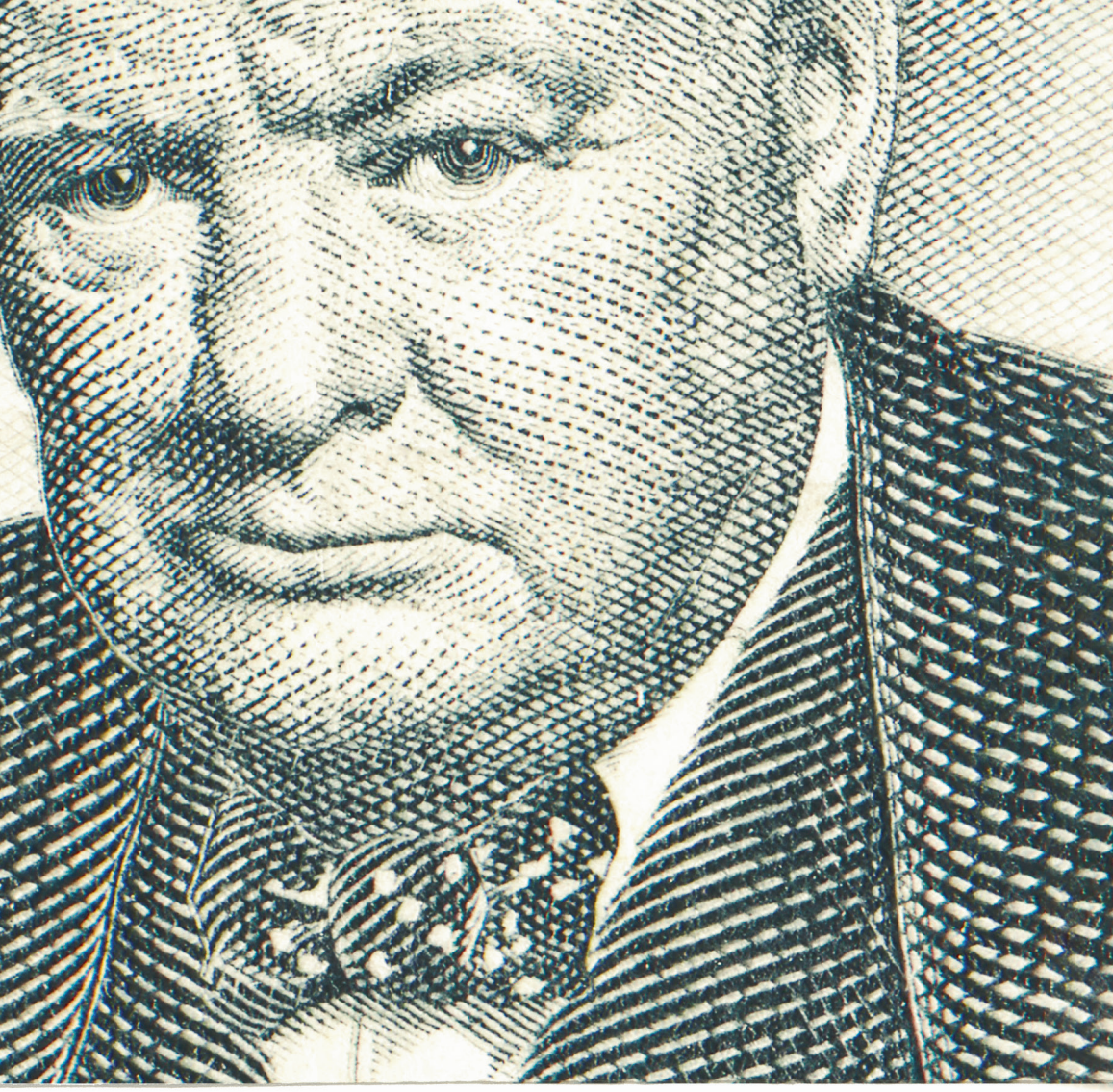


ANTHONY TUCKER-JONES

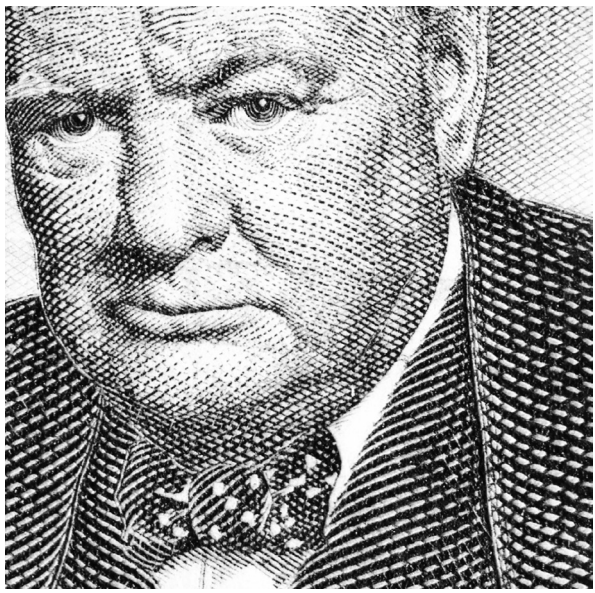
CHURCHILL

MASTER AND COMMANDER

WINSTON CHURCHILL AT WAR 1895–1945

FOREWORD BY
ANDREW ROBERTS

OSPREY



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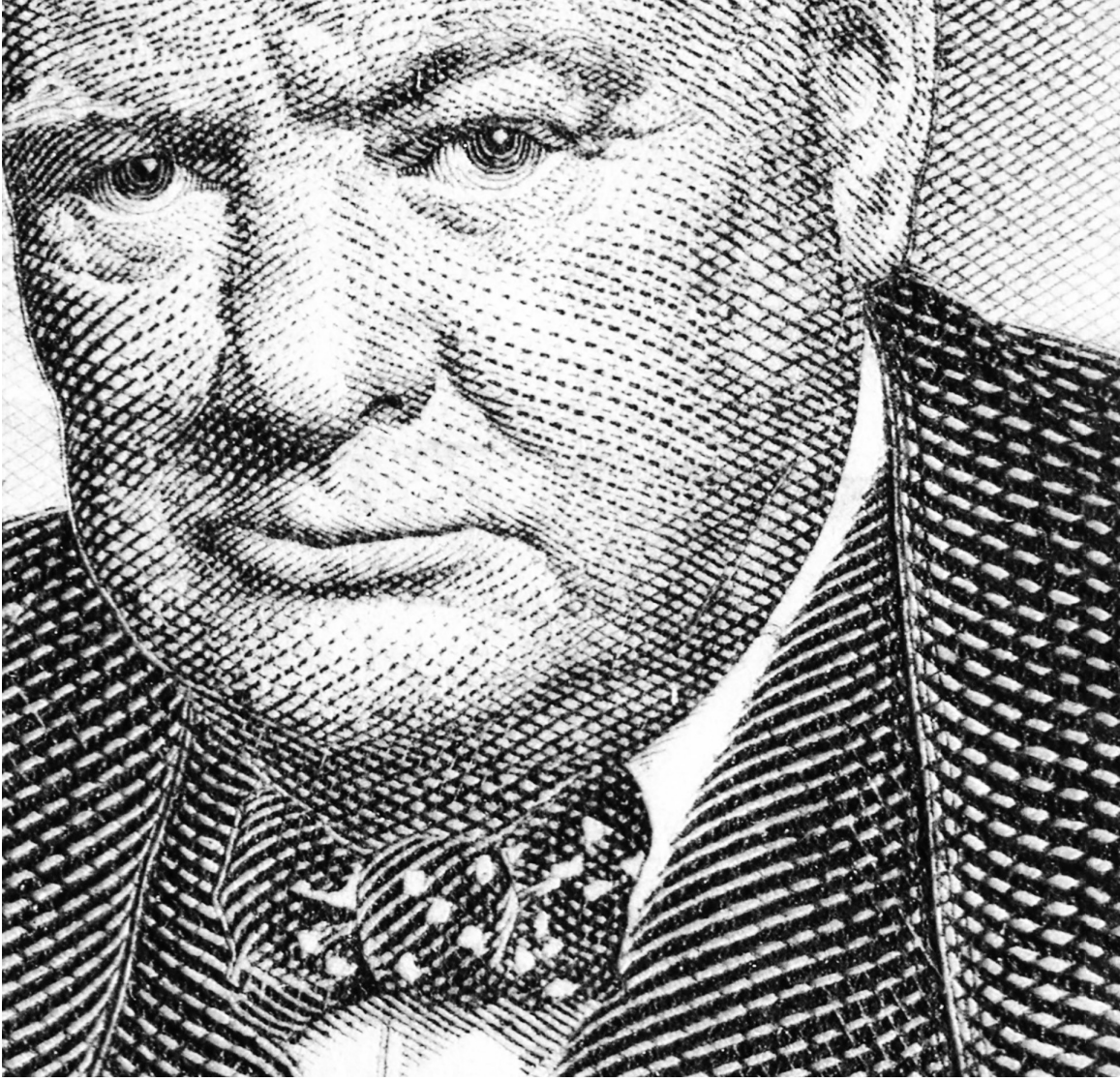

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Contents

Foreword

'I felt as if I were walking with destiny,' wrote Sir Winston Churchill of the day he became Prime Minister in May 1940, 'and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.' The distinguished historian Anthony Tucker-Jones shows brilliantly just how accurate that self-observation was, by putting Churchill's achievements during his trial of World War II squarely in the context of all that he had learned about warfare since even before he attended Sandhurst half a century earlier.

Tucker-Jones is particularly strong on the ethos, assumptions, tactics and strategic overview of the British Army at the time when the young Churchill was at his most receptive, and proves that time and again personal experience was put to astoundingly good use decades later when Churchill was Minister of Defence during the greatest existential crisis in British history. Readers will be impressed by the author's extremely wide and detailed knowledge of every aspect of this extraordinary story, as well as his willingness to engage in issues forthrightly.

Churchill felt he was qualified to act as Britain's pre-eminent 'master and commander' in 1940 in part because a quarter of a century earlier he had been taught by the Dardanelles Expedition that campaigns cannot be won by committees of politicians. Tucker-Jones examines every major influence on his thinking regarding civil-military relations, what Churchill called 'the brass hats and frock-coats'.

This fine book also explores and highlights areas that are often misunderstood or elided in other works. Churchill's enthusiasm for mustard gas; his defiance of David Lloyd George over British intervention in the Russian Civil War; his implementation of Hugh

Trenchard's controversial Air Control; his access to secret intelligence regarding Nazi rearmament; how well informed he was during the Battle of Britain; what he learned from Lawrence of Arabia that helped him set up the Commandos; his appalling dilemma over saving either Cairo or Singapore in 1942; the impact of the Quit India movement on the campaign in Burma; the two occasions when he seriously considered invading neutral Ireland during World War II: all get full and fascinating treatment.

This book is certainly no hagiography; the author points out that Churchill could get important things wrong occasionally, instancing the time that he favoured the Japanese over the Chinese in the 1930s, and also showed too little interest in the Spanish Civil War. Over the issue of Churchill's involvement in the Bengal Famine of 1943, Tucker-Jones rightly concentrates on the Viceroy Lord Wavell's full awareness of the threat posed by the Japanese Navy in the Bay of Bengal.

Churchill's adherence to the Mediterranean strategy in 1943–44 ultimately brought him to loggerheads with the Americans, to the point that he threatened to resign as Prime Minister over the projected Operation *Anvil* landings on the French Riviera in August 1944, because of the way they weakened the campaign in Italy. Tucker-Jones rightly argues that Churchill's unilateral but ultimately justified intervention without President Franklin Roosevelt's approval in the Greek Civil War needs to be seen in that context of testy Anglo-American relations towards the end of the war in Europe.

This well-researched, well-written and soundly argued book is a real addition to the avalanche of books on Winston Churchill, illuminating where the military views came from that were so profoundly to affect the twentieth century and beyond.

Andrew Roberts
London
July 2021

Introduction

Winston Churchill was one of the greatest military and political chancers of all time. This is not meant as a criticism, as these were the very qualities that made him such a dynamic and energetic leader. From a young age he craved fame, or even notoriety, as long as it brought him to public attention. It was clear he had achieved this goal by 1899, when even school girls in Pretoria knew who he was. His propensity to take risks did mean that inevitably on occasions he gambled and lost spectacularly. The focus on Churchill's life tends to be his phenomenal political career and wartime premiership. Arguably his short army and long political careers ably prepared him for that pivotal moment in 1940. Despite his limited time as a soldier, his connection with the armed forces through numerous regimental and then ministerial posts was considerable. Crucially this experience with the army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force gave him an almost unique insight into the British armed forces.

Churchill's lust for military adventure was quite remarkable. In his quest for self-promotion and glory he essentially became a war tourist. Thanks to brazen doorstepping of senior commanders and his mother's extensive network of contacts he saw action in Cuba, India, Sudan and South Africa. All of this was in a semi-official capacity and had nothing to do with his parent regiment the 4th Hussars. Churchill notably combined being a soldier, a war correspondent and an author, though this made him enemies who were annoyed by his impertinence and jealous of his rising profile. In doing so he was prepared to travel thousands of miles and at his own expense. Like many young subalterns or lieutenants, he dreamed of winning the Victoria Cross or the

Distinguished Service Order, but what set him apart from many of his contemporaries was that he actively sought to gain them by deliberately putting himself in harm's way. To get himself noticed by senior officers he regularly exposed himself to enemy fire.

On numerous occasions Churchill could have been killed, but miraculously survived his close encounters with death. These narrow escapes seem to have convinced him that he was somehow invincible. This, in consequence, persuaded him to take more risks with his safety even in later life. His dangerous behaviour on a bombed bridge over the Rhine in 1945 beggars belief, but goes a long way in illustrating what kind of man he was. Quite simply he loved to be in the thick of it. Throughout his long life he was drawn to the sound of the guns like a moth to a flame. At a young age, unable to fast-track his military career nor prepared to put the time in, he sought to emulate his father by taking up politics as soon as possible.

Churchill's monumental political achievements so eclipsed his soldiering that it is not generally appreciated that, apart from being commissioned with the 4th Hussars, he served with numerous other units. While on the North-West Frontier he was attached to the 31st Punjab and 35th Sikh Infantry and then in the Sudan to the 21st Lancers. During his time in South Africa he was first with the South African Light Horse and then the Imperial Yeomanry. Prior to World War I he was in the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars. During that conflict, after resigning from the government, he was attached to the 2nd Grenadier Guards, before commanding a battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers on the Western Front. He liked his time in the trenches and by all accounts was respected by the men under his command. He made a point of leading by example rather than from the safety of his dugout. Once more his luck held, although he almost lost a hand to enemy shrapnel and was regularly at risk from German snipers when on patrol.

In his youth Churchill made a good impression as a leader of men, though his attitude to following the chain of command was sometimes hazy at best and on other occasions downright insubordinate. As an officer he gathered lifelong friends whilst serving in India, Sudan, South Africa and Belgium. Once in government he increasingly acted as a rule unto himself. During World War II, Churchill liked to think that his leadership style was inclusive; however, more often than not it

was autocratic. Some did not altogether appreciate his long wartime working hours. There was many a night when senior politicians and the service chiefs found themselves kept up until the early hours at Chartwell having been invited for dinner and a movie. To their irritation they often found that Churchill had already made his mind up on important strategic matters. In his role as Prime Minister and the country's very first Minister of Defence he would reason that he had the full picture while they did not. Feeling exhausted after their late night, everyone then had to return to running the war the following day and carry out Churchill's bidding.

Quite surprisingly many other aspects of Churchill's military leadership are little known; particularly his continual enthusiasm for mustard gas on the grounds that it was a more humane weapon than high explosive. This, though, was completely at variance with conventional wisdom. Churchill tried, in defiance of the Prime Minister of the day, to significantly escalate Britain's involvement in the Russian Civil War in the name of crushing Bolshevism. When he failed he resorted to using mustard gas and Czech mercenaries. Fortunately, apart from the Russian Civil War, wiser counsels prevailed to curb his desire to use gas in Afghanistan, Iraq, Normandy and Germany. He was even prepared to use it in Britain and Ireland in the event of invasion by Hitler.

He supported the use of force to try and stop Irish and Indian independence, which simply led to more bloodshed. His dealings with both countries were subsequently seen as stains on his reputation. However, he never acted out of naked malice but rather from a fear of inevitable sectarian violence should British rule end. He almost invaded neutral Ireland twice during World War II and seriously contemplated violating Portugal and Spain's neutrality by seizing their Atlantic Islands. In India he was forced to contain a popular rising by the 'Quit India' movement that threatened to derail the British campaign in Burma. Equally controversially he wholeheartedly supported Truman's use of the atomic bomb against Japan. Yet during the 1930s he favoured the Japanese over the Chinese to the extent of ignoring the shocking Nanking massacre.

On a more positive note, he nurtured both Britain's key intelligence services MI5 and MI6 as well as the RAF from the start. The intelligence services repaid his support by feeding him assessments of Germany's rearmament throughout the 1930s. Yet he chose to ignore

their warnings about the Japanese threat to Singapore. He also helped initiate the formation of the Commandos, which greatly supported the development of combined operations. The latter ensured the cooperation of the armed forces on land, in the air and at sea to achieve an objective. Such coordination was needed for the conduct of large-scale amphibious operations. This was particularly vital for the success of D-Day as well as the landings in the Mediterranean. In contrast, although a supporter of Bomber Command, by the end of the war Churchill had moved to distance himself from what was effectively indiscriminate carpet bombing.

One of his contemporaries described him as having an inexhaustible strategic imagination. Unlike previous Prime Ministers, Churchill saw himself as overall director of the British war effort. He reinforced this position by wearing the uniform of any of the three services as he felt appropriate. In World War II he regularly donned a uniform, most notably an RAF air commodore and while at Yalta a colonel of Hussars. One of his most familiar outfits was his 'old sea-dog outfit of an Elder Brother of Trinity House',[1] which he used for naval occasions. He never wore an admiral's uniform; such was his respect for the Royal Navy. It was Churchill's early experiences during Britain's colonial wars and World War I that firmly convinced him that he was qualified to oversee British strategy during World War II. As the conflict progressed this inevitably brought him into dispute with his own Chiefs of Staff and the Americans. In addition, as America's role expanded so Churchill's influence on military matters markedly declined, much to his enduring frustration.

Upon being appointed Prime Minister, Churchill's wartime leadership was immediately tested by the crisis in France and the need to save the British Expeditionary Force from annihilation at Dunkirk. This was followed by the touch and go Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940. Although he enjoyed further success the following year, when the British Army soundly defeated Mussolini's forces in Libya, this victory was thrown away by the disastrous campaigns in Greece and Crete. The situation continued to deteriorate in early 1942, when Britain quickly lost Burma, Malaya and Singapore to the Japanese, who then advanced into north-eastern India. By the summer of 1942 Hitler was pressing on Alexandria and threatening the Suez Canal.

Confidence in Churchill's leadership waned. For a moment it looked as if his premiership would end thanks to a disgruntled House of Commons. However, he survived public censure and that autumn the tide began to turn with the British victory at El Alamein and the Anglo-American landings in French North Africa. These pinned down the troublesome General Erwin Rommel once and for all. Then in early 1943 the Germans surrendered at Stalingrad marking the turn of the tide on the Eastern Front. Likewise, the Germans were defeated in Tunisia finally ending Hitler's campaign in North Africa. Shortly after, the Allies landed in Sicily followed by mainland Italy, knocking the Italians out of the war. For Hitler it was a gradual slide into defeat, especially after Stalin's decisive victory at Kursk. On all fronts Hitler was left on the defensive and the initiative firmly passed to 'The Big Three' – Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin.

This book is intended to first explain what, in his formative years, shaped Winston Churchill as a military commander, and then to examine how in high office he got it both right and wrong. Churchill is widely hailed as Britain's greatest wartime leader and politician. Deep down though, he was foremost a warlord. Just like his ally Stalin, and his arch enemies Hitler and Mussolini, Churchill could not help himself and insisted on personally directing the strategic conduct of World War II. For better or worse he functioned as political master and military commander.

Again like his wartime contemporaries, he regularly had a habit of not heeding the advice of his experienced generals. He was always very impatient for immediate action. Early in the war the results of this were disasters in Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Far East. Churchill's pig-headedness over supporting the Italian campaign, in defiance of the Riviera landings, culminated in him threatening to resign and bring the British government down. Such brinkmanship was met with quite remarkable fortitude by the long-suffering Allied Supreme Commander General Eisenhower. Churchill's fruitless Dodecanese adventure in the eastern Aegean also ended in unnecessary defeat.

Yet on occasions Churchill got it just right; his refusal to surrender in 1940, the British miracle at Dunkirk and victory in the Battle of Britain, proved that he was a much-needed decisive and defiant leader. Hitler could not understand why Churchill would not see sense and sue

for peace. He assumed his Blitz, without the Krieg, would be sufficient to bend Churchill to his will. He was woefully mistaken. Churchill was made of sterner stuff. Nor did Churchill shy away from painful decisions, such as the destruction of the French Fleet at anchor to prevent it falling into Hitler's hands and his subsequent war against Vichy France's colonies. Ultimately his dogged defiance in Egypt and Burma paved the way for victory against both the Germans and the Japanese. Likewise, his insistence on attacking Italy first ensured that Mussolini was knocked out of the war, thereby finally securing the Mediterranean for the Allies.

While Britain had great faith in Churchill as a warlord, it was not so keen on the idea of him in peacetime. By 1945 the nation wanted a fresh start that did not include him. Fittingly though, Churchill's association with the military came full circle. After the war he packed himself off to Italy for a well-earned rest and much to his delight was guarded by members of his old regiment the 4th Hussars. On the whole, thanks to his vast experience, Churchill felt he made a good job of being the country's political master and military commander in its dire hour of need. Despite any initial misgivings, most of his contemporaries tended to agree with him.

Prologue

Death or Glory

The breeze gently fluttered the pennants of the 21st Lancers deployed at Egeiga, just north-east of Omdurman. It was a hot day, but what could you expect at the height of the Sudanese summer. The men fidgeted in their saddles, checking their swords and carbines. They looked rather comical in their khaki pith helmets with large quilted sun shades. From a distance these made them look like Mexican bandits in sombreros. An image of Don Quixote's Sancho Panza also sprang to mind, but these men were not about to charge harmless windmills. Their armpits soaked their dust-caked uniforms as they listened to the storm of artillery and rifle fire. There was also the distinctive clatter of the Maxim machine gun going about its deadly work. The horses languidly flicked their tails and manes to keep the pesky flies at bay. The battle had been raging for several hours.

Colonel R.M. Martin, their regimental commander, and his officers had a problem that they planned to fix as soon as possible. The 21st had no battle honours and Martin was damned if he was going to miss out on the fun. It annoyed him immensely that the army had given them the unofficial motto 'Thou shalt not kill'.[1] The regiment's only real claim to fame was that it had once guarded Napoleon Bonaparte on St Helena.[2] Martin now had the means to remedy this thanks to the written orders he was holding in his hand.

At 0830 hours on 2 September 1898 Major-General Sir Herbert Kitchener, commander of the Anglo-Egyptian Army, had instructed, 'Annoy them [i.e. the enemy] as far as possible on their left flank and

head them off if possible from Omdurman.'[3] While this was fairly explicit, it also offered some leeway in interpretation. Furthermore, Martin was accompanied by *Times* correspondent Hubert Howard. He would ensure that the Lancers' forthcoming Omdurman exploits were recorded for prosperity. Martin also had a *Morning Post* war reporter serving with him, one Lieutenant Winston S. Churchill. The latter though, unlike Howard, was not a non-combatant. He was armed with a sword and his trusty Mauser pistol and was in command of a troop of Martin's lancers. It irked Martin that the unwanted Churchill and Howard were friends. Who knew what malicious gossip they had been spreading.

Kitchener's expedition to retake Sudan and avenge the death of General Charles Gordon some 13 years earlier was reaching its climax. Gordon had been sent to evacuate Khartoum in the face of a widespread revolt led by Mohammed Ahmed, known as the Mahdi. Instead, he stayed and the Mahdi stormed Khartoum in January 1885. The Mahdi's successor, Khalifa Abdulla, who ruled supreme, had stirred up trouble in neighbouring Abyssinia and British-controlled Egypt. Finally alarmed by the Khalifa's regime, Kitchener was ordered to retake Dongola province in Sudan. His early clashes with the Dervishes had resulted in a victory at Atbara in April 1898. He then pushed down the Nile towards the Khalifa's base at Omdurman, which lay just north-west of Khartoum. The British captured the Dervish commander, Sharif Mahmud Ahmad, at Atbara. When taken before Kitchener, he had warned ominously, 'You will pay for all this at Omdurman … compared with the Khalifa I am but a leaf!'[4]

Churchill landed in Cairo on 2 August 1898 to discover two of the 21st Lancers' four squadrons were already on their way to join Kitchener at Atbara. Thanks to his late arrival the troop he was to have commanded was assigned to Lieutenant Robert Grenfell. Had Churchill been any later he would have had to make the long journey down the Nile to Sudan on his own. Being a supernumerary, on secondment from the 4th Hussars stationed in India and therefore an interloper, Churchill was not made to feel welcome, especially as his posting had been facilitated by the death of Lieutenant P. Chapman, one of the Lancers' own officers.

Furthermore, Churchill had made it abundantly clear he had no intentions of staying in the army as he wished to pursue a political

career like his father Lord Randolph. He had gone to Egypt because he wanted to take part in the historic recapture of Khartoum. Perhaps more importantly he planned to make money from a book on the expedition and his reports for the *Morning Post*, despite initial assurances given to Kitchener that he would not write whilst on campaign. Kitchener disapproved of Churchill's appointment, not only because of his lack of commitment to his military career, but also because he had pulled political strings to get there. Kitchener fully appreciated he would be under close public scrutiny by the journalists accompanying his army. He did not need any criticism in the press from a serving officer, even if his work was published anonymously.

Churchill really wanted to be attached to the Egyptian cavalry staff, as he hoped they would have given him greater freedom. Instead, the man who got that job was one Captain Douglas Haig who later gained fame during World War I. While Kitchener had absolute say over the Egyptian Army, he had no authority over the composition of the British Expeditionary Force. The War Office arranged Churchill's secondment to the 21st Lancers on the condition that he picked up all the costs. Once kitted out and while still in Cairo, Churchill had his photograph taken. Deliberately or not, he presented the image of a rather callow and impudent-looking young man.

Churchill soon developed a dim view of the Lancers, despite six of his squadron's nine officers being acquaintances from Bangalore and Harrow. He was assigned to Major Finn's A Squadron and found himself put in charge of the pack animals carrying the officer's mess. Lionel James of the *Times* found Churchill's sense of destiny amusing. When James questioned him about his new role Churchill retorted, 'These are little people, I can afford to laugh at them. They will live to see the mistake they have made!'[5] As a Hussar officer on deployment from India Churchill should have felt an affinity to the Lancers. Not only were they formerly a hussar unit, they had originally been raised in India as a European light cavalry regiment.[6] As the 21st Hussars a detachment had first seen service in the Sudan over a decade earlier. They had only just become the 21st Lancers in 1897.

James also noted that Churchill preferred to eat with the journalists rather than his fellow officers. Nonetheless, on the journey south from Cairo, he befriended Lieutenants Grenfell and Richard Molyneux, and the three of them billeted together. If there were any historians

amongst their ranks, talk would inevitably have turned to the battle of Hasheen 13 years earlier when the 5th Lancers had ridden down the Dervishes. Along with the 9th Bengal Lancers and the 20th Hussars their charge had decimated a band of enemy warriors. Notably at the time it was reported most of them had been shot by the cavalry using their carbines rather than their lances and swords. Despite clarifying the cavalry's preference for firearms, the *Illustrated London News* could not resist including a highly dramatic spread showing three 5th Lancers heroically putting the Dervishes to flight.[7] If a ten-year-old Churchill had seen this image one can only guess at the impression it made on him.

In mid-August, after leaving Atbara, Churchill got separated from his column and spent a very anxious night and day alone in the wilderness before catching up. They were some 60 miles from Omdurman by 24 August. He and his squadron then joined Kitchener's forces at Shabulka. Churchill proceeded to annoy Colonel Martin by requesting his transfer to the Egyptian cavalry. He did this on the selfish grounds he stood a better chance of gaining glory with them. Colonel R.G. Broadwood commanding the nine squadrons of Egyptian cavalry was amenable to the idea, but Martin refused to let Churchill go. It is unclear if Martin ran this request through Kitchener, but he would have certainly agreed with his decision.

To be fair Churchill had good reason for wanting this transfer. The Egyptians were tough veterans of the fighting in Sudan, whereas the 21st Lancers had only just arrived. Broadwood was said 'to have been a quick-thinking and daring leader, the ideal cavalry general'.[8] The Egyptian Cavalry Corps fought with Kitchener at Firket in 1896 and had taken part in the pursuit of the enemy after the battle. At Atbara under Broadwood it had engaged Dervish horsemen to the left of the enemy stronghold.

The 21st Lancers were Kitchener's only British cavalry unit and they spent most of their time conducting reconnaissance. They spotted large numbers of Dervishes eight miles ahead of the army on 1 September 1898. 'The 21st Lancers reported some 60,000 or more of the enemy were halted outside Omdurman, and apparently drilling,' recalled infantry officer Lieutenant Ronald Meiklejohn.[9] Churchill made a personal report to Kitchener, which went off smoothly despite their frosty relationship. That night the Lancers withdrew

into the defensive positions of the Anglo-Egyptian Army. Meiklejohn chatted to some of the cavalry officers, including Churchill, about the likelihood of a battle. 'He was far less argumentative and assertive than usual,' noted Meiklejohn. 'He said the enemy had a huge force, and if they attacked during the night it would be "touch and go" about the result.'[10]

Afterwards Churchill went for a walk along the banks of the Nile with another officer. Lieutenant David Beatty, commanding the British gunboat *Fateh*, seeing them, yelled to attract their attention. He then lifted an arm and hurled a bottle of champagne towards the shore. A grateful Churchill stepped into the shallows and picked it up, little realizing that one day Beatty would become a famous admiral.

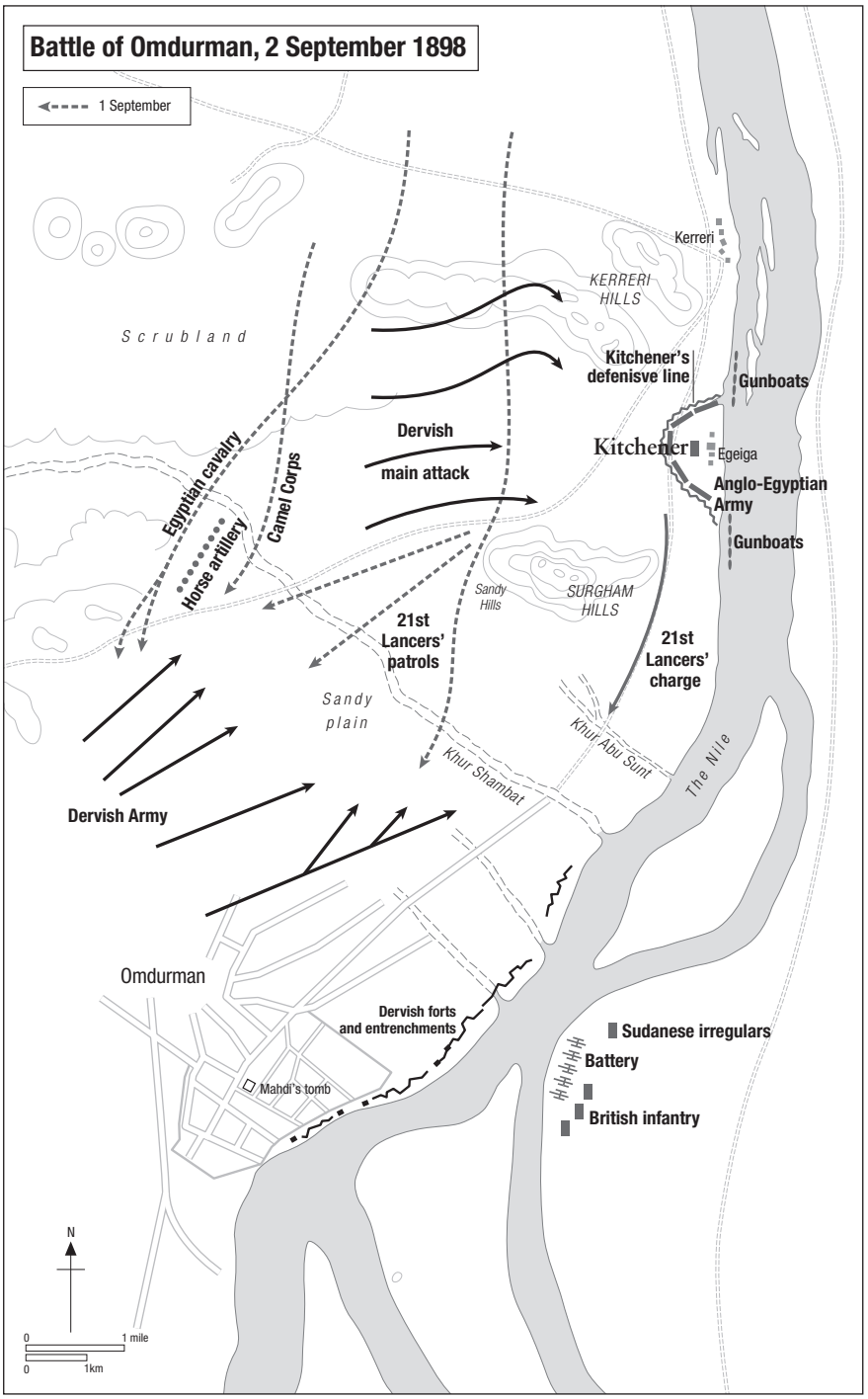
At dawn on 2 September 1898, Kitchener's Anglo-Egyptian force of about 25,000 deployed just seven miles from Omdurman in a horseshoe formation, with each flank anchored on the Nile. They were protected by a defensive barrier made from dry brushwood known as a *zareba*. This was only about waist high which meant that the front rank of the infantry, in order not to expose themselves, would have to fight kneeling.[11] Instead of deploying in the nearby hills, the Khalifa's army took the bait and advanced across a coverless plain. At about 0630 hours the Dervish forces appeared. 'The noise of something began to creep in upon us,' recalled journalist G.W. Steevens, 'it cleared and divided into the tap of drums and the far-away surf of raucous war cries … They were coming on.'[12] Kitchener coolly noted, 'I estimated their numbers at 35,000 men, though, from subsequent investigation, this figure was probably under-estimated, their actual strength being between forty and fifty thousand.'[13]

Kitchener soon discovered that his exposed mounted forces on his far-right flank were under pressure. He observed, 'By 6.30 am the Egyptian Cavalry, which had been driven in, took up a position with the Horse Artillery, Camel Corps, and four Maxims on the Kerreri ridge'.[14] Before the Anglo-Egyptian *zareba* the enemy were greeted by rifles, machine guns, artillery and howitzers. It was killing on an industrial scale and the Dervishes did not stand a chance. Kitchener's British, Egyptian and Sudanese infantry opened fire with section volleys at 2,000 yards and stopped the Dervishes at 500 yards. The fire was such that the riflemen became deafened by the din and almost blinded by the resulting smoke billowing over their ranks.

'Rifles grew red-hot; the soldiers seized them by the slings and dragged them back to the reserve to change for cool ones,' adds Steevens. 'It was not a battle, but an execution.'[15] Churchill's ears may have detected the different rates of fire by the infantry. The British were equipped with the bolt-action magazine-fed Lee-Metford rifle, while the Egyptians and Sudanese were armed with the much older single-shot breech-loading Martini-Henry rifle. The latter was a weapon he had handled as a school boy at Harrow. Lacking a magazine, the Martini had a much slower rate of fire. The Dervishes with their ancient rifles and homemade ammunition, supported by their swordsmen and spearmen, struggled to respond to the storm of searing metal. Further slaughter became a pointless task. 'Cease fire please!' Kitchener ordered one British regiment. 'Cease fire! What a dreadful waste of ammunition!'[16]

Kitchener, concerned by the prospect of the Dervishes withdrawing on Omdurman, ordered a counter-attack. His infantry brigades marched forth and prepared to advance along the Nile towards the city. Once the firing slackened off Churchill began to fret that he was going to miss out on the action. However, Kitchener had plans for his British cavalry. At 0800 hours Churchill and the four squadrons of the 21st Lancers, numbering some 310 men, left the safety of the Anglo-Egyptian camp and headed south. Fifteen minutes later they had reached the northern slopes of the Jebel Surgham. The summit was occupied by some of the Khalifa's personal guard. This rocky outcrop blocked the view to the west and the south, thereby hiding the Black Standard, the Khalifa's reserve force hiding in a dry river bed known as the Khur Abu Sunt. Patrols sent out by Martin could only see the thousands of Dervish wounded streaming back towards Omdurman. They were eventually forced to turn back by the Khalifa's riflemen hidden amongst the rocks. However, one of the patrols on the far left spotted a group of riflemen standing on the banks of the Khur. They were neither wounded nor retreating.

It was about now that Kitchener's hastily scribbled orders arrived. Colonel Martin, rather than heading for the Nile, resolved to attack this force along the Khur and cut off their retreat. 'See formed body of about 200 men six hundred yards out to our left,' noted Lieutenant Robert Smith, one of Churchill's fellow officers. 'Front troops left wheel. Immediately met by volleys fairly accurately aimed.'[17] Martin ordered the whole regiment to turn to meet the enemy.


Battle of Omdurman, 2 September 1898
1 September
Kerreri
KERRERI HILLS
Scrubland
Kitchener's defenisve line
Gunboats
Dervish main attack
Kitchener
Egeiga
Anglo-Egyptian Army
Egyptian cavalry
Camel Corps
Horse artillery
Gunboats
Sandy Hills
SURGHAM HILLS
21st Lancers' patrols
21st Lancers' charge
Sandy plain
Khur Abu Sunt
Khur Shambat
The Nile
Dervish Army
Omdurman
Dervish forts and entrenchments
Sudanese irregulars
Battery
Mahdi's tomb
British infantry
N
0 1 mile
0 1km

Major Finn's A Squadron was on the right flank, then Major Fowle's B Squadron. To his left was Captain Eadon's D Squadron, while on the extreme left was C Squadron under Captain Doyne. Their steady trot soon turned into a gallop. The horses' hooves pounding on the dry ground, they swept forward. Churchill had injured his right shoulder in India so was unable to use his sword, but by his own account he felt no fear. He gripped the reins and knew he had to do just two things, stay alive and act heroically. Now was his chance to shine and win a medal.

Steevens reports, 'The trumpets sang out the order, the troops glided into squadrons, and, four squadrons in line, the 21st Lancers swing into their first charge. Knee to knee they swept on till they were but 200 yards from the enemy.'[18] It was at this point they realized they had ridden into a trap, because instead of fighting several hundred men, several thousand were waiting in the Khur Abu Sunt.[19] Before them was a sea of white *jibbah* decorated in multi-coloured patches – the loose cotton shirt worn by the Mahdi's followers. Many of them, though, were topless Hadendowa, reportedly one of the fiercest tribes in Sudan, whose wild hair had led to them being dubbed 'fuzzy wuzzy'. They were not afraid of cavalry and would stand their ground. Out on the Nile Lieutenant Beatty had seen the Dervishes deploying, but was unable to warn the Lancers. 'By this time we were within 200 yards of their right,' recalled Martin, 'when a large body jumped up out of a small khor and commenced a very heavy fire.'[20] Smith was aghast when he had almost reached the dry river bed, 'Looking round see Khor 12 feet wide, 6 feet deep. In front. Every side a compact mass of white-robed men.'[21] In places they were up to 20 deep.

Churchill's lack of a lance was hardly a handicap. 'The lancer's pennons attract the fire of artillery,' wrote Captain Louis Nolan, the mid-19th-century cavalry expert. 'If lances be such good weapons, surely those who wield them ought to acquire great confidence in them, whereas it is well known that, in battle, lancers generally throw them away and take to their swords.'[22] Colonel Martin charged forward without sword or pistol in his hand. At a critical moment his horse stumbled forward and he had Dervish swords swinging perilously close to his head. The startled animal recovered and he pressed on down the ravine. Behind him his men thrust their lances till they broke, swung their swords till their arms ached and emptied their revolvers. Some of the Dervishes

responded by lying down so they could cut the hamstrings of the passing horses.

Unfortunately for Eadon and Fowle their squadrons hit the main body of the enemy. To make matters worse their escape route was impeded by a rough bank of boulders making it difficult for their horses to scramble up and out. Lieutenant Grenfell's troop on the far right found the enemy ranks too dense and were unable to cut their way through. Their horses were speared, stabbed and shot from all sides. The Lancers were pulled from their mounts by their feet and killed. Grenfell's horse desperately struggled to clear the river bed. The beast was cut down and he was struck by a sword. Once on the ground Grenfell was repeatedly stabbed and a spear went through his watch that stopped at 0840 hours.

In contrast Churchill galloped forward with his troop and through enemy lines that were only about four deep. Looking back, he saw one man from his troop fall and be hacked to death. Private Wade Rix with A Squadron quickly lost his lance. Just as his horse jumped into the Khor he lunged with his weapon and pierced the left eye of a Dervish. The impact was such that it shattered his lance and he quickly drew his sword. This he used to strike an enemy rifleman. 'Luck was with us,' he said. 'The horse bravely scrambled up the opposite bank of the stream bed and we were through without a scratch.'[23]

Churchill, lunging left and right, fired ten shots from his pistol, killing three men by his own reckoning and possibly three others.[24] The first swordsman who attempted to hamstring his horse was killed with two bullets. The second was so close that his weapon touched the man before he discharged it.[25] He was within 30 yards of a gathering Dervish force when he reloaded. It was then that he realized that the rest of his troop were 100 yards away, so he quickly turned and trotted after them. Churchill was extremely lucky for many of the Lancers were unhorsed, including 30 who fell on the first impact. Miraculously Colonel Martin got through without drawing any of his weapons.

Major Crole Wyndham's horse, although wounded, managed to get him beyond the river bed before dropping dead. Upon seeing this, Captain Paul Kenna galloped over, lifted the major onto his own horse and took him to safety. The unfortunate Lieutenant Molyneux found himself wounded, on foot and surrounded by angry Dervishes. He only managed to escape thanks to the actions of Private Thomas Byrne, who

used his horse to block the enemy while the lieutenant made good his escape.

When Lieutenant Raymond de Montmorency dismounted to help Lieutenant Grenfell, he discovered the officer was already dead and in the chaos his horse bolted. Luckily he was rescued by Captain Kenna and Corporal Swarbrick. Kenna, using his revolver, kept the enemy at bay while Swarbrick rounded up de Montmorency's horse. 'Lieutenants T. Connally and Winston Churchill also turned about to rescue two non-commissioned officers of their respective troops,' reported war correspondent Bennet Burleigh. 'They succeeded in their laudable task.'[26] Elsewhere, some of Churchill's fellow war correspondents were not as lucky and were set upon by a lone Arab. Captain Nevill Smyth of the 2nd Dragoon Guards managed to save at least one of them, but was speared through the arm.

An exhilarated Churchill and his troop sergeant rounded up about 15 men and prepared to go again. When Churchill enquired if his sergeant had enjoyed himself, the man responded he was getting the hang of things, which caused much mirth amongst the ranks. Looking round at the battlefield Churchill witnessed, 'horses spouting blood, struggling on three legs, men staggering on foot, men bleeding from terrible wounds, fish-hook spears stuck right through them, arms and faces cut to pieces, bowels protruding'.[27]

The Khur Abu Sunt engagement had lasted barely two minutes. In that time Captain Fair broke his sword, while Lieutenant Wormwald bent his. Major Finn, like Churchill, using his revolver shot four Dervishes. Lieutenants Brinton, Nesham and Pirie were all wounded. Churchill observed, 'the blood of our leaders cooled … They remembered for the first time that we had carbines.'[28] One of Churchill's brother officers also recalled the mayhem, 'There was half a minute's hacking, cutting, spearing and shooting in all directions; then we cleared them and rallied on the far side. Halting about 300 yards off, men were dismounted and we opened a sharp fire from our carbines, driving them westward in ten minutes.'[29] Churchill noted, 'I was about the only officer whose clothes, saddlery and horse were uninjured.'[30]

Colonel Martin rallied his regiment with a view to attacking the Dervishes once more, but quickly lost enthusiasm. 'Mr Churchill wanted the men to charge the enemy again,' observed Private Rix, 'but the colonel wisely forbade it'.[31] Churchill even warned his troop that

they might need to go back twice. Martin did not realize he had missed an opportunity to capture the Khalifa, who had been watching the battle seated upon a goatskin on the far side of the Khur. Instead both sides continued to shoot at each other from about 600 yards before the Dervishes finally withdrew.

At 1130 hours Kitchener observed that they had given the enemy 'a good dusting'.[32] This was a classic British understatement. The battlefield was a sea of bent and broken bodies. The Dervish Army had been completely wiped out. The Khalifa's forces suffered 9,700 dead, 11,000 wounded and 4,000 captured. Kitchener's losses amounted to 482 casualties of whom the bulk were Egyptians. By midday Kitchener's victory was complete and he marched into Omdurman followed by Khartoum. His callous treatment of the Dervish wounded and the destruction of the Mahdi's tomb was to result in a chorus of disapproval back home.

Churchill later writing his report for the *Morning Post* was evidently intoxicated by the charge. It may have been at this point that he became a fully fledged adrenalin junkie. He modestly tried to play down his experience when he wrote to a friend, claiming, 'it was not in the least exciting'.[33] Nonetheless, he also acknowledged, 'It was I suppose the most dangerous 2 minutes I shall live to see.'[34] In the *Morning Post* he floridly characterized the charge as 'two living walls crashed together with a mighty collision'.[35] In a letter to his cousin, the 9th Duke of Marlborough, he described the battle 'as a wonderful spectacle'.[36]

The 21st Lancers suffered 21 dead and 49 wounded and lost 119 horses for little tactical gain. In particular B and D Squadrons lost nine dead and 11 wounded, and seven dead and eight wounded respectively. Churchill was saddened by the loss of Grenfell and his war correspondent friend Hubert Howard. The latter had ridden with the 21st Lancers and survived, only to be killed by a friendly shell. Martin got the regimental fame and glory he wanted as Captain Kenna, Lieutenant de Montmorency and Private Byrne were all awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery as was Captain Smyth.[37] It was Churchill who identified Byrne as the gallant saviour of his friend Lieutenant Molyneux. Behind the scenes the actions of the 21st Lancers were seen as foolhardy. 'We hear the charge was a great error, and K. [Kitchener] is furious,' noted Lieutenant Meiklejohn.[38] Captain and future Field Marshal Haig viewed Martin's actions as verging on criminal recklessness. When

Churchill later asked David Beatty for his impressions of the charge, he rather bizarrely compared it to a pudding. 'It looked,' replied Beatty mischievously, 'like plum duff: brown currants scattered about in a great deal of suet.'[39]

Churchill discovered in Khartoum that Molyneux needed a graft on his wrist, so he surrendered some of his own skin from his right forearm for the operation. Whilst this was a brave and generous act, Churchill by his own admission had little choice after the doctor failed to get a graft from a nurse. It was not surprisingly a very painful procedure. 'It hurt like the devil,' admitted Churchill.[40] In later years he delighted in showing people his 'Omdurman' scar. He then travelled to Cairo to be briefed by the intelligence department in preparation for writing two books about his adventures called *The River War*. The charge of the 21st Lancers was subsequently immortalized on canvas by the artists Edward Matthew Hale and R. Caton Woodville to great effect.

It transpired it was very fortunate that Churchill did not get his way and accompany Colonel Broadwood. The Egyptian camel and cavalry forces fighting as foot soldiers on the far right were attacked by 10,000 men, backed by another 5,000. In the face of such numbers they had little choice but to mount up and quickly withdraw northwards. Although ordered back within the British defences, Broadwood continued north with the enemy host in hot pursuit. This move fortunately split the Dervish Army and weakened the pressure on Kitchener.

However, some of the Egyptian rearguard, covering Broadwood's escape from the Kerreri Hills, were overwhelmed and chopped to pieces. Notably Colonel Tudway's Camel Corps nearly did not get away as the camels struggled to cope with the broken and rocky ground. Although this action could not be seen from the British camp, artillery and nearby gunboats relentlessly shelled the Dervishes chasing Broadwood and his men. Gunboat fire alone killed about 1,000, gaining the Egyptians much-needed breathing space. In particular, the gunboat *Melik* under Major Gordon accounted for almost half this number.[41]

Later Broadwood was able to return to the battlefield to assist the British right in repelling a Dervish flank attack at 1015 hours. This culminated in a charge by the Egyptian cavalry, but by that stage the Dervishes were already retreating. While Broadwood's actions were extremely helpful to Kitchener, they offered Churchill little opportunity for glory. Knowing his taste for danger there is a good chance Churchill

would have insisted on fighting with the rearguard. He certainly made a good impression with at least some of the officers and men of the 21st Lancers. 'He is a nice cheery lad and I like him a good deal,' concluded Captain Eadon, 'and I think he has inherited some of his father's abilities.'[42] Churchill would have been pleased to hear such sentiments. He had narrowly escaped death and felt that glory was calling. Equally importantly he had witnessed the full military might of the British Empire at work and this had a lasting effect on him. He learned that Britain, on occasions at least, could be truly invincible. This and his earlier escapades in India gave him an unshakable faith in the country's prowess on the battlefield.

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Winston and Clementine on holiday. (Photo by Daily Herald Archive/SSPL/Getty Images)
Churchill painting in Italy. (Photo by Fox Photos/Stringer/Getty Images)

PART ONE

Baptism of Fire

1

Soldiers of the Queen

The infantry square looked resplendent with the front rank kneeling, bayonets fixed, poised to shoulder arms. It was like a scene from one of Victoria's military expeditions to the far-flung reaches of the empire. In fact, it looked just like a recreation of a photograph of the officers and men of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders forming square in Egypt in 1882. On this occasion tripod-mounted cameras had been set up on two sides of the square. Incongruously those in uniform were not soldiers, but school boys and behind them was Harrow School. The unit being photographed beneath the trees for prosperity was the Harrow School Rifle Corps. Amongst the standing second rank was Winston Churchill.

Like many young boys Churchill had grown up playing with toy soldiers. When Randolph, his father, had asked him if he would like to join the army, Winston had said yes. He assumed his father thought he had the makings of a military genius, but in reality Randolph considered his son not bright enough to go into law. Churchill wrote an essay in 1889 envisaging an imaginary British invasion of Russia, which was not such a far-fetched notion in light of the Crimean War. His 16-page manuscript included a very detailed map showing the deployment of British divisions. Notably, Churchill's English and History master, Robert Somervell, was so impressed that he kept it.

History weighed heavily on the young Churchill as he was a descendant of John Churchill, the victor of Blenheim, Ramilles, Oudenarde and Malplaquet. This had made John one of Britain's most famous commanders alongside the Duke of Wellington. One eminent

military historian concluded 'England has never produced a greater soldier'.[1] John's reward was to be made the 1st Duke of Marlborough and master of Blenheim Palace. Despite his remarkable achievements and resilience, the first duke suffered from stress.[2]

As well as this family burden of overachievement Winston Churchill may have inherited what is now known as hypomanic-depressive disorder[3] from his blood line and quite possibly Asperger's Syndrome.[4] Much has been written on his 'black dog' episodes or hypomanic depression that helped fuel his drive for greatness.[5] Some clinicians though, after assessing the medical evidence, have concluded that his mood disorder is a myth.[6] In contrast his high-achieving father, Lord Randolph Churchill, would ruin a promising political career in part due to ill-health. Winston's paternal grandfather, the 7th Duke of Marlborough, served as Lord President of the Council and Viceroy of India during Mr Disraeli's administration. However, there was little chance of him inheriting the ducal seat, as his father Lord Randolph was the duke's third son. Winston's Uncle George would become the 8th Duke followed by his cousin Charles, better known as 'Sunny'. However, Blenheim was woven into his DNA, especially as he was born there prematurely on 30 November 1874 surrounded by this Gormenghastian tradition while his parents were visiting.

He grew up revering the first duke and was not the only one. Both Napoleon and Wellington were admirers of John Churchill's military skills. Crucially Marlborough appreciated from experience the value of good intelligence on the battlefield. To facilitate this, he instigated a communication system using mounted aide-de-camp and running footmen. Wellington employed similar techniques at Waterloo to keep himself informed. Marlborough's greatest claim to fame was his victory at the battle of Blenheim over a Franco-Bavarian Army on the banks of the Danube in 1704. There were many other battles, but Blenheim sealed Marlborough's reputation as a highly gifted commander.[7] What made his victory all the more remarkable was that he was outnumbered and the enemy were in a very strong defensive position. Young Winston undoubtedly learned a number of important lessons from his illustrious forebear, not least the art of deception and good intelligence in war. Over the years Churchill would be a regular guest at Blenheim. In later life when he took up painting, the interior of the house was a source of endless inspiration.[8] He was also to write a hefty biography on the first duke.[9]

Clearly Churchill felt his future lay with the military, as he had joined the Harrow Rifle Corps within a matter of weeks of arriving at the school on 18 April 1888. He delighted in getting his hands on the standard army rifle and firing live ammunition. These were no toys. The Martini-Henry rifle kicked like a mule and its soft slug easily smashed bone and cartilage creating horrific wounds. The recoil was such that after just a few rounds shoulders were bruised and it sometimes caused nosebleeds. The rifle's long sword bayonet was also a skewering accident waiting to happen. Letting schools loose with such weapons seems reprehensible, but they were the children of the Empire. The Martini-Henry was the gun that had defeated the military might of the Zulus. Every boy had heard of the heroic defence of Rorke's Drift using this weapon which had resulted in 11 Victoria Crosses being awarded for bravery. Churchill was also enthralled when he and his classmates took part in a divisional-sized exercise, that included artillery and machine guns, at Aldershot.[10] This gave him his first feel for military manoeuvres.

However, his time at Harrow was not altogether happy; he did not excel academically and his house master considered him slovenly. Churchill's main problem was that while he was undoubtedly clever, he failed to apply himself. Lady Randolph, his mother, was driven to distraction by his inability to focus and made no secret of her disappointment. In the summer of 1889 Churchill's headmaster informed Lord Randolph that his son would not get into Woolwich, which trained officers for the artillery and engineers. However, he might be better suited to the cavalry or the infantry. Churchill joined what he called the 'Army class' that prepared boys for the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, which trained future army officers.

Churchill arrived at Sandhurst in early September 1893 and he suddenly seemed to thrive amidst the heightened discipline. He graduated at the end of the following year 20th out of 130 proving he was no dunderhead. He was destined for the cavalry and it was now that his adventures really began. An ailing Lord Randolph was not entirely happy with this turn of events. He had hoped his son would join an infantry regiment to avoid the added cost of having to supply horses and uniforms for him and his groom. Churchill's hopes of bonding with his distant and disapproving father were dashed when Lord Randolph died at the end of January 1895 at the age of just 45. Churchill was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant with the

4th Queen's Own Hussars on 20 February 1895. This unit was based at Aldershot in Hampshire not far from Sandhurst.

The 4th Hussars had a very good pedigree with numerous battle honours to their name. Previously known as the 4th Light Dragoons they had formed part of the Light Brigade at the infamous battle of Balaclava. Churchill was immediately bored with peacetime soldiering and began to crave excitement, even though his regiment was due to deploy to India the following year. He was delighted to discover that officers were entitled to five months leave every year and that ten weeks of these could be taken consecutively. The failing Spanish Empire would come to his rescue in alleviating the tedium.

Casting his eye about for some action he alighted on Cuba, where there was an insurrection against Spanish rule encouraged by the arrival of exiled Cuban journalist and poet José Martí. Although Martí was killed in battle just three weeks after landing, his death inspired the revolutionaries under Máximo Gómez to carry on fighting. By June 1895 the uprising had spread to central Cuba. The only problem Churchill had was that the British press favoured the rebels and his commanding officer, Colonel John Brabazon, was keen that his trip did not look like an officially sanctioned visit. Despite being a junior lieutenant, he completely circumvented the chain of command by approaching the head of the British Army directly.

Seeking official approval Churchill tried the British Commander-in-Chief Lord Wolseley who proved to be highly receptive and sent Churchill and his travelling companion, Lieutenant Reginald 'Reggie' Barnes, to see the Director of Military Intelligence, General E.F. Chapman. He asked they collect information for him, effectively making them spies. Although Churchill's actions were wholly inappropriate, they got the desired results. He also learned a valuable lesson: to get things done you should always go to people at the top.

After writing to the British Ambassador in Madrid, an old friend of his father's, Churchill gained permission from the Spanish government to go to Cuba as an observer. In light of his request going through official diplomatic channels it was hard for the Spanish not to consider this as a British government fact-finding mission. Ever since the loss of Florida, Mexico and Texas, the Spanish were regularly seeking support for their foreign policy in the Americas. After the Mexicans firmly established their independence and the Texans joined the United States,

the Americans were seen as a threat to Spain's shrinking influence in the region. By the time Churchill set sail, most of the Spanish Empire in Latin America had melted away until all that Spain controlled were the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Spanish rule in its remaining colonies was dreadfully corrupt and the US was a haven for Cuban nationalists.

Thanks to the Ambassador doors would open for Churchill at the highest levels. In consequence he was to be attached to the staff of Marshal Martínez Campos, the Spanish Commander-in-Chief in Cuba. His mother arranged for him to write for the *Daily Graphic*, his first foray into journalism, so that he could earn some money. He would also be able to indulge his growing passion for smoking cigars. Churchill and Barnes sailed from Liverpool in early November 1895 travelling via New York. There they were guests of Congressman Bourke Cockran, one of his mother's former admirers, who hosted them in his well-appointed Fifth Avenue apartment. While in New York Churchill visited the cruiser of the same name and the American military academy at West Point. While he was impressed by the quality of the American sailors he was appalled by the high level of discipline at West Point. The latter probably said more about Churchill's regard for military discipline than it did of the academy.

The pair arrived in Havana on 20 November 1895 and soon discovered that the Spanish military was highly skilled in conducting counter-insurgency warfare. However, despite the commitment of a large expeditionary force, Cuba was under siege, with the Spanish authorities holding the cities, and the rebels the countryside. They were met by Marshal Campos, and then travelled to see his Chief of Staff, General Valdez, at Arroyo Blanco, who was conducting an operation in the interior. On Churchill's 21st birthday, on 30 November, they set off with a column of 2,700 Spanish troops.[11] To the south at Iguara, rebel leader Máximo Gómez had gathered around 4,000 men. Valdez's column soon came into contact with Gómez's forces, but fortunately the rebels were not very good shots. This was Churchill's baptism of fire and he was very impressed by just how cool the Spanish soldiers were when being shot at.[12] The fire fights continued for the next three days.

Churchill and Barnes had a close encounter on 1 December. They and a number of Valdez's staff officers were dressing after bathing in a river when they came under fire. Rebels appeared just 200 yards away,

but luckily were driven off by about 50 soldiers who delivered a loud volley. That night Churchill and his companion's billet came under fire and an orderly was wounded. The following day they were involved in the battle of La Reforma. It was then that they discovered being with General Valdez was highly hazardous. He appeared to be fearless and in his white uniform rode to within 500 yards of the enemy attracting a great amount of fire. Valdez leading from the front bravely stayed there until his infantry had driven the rebels back. It seemed that the Spanish commander, by making himself such an obvious target, ceased to be one. His actions created a dangerous precedent for Churchill, one that he would follow time and time again for the rest of his life.

Although Churchill thought highly of the performance of the Spanish troops, he was dismayed that they then threw away the initiative and did not pursue the retreating rebels. He could not understand why, after ten days of enduring all sorts of hardship, they were content just taking a low hill. While Churchill sympathized with the Cubans' desire for independence, he considered their army little more than an undisciplined rabble. Barnes and Churchill were soon running out of leave and had to return home. Valdez, clearly impressed by the pair, recommended them for the Spanish Order of Merit. If Churchill thought the war in Cuba was a small-scale policing operation, he was very much mistaken. Spain was determined to hold onto the island and by the time he left the Spanish had flooded it with almost 100,000 troops, who were supported by tens of thousands of locally raised militiamen. The rebels, though, proved elusive and adopted increasingly brutal guerrilla tactics.

While Churchill was sailing home via America, Britain and America almost went to war. The American government had been insistent on mediating the disputed border between British Guiana and Venezuela. When Britain declined America declared that it would do it anyway and enforce the findings. For a while there was talk of open conflict, though the two countries had not fought since 1812. When Churchill got back anticipating a fight he recalled, 'vividly looking at ships off the English coast and wondering which one would be our transport to Canada'.[13] However, Britain had much more pressing concerns over growing tensions in South Africa with the Boers and agreed to arbitration. 'There followed,' said Churchill, 'a steady improvement in

Anglo-American relations.'[14] This in part he added was due to 'growing alarm at German naval expansion'.[15]

Inevitably Churchill's reports for the *Daily Graphic* and subsequent articles drew attention to his trip to Cuba. He soon found himself in trouble with the press, who were not amused that a British Army officer while on leave had gone to fight for the Spanish in the Caribbean. The *Times* declared 'spending a holiday in fighting other people's battles is a rather extraordinary proceeding even for a Churchill'.[16] He made matters worse by clarifying he had never drawn his revolver, which clearly indicated that he had been armed despite his observer status.

Churchill went on to criticize both the Spanish and rebel armies, concluding that the Spanish were the lesser of the two evils. Naturally the Spanish government expressed its displeasure to the British Ambassador in Madrid, who soon regretted sponsoring Churchill's high-profile trip. Ultimately Churchill revelled in the controversy because it brought him to the attention of the British public. Churchill in modern parlance was learning how to become a spin doctor. The Spanish should have worried more about American foreign policy than the opinions of a very young British lieutenant. The Americans intervened in Cuba in 1898 and four years later the island was granted independence. Puerto Rico became an American possession, thereby finally ending Spain's foothold in the Caribbean. Churchill had come under fire and his appetite for adventure had been whetted. Where could he go next, he pondered.

2

Frontier Wars

Once back in England, Churchill fretted about the 4th Hussars' deployment to India. Now under the command of Colonel William Ramsay, they were to deploy to Bangalore. This was several thousand miles from India's lawless North-West Frontier, about the only place that offered the chance of any real action. In some desperation he sought to join General Kitchener's expedition up the Nile to Sudan. His entreaties fell on fallow ground. South Africa looked far more promising. In early 1896 in the newly created state of Rhodesia there was an uprising by the Matabele. This resulted in a relief force being sent to Bulawayo and two troopers won Victoria Crosses. That summer there was also an uprising by the Mashona in Rhodesia. Local miners were trapped in the Mazoe Valley and a police captain, Randolph Nesbitt, won a Victoria Cross during a daring rescue mission.

Churchill made some enquiries and learned that the 9th Lancers were being sent to Durban and possibly on to Rhodesia. This regiment had a good lineage having fought regularly in India. When he also learned that they were short of three lieutenants, he wrote to the 9th Lancers' colonel requesting a secondment. Nothing though came of it. Lady Randolph, tired of her son's complaining and impatience, declined to intervene. The War Office was fed up with Churchill and many other young officers constantly requesting transfers in order to win medals. Indeed, Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for War, warned Lady Randolph that her son's antics were making him unpopular.

Churchill and his regiment docked at Bombay in October 1896. Whilst landing on the quayside he dislocated his right shoulder, which