

The Seven Lives of Winston Spencer Churchill

By Joseph C. Huber, Jr.



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Home schooled on an isolated Philippine rubber plantation (less 31 months a Japanese prisoner) and graduate of a rural Ohio high school, Joseph C. Huber, Jr., earned an SBEE and an SMEE at MIT in electromagnetic waves.

For 50 years he created designs, received patents and led programs to keep the Cold War cold, drugs out of the US, and soldiers safe in the War on Terror. In so doing he traveled a good part of the world, drove in a dozen foreign countries, and visited the Blenheim Palace room in which Winston Churchill was born.

Currently he is secretary of the Akron Club; active in church, Rotary, and WWII Round Table; a member of historical societies and a bibliophilic organization; and has nearly finished his second book.

He has been married to Julia McMillen Huber for over fifty wonderful years, and they have two great sons, two delightful daughters-in-law, and five grandsons to be proud of.

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I first encountered Winston Churchill nearly sixty years ago in the six volumes of his *Marlborough*, the biography of his ancestor John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough, for whom the grateful Queen Anne commissioned the construction of magnificent Blenheim Palace, named for his great 1704 victory in the War of the Spanish Succession.

John's diplomacy with a fragmented coalition army, his logistics innovations, and his series of successful battles against France put England in first place in Europe; Winston's command of the English language, inventive use of words, lucid and succinct narrative, and fascinating content were irresistible. Though not the overwhelming best-seller his history of the Second World War was, the biography has many other admirers; it is nothing less than "the greatest historical work written in our century, an inexhaustible mine of political wisdom and understanding, which should be required reading for every student of political science," according to political philosopher Leo Strauss.

Churchill earned his living by writing, and five feet of my shelves hold some of his fifty-eight books and 9,000 speeches. He published more than Dickens and Shakespeare combined, earning a Nobel Prize for Literature.

His literary production alone would amount to a full industrious life for most, but not for Churchill, who achieved six more successful interwoven lives. He was the first descendant of John Churchill to match his ancestor's achievements.

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The first additional life was the most unusual one, for an author, of professional soldiering. Not considered smart enough for Oxford or Cambridge, he graduated (after some difficulty with the entrance exams) from England's military school, Sandhurst, and joined the cavalry, in which he fought, was shot at by, and probably killed enemy soldiers on four continents.

Fighting in Cuba before America's "little war" and later in what was then northern India, he supported himself in the style he wished by writing newspaper articles and successful books on the wars.

Always on the lookout for the next English conflict, he pulled strings and used holidays to "go to the sound of the guns." Off to Africa, he joined the fighting near Khartoum. Scouting, he found the enemy, then joined in the world's last great cavalry charge at Omdurman in 1898, driving his horse through twelve-deep ranks of Dervishes, killing several.

Resigning his commission, he sailed to the Boer War as a correspondent, but soon joined the army. When accompanying an armored train, his valiant efforts to rescue it when ambushed failed, and he was captured by the Boers. Escaping alone from a Pretoria prison, he made his way with help to friendly lines, with a bounty on his head.

Continuing his dual military/correspondent role, he took part in lifting the siege of Ladysmith, then

scouted and found the critical point through which he signaled the attack that proved the war's final turning point at Diamond Hill.

Brave to the point of rashness and deserving a Victoria Cross, he was not viewed with favor by the old-line officers who awarded medals. His widely read writings lambasting senior officers for their failings would not have made him any more popular with his superiors. He could be called, in today's parlance, an aristocratic showboater.

It is also true that some of his opportunities arose because of connections his mother had through her liaisons, not then uncommon in that social stratum. The beautiful American Jenny Jerome was the widow of the 8th Duke of Marlborough's younger brother, Lord Randolph, a leader of Parliament till his irrational behavior cost him the job; he is believed to have died of syphilis or its mercury treatment.

Elected to Parliament in 1900, Churchill brought his military experience to new responsibilities. Prior to and in the first year of World War I, Winston served as first Lord of the Admiralty and was responsible for the sea and air defense of England, ordering successful air raids on their Friedrichshafen air-docks when Zeppelins first bombed London. In 1915, he was forced out in a change of government and berated over the Gallipoli debacle, which, in his view, had resulted from the timidity and vacillation of commanding generals and admirals that allowed Turkey, under German leadership, time to create a trench warfare defense. Hundreds of thousands of casualties resulted, and the success of the Bolshevik revolution can be traced in part to this failure.

He then served for five months commanding the 6th Battalion of the

21st Regiment of the Royal Scots Fusiliers in trenches on the Western front. Despite making twenty-six trips into no-man's-land, he again escaped shot and shell, and was once only a couple of hundred yards from a corporal named Adolf Hitler. Urged to stay, he felt he needed to return to Parliament, later serving as Minister of Munitions at a time of severe shell shortages. Even in this position he regularly visited the front, once in a combat aircraft over no-man's-land. When America entered the war, his efforts to equip the AEF earned him the US Distinguished Service Medal.

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In World War II, he stood on rooftops to witness German bombings. Only a direct order from the king kept him from being on a ship in close support at D-Day; nonetheless, in a few days he managed to be on a ship firing at the shore. Later he stood calmly under heavy shellfire to the discomfort of accompanying Allied generals, as he had done trying to save Antwerp in World War I.

Serving as Home Secretary with the power to use the military in England, and Defense Secretary, as well as Prime

Minister, through most of World War II, he had, for an author, quite a military career.

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Invention and innovation constituted a third life. Among the first to learn to fly, and crash, piloting in over 130 training flights, he started the Naval Air Force.

Crucially, he converted the Royal Navy to oil from coal in time for World War I. Seeking a solution to the quagmire of trench warfare, he used Navy money to fund development for a project he gave the non-army cover name of "tank," and then worked assiduously for its use to end horrendous casualties. Six hundred "tanks" in the Battle of Amiens started modern maneuver warfare.

In World War II, Churchill was receptive to bold ideas offered by others, to which he often contributed his own ideas. Britain's brilliant Professor Henry Tizard and his team of experts developed dozens of useful, occasionally bizarre, devices, whose tests Winston loved to watch. Appreciating the value of joint efforts, he insisted on sharing with the United States the secrets of radar, of jet engines, and of the decoding work done at Bletchley Park.

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Churchill's first priority, and the life for which he is most remembered, was as a politician. He served in the House of Commons almost continuously from 14 February 1901 until 15 October 1964, dying January 24, 1965, 70 years to the day after his father. Not shy, in his first two weeks he gave three effective speeches in Parliament, and was always at the fore with speeches, ideas, and programs in ten different cabinet posts. He approached each new ministry and issue with vigor and new ideas, faltering only when as Chancellor of the Exchequer he followed bad advice on the price of gold.

Though grandson of a Duke of Marlborough (and next in line to be the 10th Duke before the 9th Duke's wife, the American heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt, produced an heir and a spare), he strove to improve life for the common man. His efforts led to many reforms, labor laws, and early welfare and health systems.

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A fourth additional life came from being the one called upon when a problem needed a consummate diplomat. He worked on the still-vexing Irish problem, playing a role in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. Particularly contentious were strikes, where he demonstrated a willingness to successfully negotiate and avoid using the Army.

In 1921 he was given the Mid-East geography problem created when England promised the same "camel," figuratively speaking, to the Arabs, to the Jews, and to France. His map satisfied no party totally, but who else can claim to have kept peace in much of that volatile region for fifty years?

His greatest diplomatic achievement was his charm offensive with Harry Hopkins and Roosevelt before America entered the war. It obtained aid for England and helped start America's preparation for World War II. The "Destroyers for Bases Agreement" of September 1940 had little immediate practical impact—a year later, only ten of the promised fifty ships with limited capabilities were fit for service—but it helped move sentiment in the US from isolation to enthusiastically embracing England. Similarly, Lend-Lease was not generous, with England completing repayment only in 2006 (the only country to do so), but its influence on American public opinion was significant.

In the Big Three Conferences, the Cold War's enabling events, Churchill was not fooled by Stalin and did his

best—unsuccessfully—to convince Roosevelt and Truman. As early as 1945 he spoke of the Iron Curtain and the need, not for a balance of power, but the affordable strategy of enough power to dissuade any gambler. His 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, was pooh-poohed by the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, but became the foundation for U.S. conduct.

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For a fifth additional life, he became an oil painter. Unaframed to tackle something new, he took it up during World War I as a cure for his "black dog" depressions, which generally occurred when he was out of office; painting, he claimed, kept him alive in times of extreme stress. While he ranks only a gifted amateur, he created over a hundred paintings, one of which eventually sold for 2.7 million dollars. The value of the thirty-seven paintings his last surviving daughter gave to the United Kingdom averaged almost \$400,000. Notable, even if people were paying for the name—as people who pay that sort of price for art usually are.

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With all his interwoven lives, his enormous energy allowed him a sixth life as a family man.

His own childhood had been marked by neglect by his parents and serious belittling by his father, who denigrated him in letters and in every one of the six times they had a discussion. His parents, like typical English aristocrats, had a nanny raise their children. Once, while Winston was on a walk with his brother, their parents rode up on horseback, and his brother asked Winston who they were. By contrast, the brothers were so close to the nanny that, when she was summarily dismissed without a pension after they were grown, Winston shared his meager student funds with her. He and his brother later erected a striking

monument on her London grave.

Though a powerful speaker, Winston had a problem with women. Enamored of attractive Pamela Plowden, whom he met serving in India, he pursued her so slowly that she married the Earl of Lytton. When he asked Ethel Barrymore to marry him, she declined, as life with him would be too much politics. When first he met beautiful Clementine Hozier (after asking to be introduced at a ball), he stood and stared. Later, at a dinner, they discovered their mutual passionate interest in politics, the convictions they had in common, and their shared intelligence.

He immediately wrote, praising her mind and strong convictions, and said he would like to get to know her much better. But when his cousin Sonny finally arranged for both to be at Blenheim Palace, he had to push Winston to meet her on her last day. Then, as they sat in a gazebo, he talked about everything else till she concluded that, if the beetle she was watching reached a crack in the floor before he proposed, she was leaving. He made that deadline! They married a month and a day later, and ten months after the wedding, their first child was born.

Winston and Clementine were very close and let their four children know they were loved, though raising them the old way, seeing them only at teatime. When their youngest died at three, he was devastated.

He was devoted to his "Clemmi," whose brilliance, speaking ability, and common sense helped him keep getting elected and smoothed the way when he went off course. Two hundred and fifty years earlier, the first Duke had had Sarah, Queen Anne's closest friend, both ladies playing major roles in English history.

In World War II, Clementine acted as a minister without portfolio. Her letters to the appropriate ministers were given

full attention. One letter complaining of insufficient beds in air-raid shelters quickly led to two million more. She worked through the war to keep him connected to the people, but never let Winnie know. And family helped.

Daughter-in-law Pamela was intimate with the married Averill Harriman, Special Envoy to coordinate Lend-Lease, and daughter Sarah with the American Ambassador. They held soirees for high-ranking American officers, providing priceless understanding of U.S. thinking.

Servants and staff are one reason Churchill was so productive. Secretaries took dictation, even sitting by the open bathroom door while he bathed. His meals were set in front of him, his bath was drawn, and his clothes laid out. A bit of his family life has been related by Annelese Nefos, a woman who, when a young Swiss girl in England, was hired to run their household from 1959 to 1961 because she could speak French to Winston and (Swiss) German to Clementine. They were devoted to each other, she reports, adding that although Churchill is often described as a heavy drinker, his pre-dinner whisky and soda was mostly soda and the whiskey of low alcohol content. Alcohol was Churchill's energy drink, never affecting his performance or his health—he lived to be ninety.

However, Churchill was no saint. He could be insensitive and abrasive to cabinet members and military leaders, with Clementine often being called on to smooth things over. He could be stressful to live with, and Clementine had to take breaks. With his travels and hers they spent much time apart but kept close with regular loving letters, which have survived.

Money was frequently a problem, his ambitions for home and life style frequently bigger than his budget. More than once he had to be bailed out with generous gifts (not bribes) from

those who felt gifts were warranted by his service to the nation. Wealthy friends, including Onassis, provided extensive travel, holidays and yacht trips. He was, after all, a tremendous draw, and his magnificent presence and wit made every dinner memorable.

Alcohol was Churchill's energy drink, never affecting his performance or his health—he lived to be ninety.

He was driven by an overwhelming ambition to outdo his father and leave a great legacy. Perhaps for the latter, he resurrected his father's reputation with a two-volume biography that won rave reviews.

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His seventh life, as an outstanding prophet, speaks to us still. In 1911 he wrote a government paper predicting in detail the first forty-two days of World War I. In 1919 he published a prediction of World War II, and his Cold War vision has been noted. His prophesies shaped today's geography: the Mideast is his doing, Ireland and South Africa owe much to him, the breakup of the USSR into individual nations can be traced to his advice, and of course Turkey is in part the result of failure to follow his prophecy on Gallipoli.

But he should really be remembered for the concept he laid out in the four volumes of the *History of the English Speaking Peoples*. From England, a tiny language and a governing concept have spread to be heard and practiced around the world. He said it best in a talk at Harvard on September 6, 1943:

"Law, language and literature—these are considerable factors. Common perceptions of what is right and decent, a marked regard for fair play, especially to the weak and poor, a stern sentiment of impartial justice, and above all a love of personal freedom [...] these are the common conceptions on both sides of the ocean among the English-speaking peoples."

He guided, even remade England. No wonder the Queen granted him the unique honor, for a commoner, of attending his funeral. On their own initiative, dock crane operators dipped them one by one in a final salute as his casket passed up the Thames.

In the U.S., he and Mother Teresa are the only two individuals to be made Honorary U. S. Citizens during their lifetimes, and more people watched his funeral live on TV than watched that of Kennedy. All in all, a true successor to the 1st Duke of Marlborough.

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