill’s forces had all the supplies they needed except the one that armies always seemed to be short of—transport.²¹ When Churchill’s father finally came to inspect the forces, he admired his sons array of soldiers and asked him what he would like to be when he grew up. Without waiting for a reply, he asked Churchill if he wanted to go into the army. Churchill responded, “I said yes at once: and immediately I was taken at my word.”²² This moment parallels John Churchill’s decisive moment with the Duke of York. Churchill, from his first memory always wanted to be a soldier. His father, knowing that a military career was necessary to Churchill’s

¹⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *My Early Life, 1874-1904* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1996), 1.

¹⁸ Churchill, *My Early Life*, 2.

¹⁹ Churchill, *My Early Life*.

²⁰ Churchill, *My Early Life*, 19

²¹ Churchill, *My Early Life*, 19.

²² *Ibid.* 19.

success and the success of the family legacy was ever encouraging. Churchill would try to create his identity as a soldier as he moved through his teens and into his twenties and his confidence to lead would not waver.²³

Churchill saw his father and grandfather in their roles as British noblemen and understood that he was destined to be a man of much importance just like them. In his memoir, *My Early Years*, he wrote of his time at Harrow school, “The year was 1887. Lord Randolph Churchill had only just resigned his position as Leader of the House of Commons and Chancellor of the Exchequer, and he still towered in the forefront of politics. In consequence, large numbers of visitors used to wait on the school steps to see me march by; and I frequently heard the irreverent comment, ‘Why, he’s last of all!’.”²⁴ Regardless of the derision on Churchill’s progress, his self-confidence and simple arrogance still grew. He knew how his family was regarded and the notion that he was superior based on his ancestry caused Churchill to continue to pursue a military lifestyle.

Churchill’s natural arrogance would be further developed at Sandhurst where he spent many of his formative years as a cavalry cadet. Even though it took Churchill three tries to pass the entrance exam for Sandhurst, afterwards Churchill sent a letter to his father, in which he expressed his excitement about finally getting in, seemingly not ashamed of his failed two efforts. His father responded with anger stating, “Your conscience will enable you to recall and enumerate all the efforts that have been made to give you the best chances which you were entitled to by your position and how you have practically neglected them all.”²⁵ Churchill’s father, Lord Randolph Churchill, constantly made sure that his son knew the high expectations of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Churchill, *My Early Life*, 16.

²⁵ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 38.

his ancestry and how lucky he was to be granted privileges based on his bloodline. In this way, he instilled the belief in Churchill that in order to live up to this great privilege he would have to do no less than become a great military leader. Thus, Churchill carried this responsibility with him for the rest of his life.

In order to become the military and political leader he knew he was entitled to be, Churchill needed actual military experience, but he first had to find a war into which to integrate himself. He found one in Cuba where the Spanish were fighting a counter insurgency campaign against Cuban forces.²⁶ In order to gain this valuable experience Churchill exploited his parents' relationships to obtain an opportunity. Historian Ashley Jackson states, "In getting himself into a war zone, Churchill displayed the hallmarks of his pell-mell, thrusting early career—audacity, innovation and the pulling of strings, most of them in the hands of his mother and other relatives."²⁷ At this time in history, the British Empire had enjoyed an extremely prolonged peace and action in actual war was infrequent. Officers in the British army yearned for "the medals and all they represented in experience and adventure".²⁸ According to Churchill there was "never a time where the war service was held in such esteem by the military authorities or more ardently sought by officers of every rank".²⁹ Churchill recognized this fact and also realized that this experience was "the swift road to promotion and advancement in every arm. It was the glittering gateway to distinction."³⁰ This was exactly what he was seeking, a way to distinction, a method of getting his foot in the door, a starting point on the road to fulfilling his

²⁶ Jackson, *Churchill*, 45.

²⁷ Ashley Jackson, *Churchill* (London: Quercus, 2011), 45.

²⁸ Churchill, *My Early Years*, 74.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

birthright. He outlined his thoughts on the matter as such: “Now that I had assumed professional obligations in the matter, I thought it might be as well to have a private rehearsal, a secluded trip, in order to make sure the ordeal was one not unsuited to my temperament.”³¹ Ever the nobleman, Churchill needed a trial run before he could commit to the reality of a military career. Thus, he commissioned a fellow subaltern to join the cause and wrote to one of his father’s connections, the Ambassador to Madrid, asking him to obtain permission from the Spanish military for this expedition. The Ambassador assured Churchill that should they reach Havana, they would be warmly welcomed by the Captain General and shown all there was to see.³² To further Churchill’s experience, the Director of Military Intelligence also asked Churchill if he would collect military information for them.³³ Once again, any other man than Churchill would not have been able to accomplish such a feat. The persistence and sense of entitlement based on his familial background served once again to propel Churchill into a position of influence and helped to make him an asset while he worked to gain military information. In 1895 the two set sail for Havana. Thus, his relationship with war began.

It was in Cuba that Churchill truly began to form his beliefs about war. While there, he yearned to see action and when he finally came into contact with enemy fire, he “began to take a more thoughtful view of our enterprise than I had hitherto done”.³⁴ Nevertheless, his time in Cuba earned him a Spanish medal for gallantry, which in his view “ticked another item off the list of things required if he were to get on”.³⁵ In addition, this time in Cuba provided Churchill

³¹ Churchill, *My Early Years*, 76.

³² *Ibid.* 76.

³³ Jackson, *Churchill*, 46.

³⁴ Churchill, *My Early Years*, 84.

³⁵ Jackson, *Churchill*, 48.

the opportunity to establish his name in a very public way outside of the military establishment. Before leaving he contracted a deal with the *Daily Graphic*, a paper his father had also written for years earlier, to allow him to send them stories from the war.³⁶ Through his words and skillful prose, Churchill was able to connect with the British people. These stories would begin to build Churchill's name and for years going forward his newspaper columns would serve as a way to increase his influence with the British public.

After Churchill's time in Cuba he returned to England with renewed purpose. Using his family's connections, he sought an audience with anyone who could be of purpose to him and his rising career. As Churchill would come to realize, he would need to temper his avarice in order to succeed in elite social circles. Historian Ashley Jackson argues, "Nevertheless, it must have been very difficult to do so whilst mixing in the lofty circles to which his family background (and his father's name) entitled him, and never having been one to defer to others just because they were older or more important".³⁷ This six month time period before Churchill would accompany his regiment to India was one full of realization that for him, politics was becoming increasingly intriguing. He began to resent the fact that he must head to India with "this unfortunate ruthless regiment...as useless and unprofitable exile".³⁸ It was at this time that Churchill became bored with the idea the military life. It was not holding as much renown and advantage as he wanted or felt he was entitled to. He began reaching out to newspapers for opportunities to be sent away to write.³⁹ After multiple rejections, he prodded his family members to make something happen for him and many times over he was reminded that his duty

³⁶ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 56.

³⁷ Jackson, *Churchill*, 50.

³⁸ William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932* (Canada: Little Brown & Company, 1983), 288.

³⁹ Manchester, *Visions of Glory*, 232.

was to his regiment and that “abandoning his military commitment would be troublesome”.⁴⁰ Churchill urged his mother to use her many contacts to help his situation. He begged her to find, “places where I could gain experience and derive advantage—rather than the tedious land of India”⁴¹. His persistence and entitled attitude impelled him go even further to say, “I cannot believe that with all the influential friends you possess and all those who would do something for me for my father’s sake...Others are making the running now and what chance have I of ever catching up...you really ought to leave no stone unturned to help me in such a period”.⁴² What is interesting about this incident is that Churchill does not mention this moment in his own personal memoir, *My Early Life*. Instead, he seems excited for the opportunity to experience India. Yet again, this entitlement and extreme persistence based on his bloodline can be seen in his actions prior to serving in India.

Winston Churchill was a master at prose. For example, he claimed, “I got into my bones the essential structure of the British sentence—which is a noble thing”.⁴³ Because of this knowledge of language, Churchill quickly became a master at telling stories through his written work, and through his oratory style. This skill would serve to propel him towards the notoriety he craved. No other story provides such an example of this mastery than that of Churchill’s escape from capture by the Boers. This story also serves to prove the relationship between military and politics in Churchill’s life. Without the Boer War, Churchill might have fallen by the wayside unable to write about his experiences and further his aspirations. Carlos D’Este in his book, *Churchill: Warlord*, states, “His ambition was fully fueled, but the practical reality was that he

⁴⁰ Manchester, *Visions of Glory*, 233.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 233.

⁴² Manchester, *Visions of Glory*, 234.

⁴³ Churchill, *My Early Years*, 17.

had no actual strategy for achieving the fame he hungered for, noting only that if he did, ‘unusual things’, it is difficult to see what chance I have of being more than an average person”.⁴⁴ Once again, Churchill was alluding to the ever present fear of falling short of his genteel upbringing.

In 1899 Britain entered a second war with the Boers over control of South Africa. Having left the Army, Churchill quickly secured a job writing for the *Morning Post* and was awarded full benefits, which drove the rate for war correspondents even higher. As a civilian correspondent, though, he would not have the same access to information as he did as an officer. He planned a strategy to join again the Army, but in a carefully selected regiment which was commanded by a friend of his father’s.⁴⁵ Churchill used his family name and relationships to his advantage once again.

Quickly after arriving in South Africa Churchill saw the need to be in front of all the action in order to enhance his correspondence to the *Morning Post* and thus enhance his notoriety around Britain. He and a fellow correspondent decided to travel to Ladysmith, which was rumored to be overtaken by Boer forces. After finding the city besieged, Churchill traveled to Colenso multiple times in order to try to gather more information on the situation. On November 15th, an old friend of Churchill’s had been ordered to “reconnoiter once more in the direction of Colenso” and asked Churchill to come along on the journey.⁴⁶ After riding the train for an hour and a half, they suddenly came upon a group of fifty Boer soldiers who began to open fire on the train cars. The Boers had blocked the train tracks with an armored truck so as to prevent passage.⁴⁷ Churchill quickly assumed charge of getting the truck off the tracks in order to

⁴⁴ D’Este, *Churchill: Warlord*, 111.

⁴⁵ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 106.

⁴⁶ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 109.

⁴⁷ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 111.

make it possible for the British soldiers to pass. As he did, British snipers opened fire on the Boers until two other British soldiers raised their white handkerchiefs in surrender. After unsuccessful attempt to escape, Churchill was taken prisoner.⁴⁸

While many people would speak of their time as a prisoner of war with fear and trepidation, Churchill could think of nothing but his own boredom and the annoyance that he was missing wonderful opportunities for adventure and exposure. He stated, “Prisoner of War! That is the least unfortunate kind of prisoner to be, but it is nevertheless a melancholy state. You are in the power of your enemy...meanwhile the war is going on, great events are in progress, fine opportunities for action and adventure are slipping away”.⁴⁹ Churchill finally escaped his confines by boarding a series of trains and hiding out among the bushes until he happened upon the house of a British mine operator who took him in and kept him hidden while the Boers searched for him.⁵⁰ He ended up escaping by train to the Portuguese side of the Transvaal, where he was taken in at the British Consulate and sent back to the front lines.⁵¹ The “great escape,” as it would come to be known, would propel Churchill even farther into the minds and hearts of the British people. It was Churchill’s own retelling of his story in newspaper accounts that arrived back in Britain that further exploded his fame through his own self-promotion. Now widely known throughout Britain, he continued writing for the *Morning Post*, receiving more attention than ever.⁵² This “great escape” serves as an example of Churchill using what skill he did have with the pen, combined with the opportunities his family name had provided him to propel himself to the fame he yearned for.

⁴⁸ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 113.

⁴⁹ Churchill, *My Early Years*, 259.

⁵⁰ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 119.

⁵¹ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 120.

⁵² Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 121.

Winston Churchill always believed he was entitled to greatness. He had already shown great endeavor to use his opportunities to self-promote. He now had to figure out how he would continue upon his success in Cuba and the Boer War to ascend even higher. His vision of greatness was defined by the level of success of his ancestor, the First Duke of Marlborough. In the *Book of the Courtier*, Castiglione—still speaking of the perfect courtier states, “If he swerve from the steps of his ancestors, he staineth the name of his family. And doth not only not get, but looseth that is already gotten.”⁵³ The steps of Churchill’s ancestors were great and full of expectation, and Churchill worked hard to follow in those same steps, knowing full well that his failure would help to diminish the Churchill name and his path towards greatness. It was this same name that had propelled him into military life in the first place and showed him that a strategy of advancement could be achieved through military service and unyielding self-promotion. Thus, Churchill filled his time between the second Boer War and World War I bouncing around in assorted positions: serving as an MP for Oldham, Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, President of the Board of Trade, and Secretary of State for the Home Department.⁵⁴ Many, if not all, of these appointed positions depended in some part on the relationships he had made because of his family name during his developmental years. Churchill still yearned to gain the military renown of his ancestors. He stated to Clementine in a letter after observing German military maneuvers in 1907, “Do you know I would greatly like to have some practice in the handling of large forces. I have much confidence in my judgment of things, when I see clearly, but on nothing do I seem to feel the truth more than in tactical combinations. It is a vain and foolish thing to say— but you will not laugh at it. I am sure I have the root of the matter in me—

⁵³ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 32.

⁵⁴ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 239.

but never I fear in this state of existence will it have a chance of flowering— in bright red blossom”.⁵⁵ Churchill believed his strengths to be in military strategy though he had never truly been involved in real combat leadership situations. He hoped for a time when he would get to put these talents to good use and live up to the Churchill legacy of excellence in warfare.

On October 11, 1911, twelve years after escaping capture by the Boers in South Africa, Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty.⁵⁶ The First Lord of the Admiralty serves as the civilian head of the Royal Navy and Churchill was only thirty-seven when he received this post.⁵⁷ Churchill was awarded this position by Prime Minister H.H. Asquith after he begged, pleaded, and prodded the Prime Minister to better prepare the Royal Navy for a coming conflict.⁵⁸ The beginning of Churchill’s time at the Admiralty displayed a young man eager to bring an outdated system into modernity through any means necessary. He coupled this eagerness with an excessive need to be involved in every minute detail and process of the Royal Navy.⁵⁹ Churchill knew that war was on the horizon with Germany, and he began preparing the Navy to deal with the coming threat. This post finally gave Churchill what he desired most, a true position of leadership in war, that he might establish his legacy. His opportunity would come when Germany declared war on France and violated the neutrality of Belgium drawing Great Britain into the Great War. It is in the Great War where perhaps the most prime example of Churchill’s failure based on his pride and belief in his own superiority occurred during the Dardanelles Campaign.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Best, *Churchill and War* (London: Hambledon and Continuum, 2005), 37, accessed March 24th, 2018, https://books.google.com/books/about/Churchill_and_War.html?id=BzwTNIgTwjQC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁵⁶ Stephen Roskill, *Churchill and the Admirals* (S. Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books Ltd., 2004), Kindle Edition, 45.

⁵⁷ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 12.

⁵⁸ Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 236.

⁵⁹ D’Este, *Churchill: Warlord*, 195.

Churchill had never before dealt with the inner workings of the Royal Navy, only having served as an infantry soldier in Cuba, Africa, and India. He was arguably wholly unqualified for the position bequeathed upon him but did not see it that way. He was ecstatic about being able to influence the Royal Navy's legacy by implementing strategies that he thought were best. His first opportunity would come in the beginning of 1915 when Russia urged Britain to engage in a naval operation at the Dardanelles to ease their pressure in the Caucasus.⁶⁰ By this point in the war, British soldiers were exhausted and the action on the Western Front had ground to a stalemate.⁶¹ Casualties were high, morale was low, and Churchill implored Prime Minister Asquith to open another front against Germany, exploiting their naval power to do so.⁶² Together with the Secretary to the War Council, Lord Maurice Hankey, Churchill devised that if the British could somehow take Constantinople, they could effectively drive the Ottoman Empire out of the war, open a passageway to Russia and Ukrainian wheat, and finally settle the attitudes of Bulgaria and the rest of the Balkans, forcing them into the war on the side of the Allies.⁶³ Hankey stated in a memo to Prime Minister Asquith, "Unless the Dardanelles and Bosphorus can be opened up very soon, Russia will not receive the supplies indispensable to an offensive campaign, and the spring and summer may pass by without a decisive blow being struck at Germany or Austria."⁶⁴ Churchill had devised such a plan before Britain had even entered the War. In August of 1914, two German battle cruisers, the Goeben and Breslau, got away from

⁶⁰ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 52.

⁶¹ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 43.

⁶² Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 44.

⁶³ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 85.

⁶⁴ Hankey, Maurice P.A., "Attack on the Dardanelles: A Note by the Secretary." (Official memorandum, London, UK: Committee of Imperial Defense, 1915), British National Archives, CAB/24/1.

advancing British warships and eluded capture by sailing safely into Constantinople through the Dardanelles Straits. The Germans offered the vessels to the pro-German government in Constantinople as a gift.⁶⁵ Churchill, out of anger and embarrassment, sought to sink the cruisers by attacking the Straits with support from Greek and/or Russian forces on land. He reasoned that taking Constantinople would knock the Ottoman Empire out of the War and unite the Balkan States in the allied cause.⁶⁶ Because no Army could be thrown together in enough time, Churchill had to put his plan on the backburner and focus elsewhere.⁶⁷

It is important to note here that if it had not been for Churchill, the Ottoman Empire may not have entered the war on the side of the Axis Powers, nor would the Royal Navy have had to worry about the capturing of the Goeben and Breslau. William Manchester explains this in his book, *The Last Lion*. Prior to 1911, Turkey was not the part of an alliance. The leaders of Turkey in 1911 sought to align themselves with the British Empire but “Churchill, with the arrogance of his class at the time, had replied that they had ideas above their station.”⁶⁸ Churchill, in another act of public arrogance reminded the Turkish government that Britain “” alone among European states.... retains supremacy of the sea.”⁶⁹ This outraged the Ottoman Empire and they quickly raised six million pounds to pay for the construction of two warships that were then built in British shipyards. Directly after the ships were built, Churchill “requisitioned” them without Turkish approval. Angry and embarrassed, the Ottomans looked to Germany for assistance and signed a secret agreement with them on August 2nd, 1911.⁷⁰ In this situation Churchill all but

⁶⁵ Jackson, *Churchill*, 46.

⁶⁶ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 85.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 85.

⁶⁸ Manchester, *Visions of Glory*, 470.

⁶⁹ Winston Churchill, quoted in Manchester, *Visions of Glory*, 470.

⁷⁰ Manchester, *Visions of Glory*, 471.

forced the Ottoman Empire into the hands of Germany by seizing their ships and threatening their respectability as a country.⁷¹ This decision came back to haunt him soon after.

When in 1915 the opportunity arose again for naval action against the Ottoman Empire, Churchill was excited at the thought. If the straits could be taken by the Navy solely, there would be much admiration gained for Churchill and his military prowess. He sought to investigate if the straits could indeed be taken by purely naval force, an idea he was drawn to immediately because of its potential for personal benefit. Churchill reached out to Vice-Admiral Carden, Commander of British Naval forces in the Mediterranean to inquire into the possibility of taking the straits by purely naval means. Carden replied that while the straits could not be penetrated, they could be methodically attacked and worn down one by one.⁷² Churchill took these findings to the War Council on January 13th, 1915 who agreed to a purely naval offensive on the Dardanelles. Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War informed the Council that no ground troops were available to be brought from the Western Front to back up the naval offensive, but no one thought to object to the lack of military support.⁷³ As a result, on January 15th, at one in the morning Churchill telegraphed Carden and advised him to go forward with the ill-advised plan.⁷⁴ Later, on the 24th of January, Secretary of the War Council Hankey circulated a document formulated in 1907 by the CID outlining the risk involved in attempting a purely naval assault on the Dardanelles without infantry backup. His report was ignored and the plans moved forward.⁷⁵ As the operation came closer and closer to fruition, Churchill became more excited while the War Council became more hesitant about an attack without proper ground support. In mid-February

⁷¹ Manchester, *Visions of Glory*, 470-471.

⁷² Lewis Broad, *The Years of Preparation* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1958), 196.

⁷³ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 71.

⁷⁴ Gilbert, *The Challenge of War*, Chp. 11, Kindle.

⁷⁵ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 89.

they decided to assemble a land force “in case of necessity”.⁷⁶ Throughout this whole process, Churchill was nothing but excited at the opportunity to prove his plan for the Dardanelles Campaign. He was nearly blinded by the thought of being the man responsible for pushing the Ottomans out of the war. In this instance, Churchill allowed his ambition to cloud his judgment. His incessant desire to excel as a direct result of his family history led him to overconfidence and to ignore the judgment of better military minds. Churchill was arrogant, excited, and rash in his decisions regarding the Dardanelles, which serves to show that his development as a true leader was not yet achieved.

On the 19th of February 1915, Carden began his bombardment of the defenses at the entrance to the straits.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the battleships proved to be inefficient in silencing the Ottoman guns. This would prove to be only one of the issues with pushing through the Dardanelle Straits. Although on February 25, after two days of fighting, Carden was able to destroy two forts on the outskirts of the Straits, when the second phase of the operation began the British fleet found that the minesweepers sent out ahead of their battleships were insufficient for detecting 344 contact mines throughout the narrows.⁷⁸ On the same day, Mr. A J Balfour, who would succeed Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty submitted a memorandum to the Committee of Imperial Defense detailing his thoughts on the Dardanelles operations.⁷⁹ In his memorandum he stated, “I think it may help us to a sound decision next Friday if we bare clearly in mind that the forcing of the Dardanelles is the preliminary stage of two military operations,

⁷⁶ Gilbert, *The Challenge of War*, Chp. 11, Kindle.

⁷⁷ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 104.

⁷⁸ Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 120.

⁷⁹ Balfour, Arthur J., “The Dardanelles and Balkans Operations: A Memorandum by Mr. A.J. Balfour.” (Official memorandum, London, UK: Committee of Imperial Defense, 1915), British National Archives CAB/24/1.

which are quite separable in fact, and ought to be separated in our thoughts.”⁸⁰ Churchill was still optimistic about the success of the primarily naval operation at this point, informing the Cabinet on March second that the situation was ““very good””⁸¹, but when the Greek King vetoed any involvement in the fighting near Gallipoli, Churchill lost some of the necessary forces he was hoping for to back-up the British Navy. This was the critical part of the second stage of the two military operations that Balfour mentioned in his memo. The campaign went downhill from there. From March fifth through the sixth, the Queen Elizabeth, a prized British warship, attempted to demolish Ottoman forts with indirect fire, but sea planes doing reconnaissance for the ship proved ineffective at spotting enemy fire.⁸² Throughout the next two weeks, British minesweepers continued to attempt sweeping at night, but the enemy was now aware of the situation and mounted a strong resistance. On March 16, 1915, Carden resigned his office after suffering a mental breakdown.⁸³ Churchill had one more hope left when Admiral de’Robeck took over command of naval forces and stated that he could force a path through the minefields of the narrows of the Straits.⁸⁴ On the 18 of March de’Robeck facing heavy artillery bombardment from Ottoman forts abandoned the effort and called off the operation. De’Robeck would only resume if he was guaranteed ground support.⁸⁵ Churchill ever confident still, pushed to continue the operations but was staunchly denied by a majority in the War Council.⁸⁶ As a result of this terrible failure, the Conservatives in Parliament started to call for Churchill’s resignation. The disaster that was the Dardanelles Campaign required some accounting. Churchill, not deterred,

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Winston S. Churchill, quoted in *The Challenge of War*, Chp. 11, Kindle.

⁸² Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*, 120.

⁸³ Gilbert, *The Challenge of War*, Chp. 11, Kindle.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Chp. 11, Kindle.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Broad, *The Years of Preparation*, 199.

eventually gave into their wishes and submitted his resignation in November of 1915 after serving a short stint as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. In a letter to his wife in case of his death said, “I have appointed you my sole literary executor... There is no hurry, but someday I should like the truth to be known”.⁸⁷ Yet, even in his resignation, Churchill explained that his actions at the Admiralty would fit into the legacy of the Royal Navy proclaiming, “Time will vindicate my administration of the Admiralty, and assign me my due share in the vast series of preparations and operations which have secured us the command of the seas”.⁸⁸ With this statement, Churchill sought to make sure that he would not be forgotten in the history of the Royal Navy, as his ancestors were not forgotten as well.

Churchill’s great failure of the Dardanelles Campaign would have sunk the career and political aspirations of most men, but Churchill’s arrogance and persistence, just as it had in the Dardanelles, came from a much deeper source of confidence; an innate sense of entitlement granted him by his forbearers. In his mind, Churchill was destined to be a great military leader. He yearned to attain the same status as his great ancestor even though he did not possess the same bloodline. The Dardanelles was a way to achieve this goal; however, it served as the opposite—a failure that would send Churchill five steps backwards in his quest to live up to his family’s expectations. An ear-witness apparently heard Churchill exclaim after the Dardanelles disaster, “Perhaps it is better to be irresponsible and right than responsible and wrong.”⁸⁹ In Churchill’s resignation speech he sought to vindicate himself once again as he continued to fight for the conquering of Constantinople. He said, “. . .in the east, take Constantinople; take it by

⁸⁷ Winston S. Churchill and Clementine Churchill, *Speaking for Themselves*, ed. By Mary Soames, (Transworld Publishers LTD.: London, UK, 1998) 111.

⁸⁸ Gilbert, *The Challenge of War*, Chp. 11, Kindle.

⁸⁹ Kay Halle, *irrepressible Churchill*, (The World Publishing Company: Cleveland, Ohio, 1996)

ships if you can, take it by soldiers if you must; take it by whatever plan, military or naval, commends itself to your military experts, but take it, and take it soon, and take it while time remains".⁹⁰ Somewhat oblivious to his failure and personal role in it, Churchill would begin anew; a steady climb, improbable as it was, to the top of British military and political leadership and the world renown he had always felt was his destiny.

Conclusion

Winston Churchill's story is a story of greatness—greatness born from both failure and success. A man born of greatness, into a family who helped to propel him to the man he would become. Churchill's development as a leader, both militarily and politically, was undoubtedly influenced by his need to live up to his father and grandfather's expectations. This pressure to become the next great Churchill pushed him to be unforgiving with himself and his advancement through life, but also instilled in him a confidence that is a mark of the privileged class. Through investigating the early years of his life, the reader is able to see a development from young, privileged, and troublesome child to brilliant, yet still troublesome First Lord of the Admiralty. It was in the first years of his life that Churchill began to formulate his political and military beliefs, always influenced by the thoughts of his father, and the necessity to uphold his family legacy. He continued his unrelenting push to become a man worthy of a portrait on the walls of Blenheim Palace, alongside his great ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough. Today, Winston Churchill is a man well revered for his life of service and devotion to Great Britain, but it is hard to argue that without the privileges afforded him by his ancestry, Churchill almost certainly would not have become the iconic historical figure of a generation.

⁹⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *Never Give In: The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches*, (Hyperion: New York, 2003) 64-65.

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