

Part II: World War

1941–1942

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13: *At the White House*

The tide had begun to turn before Japan's fearsome plunge into the war. In North Africa, General Auchinleck's forces had raised Rommel's siege of Tobruk; a German retreat was beginning both there and at Moscow, where the pitiless Russian winter had fallen with unequal cruelty upon the opposing armies. At sea too the war of the Atlantic supply line had eased. More ships were arriving, and the first convoys of war goods had reached North Russia without loss. Only the British public, an amorphous, half-blind animal that has not always been proven wrong in its instincts, seemed perplexed by Pearl Harbor – 'rather breathless,' as a secret study found, 'with confused reactions.' Contempt for the Japanese gave way to dismay at their strength, which the 'idiotic press' had underrated. There was however satisfaction that America was now in the war.¹

The prime minister shared that satisfaction. No matter whether Roosevelt declared war on Germany or not, the P.M. knew enough from the Black Jumbos to recognise that Hitler was honour- and treaty-bound to declare war on Japan's enemies.² (A rush magic received from Bletchley Park the next day, the eighth, confirmed it: The top item in the secret box that evening was a white teleprinter message from the air ministry, an intercept of a 'most immediate' cypher message sent earlier that day by General Oshima to Tokyo: having received the radio report that hostilities had broken out between Japan and America, he had at once called on Ribbentrop. The latter said that although he had not yet secured Hitler's sanction, 'the immediate participation in the war by Germany and Italy was a matter of course' in consequence, and in front of Oshima he had at once telephoned the Italian foreign minister Count CiaNo.³ Churchill ticked this in red ink.)

Churchill had spent the last hours at Chequers that Sunday night tossing off messages to sundry leaders, with Ambassadors Harriman and Winant

assisting. He dictated words of encouragement to Chiang Kai-Shek, of emotion to Harry Hopkins, of allure to Eamon de Valera: 'Now is your chance,' he cajoled the Irish leader. 'Now or never! A nation once again! I will meet you wherever you wish!'⁴ (Churchill had secretly offered the six counties of Northern Ireland to Eire as a reward for joining his war.)

Ambassador Winant, at his request, repeated this very private message to Roosevelt, adding that it was for Washington to decide when Britain should actually declare war on Japan. Winant left Chequers at midnight-thirty.⁵ He cabled to his president: 'The prime minister is calling Parliament to meet at three o'clock this afternoon.' Should the P.M. ask for a declaration of war at that time or simply say that he would ask for a declaration within an hour after the Americans declared war, 'which he has pledged to do'? Drawing attention to the awkward transatlantic difference in time, Winant suggested that the president might want to address the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress prior to a British declaration of war.⁶

Roosevelt too did not care for any appearance of being dragged in by the British: 'I think it best on account of psychology here,' he replied, 'that Britain's declaration of war be withheld until after my speech at 12:30 Washington time.' He added, 'Delighted to know of message to De Valera.'⁷

By two a.m. – it was now Monday, December 8 – Churchill had received word from Tokyo that Japan had formally declared war on both Britain and the United States. He sent word up to Invergordon, directing Eden to call him back as soon as he arrived there, and went to bed.

At that moment in Hawaii, fires were ravaging the naval base and dockyards at Pearl and the hulks of those American battleships still afloat. Nearly three thousand servicemen had died. Unaware of these horrors, Churchill could think only of his joy that the British empire's isolation was at an end. Silly people might cavil at the vacuous Americans, might mock at their distant blather, at their vulgar ostentation and their softness and their wealth. That night, he was conscious of the maternal American blood flowing in his veins.⁸ They had won after all. He cared no longer how many years the war might last. Britain and her peoples would emerge, mauled perhaps and mutilated, but victorious. Light-headed with sensations such as these, he allowed his valet to undress him, and pulled the bed sheets over his head.

His thoughts were upon President Roosevelt as he awoke. How useful it would now be that Eden and Cadogan were in Moscow, at Stalin's table, while he, the prime minister, was in Washington: they could conduct a global three-power conference in cypher to settle all their problems. The most

urgent would be to ensure that Roosevelt, now that he was in the war, applied his country's resources to defeating Germany first.

washington, still favouring the British government with little frankness, admitted during the night that they had lost two battleships at Hawaii, and that this left the Pacific Fleet with six effective battleships.⁹ Such losses seemed eminently tolerable: such are the fortunes of war. Winston's mind was set on Washington.¹⁰ With fond, fleeting memories of his Atlantic meeting lapping around his memory, he was driven out of the Chequers estate and returned to Downing-street. It had been a most memorable weekend.

The cabinet, meeting at 12:30, accepted his suggestion that he visit Washington forthwith, and he put it to His Majesty, without whose permission he could not leave the kingdom.¹¹ 'The whole plan of Anglo-American defence and attack has to be concerted in the light of reality,' he wrote, justifying the journey. 'We also have to be careful that our share of munitions and other aid which we are receiving from the United States does not suffer more than is, I fear, inevitable.'¹²

That afternoon he addressed the Commons, with his shoulders bowed, and his features wearing the well-practised expression of grim piety. Fitting the mood of the House, he made his speech matter-of-fact, almost dull; it was poorly constructed, and indifferently delivered. He inspired hope only when he reassured the Members: 'Some of the finest ships in the Royal Navy have reached their stations in the Far East at a very convenient moment. Every preparation in our power has been made and I do not doubt that we shall give a good account of ourselves.'¹³

Aboard the battleship that was to bear him to Murmansk, Eden had been taken sick – struck down perhaps more with mortification than by any more conventional virus. At five o'clock Sir Alexander Cadogan again phoned Downing-street from Scotland, to protest about the trip to Washington. Churchill told him that the cabinet had now agreed to it. Cadogan, the permanent head of the F.O., pointed out that both the P.M. and his heir-apparent would thus be out of the country. 'That's all right,' rejoined Churchill. 'That'll work very well. Anthony will be just where I want him, and I can communicate with him in Moscow!'¹⁴

Shortly, a message arrived from Roosevelt, reporting that both Houses of Congress had voted to declare war on Japan. 'Today,' F.D.R. told the P.M., grimly clinging to his earlier metaphor, 'All of us are in the same boat

with you and the people and the empire, and it is a ship which will not and cannot be sunk.’¹⁵

The prime minister broadcast on the B.B.C. at nine p.m. Like the MPs earlier that day, the radio listeners were also disappointed. At least one gained the impression that he was ‘dead tired and not quite sober.’¹⁶

truly the peoples were in the hands of their popular dictators. While Churchill had been told of the loss of only two battleships at Pearl Harbor, the American public learned of only one. At 10:41 p.m. on December 8, Churchill's delegation in Washington reported to the admiralty however that the U.S. Navy's Admiral Stark was privately calling it ‘a major disaster’ which ‘was much more serious than thought yesterday’ –the Pacific Fleet was effectively down to only two battleships. Three had in fact been sunk, and three more seriously damaged. Stark, no friend of Britain, now planned to transfer substantial forces to the Pacific.¹⁷ Admiral Ghormley in London disclosed that Stark had ordered the *Yorktown* carrier battle group to prepare to transfer from Norfolk, Virginia, to the Pacific Fleet; and that he had authorised the U.S. commander-in-chief Atlantic to withdraw all capital ships and carriers from Iceland if he desired.¹⁸ This seriously threatened the naval balance of power. Britain now had twelve operational battleships, the United States only eight; against these Japan and Germany could already set nineteen, and the French fleet of *Strasbourg*, *Provence*, *Jean-Bart*, *Richelieu* and *Dunkerque* might one day also come under Axis control.¹⁹

On December 9 Churchill realised, after consulting various sources, that the American battleship losses were far worse than Washington had admitted – that only one, or at best two, of the eight had survived. Half of the U.S. air force in the Pacific had also been destroyed. The Japanese were now lords of that ocean: ‘The American public,’ Halifax concluded in his secret diary, ‘has not tumbled to this yet.’²⁰ Attending Buckingham Palace for his regular Tuesday luncheon with His Majesty, Churchill passed on the doleful truth. ‘The prime minister came to lunch,’ the king wrote, recording the dreadful news: ‘In Pearl Harbor 3 U.S. Battleships were sunk & 3 seriously damaged . . . which means that the U.S.A. has already lost command of the sea in the Pacific.’ This created a very alarming situation for his own *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. Even though unaware of the ‘BJs,’ the king was incredulous that the U.S. fleet had remained in harbour when Japan was already on a war footing. ‘W[inston],’ he concluded, ‘told me he is anxious to go to Washington to arrange various matters with F.D.R.’²¹

A powerful wanderlust, coupled with a desire to hobnob again at the highest levels, had seized the prime minister. Eden tried again to dissuade him, but failed. 'I still rather wish,' he wired to the P.M., 'that you could postpone a fortnight till my return.'²²

Eden was out of sight however, and out of Churchill's mind. 'Now that we are, as you say, "in the same boat,"' he telegraphed to Roosevelt, 'would it not be wise for us to have another conference?' He proposed to arrive by warship at Baltimore or Annapolis, the closest ports to Washington, bringing Beaverbrook, Pound, Portal, and Dill with him.²³

It is plain from Roosevelt's presidential papers that he did not warm to the idea. For over a year he had swooned in unweening envy of Winston's rising star. The famous cherubic features were on every newspaper's front page. Now that his, Roosevelt's, hour had struck, he did not want this carrot-topped Englishman strutting onto his stage: not yet. He too now tried to persuade Winston to postpone the trip. In fact he asked Lord Halifax to notify the P.M. that for security reasons he did not like the idea of Washington as the location either. He proposed Bermuda instead, and not before January 7.²⁴ Churchill however was determined. They had to meet.

at ten that evening, December 9, Churchill welcomed a dozen of his admiralty and other colleagues in the underground Cabinet War Rooms to survey the changed position. They discussed how to redress the balance of naval power in the Pacific. The Japanese threat to Australia and New Zealand could no longer be ignored. How best to use Britain's only capital ships in the region, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*? Churchill suggested they join the remnants of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Hawaii, a gesture of both symbolic and military significance, and prepare to take offensive action against Japan itself. Alternatively, the admiralty might consider a plan to employ *Prince of Wales*, *Repulse*, and *Centurion* as what he called 'rogue elephants.' Meanwhile Churchill would inform Eden that 'in view of the changed circumstances' Russia would no longer get the ten R.A.F. squadrons on offer.²⁵

He sent the bleak telegram to Eden, now ploughing into the long Arctic night toward North Russia, at once. It told him much of what had happened – that since Roosevelt now had only two battleships left in the Pacific against ten Japanese, he was recalling all battleships from the Atlantic; that 'according to American sources' (evidently Winston's euphemism for the BJs) 'we are going to be heavily attacked in Malaya and throughout [the] Far East'; that he intended to reinforce Malaya with aircraft from the Middle

East where, Auchinleck assured him, the tide had now turned; and that Eden should not now offer the ten R.A.F. squadrons to Stalin. 'Hope you are better,' he continued. 'We are having a jolly time here.'²⁶

after the Pearl Harbor disaster American signals Intelligence belatedly got off its high horse; in a long talk with Captain Hastings, 'C's' liaison officer in Washington, Admiral Noyes professed himself satisfied with what the British codebreakers were sending him.²⁷ Churchill however suspected that Roosevelt was concealing from him the true scale of the débâcle. Even on the twelfth Admiral Ghormley supplied an account that spoke only of two battleships sunk and 'several' more as well as three light cruisers damaged; since the message also lamented three thousand 'casualties' there were grounds not to believe what Washington was saying. A month later, Admiral Conrad Helfrich, commander-in-chief of the Dutch navy, would express disquiet at the Americans' furtiveness: 'Why not let their fighting allies know their exact losses – which the enemy already know?' If, he said, seven out of eight battleships of the Pacific Fleet and 450 aircraft had in fact been knocked out at Pearl Harbor 'why try to keep it a secret from the British and the Dutch?'²⁸

Seven out of eight? 'Surely this is untrue,' an anguished Churchill demanded of the First Sea Lord. 'What have you been told? I have not pressed for information but I could certainly do so.' Pound replied that the U.S. navy department had agreed to release the real facts, and that the damage was 'considerably more' than Colonel Knox, their secretary of the navy, had given out to the Press.²⁹

admiral tom Phillips had sailed from Singapore with *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and four destroyers on the evening of December 8, intending to maul Japanese invasion convoys off Songkhla or in the Gulf of Thailand. Early on the ninth he was advised that no fighter cover could be provided as the Japanese had destroyed all airfields in northern Malaya. While he had scanty Intelligence data on the Japanese warship movements, he had none on their air forces. The codebreakers at Singapore had identified an aircraft-carrier squadron in the Saigon area, but he pressed on, believing he had the advantage of surprise. After enemy planes sighted his force Phillips turned back briefly toward Singapore; at midnight he received a signal reporting that the Japanese were also landing at the port of Kuantan, 150 miles north of Singapore. Tragically, the signal turned out to be incorrect;

although Churchill had also spoken to the king about Japanese troop landings at Kuantan, there were none.³⁰ Phillips had however already changed course to intercept.

Seven thousand miles away in London, Churchill had retired for the night after the meeting in the underground Cabinet War Rooms.

Awakening the next morning, December 10, he worked on his boxes of papers until interrupted by a phone call from Admiral Pound. A signal had come in from the Eastern Fleet an hour earlier, he said, reading 'Most Immediate. H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and H.M.S. *Repulse* sunk by torpedoes at about 1317,' and giving the position. Japanese shore-based torpedo planes had sunk *Repulse* at 12:33 p.m.; *Prince of Wales*, her steering crippled like *Bismarck's* by one torpedo, had foundered, plunging Admiral Phillips and 760 of his sailors to the deep, forty-seven minutes later. A further signal made plain that it would be impossible to keep this grim news secret for long.³¹

Churchill was dazed by the awful news. Even to himself, he probably never admitted his own rôle in forcing through the plan to send these ships down to Singapore without a balanced supporting fleet. He certainly kept quiet about it later, when writing his memoirs. 'K.B.O.,' he once more apostrophised to his staff: 'Keep b*ggering on.'



If one item in this increasingly senseless war heralded the end of Britain's Asian empire it was this naval disaster. The fall of Singapore, the loss of Malaya, and the rise of the nationalist sentiment that was to sweep the British out of all their possessions in the Far East over the next decade could not have followed in such swift train but for the loss of these two ships, which Churchill coldly ascribed to 'Chance.' A telegram arrived on his desk from King George VI, touring the Welsh war industries. The news had shocked him too: 'For all of us,' he wrote, 'it is a national disaster, & I fear will create consternation in Australia. The lack of details makes the fact harder to bear, coming as it does on top of yesterday's bad news *re* the U.S. battleships [at Hawaii]. I thought I was getting immune to hearing bad news,' the monarch concluded pointedly.³²

Resolving anew to leave these questioning climes for Washington as soon as possible, Churchill hurried over to the House and made a clean breast of the warships' loss. 'No details are yet available,' he added, 'except those

contained in the Japanese official communiqué, which claims that both ships were sunk by air attack.’³³ He told Ambassador Winant that the meeting with the American president Roosevelt was now more urgent than ever. He added enticingly that he felt that certain information which he had should go direct to the president, rather than through embassy channels.* ‘Discouragements,’ Winant informed Roosevelt, ‘seem only to give him new courage and add to his determination.’

In the telegram which he handed to Winant, Churchill again urged Roosevelt to accept his visit now. ‘We do not think there is any serious danger about return journey,’ he pleaded. ‘There is, however great danger in our not having a full discussion on the highest level about the extreme gravity of the naval position, as well as upon all the production and allocation issues involved. . . I feel it would be disastrous to wait for another month before we settled common action.’ In the light of Roosevelt’s prevarications, he had shelved his plan to start from London the next night, December 11, and asked what rendezvous the president finally proposed. ‘I never felt so sure about final victory,’ he concluded, ‘but only concerted action will achieve it.’³⁴

The reply that Roosevelt originally drafted still betrayed acute reluctance; but he yielded, and the text that arrived in London during the night stated he would be ‘delighted’ to have Winston at the White House. ‘Impossible for me to leave country during intensive mobilisation and clarification [of the] naval action in Pacific,’ he apologised. He admitted that for three weeks Britain and Russia would not get the planes allocated to them. ‘My own great reservation is [the] great personal risk to you,’ he continued, still hoping to discourage Churchill’s trip. ‘Believe this should be given most urgent consideration for the empire needs you at the helm and we need you there too.’³⁵ It was not often that F.D.R. expressed concern for the future of Britain’s empire.

At midday on December 10 the chiefs of staff had come over to No. 10 to discuss the bleak naval situation. To General Sir Alan Brooke, the new C.I.G.S., it seemed that the P.M. had stood this latest shock well, though fretting at the delay to his departure.³⁶ ‘He does rise remarkably to big occasions,’ wrote Amery of the prime minister’s performance at that evening’s cabinet.³⁷

* Perhaps a reference to Britain’s progress on atomic bomb research, which Churchill was now anxious to divulge to his new allies. See page ••• [number follows] below.

In part, Churchill's new energy derived from the latest secret Intelligence, which he read that day. The chief operations staff officer of Hitler's *Heeresgruppe Mitte* had just ordered *Panzergruppen* 3 and 4 on the Moscow front to pull back about eight miles. 'The order,' commented Brooke, 'mentions the destruction of the area to be left in enemy hands.' This, together with an *ultra* referring to a withdrawal on the Tula front, indicated 'that the Germans have abandoned their attempt to capture Moscow from the west, or to encircle it from the north or south, before the spring.'³⁸



General Brooke had just found out what his predecessor General Dill had learned at the time of Narvik and Dunkirk – that Winston maintained private channels of communication to his field commanders and circumvented Whitehall with decisions of which Brooke disapproved.

On the tenth, Brooke wrote to General Auchinleck reminding him that, 'very desirable' though such private telegrams might be, they made his position difficult if the sender ignored the 'normal channel of communications.'³⁹ Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander in Chief, Middle East, had remained in close touch with Churchill since *crusader* had begun against Rommel in mid-November. 'Last night Tobruk garrison advanced westward and made good progress,' he had wired Churchill on December 8. And: 'Consider tide turned,' on the ninth. The next day, December 10, Auchinleck signalled more soberly to Brooke: 'Enemy is apparently in full retreat but his remaining tanks are still covering his withdrawal. El Adem is in our hands; South African and Indian troops joined hands with British troops from Tobruk, and I think it is now permissible to claim that [the] siege of Tobruk has been raised.' 'We are pressing our pursuit vigorously,' he radioed to Churchill on the eleventh.⁴⁰ Slowly but certainly, Auchinleck had regained the initiative. Rommel was withdrawing in disorganisation, but he would shortly succeed in establishing a new defensive position at Gazala, some thirty-five miles to the west of Tobruk.

victory in Libya would release air and ground forces vital for the Far East. Such was Churchill's calculus. Thanks to the R.A.F.'s all-consuming commitment to the bombing of Germany, and Britain's obligations to the Soviet Union, he had no choice, although the defences of Malaya were in a parlous

state. In September he had sent two hundred Hurricanes to Murmansk to help save Stalin's empire; but a plan to send three ancient Buffalo fighter planes to Hongkong had to be cancelled because it would have 'denuded' Singapore. The airforce in Malaya had 122 planes, including a squadron of 85 m.p.h. Wildebeeste torpedo planes; most had now been destroyed. Malaya was defended by only the 8th Australian and the 9th and 11th Indian divisions, each minus one brigade. To his old political friend Alfred Duff Cooper, visiting Singapore, the prime minister sent a telegram on December 9 appointing him Resident cabinet minister for Far Eastern Affairs.

A less likely choice as gauleiter of an imperial fortress would be hard to conceive than this gentlemanly esquire, who had been a failure as a minister in London, and whom Australia's Robert Menzies had described only recently as being endowed with 'great gifts of indolence.'*The intention was however to relieve the local generals of the burden of political decision. 'With your knowledge of the various public departments and of cabinet procedure,' Churchill had directed him, as though the Japanese enemy set store by such things, 'it should be possible for you to exercise a powerful, immediately concerting influence upon Far Eastern affairs.' Duff Cooper reported a few days later that if Singapore were overrun the loss of the Dutch East Indies would follow; then the separation of Britain's fleet from the Americans'; then the isolation of Australia and New Zealand. Japanese possession of Singapore would ensure her oil and practically all the world's natural rubber supplies. He pleaded urgently for reinforcements.⁴¹

The only available reserve was the 18th Division, now rounding the Cape on its way from Britain to the Middle East. Satisfied that he had enough troops to complete the job in Libya, Churchill now developed a plan to divert this division to Rangoon, Burma, to attack the Japanese in the Kra Isthmus.⁴²

thursday, december 11, 1941: He had hoped to leave England on this day. His appointment diary was marked, 'P.M. away.' Instead he was at the House, rendering an unhappy, cold narrative on the 'considerable punishment' which Britain must still expect. 'Victory is traditionally elusive,' he admitted, referring to the protracted battle in Libya. 'Accidents happen. Mistakes are made.' 'Still,' he added, 'when all is said and done, on November 18 General Auchinleck set out to destroy the entire armed forces of the Germans

* Page 14 above.

and Italians in Cyrenaica, and now, on December 11, I am bound to say that it seems very probable he will do so.' After reporting on Hitler's misfortunes in Russia, he turned to the Far East. His bald explanation that *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had had no escorting aircraft went down badly; he found himself being heckled, and he declared testily and with questionable tact that had he known he would be questioned so narrowly he would have made his statement on the radio. 'The House . . . seemed to hold its judgement in suspense,' he later wrote.⁴³ A Conservative M.P. told a journalist that the backbenchers were on their hind legs now, and that the P.M. knew his position was slipping.⁴⁴

That day Hitler and Mussolini declared war on the United States, ensuring her entry into the European war. The P.M., wrote his secretary John Peck to a former colleague, was once more 'full of bounce.' And to his other secretary, John Martin, Churchill commented: 'The stars in their courses are fighting for us.'⁴⁵

The bounce did not last long. Later that day Brooke came to suggest that Winston take General Sir John Dill to Washington to remain there as head of the British mission. It was an inspired idea, but Churchill nurtured a deep dislike for this general who had thwarted so many of his hairier military enterprises. It took half an hour of wearying argument for Brooke to persuade the P.M. that nobody had a closer insight into the British military mind. Dill would establish a close friendship with George Marshall, Roosevelt's chief of staff, and remained in Washington until his death in 1944.

Before going before the B.B.C. microphone to repeat that day's Commons speech, Churchill evidently took his customary steps to restore his spirits. While Home Intelligence reported afterwards that his broadcast of the eighth had evinced 'considerable disappointment,' ordinary listeners who heard this speech of the eleventh described it as 'a masterly exposition' which did much to restore a sense of proportion.⁴⁶ Some M.P.s however thought the broadcast ill-advised, as Churchill appeared 'very tired.' Apprised delicately of this by his parliamentary Private Secretary, Churchill pointed out that it was the House who forced him to deliver such speeches twice, since they still refused to allow the B.B.C. to record him in the Commons.⁴⁷

Fatigued, and now itching to leave, he presided at ten p.m. that evening over a meeting of the chiefs of staff. It began badly, recorded Brooke, and the Chief of Air Staff nearly provoked 'another brain storm' on Churchill's

plan to denude the Middle East for the Far East. 'With some difficulty we calmed him down,' wrote Brooke afterwards.⁴⁸ Modifying the plan, they persuaded him to transfer Burma to Wavell's area as Commander-in-Chief, India; and to transfer Iraq and Iran from Wavell to Middle East command. The 18th Division should go to Bombay rather than Rangoon: it could then be moved up the Persian Gulf to defend Iraq's oil if the Germans came closer through Turkey. It was symptomatic of Britain's weakness that much of a two-hour debate was devoted to the destination of one division. Churchill was very tired when the meeting ended at midnight-thirty, and complained to Ismay of a 'pain inside.'⁴⁹

Unaware that Churchill was about to leave the country, worried back-benchers demanded a Secret Session of the House of Commons to discuss the crisis. He agreed that it should be set down for a week's time; he would not be there. He would quite rightly write, 'A complete understanding between Britain and the United States outweighed all else.'⁵⁰ Not that he had no backers. Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, a Liberal M.P. and his friend for forty years, told a journalist that with all his faults he was the only man to lead the country. 'His handling of America was brilliant,' she said.⁵¹

With an eye to this uncertain public mood, the P.M. disapproved his ministers' plans to announce tighter food rations in his absence. 'It would savour of panic,' he lectured Clement Attlee. Besides, it seemed unnecessary. 'Our position has immeasurably improved by the full involvement of the United States. . . We are all in it together, and they are eating better than us.'⁵²

After a cabinet at twelve-thirty and lunch with the king an hour later, he dictated a final flourish of messages. He cabled to Roosevelt, that he hoped to rendezvous with him on about the twenty-first ('I think OK,' F.D.R. annotated the telegram unhappily.) 'I am enormously relieved,' concluded the P.M., 'at turn world events have taken.'⁵³ Still buoyant, he telegraphed to John Curtin, Australia's awkward prime minister, who had replaced Robert Menzies, that the United States' entry into the war made amends for all, 'and makes the end certain.'⁵⁴ Assuring Jan Smuts in Pretoria of his admiration for the South African troops in Libya he allowed that the Pacific situation was serious: 'We are doing all in our power to restore it.'⁵⁵ He notified Wavell of the coming of the 18th Division, explaining that Auchinleck's achievements in Libya had reduced the risk to the Middle East.⁵⁶

Churchill also sent two cypher messages to Eden, en route to Russia, discussing whether or not Stalin should be encouraged to declare war on

Japan (Churchill left it to Eden to decide); and confirming that the Japanese now had 'full battle-fleet command' of the Pacific. 'They can attack with any force overseas at any point,' he told the foreign secretary. He expected them to go for the Philippines, Singapore, and the Burma Road. Roosevelt, he added, had embargoed all war supplies under the shock of this Pacific disaster and the declarations of war by Japan, Germany, and Italy. The P.M. warned Eden not to make fresh promises to Stalin, but to point to the drain of British fighter planes to Russia, which were now sorely lacking in the Far East. 'Am just off,' he concluded.⁵⁷

There remained one sad signal to transmit to the tiny British colony of Hongkong, on the coast of China, which Japanese troops had invaded on the first day. Three battalions defending the hinterland had come under heavy attack and had withdrawn into the island on the eleventh. Churchill now radioed to the stubborn defenders of the 'port and fortress' of Hongkong: 'We are sure that the defence of Hongkong against barbarous and unprovoked attack will add a glorious page to British annals. . . Every day of your resistance brings nearer our certain final victory.'⁵⁸

He left London at ten-thirty p.m. in his special train for Gourock on the Clyde, where H.M.S. *Duke of York* was waiting, sister ship of the ill-fated warrior in which they had crossed to Newfoundland in August. Given the season, crossing by air was out of the question; besides, the Churchill party was not small. He was taking three chiefs of staff (though leaving Brooke in London), and over eighty officers and juniors, including twenty-seven cypher clerks, his personal assistant Commander Tommy Thompson, his secretary Kathleen Hill, his valet, two detectives and, for the first time on such a voyage, his doctor Sir Charles Wilson. The passenger list also included Lord Beaverbrook, Lieutenant-General Sir G. N. Macready, Ambassador Harriman, Leslie Hollis, Colonel Sir Ian Jacob, and Francis Brown. 'It was hard to remember on coming aboard that it was not the *Prince of Wales*,' wrote Jacob this first day, 'and harder still to realise that the great ship which we had so much admired was now at the bottom of the sea.'

The captain had made available a spacious cabin on the bridge; this again turned out to be brighter, and to vibrate less, than the living quarters aft. Professor Lindemann came to see them off. 'Prof.,' lisped Churchill, testing him, as they entered his cabin. 'I've drunk a quart of champagne a day for fifty years.' The Prof. calculated on his slide-rule that the volume imbibed would still not fill much of this cabin. Disappointed, Winston inquired:

'I have smoked a dozen cigars a day for forty years. They are about eight inches long,' Lindemann assessed that these would reach from London to Yarmouth, and that made the prime minister feel better.⁵⁹

Defying all naval superstition, they weighed anchor on Friday the Thirteenth, at midday. The voyage to the United States would last eight days, a day longer than planned. The going was heavy and the admiralty ordered a wide detour to the south to avoid the enemy submarines known from the Oracle to be lurking ahead. As they came within five or six hundred miles of the Luftwaffe air bases at Brest, the P.M. could not but reflect upon the range at which the Japanese torpedo-bombers had dispatched the two great British warships the week before.⁶⁰ *Duke of York* ran under heavy seas much of the way. The asthmatic Lord Beaverbrook, restless with the fuggy conditions between decks, wheezed that their vessel was a 'submarine masquerading as a battleship.'

At any moment Chance, that same incalculable *quantité* to which Churchill had ascribed the misfortunes of his warships in the Indian Ocean, might well curtail this journey too. The *Duke* was so new that her guns had not been calibrated, and many of her crew had never been to sea. On the fourth day out Admiral Pound ordered the escorting destroyers to turn back, as their slow speed was delaying the battleship. She surged on alone, maintaining radio silence, mute but not deaf – able to receive but largely enjoined from reply.

Winston spent most of each day in bed, rising only for lunch and dinner – 'We make a friendly party,' he wrote privately. Then he staggered back to his cabin on the bridge to write, occasionally peering out of the portholes to see the tremendous seas cascading over the *Duke's* heaving bows, and listening to the crash of the waves that Neptune hurled against this usurper's sides. Here the P.M. feasted upon the few telegraphic morsels that arrived – the first word from Eden in Moscow on Stalin's political demands; reproaches from Jan Smuts that 'frankly I have my doubts about the Duff Cooper organisation' in Singapore, followed by a message from Cooper that 'we cannot afford to hold the greater part of Malaya'; all balanced, in Churchill's view, by the glad tidings from General Auchinleck in Cairo, reporting the hounding of Rommel's *Panzergruppe Afrika* across Libya.⁶¹ The P.M. expected the Eighth Army to be well to the west of Benghazi by the end of the year, and the whole force of '100,000 Italians and 50,000 Huns' to be dead or captured by then. This should provide the Americans with the proof that the British soldier could beat the Germans even at unfavourable

odds. 'This lends weight to our counsels and requests,' he explained in a letter to Clementine.⁶²

President Roosevelt still showed no enthusiasm over the uninvited visit. Churchill was rather in the position of the importunate lover, bearing down upon his uncooperative partner's abode. He was anxious to ascertain F.D.R.'s outlook on the war, to hear his intentions.⁶³ As he ploughed westwards toward Washington he received 'practically nothing' from the United States radio stations, which he found most odd. He did not, therefore, know what to expect on his arrival. Perhaps he ought to travel up to Ottawa as well? Canada was after all, he recalled, a Dominion of the empire.

As the going got heavier there were broken limbs amongst the sailors. The P.M.'s transatlantic passage was however no rougher than his government had to endure in the Secret Session of the nineteenth. Afterwards Hugh Dalton drew a comparison in his diary between the events in Norway in May 1940 and those in Malaya now. 'The P.M. being away,' he wrote, 'C.R.A. [Attlee] and A.V.A. [Alexander] spoke for the government. . . Reference to the P.M. received hardly a cheer. The Far East has got people down.'⁶⁴ 'The Tories are angry with Winston,' wrote another MP, 'and are in fact in a bad mood.'⁶⁵ The truth about Pearl Harbor was seeping out; the Japanese were now claiming to have sunk five American battleships and crippled three more. Could that be true? The uncertainty was grotesque. Clementine wrote that day to Winston that people in England were calm, though the Japanese were attacking Hongkong and Singapore, had invaded Borneo, and would be in Burma soon. 'May God keep you and inspire you to make good plans with the president,' she concluded. 'It's a horrible world at present, Europe over-run by the Nazi hogs and the Far East by yellow Japanese lice.'⁶⁶ All these events, Attlee confessed to his prime minister, had 'rather disturbed' the public, press, and MPs.⁶⁷

'it is perhaps a good thing,' mused the dormant artist in Winston Churchill, in a letter dispatched at the end of this voyage to Clementine, 'to stand away from the canvas from time to time and take a full view of the picture.'⁶⁸ For the first few days his great mind was numbed and dull, but then the sea journey clarified it and he applied it both to the grand design of the war over the next two years, and to the fine detail.

His letter showed how little he had perceived what was happening to the empire in the Far East. 'It is no use the critics saying, "Why were we not prepared?" when everything we had was already fully engaged,' he grum-

bled. He suggested: 'The entry of the United States into the war is worth all the losses sustained in the East many times over.'

In the short term, it now emerged, his primary intent was to persuade the Americans to cooperate in Operation *gymnast*, an invasion of North-West Africa, still ruled by Vichy France. He revealed to Jan Smuts that he was crossing the Atlantic to confer with the president, 'to procure from him assistance in a forward policy in French North Africa and in West Africa.' He feared that the Americans would be otherwise too easily preoccupied with Japan.⁶⁹

three days out to sea, seeking to clarify his own ideas, he dictated to his stenographer a remarkable paper on 'The Atlantic Front.' This argued that the joint objective for 1942 must be to secure the coast of Africa and the Levant, from Senegal to Turkey. Having dwelt upon Hitler's shocking losses at Moscow and the Allies' need to maintain their promised supplies to Russia, to 'hold our influence over Stalin,' he turned his eye – taking a view more favourable than fortune would subsequently justify – upon General Auchinleck's prospects. 'We may expect the total destruction of the enemy force in Libya . . . before the end of the year.' Britain's impending victories here and in the Middle East would jolt Turkey, who had 'played for safety throughout' with her fifty divisions, into the Allied line.

This memorandum also broached the touchy subject of General de Gaulle, whom he had invited to lunch at No. 10 three days before sailing.⁷⁰ The Allies' relationship with the general and his Free French movement would require review: 'Through no particular fault of his own he has not been of any important help to us. Indeed, his Movement has created new antagonisms in French minds.' Unfortunately, the P.M. admitted, he himself had originally entered into undertakings with the general; but Roosevelt had not, and he asked that they act in concert to extract more 'effective effort' from him. He anticipated that General Franco's Spain would prove useful to their cause, and suggested with unstated cynicism she should be offered an improvement of her frontiers in Morocco at France's expense. Britain, he said, had some 55,000 men ready for *gymnast*, an invasion of French North-West Africa; he invited Roosevelt to add 150,000 American troops to the operation. America should also send troops to relieve the British forces garrisoning Northern Ireland, and station twenty squadrons of bombers in Britain to operate against Germany. 'Our own bomber programme has fallen short of our hopes,' he explained. 'It must be remembered

that we place great hopes of affecting German production and German morale by ever more severe and accurate bombing of their cities and harbours and that this . . . may produce important effects upon the will to fight of the German people.'

Churchill summed up their main purpose in 1942 as being to control the whole North and West African possessions of France and the North African coast from Tunisia to Egypt; this would reopen the Mediterranean routes to the Middle East and to the Suez Canal. This was a remarkable agenda which, despite the setback still to come in Libya, the coming year would see largely achieved.⁷¹



Still at sea on the following day, December 17, Churchill dictated 'The Pacific Front,' the second of his strategic memoranda. This anticipated that the Japanese would use their new naval superiority to seize the East Indies and Manila, and to advance down the Malayan peninsula to Singapore, which 'island and fortress' he currently expected to 'stand an attack for at least six months.' Japan's sea communications to her expeditionary forces would however be vulnerable once the Allies regained naval supremacy.

Until the new American 16-inch-gun battleships could join their Pacific Fleet, probably in May 1942, the P.M. envisaged 'diversions and enterprises by United States aircraft-carriers escorted by fast cruisers against the exposed cities of Japan [which would] constitute a form fast of interim offensive action.' He concurred, perforce, with the transfer of all American capital ships from the Atlantic to the Pacific. 'We may therefore look,' he concluded, 'to the Autumn of 1942 as the period when we shall have recovered superior naval control of the Pacific.' This would, however, depend on the Philippines and Singapore holding out.⁷² This was a large proviso.

The news from the Far East was disheartening. Two days out to sea, Churchill had made a signal to General Ismay in London, warning that the defenders of Malaya must not fritter away the troops needed for Singapore Island, at the southernmost point, nor allow them to be cut off elsewhere in the Malay peninsula. 'Nothing compares in importance with the fortress,' he had dictated, and he asked that the chiefs of staff now consider moving an Australian division from Palestine down to Singapore.⁷³

Events were however overtaking him. The next day the Japanese invaded North Borneo; and the day after that Penang, on Malaya's west coast, where they captured intact numbers of small craft that had been hidden in the rivers. Using these, they would leapfrog southward toward Johore and Singapore. They showed surprising speed and boasted total air superiority. Imprisoned in his storm-tossed battleship Churchill sent a further signal to Ismay, directing that their forces must retain Johore 'for the purpose of holding Singapore.' He was groping in a gathering gloom however: he did not know now who was his Commander-in-Chief, Far East. Had Pownall arrived? He cursed the distance from these momentous events. 'I had clear convictions,' he would write in his memoirs, 'which I regret it was not in my power to enforce from mid-ocean.'⁷⁴

Sobered by these deliberations, he cast his thoughts forward, in a third strategic memorandum, to 1943. In this document, he surmised that the war could be *ended* only by the defeat of Hitler's armies, or by a revolution in Germany brought about by the combined effects of her military defeats, her economic privations, and the bombing campaign. 'There must be,' he decided, 'a design and theme for bringing the war to a victorious end in a reasonable period.' He envisaged landing British and American armies during the summer of 1943 at several places in western and southern Europe – Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, and possibly the Balkans. What was perhaps revolutionary in this third memorandum was that Churchill recommended landing on open beaches, not in ports, and from specially adapted landing-craft. In his view moreover the incursion of small armoured formations was all that was necessary. 'The uprising of the local population for whom weapons must be brought,' he believed, 'will supply the corpus of the liberating offensive.' Such an offensive would be executed by forty armoured divisions, or some six hundred thousand men, of whom the British would produce 'nearly half'; and it would be followed by one million other men of arms. Meanwhile, they should keep up a punishing bombardment of Germany. If they took these tasks upon themselves now, he concluded, they might hope to win the war at the end of 1943 or during 1944.⁷⁵

Later that morning, December 18, he read this paper out loud to his advisers – Pound, Portal, Dill, and Lord Beaverbrook, explaining that he intended to use it with Roosevelt.⁷⁶ Their publicly stated goal for 1943 must be the invasion of Europe. Romantically, he defined the three phases

of the coming war in these terms: closing the ring; liberating the populations; and, the final assault on the German citadel.⁷⁷

after a week of almost unremitting gales – by this time the Japanese had also secured a foothold on Hongkong island – *Duke of York* was approaching Bermuda on December 20, 1941.

While still at sea Churchill received a secret message from Admiral Jean Charles François Darlan, the Vichy French prime minister and naval commander-in-chief. There had been, as noted earlier, furtive contacts between London and Vichy ever since the fall of France. The government's contacts in October 1940 with Professor Louis Rougier, Pétain's emissary, had continued since then through both Rougier and others.⁷⁸ Desmond Morton had written to the prime minister on March 25, 1941, reminding him that Mr Gascoigne, their envoy at Tangier, was one such channel through which the 'Dupuy' series of telegrams were being received, keeping contact with de Gaulle's representatives in North Africa 'and also with Vichy leaders.'⁷⁹

At the end of September 1941 Captain Cedric Holland, the former naval attaché in Paris, now on Lord Gort's staff in Gibraltar, had travelled to Portugal and met the Vichy naval attaché and the Vichy Intelligence officer Major Brantès in Lisbon; he had handed to Brantès a message from Churchill to convey to Darlan by diplomatic pouch. On October 1 Darlan dutifully informed Otto Abetz, the German ambassador in Paris, that Captain Holland was proposing a secret meeting.⁸⁰ Darlan sent a reply via Captain •• **firstname?** Sanson, his chief of naval intelligence, this arrived in London in mid-November through 'C's' channels. Churchill's appointment card shows a meeting on November 15 with Captain Alan Hillgarth, the swash-buckling naval attaché at Madrid (through whom he was bribing Franco's generals to stay out of the war).⁸¹

Marshal Pétain's colonial armies and the war-making potential of Darlan's fleet were never far from Churchill's mind. In his December 16 memorandum on 'The Atlantic Front' he urged that Britain and America jointly persuade Pétain to bring French North Africa into the Grand Alliance. 'Now is the time,' he dictated, 'to offer to Vichy and to French North Africa a blessing or a cursing.' The Allied leaders should promise to restore France

* To which Martin Gilbert (*Winston S. Churchill*, vol. vii, page 10) adds the limitation, 'except for Syria and the frontier zone of Spanish Morocco.' These words are not in the text seen by us.

as a Great Power 'with her territories undiminished.'* He proposed that he and Roosevelt should secretly invite Pétain to send his fleet from Toulon, Mers el-Kébir, and Bizerta to Allied ports, and thus bring France back into the war.

Perhaps coincidentally, on December 19 a telegram arrived from 'C' reporting that Darlan had asked one of his agents to find out what the British felt about him – 'If [the] war came to an end would they refuse treating with a French Government of which I was a member?'⁸² The Foreign Office radioed the suggestion that they reply only in general terms; Churchill did not share the F.O.'s corrosive animosity toward the admiral, and amended their proposed reply to include an offer couched in these carefully chosen words:

If the French fleet at Toulon were to sail for North and West African ports and be prepared to resist German attacks, that would be an event of the first order. Whoever commanded or effected such a great stroke of policy and strategy would have made a decisive contribution to the Allied cause which carries with it the restoration of France as one of the leading Powers in Europe. Such a service would entitle the author to an honourable place in the Allied ranks.⁸³

Churchill heard no more from Admiral Darlan for nearly a year.

before reaching the New World, the prime minister dictated a fourth memorandum, reverting to the Pacific. This paper drew attention to the need to improvise aircraft-carriers; a carrier, he pointed out, could be improvised in six months, a battleship took ten times as long to build. Remarkably, given his previous commitment to the strategic bombing campaign, he now accepted that the manufacture of carrier-aircraft might exceed even the priority of the bombing offensive until 1943. 'Meanwhile the German cities and other targets will not disappear,' he consoled himself, while asking all the same for the assistance of American bomber squadrons, 'be it only symbolic,' in operating against 'German cities and seaports.' It should be possible, he suggested, to launch a carrier assault on Japan – a wan echo of his pre-Pearl Harbor plotting with the president. 'The burning of Japanese cities by incendiary bombs,' he stated, 'will bring home in a most effective way to the people of Japan the dangers of the course to which they have committed themselves, and nothing is more likely to cramp the rein-

forcing of their overseas adventures.' The Americans, he suggested, should request bases in Russia or China to facilitate such long-range air strikes against Japan.⁸⁴

Unsettled by Churchill's momentary disenchantment with their strategic bombing offensive the chiefs of staff, after meeting on the twentieth, reminded him that before any invasion could take place a predominantly British bomber force must assail 'the heart of Germany' for a considerable time. Moreover, where the prime minister had envisaged such an invasion coming as early as late 1943, they spoke more circumspectly of early 1944. The saturation bombing of Germany throughout 1943 was, they reiterated, more important than staging an invasion that year. On one point they did share Churchill's view – that the defeat of Germany (and Italy) must come first; until then, they accepted, Japan would 'run wild' in the western Pacific.⁸⁵

Thus girt with their various arguments, the British visitors prepared to joust with President Roosevelt and his military staff.

as their battleship now entered American waters, Winston Churchill wrote to Clementine. A telegram came from Moscow, reporting that at Stalin's birthday banquet they had drunk the P.M.'s health: 'Stalin,' wrote Eden, 'spoke very warmly of you.' Churchill mentioned to Clementine that Eden's visit, like his own, had evidently been kept secret so far. He had however received reports from Eden on the progress of the talks with Stalin and Molotov.⁸⁶ These confirmed the rule that diplomatists seldom return from foreign jaunts without betraying at least a part of their country's interests. At their talks on December 16, 17, and 18, Stalin had demanded that Britain and America recognise the Soviet Union's territorial acquisitions in the three Baltic states, Finland, and Romania, left over from the halcyon days of his 1939 horse-trading with Hitler.⁸⁷

'I reacted violently,' Churchill would write. Already fretful from a week of cramped confinement between heaving decks, he dictated a snappy, sarcastic retort to his young protégé in Moscow. As he notified Attlee in London by telegram on December 20, Stalin's territorial demands ran directly counter to the first three articles of the Atlantic Charter to which he, Stalin, had himself explicitly subscribed. Besides, there could be no question of allowing any such territorial deal, secret or otherwise, without American consent. In his view, frontier problems should be left to a post-war Peace Conference. He scoffed at Eden's 'mere desire' to have a published agreement

with Russia, and suggested that the foreign secretary need not be downcast if he had to leave Moscow 'without any flourish or trumpets.' More realistic than Eden, he pointed out to Attlee that the Russians would have to continue fighting for their lives whether they got an agreement or not.⁸⁸

He used equally uncompromising language in a telegram to Moscow, reminding Eden that to approach President Roosevelt with Stalin's territorial proposals would be to court not only refusal but 'lasting trouble.' As for Germany, Churchill, evidently remote from any works of reference on the geography and history of Prussia, indicated that at the aforementioned Peace Conference Prussia should be first 'defined,' then separated from South Germany. He admonished Eden that to adumbrate such ticklish problems now played right into Hitler's hands.⁸⁹

It deserves comment that Eden had travelled to Moscow without precise directives for such conferences; and, for that matter, that he even debated Stalin's demands. Two weeks later, in January 1942, he would invite Churchill to contemplate the even more explosive notion of recognising Russia's June 1941 frontiers – which would grant to her substantial areas of Poland, again acquired through her dealings with Nazi Germany. Churchill again slapped him down. 'We have never recognised the 1941 frontiers,' he lectured his foreign secretary. 'They were acquired by acts of aggression in shameful collusion with Hitler.' He felt that the Russians might make a good case for restricted frontier rectifications near Leningrad and with Romania; here the populations affected would have to be evacuated and even compensated. 'There can be no question of settling frontiers until the Peace Conference,' he repeated. 'I know President Roosevelt holds this view as strongly as I do.'⁹⁰

he expected to make landfall the next day, December 22, 1941. The news that Sunday, December 21, was that British resistance in Hongkong was collapsing. Churchill had known that the island was a forlorn outpost, but he had expected it to hold out for months.⁹¹ 'Now,' he puzzled to Clementine, 'they seem on the verge of surrender after only a fortnight's struggle.'⁹² In Malaya the empire's troops were now streaming south into the southern tip, toward the fortress of Singapore. It all seemed most lamentable. How he looked forward to dry land – to dining with the president, to dallying with the press, and to speaking by transatlantic telephone to Clementine ('I

* Quite. See Appendix II.

wish particularly to know the length of your stockings,' he informed her quaintly, 'so I can bring you a few pairs.') He warned her in advance that they must be careful what they said, as the line would not be secret.*

To the chiefs of staff he wrote less fondly, parrying their harsh comments on his papers. The night air bombardment of Germany's 'civilian populations and industries' had, he chided them, fallen short of expectations. Although an invasion might well have to be postponed until 1944, he was against saying so publicly. 'I think there is a good chance,' he explained, 'of our being able to make four or five simultaneous Anglo-American landings on the Continent in the summer of 1943.' The British people would not, he feared, stand for postponing all offensive action for years while the Japanese were 'running wild' in the East Indies and northern Australia.⁹³

with that, the dreadful sea crossing was over. At two-fifteen p.m. on Monday the British warship cruised into Chesapeake Bay and anchored in Hampton Roads. The Americans had assembled a special train at Phoebus to be followed by a stately steam trip up the Potomac, but Churchill was anxious not to miss dinner at the White House and asked for a Navy plane to fly him directly to the capital.⁹⁴ After a fifty-minute flight from Norfolk, Virginia, he arrived at Anacostia Naval Air Station, in the District of Columbia, at six-thirty p.m. President Roosevelt's car was waiting on the raw and blustery December tarmac. They pumped each other's hands with all the fervour of two men united now by shared agonies and rejoicing. The English party were still rocky from the sea trip. 'I'm not sure,' grumped a still-groggy Lord Beaverbrook in an aside to their ambassador, Lord Halifax, 'whether we were seven days or seven *weeks* at sea.'

The P.M. brightened as they drove over a bridge into Washington. Under the ice-clear and starry night sky the capital city was ablaze with electric light, a stunning contrast to the darkened battleship and the drab blackout stifling London. There was food in abundance, with real eggs and marmalade. Everywhere that Churchill's staff, who arrived many hours later by slow train, looked, the people of this rich country seemed to be pudgy, pasty-faced, and double-chinned; the newspapers were even fatter – each issue of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* filled fifty or sixty pages compared to the British wartime newspapers' four.

Warmed by a bath and cocktails, Winston Churchill settled down with his old friends: the president; the frail but benign Harry Hopkins;

Beaverbrook; the ambassador Lord Halifax; the secretary and the under-secretary of state; and tucked into his first dinner ever at the White House.⁹⁵

14: *Some Chicken*

This then was the situation as the last week of December 1941 began: Winston Churchill, with two of his chiefs of staff, was in Washington far from the sound of shot and shell; Ismay and the new C.I.G.S., Brooke, were in London; the foreign secretary was in Moscow. The prime minister, inspired by what Brooke suspiciously called the 'optimistic personal and private messages' that he was receiving from General Auchinleck in Cairo, was banking on the final defeat of Rommel within the next few days to enable him to release empire forces to Malaya and the Far East; and he was hoping to persuade the Americans to commit their necessarily raw new forces to an operation in French North Africa. This operation might however depend on the readiness of the local Vichy French to invite them in, a collaboration which in Brooke's view was improbable, and would certainly run into formidable problems of shipping space. 'The situation,' Brooke summed up, on hearing the first reports from Washington, 'is beginning to become difficult.' In fact he was frightened that things might get out of hand, given the P.M.'s present 'elated and optimistic mood.'¹

To those in Washington, there seemed grounds for optimism. Whatever his earlier misgivings, Roosevelt could not have been a more charming host. He installed Churchill on the same floor at the White House as his own quarters, while Harry Hopkins occupied – to Eleanor Roosevelt's dismay – a suite across from Winston's as the president's permanent house guest. The White House staff set up the P.M.'s travelling map room next to Hopkins's suite. Onto the maps of every theatre of war Captain Pim's officers traced the movements of the opposing armies and warships.

Both Roosevelt, through infirmity, and Churchill, through age, spent much of their day in bed, but they did not discourage working visits to their

respective bedrooms.² Over the next three weeks – for Churchill was a most *determined* guest – they took many of their lunches together.

Dinner was a more social occasion, and held in a larger circle. F.D.R. presided over the preliminaries himself – sitting at his desk in the Oval Office with a tray of Gordon's gin, vermouth and ice, and mixing all the cocktails himself. This was one of the untidiest rooms that Colonel Jacob had ever seen, full of what seemed to the untrained eye like junk – half-opened parcels, souvenirs, books, and knick-knacks piled onto tables and chairs or toppled-over onto the floor; the great man's desk was heaped with papers, as was a 'sort of bookcase' next to his chair. 'It would drive an orderly-minded man, or woman, mad,' thought the British army colonel, and he silently decided that it was all 'rather typical' of the general lack of organisation in the American government.'

Often their meetings were joined by the presidential Aberdeen terrier Falla; the hairy beast started barking once in the middle of a Churchillian oration. Winston was put out by the yapping, and the dog was put out by the staff.³ Taken all round, however, these cocktail hours were hours suffused with pleasure. Eventually, with his head a-dance with visions of Sir Walter Raleigh laying down his humble cloak before Queen Elizabeth, Churchill would trundle the president in his wheelchair to the elevator to go down to dinner.⁴

Immediately after their first dinner on December 22, F.D.R. invited his English guests into his study. Lord Halifax observed afterwards that there was complete unanimity of view, 'Winston and the president getting on very well indeed together.' With none of the American chiefs of staff yet present, the P.M. at once put forward *gymnast*, his plan for a joint invasion of French North-West Africa. He argued that if Hitler was checkmated now in Russia, he might well try to push his armies down through the Iberian Peninsula to North-West Africa. It was vital to forestall him. Whoever got there first would lay hands on the magnificent new French battleships *Jean-Bart* and *Richelieu* ('a real prize,' observed Churchill in a telegram to his war cabinet the next day.)

Aware of the French dislike for the British ever since Mers el-Kébir, Churchill suggested that it would have an 'immense psychological effect' if the United States were associated with this British undertaking. As he continued to press his plans for a joint landing there 'with or without invitation,' Roosevelt showed that he favoured the idea. Buoyed up, just as Brooke had feared, by the latest private signals from Auchinleck, Churchill related the

Eighth Army's triumphant progress in Libya, thus impressing and cheering Roosevelt and his colleagues.⁵

beside their formal meetings over the next three weeks, the two leaders talked endlessly off the record with each other.

The President, explained an American usher as he stopped Ian Jacob from entering the cabinet room, never had note-takers at his meetings. Indeed, as Jacob found, he lacked any kind of military or cabinet secretariat, no machinery through which to exercise command. ('We now see how much we owe to Hankey,' reflected the colonel).⁶ Attending one such meeting, Jacob realised that beside their own prime minister Roosevelt, though a most impressive man, was 'a child in military affairs.' His army and navy appeared to be at war with each other, for want of a real enemy. The two leaders mulled over sensitive issues, like their joint opposition to Stalin's frontier demand, in private. They discussed too the possibility of making a 'sacrifice landing' of troops, as they called it, in France, or even opening a full-scale second front in the summer of 1942 if the Soviet Union should appear to be collapsing.⁷ To Churchill's irritation Roosevelt held forth at length upon the situation in British India.⁸ Their private talks also touched upon China; upon Article VII of the draft lend-lease agreement, with its troublesome reference to 'empire preferences'; and upon Anglo-American co-operation on atomic energy research.

They also whispered secret things to each other about Bletchley Park, ultra, magic, and their codebreaking operations. 'One night,' the P.M. would remind F.D.R. in February, referring to what seems to have been a presidential after-shock of the eruptions that had split the Intelligence community before Pearl Harbor, 'when we talked late you spoke of the importance of our cypher people getting into close contact with yours.' He admitted that his experts had been routinely reading the American cyphers, and warned that the enemy might be doing so too. 'I shall be grateful,' he added, 'if you will handle this matter entirely yourself, and if possible burn this letter when you have read it. The whole subject is secret in a degree which affects the safety of both our countries.'⁹

There would be little of this frankness toward Stalin about codebreaking. Attempts to get the Russians to swap signals Intelligence, beginning with low level materials, proved abortive. In February 1942 the 'Y' Board in London, which handled such decisions, decided that the time might be ripe to approach Moscow about an arrangement to exchange information on

Japanese cyphers and raw intercept material. While 'they were still firmly opposed to giving the Russians any inkling of British success on German **enigma**,' they offered to the Kremlin GAF low-grade codes to show good faith, and solutions of German police keys.¹⁰ Nothing would come of these offers, perhaps because a communist traitor at Bletchley Park was already telling the Russians all they needed to know.

as for the Dominions, Churchill had no intention of consulting with their representatives in Washington. At his very first evening meeting with the president on December 22, 1941, he had reluctantly agreed that it was important to 'bring them in,' but he had warned against establishing a permanent body that might 'limit the action or capacity' of the United States, Britain, and Russia, to 'take prompt decision.'¹¹ He merely assembled the Dominions people at the White House, at noon on the twenty-third, and explained to these doubting gentlemen that things could have been worse: Japan could have struck at the British empire alone, leaving America unmolested. 'On balance,' the report quotes him as stating, 'we could not be dissatisfied with the turn of events.'¹²

A crowded press conference followed at four p.m. The journalists could not see him in the crush, and there were cheers as he obligingly clambered up onto a chair. Somebody asked about Australia's anxiety over events in Singapore (he had by now received several worried messages from John Curtin). 'We are going to do our utmost,' he replied, 'to defend Singapore and its approaches until the situation becomes so favourable to us that the general offensive in the Pacific can be resumed.' The journalists pressed him: 'Is not Singapore the key to the whole situation out there?'

Decades of Question Time in the House made such queries easy to deflect. 'The key to the whole situation,' he purred, 'is the resolute manner in which the British and American Democracies are going to throw themselves into the conflict.'¹³

there were two immediate consequences of the news, announced that evening, that he was in Washington. Senator Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky called the White House to inquire if their illustrious guest would like to address a Joint Session of Congress. He would be the first prime minister of any nation to do so. F.D.R. promised to ask; Churchill's answer was a prompt yes. Since the only date available would be the day after Christmas, Barkley began some hectic telephoning around. The second consequence

was that fan mail poured in to the White House, and multitudes of gifts. The secret service screened them all, because this Anglo-American was not universally admired; and every suspect package was destroyed.¹⁴



Fortunately, the inevitable gift packages of cigars survived. Ten years on, when a small-minded Labour Member of Parliament urged a ban on using dollars to import cigars, Churchill would declare, 'I have not for quite a long time imported any cigars from hard-currency areas, but nevertheless, I receive some from time to time.'¹⁵ He was quite pernickety about which cigars he smoked, and how. 'Not a day passes,' he would tell a new MP, 'without my friends in Europe sending me cigars and brandy. The cigars are horrible, but the brandy is magnificent.'¹⁶ Like other celebrated statesmen, he claimed not to have inhaled. When his doctor remonstrated with him about smoking, Churchill waved the grim statistics aside. 'They make no difference,' he roared, 'between inhalers and non-inhalers. They make no difference between a cigar and a pipe, that most filthy method of smoking tobacco.'¹⁷

He himself smoked nine-inch Havanas, though not invariably. American journalist Daniel Longwell once brought him a box of Alfred Dunhill's 'Romeo & Juliet No. 1,' but Dunhill themselves had a photograph showing him smoking their 'Monte Christo,' which was thinner. Neither was a cheap cigar.¹⁸

He would play with a cigar more than smoke it, burning an inch at a time. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, whom we shall shortly meet, gained the impression that the P.M. rather relished his reputation as a heavy smoker while being actually more moderate than rumour indicated.¹⁹ Longwell felt the same. He noted that the P.M. had a burning candle on his desk: he would puff lightly at his cigar, gesticulate with it until it went out; remember the dead ember ten minutes later, and rekindle it from the flame. In a two-hour period Longwell observed Winston make little progress down the eight-inch shaft. The cigars were however important to him. When the P.M. supported Cuba's application for embassy status in 1944, Cadogan would privately presume that this was to 'assure his supply of cigars.' (Cigars were certainly not far from Churchill's mind: 'Great offence,' he wrote to Eden, 'will be given if all the others have it [embassy status] and this large, rich, beautiful island, the home of the cigar, is denied').²⁰

after his press conference on December 23, Churchill had briefly phoned Clementine in England, but the censors were omnipresent and it was not a satisfactory conversation.²¹ His 'family' now was Roosevelt and Hopkins – Hopkins's papers reveal that he lunched eleven times, and dined eleven times, with the two leaders over the next three weeks.²²

During their first private talk Churchill had discussed with Roosevelt his own idea of reviving something like the League of Nations after this war.²³ Roosevelt suggested that such an international organisation would be unwieldy because too many nations would be involved. He would prefer Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China alone to act as what he called 'the policemen of the world.' The other nations, including Germany, Italy, *and* France, should be disarmed.

'Why France?' asked Churchill, surprised.

'Why not France,' replied the president. If Germany were disarmed, France would not need weaponry either.²⁴

When they held their first plenary session at 4:45 p.m. on the twenty-third, meeting with the British and American chiefs of staff in the cabinet Room, Roosevelt told them of their discussions, then, rather to Henry Stimson's surprise, fished out a memorandum which the secretary of war had drawn up some days before and made this the basis for the conference, going over each point and inviting the P.M. to comment. 'Churchill,' dictated Stimson afterwards, 'commented feelingly on the sentence of my summary where I described our first main principle as the preservation of our communications across the North Atlantic with our fortress in the British Isles covering the British fleet.'²⁵ Churchill was impressed at the manner in which Marshall and his staff were planning years ahead.²⁶ 'He desired,' recorded Marshall, 'that we consider the question of landing troops in Norway in 1943.'²⁷ When discussion turned to North-West Africa, F.D.R. agreed with Winston that the Allies must get there before the Germans: 'On the other hand,' noted General Arnold, 'we can't take any action that might cause Vichy to turn the fleet over to the Germans.'²⁸ The president warned that given the length of mass-production pipelines for planes, tanks, and armaments, they should not project any serious operations before 1944.

Churchill summed up their discussion, according to Arnold. He urged the Americans to send one armoured and three infantry divisions to Northern Ireland, to relieve British divisions needed elsewhere. He also felt that the Americans should 'take over' Iceland from the British garrison, as it

would provide a winter training ground. He concluded that it was a great comfort to find so much common ground, and assured Arnold of his pleasure that American bomber squadrons would soon begin operating from British airfields against Germany and Hitler's 'invasion ports' in France.²⁹

the morning of December 24, 1941 brought news from London of a revolt by forty Members of Parliament, including Emanuel Shinwell, Edward Winterton – who had directed the attack on Churchill in the secret session – and Sir John Wardlaw-Milne.³⁰ Parliamentary observers were comparing the mood to the day Chamberlain fell. There was criticism of Britain's unpreparedness in Malaya. Conservative backbenchers were disgruntled that since the P.M. was also Leader of the Party nobody could stand up to him on their behalf. All in all Churchill was glad to be here in Washington, a hero in his friend's capital, rather than the object of obloquy in his own.

he was aware that the true situation was even darker than the House knew, and not only in the Pacific theatre. With dramatic suddenness, Britain had suddenly lost naval supremacy in the Mediterranean, even while he was at sea: On December 18 Italian 'human torpedoes' had crippled the battleships *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* in Alexandria. Almost at once, the cruiser *Neptune* had strayed into a Mediterranean minefield and gone down with the loss of seven hundred men (only one survived); shortly, a U-boat had dispatched His Majesty's cruiser *Galatea*. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham's entire fleet now numbered only three cruisers and a handful of destroyers.

'We are having shock after shock out here,' wrote Cunningham privately to the First Sea Lord. 'The damage to the battleships at this time is a disaster.' Nobody knew how the intrepid Italian saboteurs had penetrated the boom defences; those captured had claimed the gate was opened for destroyers to come in. 'We have got all of the enemy operators, we think,' reported the admiral, '– six in number – and I am having them segregated; no communication with the outside world by letter or other means. In fact they will just die for six months and I hope give the Italians the impression that they perished in their attempt.' Cunningham hoped to get *Queen Elizabeth* on an even keel shortly, so that from the air she still seemed to be seagoing, but two of her boiler-rooms were wrecked. He protested yet again about the R.A.F.'s failure to deal with the enemy warships. 'I fear,' he concluded, 'that I do not look forward to the next few months with much pleasure.'³¹

Britain's disastrous naval position in the Mediterranean was kept top secret; when Attlee, in his absence, authorised British flag officers in the Dominions to inform the prime ministers 'by word of mouth' of this disaster, Churchill was livid: 'I greatly regret that this vital secret should be spread about the world in this fashion,' he rebuked Attlee in this revealing message from Washington. 'We do not give our most secret information to the Dominions or, indeed, even to the whole of our own cabinet.' He added, 'The matter is all the more serious on account of what happened at Pearl Harbor, which is being kept strictly secret.' Only later did he admit to MPs, in secret session, that within a matter of weeks Britain had lost seven great ships – more than a third of all her battleships and battle-cruisers.³² He kept these grim tidings from the Americans too, just as they had concealed the truth about Pearl Harbor. He still intended to dictate policy to them.

Informed that morning that Churchill would like to discuss the Philippines, Henry Stimson hurried over to the White House bringing General Dwight D. Eisenhower, a former commander in the Philippines now attached to the War Plans Division; they came upstairs to find the prime minister pottering around his 'Map Room' wearing his siren suit. 'He was still in dishabille,' wrote Stimson, unfamiliar with this attire, 'wearing a sort of zipper pajama suit and slippers.'³³ They explained to Winston on their maps of the Philippines where the opposing troops were, and the probable outcome if their commander General Douglas MacArthur retreated across Corregidor. After Eisenhower withdrew, Churchill forcefully reiterated to Stimson his views on *gymnast*, his plan for an invasion of North-West Africa. Popping in just as Stimson was leaving, Lord Halifax wondered what he had made of Winston's 'grey romper suit.'³⁴ Lord Beaverbrook came; Winston made his excuses and left, to change into something more formal for luncheon, which F.D.R. took on his writing table.

A blunt telegram had arrived from Pretoria.³⁵ The South African prime minister demanded that the Americans be told that they were honour bound to recover the vast area of the Pacific being overrun by the Japanese, and to defeat the Japanese navy. With a 'Nazi invasion' of Britain imminent 'it would be madness to send more British capital ships to the Far East.' Churchill preferred however to dwell upon the good news arriving from Cairo – Auchinleck was boasting that he had advanced all yesterday and kept up a continuous pressure from air and ground. The Oracle revealed that Rommel was abandoning Benghazi. 'The Army of the Nile,' radioed Auchinleck to Washington, 'sends you hearty greeting for Christmas.'³⁶ Over-confident

of an early victory in Libya, the P.M. began planning for Auchinleck to release squadrons of Hurricane fighter planes and even a regiment of the new American M3 tanks to the Far East.

As dusk fell, the president took Winston out onto the balcony. A tall Christmas tree had been raised in the grounds. Some thirty thousand people milled around in the darkness. The president stood, noticeably gripping the lectern as he spoke into a microphone. Churchill followed with an elegant prepared text: 'I have the honour,' he began, 'to add a pendant to the necklace of Christmas goodwill and kindness with which my illustrious friend the president has encircled the homes and families of the United States by the message of Christmas Eve which he has just delivered.' He himself, he ventured, was far from family, if not from home – for the ties of blood on his mother's side, his many friendships, and their common cause and language made it impossible to feel a stranger. He remarked, in what was perhaps an oblique reference to the atomic bomb which he had now discussed secretly with Roosevelt, that this was a strange Christmas Eve: 'Armed with the most terrible weapons which science can devise the nations advance upon each other. Ill would it be for us this Christmastide if we were not sure that no greed for the lands or wealth of any other people, that no vulgar ambition had led us to the field.' After a happy reference to letting the children have their night of fun and laughter, he bade them, 'In God's Mercy, a Happy Christmas to you all.'³⁷

He had noticed his heart thumping madly as he spoke, and he told Sir Charles Wilson immediately afterwards about these strange palpitations. The doctor found his pulse racing at one hundred and five. 'It has all been very moving,' explained the P.M., rather taken aback.³⁸

in the morning Roosevelt took him to the Foundry Church for the Christmas service. Secret service men guarded them with Tommy guns and revolvers. The Methodist hymns did the P.M. good, and he told Wilson that it was the first time his mind had been at rest for a long time.³⁹

For all the external bonhomie, there were noticeable tensions within the presidential household. Richard Casey was angry at being kept out of the deliberations even when Australia's fate was at stake.⁴⁰ Roosevelt mischievously feigned a preference for Lord Beaverbrook over Churchill. As a Canadian, Beaverbrook was closer to the Americans in style and language; Churchill noticed once how F.D.R., wearying of the endless midnight yarn-ing about the Boer War, Britain's food requirements, and other tedious topics,

took Beaverbrook aside to see his stamp collection so as to escape the P.M.'s presence.⁴¹ Churchill stopped speaking to Beaverbrook. The presence of Churchill's friend, the eternally ailing Harry Hopkins, placed a further strain on the household.⁴² Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt could not abide him, with his blanched lips, his taut, parchment-yellow skin, and his slitty eyes. Hopkins turned a baleful glare upon other visitors to Churchill, ensuring that only the right people met him. The Roosevelts had both pleaded with Churchill's old crony Bernard M. Baruch, the New York financier, to come down for the tree-lighting party; after unconvincingly proffering the excuse that he did not want to be 'too conspicuous,' Baruch came for dinner nonetheless, stayed for several days, and had intimate meetings with the P.M. that certainly came to Hopkin's injured ears. 'The two of them were in a room together,' recorded one of Roosevelt's staff, 'when Harry Hopkins came in and seated himself. Bernie's suspicion was that Harry did not want Bernie and Churchill to be free to talk to each other frankly.'⁴³

These fractious jealousies and feuds were dwarfed by Roosevelt's unconcealed antipathy toward his own secretary of state, Cordell Hull.⁴⁴ Emerging from the Oval Office one morning Churchill found Hull sitting alone in the long corridor. 'Do you think,' Hull asked the English visitor, 'there would be any chance of my getting to see him?'

the afternoon of Churchill's Christmas Day was soured by angry words over an autocratic action taken by the 'Free French' leader, General de Gaulle, whom Hull regarded as Churchill's protégé. Breaking undertakings which he had given, evidently at their luncheon shortly before the prime minister left for Washington, de Gaulle had ordered his fleet commander Vice-Admiral E. H. D. Muselier to seize two French islands off the coast of Canada, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. The islands flew the flag of Vichy, a government with which both Ottawa and Washington retained diplomatic relations. There was the devil to pay. Highly displeased, Churchill reprimanded de Gaulle a few days later: 'Your having broken away from agreement about Miquelon and Saint-Pierre raised a storm which might have been serious had I not been on the spot to speak to the President.'⁴⁵

The American files bristle with revelations on this incident. They show that on December 13, two days after lunching with the P.M. in London, de Gaulle had cabled instructions to Admiral Muselier not to bother about getting Canadian or American consent for the raid on the islands. The American minister at Ottawa had warned Muselier against going ahead. On the

seventeenth, de Gaulle had cabled impatiently to his admiral, 'Our negotiations have shown us that we cannot carry out any operation if we wait for permission.' The solution was to act on their own initiative. Still filled with misgivings, Muselier had been reassured by a less than frank telegram from de Gaulle on the eighteenth: 'As requested,' the general had signalled, 'have consulted with British and American governments.' He ordered the admiral to go ahead 'without saying anything to the foreigners.'

As news of the raid reached Washington on Christmas Day, an angry Cordell Hull feared extensive complications with Vichy France and South America. He issued a statement declaring: 'Our preliminary reports shows that the action taken by the so-called Free French ships . . . was an arbitrary action contrary to the agreement of all parties concerned.' De Gaulle's raid dominated Hull's mind for days. For all Churchill's dismissive treatment of the episode in his own memoirs – published during de Gaulle's lifetime – it was by no means the end of the story. Churchill tried in vain to persuade Eden to put pressure on de Gaulle, but he phoned Hopkins some days later to admit that he had failed – de Gaulle was refusing to restore the status quo. 'The burden of the message,' noted Hopkins, 'was that the whole business would kick up an unbelievable row, for which we could give no good public explanation. In spite of the fact that de Gaulle acted in bad faith, the British don't see how he can be forced out and think that the use of force would be very bad. – hlh.'⁴⁶

after a Christmas morning meeting with Roosevelt, Churchill telegraphed General Auchinleck orders to release four fighter squadrons immediately to the Far East together with one hundred of the American tanks. 'All our success in the West,' he reminded the general, 'would be nullified by the fall of Singapore.'⁴⁷ He also dictated a private message to the now deeply concerned prime minister of Australia, revealing that Roosevelt had agreed, 'should the Philippines fall,' to divert General MacArthur's ground and air reinforcements to Singapore; the president was also anxious to establish substantial American forces in Australia for the war against Japan.

Australia was now a festering thorn in Churchill's flesh. 'Throughout the time of our visit to Washington,' noted Ian Jacob, reflecting Winston's views, 'the Prime Minister received a series of most exasperating telegrams from Mr Curtin, the Prime Minister of Australia. The Australian Government have throughout the war taken a narrow, selfish and at times a craven view of events; in contrast to New Zealand who, though at times naturally

critical of failures, has throughout been a tower of strength.' Churchill however had never really understood the Far East problem, observed Jacob, and had been systematically starving Singapore in favour of the Middle East; he should have taken greater pains to explain things to the Australians, perhaps even feigned taking them into his confidence. 'I am afraid we shall have a lot of bother with Australia as a result.'⁴⁸

Churchill had already written off the Philippines. Meeting the president immediately after the tree-lighting ceremony, he had pressed the need to reinforce Singapore: he had asked for a British force making for Colombo, Ceylon, in an American troop transport, to be diverted to Singapore, and for General MacArthur's reinforcements to go there too.⁴⁹ Judging by his message to John Curtin, he had persuaded F.D.R. on both counts, and one of Churchill's assistants drafted a note to this effect. Shown the note on Christmas Day by generals Marshall, Arnold, and Eisenhower, the furious secretary of war complained to Harry Hopkins, threatening to resign. It was, he added, most improper to discuss such matters while the fighting was still going on, and to discuss it with another nation. Hopkins told Stimson on the phone that he had advised the president to be more careful about 'the formality of his discussions' with Churchill. Hopkins recited all of this to Roosevelt in Churchill's presence; notwithstanding the written record, and Winston's message to Curtin, they both now piously denied having made any such proposal. At a five-thirty p.m. meeting with his military advisers Roosevelt in a casual aside disassociated himself from the note, saying that it entirely misrepresented their talk. Stimson let the matter drop.⁵⁰



It was a gloomy evening. News reached the White House that Hongkong had fallen, and that in the Philippines the Japanese had now landed at Lingayen Gulf and at two places south of the capital, Manila. General MacArthur had radioed to say that he was outnumbered and would retreat down the Bataan peninsula. The speech that the prime minister was to deliver to the Congress on the morrow hung as usual, vulture-like, over him. He abandoned one draft as unsuitable for the American mentality. Now he had found a verse in the 112th Psalm, a bit of 'God-stuff,' to spruce up the speech. *'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.'* He carried the Bible in to the study where the president was mixing cocktails, and he liked the quotation too.⁵¹

The White House Christmas dinner was a large Roosevelt family party with forty or fifty seated around the table. F.D.R. carved the turkey.⁵² Lord Beaverbrook and Churchill found themselves facing Henry R. Morgenthau Jr, secretary of the U.S. treasury. In fact Beaverbrook had gone to see Morgenthau for drinks the night before, had rung the wrong doorbell, and spent some time in a purposeless interview with a complete stranger whom he wrongly took to be the treasury secretary.⁵³ The British press lord was cocky, the real Morgenthau now observed, to the point of impertinence. ‘The one thing we shall never forget,’ remarked Beaverbrook, seconded by a glowering Churchill: ‘When we didn’t have a penny to our name [at the end of 1940] you said, “Oh, the British have got lots of money!”’ Morgenthau was intrigued by Churchill’s speech impediment, and perplexed by his morose manner. ‘He would say practically nothing,’ described the American to his staff the next day, ‘because he just wasn’t having a good time.’ Reminded that Winston could sometimes scintillate wonderfully, Morgenthau snapped: ‘Well, [last night] he wasn’t wonderful.’ Genevieve Herrick, sitting next to Morgenthau, noticed that while Beaverbrook’s wrinkled features were a map of his life, Churchill’s were literally pink. ‘That,’ explained Harry Dexter White, Morgenthau’s No. 2, ‘is what liquor does to a man.’ Three times, Morgenthau observed, the P.M. asked to be excused as soon dinner was over, ‘So I can prepare those impromptu remarks for tomorrow.’⁵⁴

After dinner a documentary newsreel was shown.⁵⁵ As scenes of Auchinleck’s offensive flickered across the screen Churchill chuckled out loud. ‘Oh, that’s good,’ he exclaimed. ‘We have got to show the people that we can win.’

As the reels were changed Churchill rose: ‘I must go and do some homework.’ His valet Sawyers helped him into his florid silk dressing gown and into bed. Here Lord Halifax shortly found him, surrounded by cigars, whiskeys, and secretaries; Halifax showed him the latest telegrams on the de Gaulle incident. ‘Winston,’ he wrote in his diary, ‘had, I think, a slightly guilty feeling that he had inadvertently encouraged him.’ Halifax reassured him that the British record at least gave him a clean bill in the islands affair.⁵⁶

it was a warm but damp twenty-sixth of December 1941. Roosevelt had stayed up until one a.m. discussing war production with Beaverbrook, while Churchill had prepared his oration to the Congress. It would not be easy,

given the resentments and suspicions still festering in many an American breast. Wearing a felt hat and a grey lightweight topcoat, he set out in a limousine with G-men on the running-boards and a motorcycle escort with sirens wailing, toward Capitol Hill.⁵⁷ To his eyes it seemed as though great crowds lined the avenue; and a few people did indeed gape from the sidewalks and cheer.⁵⁸ Puny fifty-calibre machine guns sprouted from the rooftops in case of an enemy air raid, such was the state of jitters that still prevailed here. Three hundred Capitol police swarmed the building's grounds. A thousand people packed into the Senate Chamber and its galleries. The Members of the House of Representatives arrayed themselves around the walls, joined by the youthful House pages. Nobody wanted to miss the historic speech.

At twelve-eighteen Washington's diplomatic corps was ushered in, among them the well-fed Maksim Litvinoff, the Soviet ambassador whom Stalin had dismissed as foreign minister in 1939, the better to woo Hitler (he was a Jew), and Lord Halifax, biting his nails two seats away from him. The cabinet and Supreme Court grandly occupied the front row, flanking Roosevelt's occult-worshipping Vice-president Henry Wallace. There were some gaps – Cordell Hull was deliberately absent, as was Stimson. Escorted into the chamber by a deputation appointed for this pleasurable task, Churchill noticed his wise old friend Felix Frankfurter, only the second Jewish judge (after Louis Brandeis) to be honoured by promotion to the Supreme Court, seated prominently amongst the others. At 12:31 p.m. he reached the lectern, spread out his typescript notes to a thunderous cheer, and was immediately called upon to speak. 'Churchill hulked to his feet,' wrote veteran newspaperman Frank McNaughton in his private papers, 'grinned, and grinned, and grinned again as the Members of Congress – without regard for Isolation or Intervention, the Wheelers, the Nyes, everyone – stood and applauded him. He shoved on a pair of horn-rimmed, thick spectacles, blinked. There were tears in his eyes.' A glass of water had been provided, but he pushed the unfamiliar liquid aside. He stood there, wrote McNaughton, 'a stubby, granite little man . . . dumpy, heavy-shouldered, massive-jawed, with a solid bald crown flecked with straggles of grey hair.' With his hands first on his hips, then gripping his lapels, he began to speak into the wall of microphones. As the first Churchillian witticisms hit home, a sly smile spread over his face.

The oratory was beautifully moulded to catch the American public's attention.⁵⁹ 'I cannot but help reflecting,' he said in his opening remarks,

‘that if my father had been American, and my mother British, instead of the other way round, I might have got here on my own.’ Roosevelt’s name was cheered; there were bursts of applause when he spoke of a better situation in 1942, and of taking the initiative in 1943. His Adam’s apple yo-yo’d behind the blue polka-dot bow tie, his right arm fisted the air, the heavy gold ring on his third finger glittered in the glare of the eight spotlights – because newsreel cameras had been allowed into the chamber for the first time. ‘Lastly,’ he proclaimed, ‘if you will forgive me for saying it, to me the best tidings of all is that the United States, united as never before, has drawn the sword for freedom, and cast away the scabbard.’ At this, he thumped his chunky right arm across his left breast and down to his side, as though tugging mightily at this very sword – then drew it, and flourished it aloft like Excalibur itself, wielding it for all to see: and how a thousand American hearts swelled and burst with pride!

It was 1:08 p.m. when he finished. He slumped, perspiring freely, into his seat. They leapt to their feet and applauded until their palms were sore. His timing had been perfect: precisely thirty minutes, beginning humbly as Winston Churchill, ending dramatically as Laurence Olivier in *Henry the Fifth*. This was undoubtedly one of his better performances, and the praise was not stinted. ‘He is the greatest orator in the world,’ noted Harold Ickes, secretary of the interior. ‘I doubt if any other Britisher could have stood in that spot and made the profound impression that Churchill made.’⁶⁰

His words had echoed around the world. From Cairo, Randolph Churchill wrote to his father that the delivery was ‘wonderfully confident and clear.’ Clemmie cabled, ‘Your speech was grand and fills me with pride and love.’⁶¹ Budget Director Harold Smith had watched him closely: ‘His eyes filled with tears as he mentioned his mother,’ he wrote in his diary, ‘and again when he was given a tremendous ovation during his speech.’ (‘I shall always remember,’ Churchill had said, ‘how each Fourth of July my Mother would always wave an American flag before my eyes.’) As he turned to exit stage-left, he paused once and waved to the audience, palm toward his face — the good neighbour’s wave. Secret service agents swept him up and brought him to the office of Edwin M. Halsey, secretary of the Senate, where a bottle of Haig was waiting. He poured two fingers of the liquid: he had earned it. ‘It is a great weight off my chest,’ he admitted to his doctor.

He partook here of a delayed lunch — a plate of turkey, dressing, brown gravy, sweet potatoes, green peas, and cranberry sauce. A dozen Congressmen crowded around the long green-baize table as he tucked in. Several

cabinet members joined them. Churchill felt impelled to stand up, the rounded edge of his black, short jacket sticking stiffly out, and deliver a little speech, genuinely impromptu this time, delighted to be speaking at last to Americans of influence other than the president. 'The American people,' he said, 'will never know how grateful we are for the million rifles sent us after Dunkirk. It meant our life and our salvation.' For an hour, while three thousand Americans waited patiently outside the building, he lunched and flattered these Congressional leaders. 'Mr Ickes,' he remarked to the secretary of the interior, 'you were way ahead of most people on this situation. The speeches that you made were a great encouragement to me.'⁶² He said much the same to Navy Secretary, Colonel Knox. Flushed with tears, he said good-bye to these men who had given him the tools to finish the job.

Driving back to the White House for the routine Friday two o'clock cabinet, Vice-president Wallace took the prime minister with him. Roosevelt introduced the P.M. to his colleagues. 'I shall always remember his stocky figure,' wrote one in his diary, 'his pink cheeks and blue eyes. His manner although confident was not arrogant. I am thankful that he is at the head [of] our partner nation.'⁶³

'Well,' drawled Roosevelt, 'you skated on thin ice three different times in your speech, but you didn't break through.'

'My ability to do that comes out of a lifetime in politics,' said Churchill.⁶⁴

that said, F.D.R., evidently not desiring the P.M.'s further presence at their deliberations, gently admonished him to go and get a nap. Mackenzie King had arrived that afternoon by rail from Ottawa. The Canadian prime minister found Churchill 'beginning to look rather flabby and tired.'⁶⁵ He tackled him immediately about de Gaulle's seizure of the islands. Churchill confessed that at one stage he had agreed to de Gaulle taking this action; but since Roosevelt had opposed it, he had later changed his mind, he said, and he was quite prepared to 'take de Gaulle by the scruff of the neck' and tell him he had gone too far. The general had on more than one occasion behaved in a 'troublesome' way.⁶⁶ To Lord Halifax however Mackenzie King pointed out that the deposed governor of the two disputed islands was pro-Hitler, and that his wife was actually a German; Canadian public opinion moreover backed General de Gaulle's action.

Cordell Hull was particularly distressed by de Gaulle's actions. In fact he was so drained by the episode that at one point he forgot the name of his

own hotel.⁶⁷ He reminded Mackenzie King that nothing must upset their relations with Vichy France, in case the French turned over their powerful fleet to the enemy. Churchill too was ambivalent in his attitude to the Vichy French: while in public he excoriated them, in private he told Mackenzie King that he hoped that Canada would keep Pierre Dupuy as her ambassador to Vichy, as he was the one link that London still had with Marshal Pétain.⁶⁸



Churchill now startled the Canadian statesman with an offer to address the Canadian Parliament. Taken aback, Mackenzie King pointed out that it was in recess; he offered an audience of two thousand elsewhere instead. Parliament, Churchill insisted, would be 'more dignified.'⁶⁹

Trying to open a window in his overheated bedroom that night, the P.M. was alarmed by a dull pain over his heart and pains shooting down his left arm. Examining him the next morning Sir Charles Wilson diagnosed a mild attack of angina; he preferred however not to confront him with this evidence of a coronary insufficiency. 'There is nothing serious,' he reassured his friend.⁷⁰

that day, December 26, 1941, Roosevelt had for the first time raised the prickly topic of overall strategic command in the Far East, calling a rambling conference with Churchill and what Stimson called 'the usual string of the British secretaries.' Marshall and Roosevelt had their own ideas on this matter. Meanwhile, in Sir John Dill's cautious review of Winston's dream of sending an expedition to North-West Africa, a familiar problem had emerged, the bottleneck in shipping tonnage. Unwilling to accept the bald statistics, Churchill reminded them that in the Great War the United States had shipped two million men to France – what had become of the ships used then? One solution, he volunteered, might be to transport ten thousand troops aboard a fast battleship. He was anxious to get American troops into Iceland and Northern Ireland, the latter as a boost to British morale. 'We now find ourselves,' he commented, 'in the not unusual position of wishing to do three separate things, and not quite having the resources to carry them out.'⁷¹

The Far East problem remained. From Australia, John Curtin had cabled Roosevelt directly, criticising the 'utterly inadequate' reinforcements

sent by Churchill to Malaya, particularly in aircraft, and appealing for an *American* commander to be appointed in the Pacific.⁷² That was a very sour apple to bite into. A Melbourne newspaper published an article by Curtin stating: 'Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free from any pangs as to our traditional links with the United Kingdom.'⁷³ Around the world, Churchill's enemies quoted those words with glee. On December 30, Curtin sent him a telegram loaded with invective about Britain's hapless naval policies in the Indian Ocean, and the apparent unwillingness of the United States to co-ordinate their naval policies with the British in the region. 'To sum up therefore,' wrote Curtin with a bluntness characteristic of his people, '[the] present position is that we intend to base an unbalanced fleet in the Indian Ocean during the next two months which will be inferior to the Japanese Fleet and during the period of formation we intend to use important portions of it e.g. carriers . . . in waters under Japanese naval and possibly air control.'⁷⁴

Reporting to Clement Attlee and the cabinet, Churchill said he was deeply shocked by Curtin's 'insulting speech' and vexed by his 'hectoring telegrams.' he warned: 'We must not allow the Australian Government to impede the good relations we have made with U.S. It may be that I shall have to make a broadcast to the Australian people.' Writing to an Australian minister he conjured up memories of 'the far worse shocks of the Dardanelles,' which Australia had faced: 'I cannot help express my wonder and sorrow at some of the things that are said.' This and the debate in Washington on the Pacific command structure revealed once again how little Churchill understood or cared for his King's Dominions. He told his private staff that he inclined to an agreement whereby Britain and the United States recognised Germany as the 'main enemy,' while leaving Washington to direct the war in the Pacific, and London the war in the Atlantic and Europe.⁷⁵ Opinions differed on the details. To General Marshall, wrote Ian Jacob, unity of command was a parrot-cry dating back to his experiences on General Pershing's staff in the Great War. Marshall and Arnold both felt that the man on the spot must have authority to take decisions. Churchill was uneasy, but Hopkins said to him: 'Don't be in a hurry to turn down the proposal the president is going to make to you before you know who is the man we have in mind.'

that man was General Sir Archibald Wavell, the commander whom Churchill had summarily dismissed from Cairo six months before and banished to India. Churchill was half-flattered that the American preference was for a

British general, but he still preferred MacArthur, arguing that the Americans, Australians, and Dutch would more readily accept an American; in all likelihood, given the disasters looming in the Far East, the British wanted all blame to attach to an American, and *vice versa*. As for a unified command, the prime minister was not convinced that this arrangement was either workable or desirable: but he had to bow to the American view.⁷⁶

The next morning, the twenty-seventh, Churchill found his chiefs of staff and Beaverbrook in general agreement on the principle. 'The president and Marshall have suggested Wavell,' Lord Halifax privately recorded, 'which appealed very much to Winston. The rest of us thought it rather dangerous, as we should get the blame for all the troubles which are inevitably coming. Winston didn't think so, and stuck to his point. . . The best point he made, arguing against us all, was that if we made the Pacific too exclusively an American show it would carry the danger of making them too Pacific-minded.' This was an argument of undeniable merit.⁷⁷

At two-thirty p.m. Churchill called a meeting of defence ministers at the White House. Here Mackenzie King mentioned that Lord Halifax had just told him that the Americans had learned from 'a usually reliable source in Berne' that Hitler had dismissed his army commander-in-chief, Field-Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch, because of his opposition to the Führer's plan to flood Britain with poison gas.* Churchill, hearing this for the first time, declared, 'If that is the case, we have great supplies of gas in Britain and will give the Germans such a flooding of it they will be destroyed. We shall use incendiaries to set their houses on fire, and while they are putting out the fires use the gas.' He said he would immediately get word off to Britain to have gas masks brought out to hand.⁷⁸

Churchill had to reassure Richard Casey, the Australian representative, that Singapore would not be lost; moreover the Americans, he promised, would send troops to Australia if needed. He admitted quite frankly that 'he never believed that the Japanese would attack the United States or Britain,' a belief he had based, he added, on the relative outputs of iron and steel in their countries.⁷⁹ At ten p.m. Churchill called a meeting of his chiefs of staff, also at the White House, which did not end until midnight. 'Winston's methods,' wrote Halifax, 'as I have long known, are exhausting for anybody who doesn't happen to work that way; discursive discussions, jumping like a water bird from stone to stone where the current takes you. I am sure the

* This was untrue. Hitler had prohibited any German first use of poison gas.

faults that people find with him arise entirely from overwhelmingly self-centredness, which with all his gifts of imagination make him quite impervious to other people's feelings.'



Before retiring, the prime minister reported to his cabinet in London the American desire to see Wavell appointed 'Supreme Commander' in the Far East. 'My talks with [the] President,' he added, '[are] increasingly intimate.'⁸⁰ In fact there were signs that he was overstaying his welcome in Washington. In the morning, he called Bernard Baruch to his room – 'while he was dressing,' as Ickes recorded, without making further comment than that 'Bernie . . . has known him intimately since the last war.' 'They tell me,' the P.M. ventured, 'that I have done a good job here.' 'You have done a one hundred percent job,' Baruch affirmed. 'But now you ought to get the hell out of here.'⁸¹

With a measure of relief the president learned that his British guest had 'accepted an invitation' to address the Canadian Parliament. He told his staff at 11:45 a.m. that the P.M. had also agreed in principle to Marshall's plan for unity of command in the Far East. He was about to send a radio-telegram to his cabinet in London, Roosevelt continued, reporting 'that the general thought was that the Far Eastern theater would include Malaya, Burma, the Philippine islands, Australia, and supply lines north of Australia.' He added that Churchill had agreed 'after a struggle' to the British and Dutch naval forces coming under an American admiral. ('This,' observed Stimson with satisfaction, 'had never been done before to the British navy and they kicked like bay steers.') The British General Wavell, Roosevelt added, would take over this new A.B.D.A. (American-British-Dutch-Australian) Command.⁸²

Before Sunday lunch that day, December 28, the prime minister informed Lord Halifax and the chiefs of staff of his morning's talks with the president.⁸³ He dictated a further telegram to Attlee, recommending that they accept the 'broadminded and selfless' American proposal for unity of command under Wavell, who should receive orders from a Joint Body responsible to the P.M. and Roosevelt.

immediately after lunch he left the White House from a private entrance, with carloads of G-men following. Symptoms of his own mortality seized

him as he drove with his doctor and the Canadian prime minister to the railroad station – or was he just playing to the gallery, childishly soliciting sympathy? He opened the car's window, saying he felt short of breath. 'It is a great comfort to have you with me,' he said – for the second time in four days – to Sir Charles.

Churchill remarked at once to Mackenzie King that he had succeeded beyond all expectations in solving the problem of command – that F.D.R. himself had suggested giving supreme command in the Pacific to Wavell, who was familiar with conditions in the Far East. He had left the command in the Atlantic untouched, as he did not want things to shape up with the Americans looking after the Pacific and the British the Atlantic.

The Americans had assembled a special train for him, with press cars in front and F.D.R.'s own cars in the rear, including a diner and observation car.⁸⁴ As the train set off at 2:15 p.m. Churchill joined Mackenzie King in his car. The Canadian suggested that he make a few remarks in his speech in French. Churchill needed no second bidding. When, over dinner, he tried to persuade Mackenzie King to introduce conscription in Canada, he ran however into stubborn opposition; for his host it was a matter of principle, one which he feared would split the Dominion.⁸⁵

As the train hauled into Ottawa at ten-thirty the next morning, December 29, 1941, the Canadian capital was splendidly blanketed in snow.⁸⁶ The Englishman thoroughly enjoyed the crowds; he struck poses with his cigar, he lifted his hat aloft on the end of his cane, and he made the V-sign with two fingers 'like a ten-year-old' as Mackenzie King wrote.

He had a hot bath run for him at government House. Several times he adjured Wilson to take his pulse. 'You're all right,' retorted the doctor, wise to these devices. 'Forget your damned heart.'⁸⁷ Outside, the climate was crisp and sunny; indoors, the static electricity crackled between fingertips and doorknobs.⁸⁸ London was never like this.

Addressing Canada's cabinet war committee Churchill confessed that 'he literally danced when he learned that Japan had attacked America.' He doubted that the Japanese could take Singapore – the fortress could hold out for six or eight months, he felt. In further remarks he prophesied that the Japanese would perhaps approach one side of India, and Hitler on the other. He was prepared to see the United States withdraw all her ships from the Atlantic to the Pacific; but 1943 would be the year of liberation, rescuing the countries the Nazis had overrun. He revealed to this select audience that the people had not been told the full story of Pearl Harbor —

the American losses were much worse than they had been told. When Mackenzie King gently raised the issue of Canada's lack of influence on strategic planning, Churchill spoke with feeling about the abrupt way that Casey, of Australia, had spoken to him only yesterday in Washington.⁸⁹

Over lunch with Mackenzie King and his cabinet there was little drinking. (Canada's abstemious, God-fearing prime minister had years earlier found Churchill quaffing hotel champagne at eleven a.m. and never forgot it.) Churchill was, as even his doctor could see, largely uninterested in this upright Canadian statesman, while the hard-drinking Roosevelt had cast a spell on him. Not that he was uninterested in the soldiers that Canada could provide: referring to the need that Britain would have for more manpower 'if much slaughter came,' he afterwards pressed Mackenzie King again to allow conscription, or to form a national government as he had in Britain. (The opposition parties in Canada favoured conscription).⁹⁰ He dined quietly with Mackenzie King at his old-fashioned official residence, Laurier House. The Canadian prime minister had not altered the house since his revered mother had died; a light burned perpetually before her photographs.

The next day, Tuesday the thirtieth, Winston delivered his speech to the Canadian Parliament. Truly large crowds greeted him all along the route and on the Parliament hill. As they walked together down the Hall of Fame, he whispered to Mackenzie King, 'What I am going to say will be all right.' 'And it was,' concurred Mackenzie King.

the flowery and stilted oratory was often meaningless in itself, but viewed even now, from afar, it seems as magnificent as a mighty oak in the full blaze of an autumn sun. Contrasting that great man Roosevelt – loud cheers – with the infamous villains in Berlin, Tokyo, and Rome, Churchill announced: 'There will be no halting or half measures, there will be no compromise or parley.'

These gangs of bandits have sought to darken the light of the world, have sought to stand between the common peoples of all the lands in their march forward into their inheritance. They shall themselves be cast into the pit of death and shame, and only when the earth has been cleansed and purged of their crimes and of their villainies will we turn from the task which they have forced upon us, a task which we are reluctant to undertake but which we shall now most faithfully and continuously discharge.

With Vichy France and the islands affair still rankling, he offered his own version of the fall of France – how Paul Reynaud’s government had suggested a solemn compact not to make a separate peace, how they had broken it in June 1940 and had even declined to take their government to North Africa to fight on. ‘But their generals misled them,’ scoffed Churchill. ‘When I warned them that Britain would fight on alone, whatever they did, their generals told their prime minister and his divided cabinet: “In three weeks England will have her neck wrung like a chicken.”’

‘Some chicken!’ hooted Churchill. And, as the laughter turned to cheers, ‘Some neck!’

It was a strong speech, as Halifax, listening to the broadcast observed; and ‘much better than the one he made at Washington.’ (Opinions on this differed: Mackenzie King personally thought it not as good: the delivery had showed evidence of fatigue, but this Canadian statesman took meticulous pains to avoid giving offence to anybody.) Churchill spoke of the gallant Dutch, who were still fighting at Britain’s side: ‘But the men of Bordeaux, the men of Vichy, they would do nothing like this. They lay prostrate at the foot of the conqueror: they fawned upon him.’ ‘Their only guarantee,’ he triumphed, ‘is Hitler’s good faith which, as everyone knows, biteth like the adder and stingeth like the asp.’ For one moment he lapsed into Churchillian French – the ploy suggested to him by Mackenzie King – drawing prolonged applause.⁹¹

An official group photograph was taken afterwards; as he left the Speaker’s apartment, Churchill regretted out loud that the Opposition Members had been left out, and he again pleaded with Mackenzie King to form a national government. The Canadian replied that when he had discussed this with Richard Hanson, the Opposition leader had pointed out that he had been elected to oppose Mackenzie King. In the Speaker’s apartments afterwards, Churchill found Mr Karsh, Ottawa’s society photographer, waiting for him. Karsh plucked the cigar from his eminent subject’s jaw; the resulting defiant scowl produced what was arguably one of the best portraits of Britain’s wartime prime minister.⁹²

They repaired to Laurier House for dinner. ‘After dinner,’ Mackenzie King dictated in his diary, ‘to show how frisky he was, Churchill would not come up in the elevator but ran upstairs fairly fast to the first floor.’ ‘He found after that,’ he added, ‘it was as well to go easy.’⁹³

in far-away Malaya, the Japanese troops were now bearing down on the British empire's fortress at Singapore. The defenders had few weapons and no modern aircraft. 'If Malay Peninsula has been starved for the sake of Libya and Russia,' Churchill defiantly cabled to Mr Attlee, rather speciously combining Singapore with the latter, happier theatres of war, 'no one is more responsible than I, and I would do exactly the same again.'⁹⁴

At eleven a.m. the next day, December 31, answering newspapermen's questions before departing Ottawa by train, he expressed continued confidence that Singapore could hold out. A journalist asked if he had received any peace feelers from the Axis powers. 'We have had none at all,' the prime minister said, adding: 'But then I really think they must be hard pressed for materials of all kinds, and would not want to waste the paper and ink.'⁹⁵

They left Ottawa at three p.m.⁹⁶ Through steamed-up windows rimed with layers of frost he could see the white-iced Canadian countryside float by. Sometimes the locomotive's steam-whistle howled, there was a brief Doppler of clanging bells, and he glimpsed knots of people standing at crossing gates, waving as the train rattled past. He wondered how they knew he was aboard. On one slow incline he fancied he saw an old Canadian of seventy or more, white-haired, ramrod erect, searching each window as it crawled past him until their eyes met; the stranger doffed his hat to the empire's first minister.

As midnight approached, and with it the New Year, the train was hammering the railroad tracks of New England. The American reporters invited him into their dining car. A well-oiled cheer greeted him. Some of the reporters were in bathrobes and slippers, he himself in his siren suit. Jackie Martin, picture editor of the *Chicago Sun*, was momentarily awed. 'It was the Teddy bear suit,' she wrote to a friend a few days later, 'the ruddy cheeks, the white hair, and the slightly bowed head. His hand was reaching for the glass. . . . We cheered lustily for it was midnight. It was 1942.'⁹⁷

'To the New Year!' announced Churchill. 'Here's to a year of struggle and peril, and a long step forward.'

He puffed at his cigar, linked arms with Sir Charles Portal, Tommy Thompson, a British reporter and some Americans to sing *Auld Lane Syne*; then raised a pink and chubby hand for silence. 'May we all come through safe,' he cried, 'and with honour!'

He flipped them a V-sign and vanished to his stateroom.

15: *The Completest Intimacy*

Churchill's proposal to allow President Roosevelt to establish a seat of supreme command in Washington aroused consternation among his colleagues in London. The cabinet felt that the prime minister had swallowed Roosevelt's scheme with too much enthusiasm. General Sir Alan Brooke, the C.I.G.S., candidly described the whole scheme as 'wild and half-baked,' and noted that it catered for only one area of action, the Western Pacific, and only one enemy, Japan.¹ 'The whole thing is incredibly sketchy,' wrote one minister.² Brooke recorded that the cabinet was 'forced to accept P.M.'s new scheme owing to the fact that it was almost a "fait accompli".' He could not fathom why, with America's forces as yet unprepared, Britain should abdicate central control to Washington. He shortly found more flaws: Churchill's draft charter placed Burma under Wavell's command, but not China, Australia, or New Zealand. It seemed a most unsatisfactory structure.

Churchill was instinctively relying on less tangible values. He was forging a relationship with the president, involving a special closeness and even an intimacy – an intimacy which he would put on display on the first day of this New Year, 1942.

at midday on January 1, 1942 Churchill's train puffed back into Washington.³ He repaired to the White House for an immediate hot bath, and sent for his shorthand writer, Patrick Kinna, while still going about his afternoon ablutions. This was nothing new. John Martin and other private secretaries had been subjected to the same male-bonding ordeal, but not, so far, a foreign head of state. After a while, the president was announced. The P.M. stepped from the bath into a towel held by his valet, but he casually allowed this to drop while pacing the room and continuing his dictation.

He affected not to hear the knock at the door. Roosevelt was wheeled in. Churchill is said to have exclaimed, 'You see, Mr President, I have nothing to conceal from you.'

This bathroom incident became the talk of many tongues in Washington. At the state department, Adolph Berle reported it in his diary.⁴ From the British embassy, Lord Halifax communicated it to Eden in these words: 'Winston . . . has got onto the most intimate terms with the president, who visits him in his bedroom at any hour and, as Winston says, is the only head of State whom he, Winston, has ever received in the nude!'⁵ Newspaper columnist Arthur Krock noted the little episode for his own files.⁶ Churchill himself was still boasting of it ten years later.⁷

Roosevelt was holding a document. He said that he had noticed Churchill fumble once during his broadcast speech, trying first the phrase 'Allied nations,' and then 'Associated nations.' F.D.R. said he had mulled this over. 'How about "United Nations"?' he asked. Churchill reached for the towel. 'I think you've got the answer,' he said. Roosevelt wrote the heading onto the document. 'Joint declaration by the United Nations,' and that is how it would go into history. At the back of his mind was the process – not entirely dissimilar – whereby the United States had been named in 1776.⁸

The great American took his guests out that afternoon to a service at the church in Alexandria where George Washington had been a sidesman, then on to Mount Vernon for Winston to lay a wreath at Washington's tomb. ('I think there will be photographers there,' the prime minister told Lord Halifax, eager that no moment of summit intimacy should go unrecorded.) 'Winston,' wrote the ambassador, 'gave the president for his general betterment a short lecture on India, which he did quite well.'⁹

Over after-dinner drinks the Joint Declaration on the United Nations was finalised by Churchill, Roosevelt, Litvinov, and the Chinese ambassador.¹⁰ Once more the ghost of de Gaulle dogged the ceremony: Hull stayed away, still sulking. 'His antagonism to the Free French,' observed Hopkins, 'is very deep-seated and he still believes there is some way we can get on with Vichy.'¹¹ There were other problems. The Dutch government found that Washington was announcing that agreement had been reached on commands in the Far East with their concurrence, 'when that concurrence had not in fact been obtained.' Litvinov objected to two words, '*or authorities*,' being inserted in the final paragraph, after the words, 'The foregoing declaration will be adhered to by other nations . . .' Churchill heatedly exclaimed that Litvinov was not much of an ambassador if he didn't have the power to

authorise such trifling additions. 'We are in a war,' he said. 'And there is no time for long-winded negotiations.' Litvinov still demurred and the words were dropped.¹² A few days later he made to Hopkins the malevolent prophecy that Winston would 'not be very useful after the war was over.'

The phrase 'United Nations' did however prove useful. Churchill used it immediately, in a message to Cordell Hull agreeing to put pressure on de Gaulle if he refused to withdraw from the islands. A handful of Canadians, he wrote, would remain 'to make sure that the important radio station shall not be used contrary to the interests of the United Nations.' He proposed issuing a joint statement, he said, that the general had taken his action 'in the face of the declared orders of the British government.'¹³

There were conferences on war supplies on January 2 and 3, 1942, but Churchill was happy to leave these negotiations to Lord Beaverbrook. The Canadian persuaded the president to set inflated American war production targets for 1942: the arms manufacturing expert William S. Knudsen was planning to turn out thirty thousand tanks in 1942 – Beaverbrook persuaded Roosevelt to aim at forty-five. Instead of 12,750 aeroplanes, the United States would plan to produce forty-five thousand in 1942, and even more splendid targets were set for 1943. Informing London of these figures, the prime minister praised Beaverbrook as 'magnificent.'¹⁴

'we live here as a big family,' he cabled on January 3, 'in the greatest intimacy and informality.'¹⁵

Before he left Washington Roosevelt called a conference on future operations at five-thirty p.m. on Sunday January 4 in his upstairs study. Henry Stimson raised the prospect of packing American forces into Northern Ireland to release the three British divisions there. Churchill spoke of the 'tremendous importance' of beginning this movement, *magnet*, at once. When discussion turned to *gymnast*, the prime minister's own plan for an expedition to French North-West Africa, there was little American enthusiasm. Stimson listed the 'cardinal objections and problems,' as he saw them. For ninety minutes they examined ways of accelerating the inevitably slow rate of landing troops in North Africa. 'Churchill observed,' the record stated, 'that if we could complete the movement in one month, the opposition (from the Germans) would undoubtedly be small, but that if it takes four months we would probably be blasted out.' The Americans still disliked the whole idea. Stimson commented on the lack of Intelligence data about the region. Roosevelt was no more encouraging. The operation hinged

on getting the Vichy French to invite the Allies in. 'And that,' remarked the president, 'is in the lap of the gods.'¹⁶

The time factor in all of this could not be ignored either. Roosevelt had been sobered by news that the Japanese were about to take Manila, capital of the Philippines. In Libya final victory seemed to have eluded Auchinleck after all. The P.M. seemed so reluctant to return to London that President Roosevelt hinted that the Englishman might like to accept the invitation which Edward R. Stettinius, his lend-lease administrator, had extended to him to vacation at his secluded beach bungalow in Florida. Sir Charles Wilson endorsed the idea. Thus, taking only the already overworked General Marshall with him – a final 'thoughtlessness' which 'troubled and distressed' Stimson¹⁷ – Churchill's party flew to Morrison Field at West Palm Beach early on the fifth, flying the eight hundred miles south in an army plane, and settled into Stettinius' villa at Pompano Beach.¹⁸

Since it would not do, at this taut pass in Britain's imperial fortunes, for photographs to appear of the P.M. gambolling in the Floridian sunshine, the secret service guarded him closely, and the locals were told that a Mr Loeb, a wealthy invalid, was convalescing at the house. Churchill ordered a D-notice issued to the British press forbidding any mention.¹⁹ He plunged into the sea as naked as the day he was born; he was severely rolled over by rough waves, whereupon he picked himself up and shook his fist at the sea. 'It sounded like Canute,' remarked Halifax in his diary, hearing of this from Roosevelt afterwards.²⁰ For once Churchill forgot even to talk about his heart. 'It was an opportunity,' wrote his private secretary in a letter home, 'for him to clear his mind of various things, but we . . . were of course connected with Washington by telephone; and a courier once, and sometimes twice, a day brought down a pouch to us by aeroplane.'

While reclining in the mellow southern sunlight, as he recalled in his memoirs, Churchill maintained a ceaseless barrage of memoranda. One was about the famine threatening neutral Spain. He invited F.D.R. to 'consider giving a few rationed carrots to the Dons to help stave off trouble at Gibraltar.' The British empire base there was vital to Mediterranean operations.²¹ 'Every day we have the use of the harbour there is a gain,' he explained, 'especially in view of some other ideas we have discussed' – a reference to gymnast.²² In a further telegram to Attlee he addressed the concerns about India, to which we shall shortly return.²³ It was here, at Pompano Beach, that he received the secret news that Italian 'human torpedoes' had crippled the battleships *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* at Alexandria.²⁴

He ordered planes sent out from England to reinforce the Mediterranean, even if this meant a 'relaxation' of the bombing offensive against Germany over which questions marks still hung. (Alarmed that the enemy might use these 'human torpedoes' against Scapa Flow, he cross-examined Admiral Pound about the patrols there.²⁵)

in libya the fighting had died down, with Auchinleck denied complete victory over Rommel. In fact the cost of *Crusader* had been cruel. The British had lost 1,200 officers and sixteen thousand men. Nor it seemed had Churchill defeated Britain's critics on Capitol Hill. When Roosevelt now addressed the Congress it was noticed that the mentions of Churchill, and about how well they got on together, evinced not a flicker of applause. There was only token approval of his decision to send American troops to Ireland, and silence again when he asked Congress to appropriate fifty-six billion dollars for the war in the coming year. 'Britain is not popular even yet,' wrote Mackenzie King, 'despite all the heroic resistance she has given.' He deduced that the legislators regarded Churchill as having unduly influenced their president.²⁶ General 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell, of the U.S. war department, felt the same: 'The Limies have our boys hypnotized,' he recorded on the same day: and two days later. 'We now concentrate on *gymnast*. Everybody sure it's a crazy gamble. Sucked in by British (our air materials still going to England. Our own units strained to zero.) The whole goddamned thing is cock-eyed. We should clear the Pacific *first* and then face East.'²⁷

Anthony Eden had meanwhile returned from Moscow to London, having evidently gotten onto terms of scarcely less intimacy with Stalin than those of Churchill with Roosevelt.²⁸ He told his cabinet colleagues of a dinner party with Stalin at which General S. K. Timoshenko had arrived drunk but turned sober, while General K. E. Voroshilov had arrived sober and was carried out in a stupor at four a.m. 'What does your Winston Churchill do when his field-marsals get as drunk as this?' Stalin had belled as Voroshilov collapsed across his knees. A cabinet minister who had seen Churchill approach this condition rather more often than his generals recorded Eden's description with merriment in his diary.

Himself intoxicated by the allures of this new Peter the Great, the British foreign secretary commended to the P.M. all of Stalin's claims to the Baltic states Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and asked him to put them before the president. To Churchill, who had drafted the Atlantic Charter barely four months before, such an act was unthinkable. 'If that were done,' his

doctor heard him say, 'it would dishonour our cause.'²⁹ He flashed these truculent words across the Atlantic to his young protégé:

We have never recognised the 1941 frontiers of Russia, except *de facto*. They were acquired by acts of aggression in shameful collusion with Hitler. The transfer of the peoples of the Baltic States to Soviet Russia against their will would be contrary to all the principles for which we are fighting this war...

The same applied to the territories of Romania and Finland on which Stalin had designs. Churchill envisaged instead a complex but democratic process of post-war plebiscites, population transfers, and compensation. 'In any case,' he ruled, 'there can be no questions of settling frontiers until the Peace Conference.' He showed how little he cared for possible Soviet consternation at this stubborn attitude: 'It must be observed,' he reminded Eden, 'that they entered the war only when attacked by Germany, having previously shown themselves utterly indifferent to our fate.' He added, 'No one can foresee how the balance of power will lie or where the winning armies will stand at the end of the war. It seems probable however that the United States and the British empire, far from being exhausted, will be the most powerfully armed and economic bloc the world has ever seen, and that the Soviet Union will need our aid for reconstruction far more than we shall need theirs.' 'There must be no mistake,' he thundered in this blunt telegram to London, 'about the opinion of any British government of which I am head.'³⁰ When he phoned Lord Halifax later that evening, January 8, the ambassador remarked upon the acerbity of this reply. 'Winston,' he wrote in his diary, 'said he had been greatly surprised with Anthony.'³¹

resting in Florida, Churchill dictated yet another overview of Britain's strategic position. It said little that was new. Since it was for the president's eyes only, it exaggerated as usual the likelihood of a German invasion of Britain in 1942, as 'the only supreme means of escape and victory open to Hitler.' He expressed concern however that General 'von Rommel' as he referred to him, might put up a stubborn resistance in Cyrenaica even now. Hoping to regain the initiative, he defined Britain's task as being to engage Germany in the air whenever possible, since the Allies could replace war-planes faster than Hitler. 'Every German aircraft or pilot put out of action in 1942,' he reasoned, 'is worth two of them in 1943.'

Forewarned by his Oracle, he predicted that Hitler would strike out toward the Soviet oil sources at Baku in the spring. All in all, defeating Germany must definitely come before Japan.³²

Probably while still in Florida he was obliged to review the ugly possibility that Hitler, in violation of the Geneva Agreement of 1925, might unleash not only poison gas, but germ warfare. On the day before Pearl Harbor, Lord Hankey had written him explaining that the late Neville Chamberlain had authorised him, a few days after Hitler invaded Poland, to commission germ warfare experiments, though strictly from a defensive standpoint. Scientists at the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down in Wiltshire had begun tests with anthrax in 1940. Both the British and the Americans had developed a second toxin, *botulinum* – of which the merest dot, a two-hundredth of a milligram, would kill a half-pound guinea pig; the scientists at Porton had suggested using it as a poisonous tip for small-arms ammunition. There was a third toxin, code-named 'L,' but it required large manufacturing plants. Most probably the Germans would use anthrax, to which there was no known antidote.

Before leaving London for Washington, Churchill had turned the problem over to the chiefs of staff.³³ According to Lord Hankey's report, Britain could retaliate by scattering across Germany two million cattle-cakes steeped in anthrax, and he recommended stockpiling this quantity now. General Ismay insisted however that the *defence committee*, their political masters, review the grim proposal.³⁴ Sir Archibald Sinclair referred unhappily to earlier such dilutions of their bombing effort, for example to phosphorus wafers designed to ignite Germany's crops; but the *defence committee* gave the order at the beginning of 1942 to manufacture two tons of anthrax pellets, under the code name *vegetarian*, provided that there was no possibility that the weapon would 'recoil upon ourselves or our Allies.'

This was what Churchill was now told; and there, thank God, the matter rested until 1944.³⁵

he had hoped to renew his acquaintance with Wendell Willkie, whom F.D.R. had defeated in the presidential election, before leaving, despite a perceptible reluctance on the president's part to let him meet any opposition leaders. Since protocol required that all of the P.M.'s calls be routed through the distant White House, John Martin, phoning from Florida to set up the call, asked the switchboard in Washington to put the call through. The operator connected the call, but not to Willkie. For a few moments of black

comedy the P.M. imagined that he was speaking to the president's opponent, a gentleman with whom Roosevelt was not on fair terms. 'I mustn't tell you on an open line how we shall be travelling,' Martin heard his master say coquettishly. 'But we shall be coming by puff-puff.' Then Churchill flirted more outrageously. 'Can you not join the train at some point and travel with me for a few hours?'

'Whom do you think you are speaking to?' the voice at the Washington end drawled. 'To Mr Wendell Willkie, am I not?' said Churchill. President Roosevelt – for it was he – sternly wished him an enjoyable stay in Florida.³⁶

Churchill had to forego the tryst with Willkie. Aghast at his own *faux pas* he wrote to Harry Hopkins asking for absolution. 'I rely on you,' he wrote, 'to let me know if this action . . . is in any way considered inappropriate.'

for mr churchill's party, two Pullman cars had been attached to the rear of the regular east coast overnight train to Washington. It was eleven in the morning when he reached the capital.³⁷ His spirits began to sink; with each mile that he now drew closer to London, the war's already lowering horizon darkened. Japanese forces were flooding into Johore in Malaya; they had invaded the Dutch East Indies too. In North Africa, Rommel was not beaten after all. He had eluded the empire forces ponderously pounding after him, and had withdrawn his Panzer Army, as it now was, to a new defensive line, thus thwarting General Auchinleck's hopes of evicting the Axis from Libya altogether. 'I am sure you and your armies did all in human powers,' Churchill gloomily consoled the general, 'but we must face facts as they are' – words which implied that he, like General Brooke, was beginning to doubt Auchinleck's appreciations of the enemy's losses.³⁸

A messenger brought round a letter from Lord Halifax. 'You have had the principal share,' the ambassador assured him, 'in the recovery of American morale. . . I don't think you have ever done a better fortnight's work in value!' After this subtle flattery, he amplified what he had said to the P.M. on the phone three days before, about the need to placate Stalin. 'You truly say that it is much more easy to deal with the selfish than with the lunatics and the altruists, but it is just because of this that I feel uneasy as to what may be the result of meeting his question [on the Baltic states] by . . . a negative reply.'³⁹

Bearing this advice in mind, Churchill cabled to Stalin: 'I am emphasising in my talks here the extreme importance of making punctual deliveries to Russia of the promised quotas.'⁴⁰ When he learned however that

Beaverbrook had approved cuts of American aid to Britain in order to meet these quotas, his anger boiled over and in front of Roosevelt he vented it upon his friend. Lord Beaverbrook went off to his hotel room, and wrote out yet another letter of resignation to the prime minister.⁴¹

A further embittered telegram arrived from Australia. 'It is naturally disturbing,' John Curtin complained, 'to learn that the Japanese have been able to overrun so easily the whole of Malaya except Johore. . . . It is observed that the 8th Australian Division is to be given the task of fighting the decisive battle.' With the needless Australian losses in the spring Balkan campaign of 1941 uppermost in his people's minds, Curtin urged Churchill to leave nothing undone this time. 'I am particularly concerned,' his message continued, 'in regard to air strength, as a repetition of the Greece and Crete campaign would evoke a violent public reaction.'⁴²

The Balkan fiasco was a sore point for Churchill, and he dictated a glacial reply. 'I do not see,' this read, 'how anyone could expect Malaya to be defended once the Japanese obtained command of the sea and whilst we are fighting for our lives against Germany and Italy.' While he was optimistic about Singapore's defences, he rejected Curtin's other reproaches. 'I do not accept any censure about Crete and Greece.' After admitting the empire's mounting losses in warships and men, he reported that there was ominous news from Auchinleck. 'A heavy battle around Agheila seems to be impending.'⁴³

Later that night the president revived the – for Churchill – increasingly tedious matter of General de Gaulle's seizure of the islands. This was, he felt, an urgent issue, in view of their need to persuade the Vichy French to invite the Allies to invade French North Africa. Large numbers of French officers were making overtures to the Americans, he said: 'Admiral Darlan [the Vichy French prime minister and fleet commander] had asked if he would be accepted into a conference. The Americans had replied, 'Not under the present circumstances,' but if Darlan brought the French fleet over to the Allies, the situation would of course change.

'United States relations with Vichy have strengthened since [the] German–American war,' Churchill had to advise Eden in a telegram. 'He does not wish to break sharply with Vichy.' After setting out his own proposals for evicting Admiral Muselier's forces from the two islands, he instructed the foreign secretary: 'You should tell de Gaulle that this is our settled policy, and that he must bow to it. He has put himself entirely in the wrong by his breach of faith. If he is to retain any measure of our recognition he

must send orders to Muselier which the latter will obey.' Should the admiral disobey, added the prime minister, Washington was in a mood to use force – 'i.e., the battleship *Arkansas* which the president mentioned, or starvation without stint' – and he himself would not intervene to save de Gaulle from the consequences. 'We shall soon be flitting,' he concluded this hitherto unpublished telegram, 'and I must settle this before I go.'⁴⁴

He supplied a copy of this to Harry Hopkins, and a copy of London's unhelpful response: 'Public opinion here,' cabled Attlee, who was also Leader of the Labour Party, 'would not understand why . . . de Gaulle was not allowed to occupy French territory which welcomed him. People will not appreciate going easy with Vichy.'⁴⁵ Eden told Churchill, 'Cabinet . . . doubt whether it will be possible to obtain his consent and co-operation, and they would feel greatest reluctance to join in coercing him.' How sorely the P.M. now regretted ever having created General de Gaulle.⁴⁶ It was an augury of even uglier difficulties that were to arise with the general at the end of the year.

There remained important negotiations about a 'Combined Chiefs of Staff,' a new body, to be based in Washington, linking the British and American chiefs of staff. Speaking privately with Roosevelt, General Marshall, still unsympathetic to the British, objected to Churchill's proposals for this body. 'The British, observed Henry Stimson, 'are evidently taking advantage of the president's well-known shortcomings in ordinary administrative methods.'⁴⁷

Privately, Roosevelt promised to send fifty thousand American troops to defend Australia and the South Pacific islands covering its approach.⁴⁸ Libya however was an unexpected setback. 'It looks,' Churchill conceded, meeting Roosevelt and the new Combined Chiefs of Staff on the twelfth, 'as if Rommel might get away.'⁴⁹ He attempted to downplay the significance of this setback. It would, he suggested, give them more time to prepare for *gymnast*. Roosevelt was optimistic too. At a dinner hosted by Churchill at the British embassy that evening, Colonel Knox, secretary of the Navy, showed that he too wanted to see *gymnast* prepared immediately; and General Bill Donovan, Roosevelt's 'Co-ordinator of Information' pitched in with them.⁵⁰

Overshadowing all such amphibious operations was their shortage of troop-carrying ships. One evening Marshall asked the prime minister about the two great ocean liners *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*, which were to be used as fast troopships. They had life rafts for only eight thousand men,

but each could carry sixteen thousand American troops. Churchill told the general, 'You must judge for yourself.'⁵¹

On lend-lease too, the Americans drew a blank. Once or twice during these final days they had hoped to debate Article VII of the master lend-lease agreement and their insistence on the prohibition of the 'discriminatory' trade practices which were at the core of imperial preference.⁵² Churchill airily side-stepped all such discussions.

On January 13, wagging a cigar and wearing his siren suit, he stepped into Hopkins's room and found Hopkins, himself clad in pyjamas and dressing gown, conferring with Budget Director Harold Smith and Justice James Byrnes. Churchill smoothly steered the talk away from Article VII and the funding of the war, to the art of oratory. 'Byrnes,' recorded Smith in his diary, 'commented to the prime minister upon the skilful manner in which, in both his speech to the Congress and to the Parliament in Canada the prime minister in short, sarcastic words referred to Mussolini.' Churchill acknowledged that he had developed his references to the Duce into an art. 'Sarcasm,' he said, 'to be effective, has to be short.'⁵³



That day, January 13, 1942, a pessimistic dispatch came from Lord Moyne, the Colonial Secretary, on the weakness of the defences of Singapore. Churchill was shocked. 'Why,' he challenged his colleagues in London, in an anguished telegram, 'did not Duff Cooper report the lack of preparations and provision of gas-masks, steel hats, etc., for civil population? These elements of deficiency must have been known to him, before war broke out.'⁵⁴ Later still, a message came from General Wavell, now installed in the Dutch East Indies. 'Battle for Singapore will be [a] close run thing,' this said, 'and we shall need luck in getting in convoys safely...'⁵⁵ The troopship *Mount Vernon* had now docked at Singapore and was unloading nine thousand troops, fifty anti-tank guns and fifty Hurricane fighters – but the latter were still in wooden crates, and would take weeks to assemble.⁵⁶

In the map-room, following on the charts the Japanese advance down the peninsula, Churchill fretted. 'What are the defences and obstructions on the landward side?' he signalled to Wavell, and he demanded confirmation that the defenders could 'dominate with Fortress cannon' any Japanese attempt to bring up siege batteries.⁵⁷

The problem lay with the quality of his commanders. Many were Churchill's personal friends. He had balked at the cabinet's recent demand to remove the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham from the New Year's Honours List (he was down for a baronetcy) and he stoutly defended the officer against Australia's fury. Meeting him in Singapore twelve months earlier, Robert Menzies had been shocked at what he found: Brooke-Popham liked to meet visitors coming off the Clipper wearing a pith helmet and with the tail of his khaki bush shirt hanging. His shoulders were stooped, his sandy hair and moustache wispy and indeterminate. Before sending him out, Menzies learned, Churchill had lunched Brooke-Popham and sent him on his way with these words: 'Hold out to the last, my boy. God bless you. If your grandfather had not broken his neck playing polo at Poona, he would be proud of you this day.'⁵⁸ As recently as October 1, Brooke-Popham had assured the cabinet that a campaign here, in the south, was 'the last thing Japan wants at this juncture': in his view the Japanese were winding up for a strike against the Soviet Union.

they had reached January 14, 1942, the last day of their visit to Washington. For whatever cause, and no doubt remarks passed recently by the president were the reason, Churchill considered it advisable to dictate a reminder to him that he had promised to confirm publicly that, despite the recent Bases Agreement, there was to be 'no question' of any transfer of the British West Indies to the United States.⁵⁹ Two years later Roosevelt still chuckled mischievously when he recalled Churchill's anxiety. 'I'm a mixture of Scots and Dutch ancestry,' he quipped in reply, 'and if there is one thing I won't do is buy a headache.' He had learned what these colonies cost the British taxpayer. 'The United States has no desire whatsoever,' he continued, 'to take over these islands. All we want is a small piece of property on each one for bases.'⁶⁰ This, he insisted, was his last territorial demand.

At a farewell White House conference he gabbled through to his colleagues a series of proposals.⁶¹ In addition to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, he proposed to set up Anglo-American boards to allocate raw materials, shipping space, and munitions. 'It was very difficult to appraise them,' grouched Henry Stimson in his diary, 'when they were shot at me in this way.'⁶² The conference rambled across many topics. George Marshall evidently revealed his latent hostility to the British for the first time because General Stilwell, over at the war department, heard almost at once that 'Geo.' had 'ticked off' [displeased] the prime minister 'and got away with

it.’⁶³ Marshall warned that the scrambler system for transatlantic telephone calls assured privacy, but not secrecy. Sir Charles Portal spoke of a British invention ‘which would insure secret radio telephonic transmission.’*

They reverted to *gymnast*. Roosevelt hoped they could launch this as early as May 1942; they idly considered what to do if Hitler got there first. ‘In this case,’ said Churchill, ‘we should make a slash with whatever forces were available and, if necessary, operate on the guerrilla basis.’

Roosevelt ordered Scotch and soda all round.⁶⁴ They drank to the ‘hope of mutual co-operation.’ ‘The time had now come,’ wrote Churchill later, ‘when I must leave the hospitable and exhilarating atmosphere of the White House and of the American nation, erect and infuriate against tyrants and aggressors. It was to no sunlit prospect that I must return.’⁶⁵

The president and Hopkins drove with him through downtown Washington to Sixth-street, where a special train waited on the sidings. They boarded a Pullman car named after explorer Roald Amundsen, and parted.

On the way back to the White House, the president remarked that he was very pleased with the meetings. ‘There was no question,’ noted Hopkins, ‘but that he grew genuinely to like Churchill.’⁶⁶ He was also relieved to see the British go. Later he remarked to Lord Halifax that the prime minister and Beaverbrook were apt to get under each other’s skin, which could be tedious for others. Winston lived on his nerves, observed Halifax; to which Roosevelt replied that he, the president, could and did get away from the war to nature, or to his books, whenever he could.⁶⁷ Hopkins remarked that to have Winston over more than twice a year would be very exhausting – he himself had never got to bed before two or three a.m., as Winston, after finishing with the president, had always gone into his room ‘for one more drink.’ Once, barely four hours later, the door had opened and a barefoot Winston had padded in saying, ‘Have you done anything about what we were discussing last night?’⁶⁸



The British party took off from the naval base at Norfolk, Virginia, in the early hours of January 15 aboard a seaplane, one of the British Overseas Airways Corporation’s new Boeing Clippers. J. C. Kelly Rogers, the company’s senior flying-boat captain, was at the controls. Stopping at Bermuda,

* See Appendix II.

Churchill addressed their parliament, the oldest in the empire.⁶⁹ He pleaded with the islanders to give all their aid to the establishment of the American bases 'about which,' he later reminisced, 'they were in some distress.' A battleship was waiting at Bermuda for his party. They all had vivid memories of the stormy outward crossing, however, and Churchill, pleading urgent business in the Mother of Parliaments, persuaded Captain Rogers to fly him and a fortunate few onward to Plymouth, England.

The decision provoked some discreet jostling for the other seats. Sir Charles Wilson insisted that a doctor must be aboard. Less successfully Commander 'Tommy' Thompson – no sea-dog, he – persuaded a BOAC steward to change places with him, only to be thwarted by the captain. Pound and Portal dwelt on the risks of air travel, until Churchill invited them to accompany him. Eventually much baggage had to be left behind. The Clipper traversed the three thousand three hundred miles to Plymouth at nine thousand feet, cruising at a stately two hundred miles per hour.⁷⁰ Churchill, still 'fording the might Arpes river' in his mind,⁷¹ ever the adventurer, subsequently thrilled readers with his account of how the boat only barely got airborne at Bermuda – 'I must confess that I felt rather frightened' – and came within five minutes of the enemy flak batteries at Brest. R.A.F. Fighter Command, he further claimed, reported the B.O.A.C. Clipper 'as a hostile bomber squadron' and scrambled six Hurricane fighters to shoot it down. 'However they failed in their mission.'

This embroidery upon a valiant flight, while attracting the awe of subsequent biographers, finds no sustenance in the archives.⁷²



'Trust me to the bitter end!' President Roosevelt's farewell words rang in Churchill's ears as his special train left Plymouth.⁷³ The *Daily Express* that morning had front-paged a news story about a feature in *Life* exposing the military weakness of Singapore; it was a damning indictment of the empire's civil servants in Malaya. 'There seems to be plenty of snarling,' the P.M. remarked wearily to Sir Charles Wilson.⁷⁴ His ministers – Brooke called them 'a queer crowd . . . in black slouch sombreros and astrakhan collars' – elbowed each other for the best positions on the platform as the train drew in to Paddington.⁷⁵ He was indeed, assessed one critical observer, a great man to have established such a dominion over his colleagues, 'even if they are a poor lot.'⁷⁶

The photos showed the prime minister in good form. 'He may need it for the debate on Tuesday,' wrote one newspaperman, studying the prints.⁷⁷

Churchill related his American experiences to his six p.m. cabinet. He told them of the White House's proposals to pool resources and to agree upon Hitler as 'our major enemy.' 'An Olympian calm,' he reported, 'had obtained at the White House. It was perhaps rather isolated,' he continued, adopting a tone more critical of transatlantic methods. 'The president had no adequate link between his will and executive action.' Thus Roosevelt's meetings with Stimson and Knox had been too informal. On the other hand Harry Hopkins's instincts were 'fundamentally sound,' he believed, and the Americans were 'not above learning from us – provided that we did not set out to teach them.'⁷⁸ The United States had clearly struck a most sympathetic chord in this product of Anglo-American breeding. 'Curiously enough,' observed one shrewd cabinet minister in his diary, 'he never said a word about Canada.'⁷⁹ He did seem however to have attained the 'completest intimacy' with Roosevelt.

Some of the more prickly issues had been left in abeyance. Imperial preference was one. During Churchill's absence, Beaverbrook and Amery had held out against any form of compromise, and most of their cabinet colleagues opposed any weakening of imperial preference in return for Lend-Lease. Amery warned of the terrible sense of betrayal that would run through the empire, if the reward for its sacrifices in this war was to be the disbanding of its very economic basis.⁸⁰ Anthony Eden however, backed by Lord Halifax in Washington, inclined to the American view.⁸¹ Churchill equally feared to upset the Americans. He hoped the problem would go away, comforting the cabinet on his return from Washington in January with the remark that it was all 'just a fad of Cordell Hull's' and it could be left until after the war.⁸²

the political crisis at home could not be so easily disregarded. Chill tidings of distant disasters were gusting down Fleet-street; the editors knew by now that Singapore's water supply came from the mainland, so it could not hold out for long. On January 18 the Japanese announced that they had captured the empire's last airfield and were fifty miles from the fortress. The House was in uproar. Harold Macmillan sensed that its Members were as 'disturbed' as at the time of Norway.⁸³ The Conservative Chief Whip, James Stuart, hinted at changes in the government, including even the discharge of Churchill's son-in-law Duncan Sandys and Lord Cherwell, as the

Prof. was now styled. Late that evening Downing-street announced that the prime minister would not be speaking in the debate on Tuesday the twentieth after all, but perhaps a week later – and perhaps not even then.⁸⁴

He would have to address both the House and the nation. He had cabled plaintively from Washington a week earlier about this 'burden of my having to deliver the speech again on the 9 o'clock broadcast.'⁸⁵ He hoped, since he loathed broadcasting, to have the speech to the House recorded and broadcast. Emboldened by his absence the cabinet rejected his plea. When he raised it again in person on the nineteenth, and called for a show of hands, he found he had persuaded them after all.⁸⁶ (The House, jealous of its privileges, still refused to allow the broadcast.)

on monday morning, January 19, the real Far East nightmare began, with General Wavell's response to Churchill's inquiry about Singapore's defences.⁸⁷ The Japanese were now claiming to be less than twenty-five miles from the fortress, Churchill now learned that Singapore had no defences whatsoever in the rear, against a crossing of the Johore Straits. Bad enough that the Japanese had made such rapid progress through Johore, although he had been assured that it would be waterlogged for months; it now emerged that Singapore's guns were all directed out to sea. Angry metaphors danced in his head – exhausted troops retreating upon an 'almost naked island,' a battleship without a bottom. 'I cannot understand how it was that I did not know this' he wrote years later.

Wavell's telegram, which was dated three days earlier, staggered him. In a towering rage he thrust it into 'Pug' Ismay's hands. The general could scarcely believe his eyes. 'You were with the Committee of Imperial Defence for several years,' challenged the P.M. 'Why did you not warn me?'⁸⁸ Ismay had taken for granted that the local command would provide for landward defences. The local commander, Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival, had done nothing.

Sending for a secretary, the prime minister dictated a crisp memorandum, directed as much at the unreasoning glare of History as at the chiefs of staff to whom it was formally addressed: 'What is the use,' this asked, 'of having an island for a fortress if it is not to be made into a citadel?' It was elementary, he wrote, to construct even in peacetime a defence line of searchlights and cross fire combined with barbed-wire entanglements and the swamps, and to enable the fortress guns to dominate the land approaches in Johore. Britain had spent twenty years building this fortress, and these

measures had occurred to nobody – least of all of course to himself: ‘How is it that not one of you pointed this out to me?’ He demanded the names of those who had promised that the terrain north of Johore would be water-logged, an opinion ‘so violently falsified by events.’ This neglect had now put Singapore ‘at the mercy of 10,000 men breaking across the Straits in small boats.’⁸⁹

He set out a sombre ten-point plan to salvage the situation – proposals for minefields, artillery, and defensive works on which ‘the entire male population’ was to labour, and for a resolute defence of the island point by point, with the city itself ‘defended to the death.’ In no mood for mercy now, he dictated: ‘The Commander, Staffs, and principal Officers are expected to perish at their posts.’

Lunching at Buckingham Palace he evidently said nothing about the staggering news from Singapore, but reassured his monarch that he was confident of ultimate victory. The United States were longing to ‘get to grips’ with the enemy. That was his trump card. Their two nations, he said, were now ‘married’ after months of ‘walking out.’⁹⁰ By six p.m. he had learned that the Navy had failed to send even a corvette to prevent the Japanese from leap-frogging southwards down the Malay peninsula’s west coast in the unarmed boats and barges which they had rounded up. At a rambling and unhappy three-hour cabinet he ‘blew up,’ as Leo Amery wrote. ‘Whatever else happens,’ Churchill said, ‘Singapore must be fought to the last and everything then destroyed.’⁹¹ He had obviously written off Malaya.⁹²

The prime minister was at no loss to find proper scapegoats. ‘I had been for eleven years out of office,’ he wrote to John Curtin, replying to Australia’s reproaches that Singapore was not ‘impregnable’ after all, ‘and [I] had given ceaseless warnings for six years before the war began.’ As though this mattered now, he blamed their weakness on years of Labour Party misrule. ‘The blame . . . rests with all those who, in or out of office, failed to discern the true Nazi menace and to crush it while it was weak.’ He urged the Australian leader not to be dismayed or stoop to recrimination. ‘I cannot offer any guarantees for the future,’ he dictated, ‘and I am sure great ordeals lie before us, but I feel hopeful, as never before, that we shall emerge safely and also gloriously from the dark valley.’⁹³ On occasions like these, his telegrams became orations before unseen audiences, with imaginary applause comforting his ears.

Fortunately General Wavell, as Supreme Commander, now came jointly under the orders of Washington and London, which gave Churchill an excuse for avoiding sending 'instructions,' while he could, as he notified Wavell that night, still proffer suggestions or ask questions. And so, in a fore-echo of similar orders issued by other great dictators elsewhere in this now global war, he colourfully directed Wavell to defend 'every inch,' to destroy 'every scrap of material,' and to allow surrender only after protracted fighting 'among the ruins of Singapore city.'⁹⁴

snuffling and pink-faced with a common cold on January 20, 1942, he made his first brief appearance in Parliament since Washington.⁹⁵ The Members gave him an unenthusiastic response. No one rose to his feet. He proposed they postpone any debate on the Far East for a week, and indicated that he might then ask for a vote of confidence. This ploy did not go down well.⁹⁶ The House roasted him. His request for their permission to record his speech aroused such ill feeling that his Labour colleagues obliged him to abandon the project; this was in fact the first parliamentary setback since becoming prime minister.

Once again however the backbench criticism seemed to be less of Churchill than of his colleagues. His parliamentary Private Secretary Harvie-Watt warned him that the Party's 1922 Committee was demanding ministerial changes. Over lunch Eden urged him to rejuvenate his cabinet, dispensing with Kingsley Wood, Margesson, Arthur Greenwood, and Amery, and bringing in the left-wing, ascetic Sir Stafford Cripps. In a revealing reply, Churchill remarked that he would be reluctant to let Kingsley Wood go – 'I'd rather have a cabinet of obedient mugwumps,' he said, 'than awkward freaks!'

The Far East overshadowed everything. Churchill feared that by throwing all their reinforcements and aircraft into a losing battle in Malaya, they might forfeit the strategically vital Burma Road too. This was certainly the view that Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, the Governor of Burma, expressed in a message sent round to him that morning.⁹⁷ On January 21 he read a further telegram from Wavell, painting an even gloomier picture about Singapore. 'I doubt,' signalled Wavell, 'whether island can be held for long once Johore is lost.' He confirmed that its guns could fire only seawards. He himself flew to Singapore. 'If all goes well,' he stated, after reporting on plans to bring in troops from Johore, 'hope prolonged defence possible.'⁹⁸

Facing tough decisions, Churchill asked the chiefs of staff whether, if Singapore were doomed, they should not 'at once blow the docks and bat-

teries and workshops to pieces' and abandon the ruins to the Japanese, falling back upon Burma. 'This question,' he wrote, 'should be squarely faced now and put bluntly to General Wavell.'⁹⁹ At six p.m. he told them in person that he saw no point in sending reinforcements if there was no reasonable chance of holding the fortress.¹⁰⁰ At a subsequent *defence committee*, held after dinner in the underground Cabinet War Rooms, he repeated that Wavell, as Supreme Commander, would have to ponder whether Burma was not now more important.¹⁰¹ But there was the rub: Since only the Combined Chiefs of Staff, in Washington, could now issue orders to Wavell, the P.M. had to state the issue to him as a question.

He was feeling hung-over and miserable. In a play for sympathy, he appeared in the bunker wearing a green and crimson, gold-embroidered dressing gown, as one minister described: 'He only wanted a turban to make it complete!' The contrast between this Göringesque costume and the sombre suits and uniforms of the others highlighted the difference between his florid oratory and their sober, precise statements. Australia's representative Sir Earle Page droned on in an almost inaudible, nasal, monotonous twang; Churchill was beginning to dislike the Australians, with all the Irish and criminal impurities in their blood. Toward midnight a rude telegram came from John Curtin, challenging his proposal to allow Australia only junior representation on the Far East councils in London and Washington. Churchill tossed the telegram aside, observed Leo Amery, and stalked out declaring: 'Let them do what they like.' 'Winston,' summarised Amery, 'has no sympathy for the empire idea anyway, or understanding of it, and wants to run this war alone and through the president.'¹⁰² Joining Churchill for drinks afterwards, Beaverbrook, Eden, and the First Lord urged patience toward Australia. 'Winston,' wrote Eden that night, 'was tired and depressed, for him. His cold is heavy on him.' Churchill remarked with fatalism that 'the bulk of the Tories hated him.' He would be delighted to yield to another prime minister, he said.¹⁰³

The Australians, the House, Malaya – all of these things together were more than any mortal could reasonably endure.

seconded by Eden and Major Morton, Churchill now squared up to the Free French problem. At five p.m. on January 22 he met de Gaulle and René Plevén, and heatedly explained to them that since President Roosevelt so disposed he could not allow the disputed islands to be transferred to Free French control. 'We cannot,' he said, 'allow anything whatsoever to com-

promise our relations with the United States.' He proposed free elections, and the demilitarisation of the islands. He stipulated that they would remain French but he avoided defining which France he was referring to. De Gaulle's chagrin was huge. When the general alluded to their 1940 agreement, Churchill turned to ice: he had signed that, he said, in the belief that de Gaulle would be able to rally the French against the enemy. This had not, he said, been the case.¹⁰⁴ Bill Donovan, the American Intelligence chief, learned of the meeting. 'De Gaulle,' he wrote, 'has had a stormy interview with Churchill . . . His position is still unsettled.'¹⁰⁵ That was an understatement. His vanity gravely *blesé*, the Free French general sent a largely fictitious account of the meeting to his Fleet Commander, Admiral Muselier.

Citing de Gaulle's 'lies and inadmissible methods' and his unbridled 'thirst for power' as the reasons, Muselier would resign on March 3. De Gaulle placed him under close arrest for 'mutiny,' and a wave of resignations from the Free French navy followed.

the coming debate preyed on Churchill. He reacted disagreeably to each new scandal reported from Malaya. 'This really is not good enough,' he wrote sharply to Admiral Pound; the Japanese command of the west coast of Malaya, despite not having one warship in the region, was 'one of the most astonishing lapses recorded in Naval history.'¹⁰⁶ He found the new A.B.D.A. command set-up highly inconvenient, but told his cabinet, 'It is no good appointing a Supreme Commander if you spend your time teaching him to Supreme Command.' That said, he succumbed to temptation and sent off several telegrams to Wavell.¹⁰⁷ That Friday, January 23, he sent Beaverbrook over to Fleet-street to soften up the editors. Beaverbrook told them of how Churchill had dominated everyone at Washington, and of how he himself had persuaded Roosevelt to pitch higher production targets. Churchill had sent everything possible to the Far East, Beaverbrook loyally declared. ('Apparently some time after Pearl Harbor,' noted Cecil King.¹⁰⁸)

Setting out across the snowy roads to Chequers, Churchill took with him only his wife and a private secretary, as he wanted to work up his opening speech for Tuesday's debate. He slaved at it until four a.m. that night, then again until 3:20 on Saturday night and until 3:40 a.m. the night after that.¹⁰⁹ Sir Charles Wilson, Nurse Campbell, and the masseuse Miss Roper stood by. On Saturday he lunched with Captain William Tennant of His Majesty's late battle-cruiser *Repulse*. The disaster in the Far East beset all his waking hours.

Earle Page had meanwhile transmitted to his government in Australia word of the *defence committee's* deliberations on Singapore. It seems that Churchill had not realised that Page was among his listeners.¹¹⁰ On Saturday, January 24, he received a blistering message from Canberra. 'After all the assurances we have been given,' charged Curtin, 'the evacuation of Singapore would be regarded here and elsewhere as an inexcusable betrayal.' Had not Churchill himself always regarded this island – although barely the size of the Isle of Wight – as a 'central fortress' in the empire? Australia had kept her share of 'the bargain,' he said; he now called upon Churchill to do the same.¹¹¹ There was no more talk of abandoning Singapore after that.

churchill's uneasy relationship with Lord Beaverbrook, Minister of Supply, was coming to an end. Plagued equally by asthma and ambition, impulsive and unpredictable, and unbridled in his own pursuit of power, the press lord had squirmed under the constraints of cabinet office. His newspapers were noisily championing Australia's cause and publishing the most unhelpful reports on Singapore. Churchill found that he could no longer work with him; but he feared he could not work without him either. Clementine pleaded with her husband to rid himself of Beaverbrook's baleful influence, at least while down at Chequers. In Whitehall he was disliked. Inquiring into the inferior tanks produced by Beaverbrook's methods, Lord Hankey was horrified by the hatred which Beaverbrook inspired, and he warned Sir John Anderson that he would have to be 'got rid of.'¹¹² Bevin could not stand him. General Brooke recorded, after the minister phoned him about the two-pounder guns in the Middle East, '[I] do not trust him a yard.'¹¹³ Such was Beaverbrook's unhappy reputation at the start of 1942.

What else could Churchill do however? Although he balked at including the more left-wing ministers in his cabinet, he could no longer ignore Sir Stafford Cripps, who had returned from Moscow; he invited him down to Chequers for Sunday luncheon, and asked whether he would accept the ministry of supply.¹¹⁴ Clementine glowed, but only momentarily as Lord Beaverbrook came down later that same day and she erupted in fury. It was, after all, her first weekend with her husband since Washington. The P.M. left her in no doubt that a nagging wife was not what he needed right now. She penned a contrite reply. 'I am ashamed,' this began, 'that by my violent attitude I should just now have added to your agonising anxieties.' She begged him to leave 'Lord B' out of any reconstruction: 'It is true that if you do he may (& will) work against you – at first covertly & then openly.' Was this

not preferable to 'intrigue and treachery' from within, she asked. 'Now that you have (as I understand) invited Sir Stafford, why not put your money on him?' She believed that Beaverbrook's temper was a product of his jealousy of Cripps – a personality so superior in intellect. 'Try ridding yourself of this microbe . . . in your blood,' she wrote, betraying unconcealed animus toward the Canadian. 'Exorcise this bottle-imp & see if the air is not clearer & purer – you will miss his drive & genius, but in Cripps you may have new accessions of strength.'¹¹⁵ It was wise and loving counsel.

The next day Beaverbrook cannily recommended Cripps to accept the prime minister's offer – but warned him that Churchill intended to exclude the ministry from his war cabinet. That did the trick. Cripps turned the offer down, writing to the P.M. that he would prefer to undertake special missions, 'as for instance with regard to the Indian question.'¹¹⁶

before the weekend was over, deeply unwelcome news arrived from Cairo. Rommel was advancing eastward from Agheila. Auchinleck's report on the twenty-third showed solid confidence but at three p.m. the next day he conceded: 'Once again Rommel has made a bold stroke.' Churchill learned independently that the Eighth Army was preparing to abandon Benghazi and Derna. On Sunday the twenty-fifth he challenged Auchinleck to come clean. 'Have you really had a heavy defeat? . . . It seems to me this is a serious crisis.' It looked like not only the final failure of *crusader* but a temporary end to plans for *acrobat*, the occupation of Tripoli, too.

He was dismayed. He knew of no explanation, except the mechanical shortcomings of the British cruiser tanks – about which Lord Hankey had been warning him. A few days later he reassured Auchinleck that he had complete confidence in him – a message that rather conveyed the opposite sense – but was most anxious to hear from him about the 'defeat of our armour by inferior enemy numbers,' adding: 'This cuts very deep.' Referring to the latest *ultras*, he chided the general: 'You have no doubt seen the most secret stuff about Rommel's presumed intentions, namely: clearing up the triangle, Benghazi–Msus–Mechili and then withdrawing to [a] waiting line about Agheila. This seems to reinforce the importance of our holding on.' Auchinleck responded with a wan admission that Rommel had succeeded 'beyond his expectations and mine.' By February, Rommel would have forced the British back three hundred miles to Gazala and Tobruk.¹¹⁷

Churchill buried himself in drafting the speech he intended to deliver to Parliament. That Sunday night January 25 a message arrived from Roosevelt

— it is not in either the British or American public archives — and a ‘telephone job’ followed between the two leaders, agreeing that he might announce the Washington agreements about pooling shipping, munitions, and raw materials. Churchill returned to London on Monday afternoon, pleading with his staff to find some morsels of comfort for his speech.¹¹⁸ He reviewed the script on Tuesday morning, lying in bed in his silken dragon dressing gown. Pushing aside the breakfast tray he sent for the C.I.G.S. ‘The few hairs,’ wrote Brooke, ‘were ruffled on his bald head. A large cigar stuck sideways out of his face. The bed was littered with papers and dispatches.’ Winston asked his views on a sentence about the withdrawal of Australian troops from Syria, but ignored Brooke’s request that he omit it, along with a passage about Britain’s continued supply of tanks to Russia.¹¹⁹

Among the incoming papers was General Oshima’s latest report from Berlin to Tokyo, decoded by Bletchley Park.¹²⁰ Ribbentrop had told the ambassador on the fourteenth that despite temperatures often 40 degrees Celsius below zero, the German army had safely reached the winter line. Hitler was already preparing for a major spring offensive. Asked about the situation in Britain, Ribbentrop had responded that he had seen Press rumours of Churchill’s resignation, and he believed that Parliament was becoming thoroughly dissatisfied. Oshima inquired whether this might not be a good time to invade England? Ribbentrop claimed that ‘preparations were in full swing,’ but it was impossible to say when it would go ahead. Churchill inked a red line beside this paragraph for Anthony Eden to see.

in june 1940, privately rebuking Duff Cooper for deriding the Italian army on entering the war,* Churchill had written: ‘It is a well-known rule of war policy to praise the courage of your opponent which enhances your own victory when gained. The Japanese Field Service Regulations specifically enjoin this, and the German War Communiqués follow the practice now.’¹²¹

He followed that policy now, and even his critics had to admire the speech he delivered on January 27 to the House. He defiantly declared that the fateful decisions — like sending the empire’s material to Libya and Russia instead of to the Far East — had been his, and he refused to appoint scapegoats (though specifically referring to Duff Cooper by name).¹²² He had remarkable words of praise for Rommel, saying: ‘I cannot tell you what the

* Duff Cooper had also predicted that Mussolini would ‘increase the number of ruins for which Italy has long been famous.’

position at the present moment is on the western front in Cyrenaica. We have a very daring and skilful opponent against us, and, may I say across the havoc of war, a great general.' He spoke for nearly two hours, 'a pretty convincing statement,' wrote one Member of Parliament, while another noted that one could actually feel the wind of opposition dropping sentence by sentence. Coming to Singapore, the prime minister declared, 'It will be fought to the last inch.'

By the time that he had finished, all that remained was a 'certain uneasiness.' 'He thrusts both hands deep into his trouser pockets,' wrote Harold Nicolson, 'and turns his tummy now to the right, now to the left, in evident enjoyment of his mastery of the position.' A *Daily Mirror* journalist remarked that 'the P.M. had the critics in the hollow of his hand.' Witnesses saw him trickle two well-timed tears onto the Dispatch Box as he confessed that he was no longer the man he had been in 1940. The next day Randolph Churchill also rose in his father's defence. That evening the P.M. blurted out to Fred Bellenger, with fresh tears in his eyes, 'He's a fine boy – a grand boy.'

Winding up the debate on the twenty-ninth he spoke with studied charity toward his critics and complimented them on their speeches.¹²³ Reaching his peroration, his tone changed. He became less genial, recorded Nicolson: "I have finished," he says, "I have done," and he makes a downward gesture with his palms open as if receiving the stigmata.'

I offer no apologies, I offer no excuses, I make no promises. In no way have I mitigated the sense of danger and impending misfortunes . . . which still hang over us. But at the same time I avow my confidence, never stronger than at this moment, that we shall bring this conflict to an end in a manner agreeable to the interests of our country, and to the future of the world.

The vote was a total victory: 464 to one, a brutal show of parliamentary mastery. 'A most extraordinary reaction' had set in, as Lord Beaverbrook explained to Hopkins.¹²⁴ The Members had delivered a warning to the prime minister – they saw no point in humiliating him.

Winston Churchill rose to his feet amidst cheers and swept out of the building, arm in arm with his wife. He had triumphed, where Chamberlain had stumbled. He heeded not the ticker tape chewing out of the glass-cased machine in the hall: Rommel's desert-grimed soldiers had re-entered Benghazi: the Japanese were now only eighteen miles from Singapore.

16: *Poor Winston*

Domestic intelligence reports showed that Churchill's Parliamentary speech of January 27, 1942 had reinforced the public's confidence in ultimate victory. The overwhelming vote, 'Behind the prime minister to a man,' had given genuine pleasure.¹ He knew however that the honeymoon would not last long. President Roosevelt was demanding his pound of flesh for lend-lease. The R.A.F.'s bomber effort against Germany had stalled. The squadrons were formally under his orders to 'conserve' strength. Churchill faced defeat in Benghazi, humiliation in Singapore, tantrums from de Gaulle, and, more secretly, worries about his heart.² For days he lay low; he ducked the *defence committee* session on January 30, 1942 altogether, recorded by Brooke as 'one of the dark days of the war.'³ Clementine wrote to Harry Hopkins that Winston was 'rather flattened out' after 'telling the House of Commons what's what.'⁴

One factor about which he could not speak sustained him. He and Roosevelt, meeting in private, had now taken the necessary steps to begin building an atomic bomb with which to devastate Berlin – that was the explicit purpose. Would the Nazis get this weapon first? It was the German chemists Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann who had discovered nuclear fission in December 1937. Alerted by a *New York Times* report that Hitler's physicists were working feverishly on a uranium bomb, the British had begun their own tests. Theory confirmed that a neutron chain reaction could lead to a violent explosion, and in May 1939 a British committee chaired by the scientist Sir Henry Tizard had investigated further. In the spring of 1940 the government had set up the *maud* Committee under Sir George Thomson to investigate the war use of atomic energy. Professor Lindemann (later Lord Cherwell) had kept Churchill abreast of this investigation. It seemed that the project would be feasible, but prohibitively costly. Although, as the

maud committee pointed out, 'by having [the plant] here we should keep full control of what may well prove a major weapon,' it had to recommend in June 1940 that it should be located in Canada or even the United States.⁵ In the United States research had meanwhile begun in mid-1940 under the 'S-1 committee' of the National Defense Research Committee (the NDRC). The experiments carried out by this body suggested that the project would indeed be feasible; in April and July 1941 the NDRC sent two representatives to attend the British meetings and review the British work.

On July 15, 1941 the maud committee reported favourably to Whitehall; there were, it seems, no moral compunctions. The physicist Sir Charles Darwin (grandson of the famous evolutionist) inquired of Lord Hankey on August 2 whether, if an atomic bomb was manufactured, governments would ever sanction its use? Nobody seems to have replied. The minister of aircraft production sent the report to Lord Hankey on August 27 as chairman of the cabinet's Scientific Advisory Committee. It recommended both a long term 'atomic power' project and a bomb. Calculations indicated that just ten kilograms of uranium-235 might unleash the same destructive energy as 1,800 tons of **tnt** (the eminent physicist Professor P. M. S. Blackett dissented). Summarising this report to Churchill on August 27, Lord Cherwell stated that atomic bombs might be produced 'within, say, two years.' One plane might then carry 'a somewhat elaborate bomb' weighing about one ton equivalent to about two thousand tons of **tnt**. Cherwell considered the odds to be good. 'It would be unforgivable,' he wrote, 'if we let the Germans develop a process ahead of us by means of which they could defeat us in war or reverse the verdict after they had been defeated.'⁶

Churchill was not inspired by the thought. 'Although personally I am quite content with the existing explosives' he minuted the chiefs of staff, 'I feel we must not stand in the path of improvement.' He approved the action proposed by Lord Cherwell, and invited Sir John Anderson, Lord President of the Council and a fine administrator, to be the cabinet minister responsible.⁷ Lord Hankey also recommended on September 24 that Britain go ahead. While biological warfare hid behind the codename **vegetarian**, the new weapon was named even more innocuously **tube alloys**. In November the prime minister set up a 'Directorate of Tube Alloys.'

Roosevelt, who had got wind of all this, had written to Churchill on October 11, 1941 proposing a joint effort.⁸ In November he sent the American professors George B. Pegram and Harold C. Urey over to Britain; on Churchill's instructions they were allowed access to all the British labora-

tories. In December he assured the president of Britain's readiness to collaborate in this matter. What followed in February 1942, and again in June 1942, was truly Britain's most unsordid act as, on Churchill's instructions, her scientists conveyed their atomic project secrets westward across the Atlantic, receiving but little in return.

If he had hoped for reciprocity in other areas, the P.M. was confounded. Roosevelt pressed the acceptance of the American draft of Article VII on lend-lease more vigorously than before.



After the impressive parliamentary vote Churchill felt immortal. He hectored his cabinet into subservience. 'He flew at Amery,' observed Sir Alexander Cadogan after one such meeting, on February 2, 1942. Leo Amery had courteously inquired, 'Is that the view of the cabinet?' Nobody had spoken up except Churchill, who said simply: 'Yes.'⁹ 'The meeting,' recorded Brooke, 'then became a complete parrot-house!'¹⁰

The cabinet had been arguing once again about Article VII. Under pressure from Morgenthau and Hull, Roosevelt refused to let this issue slumber until the war was over. 'I was glad,' recorded Amery, 'to find the Labour Members . . . resentful of what they felt to be an American attempt at blackmail.' That word, blackmail, appears to have been spoken because to Cadogan too the American draft looked like 'impertinent blackmail.' Eden was, once more, outspoken for appeasement: 'The one person,' wrote Amery, 'who clamoured passionately for surrender was Anthony, convinced that if we did not give way we should have worse terms in future.' When Amery asked repeatedly how the terms could possibly be worse he drew no answer.¹¹

Three days later a personal telegram came from Roosevelt, insisting that any delay in agreeing to Article VII would harm their interests.¹² This got him nowhere. Inviting the U.S. ambassador Winant to Chequers on February 7 (for the first time since Pearl Harbor), Churchill expressed the view, as Winant reported, that while he himself did not believe that the principle of imperial preference served any useful purpose, and he was ready to begin discussions immediately, though outside the scope of the lend-lease Agreement, on preferences, tariffs, and other post-war questions of economic policy, 'three-quarters of his cabinet' were opposed to Article VII.¹³

Roosevelt cabled him on the eleventh, putting in writing an unctuous assurance that 'it is the furthest thing from my mind . . . to ask you to trade the principle of imperial preference as a consideration for lend-lease.'¹⁴ Considering that they had drawn its sting, the British signed the Mutual Aid Agreement, with its ominous Article VII, on the twenty-third. Its language now was nebulous. Two years later Churchill would boast to the House that he first obtained from the president a stipulation that Britain was no more committed to the abolition of imperial preference than the American government was committed to the abolition of its high protective tariffs.¹⁵

that weekend 'C' showed him General Oshima's latest despatch from Berlin to Tokyo. Surveying Hitler's campaign in Russia so far, the Japanese ambassador recalled that Germany had originally estimated that it would take two to three months to destroy the Soviet field army, occupy the industrial regions east of the Urals, and pull out her main combat troops before winter set in. 'This confidence,' recalled Oshima, 'was clearly reflected in Hitler's statement to me on July 14 that the Soviet campaign would be over by September.' Soviet resources and powers of resistance had proven 'unexpectedly great' however. The German army had lost much heavy equipment in the retreats. 'The impression obtained from a number of talks I have had with Hitler is that in view of the setback to last year's operations, he has made full preparations for the coming Spring and he is absolutely determined to try and destroy the Soviet Army with one great blow.' In General Oshima's considered view, Hitler's coming offensive through the Caucasus and into the Middle East would ultimately succeed.

Into the Middle East? Churchill instructed his secret service chief to ensure that a copy of this MAGIC was laid before President Roosevelt.¹⁶



We must now turn briefly to the naval war. For many months – ever since May 1941 – Hitler's battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* had lurked in harbour at Brest on the Atlantic coast of France; during those months R.A.F. Bomber Command directed forty percent of its bombing effort at them. By late January 1942 it was plain that Hitler had plans to reduce the risk to those ships. The admiralty expected them to sail at any time; but would Hitler take them home to Germany, or perhaps even fight them through the Straits of Gibraltar to an Italian port in the Mediterranean?¹⁷

In fact Hitler had decided to transfer them, via German ports, to Norwegian waters, to oppose any British invasion aspirations there. His admirals had advised that the two warships and *Prinz Eugen* must run the gauntlet of Britain's formidable defences dominating the English Channel, even though this would mean forcing the narrow Straits of Dover in broad daylight, at high noon. A more dramatic operation could scarcely be conceived.

There could therefore be no talk of the British being caught unawares by subsequent events. On February 3 Admiral Pound told the chiefs of staff that the Luftwaffe had now concentrated enemy fighters along the Channel coast, which was a hint that Hitler was planning such a move.¹⁸ That day the admiralty notified 'all concerned' in a hush most secret message at 12:52 p.m. that the 'most probable course of action' of the Brest squadron would be 'to break eastward up the Channel and so to their home ports.'¹⁹

On February 5 it was reported that the Germany's Admiral Commanding Battleships, Vice Admiral Otto Ciliax, had hoisted his flag in *Scharnhorst*. This was rightly read as indicating 'an impending departure.' Vice-Admiral Bertie H. Ramsay, commanding Dover, put his destroyer force on notice and brought half a dozen torpedo-carrying Swordfish aircraft forward to the airfield at Manston in Kent. Shortly, enemy minesweepers were detected clearing a route toward the Bight of Heligoland. The British minelayer *Welshman* laid four new minefields across the enemy warships' probable route, and the admiralty asked Bomber Command to sow mines in five specified areas along the same precise channels; in all, ninety-eight magnetic mines would be laid over the next six days, and Sir Archibald Sinclair made a pusillanimous protest at the admiralty operating his bombers without reference to him.²⁰ Everything possible having been done, Ramsay settled back to wait for the show to begin.

churchill's horizon was cluttered with broader affairs. The Atlantic Charter, with its pious avowal in Article Three of 'the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live,' had raised dangerous aspirations in India and Burma.²¹ Speaking to the House on September 9, 1941 he had dashed these hopes, declaring in Orwellian fashion to the Members that this applied only to European nations under Nazi rule, and not to 'the development of constitutional government in India, Burma, or other parts of the empire.' There was much bitterness in India over this.

During the prime minister's visit to Washington Roosevelt had lectured him that the English could not hope to rule three hundred million Indians

indefinitely. Unduly sensitive on India, Churchill had made a sharp reply and he boasted afterwards that Roosevelt did not ventilate the matter again.²² That had merely shelved the problem however; it had not solved it.

The American people had been largely reared to regard the British empire as an unwholesome anachronism; fifty-six percent of all Americans believed that Britain was oppressing her colonial populations. Churchill cannot have regarded this as an educated opinion, however, since Roosevelt occasionally received letters suggesting he refer the India problem to his Office of Indian Affairs, an unhelpful confusion between his few surviving native Indian subjects and the peoples of the Asian subcontinent. Felix Frankfurter felt that Churchill ought to impress upon the American public the civilising influence of the imperial process, 'and not rouse the embers of old prejudices and misunderstandings by using a shorthand phrase uncongenial to Americans.'²³ Not one to mince his language, Churchill's attitude to empire was inspired as much by racial instincts as by economic imperatives. Why did the prime minister have to talk about 'white troops,' lamented Lord Halifax in a letter to Eden, when 'the British Army in India' would have done just as well?²⁴

There was little that distinguished Churchill from his critics over India – he too was committed to granting her eventual independence – but he saw no urgency. With the unrest between Moslem and Hindu stimulated by the Japanese military successes, the worsening crisis in India was serious enough to occupy the war cabinet for several hours on February 5. Leo Amery, Secretary for India, introduced his own proposals, which envisaged Indian participation in these cabinet meetings on the same footing as the Australian. Churchill was in fine debating fettle and sent for Cadogan, who was sitting outside, to witness the performance. The P.M. earned laughter with his comment that an Indian would certainly 'add colour' to their proceedings. On Amery's proposals he 'hummed and hawed,' and he indulged in merciless ragging of his Labour colleagues. 'His whole manner throughout was most puckish,' wrote Amery, mystified, 'with many winks at myself.'

Churchill had prepared his own scheme for India, which he only produced to them after two hours. Broadly speaking, this would expand the Defence Council in India to a body of one hundred elected Members representing the provincial assemblies and princes; after the war, this body would frame the new Indian Constitution. Indeed, he proposed that he himself should set out for India to consult with her leaders – an idea that Cadogan found 'imaginative and bold.'²⁵ Amery too was taken with the

idea. Churchill invited him to Chequers on the seventh to discuss it. The idea had come to him in Washington, in the light of his reception in the U.S. Congress.²⁶

Churchill's idea was to promise India Dominion status, with the right to secede from the empire if she so wished after the war. Warned of the risk to his reputation if the scheme fell through, Churchill indicated that at least his offer would be on record. By the time he lunched at Chequers that Saturday, Amery had cooled toward the idea, fearing its broader implications. He arrived at the country mansion at midday to find the P.M. still in bed. He looked undeniably older, and confessed that he was now 'not quite so sure' that his doctor would allow this new bold adventure. Clementine and his private staff were also concerned. Churchill warmed to the suggestions that Amery had brought with him, about appointing an Indian representative to the cabinet. Over lunch the prime minister pulled his leg mercilessly over his abstemiousness and desire for exercise, and helped himself to several brandies to illustrate to the doctor, another guest, how much better was his own way of life.²⁷

He did not let go of the excursion to India easily. On Monday the ninth he wistfully discussed it with Eden and spoke of throwing in meetings with Generals Chiang Kai-shek, of China, and Auchinleck as well. Sir Charles Wilson admonished that his heart needed respite. The P.M. confessed to Eden that he had recently tried to dance a few steps but had become short of breath. Given that he washed down a large lunch with a beer, three ports, and three brandies this was not surprising. 'W. did not look well,' recorded Eden, 'and yet did himself as well as ever at luncheon. I told him he should lighten his load and suggested an assistant minister of defence who could do the essentials of co-ordination. Winston said that Ismay did that.'²⁸

to his fear over his 'pump,' as he called his heart, was now added fury about the Far East.

The Japanese were suddenly five miles deep inside Singapore island: while the feckless General Percival had massed his defenders at the eastern end, the Japanese had crossed the Strait at the western. At his five p.m. cabinet, Churchill let fly about his generals: 'What will happen if the Germans get a footing here?' he thundered. 'Our army is the mockery of the world!' In front of the whole cabinet he snapped at General Brooke, 'Have you not got a single general who can win battles?' Brooke admitted that

Percival probably commanded over one hundred thousand troops, greatly outnumbering the Japanese forces.²⁹

That evening the prime minister set about drafting a Nelsonian telegram to General Wavell, lecturing him on the duty of every man to perish at his post. Toward eleven p.m. he sent for Brooke to assist him. The signal went out at one-thirty a.m.: 'There must at this stage be no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population,' it read. 'The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs.' This, he said, was the 18th Division's chance to make its name in history: 'Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops.' With the Russians and Americans fighting so magnificently, he said, 'the whole reputation of our country and our race is involved.'³⁰

He abandoned the idea of flying to India: it would look bad to be out of London when Singapore fell.



Lord Beaverbrook had been among the weekend guests. 'Nothing [he] does,' observed the doctor, Sir Charles Wilson, 'and he is pretty erratic at times, can shake the P.M.'s faith in his genius.'³¹ Something intangible still tied the two men together, although both had difficulty explaining what it was. As a sop to this asthmatic Canadian's ambitions, Churchill had just appointed him minister of war production and invited him down to Chequers on the sixth with the minister of labour to discuss war production. Ernest Bevin was one of the press lord's most implacable enemies; no man had spoken to him more roughly. When Beaverbrook now insisted on having control of both labour and merchant shipbuilding, Bevin refused to budge on the former, and A. V. Alexander refused to give up the latter. All of this taxed Churchill's patience to the utmost. 'I was altogether too tough,' conceded Beaverbrook a few days later, recalling the bickering of that weekend. 'The discussion became acrimonious.'³²

The prime minister sent Sir Edward Bridges to him with the final draft of a White Paper on Monday, February 10: 'I have lavished my time and strength during the last week,' he wrote, 'in trying to make arrangements which are satisfactory to you and to the public interest and to allay the anxieties of the departments with whom you will be brought into contact. I can do no more.'³³ Bridges told Beaverbrook that the P.M. would allow no change in the wording, and that 'all resignations would be received by 11:00 o'clock' the next morning. Beaverbrook saw Churchill and snapped that he

could have his resignation there and then. 'If we part now,' said Churchill, 'we part for ever.' Beaverbrook wheezed, 'So be it,' and swept out. Churchill sent Bridges after him to urge him not to do anything until next day, and Beaverbrook grudgingly climbed down.

Fired by a deeper instinct for political survival, Beaverbrook continued to criticise Churchill's wider policies. After leaving Chequers on Saturday, he had written an attack on the P.M.'s bombing policy. It was clear from Intelligence reports, he wrote, that the raids had caused only minor damage to German industry.³⁴ On the same date he also inveighed against critics of Stalin's request for recognition of Russia's 1941 frontiers. He blandly described the Baltic states as 'the Ireland of Russia,' knowing the value that Winston had attached of yore to the naval bases in Ireland; and he supported Stalin's claims on Finland and Romania as well.

The result was a row in cabinet on the tenth. Churchill refused to allow him to circulate a paper asking for a decision on the Russian frontiers in line with the P.M.'s own pledge to recognise them, uttered in his famous broadcast of June 22, 1941. Beaverbrook cynically announced that in that case his newspapers would spearhead a campaign in Stalin's favour. Clement Attlee said that he would resign if the Baltic States *were* handed over to Stalin; Beaverbrook retorted that he would resign if they were not. Probably he had already decided that the prime minister was doomed. He determined to give up the new ministry awarded him by Churchill, and go over to the attack.³⁵ Clementine left Winston in no doubt of her implacable hatred of Beaverbrook. 'My own darling,' she wrote him:

I am ashamed that by my violent attitude I should just now have added to your agonizing anxieties – Please forgive me. I do beg of you to reflect whether it would not be best to leave Lord Beaverbrook entirely out of your Reconstruction.

It is true that if you do he may, & will, work against you – at first covertly & then openly – But is not hostility without, better than intrigue & treachery & rattledom [*sic*] within?

Now that he had, as she understood, decided for Cripps, 'Why not put your money on him?' As for his description of Beaverbrook's temper and behaviour, she pleaded: 'My Darling – Try ridding yourself of this microbe which some people fear is in your blood – Exorcise this bottle Imp & see if the air is not clearer & purer – You will miss his drive & genius, but in

Cripps you may have new accessions of strength.' It was altogether a remarkable letter written by a remarkable and perceptive woman.

'This has been a pretty wretched week,' Eden remarked in his private notes, 'with [a] growing sense of confusion in the management of our affairs. . . It is impossible to understand what P.M. & Roosevelt arranged as to Pacific Council, nor do either seem to know. . . R's announcement today of two Pacific Councils is in flat contradiction to what Winston told us & the Dutch, who are excusably becoming increasingly exasperated.' What was required, at the very least, concluded Eden, was an independent minister of defence. 'It will be a stubborn fight to get Winston to agree.'³⁶

The prime minister chaired the first Pacific War Council at six p.m. on the tenth.³⁷ The Chinese requested permission to sit in. Churchill considered them a *quantité négligeable*; phoning Harry Hopkins that night to tell him of the meeting, he assured him that Roosevelt would always have the primary responsibility for dealing with China.³⁸

He interviewed Cripps at 5:15 p.m. the next day, February 11, but that austere gentleman once more turned down the ministry of supply.³⁹ Cripps continued to agitate subtly in public, and even asked for broadcast time. Churchill shortly decided to hive off to Cripps his own function as Leader of the House (a cabinet post, hitherto performed in fact by Attlee); he would also give him Attlee's office of Lord Privy Seal.⁴⁰ He would compensate Attlee with the Dominions Office and the title of 'deputy prime minister.'

His mood was too despondent to do more than begin the reshuffle: having dealt with Cripps, as he thought, Churchill reverted to the war.

the louder the Labour Party's clamour grew for the stubborn 'old man' to go, the more obstinate he became. Visiting him on the eleventh, Violet Bonham Carter found him querulous about this criticism, and melancholy about the refusal of Cripps to accept the ministry he had offered him. Singapore was at the root of his gloom: 'In 1915,' he complained to her, 'our men fought on even when they had only one shell left and were under a fierce barrage. Now they cannot resist dive bombers!' The latter criticism, it might be said, sat poorly coming from the Hero of Dytechley. 'We have so many men in Singapore,' he mused. 'They should have done better.'⁴¹

He had sound reasons for despondency. Hitler's submarines had sunk a quarter of a million tons of merchant shipping off America's east coast in two months.⁴² The prospect of launching amphibious operations anywhere receded even further. He now had authentic reports of Japanese atrocities

in Hongkong – ghastly mass executions, and multiple rapes of White nurses; he was undecided whether to publish the stories or not.⁴³ He discussed them, and India, with his ministers just before midnight in the Cabinet War Rooms: then reverted to Singapore. He had received General Wavell's latest signal, transmitted from Bandoeng, Java, after his flying visit to the doomed island: 'Battle for Singapore is not going well,' summarised Wavell.⁴⁴



Thus they came to February 12, 1942 – 'the blackest day, yet, of the war,' as Cadogan called it. In London, attention was fixed upon Singapore's last throes, but military calamity was much closer to home.

As misfortune would have it, by that day the codebreakers had been unable to solve the German navy's daily *enigma* settings for three straight days.⁴⁵ At eleven-thirty that morning, the admiralty suddenly reported that *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, accompanied by the cruiser *Prinz Eugen* and swarms of fighter aircraft and destroyers, were already charging eastward up the English Channel. Despite all the advance notice given by the codebreakers, Admiral Ramsay had been taken unawares. He had expected the enemy to scuttle past during the hours of darkness, and by this noontime hour he considered the prospect of any breakthrough that day unlikely. At 10:45 a.m. an off-duty radar station carrying out routine maintenance had reported, during a test sweep, an unidentified plot some twenty-seven miles south west of Cap Gris Nez – the narrowest point of the Channel. A hubbub of radar-jamming interference began, and at 11:25 the admiralty had phoned Ramsay with the astonishing news that the German battle cruisers had been sighted. He had at once thrown all his forces into action – five destroyers, eight motor torpedo-boats, two motor gunboats and every available aircraft. A brave but hopelessly unequal brawl ensued. Every motor torpedo-boat fired off its torpedoes at the big ships, but the boats were ruthlessly beaten off by the German fighter cover, E-boats, and destroyers. At midday Hitler's warships passed within full view of the famous White Cliffs of Dover, an act of breathtaking effrontery.

Only one of the R.A.F. fighter squadrons turned up at the rendezvous to cover the half-dozen Swordfish biplanes. They pressed home their aerial torpedo attack in face of a terrifying gun barrage; few closed within proper range, all were shot down. Then Bomber Command went in, hurling in its squadrons escorted by hundreds of fighter planes. In all, 243 bombers, thirty-

three Coastal Command aircraft, eighteen Hurricane bombers and 380 fighters of Fighter Command joined battle; fifteen bombers, three Coastal Command aircraft, and seventeen fighters were shot down in the affray.⁴⁶ Still hounded and harried by these pursuers, the enemy warships escaped into the North Sea, leaving behind only the flotsam and wreckage of these truly valiant British warriors. Admiral Ramsay's operators watched the radar plots fading steadily away to the east. There remained one hope: it seemed that Hitler's naval squadron was heading straight toward the minefields that the bomber squadrons had laid on the previous nights.⁴⁷

keep bugging on! From the Cabinet Room, Churchill sent for Miss Layton, his secretary. She entered at three p.m. to find him striding up and down. 'He dictated four telegrams like a whirlwind,' she wrote a few days later, 'and then phoned this and phoned that.' Shortly he slumped into silence, then recalled her for another telegram, which he dictated fists a-clench with compressed energy. 'There's a bloody great battle going on out there,' he said. 'Do you think we might get them?' she ventured. 'Don't know,' he replied. 'We winged 'em but they aren't dead yet.'⁴⁸

The *defence committee* met at five p.m. that day. The prime minister had asked Lord Beaverbrook to chair the meeting. The Channel battle was still raging, and there were ninety minutes of daylight left, but Beaverbrook found A. V. Alexander, the First Lord, with Rear-Admiral A. L. Lyster, Chief of Naval Air Services, and the deputy chief of Air Staff all jawing away at this meeting. Their lackadaisical air made a lasting impression on him. He told his compatriot Garfield Weston, 'The meeting lasted three hours but in all that time not one of the three went to the telephone to find out if the battleships had been hit!' He would have fired the lot. He called round on Winston later. As they whiled away the rest of the evening over a bottle, Beaverbrook's determination wilted. The unfavourable images of the day hardened his scepticism about the war. He decided to have no part of it.⁴⁹

That evening, Cadogan learned over at the F.O. that the British had been unable to 'knock any paint off' the warships. 'We see nothing but failure and inefficiency everywhere,' he lamented, 'and the Japs are murdering our men and raping our women in Hongkong.'

By the next day the Nazi warships were in safe havens in North Germany. 'Poor Winston must be in a state,' commiserated Cadogan.⁵⁰ And: 'Poor Winston!' echoed Eden's secretary in his own diary.⁵¹ Beaverbrook sent a note to Winston to the effect that only a government reshuffle could

forestall public calamity. 'The war is going very badly for us,' he told a friend, then corrected himself: 'Badly for Churchill.'⁵²

The admiralty's Captain Lambe, who had stayed on in Washington for a while, remarked to the ambassador that Churchill had been wrong to talk of the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* 'escaping' from Brest – he should have spoken of their retreat to Kiel. Strategically speaking, there was also much to be said for that point of view. Lord Halifax speculated that if Winston were to float this idea now the public would smell a rat. There was much to be said for that too.⁵³ In the Midlands there was now a rapidly spreading feeling that Churchill himself was the Jonah.⁵⁴

the darkness of defeat was descending on Singapore. On Friday the thirteenth a telegram from the Governor spoke of 'disintegration'; the Australians, he said, were fighting only half-heartedly: a British naval liaison officer later reported the streets were full of debauched soldiers, deserters from their units, NCOs among them, breaking into hotels and shouting 'They won't be long now.' A great weariness etched into Churchill's soul. He invited only his closest 'family,' which included the Prof. and Bracken, to Chequers. His imagination needed little stimulus to see a million people jammed into a three-mile radius, their water running low, their dead lying unburied in the narrow streets, while fires raged and explosions rocked around them. On Saturday morning he had word from Wavell that General Percival had reported his troops incapable of counterattack.⁵⁵ For once, Churchill allowed Brooke to approve his reply. It instructed Wavell: 'You are of course sole judge of the moment when no further result can be gained at Singapore.'⁵⁶ The moment came all too swiftly. That Sunday Wavell gave Percival discretion to cease resistance. At eight-thirty p.m., lunch time at Chequers, the ordeal was over. Characteristically, Churchill picked up a phone to speak with Beaverbrook. He needed a real friend to console him.

At nine p.m. he broadcast from Chequers words that were heard around the empire and in the United States. This was his first time before a microphone since August 1941. To those who knew him well, like John Colville, now in South Africa, the voice betrayed the pressures under which the P.M. was living; the former private secretary detected 'a new note of appeal, lacking the usual confidence of support.'⁵⁷ Against their recent setbacks he set the overriding fact that the United States was now in the war, allowing himself however this boast: 'That is what I have dreamed of, aimed at, and worked for.' He denied he had failed the Far East by diverting aid to Russia.

How then in this posture, gripped and held and battered upon as we were, could we have provided for the safety of the Far East against such an avalanche of fire and steel as has been hurled upon us by Japan?

He made a colourful appeal for unity, saying that whoever was guilty of weakening that unity, 'It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea.' He wasted not a word upon the events in the English Channel, but concluded: 'I speak to you all under the shadow of a heavy and far-reaching military defeat. It is a British and imperial defeat. Singapore has fallen.' After flinging in some florid words about Race and Nation, the Very Jaws of Death, and the Whole Future of Mankind, he ended: '. . . We shall not fail now. Let us move forward steadfastly together into the storm and through the storm.'

The morning newspapers gave his broadcast a frigid reception. Neither the MPs nor the country were in a mood to be fobbed off with 'fine phrases.'⁵⁸ They were angrier at the escape of the German warships than at the fall of Singapore.⁵⁹ After two and a half years of Churchill, so voices were saying, their forces were still incapable of defeating anybody but the Italians. 'He never was a military strategist,' was one complaint. 'He will not delegate authority,' was another. The plea for unity went down poorly: 'Unity,' people said, 'depends on having the right men in the right places.' Public rumour placed Sir Stafford Cripps in No. 10 Downing-street quite soon – 'people,' the pollsters found, 'are beginning to think of alternatives to Churchill.'⁶⁰

Inviting Eden to lunch that Monday, February 16, he greeted him with the stage direction: 'I am in a truculent mood.' Sensing his own hour coming, Eden urged him to make changes – Greenwood must go: he had the reputation of being an alcoholic; and Cripps, who Eden was sure was no self-seeker, should be brought in. Churchill refused even to consider standing down as minister of defence, explaining that he himself was 'soaked' in it. Later that day, Attlee told Winston that no changes were needed at all: he probably feared the introduction of the left-wing ideologue, Stafford Cripps. 'Anthony,' the P.M. corrected him, 'thinks changes are necessary.'⁶¹

cheerful news reached him from his Oracle. The secret intercepts suggested that, far from escaping unscathed, the German battle cruisers had run across several mines and suffered serious damage; they would be out of mischief for six months.⁶² He instantly dictated a message to Roosevelt

about this.⁶³ General Brooke accordingly found him in a much better spirit at that evening's cabinet.⁶⁴

They conducted an initial post-mortem into the signals from Bandoeng and Singapore; as Attlee had written to the P.M. that afternoon, these confirmed that the training and fighting passion of the empire's troops had been wanting.⁶⁵ Churchill picturesquely suggested to his colleagues that their troops had forgotten how to march – it was a familiar complaint of his; and that they were over-wedded to mechanisation. He vaguely lamented the White man's general loss of prestige. Talk at the subsequent *defence committee* rambled on until after midnight: with the latest landings in Sumatra, it appeared that Java too was now all but lost to the Japanese. The Dutch might well ask their Allies to slog it out there however, rather than abandon their precious colony. The P.M. said it was clearly more vital to reinforce Burma and Ceylon, and it would be difficult to refuse the Australian government's request for the return of their three divisions. He telegraphed to the Governor of Burma warning that the weight of attack would assuredly now fall upon him.⁶⁶

Visiting him on February 17, the U.S. ambassador John Winant could see that he was tired. The petty criticism, Winant privately notified his president, was draining Winston's time and energy. 'A cheery word from you and Harry always lightens his load.'⁶⁷

The House was in intractable form. He made a short-tempered, petulant statement that midday about Singapore and promised to set up an inquiry into the German warships' escape; he could not reveal the news of the mine-damage without compromising the *ULTRA* secret. He deflected calls for a debate on Singapore with skilful parliamentary tactics and his customary verbiage, saying: 'It would ill become the dignity of the government or the House . . . if we were drawn into agitated or excited recriminations at a time when all our minds are oppressed with a sense of tragedy and with the sorrow of so lamentable a misfortune.' He slunk back to Downing-street, where Brooke discovered him crestfallen and dejected.⁶⁸

THERE WAS a tide of exasperation running across the whole country. The King, who had sent his personal secretary out over the weekend to inquire, mentioned to Churchill over their weekly luncheon that 'people' felt that the burden of being minister of defence as well might be too much for the prime minister. Churchill did not take kindly to popular criticism. He compared his present troubles with 'hunting the tiger with angry wasps about

him.' He refused to relinquish the other office. 'If I am to lead this country,' he insisted, 'I must know everything.' He indicated a reluctant willingness to reconstruct his government – but made it clear that any heads that rolled would not include his own.⁶⁹

Bracken brought to him a letter from Lord Beaverbrook, recommending a war cabinet of only three names, all to be free of departmental duties, beside the P.M.: quixotically, he recommended his arch enemy Bevin, whom he called 'the strongest man in the present cabinet,' Eden ('the most popular'), and Attlee (whom he loathed); he barely mentioned his real rival for power – 'the desire of the public for Cripps is a fleeting passion.'⁷⁰

with all the sinister timing with which the vultures appear, circling above a wounded animal, the Zionists seized once more upon a dark hour in Britain's fortunes to further their own ambitions. Chaim Weizmann had been about to depart for the United States, that Thursday February 12, but inspired by the grim news he wrote to the prime minister yet again to demand that Britain allow the arming of twenty thousand Jews from Palestine, who were willing to fight, he said, if 'their homeland' should become endangered by the Nazi advance. Twelve thousand Jews had already enlisted singly in Britain's armies, but they needed the stimulation of a national identity, the Zionist leader argued: 'Give the Jews their national name, emblems, and military organisation,' he demanded, 'and enjoin on the [British mandate] authorities in Palestine a more sympathetic approach to our people.'⁷¹

This was however quite impossible, as Eden later explained to Gil Winant: 'As long as the decision against the formation of a Jewish Army stands, so long must Jewish companies in Palestine and elsewhere continue to be regarded as an integral part of the British Army.' Otherwise the Palestinian Arabs might demand an emblem too, and Britain would have two 'national' forces with which to contend. To Winant, Eden talked of the need for 'appeasing Jewish sentiment' as though again facing an unreasoning dictator.⁷²

Grave though his own preoccupations were, Churchill did receive Weizmann, but only briefly. Although a confessed Zionist, he could not openly avow his beliefs: at least for the duration of this war, the empire's bread was buttered on the Arab side. He placated Weizmann during their brief talk with the assurance that he had 'a plan, which of course can be carried into effect only when the war is over. . . We shall help you.' He confided this plan to him, as Weizmann later told Bernard Baruch: 'We shall help you,' repeated Churchill. 'Keep this confidential, but you might

talk it over with Roosevelt when you get to America. There's nothing he and I cannot do if we set our minds to it.'⁷³

how rapidly the weeks had skimmed by. Churchill was dazed by how scales had continued to tilt unfavourably even after Pearl Harbor. The Pacific War Council of February 17, joined by the two sad faced Dutchmen still hoping to save Java, passed in a blur of impressions – the swift-footed Japanese in Churchill's angry words who 'moved quicker and ate less than our men,' the baffling inactivity of American submarines in the region, the surliness of the Australians, the intransigent Indian princes and politicians – absent from these councils, but a dilemma none the less for that.⁷⁴

He submerged himself in reshuffling his government, skilfully juggling new names with old. His aide, Captain Richard Pim, found him the next morning in the map room. Churchill hinted at resignation, and was pleased at Pim's response – 'But, my God, Sir, you can't do that!'⁷⁵

Some of the changes were effortlessly made. Churchill decided to drop Lord Moyne as Colonial Secretary, as well as Labour's Arthur Greenwood, whose effectiveness had been reduced, Winant reported, by 'over-indulgence in strong drink.'⁷⁶ He also recommended to the king that in the event of his death Eden or Anderson should succeed him. Imparting this news to Eden that morning, February 18, he dangled the additional post of Leader of the House before him: or should it go to Cripps? Eden wanted it as a stepping stone to power; but he found no tactful way of pressing his claim. He said he would think it over.⁷⁷ Churchill asked, 'When can I see you again?' He added: 'I must have my sleep after lunch.' But he was robbed of his nap, because Cripps now buttonholed him for two hours to say that yes, he had decided to accept the job unless of course Anthony wanted it. 'That is what I should like most,' said Cripps, and he repeated these words fervently to Eden. Beaverbrook did not want Cripps at all. Seeing Eden at five, he again strongly urged that the cabinet be reduced to four – namely Churchill, Cripps, Attlee, and Eden; and that Eden be Leader of the House. Returning to the prime minister at five-thirty, Eden told him of this.⁷⁸ Speaking to the junior ministers at six-thirty p.m. Churchill again remarked that he had been inclined to resign. But, wrote Lord Reith, Minister of Works, 'there was no one else with shoulders broad enough to bear the burden.'⁷⁹

Retiring for drinks with Beaverbrook afterwards in the Annexe, Churchill showed him his ideas for a new, smaller war cabinet. One list had five names, the other seven including Bevin and Beaverbrook, as Minister of Production. 'Take the five,' Beaverbrook recommended. 'And leave me out. I want

to retire. Anthony should lead the House, not Cripps. And Attlee should not be deputy prime minister.' He regarded Attlee as colourless and lacking drive. 'We want tougher fellows at a time like this. Fighting men.' He had however walked into an ambush. Churchill led him into the adjacent room where Attlee, Eden, Bracken, and the Chief Whip had been waiting. Beaverbrook stoutly repeated his criticisms of Attlee. The two squawked at each other like fighting cocks until the prime minister silenced Beaverbrook. Beaverbrook stated flatly that he would not join a government with Attlee as deputy P.M., and stalked out. Churchill amended his list, with Oliver Lyttelton replacing Beaverbrook as minister of war production.

Churchill invited him back the next morning, and showed him the new list. Beaverbrook was hurt. 'Against my bad manners,' he wrote a few days later, 'I thought the prime minister should set my capacity to get the ships.' The prime minister now offered him a post in Washington; since Beaverbrook declined that, he offered him the office of Lord Privy Seal. Again his friend declined. The P.M. then suggested he announce Beaverbrook's retirement on account of ill-health. 'I agreed,' wrote Beaverbrook.⁸⁰

Lunching with Eden at Claridges on the nineteenth Churchill told him that he had decided upon a seven-man cabinet and would accept Beaverbrook's offer of resignation.⁸¹

thus the troublesome Canadian hobgoblin left Churchill's government, never to return. Winston was melancholy at this parting. 'He needn't have gone,' he said over lunch next day with the Crippses and the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*. 'He could have had any one of three or four offices. . . He was good for me!. . . He put courage and pep into me.'⁸²

Over dinner with Lord Beaverbrook a few days later the P.M. again mentioned that job in Washington. 'I did not want you to leave the government,' he pleaded. Beaverbrook growled, 'Let us leave things as they are.' As they went their ways, Churchill told him: 'We shall gain in tranquillity but we shall lose in activity.'⁸³ It was a fine appreciation, matched by the generous language of Beaverbrook's letter of farewell. This spoke warmly of having spent in Churchill's government 'twenty-one months of high adventure, the like of which has never been known,' and confirmed:

You took a great chance in putting me in. . . It was little enough I gave you, compared with what you gave me. I owe my reputation to you. . . I send this letter of gratitude & devotion to the leader of the nation, the

saviour of our people & the symbol of resistance in the free world. Yours affectionately, max.⁸⁴

'I was often bad-tempered, irascible, and at times rude,' conceded Beaverbrook, writing a contrite memoir on these events. 'I yielded on big issues and magnified small ones into insuperable obstacles.'

churchill would not have altered one word of that. Under mounting Labour Party pressure, meanwhile, the recasting of the government continued.⁸⁵ With the situation in Burma critical, Churchill had sent for General Brooke after lunch on February 19, 1942 and readily agreed to his suggestion that they send out a better general to take command – Sir Harold Alexander. Churchill showed the C.I.G.S. his new cabinet list. ('The greatest blessing of all,' rejoiced Brooke privately, 'is to be rid of Beaverbrook!'⁸⁶) No, the Beaver was not liked; and even less when word of Churchill's plan to exile him to Washington reached the British colony there – Dill spoke to Halifax of resigning.⁸⁷ Churchill released the new government list, embargoed, to the press that evening, February 19. (When Eden came to see him the next morning, still pleading his own cause, Churchill agreed however to hold it for a few days, and to consult him before releasing it.)⁸⁸

Shown the new cabinet list, the American ambassador was relieved at Beaverbrook's departure – he had 'so harried' the P.M. since the visit to Washington.⁸⁹ Winant had brought over to No. 10 Downing-street a 'cheery word' of support which he had elicited from the president. 'I realise how the fall of Singapore has affected you and the British people,' wrote F.D.R. 'It gives the well-known back-seat drivers a field day but no matter how serious our setbacks have been . . . we must constantly look forward to the next moves that need to be made to hit the enemy. I hope you will be of good heart in these trying weeks because I am very sure that you have the great confidence of the masses of the British people.'⁹⁰ In his forthcoming broadcast he proposed to excoriate the people who treated 'the Channel episode' as a defeat. Late that night, Churchill responded. 'The pressure here has never been dangerous,' he assured the president. He claimed to have used it, in fact, to effect 'wholesome changes and accessions,' although he did admit to grieving still over Beaverbrook. He confessed that he did not like these days of stress: 'I have found it difficult to keep my eye on the ball.' Promising to 'teleprint' more to F.D.R. over the weekend, he reminded him not to 'dwell upon' the damage that the warships had sustained.⁹¹

The word 'teleprint' was a clue that he was again going to use his private line. On February 18 the admiralty had already signalled to its representatives in Washington and Moscow a full narrative on the escape of the German battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, though Admiral Pound was not able to disclose any *ultra* aspects.⁹² Churchill now knew that his magnetic mines had done some serious injury to the warships. As they had ploughed across the deadly minefields, both battle cruisers had triggered explosion after explosion. The codebreakers sent to him a summary of the intercepted signals, and these spelled out the hidden drama of February 12:

3:30 p.m. *Scharnhorst* hit a mine...

4:06 p.m. From Admiral Commanding Battleships. Most Immediate. *Scharnhorst* as leading ship hit a mine . . . abreast of A and B turrets. Compartments 1 to 12 undamaged. Slight inflow of water into No. 2 boiler room. Rudders, propellers, and engines apparently in order. We have no report concerning the forward spaces. Admiral Commanding Battleships is on board Z 29. 3rd Torpedo-boat flotilla is with *Scharnhorst*.

10:45 p.m. From *Gneisenau*. Most Immediate. Mined . . . At 02:00 shall be at Buoy A. Intended to proceed Elbe. Request orders.

10:47 p.m. . . . Most immediate. . . . *Scharnhorst* mined again.'

Jubilant, Churchill asked the First Sea Lord whether this should not be laid before the President, adding: 'I am inclined to send it with a covering note by my secret and direct line' – possibly the most telling proof of this hitherto undisclosed secret channel between the war leaders.

Admiral Pound discouraged the idea. Releasing even the word 'mined' might compromise the *ultra* secret. Sir John Godfrey, his director of Naval Intelligence, cabled to the Navy Department in Washington the rather less specific report, 'It is now known from our most secret source that both German battle cruisers received underwater damage on their passage from Brest to German North Sea ports.' It was hoped to publicise this later.⁹³



A second good-natured letter arrived from Roosevelt, playfully revealing that Winston's sins had found him out.⁹⁴ The secret that he had discovered was an embarrassing hangover from Churchill's wilderness years, the early

1930s, the aching epoch when Churchill, out of office, had eked out his literary earnings by selling his paintings, like another Great Contemporary.

Other men of action and adventure had also been painters – Captain Bligh of the *Bounty* for one – but few statesmen apart from Hitler and Churchill. The latter had sought solace at the easel after leaving the admiralty in 1915, and under Lady Lavery's tutoring he had become an accomplished painter. His likeness of her husband, Sir John Lavery painting Churchill, was exhibited at the Royal Society of Portrait Painters four years later, but since then he had displayed none of his works – at least, not under his real name.⁹⁵ In the early Thirties he had agreed, evidently at the bidding of French painter Charles Montag, to stage a one-man show at the *Galérie Druet* in Paris. He signed the Impressionist-style canvases, according to art historian Professor Bodkin, as 'Charles Maurin' (spelt that way). The Paris gallery had sold half a dozen of them at an agreeable price, according to Bodkin, who otherwise drew a discreet veil across the subject.⁹⁶

Neither the ease of the sale nor Bodkin's discretion are surprising. The real Charles Maurin, born at Puy in 1856, was a minor master of the Post Impressionist school who had died in the *Alpes-Maritimes*, France, in 1914.⁹⁷ Winston Churchill's harmless artistic conceit had escaped detection – until now, when Roosevelt had dictated this straight-faced letter, clucking his tongue at his new friend's profitable subterfuge.

How had Roosevelt cottoned on to this? On the day in December 1941 when the Washington newspapers had announced Churchill's arrival, a local art expert, Mr Edward Bruce, had sent a droll 'invitation' round to the White House, addressed to 'Charles Marin [*sic*] care of the president.' (In a covering letter Bruce had explained, tongue-in-cheek: 'We have always had a very high regard in the Section [of Fine Arts] for an English painter named Charles Marin who we understand is otherwise known as Winston Churchill.') 'My dear Marin,' the actual invitation ('we serve coffee!') read in part:

I just heard you were staying in Washington and as you are on our list of the artists we would like to entertain at the Section of Fine Arts, I hope very much you will drop in and have lunch with us.

'I think,' the letter concluded innocently, 'I could get one or two of our better artists to drop in because I know they would like to meet you.'⁹⁸

By the time that this letter had filtered through the humourless White House mail room, Churchill had returned to London and Roosevelt too

had gone away. It was shown to the president upon his return. Intrigued, he asked his secretary to make phone inquiries of the British embassy. He himself signed an internal memo directing that Lord Halifax be asked in confidence 'whether Winston Churchill's painter name is Charles Marin.'⁹⁹ Prudently using the telephone, the embassy responded weeks later that the correct name was 'Morin,' according to the White House memo.¹⁰⁰ Roosevelt sent the whole dossier over to London in February 1942, the day before the German warships made their Channel dash. 'Dear Winston,' he reproached him on February 11, 'these people who go around under assumed names render themselves open to all kinds of indignity and suspicion.' He added this piece of mischief: 'The British Embassy was asked for verification and I suppose the matter has been to Scotland Yard and back again.' He concluded: 'Some day I want to see a painting by this alias fellow – and some day I hope you will get enough time to resume the painting and that I will be able to return to making ship models and collecting stamps!'¹⁰¹

The auction room prices for a Churchill, averaging from five- to twenty-four thousand pounds, would eventually far outclass those for a Charles Maurin. Churchill's 1924 French landscape, 'Mimizan,' would sell for £48,000 fifty-three years later; a Maurin attracted only £800 in 1972.

the prime minister adored painting. He completed ten or fifteen paintings a year. He had always favoured landscapes bathed in the Mediterranean sunshine – paintings in which Man scarcely figured. He told Sir John Rothenstein, director of the Tate Gallery, 'If it weren't for painting, I couldn't live; I couldn't bear the strain of things.' It recharged his batteries, he said.

Brendan Bracken would write to a later president that Winston had returned from the South of France in fine fettle – 'He has finished the second volume of his book,' exclaimed Bracken, 'and is well on the way to completing half the third. In less than five weeks he painted more than ten pictures. What a man!'¹⁰² By the time Churchill laid down his brush in 1958 it had passed across five hundred canvasses. Experts spoke of them in the muted tones reserved for the efforts of the eminent. It was odd, the art critic of the *Manchester Guardian* once pointed out, for a man so British to have leaned to the French Impressionists. Perhaps he too knew something about 'Maurin.' *The Times* was condescending: it agreed that his 'Winter Sunshine' would 'certainly attract attention by its original vision combined with sound craftsmanship.' The Tate Gallery acquired one Churchill study, 'Loup River, Alpes-Maritimes.' Upon his election as an honorary R.A. he was entitled to show six canvasses at the Royal Academy each year. His views on other people's art were uncompromising. Rothenstein has quoted one remark about a cherished work at the Tate: 'If this is the "Resurrection," growled Churchill, 'give me Eternal Rest.'

17: *Churchill Up and Churchill Down*

Lord beaverbrook had once written a book with a chapter entitled, 'Churchill up and Churchill down.' When all was well, Winston was steady; when it was not, he was not. All was not now well. Public opinion in England had been more affronted by the Channel episode than by the loss of Singapore; it revived the spectre of seaborne invasion. Accordingly, he wilted; his heart began to play up again. Now sixty-seven, he was an ageing statesman in an unimpressive Parliament which was perforce elderly too. Its Members' average age was sixty. Only Eden, wrote Cecil King, stood out by his looks, grace, and charm. The Commons now met in the old House of Lords, which added to the faint air of unreality. Meanwhile southern England congealed in the grip of a long, bleak winter which would last until the early spring of 1942.

Beaverbrook later told Halifax that when Churchill had returned to London from Washington in January he had been slow to realise how strong the criticism against the government was. He had thought that by refusing to make changes he could handle the criticism. He soon found that he couldn't get away with that, and between February 19 and 27 he was forced to reconstruct his war cabinet, bringing in Cripps. It was a further lurch to the left; Churchill had escaped defeat, but only by the skin of his teeth. Ambassador Averell Harriman was disconcerted by the time and energy which the prime minister had had to expend in mastering the political crisis. Winston's hold on the public imagination had loosened. The opposition to the prime minister came now, the American reported to Hopkins early in March, both from the House and Fleet-street (the newspaper world), while the star of Sir Stafford Cripps was rising with each triumph of the Soviet armies in battle.¹

Wise men predicted that he could not last many more months.² Germany and Italy evidently believed that time was on their side. On March 8 Churchill could read what Ribbentrop was secretly saying about the establishment of a new Nazi world order. 'Germany,' Hitler's foreign minister had remarked, 'also was not in favour of anything like the Versailles Conference,' but he himself had 'not yet thought out' what method would be better. They could devise the best method of dealing with the defeated Allies amongst themselves, he added, 'as there was still plenty of time yet.'³ The Japanese ambassador further reported that Ribbentrop had said that Hitler's headquarters was now planning a Spring offensive in Russia, with emphasis on reinforcing the southern front and cutting the Allied supply lines to the Soviet Union. 'Following her Caucasus campaign,' Ribbentrop had added, Germany would advance into the Middle East.⁴

with the replacement of six more ministers and nine under-secretaries on Sunday February 22 the reconstruction of Churchill's administration was complete, though he left many bruised feelings. As Cripps later said, Churchill fought for days against excluding the few men he did dismiss. Cripps refused to join until the sycophantic and inadequate Captain David Margesson and Colonel J. T. C. Moore-Brabazon, secretary of state for war and minister of aircraft production respectively, were removed.⁵

Although Eden favoured Lyttelton for Margesson's post at the war office, Churchill eventually agreed to replace him with the blunt Whitehall insider Sir Percy James ('P.J.') Grigg. What made it an unusual choice was that Grigg had previously been Margesson's permanent under-secretary at the war office; promoting a civil servant to be the political chief of his own ministry seemed to set an undesirable precedent. On the twentieth, Churchill sent James Stuart, the Conservative party's Chief Whip (i.e., 'enforcer'), to drop a hint to Margesson, saying: 'I am afraid the changes may possibly affect you.' Margesson said that no hints would be necessary. Even so, he was taken aback. Asked to recommend a successor from outside the parliamentary machine he himself had suggested Grigg, meaning to be purposefully unhelpful; Churchill however knew Grigg – he had been his private secretary in the Twenties – already, and he leapt at the idea.⁶ On Saturday Churchill sent a letter round to Margesson asking him to resign (he found it difficult to look people in the eye when sacking them). Simultaneously he invited Grigg down to Chequers.⁷ 'That is the last time I

recommend anyone for anything,' lamented Margesson to Grigg upon his return.⁸

Firmly swinging his axe again, Churchill asked Lord Hankey to resign as Paymaster General while retaining his special committee on oil. Aggrieved by this action, Hankey was minded to give up the lot – he had for some time been feeling the 'utter incompetence' with which Winston was running the war, he told others.⁹ Even after resigning as asked, Hankey kept the bit between the teeth. He warned Churchill in private letters about the danger to *Ramilles* and *Royal Sovereign* in their present station off Ceylon, and attacked the government publicly in the House of Lords, demanding an inquiry into the disaster at Singapore.

Duff Cooper had just returned from Singapore. He told Churchill and Brendan Bracken he was looking for a job. Perhaps unwisely, Bracken grouched that anybody could have his now thankless job as minister of information. Churchill snapped: 'You ungrateful puppy. You may have learnt nothing; but I have learnt a lesson.' Referring to Duff Cooper's earlier tenure of the information ministry, he snarled at Bracken: 'I choose a distinguished man of letters, a brave man, a master of English culture, and put him into the Ministry of Information, and though I could never understand it, the public felt him a failure. I then choose you from the gutter against all advice. Everybody says I am wrong, and yet for some reason that I equally fail to understand, everybody now says you have been successful. I have learnt my lesson: never again to put a thoroughbred to draw a dung cart!'¹⁰

in the midst of this Whitehall upheaval, Churchill made two highly unorthodox changes to his chiefs of staff committee. Their chairman, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, was no longer up to the task. He often appeared to be asleep, looking in Brooke's vivid words 'like an old parrot asleep on his perch.'¹¹ By-passing Portal, the airman, to whom the post should by rights have gone by rotation, Churchill appointed General Alan Brooke as chairman. It turned out to be one of his more felicitous appointments, though for the wrong reasons. Brooke knew how to stand up to the prime minister. After a few weeks, the chiefs of staff meetings began to hum. Major-General John Kennedy, the director of military operations, found that the new organisation worked much better than the old. 'There is very little interference by the P.M.,' he told Lord Hankey, 'and the whole machine is working smoothly.'¹²

Churchill's second innovation was the appointment to the chiefs of staff of the youthful Lord Louis Mountbatten, then only forty-one years old and recently selected as the new Chief of Combined Operations. Churchill's reasoning behind this choice was sound. He intended to expose the chiefs to a lively mind, he said, and to ensure that a Singapore – 'the most shameful moment of my life,' as he told the under-secretaries on March 3 – never happened again.¹³ He invited Mountbatten and the Griggs to lunch at Downing-street on March 4, and told Mountbatten that he was henceforth to sit as a 'fourth chief of staff' on their committee; to which he added the eccentric detail that Mountbatten, a Captain RN, was to have the acting ranks of vice-admiral, lieutenant-general, and air marshal.¹⁴

If General Brooke took poorly to this youthful interloper ('Rather doubtful,' he mused, 'how that business will run!') the First Sea Lord was livid at the promotion of an officer twenty-four years his junior and half way down the captains' list.¹⁵ In the Royal Navy, seniority was a matter taken excruciatingly seriously. Churchill informed him of Mountbatten's appointment only the next day; he explained that he wanted the young officer to exercise his influence 'upon Combined Operations in the largest sense,' not merely the local Commando incursions he had been planning until then.¹⁶ Writing formally to the three chiefs of staff, he directed that the changes were not to be made public; no doubt he wanted to protect feelings that were already ruffled at this unexpected visitation by the king's cousin.¹⁷ Admiral Pound replied frankly that hitherto he had been able to carry the can for almost all the naval operations that had appeared ill-advised, including the last fateful operations of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*; he feared however that the Navy would believe that Lord Mountbatten's 'wrong' promotion had been undertaken against his advice: 'I am very much afraid that it would be taken as another supposed case of your overriding my advice.' Alternatively, people would assume that Mountbatten's Royal blood had earned him, a junior captain in a shore appointment, a 'three steps' promotion.¹⁸

Churchill was unrepentant. He repeated to the chiefs of staff that Mountbatten was to attend all their meetings on major issues; he appended a hand-written note to General Ismay, their secretary, allowing them to discuss only the details of Mountbatten's appointment, if they desired, 'but I cannot have the plan seriously affected.'¹⁹



From Robert Menzies, formerly prime minister of Australia and now a backbench Member of the Opposition in the Canberra parliament, came a fawning telegram. He had an eye on Lyttelton's now vacant post in the Middle East; it had a seat in the cabinet. He had watched recent events, he wrote to Churchill, with a 'clear understanding [of] your problems.' He even expressed admiration for Winston's 'sustained and sustaining courage and leadership.'²⁰

The prime minister sent a routine reply.²¹ Sir Ronald Cross, his High Commissioner in Canberra, explained that Menzies desired to enter the British House of Commons and pull his weight in the war. 'No doubt he also hopes for promotion.' Ignorant, as he confirmed, of Churchill's views, Cross found it difficult to talk with Menzies on the matter: 'I am now in need of guidance as to the line I should take.'²² The last thing Churchill wanted was a man of Robert Menzies' calibre at Westminster. He could hardly forget the painful remarks by Menzies during the cabinet meetings in the spring of 1941. * Mr Attlee, equally horrified at the proposal, minuted helpfully that given the dearth of qualified people in Australia, Menzies' duty and utility surely lay there. 'I agree' concurred Churchill, adding the words: 'At present.'²³ Upon reflection he thought that a foreign posting – anywhere but Britain, in fact – would be more appropriate. He suggested that Curtin might send Menzies to Washington, as Australian minister. To this end, he shortly brought Richard Casey, the virtually unknown diplomat currently serving there, to replace Lyttelton in the Middle East, offering to Curtin the hollow explanation that it 'strikes the note of bringing statesmen from all over the empire to the highest direction of affairs.'²⁴ Well, if not the highest, at least it left a vacant slot in Washington, into which Menzies could be sloughed away. There was wide support in Canberra for the Washington appointment; but Curtin, the Australian prime minister, vetoed it, and Menzies, one of the empire's finest statesmen, stayed in the wilderness.



On February 23, 1942, Churchill's government upheaval was complete. He was not proud of it; he scolded himself for having surrendered to newspaper criticism and to public opinion. He had believed himself strong

* Vol. i, pages 514 *et seq.*

enough, he wrote years later, to spit in all their faces: 'This,' he reflected, 'was certainly not my Finest Hour.'²⁵ It had done much to restore Churchill's popularity. The corrosive speculation that he would soon be forced out of office himself eventually ceased.²⁶

For the empire, the unhappy consequence was that the reshuffle had given the National Government a more noticeable leftward bias than the inclusion of the first Labour ministers in May 1940. The cabinet as reconstructed was an ill-fitting assortment. Churchill was not a well man; Eden and Lyttelton both drank heavily, perhaps understandably in these times of trouble; and none of those three was truly Conservative.²⁷ Against them were now ranged not only Cripps, but a remarkably revived Clement Attlee, who in Amery's words was now browbeating them like 'a perfect lion.'²⁸

Cripps was the real danger to Winston's position: possessed of a driving intellect, he had so far played his cards faultlessly. An ignorant public, momentarily dazzled by his achievements as British ambassador in a beleaguered Moscow, had begun a 'Cripps for premier' campaign. How the prime minister must have wished him well away, and far from the London limelight!

there is evidence that the weeks of recrimination which the British public had focused upon Churchill after the loss of Singapore brought him to the brink of a nervous collapse.

Over his Tuesday luncheon with the king on February 24 he openly admitted that Burma, Ceylon, Calcutta and Madras, in India, as well as part of Australia might fall into Japanese hands. 'Can we stick together in the face of all this adversity?' his King and Emperor wrote despondently in his diary.²⁹ Eden, pleasantly aware that he was only a heart-beat away from supreme office, found the P.M. 'in a state of great depression and mental agony.' Desmond Morton believed he was mourning the loss of Beaverbrook and other colleagues.³⁰ General Brooke found him very gloomy at the Pacific War Council, and still 'very tired but cheerful' when they discussed Burma, Ceylon, and India two days later.³¹ The reconstructed war cabinet which met on February 25 had however a new feel, an abrasiveness. In Eden's view the reconstruction received a better press than it deserved, but the cabinet seemed to work better, and Churchill was occasionally overborne by his colleagues. No longer was he their undisputed master. 'This is a much better balanced cabinet,' remarked Bevin as they emerged from one such meeting.³² Winston did not like that at all. He told Eden that his

heart was failing. On February 25 the staff at Chequers were told to stand by for his arrival that weekend, but he did not go down to the mansion.³³

churchill was tired, and this was small wonder. His appointment card was crowded with fixtures. Bad enough that regular cabinet meetings ceased for days on end – he could not bear the new faces – but he called no *defence committee* meetings either.³⁴ Eden expressed private concern; Cadogan remarked that there was no hand on the wheel.³⁵ Watching Winston's extraordinary, rambling performance at the India Committee's first session on February 26, and his 'complete inability to grasp even the most elementary points,' his old school-friend Leo Amery concluded that the sudden heart problem had finally affected the great man's brain.

'He seems quite incapable,' Amery wrote in his diary,

of listening or taking in even the simplest point but goes off at a tangent on a word and then rambles on inconsecutively. . . . Certainly a complete outsider coming to that meeting and knowing nothing of his reputation would have thought him a rather amusing but quite gaga old gentleman who could not quite understand what people were talking about.

Some ministers accepted Churchill's heart problems at face value. Amery morbidly wondered if they were witnessing the beginning of the end. He recalled that with Herbert Asquith and Lord Birkenhead too their gift of oratory had lingered on long after their more important talent for decision-making had declined.³⁶ At least one other minister detected the same signs of Churchill's 'becoming gaga' as he too put it.³⁷ Bracken warned Eden that the old boy's failing heart might affect his faculties of co-ordination, thought, and speech. Churchill had told Bracken he was already 'most depressed.' 'He . . . said he could only go on for another month and then he would be finished.'

Others close to the inner circle suspected the prime minister of play-acting. Eden's private secretary Oliver Harvey believed that he might be trying to thwart critics by feigning health problems.³⁸ The problems were however real enough. At low ebb, Churchill lunched alone with his wife and youngest daughter on Friday the twenty-seventh: 'Papa,' Mary observed, 'is not too well physically – and he is worn down by the continuous crushing press of events.'³⁹ In some ways the *Angst* crowding in on him was worse

than a Nazi air raid. That night, he fled to Dytchley Park, to spend the weekend out of earshot in Oxfordshire.⁴⁰

Clementine wrote to her sister that these were 'days of anguish' for her husband – 'So . . . impotent to stem this terrible tide in the Far East.'⁴¹ Each morning the boxes brought into his bedroom held new, crushing disappointments. He had hopefully asked General Auchinleck about his intentions; Saturday brought the wordy and affable reply that Auchinleck did not feel able to launch a major offensive against Rommel, or even to recapture the airfields in Cyrenaica, before June.⁴² 'The bloody man does not seem to care about the fate of Malta,' Churchill snapped at his doctor.⁴³ Bracken came, and warily suggested that he appoint Eden as 'deputy minister of defence.' It was not a new idea, and the P.M. was noncommittal.⁴⁴

Eden lay discreetly in wait, listening to the P.M.'s heartbeats. 'Anything may happen to me at any time now,' Churchill said plaintively to him. 'Remember, if it does, you are the one who must succeed.'⁴⁵

Beaverbrook also began to doubt Churchill's continuing mental stability.⁴⁶ His papers contain a folder of ammunition, completed around this time, February 1942, to use against Winston. The two dozen pages were an alphabetical repository of his friend's disappointed prophecies and miscalculations from 'A for Abdication' onward, through the 'error' made by Hitler in invading Norway, to the prediction that Germany 'dare not assail' the Soviet Union; the most recent item was the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*.⁴⁷

Harried by the cabinet ferment over India and the Soviet frontier demands, hounded now as well by an unruly press powered by Beaverbrook and fed directly with titbits by the Soviet ambassador, Churchill slumped in his chair; he alternated, in Bevin's words, between violent resentment and the theatrical posture of a beaten man.⁴⁸

by alternately clutching at his heart and talking of resignation Winston Churchill all but stilled ministerial dissent. A clammy, unspoken fear gripped them nonetheless – namely that Britain's fabulous eastern empire was all but lost. Some blamed Churchill personally.⁴⁹ A few days after the fall of Singapore, General Brooke wrote that if the army could not fight any better than this, Britain deserved to lose her empire.⁵⁰ More particularly, Churchill cursed the Australians – they had refused even to counter-attack in Singapore, he would tell the under-secretaries on March 3.⁵¹ Much as he had earlier mistrusted Menzies for his ambitions, he now detested Curtin

for the manner in which he was standing up to him, despite having a parliamentary majority in Canberra of only one.

How he loathed Australia! He had never visited the antipodes, and according to Lord Moran regarded the Australians (and New Zealanders too) as being of bad stock, as being ‘tiresome people with whom contact should be kept to a minimum.’⁵² He scarcely mentioned either nation in his speeches and writings. In May 1943 he would mock General Marshall for wanting to visit Australia – describing the vast and hauntingly beautiful continent as a brush-covered island famous only for a fur-bearing egg-laying animal which made love in the moonlight; Clementine, he quipped on the same occasion, had visited Australia for only one day, and had spent that visiting Melbourne Zoo.⁵³



After Singapore the mutual antipathy between Churchill and Australia blazed up anew.

Knowing that the line in Burma could not be held for long, and casting about for reinforcements, Churchill’s eye had lit upon the two divisions of the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.) which he had himself released from the Middle East after Pearl Harbor, moving them first toward the Pacific, latterly toward Sumatra and Java, and now – at Canberra’s instance – allowing them to steer for home. A glance at the map room chart confirmed that, if diverted immediately, the 7th Australian division, loaded in the *Mount Vernon* convoy, could reach Rangoon within days. He evidently counted on forcing the Australians to accept the diversion of their following division as well, because the two had been loaded in such a way that the destination of both would be governed by that of the first.⁵⁴ Since the Norway fiasco of 1940, it is fair to presume that he had always kept loading considerations in mind.

Churchill put this proposed diversion of the ‘leading Australian division’ to General Ismay on February 17.⁵⁵ He also asked Canberra; and when permission was curtly refused, he appealed again on the twentieth, promising to relieve these troops at the earliest.⁵⁶ ‘I suppose you realise,’ he began, ‘that your leading division . . . is the only force that can reach Rangoon in time to prevent its loss and the severance of communication with China.’ That was language of acceptable robustness, but what followed was not. He reminded Prime Minister Curtin of his earlier accusation that to abandon

Singapore would be 'an inexcusable betrayal,' and – carefully picking his words to avoid lying – said that 'agreeable with your point of view' he had therefore put the 18th Division and other reinforcements into Singapore, where they had now been lost, instead of into Burma. 'You . . . bear a heavy share on account of your telegram,' he charged, rubbing the point in.⁵⁷

He did not believe that the Australians would relent.⁵⁸ Nevertheless on February 21 he ordered the *Mount Vernon* convoy diverted northward toward Rangoon. Meanwhile he also asked Roosevelt to lend his weight to the appeal to Curtin.⁵⁹ Roosevelt did so, arguing that he was sending thousands of American troops to Australia.⁶⁰ Curtin rebuffed him, politely; he refused Churchill's 'rather strongly worded' request (received 'at this late stage') quite rudely, referring with all the tactlessness which is so much a part of the Australian charm to his fears of 'a recurrence of the Greek and Malayan campaigns.' He doubted, he said, that the leading Australian division could even be landed in Burma, let alone 'brought out as promised.'⁶¹

Still hoping to persuade Curtin, Churchill ordered the Australian convoy, now on the high seas between Colombo and Rangoon, to slow down. He admitted that he had already 'temporarily' diverted the convoy toward Rangoon – 'The convoy is now too far north . . . to reach Australia without refuelling.'⁶² His duplicity shocked Curtin: Australia's soldiers had fought in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. 'Now you contemplate using the A.I.F.,' he wired angrily to Churchill, 'to save Burma. All this has been done, as in Greece, without adequate air support.'⁶³ Churchill caved in: on February 23 he conceded that the convoy would refuel at Colombo, then 'proceed to Australia in accordance with your wishes.'⁶⁴

There was of course a silver lining to all this. He had now a scapegoat for the loss of Burma. 'We have made every appeal,' he radioed to the Governor of Burma, 'but Australian government absolutely refuses. Fight on.'⁶⁵

In Burma the situation deteriorated rapidly. The British 17th Division (two British battalions and an Indian brigade) was driven back, retreating toward the Sittang river; the premature demolition of the only bridge trapped two of the brigades. On the last day of the month the Governor radioed that he was evacuating Rangoon. Thus the Japanese tide rolled onward, and India itself, glittering bauble in the crown of Britain's far eastern empire, was only just beyond the next horizon.

churchill had no reason to consider Australia at risk of invasion; he had cypher intelligence which supported his belief. Equally, he differed with his

colleagues in his assessment of the rising agitation in India. 'I doubt,' he informed Ismay on February 23, 'whether the internal security problem in India will become serious. The mass of the population will hold their breath as usual till the arrival of a new conqueror. There will I think be a healthy dread of the Japanese.'⁶⁶

On the same date, the master lend-lease agreement between Britain and the United States was signed.⁶⁷ With this ticklish negotiation out of the way, Roosevelt now felt free to intervene directly over India. He sent a highly sensitive message to London for Ambassador Harriman to deliver to the prime minister in person on the morning of February 26.⁶⁸ This inquired what steps Churchill proposed by way of conciliating the Indian leaders. The letter was an impertinent demand for Britain to give up India.

Truly it might be said that the empire had more to fear from her allies than from her enemies. 'States which have no overseas colonies or possessions,' Churchill would write, dipping his pen in the vitriol of sarcasm, 'are capable of rising to moods of great elevation and detachment about the affairs of those who have.'⁶⁹ He wondered what right a country might assert to take such a lofty view when it had such troubled race relations as the United States.⁷⁰

In fact he had just set up an India Committee to examine this very issue – it was at its first meeting that evening, February 26, that Leo Amery decided that Churchill was on the brink of nervous collapse. The Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, objected to Churchill's plan to promise India Dominion status after the war. He wrote to Amery protesting about 'these explosions in the prime minister's mind.'⁷¹ Amery, the only Conservative on the India Committee, saw three alternatives – to do nothing; to revert to British Rule in its most intractable form, or to move onward to an All-Indian Executive Council. Cripps however agreed with Churchill's scheme, as did Attlee and Sir John Anderson.⁷²

Adrift in a rising political tempest, Churchill dragged his anchor. At that India Committee meeting on the twenty-sixth, in one of his more 'expansive moments,' as Amery charitably put it, the P.M. suggested that they might just dump India and concentrate on the defence of the British Isles, Africa, and the sea route to Australia.⁷³ He was in a *fin-de-siècle* mood. It brought to mind Lord Beaverbrook's vivid simile of the housemaid who spites her nagging mistress by dropping the tray with all the priceless porcelain, before handing in her notice.⁷⁴

churchill retired to Dytchley Park for a few days, leaving the Committee to thrash out their proposal on India. The original intention had been for him to make a Declaration in Parliament, and to broadcast it to India. This speech would avow Britain's intention of granting full Dominion status after the war. If the Congress Party still obstructed, suggested Amery, then India should be partitioned: the Moslems should have their 'Pakistan.'

By Monday March 2 the draft document was ready. It contained sensational provisions. There was only indirect reference to the Crown; and India was to be told that she was free to leave the British empire. Amery objected that this would invite trouble from India's predatory neighbours Afghanistan and Nepal.⁷⁵ He asked Lord Linlithgow what the effect might be on these neighbours, and on the frontier tribes, the princes, and the Indian Army. He did not expect the Congress Party to favour the declaration.⁷⁶ The Viceroy's reply showed that he liked the draft better than Churchill's original scheme, although he feared the effect on the Indian Army of announcing that India was free to leave the empire.⁷⁷

Truculent and unreasoning, Churchill did what he could to obstruct: while appearing neutral himself, he would throw the matter open to debate by those upon whom he could count to object. Shown the draft declaration, he asked for a special cabinet meeting to be called on March 3, to discuss 'this India business.' Thereafter, he indicated, he would feel obliged to consult all the other ministers and 'probably' all the under-secretaries too. 'Moreover,' he pointed out, 'the King's assent must be obtained at an early date, as the rights of the imperial Crown are plainly affected.'⁷⁸

Hitherto, of course, he had not been known to consult His Majesty so diligently. As for his other tactic – appealing to *all* the ministers – this was the same means as he had adopted to subvert his colleagues' eagerness to accept Hitler's peace offers after Dunkirk in May and June 1940.*

general auchinleck's telegram, anticipating mounting no desert offensive against General Rommel before June 1942, had dismayed the prime minister. He advised Eden from Dytchley that Stalin, Roosevelt, and 'everybody else' would judge this delay 'intolerable.'⁷⁹ He drafted an abusive message to Auchinleck, insisting on an earlier date, but showed it to the C.I.G.S. upon his return to London on Monday, March 2. Brooke considered it an unpardonable interference with a commander's judgement – it

* Vol. i, pages 301-2.

reminded him of a similar episode at Dunkirk. The chiefs of staff withheld Churchill's draft and sent a more temperate message of their own.⁸⁰

Thwarted yet again, Churchill voiced his anger at the after-dinner meeting of the *defence committee* – the first in two weeks. Lyttelton said it was wrong to blame the generals; their losses were 'mainly due to mechanical defects in their tanks,' particularly the cooling system, which had needed distilled water, but had been refilled with the foul product of desert wells. The German tanks had greater fire-power, and their commanders were using superior tactics; Brooke chimed in about the cruiser tanks' fan-belt drive and lubrication, and about poor morale. They wrangled until two a.m., with Churchill 'at his worst,' according to Eden's secretary, 'discouraging, complaining, groaning.'⁸¹

At the end of February Churchill's health continued to fail. Bracken found him sitting with his head in his hands and talking of having only a few weeks to live. 'Wilson,' recorded Eden, referring to the doctor, 'fears that the heart will affect his circulation & perhaps even his speech, that there may be something in the nature of a "blackout" temporarily on occasion. All this sounds very alarming & more like a stroke.' Once again Churchill's friends urged him to offload his duties as minister of defence onto Eden. The latter might perhaps, suggested Bracken, appoint a deputy foreign secretary. Bracken insisted on putting the suggestion to Winston and, noted Eden, 'I did not discourage him, for I think that I could help.' He doubted, rightly as it turned out, that Winston would readily agree.⁸²

an additional problem boiling up was whether to appease Stalin. Eden was still insisting that they entertain the Soviet frontier demands.⁸³ Resting at Dytchley, Churchill drafted a telegram to Stalin, painting the situation in darkening hues of grey. Cadogan intercepted it and Eden suggested several additions. Winston sent a disapproving message to the F.O. that night, drawing Eden's attention to a further pessimistic telegram from General Auchinleck in Cairo. Back in London that Monday, March 2, Churchill again objected to the proposed alterations.⁸⁴ 'Fact is,' wrote Cadogan on March 3, 'P.M. is in a sour mood – ill, I think – and frightens anyone.'

Churchill toyed with the idea of flying out to Teheran to meet Stalin for the first time; over dinner on Tuesday he invited Lord Beaverbrook to accompany him. On Wednesday Eden advised that it was better to send no message at all than just the proposed gloomy litany. No message finally went.⁸⁵ Churchill however enlarged his travel plans to include flying on to

Russia, and 'clearing up Cairo' – meaning the obdurate General Auchinleck – on the way. 'This,' observed Eden's private secretary with admiration, 'from a man afflicted with [a] heart which may collapse at any moment. What courage.'⁸⁶

The plans came to naught. Churchill phoned Beaverbrook: their trip was off. Circumstances, he said, made it undesirable to go away at the present. It would be August before he either set eyes on Stalin or 'cleared up Cairo.' His differences with Beaverbrook were seemingly forgotten. 'For your personal information,' wrote Harriman to Hopkins on March 7, 'Max will not come to America.' The Canadian's disposition, he reported, had improved and he expected one day to return to government; until then, he would run his papers and play politics with his exaggerated support for the Soviet Union. 'He intends,' Harriman however believed, 'to be loyal to Churchill.'⁸⁷

japanese troops had invaded Java on the last day of February 1942, sinking four British destroyers as well as the cruiser *Exeter* and four cruisers of Britain's allies in the invasion battles. General Wavell had three days earlier made good his escape to Ceylon. He had rather doubted that he should make this move – to Ceylon – stating in a message to Winston on February 21: 'I hate [the] idea of leaving these stout-hearted Dutchmen and will remain here and fight it out with them as long as possible if you consider this would help at all.' The prime minister had authorised the general's departure: 'You should proceed to India where we require you to resume your position as Commander-in-Chief.' He also informed Wavell that despite Canberra's refusal, he had yesterday diverted that troop convoy northward toward Rangoon, 'being sure Australian Government would not fail to rise to the occasion.'⁸⁸ He suspected that after devouring Java the Japanese would strike toward Ceylon, where the Royal Navy would now have to convert Trincomalee into a naval base to replace Singapore.⁸⁹ He conveyed all these sorrows to the king over lunch on March 3.⁹⁰

His gloom became more impenetrable. He saw no way of gaining a strategic initiative. The signs of a more general malaise multiplied. 'I don't think he's well,' Cadogan chronicled, 'and I fear he's played out.'⁹¹

Churchill pinned his hopes on the awakening American giant. He was now sending frequent telegrams to the president through his most secret channels, involving Bletchley Park, 'C,' and the F.B.I., thereby by-passing Eden, Lord Halifax, and the state department. Since many of the messages

were now numbered, it dawned on the ambassador that there were some that he never saw. 'They may of course be purely personal,' Halifax chided Eden, reporting this discovery; but political or military telegrams, he argued, should surely be shown to himself or Dill. 'I am all for Winston and the president intercommunicating with complete freedom,' he added, 'and I suppose you know what messages pass. If you don't, I would think we might possibly get into some difficulty.'⁹²



It remains a challenge for historians – the certainty that there were many messages between the two leaders which even now, for whatever reason, have not been found or released for public scrutiny.* In July 1941 J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.), reported to the U.S. justice department that Sir William Stevenson, head of British Security Co-ordination in New York, had given this as the reason why no American official could be permitted to know the code used for the two or three hundred messages a week that his organisation was passing via the F.B.I.'s radio station in the United States to S.I.S. headquarters in London. Hoover's political chief, the attorney-general Francis Biddle, learned that nobody in authority in the United States knew anything about these code messages. Stephenson's excuse was that they 'reflected' a correspondence between the president and Churchill.⁹³

Biddle paid an angry visit to the British embassy and challenged Lord Halifax about these code messages; the ambassador stated that 'he had inquired of Stevenson whether these cypher messages going forward were kept secret because they reflected a correspondence between the president and Churchill; Stevenson had denied that he had ever made any such statement.' Biddle brandished at him Hoover's report to the contrary. Lord Halifax professed to be unconcerned; but he was seen to be smiling blandly as the Americans left his embassy. Biddle remarked: 'Somebody has been doing some tall lying here.'⁹⁴

Among the four wordy telegrams sent by Churchill through regular channels to the president on March 4, 1942 was a sombre admission of how the torrent of events since Pearl Harbor had crushed his hopes.⁹⁵ 'When I reflect how I have longed and prayed for the entry of the United States into

* See Appendix I

the war,' he began, 'I find it difficult to realise how gravely our British affairs have deteriorated by what has happened since December 7.' He hoped that all could be retrieved 'in 1943 or 1944.' He pointed out however that the 'Levant-Caspian' front – the Middle East – depended on Stalin's ability to hold off Hitler's coming offensive. In the Pacific, he relied on the Americans regaining their lost naval superiority. After describing his own planned naval reinforcements, moving British aircraft-carriers and battleships into the Indian Ocean by May, Winston predicted: 'The next fortnight will be the most critical for Ceylon.'⁹⁶

A spark of the old aggressive spirit glowed among these embers of despondency: drawing Roosevelt's attention to Japan's widening commitments, he suggested that the Americans mount Commando raids against these far-flung Pacific islands during 1942. He himself was not excluding, he confided, staging a raid on Europe the moment Hitler resumed his offensive in Russia.⁹⁷

the king felt grave concern about the cabinet's draft declaration on India, which he had now seen. The notion that India was free to 'walk out of the empire' astonished him. He grilled Leo Amery for an hour about what was going on. 'He was frankly puzzled,' noted the minister afterwards, 'as to how the thing had all come about so suddenly.' Amery blamed Roosevelt and Attlee; but there was pressure from the Chinese and left-wing British public opinion too.⁹⁸

Churchill had called a special session of his cabinet on India, and it met in his room at the House on March 3; here he 'shook his head very much' over the whole business, as Amery dictated that day. 'For once, he took views round the cabinet. No one did otherwise than accept.' Churchill bowed to the inevitable, but refused to broadcast the declaration himself.⁹⁹ Amery told the king the next day that the 'storm' was purely internal: Winston hated giving up ancient prejudices – he was 'undergoing all the conflicting emotions of a virtuous maiden selling herself for ready money.'¹⁰⁰

Churchill had however still not decided to sell out over India. He dictated another telegram to Washington educating Roosevelt on the broader implications of issuing the declaration on India 'at this critical juncture.' Britain, he argued, had to regard the rights of the one hundred million Moslems, the Indian army, and the thirty or forty million Untouchables, as well as her treaties with the Princes' states. 'Naturally,' he chided the presi-

dent, 'we do not want to throw India into chaos on the eve of [a Japanese] invasion.'¹⁰¹

Churchill brought everything to a head at midday on Thursday March 5. Using his '1940' technique to outflank his war cabinet, he put the India declaration to the full, and still broadly Conservative, body of ministers of cabinet rank. Showing what Cadogan called 'a strong bias against,' he asked their opinions; virtually all objected, as Churchill knew they would, to enabling India to secede from the empire.¹⁰² There was angry spluttering about resignations. Churchill thanked them. Once again, democracy had its uses.

He then told the war cabinet that they would resume these deliberations on Monday the ninth.¹⁰³ 'We shall have to think again very carefully,' Amery wrote to him later that Thursday, 'before proclaiming to the world and the Indian soldier that India can walk out of the empire.' He suggested that Churchill send an emissary to India.¹⁰⁴ 'There will therefore not be a statement,' wrote R. A. Butler, of the foreign office, relieved, 'and, when it comes, it should not sell everything away.'¹⁰⁵

It was only a brief respite. Churchill lunched with his old cronies of the Focus days, General Spears and the Henry Strakosches.^{106*} He went, well oiled, into the war cabinet at six. Cripps coldly accused the prime minister of having wriggled out of issuing the declaration, but these rebukes slithered off the P.M.'s back.¹⁰⁷ 'Talk,' summarised Cadogan, '— only talk — of resignations from [the] war cabinet.'¹⁰⁸

Resentful and truculent, Churchill dined at the foreign office. The alcohol again flowed freely, but according to General Brooke the situation was strained. Now it was Winston who was talking of resigning: he would return his Seals of Office on Monday, if necessary, and Eden should take over.¹⁰⁹ Eden, preoccupied with his own sudden fears that Stalin might do a deal with Hitler again, spoke only of the need to appease Moscow.¹¹⁰ He boasted to his private secretary the next day that Churchill, 'in his cups,' concurred, and this was how the sell-out of eastern Europe to the Soviets began.¹¹¹ In a post-prandial haze, Churchill dictated a telegram to Roosevelt so supportive of Eden's arguments that it was almost a parody. ('Having called Anthony every name from a dog to a pig for suggesting composition with Stalin,'

*The Focus was a group of wealthy or influential Socialist, Jewish, and opposition Conservative politicians and financiers who had financed his lifestyle from July 1936 on. In 1938 Strakosch had 'loaned' him £20,000, a considerable fortune in those days, and wrote it off a few years later. See vol.i, page 104.

marvelled Lord Halifax, reading the telegram in Washington, 'he now goes all out for it himself.'¹¹²)

'The increasing gravity of the war,' Churchill blandly wrote,

has led me to feel that the principles of the Atlantic Charter ought not to be construed so as to deny Russia the frontiers she occupied when Germany attacked her

Incongruously, he then argued that Stalin's own crimes entitled him to these territories: 'I expect that a severe process of liquidating hostile elements in the Baltic States, etc., was employed by the Russians when they took these regions at the beginning of the war. I hope therefore that you will be able to give us a free hand to sign the Treaty which Stalin desires as soon as possible.'¹¹³ Without waiting for Roosevelt's comments, he informed Stalin of this message.¹¹⁴

in ambassador Gil Winant's absence in Washington his rival, Ambassador Harriman, had called at Downing-street that Friday, March 6, 1942. Churchill showed him the cables about India. Harriman assured Roosevelt privately that Churchill and his colleagues were struggling to find a formula that would satisfy public opinion in Britain, the United States, and India – no easy task; Harriman suggested that the president might like to convey through him to Winston what he had in mind on India.¹¹⁵ In a private letter the American added that he was worried about Churchill – about his spirits and about his survival as prime minister as well. The P.M. had not taken the recent criticism well, he said; he had also been tired of late.¹¹⁶ 'The prime minister,' he wrote in a further letter that weekend, 'hates the kind of rum-pus he has had to go through and it has taken a lot out of him. He is better now.'¹¹⁷

In Burma, the Japanese were bearing down on Rangoon. 'Appalled by events,' as young Mary Churchill described in her diary, and 'desperately taxed,' her father prepared for Chequers.¹¹⁸ That he would be joined there by both his doctor and the cardiologist Dr John Parkinson shows that the concerns about his heart were real.¹¹⁹

The political crisis allowed no respite. Cables from India showed that both the Viceroy and Wavell regarded the planned declaration as a calamity; the former spoke of resignation. The Dominions' High Commissioners, meeting in London, also objected. Bringing forward Monday's planned cabi-

net meeting to Saturday morning, Churchill argued there for postponing the issue of any declaration.¹²⁰ Nehru, in a speech, had however categorically ruled out any postponement in advance. Churchill spoke of a stalemate, and then again of resignation, and then of the innate strength of the Tory party – a sequence which caused Eden to write: ‘It was all rather out of tune, but he has a strange hankering after party politics again.’

Stafford Cripps diffidently suggested flying out to India himself; but the idea did not at first sink in.

Delayed by all these events, and saddened, the prime minister left for Chequers. ‘I have to be careful,’ he cabled Roosevelt, ‘that we do not disturb British politics at a moment when things are increasingly aquiver.’¹²¹ The India Committee resumed. That afternoon Cripps told Eden that he was quite prepared to co-operate with Churchill about India on almost any basis except the status quo. Learning that Cripps was about to go down to Chequers, Eden telephoned ahead to Winston and suggested that if Cripps repeated the offer to go out to India they should accept it with alacrity.¹²²

shortly, sir Stafford and Lady Cripps arrived at Chequers.¹²³ Cripps did indeed repeat his offer to fly out to India, ‘immediately,’ to discuss the revised declaration.¹²⁴ Forewarned by Eden, Churchill seized this opportunity. It offered a three-in-one solution: it would spike his critics’ guns, muzzle the Indians for months, and remove this noxious young cabinet minister from London as well. With any luck, the Cripps mission would fail. Bent on ensuring that, Churchill arranged for Cripps to be given ‘a private cypher code’ to communicate directly with him, by-passing the viceroy, and he bestowed on him special powers ‘if he sees fit to use them,’ as Sir Stafford confided to Lady Cripps afterwards.¹²⁵

Churchill’s mood brightened as his own cleverness sank in. ‘Winston in very good form,’ wrote Amery, invited down for lunch. Warmed by the food and drink, the P.M. lectured his captive audience with Table Talk on free will and predestination, and on the relief afforded by expletives in times of stress. Afterwards Amery showed him the latest telegrams from Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy. Churchill looked at one, and tossed the rest aside. It was clear to Amery that it had pained Churchill deeply to abandon his old die-hard position: with Cripps going out there, however, India was now out of his system. He had excreted them both.

Amery, who was also pushing seventy, put up a lame case for going out himself, but Churchill detected not one tithe of the political profit that was

to be gained from dispatching Cripps.¹²⁶ He told Eden that he was persuaded more than ever of the 'loyalty and integrity' of Cripps, while criticising Attlee freely for his petty and perpetual hunt for offices for his party comrades.¹²⁷ Informing his senior ministers on the tenth, he would dwell upon Sir Stafford's self-sacrifice and courage in departing on such a difficult and dubious mission.¹²⁸ His heart was agleam with candles again.



He had another cause for gladness. He now also had a prospect of really hurting Germany.

Among that Sunday's lunch guests at Chequers was a stocky, sandy-haired figure in air chief-marshal's uniform – Sir Arthur Harris, known as 'Butcher' Harris to all his aircrews.¹²⁹ He was the new commander-in-chief of Bomber Command. Churchill had met him at close quarters only once before this Sunday, briefly at Dytchley. Churchill and his staff had first noticed him in Washington a few weeks earlier. Ian Jacob had placed him in his diary as cross-grained, cynical, and tactless – not the sort to hold a position needing diplomacy and understanding. He was a commander of men, noted the army colonel, with strong views and powerful methods of promoting them, and 'not a co-operator.'¹³⁰ These were astute observations on Arthur Harris's weaknesses and strengths. Single-minded and terrifying, Churchill's new bomber commander would change the nature of warfare over the next three years.

If Churchill needed something to show the Russians, what better than the devastation of Germany's cities? The bombing had come to a halt after the dismaying losses suffered during bad-weather operations one night three months before. On January 4, 1942 Sir Charles Portal, while still in Washington, had submitted an analysis of this disaster to Churchill. They had concurred that the command's leadership was at fault, and Sir Richard Pierse was replaced by Harris. Harris was nearly fifty, but his leadership qualities were undeniable. His military career in the empire had begun as a boy bugler in the Rhodesia Regiment in 1914 and he had seen service in the Royal Flying Corps in World War One. Faced with declining aircrew morale and doubtful bombing accuracy, Portal had directed the command to husband its strength until the spring, and had invited Harris, an old friend and flying comrade, to return from Washington to take over the command.

The decision to go all-out for what became known internally as ‘saturation bombing’ was not Harris’s, and it is fair to make this clear. It was in place when he arrived at Bomber Command’s headquarters in High Wycombe – which was conveniently close to Chequers – when he took command at the beginning of the last week in February 1942. A few days earlier, on February 9, Sir Archibald Sinclair had circularised to the *defence committee* the Air Staff’s arguments that the time had come for Bomber Command to resume operations. Some of the bombers had now been fitted out with *gee*, an electronic navigation device which tracked an invisible radio grid that covered the Ruhr and Rhineland; this promised to enable bombers to find, and concentrate in time and space over, enemy targets. Sinclair proposed fire-raids on the Ruhr, Rhineland, and north-west Germany. He believed that this was the best time of year for such ‘concentrated incendiary attack.’¹³¹ He particularly deprecated the current diversion of forty percent of Bomber Command’s limited effort to hitting the ‘extremely small targets’ presented by the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* at Brest – a problem which had solved itself anyway three days later.

The proposal to resume the attack on Germany’s cities met with opposition from the admirals, as well as from Lord Beaverbrook and other ministers. Beaverbrook drafted a paper to the *defence committee*, pointing out that Bomber Command had lost 2,075 airmen and 376 bombers in the last half of 1941 to little purpose. ‘The weight of bombs dropped recently on Cologne, Emden, or Hamburg,’ he argued, ‘would have utterly destroyed the port of Tripoli’ – Rommel’s main supply gateway in Libya. The bombers could have saved Malaya and Borneo. The remaining squadrons, he argued, should now be flown out from England to the Middle East and Far East.¹³² This was not Churchill’s view and, as Harris soon found, the prime minister usually got his way – he had ‘this rather unfortunate trait of the man who has almost absolute power, knows his own mind, and really does not want to be bothered with everybody else’s ideas.’¹³³

Churchill wanted to see Europe’s cities ablaze. He had always had an obsession with fire; in 1940, as we saw in the first volume, his writings had more than once dwelt on the phrase ‘palls of smoke.’ A sinking enemy warship did not capture his imagination as much as the promise of a blazing enemy skyline. He endorsed Sinclair’s plan, writing to him on February 14 that since there were now no German warships left to bomb at Brest he was ‘entirely in favour of the resumption of full bombing of Germany,’ to which he added the proviso, ‘subject always, of course, to our not incurring

heavy losses. . .¹³⁴ 'This means,' Sinclair wrote, paraphrasing the document to the chief of air staff, 'that the conservation policy is at an end.' The bomber offensive was to be resumed as soon as the weather permitted, and sustained at maximum possible intensity.¹³⁵ The Air Staff that same day authorised Bomber Command to resume operations 'without restriction,' subject to weather conditions. The attack should be 'focused on the morale of the enemy civil population and, in particular, of the industrial workers.'¹³⁶

On the fifteenth Portal personally directed his staff to remind the new commander-in-chief, Harris, that under this directive aiming points were to be 'the built-up areas,' and *not* the specific military target (for example the dockyards or aircraft factories) associated with each town.¹³⁷ This directive, with this sinister postscript, would stand for the next twelve months.

harris would be a rare commander of men. As the bloody bombing onslaught against Europe's cities – not all of them German – began, his reputation became cocooned in legends, many of them true: rebuked by a police constable for driving on the wrong side of Western-avenue with the words, "You might easily kill somebody like that," Harris replied: "Officer, I kill thousands every night." He was not often glimpsed by his aircrews or for that matter by Winston either. He never failed however to return from his visits to Chequers invigorated with fresh hope and enthusiasm, his spirits revived 'in spite of the appalling hours,' as he would later write.¹³⁸ 'After dinner Winston would talk,' wrote Harris.

He was really thinking about how things were going. He would get repeated reminders that a film show was waiting for him, and eventually we would all go up to the gallery – the household staff, and the rest of the family, and even the military guard from outside – to see the picture. . . One realised, of course, that he was really resting himself in this atmosphere, and that his thoughts were often far away. Sometimes one could hear him rehearse a phrase for a telegram he would send later.

Each man would come to need the other. Harris hero-worshipped the prime minister. 'Winston,' he would recall in one private letter, 'blarneyed, blustered, and bullied with all the force and weight of his incomparable oratorical powers.'¹³⁹ The prime minister would use that oratory as a flail to beat the good grain from the chaff. 'If,' reminisced Harris, 'in the flailing,

some knuckles got rapped and heads broke, so what?, as our Yanks would say. There was no time to be “nice,” but only to be right!’

Supremely convinced of his own rectitude – both tactical and ethical – Harris seduced the prime minister with the prospect of an easy, antiseptic victory, and of defeating Germany with his youthful aircrews, perhaps even without having to risk a conventional invasion.



There remained the matter of the higher strategic direction of the war. Ever since the Washington conference, General Brooke, the C.I.G.S. (who was not there), had scolded his colleagues Pound and Portal (who were) for having sold their country’s birthright for ‘a plate of porridge.’¹⁴⁰ By February 1942 they had begun to agree with him; they now realised that, despite their unreadiness, the Americans ultimately intended to run the war from Washington. Failing to grasp that the R.A.F. bombing offensive was to become the *Schwerpunkt* of Britain’s war effort against Germany, Roosevelt’s advisers saw in Churchill only an alarming tendency to dissipate his forces. The prime minister’s gloomy telegram of March 4 had deeply worried him; but while Roosevelt told his generals that what the British prime minister needed was only ‘a pat on the back,’ in his telegrams he lectured him on global command and India instead.¹⁴¹

Henry Stimson feared that Churchill’s sombre message heralded an appeal for even wider dispersion of their forces. In a foretaste of the controversies to come, he advocated sending an overwhelming American force to the British Isles for an ‘orthodox’ cross-Channel attack later that year. General Arnold backed him, saying that their airforces should set about overwhelming the Luftwaffe in France first; the American navy, in the person of Admiral King, was less keen, seeing his country’s major tasks as being on the other side of the globe, in the Pacific theatre. Roosevelt himself drafted the resulting proposal to Churchill which, Stimson was relieved to see, took the initiative out of the prime minister’s hands (‘where I am sure it would have degenerated into a simple defensive operation to stop up urgent rat-holes’). The new plan simplified the already rickety global command structure into spheres of strategic influence: the Americans to take the Supreme Command in the Pacific, the British in the Middle East, and both nations jointly in the Atlantic and North Africa; the British should command operations in Burma, India, and the Indian Ocean.¹⁴²

Roosevelt's new telegram arrived in Churchill's hands on the ninth. Eden agreed with the prime minister that it was a heartening sign that the Americans were beginning to swing into their stride. Churchill read it out to his Pacific council. His colleagues viewed it with as much enthusiasm as the Curate did the Egg. 'Good in places,' was the assessment by the C.I.G.S., 'but calculated to drive Australia, N.Z., and Canada into U.S.A. arms, and help to bust up the empire!'¹⁴³

At the same time Churchill received a long analysis from Sir John Dill in Washington. In the field-marshal's view, the Americans were still unready for war on this scale. They were inclined to blame the British for their problems, comparing British generals with 'MacArthur the Magnificent and his Miracle Men,' as Dill alliteratively put it. Many Americans comforted themselves with the belief that if only the British had treated their Indians and their Burmese as the Americans treated 'their' Filipinos, the Far Eastern countries would give less cause for anxiety today. 'There is a lot of very unfriendly criticism of Britain in this country,' warned Sir John, 'and a lot of the criticism is based on abysmal ignorance.' Roosevelt was charming, he said, but he lacked 'a tidy mind,' and he did not like facing facts. Dill described Marshall as outstanding and clear-headed, but King and Arnold in less glowing terms.¹⁴⁴



During Churchill's absence in January 1942 the cabinet had expressed the curious view that it would not only be salutary to bomb certain munitions factories in France, but that French morale would be strengthened by such raids, despite the civilian casualties.¹⁴⁵ The chiefs of staff in Washington were unhappy with this, reminding their colleagues in London that their object was to bomb Germany and *lower* German morale – 'It is not clear whether bombing French factories and raising French morale is a sound diversion.'¹⁴⁶

Sir Arthur Harris had no time for such dialectics. A few days after he settled into High Wycombe, the bombing offensive resumed with the Renault factory at Billancourt in northern Paris as the target. The factory was believed to be turning out about a hundred tanks and a thousand trucks for the Wehrmacht each month. It was an easy target, involving only a short penetration. Harris's crews dropped over four hundred tons of bombs, doing damage on a scale exceeding any so far achieved elsewhere by either the

British or German air forces.¹⁴⁷ The bombs killed over five hundred French men, women and children including 397 whose homes were near the factory; a thousand more seriously injured. It seemed hard to justify inflicting such carnage on the peoples of a friendly country with which none of the Allies was at war. Admiral William D Leahy, Roosevelt's ambassador to Vichy France, was particularly critical.¹⁴⁸ France declared March 7 a day of national mourning for the dead, and flags went to half-mast throughout the country, including those on the American embassy.¹⁴⁹

To Churchill's admirals the advantages to be sought in bombing even German women and children to death while Britain's fleet and every outpost of her empire were starved of aircraft, were less obvious. By bombing Germany however Churchill hoped, as he informed Sir John Dill in Washington, to take the weight off Russia.¹⁵⁰ 'Now that the season is improving,' he wrote to Stalin on March 9, the day after Harris's visit to Chequers, 'we are resuming [our] heavy air offensive both by day and night upon Germany.' In his reply, Stalin included half a dozen words of appreciation, and to Churchill that made it all seem worthwhile.¹⁵¹

On the eighth and ninth, Harris attempted to raid Essen in the Ruhr, using *gee* for the first time. Results were disappointing and Churchill remained unconvinced. Perhaps the air ministry *had* ridden too hard over naval requirements in order to favour Bomber Command. Lunching with him in London on March 12, the Archbishop of Canterbury touched upon their bombing offensive. For half an hour he held forth on the 'failure' of high-level bombing – it must have been an incongruous conversation, and the prime minister was also perplexed at how much the prelate actually knew about it all. Writing to Portal and Sinclair a few days later he echoed something of the archbishop's scepticism. 'You need not argue the value of bombing Germany,' he assured them, 'because I have my own opinion about that – namely, that it is not decisive but better than doing nothing.' It was, he said, a formidable means of injuring the enemy. He currently considered however that shore-based torpedo bombers should enjoy priority. 'I hope you realise,' he added, 'how very widely the existing policy of the Air Ministry is challenged by opinion,' and he mentioned those which the archbishop had expressed to him.¹⁵²

Portal's response boiled down to one which rather begged the underlying question as to Bomber Command's effectiveness: 'How long the criticisms would survive the resumption of full scale [German] attacks on this country,' the chief of air staff observed, 'seems to me open to question.'

Later that month 134 R.A.F. bombers visited the Rhineland's ancient cathedral city of Cologne. For a day or two Adolf Hitler contemplated retaliation against London's famous architecture. On the sixteenth Portal learned that the Luftwaffe was calibrating its blind-bombing beams for a raid on London that night, just like in the Blitz of 1940; Learning of this, Churchill, still out at Chequers, ingloriously cancelled his return to London to attend that night's war cabinet.¹⁵³ No raid however materialised: Hitler had personally intervened.* 'With P.M. in his present mood,' noted Sir Alan Brooke, 'and with his desire to maintain the air bombardment of Germany, it will not be possible to get adequate [air] support for either the Army or the Navy.'¹⁵⁴

Sunday March 22 found Sir Arthur Harris lunching again with Churchill at Chequers, together with 'the Prof.,' Lord Cherwell.¹⁵⁵ The bomber commander was gaining what is now popularly called the Inside Track.

* Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring inquired on March 21: 'Why did the Führer call off the reprisal raid on London again?' Chief of air staff Hans Jeschonnek replied: 'The Führer does not want to provoke an attack on German cities so long as the British are attacking in such meagre strength and we can't strike annihilating blows in the west.' Transcript of Göring's conference in Erhard Milch's papers; author's microfilm di-40.

I 8: *Humiliation Valley*

updated Monday, October 30, 2000 3:49 PM

Many times, visiting his map room since returning from Washington, Churchill had glared at a coloured pin stuck into the Trondheim fjord in Norway. On January 6, 1942, his Oracle had tipped him off to the arrival there of Hitler's 42,000 ton battleship *Tirpitz*. Bristling with eight fifteen-inch guns, she was one of the most powerful warships afloat. Riding at anchor at Trondheim with the cruisers *Admiral Scheer* and *Hipper*, her mere existence exerted a baleful effect on all allied naval planning in the northern hemisphere. 'Crippling this ship,' Churchill reminded Admiral Pound, 'would alter the entire face of the naval war.' It would be worth the loss of a hundred aeroplanes and five hundred airmen, in his view.¹ 'The entire naval situation throughout the world would be altered,' he reiterated a few days later, 'and the naval command in the Pacific would be regained.'²

Yet the weeks passed, and nothing was done. At a *defence committee* meeting in March he demanded an air attack on the battleship while the moon was full. 'Her elimination would profoundly affect the course of the war,' he reiterated. The chief of air staff Sir Charles Portal explained however that *Tirpitz* was now shielded by powerful anti-aircraft gun defences.³

She could not always hide behind them, however. On March 5 radio monitors heard the German admiral commanding the Arctic region reporting in code to *Gruppe Nord* (Naval Group North) that air reconnaissance had located an allied convoy heading for North Russia – it was convoy PQ. 12; a few hours later, he ordered a destroyer flotilla to stand by. At 4:37 p.m. on the sixth the British heard *Gruppe Nord* radioing instructions that 'Admiral Commanding Battleships [Vice-Admiral Ciliax] with *Tirpitz* and three destroyers will leave square af.6717 at 1700/6/3 [March 6] northbound at twenty-five knots to operate against enemy convoy.' Two days later, the



codebreakers learned that *Tirpitz* was to rendezvous with other enemy naval units at eight a.m. at square AC.4735 – a code-grid location precisely known to the admiralty from captured maps.⁴ Churchill was told that so far the Germans had suspected 'no unusual British activity.'⁵

The chance had now come to destroy this enemy naval titan as she embarked on her first hostile sortie. With *ultra* giving the game away like this, it was like playing a deadly poker with a mirror behind your opponent's back. Admiral Sir John Tovey, commander-in-chief of the Home Fleet, took his force, which included the new aircraft-carrier *Victorious*, to sea. The vulnerable PQ convoy was diverted to safety. The battle took place on March 9. At eight a.m. the enemy admiral saw that he was being shadowed by Albacore torpedo-planes. As he turned to flee, a cloud of Albacores came buzzing in to attack, hurling their torpedoes at the battleship from every angle in a nine-minute action which none of her sailors, knowing how few had survived the sinking of *Bismarck*, would forget. Fate was with the Germans, this time, as every single torpedo missed the battleship.⁶

Cheated of his prey, Churchill demanded an explanation from the First Sea Lord as to 'how it was that 12 of our machines managed to get no hits as compared with the extraordinary efficiency of the Japanese attack on *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. Was *Tirpitz* under an Air Umbrella at the time, or not?' Pound pointed out that *Tirpitz* was a moving target, while *Prince of Wales* was stopped.

as a response, this was hardly likely to satisfy Churchill, and it did not.⁷ Fortunately, if such figures in wartime can be believed, his *personal* popularity rating, currently measured by Gallup at eighty-one percent, seemed inviolate – the British still blamed only their government, rather than its prime minister, for Britain's misfortunes; but this might not last much longer.

His friends and sycophants like Harriman blamed his problems on Britain's 'disreputable press.' Churchill liked to hear this: he hated the press, and even persuaded the cabinet to appoint a committee to deal with them.⁸ On March 11 Brendan Bracken, minister of information, lashed the parliamentary Lobby correspondents, telling them that it would be their fault, 'If,' as now seemed possible, 'Britain lost the war.' He appealed to them to play down the speeches of the government's critics, while giving more generous coverage to its supporters.⁹ With Churchill's approval, Bevin ordered the incorrigible journalist Frank Owen and Percy Cudlipp, editor of the *Daily Herald*, drafted into the uniformed forces, and he had a warning sent

to the *Daily Mirror* to tone down its political cartoons. Lunching with Bracken and the editor of *The Times*, Churchill rasped that the reporting of the *Mirror*, *Mail*, and *Herald* was ‘calculated to undermine the Army.’ ‘No man has had to bear such disasters as I have,’ he said. The editor of *The Times* responded however in robust terms and, as he observed in his private diary, Winston ‘far from storming’ bore this candour well. ‘A very impressive person,’ summarised the editor, ‘with strong limitations. His utter lack of pomposity is engaging. He was wearing his one-piece “siren suit.” Ate heartily.’¹⁰

Even this worthy newspaperman, Robin Barrington-Ward, found Winston ‘not quite as fit and sparkling as at our last lunch’ however. Churchill’s doctors seem to have felt the same way, and they ordered him to rest. The rest of his appointments were cancelled, and a car drove him down to Chequers late on Thursday March 12.¹¹ He spent the next six days here in bed or prowling around in his silken dressing gown. On Friday his doctor arrived at the mansion, bringing the Australian surgeon Sir Thomas Dunhill; they stayed for four days. The whisper in Whitehall was that Winston had had a minor operation: it was probably on his thyroid gland. Eden, arriving at Chequers a few days later, found the prime minister still laid up in bed after a ‘minor operation which he most amusingly described.’¹²



From the Oracle he could see that Hitler was planning a spring offensive into southern Russia, and he fretted over how Britain could help Stalin.¹³ Perhaps Britain really should accept Stalin’s claims for new frontiers; Churchill decided that, *faute de mieux*, he should put pressure on the United States to this end. On March 10 he dined with Beaverbrook and asked him to go to Washington to establish a ‘direct line of communication’ to Roosevelt. He asked Hopkins in a telegram to impress upon the president that although Beaverbrook was ‘for the time being’ out of office at his own wish, they remained ‘close friends and intimate political associates.’¹⁴ Beaverbrook however still made no bones of his criticism of Churchill for having as he said ‘no Russian policy,’ and he continued to urge the need for a Second Front to help Stalin.¹⁵

Churchill, now down at Chequers, phoned him on March 13 with a new proposal – that after his consultations with Roosevelt, he should go on to Moscow as the prime minister’s personal ‘plenipotentiary’ to Stalin. That

should see him in Moscow by the time of Hitler's uneasily awaited spring offensive. It was an odd idea — appointing a plenipotentiary to bypass both the foreign office and Lord Halifax.¹⁶ He claimed to Beaverbrook that Eden was in favour; but evidently he was not, because the next day he phoned again to say that Eden advised against announcing any mission by Beaverbrook to Moscow as this would encourage Stalin to take Britain's agreement on the Soviet frontiers for granted. 'Beaverbrook is off to Washington,' the prime minister nonetheless informed Stalin, 'where he will help smooth out the [frontier] treaty question with the president.'¹⁷ Perhaps he, Churchill, should see Stalin himself? The idea kept dancing into his head. Over lunch at Chequers that midday he asked the Soviet ambassador, who arrived with a 'good message from Joe,' whether Stalin would meet him if he went out to, say, Baku (calling, of course, at Cairo on the way out, to be rude to Auchinleck).¹⁸

Maisky undertook to find out.

it was on this occasion that Maisky conveyed to Churchill fresh rumours that Hitler was planning to use poison gas in his new offensive.* Eden suggested that they promise that Britain would immediately retaliate with poison gas attacks on the civil population of Germany, and on the eighteenth Churchill laid this grim prospect before the *defence committee*.¹⁹ Portal assured him that Britain's 'dropping capacity' was greater than Germany's, and Churchill accordingly informed Stalin: 'I have been building up an immense store of gas bombs for discharge from aircraft.'²⁰ Stalin replied expressing gratitude.

Three weeks later, Sir Alan Brooke secretly reported that it would in fact be to Britain's 'grave disadvantage' to become involved in chemical warfare. Countries like India had no gas defences at all. Moreover Britain would have no way to verify any unsupported Russian allegation that the Germans had begun using poison gas. These were serious issues, and the *defence committee* agonised over how to escape from the commitment that Churchill had given. They also told him on April 28 that, far from having an 'immense store' their own stocks of poison gas shells were only limited. They decided to inform Stalin that throughout the empire gas warfare preparations were 'totally inadequate.'²¹

* There were no such plans.

On the other issue, the Soviet frontiers, the prime minister received an unhelpful telegram from Roosevelt, who still refused to let the British foreign office stampede him. Since the president saw no real danger that Stalin would 'quit the war,' he saw no reason to decide any frontiers until it was over. It was not the first time that the president would display greater statesmanship than Mr Churchill, or his advisers.

Egged on by Eden, Churchill and his cabinet took the other line. It would remain a divisive issue among the allies until long after the war was over. 'We are selling the Poles down the river,' the veteran F.O. chief Sir Alexander Cadogan would privately observe, recording his opposition, 'and everyone will suspect we're going to do the same to them; and we're annoying and disgusting Roosevelt. And to what purpose?'²²

when the prime minister had announced to the House on March 11, before departing for Chequers, that the cabinet was sending Sir Stafford Cripps out to India, there were loud murmurs of approval from his own benches. The Socialists were silent, suspecting that he was spiriting their champion out of England for reasons of his own.²³ The next day brought a further nagging telegram on India from President Roosevelt, suggesting that they install a 'temporary' Dominion government there. 'For the love of Heaven,' the great American concluded, finally using a passage that he had in fact drafted and redrafted two weeks before, 'don't bring me into this, though I do want to be of help. It is, strictly speaking, none of my business,' he added – probably the only words with which the P.M. heartily concurred – 'except in so far as it is a part and parcel of the successful fight that you and I are making.'²⁴

Churchill ignored the message. He hoped that the India nightmare would soon be over. He dined with Sir Stafford at Chequers on the following day, the eve of his departure for India, and gave final instructions for the mission – Cripps was to consult with both the Viceroy and Wavell, and to seek the assent of the Indian parties to the declaration; but it is noteworthy that he gave to Cripps no powers whatsoever to negotiate beyond what the war cabinet had approved.²⁵ This left purposefully vague the actual means whereby the Indian leaders were to participate in their country's destiny, while stipulating Britain's need to retain control of her defence. Churchill asked Sir Stafford to visit Auchinleck at Cairo on the way and give him a piece of the prime ministerial mind about the delays. The prime minister

ordered General Sir Archibald Nye, Brooke's deputy, to accompany Cripps to Cairo.

anxious to bring forward the offensive in the Western Desert, Churchill had cabled to General Auchinleck, using their private link, a terse request that he come to London for immediate consultations at his 'earliest convenience.' The general had declined, arguing that he was needed in Cairo. Such a rebuff would have been unthinkable before Singapore. Churchill seethed at Auchinleck throughout March and talked of replacing him with Lord Gort. Brooke was dismayed.²⁶ Gort's last field command had resulted in the one recorded occasion when fortune had permitted the British to reach the beaches before the Germans (at Dunkirk, in May 1940).

On the thirteenth he phoned Brooke in fury about Auchinleck's rebuff. He predicted that Rommel would probably succeed in reinforcing his front faster than Auchinleck. That afternoon he phoned Brooke again, announcing that he was going to wire Auchinleck immediately.²⁷ Brooke intercepted the message and toned it down. 'A very heavy German counter-stroke upon the Russians must be expected soon,' Churchill's message to Cairo eventually read, 'and it will be thought intolerable that the 635,000 men (exclusive of Malta) on your ration strength should remain unengaged, preparing for another set-piece battle in July.' The next day he followed with another message threatening, to Brooke's dismay, to remove fifteen of General Auchinleck's air squadrons to help Stalin in the Caucasus.²⁸

Churchill squirmed with impatience. After due inquiry in Cairo, Cripps and Nye signed a telegram to Churchill confirming that there was no alternative to accepting the target date given by Auchinleck for the offensive in Cyrenaica. Before the chiefs of staff meeting on March 24 he sent for Brooke. The C.I.G.S. found him in bed wearing his dragon dressing-gown, cursing out loud, and suggesting replacing Auchinleck with Nye. Brooke found this constant need to protect the general exhausting, particularly given that he actually had no high opinion of him as a field commander.²⁹ The next day Churchill agreed to postpone the offensive until mid-May. Given the secret data that he had from *ultra* on the relative tank strengths, he remained convinced that Auchinleck was missing a unique opportunity, and at the next *defence committee* meeting he made no secret of his impatience.³⁰ Chancing to visit the prime minister at this time, Brooke was just able to prevent his next act of 'madness,' namely removing half a dozen fighter squadrons from the Middle East to send to southern Russia or India.³¹ If they were to

stage the offensive in Libya in May, the C.I.G.S. argued, it would be naked folly to withdraw fighters from the Middle East for India or anywhere else right now.³² Churchill's favourite airman, Charles Portal, had suggested it. It was all hauntingly similar to the controversies about reinforcing a tottering France at the time of Dunkirk.³³

Lord beaverbrook now left for Washington. He was not happy to go. He phoned Eden on March 19 in disconsolate mood, suggesting that 'he was being banished' to the former colonies. Eden wearily reminded Beaverbrook that he had in fact proposed it. 'Only to please Winston,' retorted Max. Did the prime minister really want him to go? Eden promised to ask, and walked over to No. 10; he persuaded Winston, whom he found 'almost maddened' by Beaverbrook's changes of mind, to telephone Beaverbrook and put him out of his misery.³⁴

Arriving in Washington, Beaverbrook would find President Roosevelt obsessed with the need to invade western Europe that same year, 1942.³⁵ He well knew that Churchill's government was unanimously opposed to this. Beaverbrook perceived that by taking the opposite line he might yet restore his prestige at home, regain the favour of the shop-stewards, and generally take the left wing by storm. Was this not a far grander cause to espouse than Stalin's dubious frontier claims?

To Lord Halifax in Washington he postulated that no military achievement in the western desert could be an adequate substitute for a cross-Channel invasion. It would bolster Russian morale and help the British political situation and, he said, he personally 'would not grudge the loss of 50,000 men.' If Hitler defeated Russia during 1942, Beaverbrook reasoned, that would be the downfall of Mr Churchill too. Although he was careful to intersperse the remark, 'I am completely loyal to Churchill, who I think is the greatest leader we could have had,' he voiced criticism of the P.M.'s off-hand treatment of Australia; Lord Halifax detected a trace of jealousy at the intimacy that had sprung up between Churchill and Roosevelt. The P.M., Beaverbrook complained, no longer showed him what was in their telegrams to each other. Of his own political ambitions the former minister made no secret: 'I might be the best man to run the war,' he meditated out loud to the ambassador. 'It wants a ruthless, unscrupulous, harsh man, and I believe I could do it.' Somewhat improbably, he claimed to have said so to the P.M. too.³⁶

Beaverbrook dispatching a short message to Winston, promising a longer one next week; and a telegram to Eden urging him *nil desperandum* (not to despair) – ‘which,’ mocked the Canadian, ‘you will be able to translate because you were at Eton.’ An odd creature, reflected Halifax, as he showed Churchill’s uncertain friend the door.³⁷ At the end of that month Beaverbrook made a broadcast in which he loudly propagated the Soviet line on the Second Front. Churchill heard it, but sent a surprisingly warm telegram to him.³⁸



There could be little likelihood of hurling any full-scale amphibious assault across the English Channel this year, 1942. ‘Dickie’ Mountbatten was still finding his feet as Churchill’s new Director of Combined Operations. He did however mount two minor assaults on the French coast; in February he landed a Commando team at Bruneval in a brilliantly executed operation designed to take out an enemy coastal radar site and capture electronic equipment essential for planning the attack on the German radar system.

A few weeks later Mountbatten staged a more ambitious *coup de main*. Under cover of darkness on Saturday March 28 he sent an amphibious task force consisting of 353 naval officers and men and 268 Commandos to destroy the large dry-dock at Saint-Nazaire on the Atlantic coast of France; it was said to be the only such dock capable of accommodating *Tirpitz*. He had packed three tons of high explosive aboard the worn-out destroyer *Campbeltown*, converting her into a floating time-bomb; she was one of the fifty elderly destroyers which Churchill had acquired from Roosevelt in August 1940. Bathed in the glare of enemy searchlights, and under a hail of fire from the shore, escorted by eighteen coastal force boats flying the German ensign and making German identification signals, this warship forced her way up the Loire river after midnight, and rammed the lock gates. While officers set time fuses on the explosives, Mountbatten’s Commandos poured ashore to destroy the dockside equipment. A pitched battle resulted between these brave troops – four of whom earned the highest British medal for valour on this night – and the German defenders.

Mountbatten spent that weekend with Churchill at Chequers awaiting news of the operation. News arrived only sparsely at first. ‘At first,’ Elizabeth Layton learned, ‘it seemed that all had not gone quite as planned.’ The

Campbeltown had not blown up as anticipated. On the morning of March 29 the admiralty had to inform Churchill that the operation had been successful 'but costly.'³⁹ This was to become a familiar refrain with Mountbatten's early ventures. Late in the evening however he came into the prime minister's office, 'flashing his charming smile' so that the girls swooned with delight, and asked Miss Layton to put him through to the palace, so that he could give His Majesty the latest reports.⁴⁰

The true facts, as they emerged, were not encouraging. The ship had eventually blown up, destroying the installations; but the raid had cost 144 British lives. Of the eighteen accompanying coastal force boats, fourteen had been destroyed, with the loss of 191 sailors (of these half had been killed). Of the Commando landing party, all but five had been killed or taken prisoner. French (not German) dockyard workers and civilians were crawling over the abandoned *Campbeltown* when it blew up without warning at 11:45 a.m., killing sixty of them. The Germans had pulled well back, and suffered few if any casualties.⁴¹

As was his way, Churchill would maintain that the enemy had bled far more.* He – or perhaps Mountbatten himself, who may well have drafted this passage of Churchill's *The Second World War* – suggested that 'a large party of German officers and technicians were inspecting the wreck of the *Campbeltown*' when it blew up shortly before midday, killing 'hundreds of Germans.'⁴² The British official historian would merely console his readers that 'the enemy's losses were certainly far higher,' without venturing to offer any details.⁴³

The strategic benefit of the Saint-Nazaire raid was slight. For other reasons, *Tirpitz* never ventured out into the Atlantic from her various Norwegian lairs. More significant was the boost which the operation gave to British morale, and the strategic uncertainty that the operation inculcated in Hitler – the sudden awareness of the vulnerability of his entire French coastline, which he now issued immediate orders to reinforce. The raid was thus the origin of the formidable Atlantic Wall.

after dinner on March 30 the prime minister kept General Brooke up long after midnight examining with him ways of operating against northern France in the event that Hitler's coming offensive on the eastern front

* See our reference to Churchill's statements about the 'four thousand' Germans drowned when his warships sank ten Greek caiques in May 1941; the figure was three hundred. Vol. i, pages 568–9.

succeeded. Brooke had to point out that there was little they could do with only ten divisions.⁴⁴ Having lost her finest officers in what was still called the Great War, Britain lacked good commanders; in Brooke's candid view half of the army's corps and divisional commanders were unfit for their commands. Leaving No. 10 long after one a.m., Brooke felt dispirited by it all. Britain was not much different from a dictatorship, he reflected, governed by one big man who was 'a grave danger' in many respects. 'Politicians,' he philosophised, 'still suffer from that little knowledge of military matters which gives them unwarranted confidence that they are born strategists!'⁴⁵

'You cannot judge the P.M. by ordinary standards,' Pug Ismay had written to Auchinleck early in 1942. 'He is not in the least like anyone that you or I have ever met. He is a mass of contradictions. He is either on the crest of the wave, or in the trough, either highly laudatory or bitterly condemnatory; either in an angelic temper, or a hell of a rage. When he isn't fast asleep he's a volcano. There are no half-measures in his make-up. He is a child of nature with moods as variable as an April day.'⁴⁶ Under pressure from this volcano, the chiefs of staff agreed, three weeks after Saint-Nazaire, that there should be more and bigger raids on the enemy coastline.⁴⁷



There was another front, still barely noticed by the enemy – the bomber offensive. At the same time as Mountbatten's amphibious warriors were straggling home from Saint-Nazaire, Sir Arthur Harris's bomber crews were being briefed for their first major fire-raising attack on a German town, the mediæval port of Lübeck on the Baltic. In every such raid, as Sir Charles Portal had directed, the aiming point would be the town's ancient – and combustible – residential heart, and *not* its factories or war installations. That night, March 28, the conflagrations in Lübeck totally gutted the city centre, and killed several hundred of its citizens. Encouraged by the aerial photographs of the devastation, which Harris was not slow to produce to him, two weeks later Churchill asked the air ministry to do what it could to increase the weight of bombs actually dropped on the German cities; he referred to the new radio-navigation and blind-bombing equipment coming into service.⁴⁸

The bombing campaign was still very much on probation. It had many enemies, but one powerful advocate: the Prof. – Professor Lindemann, now fifty-six years old, the prime minister's faddish and eccentric personal ad-

viser since 1940. He had the happy knack of reducing even the most complicated scientific matters to a language which was intelligible to Winston. On the Monday after the Lübeck raid the Prof. submitted to Churchill what seemed to him, he wrote, 'a simple method of estimating what we could do by bombing Germany.' The method had the advantage of being based on the crudest kind of mathematical equation. The 1940 German raids on Birmingham and other cities, he said, showed that each ton of explosives dropped on a built-up area rendered one or two hundred people homeless. Each bomber had a life expectancy of nearly fourteen operational sorties, during which it would drop about forty tons of bombs. By mid-1943 they would manufacture about ten thousand heavy bombers. If even half the total bombload were dropped on the fifty-eight German cities housing over 100,000 people, so Lord Cherwell calculated, then about one third of the German population would be blasted out of house and home. 'Investigation,' he added, 'seems to show that having one's house demolished is most damaging to morale. People seem to mind it more than having their friends or even relatives killed.' He pointed out that he was not even including in his calculations the thousands of American bombers due to enter the fray.⁴⁹

The prime minister circulated this brutal and unfeeling document to the members of the *defence committee* a few days later.⁵⁰ Sir Archibald Sinclair wholeheartedly adopted Cherwell's views, pointing out however 'we must resist to the utmost any avoidable diversion of bombing effort away from Germany.' If these conditions were met, based on the recent results at Lübeck, 'We see no reason to doubt that within eighteen months, and with American help, the degree of destruction which Lord Cherwell suggests is possible can, in fact, be achieved.'⁵¹

Others scoffed at these calculations. Sir Henry Tizard, already a bitter academic rival of the Prof., called his arguments misleading. Doubting even the 'ten thousand bomber' figure, he suggested that seven thousand would be more realistic, and even these would be short of trained aircrews. He queried too whether they could regularly set down half of their bombs in the built-up areas of the target cities. German bombs, he warned moreover, were more efficient than British; German houses were more sturdily built; and meanwhile the navy would be robbed of the support of long-range bombers.⁵² The Prof. sent a bland reply: 'I used the round figure of 10,000 . . . to save the prime minister the trouble of making arithmetical calculations.'⁵³

Churchill was still unconvinced, it must be said. By the middle of April he had commendably decided that a keen intellect, untrammelled by departmental prejudices, should weigh all the evidence. Once again Mr Justice Singleton was asked to investigate.⁵⁴

In truth, with the industrial base for Britain's bomber force already largely laid down in steel and concrete (the blueprints for the Lancaster heavy bomber went back to 1936), and a significant portion of her arms effort devoted specifically to supporting strategic bombing operations, there was no short-term alternative before the government. In April, Sir Arthur Harris took the debate into his own hands. His force executed four classic incendiary attacks on the Baltic city of Rostock (such port cities were much easier to find at night). This time there could be no arguing about the effect. Intercepted German police messages reported over two thousand dwellings destroyed in one such raid, fifty people dead, five hundred injured, and twenty thousand evacuated.⁵⁵ A few days later the prime minister was reading an intercepted Turkish diplomatic telegram which reported that 'as a result of the heavy air raids on Rostock which started on 24th April and continued for four nights, the Neptune naval arsenal and the Heinkel airplane construction works were burnt out and totally destroyed.'⁵⁶

As the fire-raid strategy took shape, the government had to weave an increasingly tangled web of deception. When the British Broadcasting Corporation reported that the R.A.F. had 'destroyed a large number of workmen's houses' in Rostock, an indignant Independent Labour M.P., like a ghostly voice from different times, asked in the House whether it 'was necessary to destroy workers' dwellings in order to impede or disorganise the German war effort?' (Unwilling to shame the Devil and speak the truth, a government spokesman made a non-committal reply.) Churchill of course knew what was going on, but he began deceiving his gullible monarch about the bombing campaign; when the German air force started a belated campaign of reprisals – the 'Bædeker raids' targeted on Britain's most historic cities like Exeter, Bath, Norwich, and York – the King bleated in his diary at the end of April, 'It is outrageous that the Germans should come & bomb our Cathedral cities & towns like Bath, which they know are undefended & contain no war industries, as "Reprisal" raids for what we are doing to their war industries.'⁵⁷

Cynical, ruthless and bloodthirsty elder statesmen were now giving the orders to the young and idealistic bomber crews. Often they had volunteered for Fighter Command, and found themselves propelled into the

bomber force instead. Most of them were too young to have families of their own, and they were insensitive to the carnage they were wreaking. It was dark, and they were flying at great height. Peer-pressure and *esprit de corps* maintained discipline. Crew members who balked at flying such missions were branded cowards and transferred in disgrace.⁵⁸ It is true that those who flew with Bomber Command displayed physical courage of an uncommon variety, since their life expectancy was short, and they knew it. But what in the earlier wars, and in more modern times, was universally recognised as a war crime, would become in Churchill's War a commonplace, justified by a lattice of legends, apologias, and lies. Besides, those at the top like Portal and Sinclair firmly believed in killing. Sinclair received a letter from a Member of Parliament describing a visit to Norwich after two nights of 'Bædeker' bombing which had destroyed nearly half of the city's forty thousand houses. 'Incidentally,' the correspondent added, 'I am all for the bombing of working class areas in German cities. I am Cromwellian – I believe in "slaying in the name of the Lord."'

'I am delighted,' Sinclair replied, 'to find that you and I are in complete agreement.'⁵⁹

the allied convoy PQ.12 had completed its passage to North Russia almost unharmed, after the brief excitement caused by the *Tirpitz* sortie. PQ.13 attracted an operation by enemy destroyers which skirmished with the cruiser escort at the end of March 1942. Admiral Tovey warned that Hitler evidently intended to do his utmost to stop the North Russian convoy operations.

Churchill was not comfortable with this admiral. Tovey was outspoken and no respecter of persons, as one operation at the end of 1941 had shown: Rear-Admiral Sir Louis 'Turtle' Hamilton had deemed it wise to break off an elaborately planned Combined Operations raid against Vaagsö island, off north-west Norway, when the Germans moved dive-bombers to Bodö, an airfield dangerously within range. From Washington, Churchill had ungraciously asked the chiefs of staff to justify what he called this hasty departure.⁶⁰ Hamilton however had clear orders from Tovey to withdraw immediately if he considered the danger of air attack to be serious.⁶¹ Both Tovey and the First Sea Lord endorsed Hamilton's action.⁶² For several days Churchill continued to grumble about the Vaagsö raid, calling it 'a marked failure,' and carping that it would have been better not to undertake it at all.⁶³ He rebuked Pound for disagreeing with him, and described Tovey as negative,

unenterprising, and narrow-minded ('This however is entirely between ourselves.'⁶⁴)

The problem for Churchill was that the commander-in-chief was admired throughout the navy. In April 1942 he tried to persuade Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, brother of the unfortunate general, to replace him; he brought Cunningham back from overseas, ostensibly to offer him the job currently held by Admiral Sir Charles Little as head of the British naval mission in Washington. Reporting first at the admiralty, however, Cunningham found Admiral Pound 'in great distress' and even contemplating resignation, since he had learned that Churchill was thinking of replacing him by the young upstart, 'Dickie' Mountbatten (although Cunningham himself was by seniority and experience the obvious successor).⁶⁵

Deducing that the P.M. evidently had 'some ulterior motive' for bringing him back to London, Cunningham was on guard when he arrived to spend the night at Chequers on Saturday April 11.⁶⁶ It was a full house, with not only Mountbatten and A. V. Alexander, but 'Butcher' Harris and the Prof., and – as we shall see – the Americans Marshall, Harriman, Hopkins, and all the British chiefs of staff staying under the ancient roof as well.

After dinner Winston invited Admiral Cunningham into the map room for a talk. 'Of course there is no reason why you should go to Washington,' Churchill lisped, and when the admiral, his suspicions confirmed, replied that he thought this was why he had been brought home, Churchill continued: 'No, I want you to go to the Home Fleet.'

'But you have a very good Admiral there already,' said Cunningham: 'Sir John Tovey.'

'Oh, I want you to relieve Admiral Tovey,' said Churchill.

'If Tovey drops dead on his bridge,' said Cunningham pointedly, 'I will certainly relieve him. Otherwise not.'⁶⁷



It seemed therefore that Churchill was stuck with the generals and admirals that he had got. People often harked back, he would remind his ministers a year later, to the 'crisis of 1940.' He himself was however far more frightened, he freely admitted, during this spring of 1942. It was at this moment, he would recall, that the Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi invited the British to withdraw from India, leaving the sub-continent, in Churchill's words, 'to God, that is to say, to Anarchy.'⁶⁸ Thus these

weeks found him fraught by fears of what seemed to be a vast and sinister Axis pincer movement, with the Japanese marching through India into Iran and the Germans plunging across the Caucasus into Iran too. That would truly spell the end of the empire. The Japanese seemed to be unstoppable. After reading one report on Japanese naval construction he asked, 'Is it credible that the Japanese have at present nine capital ships and two large aircraft-carriers all building simultaneously? If so, the future is indeed serious.' He inquired how much steel would be required – this was the parameter on which he had always relied. 'We must on no account underrate the Japanese,' he wrote. 'Facts are however what is needed.'⁶⁹

On the first day of April 1942 he communicated his worries to Roosevelt. Which way would Japan strike next? Toward Australia after all, or India? Confessing himself to be an 'amateur' strategist, he felt that Japan's wisest strategy would be to continue northward through Burma and finish the job in China first. He doubted that the Japanese had any serious intention of invading either India or Australia.⁷⁰

Already disconcerted by Churchill's sleight-of-hand with their other homebound divisions, the Australian government had begun expressing concern about leaving their division in the Middle East.

On March 23 Churchill had cabled about this to Roosevelt: 'The matter is complicated by Australian Party politics,' he added, 'which proceed with much bitterness and jealousy regardless of national danger.'⁷¹ Roosevelt responded on the twenty-sixth that he had undertaken to send more troops out to Australia, but only the Australian prime minister Curtin could decide whether the division should return home.⁷² Churchill remained reluctant to send scarce resources down under. 'I am by no means convinced that Australia is the chosen target,' he informed the Australian delegate in Washington, adding reassuringly: 'Once the enemy shows his hand, decisions can be made.'⁷³ He had pledged to the prime minister of Australia that if Japan did ever make a serious invasion attempt, by six to eight divisions, Britain would come to his aid. It was all very worrying.

He admitted to Roosevelt that the weight of the war had oppressed him more since his homecoming, and he hinted at making an early return to Washington, perhaps 'when the weather gets better' – he might propose himself for a weekend with the Roosevelts, 'and flip over,' as he airily put it.

Roosevelt, appalled by the prospect of another British invasion of the White House, did not rise to this hint. No invitation was forthcoming.

with singapore gone, it became imperative to hold on to Ceylon, with its capital Colombo and the naval base at Trincomalee.

Late in March Churchill's Intelligence agencies deciphered Japanese messages which indicated the possibility of operations against Ceylon; but the clues were only vague.⁷⁴ From the **most secret** account of events rendered afterwards by the First Sea Lord it seems possible that the British were reading JN.25, the Japanese fleet operational code. 'From secret Intelligence' wrote Pound a few days later, 'we had reason to believe that some operation involving aircraft-carriers was contemplated about 1st April. Having in mind the Pearl Harbour attack, a similar operation against Colombo and Trincomalee naturally occurred to everyone.'⁷⁵

The minuscule pocket diaries kept by Admiral Sir James Somerville, the commander-in-chief, Eastern Fleet, relate the rest of the unhappy story. On March 28, a 'very hot & sweaty' Ceylon day, he had recorded: 'Great flap owing to news that [the] Japs intend carrier-borne attack on this place quite shortly.' The next day he went to the office early and had 'a series of conferences, all on possible Jap carrier attack.' From which direction would the Japanese strike? Correctly, as it turned out, Somerville expected them to make a hit-and-run raid at Ceylon with carrier planes. He would have to assume they would approach from the south-east – besides, 'we cannot cover all approaches.' It would be unwise to attack the Japanese fleet with land-based airplanes, as the Blenheim bomber crews lacked experience and the Swordfish torpedo bombers did not have sufficient range. 'So all depends on the carrier,' concluded the admiral, adding however: 'Hermes cannot fly off T B [torpedo bombers] unless good breeze.' On March 30, he had time to jot down: 'Rush at the office getting ready for sea. To see Adm. Helfrich [Dutch C.-in-C.] & discuss situation. . . . Addressed ship's co. Weighed and proceeded at 2:00.'

Somerville put to sea with the whole of his fleet including the R-class battleships, and positioned himself to the south-east of the great island.⁷⁶ For two days however nothing happened. It looked like a false alarm.

April 2: Heavy rain squalls during forenoon & fine afternoon. . . No news of enemy. . . Decided to start back for base T [Trincomalee] to-night if no report. Rest. Very short of water.

April 3: A very hot fine day. No news of enemy during night.

Still no attack materialised, and he returned the R-class battleships to port; he also detached the eight-inch cruiser *Dorsetshire* to Colombo to complete her refit there, and her sister *Cornwall* to escort an Australian troop convoy, while sending off *Hermes* to Trincomalee to prepare for ironclad, a forthcoming British invasion of Madagascar, the huge Vichy-controlled island off the east African coast. With the British force now fatally dispersed, Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's powerful fleet, which had been 'missing' since the attack on Pearl Harbor, now materialised. On April 4, while down at Chequers, the prime minister received Intelligence that the Japanese fleet was approaching Ceylon.⁷⁷ It included three battleships and five aircraft-carriers. Somerville received word from Colombo that the force had been sighted three hundred miles south-east of Ceylon, in fact just where he had anticipated it. 'So we've missed them,' he cursed in his diary. 'Decided to put to sea as soon as possible. . . . *Dorsetshire* & *Cornwall* ordered to RV [rendez-vous]. Signalled my intentions to Admiralty.'⁷⁸

On the next morning, Easter Sunday, April 5, eighty Japanese carrier-based planes bombed Colombo in a ninety-minute raid. Somerville's force was now widely scattered. That afternoon he picked up an ominous radio report from the cruiser *Dorsetshire* – she was being shadowed, and radar showed a 'formation on her bearing.'⁷⁹ At about 1:40 p.m. waves of Japanese fighter-bombers attacked *Devonshire* and *Cornwall*, sinking both ships with the loss of over four hundred lives. Worse was to follow. Raiding Trincomalee a few days later, the Japanese planes caught and dispatched the carrier *Hermes* and a destroyer with the loss of three hundred more lives. In the Bay of Bengal the Japanese naval forces now roamed at will; in the space of a few days they sank one hundred thousand tons of shipping. Somerville prudently moved the remains of his fleet two thousand miles westwards, to ports on the eastern perimeter of Africa. Thus Britain abandoned the Indian Ocean, driven out by this one brief sortie by the Japanese navy.

aghast at this fresh naval misfortune, Churchill asked Admiral Pound what explanation he might plausibly render to Parliament. He needed a scapegoat, and he had never liked Admiral Somerville. The First Sea Lord reminded him however of the secret Intelligence which they had received. He added, 'I do not consider Somerville is open to criticism for what he did at the time.' As for Parliament, Pound stipulated: 'We cannot say anything about the special information' – they should dupe the Members with talk of aircraft sightings.⁸⁰ In June Churchill would again press the admiralty

about Somerville's culpability: 'No satisfactory explanation has been given by this Officer of the imprudent dispersal of his forces in the early days of April resulting in the loss of *Cornwall*, *Dorsetshire*, and *Hermes*.'⁸¹ Pound refused to let this innuendo pass unchallenged, and he himself drafted the reply which his minister, A. V. Alexander, sent to Churchill.⁸² This again referred to the 'special intelligence' – the intercepts of Japanese signals indicating operations against Ceylon.

The Japanese had never had any intention of invading Ceylon; but characteristically, Churchill acted as though they had and claimed that he had thwarted them in this resolve and, of course, had inflicted great casualties on them. He made much of the air battles and 'twenty-one' Japanese planes shot down at Colombo and 'fifteen' at Trincomalee. 'Ceylon news seems good,' he radioed to Cripps in India, 'and it is lucky we did not withdraw fighter forces.'⁸³

Writing to Roosevelt however he struck a deliberately gloomy posture. When a few Japanese bombs now fell on Indian soil and on Madras, Churchill hinted to Washington that this might be the prelude to an invasion of Ceylon, and he pleaded for some action by the American fleet. The Japanese might take both Madras and Ceylon, he warned, as well as the steel industries of Calcutta; they might sweep on to the Persian Gulf, demoralising the whole Middle East. The British people, he complained, had expected the American fleet to do more than it had.⁸⁴ General Joseph T. McNarney and Admiral King drafted a caustic reply which referred to the foolishness of mingling their two fleets. Roosevelt however softened the message, mentioning only the difficulties that stood in the way.⁸⁵ He told the visiting Canadian prime minister Mackenzie King, that this was the worst message he had ever received from Winston.

Roosevelt was mystified by Britain's naval disaster off Ceylon. He had always warned Churchill not let his ships go beyond the range of air cover. The loss of *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall*, the president felt, showed that the P.M. had still learned nothing from the loss of *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*.⁸⁶

The disaster fuelled fresh criticism of Churchill's naval and air strategies. 'It makes me mad,' wrote Rear-Admiral Hamilton, 'to see the air strength of this country being devoted to killing a few women and children in Germany whilst our fleet and empire are being lost to the Japanese daily.'⁸⁷ Even Eden, an unreconstructed apologist for the bombing of German towns, was worried to find how many aircraft they had actually lost in Ceylon. 'Our margin never seems large enough,' he reflected. 'Now we are to send

two more squadrons post-haste from [the] Middle East but they cannot arrive for some weeks & should surely have been sent sooner. Our air people always seem too optimistic in their forecasts. It was the same in Greece last year. . . . And then Malta. We ought never to have allowed our margin of fighters to fall so low. Everyone knew of the threat. Nine Spitfires at a time flicked off an old fighter [*sic.* carrier] is not good enough. We always seem to need brilliant improvisation, especially the Air Ministry, & that is not the way.’⁸⁸

From India there came a similar complaint about the waste of R.A.F. resources in Europe: ‘I do, I confess,’ wrote the Viceroy, ‘find it very difficult to believe that the concentration of virtually the whole of our heavy bombing force for use on the Continent . . . is a wise policy.’⁸⁹ General Wavell echoed this in a bitterly worded cable to the chiefs of staff: ‘It certainly gives furiously to think when, after trying with less than twenty light bombers to meet [an] attack which has cost us three important warships and several others and nearly 100,000 tons of merchant shipping, we see that over 200 bombers attacked one town in Germany.’⁹⁰

describing the naval disaster off Ceylon to the House, the prime minister damned Admiral Somerville with faint praise, describing how he, an admiral ‘fresh from two years’ almost continuous fighting in the Mediterranean,’ had stationed his fleet south-east of the island, expecting the Japanese battle-cruisers and carriers to attack from there. Since the Japanese had not at first shown up, he had abandoned the operation, sending *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire* to Colombo while the carrier *Hermes* was at Trincomalee.

Almost at once the Japanese had shown up precisely where expected earlier. The admiral had arranged a rendezvous with his now refuelled forces, and told *Hermes* to quit Trincomalee and stay out of the way. ‘The admiralty,’ explained the prime minister, ‘did not interfere at all in these dispositions. When they put one of their best admirals in charge of a fleet and a theatre, they do not stand over him with a stick joggling his elbow. It is only very rarely, when they possess exceptional knowledge, that they override the judgement of the man on the spot. If the admiralty does too much of that they simply destroy the whole initiative and responsibility of the Admirals at sea. Such a bad habit, acquired only through wireless telegraphy, would be entirely contrary to the traditions of the Royal Navy. But of course, if the House thinks fit, it may blame me for whatever went wrong.’

All of this was pious humbug, and he knew it. 'Winston in the House was not at his best,' wrote Harold Nicolson in a private letter on April 13. 'He feels deeply the loss of naval units and becomes like a surly buffalo – lowered head, eyes flaring right and left.'

On May 1 the Viceroy expressed to Leo Amery the hope that their prime minister had finally grasped that there was now 'no more than a sheet of paper' between the Japanese drive westward and the German drive south-east from Libya and the Caucasus. Amery echoed these fears in a letter the next day to Smuts, warning of the danger that the Japanese, by-passing India, would join hands with the Germans in the Middle East. None of these fears would however be realised. Admiral Nagumo and his fleet had to return to the Pacific, where they shortly met their nemesis in the Battles of the Coral Sea in May 1942, and Midway in June.



Britain's continuing military humiliation encouraged the Indian nationalist leaders, and particularly the Hindus of Mahatma Gandhi's All-India Congress, to amplify their demands for self-government. An 'Indian National Army' soon rallied to the Japanese cause, consisting of 25,000 Indian troops who had deserted from the 67,000 who had surrendered in Singapore. In Burma too, people and politicians looked to the rising sun.

Seen from Washington, it appeared that Churchill was committing the error of dispersing the empire's forces all over the globe. On March 10, 1942 President Roosevelt had sent to London a cable suggesting the creation of a Central Temporary Dominion government in India.⁹¹ Roosevelt and Marshall felt that they should pin down the British as to their intentions for the coming months. The president made plain to his intimates that if the United States were to be held to defeating Germany first, it must be on his terms – and that meant launching a cross-Channel assault in 1942. In April he therefore sent Marshall and Hopkins to London for one week with instructions to hint that if Churchill would not see things their way, the United States might switch to a 'Japan first' policy.⁹²

Thus it was that Churchill received in the first days of April an unexpected telegram from Hopkins. 'See you soon,' this read. 'Please start the fire' – a reference to the American's chilly experience when last housed at Chequers.⁹³

Simultaneously Roosevelt informed Churchill that Marshall and Hopkins were bringing over to London a plan – a plan which he hoped Stalin would greet with enthusiasm.⁹⁴



Churchill too had sent out emissaries – General Nye to Cairo; and Sir Stafford Cripps to India.

The India episode speaks eloquently of the problems confronting Churchill that spring, and how he overcame them. In his war memoirs he would skate over the events between March 22 and April 11, when the Cripps mission collapsed, in one line ('Space does not allow...'). Even his authorised biographer would favour his readers with only ten more.⁹⁵

Cripps had arrived in Delhi, the capital of India, on March 23, emboldened by a burning sense of mission and a conviction of his own piety. The scheme which he was to outline, with the grudging permission of Churchill and the sanction of the war cabinet, was essentially of his own authorship.⁹⁶ Britain promised to give India her independence if a constituent assembly after the war so demanded. His first reports back to London, dated April 1, were gloomy.⁹⁷ The Indians were demanding control of their own ministry of defence if they were to make a stand against the Japanese. Cripps decided to stay on, to talk with the Indian Congress leaders and General Wavell. Telephoning Eden about these telegrams, the prime minister asked him to come up to London for a cabinet meeting.⁹⁸

The cabinet could see no reason not to give to some suitable Indian the partial responsibility for defence, but insisted on knowing what the precise proposals were. Beyond that, the cabinet refused to consider amending the declaration.⁹⁹ Churchill himself drafted the cabinet's tough response to Cripps, observing that the declaration had 'won general approval' in the outside world: 'We all reached an agreement on it before you started,' he reminded his emissary, 'and it represents our final position.'¹⁰⁰

Amery thought Winston's draft 'rather crude and negative, especially if all these telegrams come to be published some day.' Churchill however was in a masterful mood. He again made it plain over lunch to Eden, who confessed to worries about the 'direction and conduct' of the war, that he had no intention of giving up the ministry of defence. 'He sees himself in Roosevelt's position as sole director of [the] war,' recorded Eden bleakly.¹⁰¹

what strengthened Churchill's hand was that the Viceroy did not see eye to eye with Cripps. Just as Churchill was leaving for Chequers on April 2, Amery brought over to No. 10 an urgent cable from Linlithgow, asking permission to express his own views and those of the C.-in-C.¹⁰² Delighted at this development, Churchill obtained cabinet approval; Amery wired back to the Viceroy asking whether Cripps' pessimism was justified. In this way there emerged that Easter weekend, as one writer has observed, a direct Linlithgow–Churchill axis behind Cripps' back.¹⁰³ Linlithgow now cautiously asked for categorical instructions from Churchill to report independently.¹⁰⁴ On April 5, Easter Sunday, the prime minister responded: 'Of course telegraph personal to me or secretary of state exactly what you think.'¹⁰⁵

It was like Norway and the Battle of France in 1940 all over again: not for the first time he was thus opening up a direct and secret line of communication to a 'commander' on the spot.* Except that then he had wanted victory; and this time, he wanted – for his political opponents and the Cripps Mission – defeat.

The first reaction from India was approval of the appointment of a native Indian Defence Co-ordination Member, but it emphasised that Wavell's status as minister of defence must be preserved; Linlithgow had informed the general on his return to Delhi two days earlier (Good Friday) that he would tolerate no weakening of his powers as commander-in-chief. Meeting the Congress leaders on Saturday Wavell had reiterated the need for unified control of India's defence. Until that moment, Cripps would later write, Wavell had met only Indian soldiers; even now he plainly understood little of what Jawaharlal Nehru, the leader of Congress, was driving at.¹⁰⁶ Nehru himself, a friend of Cripps, made no bones about it and told the press that the question was simply whether the (Indian) defence ministry was to control the commander-in-chief (Wavell) or vice versa. 'I dare say,' observed Amery, 'we may before long have to clap Nehru in gaol again.'¹⁰⁷

That Saturday night (April 4) Cripps sent his estimate of the situation to Churchill, stating that the time had come when a final decision had to be reached on 'how far we are prepared to go on the chance of getting a settlement.' There were in Cripps' view once again three alternatives: to do nothing, and make no concession; to transfer the Indian defence ministry to an Indian, who was to be given however strict written policy guidelines;

* See vol. i pages 243 and 284.

or to create a separate portfolio for an Indian, to whom Wavell could assign certain functions only.¹⁰⁸

Churchill had Lady Cripps staying that Easter weekend at Chequers.¹⁰⁹ He made a surprisingly mild response at first, informing the Viceroy on Sunday that he would discuss it all with his cabinet on the following morning.¹¹⁰ In the small hours of Monday the sixth however he received from Linlithgow a powerfully worded attack on Cripps, which the Viceroy had in fact been preparing for some days. It supported the first option – doing nothing, the status quo; it questioned Cripps' assumption that a reconstituted executive could function as if it were an Indian cabinet, and it solidly opposed any transfer of the present defence ministry to a native Indian.¹¹¹ The war cabinet, on the advice of its India Committee, agreed that Cripps must be firmly put in his place. 'The position is and must remain,' he was told, 'that the Viceroy in Council acts as a collective body responsible to the secretary of state and subject to the Viceroy's special powers and duties. . . There should be no misunderstanding between you and Indian political leaders on this point.'¹¹²

at this time there was an unforeseen intervention. Roosevelt had sent Colonel Louis A. Johnson, an American lawyer, out to India as his personal representative, ostensibly heading a mission on munitions; Johnson had arrived in Delhi on April 3, as the negotiations between Cripps and the Indian leaders were at their height.¹¹³ He rapidly established a rapport with Cripps, and together they developed an alternative formula on the tricky question of a native Indian minister of defence. Linlithgow immediately reported this to London. Linlithgow complained that Cripps, 'presumably' with Johnson's assistance, had proposed to Nehru that an Indian would become defence minister. He added that Johnson 'acts and talks as though he were sent to India as Roosevelt's personal representative to mediate' (as indeed he was). From Cripps meanwhile Churchill received a rather naive secret telegram, in their private code, asking him to thank President Roosevelt for Johnson's 'very efficient' help.¹¹⁴

Shocked by the scope of the new proposals, Churchill forbade him to proceed, pending the cabinet's decision.¹¹⁵ Receiving Harry Hopkins in the cabinet room an hour or two later, at ten-thirty a.m. on April 9 – Hopkins had arrived in London with General Marshall on the day before – Churchill read out the Viceroy's telegram. He protested in vivid language at Roosevelt's meddling in India, and predicted that his cabinet, meeting at midday, would

reject this 'Cripps–Johnson proposal,' as he termed it. Fearing that Roosevelt's gauche action would set back his own strategic mission in London, Hopkins lied to Churchill: he insisted that Colonel Johnson had had no such instructions from Roosevelt, and that it was Cripps who was dragging Roosevelt's name into the debate for his own reasons. 'I told Churchill,' noted Hopkins afterwards, 'of the president's instructions to me, namely that he would not be drawn into the Indian business except at the personal request of the prime minister.'¹¹⁶

Churchill saw through Hopkins's little subterfuge, but he drafted in long-hand a telegram to Cripps and the Viceroy exploiting it to the full: 'Colonel Johnson,' he wrote, with Harry Hopkins looking over his shoulder, 'is not President Roosevelt's personal representative in any matter outside the specific mission dealing with Indian munitions and kindred topics on which he was sent. I feel sure President would be vexed if he, the President, were to seem to be drawn into the Indian constitution issue.'¹¹⁷

The war cabinet was also critical of Cripps.¹¹⁸ They sent him two cables, objecting to the Cripps–Johnson formula, revoking his powers to negotiate, and rebuking him for going behind the Viceroy's back.¹¹⁹ In a wounded reply, Cripps indicated that he had belatedly found out that the Viceroy was going behind *his* back. 'Your telegrams...', he wrote to the cabinet, 'apparently refer to some sent from here which I have not seen.'¹²⁰ Colonel Johnson would report to Roosevelt that Cripps had explained to him, in some embarrassment, that Churchill had now rescinded his powers and would give no approval 'unless Wavell and [the] Viceroy separately send their own code cables unqualifiedly endorsing any change Cripps wants.'¹²¹ By skilfully exploiting Roosevelt's diplomatic bêtise, Churchill had at one stroke thrown Cripps and his mission into a promising disarray.

clementine churchill was glad to see Hopkins, because she knew how much his presence elevated Winston's spirit. She sent him these words of welcome: 'Oh how glad I am you are back with us all once more, to encourage, to cheer and to charm us. You can't think what a difference it makes to Winston – he is carrying a very heavy load and I can't bear his dear round face not to look cheerful and cherubic in the mornings, as up to now it has always done – what with Singapore and India (India, I fear, being messed and juggled about by Cripps, which is very disappointing). We are indeed walking through the Valley of Humiliation.'¹²²

Hopkins had arrived in London on April 8, bringing with him General George C. Marshall, and carrying Roosevelt's written insistence that Britain agree to an early cross-Channel invasion operation. They visited Churchill at No. 10 Downing-street from four to six p.m. In his letter, the president emphasised that what they were about to impress upon the English – namely Operation **round-up** as he called it – 'has my heart & *mind* in it.' Both their peoples, he wrote, were now demanding a Second Front. 'Even if full success is not attained,' the letter continued, 'the big objective will be,' – namely drawing Nazi pressure off the Russian armed forces. 'Best of luck,' this friendly letter ended, adding: '*Make Harry go to bed early.* . .'¹²³

The projected operation as outlined in the accompanying U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum was a cross-Channel amphibious assault by, eventually, forty-eight divisions (with Britain contributing eighteen), backed by 5,800 war planes (of which 2,550 would be British). This gigantic operation was to be staged during 1942 if possible, otherwise not later than September 1943, spearheaded by six divisions landing on selected beaches between Le Havre and Boulogne, at the narrowest part of the English Channel. The Americans suggested that Churchill's staff also draw up a smaller, largely British, emergency operation designed to exploit a sudden German collapse, or alternatively designed 'as a sacrifice' to avert an imminent Soviet collapse.¹²⁴ This latter idea, with its ominous wording, was an innovation.

As General Marshall set out these proposals, he gathered that Churchill was already aware of them. Hopkins indeed suspected at once that Churchill was not taking them seriously. Marshall, who had expected more resistance, was more optimistic; he thought that Churchill went a long way to meet them. Remarking that he was 'prepared to go along' with the American plan, Churchill set out all the objections which his own chiefs of staff had raised. He began by reviewing the broader military situation, dwelling briefly on the recent disaster in the Indian Ocean. As for the British humiliation in Singapore in February, he admitted that there was no real explanation: the defenders – no doubt he identified the Australians in particular – had let him and the whole British Army down very badly. 'He also expressed a good deal of criticism of Auchinleck,' recorded Hopkins; 'said he had had [a] pretty acrimonious correspondence with him.' While Winston was pressing for action, his commanders invariably responded that they lacked supplies.¹²⁵

Over dinner, at which they were joined by Attlee and the C.I.G.S., the prime minister displayed his talents as a military historian, spending much

of the evening expatiating on the American Civil War; in a neat piece of showmanship that was not without effect on the Americans, a message arrived for him during the meal revealing that Harris 'was sending out 350 bombers' over Germany that night. (The figure was inflated: 172 took off to attack Hamburg). He barely touched on Roosevelt's cross-Channel proposals; from what General Brooke said, both Hopkins and Marshall realised that the C.I.G.S. had his misgivings about them.¹²⁶ This may account for the unfavourable impression which he made on Marshall, who decided that he lacked the brains of his predecessor Sir John Dill.¹²⁷

They met again in the Cabinet Room at ten-thirty the next morning. This was the day of the upset over Colonel Johnson's machinations in Delhi. Churchill staged two more incidents for their benefit: his secretary brought in a telegram reporting the sinking of *Hermes*, and then a 'discouraging' dispatch from Admiral Somerville, announcing the withdrawal of his fleet to East African ports as he could not risk battle with the superior Japanese fleet. Churchill pronounced himself not hopeful about holding on to Ceylon and, in an unspoken criticism of Admiral King, again lamented the lack of joint naval planning in the Far East. The British admiralty, he asserted, told their American colleagues everything, but were fobbed off with responses like: 'We have the matter in hand.'

After reviewing the maps of Rommel's advances in Libya, the Americans reverted tenaciously to **round-up**. The British must assume, said Hopkins, that their ground forces would one day be thrown into the fight. 'I said this to him,' Hopkins recorded, 'because, in conversations the previous day, I sensed that his advisers had told him that the ground attack would never be made, at least for nearly a year.'¹²⁸

On the ninth the British chiefs of staff patiently set out to the American visitors all the familiar objections to launching any major operation before 1943.¹²⁹ Brooke was privately contemptuous of the Americans – even by September, he noted, they would have only two and a half divisions available.¹³⁰ The next afternoon, April 10, Churchill expressed concern to Eden that the chiefs of staff might yet endorse **round-up** and use it as a pretext for doing less elsewhere.¹³¹ They all dined down at Chequers; with scant regard for his visitors, Churchill kept them up after dinner for another review of the war situation, followed by a movie which lasted until shortly before three a.m.; General Marshall's face was a study, as Brooke happily entered in his diary.¹³² Exhausted by the journey, Hopkins became ill but he soldiered on and reported to Roosevelt that he felt sure that all would turn

out satisfactorily.¹³³ Churchill accounted to Roosevelt for their talks on Sunday, though with his tongue firmly in his cheek, referring to 'your masterly document,' expressing himself entirely in agreement 'in principle,' and declaring that if carried through the invasion would be 'one of the grand events in all the history of the war.'¹³⁴



The ordeal of the North Russian convoys was now beginning. Five of the nineteen merchantmen in Convoy PQ. 13 had been sunk by German surface and air attack. The cruiser *Trinidad* had been badly damaged. Of the twenty-three ships in the next convoy, PQ. 14, fourteen had to turn back; only eight would reach Russia. Churchill impressed on his war cabinet on Monday, April 13, the need to make the Russians realise the risks that Allied seamen were running.¹³⁵ He invited Marshall and Hopkins to meet his cabinet that day and to sit in on the *defence committee* on the following night, 'at which time,' so Hopkins informed Roosevelt, still concerned about securing a British commitment to the cross-Channel invasion strategy, 'I believe the matter will be decided definitely.'

As for India, everybody had assured him, Hopkins added in this telegram, that they were disappointed at how things had turned out there; but all believed that no stone had been left unturned to reach agreement.¹³⁶

The Indian leaders had rejected the British offer on April 10.¹³⁷ It was a triumph for Churchill's tactics. 'I was able to bear this news,' he would write in his memoirs, 'which I had thought probable from the beginning, with philosophy.'¹³⁸ Even at the time, everybody chortled. 'I fancy,' wrote Amery, summarising their relief, 'most of us feel like someone who has proposed for family or financial reasons to a particularly unprepossessing damsel and finds himself lucky enough to be rejected.'¹³⁹ After that morning's cabinet, Eden recorded that there still seemed to be some conflict between Cripps and the Viceroy, but it was all rather difficult to follow, 'the more so since they don't seem to show each other the telegrams they send.' He sensed that personal relations between the two men were 'pretty edgy.'¹⁴⁰ All that remained was for Churchill to chair, later that afternoon, a meeting of the India Committee where he delivered the *coup de grâce*.

having failed in his mission Cripps announced that he would be flying home to London on Monday the thirteenth; Churchill thanked him in an unctuous telegram: 'Even though your hopes have not been fulfilled, you have rendered a very important service to the common cause and the foundations have been laid for the future progress of the peoples of India.'¹⁴¹ The correspondence which had passed between Cripps and Gandhi's officials was now published.

Knowing that Churchill had wittingly destroyed the Cripps mission from afar, Roosevelt sent him an uncomplimentary message which arrived at three a.m. on April 12:

The feeling is almost universally held [*this said*] that the deadlock has been caused by the unwillingness of the British government to concede to the Indians the right of self-government, notwithstanding the willingness of the Indians to entrust technical, military, and naval defense control to the competent British authorities. American public opinion cannot understand why, if the British government is willing to permit the component parts of India to secede from the British empire after the war, it is not willing to permit them to enjoy what is tantamount to self-government during the war.¹⁴²

In his memoirs, Churchill was rightly scathing about this message. Roosevelt's mind seemed to have ossified in the American War of Independence; he was thinking of the Indian Problem in terms of the thirteen colonies fighting George III. Since the telegram was addressed to him (as 'Former Naval Person'), Churchill decided not to show it to the cabinet. Hopkins, who had been with him as he received the telegram, asked to phone Roosevelt at once – three a.m. in London was still late evening in Washington. Mysteriously however, 'owing to atmospheric,' as Churchill explained to him, the call could not get through. From the message which Churchill sent to Roosevelt a few hours later, what Eden's private staff described as a polite raspberry, it was plain that he intended to brook no further presidential meddling in India.¹⁴³ 'You know the weight which I attach to everything you say to me,' Churchill silkily assured the president, 'but I did not feel I could take responsibility for the defence of India if everything had again to be thrown into the melting-pot at this critical juncture. That, I am sure, would be the view of cabinet and Parliament. . . . Anything like a serious difference between you and me would break my

heart, and would surely deeply injure both our countries at the height of this terrible struggle.'

Thus Churchill effectively shelved the Indian constitutional issue for the duration of the war. Neither he, nor Amery, nor Lord Linlithgow trusted the Congress Party. In sabotaging the mission, he had also taken Cripps down a useful peg or two. 'Good-bye Mr Cripps!' mocked the Viceroy in the margin of one telegram.¹⁴⁴

After an eight-day journey, Cripps arrived back in England on April 21. Roosevelt continued to interfere, grumbling to his own cabinet about India, and firing off more letters to Churchill. Once they even spoke by telephone about it; the prime minister again deprecated any American intervention, and lectured Roosevelt that neither Gandhi, a Hindu, nor his Congress Party represented all the Indian people. A million Indians had already enlisted in the British army, he pointed out.¹⁴⁵ On the last day of May 1942 he would send another acerbic telegram to Washington, this time about rumours that Nehru was to be invited to the United States; he added that neither he nor the Viceroy relished the prospect that the meddlesome Colonel Johnson was to return to India. 'We are fighting to defend this vast mass of helpless Indians from imminent invasion,' he chided the American president. 'I know you will remember my many difficulties.'¹⁴⁶

All of this was just treading water. Deep down, he regarded the Indian sub-continent as lost. He would 'amaze' King George VI, the Emperor of India, in July 1942 with the casual remark that his cabinet colleagues and all three parliamentary parties were 'quite prepared to give up India' after the war. 'Cripps, the Press, and U.S. opinion,' observed the King, somewhat mystified, in his diary, 'have all contributed to make their minds up that our rule in India is wrong and has always been wrong for India.'¹⁴⁷



Let us now revert briefly to where we left General Marshall and Harry Hopkins, urging **round-up** upon a reluctant prime minister and his chiefs of staff. Meeting the latter gentlemen on the morning of April 14, 1942 Marshall argued that they might have to take action in the next three or four months because either Russia or Germany was on her last legs. (We may suspect that 'or Germany' was routinely added as a sop to avoid charges of defeatism). Both Mountbatten and Brooke pointed out that the shortage

of landing-craft severely limited anything they could do except on a small scale before 1943.¹⁴⁸ This, it turned out, was just one of the factors which the U.S. Joint Planners had failed to take into account.

the difficult American visit was nearly over. Hopkins saw Churchill again on April 14 and dined with him later.¹⁴⁹ At Churchill's bidding he sent off a telegram to Washington drawing attention to the naval danger developing in the Indian Ocean. Hopkins told the president that Marshall had presented their case on the cross-Channel operation impressively; the prime minister had regretted that Admiral King had not come and he had complained that the U.S. Navy was not communicating to them its strategic intentions.¹⁵⁰

After dinner Churchill invited the *defence committee* to hear the 'momentous proposal' that Hopkins and Marshall had brought over from Washington, and in an 'impressive pronouncement,' according to Marshall, declared his complete agreement.¹⁵¹ Answering the American criticisms, he continued that Britain must defend India and the Middle East. 'Furthermore, Australia and the island bases connecting that country with the United States must not be allowed to fall, as this would inevitably prolong the war.' Thus, he reasoned amiably, they could not lay aside 'everything' else. In short, Churchill seemed to agree with everything, while in reality he had accepted nothing. Even so 'Pug' Ismay, whom he had asked to take a minute of this important conference, regretted that his master had not spoken out more vigorously about the problems inherent in a cross-Channel operation.

General Marshall was thoroughly bamboozled by Churchill's bland assurances. He skated over the main difficulties – the shortage of shipping tonnage, landing-craft, aircraft, and naval escorts. All agreed that Germany still came first as the main enemy. In closing Churchill delivered a homily on 'unanimity,' and 'going ahead with the utmost resolution.' 'The two nations,' he said, his prose now flowing unstopably like Ol' Man River itself, 'would march ahead together in a noble brotherhood of arms.' He suggested that they make a public pronouncement of the resolve of the English-speaking peoples on the liberation of Europe.¹⁵² Inundated with these rivulets of Churchillian verbiage, the Americans willingly believed that great harmony had been achieved. They lunched the next day, April 15, with the King and Queen, and dined that night with the King and chiefs of staff – and inevitably Mountbatten – at No. 10.¹⁵³ In retrospect, it might seem remarkable that important military and political figures had to travel

thousands of miles to establish in personal meetings what an exchange of letters could have done equally well. In fact, letters would have added a certain contractual validity to the assurances so blandly uttered. The Americans believed however in the benefits to be drawn from looking people in the eye. Writing to Churchill after his return home, Marshall expressed the belief that they had laid a firm foundation for co-operation 'without the interminable delays and usual misunderstanding common to such joint enterprises.'¹⁵⁴

before the irksome visitors left, Churchill thought it wise to summarise the limits of his agreement in writing to Roosevelt. He accepted the Roosevelt project *subject* to the qualification that enough Allied resources be set aside to halt the Japanese advance. Their military staffs would accordingly start planning for the 1943 cross-Channel operation at once. As for launching a smaller-scale operation, the prime minister warned that it might become necessary even before September 1942, as things might easily 'come to a head' before then.¹⁵⁵

While still in London, General Marshall received a signal from Washington which he immediately passed on to Churchill. *magic* was indicating that Tokyo was now pondering whether to dispose of Russia first or to 'wipe out' the power and influence of the United States, Britain, and China. The Japanese consensus favoured attacking Russia first; and Germany, the message said, was also urging this action. The date of June 15 (for such an attack) had been derived from other sources.¹⁵⁶ All of this contradicted however everything that Bletchley Park had deduced; to their 'friends' at the U.S. Navy department, they secretly signalled that they had seen no Japanese telegrams indicating designs on Russia. 'Recent telegrams,' the British codebreakers argued, 'indicate intensification of the campaign against India or Australia, preferably the former.'¹⁵⁷ From secret Intelligence on Japanese troop movements, Churchill deduced that there was no immediate intention of invading Australia.¹⁵⁸

Inevitably, the loss of *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall*, and now of the carrier *Hermes*, evoked fresh anxiety in Australia. Mr Curtin wired to Churchill demanding the fullest information about the cause, and a statement on how he intended to combat the Japanese naval forces in future.¹⁵⁹

The Japanese threat to India continued to alarm Churchill. On April 15, at a time when he was already sending hundreds of bombers to raise fires in

German cities, the prime minister appealed to Roosevelt to allocate American bombers to India. 'Might I press you, Mr President, to procure the necessary decisions?'¹⁶⁰ The president replied that fifty fighter planes and almost as many bombers were already wending their way out to India. There were limits to the prime minister's concern however. When Attlee suggested that they transfer the whole of Bomber Command to India and the Middle East, the prime minister predicted to him that the squadrons would do nothing once they arrived: 'We have built up a great plan here for bombing Germany,' he explained, 'which is the only way in our power of helping Russia.'¹⁶¹

Nothing was cut-and-dried about the political constellations in Europe. On the morning of Saturday April 18, as Churchill was talking with Portal and Pound in his bedroom in the Annexe, Hopkins showed him a secret message from Washington, revealing that Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring was currently meeting Admiral Darlan near Forger-les-Eaux. Portal already had this information, however, and replied that if he could confirm it he would 'bomb the place.'¹⁶² Battleships and Nazi brass hats; women and children; factories, homes, and workers – there still seemed little rhyme or reason in the deployment of Churchill's increasingly costly bomber force.



Hopkins and Marshall left for home. They paused in Northern Ireland to visit the American troops now stationed there. Whitehall was relieved to see them go, but later that day Churchill had a phone call from Hopkins, who had now heard rumours from Roosevelt that Admiral Darlan had replaced Marshal Pétain. To the Americans, ever starry-eyed about using Vichy France, this suggested the possibility of encouraging an independent move by the French in their colonies in North-West Africa. While Eden scoffed at the prospect, Churchill wanted Hopkins and Marshall to return to London to immediately; but when Hopkins phoned Roosevelt again, the president would not hear of it.¹⁶³

While the rumour proved unfounded anyway, it did set Churchill thinking about those French colonies, and he cabled to Roosevelt the proposal that they ought now to make an offer of Allied support to the Vichy leaders 'Pétain and/or Darlan' if they would agree to move the remaining French fleet to African harbours. Should Roosevelt agree, the prime minister would

cable to him details of what forces Britain could, 'on invitation' and unopposed, land in Morocco. 'It seems to me,' wrote Churchill, 'they ought to be offered blessings as well as cursings.'¹⁶⁴ The answer from the White House was deliberately evasive, suggesting that they allow the situation to develop first.¹⁶⁵

roosevelt's two emissaries arrived safely back in Washington on April 20; From London, Churchill and Harriman sent a one-word cable: 'Hurrah.'¹⁶⁶

Marshall assured Henry Stimson that the British had swallowed round-up practically without change. He warned however that Churchill was over-preoccupied with the 'dangers on all sides.' At one stage in the military negotiations there had been a sudden crisis with a PQ convoy; at another, 'there came the news of the president's foolish intervention in India with Louis Johnson.' Churchill, said Marshall, had become so excitable that he and Hopkins had had the greatest difficulty in cooling him down.¹⁶⁷ Hopkins confirmed this vividly, relating to Stimson that 'the string of cuss words lasted for two hours in the middle of the night.'¹⁶⁸

Briefing the British ambassador, Hopkins again underlined the importance of launching an early cross-Channel invasion. The Americans would not stand for putting men and planes into England just to sit around. 'He had said this,' Lord Halifax gathered, 'to everybody in London.'¹⁶⁹ Pound's idea, he said, was to 'try and do something in the way of a landing in order to bring on an air battle,' calculating that even this would assist the Russians by inflicting casualties on the Luftwaffe.¹⁷⁰

Winston, said Hopkins, did not like having to consult Roosevelt. He preferred to run the war by himself.¹⁷¹

19: *Three Men and a Baby*

Some weekends, in the blackness of the night after the last of his guests at Chequers had retired to bed, Winston Churchill imagined enemy bombers flying overhead – not only to attack some target like Birmingham, but also to debouch by parachute silent squads of assassins charged with orders to kill him. He wondered how well his bodyguard – the police sergeants armed with regulation-issue revolvers and even the Guards officers which he favoured for his own security detail – would fare in such an event. During the first weekend in April 1942 he asked Tommy Thompson to have the matter looked into.¹

His health had improved, but there were little pointers that his popularity was no longer inviolate. In the Grantham by-election in March, his own man was trounced by an Independent whom he had publicly attacked. Labour M.P. Aneurin Bevan criticised his faiblesse for wearing his ‘siren suit’ in public. Then, showing a temerity unthinkable a few months earlier, General Auchinleck refused to have the prime minister’s son Randolph back in the Middle East, explaining that he had made himself highly unpopular.²

the problems with Randolph ran deeper than that. His marriage was falling apart. It had seemed doomed from the start. In October 1939, he had married the nineteen-year old Pamela Digby after a two-week courtship; the daughter of a distinctly unenthusiastic Lord and Lady Digby, this auburn-haired society beauty and *Tatler* cover-girl had devoted herself initially to Randolph, but then in increasingly generous measure to a number of handsome and wealthy visiting Americans including, it is clear, the millionaires Averell Harriman and Jock Whitney.³

In December 1940 Pamela had presented the Churchills with a son and heir, Winston. Despite their family’s standing, the Randolph Churchills were

not well off, and Pamela had little over ten pounds a week for keeping house; she set up a rented home in an old rectory at Ickleford in Hertfordshire. Randolph had joined No. 8 Commando, with ten troops each of fifty men. His troop boasted the more raffish element of his White's Club drinking pals – they considered themselves a cut above the rest, and some were certainly better card-players than the prime minister's headstrong son. When they left England aboard the troopship *Glenroy* bound for the Middle East, they had necessarily taken the long route around the Cape to Cairo, which they would not reach until mid-March 1941. According to the novelist Evelyn Waugh, a fellow-officer, they whiled away the long journey playing roulette, chemin-de-fer and poker. In two disastrous evenings Randolph lost £850, around twenty thousand pounds in today's money. In a telegram from Capetown he confessed to Pamela that he had gambled away a fortune; he pleaded with her to keep this from his father, and asked her to pay off his debts to a list of these rich friends by instalments, at the rate of ten pounds a month. In some marriages such a calamity would have brought the couple together in adversity; in his own shaky circumstances, it marked the end of any affection that she had felt for him.⁴ She had to sell off her jewellery and wedding presents, and rent out their rectory home. Lord Beaverbrook wrote her a generous cheque – he was continuing to pay the absent Randolph £1,500 per year as a journalist – and offered to let the young and undeniably comely Pamela stay with the infant Winston and his nursemaid at Cherkeley, the Beaverbrook country estate.⁵

In March 1941 the handsome and immensely wealthy Averell Harriman, a married man, had arrived in London as the head of an important American mission connected with lend-lease. His interest in Pamela, a girl thirty years his junior with innocent 'kitten eyes,' started soon after, and her father-in-law the prime minister did shockingly little to discourage it. Divorce was unthinkable. Cecil King had noted one earlier conversation with the Churchills from which it was plain that Winston was flatly opposed on principle to divorce: whereupon, the newspaper editor had noted in embarrassment, Clementine had 'embarked on a long story of her parents' matrimonial differences,' murmured more or less into his ear. 'It is difficult to know what to say,' he wrote in his diary that night, 'when the P.M.'s wife goes off into a long account of the differences of her parents, her father's infidelities and failure to pay the children's allowances specified under a judicial separation, and his habit of pursuing his women friends for ever after in a vindictive spirit!' A few weeks later the prime minister's private

secretary John Colville ran into Harriman and Pamela strolling arm in arm in Horse Guards Parade.⁶ The liaison flourished. Cecil King would write that society was buzzing, ‘She is looked on as young and silly – brought up in a very strict home by parents who were against the Randolph match. She is tired of him and disgusted, and has been carrying on this affair with Harriman for some time.’ It had become so blatant that he put out the story that he had asked Pamela to be hostess and chaperone for his daughter Kathleen. ‘The whole episode,’ concluded this journalist with a practised pen, ‘reveals a new aspect of lease-lend!’⁷

on june 8, 1941, while the scandalous affair was still in its infancy, the prime minister wrote to Randolph that Harriman would soon be visiting Cairo on a mission of inspection; with what misplaced sense of devilry did he now order his cuckolded son appointed to the Harriman mission? Randolph was seemingly resigned to the inevitable. In a circuitously worded letter, which he sent back to London by the hand of Harriman himself, Randolph thanked his father for appointment, since he had thereby obtained from Harriman ‘all the latest news of you and Pamela.’ ‘I have become very intimate with him,’ he wrote, surely hinting at his own knowledge of the awkward truth, ‘and he has admitted to me all the business he has transacted.’ He chivalrously kept his suspicions from his wife herself. In a wry letter to Pamela on the same date Randolph confessed that he had found the American absolutely charming. ‘He spoke delightfully about you,’ he added, ‘& I fear that I have a serious rival!’⁸

Two or three months later Randolph, a skilled journalist in his own right, had persuaded Oliver Lyttelton to put him in charge of the army’s propaganda bureau in Cairo. His rough-and-ready methods did not endear him to the more comfort-loving staff officers, and early 1942 found him home on leave. He spent the weekend of February 7 – 9 with Pamela at Chequers; as did Averell Harriman and his daughter Kathleen.⁹ It was only now that Randolph realised that what had been going on while he was on duty overseas was rather more serious than a wartime romance. When he and Pamela spent the following weekend at Chequers he learned that while Pamela had parked their infant at Lord Beaverbrook’s, she was living a gay and independent life in London. He learned too that his own father the prime minister fully condoned this Randolph–Pamela–Harriman triangle; for this, Randolph found he could not forgive his father. On March 17 he again spent the night at Chequers; Harriman came too. This time Pamela

stayed away.¹⁰ She now confessed to a profound loathing for Randolph, her lawful husband. Throughout one trying weekend, which he spent with her father Lord Digby in London, Evelyn Waugh noticed that she could not bear even to sit in the same room as Randolph.¹¹ When Randolph accused his father of taking the wayward Pamela's side against him, the row became so upsetting that Clementine forbade him to return home for the duration, lest the prime minister's fragile heart seize under the strain.¹²

The whole Churchill family was up in arms against Randolph. His sister Mary, just twenty years old and the baby of the family, wrote him a furious letter suggesting that he return to the front. Whatever else might be said of him, Churchill's son would never be found wanting in courage. He appealed to Mountbatten to let him return to the Commandos, but a few days later he received orders to return to Egypt instead. In Cairo, he found that Auchinleck's officers refused to have anything to do with him. Claiming to find life as a staff officer in Cairo too tame, Randolph cabled to Pamela that he was volunteering for a parachute unit. He impulsively joined the Special Air Service, commanded by Major David Stirling. Clementine wrote an emotional, grieving letter to Winston about this new decision, anguished that Randolph had done this 'because I know it will cause you harrowing anxiety, indeed, even agony of mind.'

I feel this impulse of Randolph's, caused by natural disappointment that he has lost his interesting post [in Cairo], is sincere but sensational – Surely there is a half-way house between being a Staff Officer and a Parachute Jumper? He could have quietly & sensibly rejoined his Regiment & considering he has a very young wife with a baby to say nothing of a Father who is bearing not only the burden of his own country but for the moment that of an unprepared America, it would in my view have been his dignified & reasonable duty.

Clementine continued that she regarded her son's action as 'selfish & unjust' and with regard to Pamela, she added, 'one might imagine she had betrayed or left him.'

I am really very sorry he has lost his post because his talents & capacities suited him for it; but alas – these were not sufficient to outweigh his indiscretions & the hostilities which he arouses – It's no use offending & antagonising everybody unless you really are indispensable.

She asked Winston whether it would be any use for her to send an affectionate telegram begging him on Winston's account to rejoin his Regiment, arguing: 'He has already left one Commando [No 8] & if he takes up parachuting & then gives it up for perhaps some other Staff job he might be regarded as theatrical & unstable.' She signed this heartfelt letter of a sorrowing mother to her husband, 'Your poor loving Clemmie.'

Caught in this family maelstrom, the prime minister dispatched a peremptory cable to his son to Cairo: 'Please let me know what your employment is as naturally I like to follow your fortunes. Acknowledge.'¹⁴

Pamela was unimpressed. 'Randolph went to the Middle East about three weeks ago,' she wrote to Beaverbrook, after a day in the country with Hopkins, Harriman, and his daughter Kathleen (their alibi), 'and has joined some sort of Commando unit out there. Which is I think the best thing he could have done. We have moved into a flat in Grosvenor-square, so much nicer than the Dorchester.'¹⁵ The 'we' is the give-away: it was Pamela and Averell. He had begun renting a top floor apartment in Grosvenor-square for her; Beaverbrook's papers show that he himself paid the quarterly rent fee, and Harriman (usually tardily) reimbursed him.¹⁶

When Harriman now fell ill, 'K.H.' (Kathleen) typed a letter to the prime minister on April 25 which confirms that they were all living under the same roof: 'Mrs Randolph [i.e. Pamela] says that he has a high temperature, and two nurses are in attendance. Lord Dawson [a leading physician] came to see him last night.' Kathleen promised the prime minister that 'Mrs Randolph' would tell Harriman that he had inquired about him.¹⁷ Responding to an inquiry from Hopkins, Churchill reported that the unofficial diagnosis was paratyphoid: 'I have just spoken to Kathleen,' he added, 'who does not seem at all anxious. I am keeping in the closest touch with her and Pamela.'¹⁸

London society was enthralled by the juicy scandal. It was learned that Pamela had replaced young Winston's nanny with a new young thing at nearly three times the previous salary, paying her £150 per annum, and that Harriman was paying the difference; when Beaverbrook bought a complete trousseau for the child, from the White House in Bond-street, the gossip was that Pamela took everything back and exchanged the goods for things for herself. Rather than see young Winston looking shabby and shivering, Harriman himself had forked out for a coat. 'In fact,' observed Cecil King gleefully in his diary, 'of pride or dignity in the PM's family circle there is at this writing no trace.'¹⁹

churchill had cut his only son adrift, but he continued to dote on him in his absence and to overlook all, or most, of his shortcomings. When their paths did cross, they snarled at each other in a most unbecoming manner. Early in May 1942, writing to him about the family news, he reported on Harriman's illness, and described how Pamela was 'watching over him' with Kathleen; in a gentle, perhaps unintentional, hint that the American millionaire meant more to him right now than Randolph he added, 'I earnestly hope he will be better soon, for he is a true friend of our country, and I have taken a great personal liking to him.' The infant Winston had, he mocked his hapless son, 'not so far grown old enough to commit the various forms of indiscretion which he would be expected to inherit from his forebears.'²⁰

What are indiscretions to one man are another's heroism. Returning from his first sortie behind enemy lines with Stirling and the S.A.S. in the third week of May 1942 – a long-range patrol into enemy-occupied Benghazi – Randolph was injured when their car overturned. To Winston's dismay he returned, temporarily disabled, to England in August and delivered a fiery speech in the House at the end of September (he was still Member for Preston). His marriage and his life were in equal turmoil. Writing that October to Winston 'with full knowledge of all the circumstances' about Pamela, Lord Beaverbrook, who had been through much the same with his own son Max Aitken, spoke up for Randolph: 'He is losing his balance and giving way to despondency. It is my hope that you will see something of him now and give him your sympathy and even some support.'²¹

A dear friend of all the parties involved in this *mélange*, Beaverbrook talked things over with Randolph and Pamela a day or two later, then wrote this comforting letter to the prime minister. 'My dear Winston: Everything is settled. No more trouble now. Both Randolph and Pamela are pledged never, never, to talk with anybody at any time about their differences. The Boy [the infant Winston] goes to Chartwell now and to town when the flat is ready.' Randolph, he enthused, had behaved wonderfully well, and there were grounds to hope that he would give no more cause for anxiety. After signing the letter, 'Max' added: 'PS: & Pamela won't talk. – m.' 'PPS: Randolph has discussed and settled money affairs. I hope his plans will stand up and without any supplement.'²²

While Pamela continued her adulterous affair with Harriman, her husband sought solace with an old childhood flame, Laura Charteris. On October 30, 1942, Cecil King confirmed: 'Randolph has been playing around on his own account.' Recovered from his injuries, Randolph resumed his

military exploits at the end of October 1942, joining the military operation that will enter the annals of this history as *Torch*. From the troopship taking him to join the British First Army descending on North Africa he wrote to Laura: 'We are on a much more exciting venture of which you will soon be reading in the papers.' No equivalent letter went to Pamela. Randolph had been supplanted in her affections by Harriman. From time to time Harriman wrote out cheques (again via Lord Beaverbrook) on her behalf, including a £1,000 cheque on April 5, 1944.²³ This arrangement left most of the parties, if not the honour of the Churchills, satisfied.



It would be unwise to overlook that during these spring months of 1942 the prime minister had his mind on matters of far graver consequence. He had decided to address a Secret Session of the Commons, and dictated the script for his speech at Chequers on April 13.²⁴ He delivered it ten days later; he entered the Chamber to virtual silence while Sir Stafford Cripps, newly arrived from India, was received with cheers.

Churchill had however chosen the metier for his secret speech well, opting for what one called 'his stolid, obstinate, ploughman' manner.²⁵ In a well-paced speech that lasted for one hundred minutes, he contrived to move the Members with a deliberately woeful catalogue of misfortunes. There is inevitably no record in *Hansard*, but one senior Labour Member called it in his diary 'a very sombre picture,'

naming places which may well be lost to the Japs in the near future, and various misfortunes (principally naval, and what a hell of a run of bad luck we have had!) in the near past and present. Enough, but not too much, on Singapore. Events there quite out of harmony with our traditions and our previous experience. . . .²⁶ It would do no good and would only divert active men from the immediate business of the war to hold an inquiry. Great praise for New Zealand. Their one Division is still in the M[iddle] E[ast] with no request for its recall. . .

Then to the future, and the grounds for undiminished confidence. American production; recent consultations; Hopkins and Marshall in London; the matters discussed; their return to U.S.A.; exchange of messages between P.M. and President. This most dramatically ends the speech. 'Who wants a public session after that?' one Tory asks me.²⁷

Churchill would later sell his own typescript for this speech to *Life* magazine.²⁸ In this version, he explained that his ambition all along had been to have the United States in the war, while Japan stayed out. 'I frankly admit,' he continued, 'that the violence, fury, skill, and might of Japan has [*sic*] far exceeded anything that we had been led to expect.' At the time of Pearl Harbor the 18th Division had been rounding the Cape of Good Hope bound for the Middle East, while the 17th Indian Division was leaving India bound for the same theatre. He had diverted both forces to the Malay peninsula, and before leaving for Washington on December 12 he had started six anti-aircraft units and 250 aeroplanes off to India and Malaya; this transfer, he warned, would account for any coming German successes in Libya. 'The House must face the position squarely. Not only have we failed to stem the advance of the new enemy but we have had to weaken seriously the hopeful operation we were carrying on against the old.'

By the time of the loss of Singapore, he continued, he had landed in the Malay peninsula, or moved from India into Burma, seventy thousand troops, three hundred guns, 'a certain number' of tanks and 350 aeroplanes. 'During these times a series of unexampled losses fell upon the Royal Navy.' These included the loss of the 33,950 ton battleship *Nelson*, crippled by a torpedo on September 27; a torpedo had sunk the carrier *Ark Royal* on November 13; the 31,000 ton battleship *Barham* had foundered off Libya twelve days later with the loss of eight hundred men. Two days after Pearl Harbor, they had lost the new 35,000 ton battleship *Prince of Wales* and the 32,000 ton battle cruiser *Repulse* in the Far East.

'It was to be hoped,' explained the prime minister, 'that their presence there might be a deterrent upon the war party in Japan, and it was intended that they should vanish as soon as possible into the Blue' – an unfortunate choice of words, given the fate of those warships. 'A further sinister stroke was to come,' continued the prime minister, unfolding his tale of woe. 'On the early morning of December 19 half a dozen Italians in unusual diving suits were captured floundering about in the harbour of Alexandria. . . Four hours later explosions occurred in the bottoms of the *Valiant* and *Queen Elizabeth*.' Both these 30,600 ton battleships would be out of action for many months. 'Thus we had no longer a battle squadron in the Mediterranean.' Since the ships looked all right from the air, he was hoping that the enemy would not realise their loss; in theory, the Italians now had naval superiority in the Mediterranean, and they could have invaded Egypt or the Levant.

He then brought the story forward to February 1942, with Hitler's battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* passing boldly up the English Channel: 'I have been impressed,' he explained, 'by the shock which the passage of these two ships through the Channel gave to the loyal masses of the British nation. Personally,' he said dismissively, 'with my special knowledge, I thought it a very annoying incident but not comparable at all to the other happenings I have just described.' He confided to the House the admiralty's remarkable appreciation of the situation written on February 2, ten days before the event. Their Lordships had anticipated Hitler's intention of forcing the Channel only too well:

At first sight [the admiralty had warned] this passage up the Channel appears hazardous for the Germans. It is probable however that as their heavy ships are not fully efficient they would prefer such passage, relying for their security on their destroyers and aircraft, which are efficient, and knowing full well that we have no heavy ships with which to oppose them in the Channel. We might well, therefore, find the two battle-cruisers and the eight-inch cruisers with five large and five small destroyers, also say twenty fighters constantly overhead (with reinforcements on call) proceeding up the Channel.

'I have read this document to the House,' explained Churchill, 'because I am anxious that Members should realise that our affairs are not conducted entirely by simpletons and dunderheads as the comic papers try to depict.' Any featherhead, he added, could have confidence in times of victory; the test was to have faith when things were going wrong.

Which brought him to Singapore. There had been one hundred thousand British, Australian, and Indian troops in the Malay peninsula. They found themselves confronted with only thirty thousand Japanese invaders. 'After five or six days of confused but not very severe fighting,' related Churchill, 'the army and fortress surrendered.' Some, he said, blamed the Australians. The fall of Singapore had led to the loss of Java and Sumatra; as for Burma, 'The best that we can hope for is that the retreat will be as slow as possible.'

The Japanese warriors, he lamented, cost about a quarter as much as equivalent British 'and still more, American,' troops to feed. In consequence of all this, Australia naturally feared immediate invasion, and he had sent back most of her forces from the Middle East.

He reminded the House that the war could be ended only by the defeat of Germany. The liberation of Europe by 'equal numbers' of British and American troops was, he said, the main war plan of their two nations.

The timing, the scale, the method, the direction of this supreme undertaking must remain unknown and unknowable till the hour strikes and the blow falls.²⁹

it was oratory calculated to numb the mind of listeners with disbelief and even dismay. His tactics were flawless. His speech had opened the eyes of the House to so much, as he wrote privately to Randolph in Cairo – 'to the vast panorama of war and its many grievous dangers,' that the debate itself collapsed.³⁰ The debate, expected to last until seven p.m., was over by five. It is itself debatable whether this clever deflation of the will to debate was ultimately a good thing. 'This,' wrote one observer, 'would indicate a petering out of the attack.'³¹ There was now a feeling that things would turn out all right in the end. This was where Winston was so much bigger than those around him, suggested one minister – and he mentioned Eden, Beaverbrook, and Cripps in this connection – namely, 'in his sublime refusal to concede even the possibility of anything but a successful outcome.'³²

Beaverbrook was safely out of the way, but Cripps' prestige was still dangerously high, and there was Oliver Lyttelton too.³³ Rather drunk, Eden confided to his circle that the future of the country rested on himself, Lyttelton, and Cripps.³⁴ When Eden urged him to bring as many cabinet members into his plans as he could, the prime minister agreed, although he feared this might slow up the cabinet machine. 'However,' recorded Eden, 'Cripps, Oliver [Lyttelton], & I [were] he thought pretty powerful with himself. Attlee he liked but he was very feeble.'³⁵



Immediately after the Secret Session, Churchill arrived at the Royal Albert Hall for a military pageant staged by the *Daily Express*. A roar went up as he stepped into the Royal Box. Fatigued from his speech to the House he warned editor Arthur Christiansen that he would not be staying long. 'The last scene he saw,' wrote Christiansen to Beaverbrook in Washington,

demonstrated the spirit of attack. The house lights were down, and the

limes were concentrated on the arena. From loud-speakers all round the hall the word 'Attack' was whispered. Second by second it grew more urgent, then waves of Commandos, Guards, paratroops swept across the white canvas floor, their long shadows making the scene more sinister. As they reached the platform they let out their battle cries; and as each wave reached the platform a new wave started across the floor. All the while the word 'Attack' was being muttered.

Churchill left his family at the Albert Hall with Bracken and Eden to watch the final Olympiad- (or Nuremberg-) style spectacular, as the flags of all the empire and its allies were paraded into an arena now packed with two thousand troops and civil defence worker. The United States and USSR alphabetically bringing up the rear got loud cheers – though not as loud as Malta, an island displaying much fortitude under air attack.³⁶ After singing the national anthem the audience turned to Churchill's box again. 'I think they wanted,' wrote one of Beaverbrook's men, 'or expected, him to speak. But by that time he had gone.'³⁷

churchill did speak again the next day, April 24, at a Savoy luncheon of American newspapermen. He displayed a surprising compassion for Vichy France.³⁸ 'It is not easy for us here,' he said, 'fully to appreciate the sufferings of the French, the constant series of alternating threats and tantalising offers which their "oppressors" hold over them and their complete helplessness to defend themselves. Even Vichy does its best, I suppose, to resist.' That said, he added: 'If news came through that some patriot had done in [prime minister Pierre] Laval, I can't say that I would enjoy my dinner any less.'

He observed that had London and Washington devoted less attention before the war to reducing each other's battleships in size and number, and more to enforcing treaties, the present conflict could have been averted; he it called 'the unnecessary war.'³⁹



If Malta, this island bastion, were lost it would close the eastern Mediterranean to British ships as securely as the loss of Gibraltar would close the western. By holding on to Malta, Britain retained a base from which her forces could harass the enemy's supply lines to North Africa. Rommel had stated in a message, probably intercepted by the code-breakers, 'The

Panzer Army is to attack as soon as possible after the capture of Malta.' At a Defence Committee meeting on the afternoon of April 22 Churchill had decided that they must fight supply convoys through to the island whatever the cost.⁴⁰ Reluctant though the U.S. joint chiefs of staff were to venture into the Mediterranean, Roosevelt agreed allow his carrier *Wasp* to transport forty-seven Spitfire fighter planes to the airfield at Malta. In a second daring operation the same carrier would fly off sixty-one more planes to the island on May 9. Thanking the ship's crew, Churchill made this signal: 'Who said a wasp couldn't sting twice?'⁴¹

Mellowed by a mood of nostalgia for the past he drove down to Chartwell, in Kent. The house was empty, its contents in mothballs and dustsheets for the duration. Spring was blossoming in all its beauty, as he wrote to Randolph a few days later. Nature was running rampant. 'The goose I called the naval aide-de-camp,' he added – more family gossip – 'and the male black swan have both fallen victims to the fox.' After a while however the feline which he called the Yellow Cat had arrived, purring continuing friendship with all the fervour that long-neglected cats display, and this pleased the prime minister as he had not been down there for many months.⁴²



Attack! In order, as he claimed, to forestall the Japanese in the occupation of Madagascar – but more likely driven by a commendable desire to do something, somewhere – Churchill had ordered the invasion of Madagascar, a nine-hundred-mile long island off the eastern coast of Africa. The French colony currently had a garrison loyal to Vichy France. Since Washington still maintained diplomatic relations with Vichy, and Roosevelt was still anxious to observe the niceties of international law, he let Churchill know that he 'preferred not to be openly associated with' this enterprise.⁴³

On April 24, the day after the Secret Session, Eden recorded in his diary a meeting with the chiefs of staff about *ironclad*, the code name for this new operation. General Brooke was hostile to the plan, fearing armed resistance by the French, or even an open invitation by Vichy to the Japanese to come in; Eden discounted both possibilities. Churchill pointed out scornfully that it was 'of course' easier to do nothing – if they called off the enterprise now, they should not have to run any risks; but he had already informed Roosevelt and Smuts of his intent, and if the Japanese were allowed to 'walk' into Madagascar it would take 'a deal of explaining away.'⁴⁴

For security reasons they had to conceal the operation from General de Gaulle, leader of the Free French in Britain. The prime minister now reinstated all the security restrictions enforced against him in September 1941. Hearing that de Gaulle was intending to leave for Brazzaville, in the French colonies, Churchill ordered in mid-April 1942: 'He must not go.' Informed of further erratic behaviour by the general on the day of the chiefs of staff meeting on *ironclad*, Churchill wrote to Eden, 'This is what I have long feared; & explains why I have given directions (some months ago) to prevent De G. leaving in any aeroplane from this country.' He instructed Desmond Morton to contact both the air ministry and admiralty to ensure that de Gaulle did not slip out of Britain by air or sea, and he directed the security services to step up their watch on the general's telephones. 'Meanwhile make sure that no accident occurs,' Churchill told Morton.⁴⁵

after issuing these instructions Churchill took his afternoon nap. It was a sleep so deep that when he awoke he could not remember where he was.

Eden arrived at about five p.m. to find him 'striding about his room in vest and drawers with cigar in his mouth, whisky & soda at his side & calling for Nellie [the parlourmaid] to produce his socks.'⁴⁶ He showed the prime minister a telegram just in from Moscow, responding to the message they had sent two weeks earlier inviting Molotov to Britain to sign an Anglo-Soviet treaty. Stalin's telegram indicated that not only would Molotov be bringing with him a draft treaty, but he would also take up the question of the Second Front.⁴⁷

This was less agreeable. The Americans disliked the whole process. Ambassador Winant half-jokingly admonished Eden that Washington now regarded him as 'a Bolshevik.' Roosevelt could not see any necessity for a treaty on frontiers, and felt that keeping up the rate of Allied supplies to Stalin should be enough. The London Poles too would hardly leap at such a treaty, as it would legitimise Stalin's 1939 depredations on their country's eastern territories. In July 1941 Eden had written assuring General Wladyslaw Sikorski, prime minister of the exile Polish government, that His Majesty's government did not recognise any 'territorial changes' effected in Poland since August 1939. On the thirtieth of that month, however, the very day that diplomatic relations were restored between this Polish government and the Soviet Union, Eden had put a different spin on the question, stating in the House of Commons that this note to Sikorski did not involve any guarantee of *frontiers*. Surely, one innocent Labour Member

had asked, the existing guarantee to Poland, under which the war had been declared on Germany in 1939, still held good? 'There is, as I have said, no guarantee of frontiers,' Mr Eden stubbornly replied.⁴⁸

Trouble between Moscow and the Poles had begun to fester soon after. Stalin refused to reveal the fate of tens of thousands of Polish officers captured by his army. The Kremlin described the formerly Polish city of Lvov as 'Ukrainian.'⁴⁹ Soon after, the British ambassador informed Sikorski that Stalin was planning to annex East Prussia to Poland and to force back Poland's eastern frontier – to 'push Poland from the East to the West,' as Sikorski remarked, adding ominously: 'But that cannot be done without Polish consent.'⁵⁰ These Polish eastern territories were the very territories that he had conquered, or re-conquered – the semantics are unimportant here – in 1920; they had been ceded to Poland by the treaty of Riga in 1921.

Obstinate, intransigent, and overly proud – in many ways a Polish 'de Gaulle' though vested with greater legitimacy – Sikorski discussed these problems with Churchill on the last day of January 1942, candidly advising him to delay any visit to Moscow until the Red Army was in difficulties again. He predicted that Hitler would launch his summer offensive toward the Caucasus, relaxing his present thrusts toward Leningrad and Moscow. While the prime minister made the odd observation during this conversation that Britain was not 'afraid of' communism, and would not oppose it if Europe should embrace it, he did give Sikorski his solemn word, according to the Polish record, that 'as long as victory has not been achieved the problem of the future State boundaries in Europe will be in no way discussed.'⁵¹

As the Soviet claims were more rudely asserted, Sikorski began to wonder whether Churchill's word would be enough. On March 11, during a long talk with the prime minister and Eden, he protested that despite his sacrifice in signing the agreement with Stalin the leopard had not changed its spots: the treaty which Eden hoped to sign with Molotov would be pure folly if there were no *quid pro quo*. He did not want this to sound like a threat, he added; but he would no longer hold back the release of brutal information exposing to the world 'the real face of the Russians.'⁵²

In Washington, whither Sikorski now flew, he found that President Roosevelt, under the watchful glare of seven million Polish voters, was more inclined to stand firm on the frontier issue.⁵³ Churchill was thus caught between two major powers with very different views on Poland. He invited Sikorski to come to Chequers with Count Edward Raczyński, his foreign minister, and Joseph Retinger, their senior adviser, and over Sunday

lunch on April 26 he put it to them bluntly that even though it would involve violating the Atlantic Charter he saw no alternative to making the concessions which Stalin was demanding. This was the lesser of several evils. He urged the Poles to accept something like the old Curzon Line as their post-war eastern frontier. After all, the Russians would then just be recovering what they had held in 1914.⁵⁴ It was at very least a simplistic view of eastern Europe's political geography, but there was not, in Churchill's belief, much that the Poles or he could do about it.



The British working class pinned their faith on Stalin, and wanted to do everything possible to help the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ The voters showed their nagging disapproval of Churchill's policies in two by-elections at the end of April 1942 when they returned two Independent candidates: the candidate for Richard Acland's new Forward March movement romped home at Wallasey with a majority of six thousand, while William J. Brown, fighting the government candidate at Rugby, scraped in with a majority of six hundred. With his campaign probably secretly funded by Lord Beaverbrook, Brown had followed the latter's line and demanded a 'Second Front now.'⁵⁶

Beaverbrook was still in the United States, his clandestine activities against Churchill being closely monitored by the state department and the F.B.I. On Thursday April 23 he delivered a speech, which was broadcast from coast to coast, at a newspaper dinner in New York; at this he raised the same demand for an immediate Second Front. His tone was one of unstinted praise of Stalin. 'Communism under Stalin,' the mischievous Canadian said, 'has won the applause and admiration of all the western nations.' He painted a portrait of a Soviet Union in which there was no religious persecution, and 'the church doors are open.' He even defended Stalin's political purges of 1930. 'Strike out to help Russia!', he said. 'Strike out violently! Strike even recklessly!' He remarked to his secretary: 'I wonder what that fellow Churchill will say.' He knew that these words would sting the prime minister, and he admitted privately that he was 'a little ashamed' of having said these things.⁵⁷ In London, *The Sunday Times* called the speech 'unfortunate' and attacked him for circulating rumours that Churchill's days were numbered; but there was support for him from the usual left-wing icons.⁵⁸

Astonished by the New York speech, Churchill telephoned him from London the following morning, April 24. Hoping now to keep the mis-

chief-making Beaverbrook out of England, he offered to put him in charge of all their various wartime missions in Washington, and of the handling of supply and liaison with Harry Hopkins. Beaverbrook now had higher ambitions than that however; convinced that Churchill would not last much longer in office, he wanted to return to Britain and replace him.⁵⁹ (He told Halifax, the British ambassador in Washington, that Cripps was 'very ambitious' and another contender.)⁶⁰ Naturally reluctant to see Beaverbrook back in London, Churchill continued to ponder the idea of making him British supply minister in Washington and he discussed it with Eden and Lyttelton after the late-night Defence Committee on April 29. The latter reminded him that Max would not take orders, and predicted that he would soon be at loggerheads with the Americans, just as he had been with his colleagues in London. 'I suggested,' noted Eden, '[that] we should await Max's return, his moods change so often.' Churchill talked it over with Halifax via the transatlantic telephone, informing the ambassador, when asked if he was 'interested,' Beaverbrook had replied that he would do whatever the prime minister commanded. The idea was, Churchill explained, to nominate a high-ranking cabinet official to go to Washington to guide the higher handling of supply matters, tie up with Harry Hopkins, *et cetera*.

Halifax at once made clear to Beaverbrook that, friends though they were, he did not intend to play second fiddle to him. It was by all accounts an awkward conversation. Making no secret of his underlying ambitions, Beaverbrook began an ill-tempered discourse on the political situation in England: to Halifax, he seemed obsessed, talking of the fan mail he was receiving, and of how people regarded him as ruthless and imbued with the proper sense of urgency. He seemed in two minds. One moment he talked of creating a storm in the House of Lords about Singapore's lack of defences; the next, he was assuring Lord Halifax that that he would 'never do anything to make Winston's position difficult.'⁶¹

Dismayed at the thought of the meddlesome Max remaining in Washington, Halifax wrote secretly to Churchill and then to Eden, pleading with him to 'help discreetly' to ensure that 'M' (Max) got no permanent job there.⁶² A few days later Lord Beaverbrook decided to return to London.



The pressure increased, and not only from Moscow, to run the next North Russian convoy from Iceland soon. Ships with cargoes destined for

Russia were backing up in United States ports; Hopkins suggested in a telegram they should expand the size of each PQ convoy.⁶³ After Churchill informed Hopkins that the onward convoy situation was serious, Roosevelt himself cabled to London on April 26 expressing concern: 'We have made such a tremendous effort to get our supplies going,' he wrote, 'that to have them blocked except for the most compelling reasons seems to me a serious mistake.'⁶⁴ Churchill explained in his response that it placed an extreme strain on his fleet to provide the escorts; escorting each convoy now entailed a major fleet operation. 'With the best will in the world,' he insisted, '[the] cycle of convoys cannot be more than three in two months.' PQ. 15, he added, consisting of fifteen ships, had just sailed; he was willing to increase the next convoy, PQ. 16, to thirty-five ships. 'But 35 is the absolute maximum number which it is safe to risk without further experience of the scale of enemy attack.'⁶⁵

The admiralty hated these convoy operations. Escorting them was a dangerous drain on Britain's dwindling flotillas of destroyers. The Germans mounted an even heavier attack on PQ. 15; submarines crippled the cruiser *Edinburgh*. From the relative comfort of Pennsylvania-avenue in Washington, Roosevelt pressed for at least one more big convoy to be run from Iceland during May in order to break the log-jam.⁶⁶ 'With very great respect,' responded Churchill, 'what you suggest is beyond our power to fulfil.' 'I beg you,' he pleaded, 'not to press us beyond our judgement in this operation, which we have studied most intently, and of which we have not yet been able to measure the full strain. I can assure you, Mr President, we are absolutely extended, and I could not press the admiralty further.'⁶⁷

Roosevelt gave way, and agreed to tell the Russians to reduce their clamour for supplies, using the argument that the Allies would need all possible munitions and shipping to mount what he now called *bolero*, the cross-Channel invasion.⁶⁸

Stalin insisted that Churchill must do what he could to send on the ninety shiploads of war materials for the Soviet Union presently 'bottled up' in Iceland.⁶⁹ Churchill assured him that the Allies were resolved to do what they could, but he referred to the threatening presence of *Tirpitz* at Trondheim. 'I am sure you will not mind my being quite frank,' he continued, and he suggested that the Russians might now themselves provide long-range fighter and escort cover for the convoys at their own end of the hazardous Arctic route.⁷⁰ Stalin's dour response was that most of his aeroplanes were engaged 'at the battle front.'⁷¹

on may 1 Ambassador Maisky brought back the Russian answer to Eden's draft of an Anglo-Soviet treaty. Stalin wanted the more delicate parts of the treaty – which would permit Soviet bases in Finland and Romania – to be treated in a secret protocol. Eden had not originally envisaged this.

'It is a tough job to make progress with these people,' he realised. 'They always ask for more.'⁷² The Americans were likely to object since Roosevelt disapproved of all and any wartime attempts at redrawing frontiers without the consent of the populations involved. He lost no opportunity to impress on visiting statesmen that he would not support any frontier claim which meant ignoring the Atlantic Charter.⁷³ Eden discussed the Russian draft with the U.S. ambassador, and got nowhere. 'Winant clearly worried by President's attitude & that of Hull & Welles,' he wrote afterwards.⁷⁴



The Japanese had invaded southern Burma, part of the British empire, in January 1942. By late April, with the Japanese at the gates of Mandalay, the end of British rule in Burma appeared to be near.

Churchill had barely bothered with this country until now apart from one minor transaction during his visit to Washington. The prime minister of Burma, U Saw, after fruitless talks with Leo Amery and an ample (though necessarily 'dry') luncheon with Churchill at Chequers in October 1941 had foolishly decided, after weighing his options, to cast his lot with the Japanese and set up a 'Quisling' government on their behalf.⁷⁵ While both men were visiting Washington early in January 1942, Churchill slipped a handwritten message to Roosevelt's staff reading, 'Can [the] President get U Saw & his companion Tin Tut on first available plane going to West Africa?' Roosevelt himself typed the following comment for his files: 'I got He Saw, We Saw, U Saw on to the plane, in accordance with above request and they were arrested by the British in the Near East before they got back to Burma. U Saw had been communicating with the Japanese.'⁷⁶ U Saw, whose name was the butt of such levity, was executed as a traitor in 1948.

In the face of the Japanese invasion the First Burma Corps had displayed unexampled gallantry, fighting a nine-hundred-mile retreat toward their common frontier with India. At one minute to midnight on April 30 they demolished the centre spans of the Ava bridge across the Irrawaddy river. It

was, described General William Slim, a sad sight and a signal that the British had lost Burma.

‘the depression following Singapore,’ Churchill nonetheless dictated in the letter to his son that weekend, ‘has been replaced by an undue optimism, which I am of course keeping in proper bounds.’⁷⁷ He was out at Chequers as news arrived of the fall of Mandalay and the end of the campaign in Burma.⁷⁸ In an act of charity, he directed the British governor of Burma to abandon his post and make his way by air to India immediately.⁷⁹ He also took steps to salvage General Sir Harold Alexander, one of Britain’s finest soldiers, from the morass, ordering Wavell to bring him out to India too as soon as seemed opportune.⁸⁰

In London an unusual spell of fine weather had arrived. In what was left of Burma, the monsoons had begun. General Slim’s corps continued the retreat westwards across the Chindwin river until mid-May, then slithered on, retreating up slippery slopes and tracks feet deep in slime, drenched with rains that became ever colder as the months progressed. Unwilling even now to write off this country, Churchill set his vivid imagination to work. ‘What are the standing instructions for dealing with “infiltration”?’ he asked Brooke on May 14. He suggested they raise special small-force units to wipe out any such bodies of two to three hundred Japanese, rather than withdrawing the whole front.⁸¹ ‘By far the best and easiest way to defend India,’ he minuted three weeks later, ‘is to attack the Japanese lines of communication through Burma.’ He had put urgent proposals to the chiefs of staff on this subject, but they had made no headway.⁸²

the japanese had sent a makeshift invasion force by sea to the Solomon Islands and northern New Guinea, seizing key points. Operating in the Coral Sea, five hundred miles from Australia, on May 4 the American navy intercepted this fleet and over the next three days sank or damaged several Japanese ships for the loss of only one carrier, *Lexington*, and one destroyer, inflicting a defeat which started the tide turning against the enemy in the Pacific. The Japanese abandoned plans to land on the tenth at Port Moresby in New Guinea.

‘The evidence at present available,’ wrote Churchill to Roosevelt, ‘shows that Japanese carriers are equipped with striking forces of fighter dive bombers in large numbers.’ He concluded that it would be necessary for him to increase his own fighter aircraft strength in the carriers of the Eastern fleet;

he asked for the loan of two hundred more American fighter aircraft. 'There is another urgent matter to which I would like to draw your attention,' he continued, 'namely the early supply of transport aircraft for our airborne forces.' He hoped to use these forces in summer operations. 'Without this help,' he concluded, 'our airborne forces can only be lifted at the cost of the bombing offensive against Germany.'⁸³ This was however an offensive which he was very unwilling to reduce.

From Field-Marshal Smuts came a telegram highly critical of Allied naval planning. 'I am deeply dissatisfied with the strategy which has divided our resources and sent the American fleet to Australasia,' wrote the field-marshal. 'The vital front this summer is the Indian ocean and the surrounding lands, and the Japanese move towards Australia seems to me no more than a clever feint.'⁸⁴

The British contribution to this naval battle was the reading of the Japanese fleet code. The Japanese messages showed that another major fleet operation was brewing, involving six battleships and other carriers and warships to match. Hopkins told Lord Halifax on May 19 it was uncertain whether this battle fleet was making for Hawaii, Luzon island, or even Australia.⁸⁵ By May 21 British naval Intelligence, 'based on our own best sources in Melbourne' as Admiral Pound told General Ismay – a reference to Commander Nave, the chief British codebreaker working on Japanese naval codes there – deduced that the Japanese target was Midway Island. Since the British had not revealed to the Americans that they were reading JN.25, Ismay suggested to the prime minister that they state to Washington merely, 'There are very good reasons for believing that operations against Midway Island are certain, against Aleutian Islands very probable, and against Hawaii probable.'⁸⁶ The Battle of Midway in June would seal the Japanese Navy's defeat.

At first however there was no clear news of the Japanese naval movements. By May 21 it was clear that the Japanese had abandoned any designs they might have had against New Guinea and Australia – namely against Port Moresby and Darwin. 'I feel much more hopeful,' Churchill signalled to Wavell, 'that you will get through the next two months than I did two months ago. The end of July if all goes well should see you more comfortable.'⁸⁷

Drafting a reply to Smuts on May 27, he set out the basis for his own immediate strategy in the Far East. He would send his warships to Ceylon by late July. 'My own belief is that Japanese will strike north and try to finish off Chiang Kai-shek but the distances are very great and there will be

time if we do our best to strike eastward at the Japanese communications through Burma in the autumn. For this purpose it will be necessary to have naval and air command on the western half of the Bay of Bengal and a good umbrella of shore-based aircraft in its northern quarter. Ceylon is the naval key-point of all this.' Churchill admitted that any German successes in the Caucasus and the Caspian sea would be difficult to meet, but there was no reason to presume such a disaster yet.⁸⁸



Discussing the Madagascar operation ~~ironclad~~ again with his Defence Committee on April 28 Churchill had agreed that the operation would have to be carefully synchronised with American messages to Vichy France transmitted through the various Vichy and American ambassadors.⁸⁹ When he informed Roosevelt a few days later of his intention of seizing Madagascar, there were misgivings in Washington – some people feared that it was another example of Churchill's activism; Lord Halifax went so far as to protest to Eden, but received no reply.⁹⁰ On the twenty-ninth, President Roosevelt announced in a speech that the United Nations would take all necessary measures to prevent the Axis powers from using French territory 'in any part of the world.' It was a useful formula, and Churchill expressed his gratitude to the president.⁹¹

Even he wondered what he was letting himself in for. He directed the chiefs of staff on April 30 not to lay too much stress on 'gaining control of the whole island.' He invited them to lunch on May 4, arriving late from Chequers for this engagement in visibly good form – evidently elated at the prospect of the imminent assault on Madagascar.⁹² British troops invaded the huge Indian Ocean island the next day. Meeting his Defence Committee that morning Churchill was disconcerted to find that the chiefs of staff suddenly had cold feet, worried that Laval might now allow the Nazis to occupy Dakar on Africa's other coast. Sending for Eden and addressing him somewhat quaintly as 'Mr Foreign Secretary,' Churchill asked his view. Eden replied evasively that this was a political question, so politicians must assess how Laval might react. 'There,' triumphed the prime minister. 'You see, the secretary of state takes the same view as I do.'⁹³

That evening he explained to a more docile Pacific War Council his reasons for ordering the invasion. The Japanese would not now find it easy to establish air bases on the island, he felt, 'as they would be unaware of our

strength.’⁹⁴ Although he had airily assured the council that ‘opposition was slight,’ Churchill admitted to Brooke on May 6 that the operation had been ‘rather sticky’ during the last twenty-four hours.⁹⁵ On the seventh the Vichy commanders at Diego Suarez, in the northern part of the island, surrendered to the British task force commander Rear-Admiral Sir Neville Syfret, who was an old friend of the prime minister’s. Who should now govern the island? Less enamoured than Eden of de Gaulle, Morton suggested that the general’s men did not deserve any power in Madagascar. ‘I am getting vy. tired of de Gaulle,’ scribbled Churchill on May 8.⁹⁶

On May 11 Eden recorded a ‘very stiff’ meeting with the French leader about Madagascar. ‘He is a most difficult creature to handle & I had no easy task to keep my temper.’ ‘But I am sorry for any exile,’ he added charitably, ‘so I just did!’⁹⁷

By mid-May the chiefs of staff were still uneasy about the operation’s progress, wanting now to occupy only the northern half of Madagascar, leaving the rest to Vichy. Eden warned that Vichy could not be trusted.⁹⁸ Field-Marshal Smuts proposed that South Africa send extra troops across the straits to complete the operation and install a Free French administration throughout the island. For political reasons, Eden also wanted to see de Gaulle’s generals take over, but Churchill doubted whether Smuts’ force would suffice, and without telling Eden he sanctioned negotiations with the Vichy commanders. After talking with him on the thirtieth, Eden noted: ‘We are in danger of a muddle. I have no confidence that they will hold by anything they promised.’⁹⁹ The next day Winston rang up Eden to report that the battleship *Ramilles* had been torpedoed at Diego Suarez. ‘It might be Jap float plane or Vichy,’ commented Eden in his diary, adding, in the absence of any enemy claims: ‘I guess the latter.’¹⁰⁰ After Vichy airplanes on May 18 shot down an Allied Catalina on anti-submarine patrol from Gibraltar, Eden wrote a bloodthirsty letter urging that they punish Vichy. But how? He knew no way – unless they bomb the town of Vichy, ‘but the moment for that does not seem to have come yet; and the Americans would certainly not like it.’¹⁰¹

The behind-the-scenes duelling between the prime minister and his young foreign secretary over de Gaulle resumed on June 1. Given the conditions prevailing in Madagascar, General Brooke found Churchill’s outright support of the Vichy French against de Gaulle very refreshing; he even wrote privately, ‘Eden’s support of de Gaulle will go near losing the war for us if we do not watch it.’¹⁰² De Gaulle demanded facilities to send his men to

Diego Suarez and when Churchill refused on the sixth he sent strongly anti-British telegrams to his generals Georges Catroux, Philippe de Hauteclocque Leclerc, and Edgar de Larminat; these missives Churchill somehow ‘obtained,’ and he sent Eden to tax ‘his’ general about them.

Since de Gaulle recanted only partially, the prime minister renewed the ban on his leaving Britain. It would stay in force until August.¹⁰³ He now sent for de Gaulle himself, treated him ‘like a little boy,’ according to Morton, and ‘pricked his balloon badly.’ When the general began to cavil about being frozen out of Madagascar, Churchill retorted that the French officials on the island wanted nothing to do with him. On this occasion, he also urged de Gaulle to broaden the basis of his National Committee, and to bring in Churchill’s old friend and pre-war fellow-conspirator, the diplomatist Alexis Léger, in whose political judgement he vested much confidence. He found the general ‘most humble throughout’; in view of which he allowed, as he escorted him to the front door of No. 10, ‘We must see each other again.’¹⁰⁴

On June 3 the prime minister dictated a well-reasoned (and, in the light of later events this year, significant) memorandum in which he argued that whatever their scorn for Vichy, they must not forget that Pétain and Darlan ran the only French government capable of giving the Allies what they wanted, namely the Toulon fleet and the right of entry into the French North African provinces. He expressed downright admiration for the patience with which Vichy had borne, ‘with the least possible show of anger,’ not only the humiliations of Oran, Dakar, and now Madagascar, but the British naval blockade and air raids. While he had always been ‘ready to take rough action against Vichy,’ he now looked forward, he concluded, to a time when the certainty of Allied victory would produce a sudden and dramatic change in the action of the Vichy government.¹⁰⁵

The foreign secretary swooned with rage when he read this document. In his response, he tore into Pétain’s defeatism, Laval’s hostility to Britain, and especially Darlan (‘it is unnecessary,’ Eden spluttered in his draft, ‘to quote his many anti-British utterances’). In an ugly mood Eden even hinted, ‘It is possible that Pétain’s white hairs may not save him from the fate which is awaiting Laval, Doriot, Déat, and perhaps Darlan.’¹⁰⁶

Eden continued to beat this powerfully anti-Vichy and pro De-Gaulle drum, but met no support from Churchill who knew more about de Gaulle than he suspected. His codebreakers had now decyphered a treacherous telegram from the general to his senior officers in the Middle East, bleating that the Allies were about to rob France of Madagascar and, soon, Dakar. ‘I

am not disposed to remain associated with the Anglo-Saxon powers,' de Gaulle raged, and he secretly instructed the other French generals as follows: 'We must form a united front against all comers and have no relations with the Anglo-Saxons under any circumstances and at whatever cost. We must stand fast in the liberated territories and defend them, and warn the French people and the whole world by radio of Anglo-Saxon imperialist designs.' De Gaulle concluded, 'I have been asked to visit Beirut and Brazzaville, but the British have prevented it.' Amused, Churchill noted on this intercept in red ink for Eden's benefit, 'So much for Gen. de Gaulle.'

It was deceptively easy, the prime minister admonished Eden two days later, to list 'all the shameful things the Vichy Government have said' – but his own instincts ran differently. Vichy was living on the sufferance of the enemy. His own great hope was to persuade them to sail their fleet to North Africa 'and to get an invitation for British or American troops to enter French North Africa.' Vichy was the only party who could bestow these 'good gifts.' 'There is much more in British policy towards France,' he lectured, 'than abusing Pétain and backing de Gaulle.' He urged Eden to withdraw his paper abusing Vichy, failing which he himself would weigh in, and inform the cabinet of the intercepted 'traitor' telegram, which he thought would convince most people that de Gaulle had better stay in Britain 'under our control.' 'Imagine what he would do if free to fulminate from Brazzaville,' he wrote.¹⁰⁷ It is hard not to believe that Churchill thoroughly enjoyed needling Anthony Eden over his support for the incorrigible general.

eden and his foreign office officials took a stubbornly different line, insisting on sending Free French representatives into Madagascar in July 1942, just as the British forces were completing their negotiations with the local authorities. 'The foreign office's love for de Gaulle,' noted Brooke again, 'will finish by losing us this war!'¹⁰⁸ The Madagascar problem simmered on all summer. After failing to agree terms with the Vichy governor of the rest of Madagascar, Armand Annet, the foreign office urged that they now occupy that half too; Churchill objected, telling Eden, 'Annet's quite a good chap: Clemmie met him in a train somewhere once.' To the F.O. this did not seem an adequate credential.¹⁰⁹ The British completed the island's occupation in November, when despite all Churchill's remonstrances it was handed over to de Gaulle's Free French, in line with the F.O.'s wishes. This did not see an end to Churchill's problems with the general.

20: *Molotov and the Mongolian Smile*

Visiting Churchill's England in May 1942 for the first time in a year – in 1941 the English were diffident, harried, and listless – the American air force commander 'Hap' Arnold now found the countryside green and prosperous; the sheep and cattle were fat. The cities were still poor and seedy; their shops were open but few goods were on sale. Everything but jewellery seemed to be rationed, and there were long lines outside the butchers' and bakers' stores.¹ The Londoners of 1942 were however a breed apart from those of the year before; the people now had an interest in life, and the scars left by the Blitz were fast healing. 'Now,' he found, 'men, women and children have lost that expression of dreaded expectancy . . . that look of almost fearful bewilderment.'²

Power shortages were still biting deeply. The Queen painted a red 'Plimsoll line' around the royal bath to limit the hot water's depth to five inches; following her example, London clubs marked a two-inch line in wash basins. Lighting in Tube stations was reduced to only a few dim bulbs.³ The cost of living was rising. After lunch for two at Gourmet's, Winston's private secretary John Martin found he got only one shilling change out of a one-pound note.⁴ His master encountered few such problems. Late in April 1942 the prime minister was sighted in the Savoy restaurant with Clementine and a young man; there seemed to be a problem, and the waiter went off to speak with the head waiter. The latter shrugged and told a reporter afterwards that the prime minister had insisted on his party having fish *and* meat, even though the waiter objected that this was against his own government's wartime regulations.⁵

If there were still morale problems at the end of April 1942, Cecil King believed that one reason was the graft perceived in high places, apostrophised as 'jobs for the boys' – of which Attlee's appointment as deputy



prime minister was one proof, and Randolph's safe seat at Preston another. Other reasons listed by King were that Britain's generals had turned out to be duds; and that Churchill had no intention of altering his government's constitution.⁶ Given Britain's run of military disasters, few people were happy that he was remaining minister of defence.⁷ While educated men like Cripps believed that the British people would even get over, if necessary, the loss of India, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, and the Mediterranean, Cecil King felt that far smaller disasters would 'break the people's heart' and lead to an irresistible demand for peace.⁸

churchill had now been prime minister for two years. Those twenty-four months of political and military crises had been like a savage painting executed in alternating hues of glory and sombreness. After lunching alone with the prime minister late in April 1942, Anthony Eden recorded: 'He was in better form than I have known him for ages. We spoke of painting and pictures, the light on the Horse Guards, the right tactics in politics, and so forth.' Churchill impressed upon his chosen heir the importance of 'not being afraid to drop out for a bit,' and he regretted that he had not toured the empire when in the political wilderness. If one had once played a great part, Churchill now realised, one would not be forgotten.⁹

No matter how often he decried those who called him a dictator, he left no doubt that he was in control. Hugh Dalton attended one cabinet meeting where fuel rationing was discussed for no less than eighty minutes. 'I have never thought so ill of the P.M.,' he wrote afterwards, 'nor been so vexed by him, before. He talks more than half the time, and has clearly not concentrated his mind on the details of the subject at all. . . He argues at immense length, almost alone, against a substantial majority of his colleagues.'¹⁰ There was a general fear of Churchill. Even Attlee once approached Leo Amery to propose an action on India which he dared not put to Churchill direct.¹¹ Bevin said that the prime minister mistook criticism for attack, and that it was difficult to tell him the truth.¹² Amery however had a different impression. 'There is no doubt,' he wrote after one minor triumph on India, 'that if one stands up to Winston and argues with him . . . the argument often sinks into the subsoil and comes out as a Winstonian flower later on.'¹³

As for the late hours engendered by Churchill's loquacity, Lord Hankey, now unencumbered by any chains of office, had publicly criticised them in the Lords on March 25. During World War One, he recalled, the war cabi-

net had met only four times after dinner and none of these meetings lasted after midnight. Churchill however regularly kept his cabinet or its *defence committee* up until two or three in the morning; this meant that junior staffs in the ministries had to wait about until the meetings had finished.¹⁴ 'We sit up at night dealing with all sorts of subjects,' wrote one admiralty official, '& then it goes to the chiefs of staff & then Winston & the cabinet interfere & the Ministry of War Transport butts in & this sub-committee & that. . . We began one meeting at a quarter to midnight & finished just after three!'¹⁵ Churchill thought nothing of telephoning staff at one or two a.m. for no evident reason other than what Alan Brooke called his 'impish habit of pulling people out of bed for the fun of it.'¹⁶ Churchill made light of such criticism. He ended one late *defence committee* meeting in April 1942 with the remark, 'It is half past eleven. We had better knock off now, or we shall have Lord Hankey on our tracks.'¹⁷



Sitting in the underground Cabinet War Rooms on May 10, 1942, the second anniversary of his *Machtergreifung*, Churchill broadcast live what he called 'a message of good cheer' to the world. His text struck no new chords. He ridiculed Hitler for forgetting the Russian winter: 'We all heard about it at school,' he mocked, 'but he forgot it. I have never made such a bad mistake as that.' In more serious vein, he pledged Britain to retaliate with poison gas if Hitler chose to initiate its use, whether against Britain or Russia.

From start to finish of this broadcast however he never referred once to the empire: 'It just doesn't occur to him,' wrote one minister, distressed by this omission, 'except as a mere appendage to this country and covered by the reference to ourselves.'¹⁸ He had originally drafted in this script, but ultimately chose to omit, a passage defending his record against criticism by 'the weaker brethren' who had become more vocal since Singapore. 'In particular I am much blamed by a group of ex-ministers,' he stated, 'for my general conduct of the war.' These men would have liked to reduce his powers. He was however, he once more averred, no dictator: 'I am only your servant.'¹⁹ It showed how profoundly the criticisms of him had actually stung.

As broadcast, the government's pollsters found, this speech acted as something of a tonic to the people. The broadcast 'stimulated militancy, increased confidence, silenced fretting over inaction, and re-established

Churchill as the natural leader of people at this time.' Depressed by their recent losses to Rommel and the Japanese, British spirits were elevated by the intentions the prime minister now stated of visiting even greater ruin on Hitler's homeland. The broad mass of the British people, there could be no doubt, backed his bombing policy. They regarded with indifference the R.A.F.'s destruction of German workers' homes and non-military targets 'whether by accident or design.' In north-eastern England, in fact, the researchers of public opinion found that any softening by the air ministry toward Germany might result in Churchill being thrown out of office.²⁰

at the start of May 1942 the left-wing *Tribune*, then edited by Aneurin Bevan, carried a well-aimed attack on Churchill written by 'Thomas Rainsborough,' evidently a pseudonym for Michael Foot; it alluded to the prime minister's fondness for drink and the readiness of his tears.

It was one more little barb sponsored by Lord Beaverbrook.²¹ He made no secret of his intentions. An American Intelligence unit near Roosevelt's country home learned from a source close enough to call Beaverbrook 'droopy-pants' that he was boasting that he would be Britain's new prime minister, as 'Churchill is all done.' After sizing up his prospects Beaverbrook returned from Washington to talk things over with Churchill on May 5.²²

In London, Beaverbrook reported faithfully to the prime minister that Lord Halifax had made plain that as British ambassador he wanted 'all or nothing' – that there was no room for the two of them in Washington. 'All right,' the prime minister unexpectedly growled, 'take everything. The embassy as well.' It suited him: he was already becoming disenchanted with Halifax in Washington.²³ It was not as easy as that.

Churchill chewed on this problem all week. On the morning of May 12 he asked Eden to come over and, struggling with his bath towel like a Roman emperor in his toga, talked of sending Beaverbrook back over the Atlantic to replace Halifax. 'Winston doesn't like him loose,' perceived Eden, writing in his diary. 'He maintains Max has entrée to President which is all that matters, that he would do as told or be recalled, that he would get us what we wanted as none other could, etc.'

Eden disagreed with most of this but eventually agreed that Winston should casually sound out Hopkins. The draft telegram which the prime minister showed Eden that same day seemed to be stampeding the Americans however – it smacked of asking for an 'agrément.' The foreign secretary

persuaded him to add, 'This is not official, please tell me frankly what you think.'²⁴

The message, as dispatched on May 12, asked Hopkins to inquire of the president whether Beaverbrook might replace Halifax as ambassador. 'I should also be glad to have Halifax home here to lead the House of Lords and for general duties in the war cabinet.'²⁵ Although Hopkins replied in the affirmative, it was an icily diplomatic reply; Churchill however willingly interpreted it as an enthusiastic acceptance.²⁶ Now however Beaverbrook himself spiked the idea, by making his return to Washington conditional on 'the promise of a definite strategic decision in favour of a Second Front.'

Churchill had to decline. Thus unfolded another final conflict between the two cantankerous old friends. Lord Beaverbrook directed his newspapers to promote his new Second Front crusade. He began to fund a 'Centre of Public Opinion,' and this staged mass meetings at which prominent left-wing speakers demanded the Second Front. His real purpose in all this was to overthrow Churchill and replace him.

seeking to bolster his flagging popularity the prime minister left to tour the northern Midlands on May 14, taking Dr Herbert Evatt, now Australia's representative in London, and others in his train. 'He was given a staggering welcome,' wrote his secretary, 'and was so pleased and touched by it all.'²⁷ He visited some of Harris's bomber stations and an ammunition filling factory, then spoke to twenty or thirty thousand people from the steps of Leeds Town Hall on the sixteenth.²⁸ He told the crowd there that it would be premature to talk of having 'topped the ridge.' At least they could now see that ridge ahead however.



In the Arctic, the edge of the ice pack came and went each year like a slow frozen tide. It was still so far to the south in May as to force every convoy within range of the German bombers stationed in northern Norway. Seizing on Churchill's absence from London, on May 15 the chiefs of staff tried to engineer a delay in any further Arctic convoy operations for six weeks.²⁹ Churchill overrode this advice on his return; he informed them on May 17 that both Stalin and Roosevelt would object to any delay. 'My

own feeling, mingled with much anxiety, is that the convoy ought to sail on the eighteenth. The operation is justified,' he felt, 'if a half gets through.'³⁰

This next convoy would be PQ.16, laden with hundreds of tanks and aeroplanes for Russia. At the cabinet on May 18 voices were still raised against risking the operation. Dr Evatt stated forcefully that Australia now needed tanks and aeroplanes as much as the Soviet Union. Against his colleagues' unanimous advice Churchill decided to send PQ.16 on its perilous way. It was their duty, he said, to fight these convoys through 'whatever the cost.' All but three of the ships in PQ.15 had got through, he pointed out; this time they might again do better than they feared.³¹ The convoy would sail two nights later.

Churchill did what he could to tilt fortune in its direction. He invited Stalin to send Russian squadrons to attack the German bomber bases in North Cape. 'If luck is not with us,' he now informed the Soviet leader, mindful of his cabinet's hostility, 'and the convoy suffers very severe losses, the only course left to us may be to hold up further convoys until . . . the ice recedes to the northward in July.'³²

churchill was necessarily aware of how each theatre interacted with the other. At the southern end of this vast European theatre of conflict, the German and Italian bombers maintained a ceaseless air attack on Malta. Hitler had issued a formal directive for the island's capture. Further south still, in North Africa, General Auchinleck was planning to hold off his attack on Rommel's army until July. Until however Rommel's bombers were driven out of their airfields in the Cyrenaica, Malta would remain exposed to this crippling air attack. By early May the defences of the island fortress were down to six Spitfire fighter planes. The Maltese were facing starvation. The governor of Malta wilted under the strain. Churchill sent Lord Gort, governor of Gibraltar, to replace him. 'It has been decided not to try to reinforce Malta in May,' the King learned, 'and if we cannot do so in June we shall have to try and evacuate it.'³³

Churchill was dismayed by Auchinleck's senseless procrastination. From his Olympian heights, drawing upon all the secret Intelligence, he believed that he knew better than the general how weak Rommel's army now was. On April 21 the codebreakers had informed him that Rommel had only 161 tanks running in the forward areas.³⁴ Auchinleck put the figures higher, assessing a few days later that Rommel had 265 running with forty-five more in the tank workshops. On the last day of April Churchill received

from 'C' a dozen fresh signals from Rommel's headquarters; the Nazi general intended to reinforce the Panzer Army by May 15. Churchill thoughtfully ringed the '15' in red ink, and on the other pages he ringed the numbers of tanks, and totted up the totals for himself.³⁵ He now informed Auchinleck that the latest 'most secret' information confirmed his estimate; Rommel moreover would be getting twelve thousand troop reinforcements during the coming month.³⁶ Every day that Auchinleck waited, his opponent was growing even stronger. On May 2 a new intercept showed Rommel as having enough fuel in reserve to sustain thirty-eight days of battle.³⁷

Churchill was furious at Auchinleck's dilly-dallying. Once before, he reminded Eden, General W.H.E. 'Strafer' Gott had wanted to hang on to Benghazi, while Auchinleck had favoured a retreat to Marsa Matruh.³⁸ Now he was talking of postponing his offensive until July or August. Conversely, on May 4 military Intelligence advised Churchill that Rommel was now planning to launch his own offensive early in June.³⁹ By that time, Malta might be lost. The next day however, Churchill gathered from his Oracle that Hitler had transferred a bomber and a fighter group from the Mediterranean to the eastern front in preparation for his coming summer offensive; so he informed Wavell on May 5.⁴⁰ By mid-May the crisis here seemed past.

They could not keep going on like this. Early on the seventh he sent for General Brooke. (The C.I.G.S. found him 'a wonderful sight' in bed, sucking on a large cigar, his hair somewhat ruffled, with papers and messages littering the bed and a large spittoon next to it to drop cigar butts into.) While Brooke, who privately thought little more of Auchinleck, listened impassively, the prime minister began to develop wild plans of ridding himself of this tardy commander-in-chief and replacing him with Alexander, still valiantly fighting his retreat through Burma.⁴¹

On the eighth Auchinleck sent a new cable to London, still urging postponement, at least until mid-June. Churchill referred this to all his colleagues.⁴² The C.I.G.S. admitted to the cabinet that he was surprised that Auchinleck was not timing his own attack to spoil Rommel's offensive. The issue was so clear that Churchill risked asking each minister his view 'individually' – it was again one of those occasions when 'democracy' had its uses.⁴³ Emboldened by their response he fired off to Cairo a telegram reminding Auchinleck that the loss of Malta might lead to the loss of the Nile Valley, which would be a disaster of the first magnitude to the empire (the word 'empire' too sometimes had its uses). Therefore, whatever the risks, Auchinleck should attack Rommel's forces 'and fight a major battle,'

during May if at all possible.⁴⁴ On May 10 he sent a further telegram, phrased in unmistakable language instructing the general to fight a battle with 'your whole army.' On the twelfth the cabinet instructed Auchinleck to begin his offensive in June, whatever his misgivings.

Despite a reminder from the P.M., a full week passed before the general even replied.⁴⁵ It was May 19 before Auchinleck bestirred himself – so it must have seemed – and submitted his intentions in a lengthy telegram. Its tone was one of pained reproof, as from a veteran warrior to a lay bystander. He did agree that there were signs that Rommel intended to attack in the immediate future; the results of that action, he pointed out, must govern any future action by the Eighth Army.⁴⁶ A further telegram went from Downing-street to Cairo on the twentieth, but it failed to move the general to any speedier action.⁴⁷



Beside Beaverbrook, Rommel, and the Arctic convoys, the prime minister had other preoccupations: Molotov had been due to arrive in Scotland on May 11, but the draft treaty which he would be bringing was in Churchill's view unacceptable, as it betrayed Poland's interests completely. He wished that the Russians and the treaty would go away. 'We must remember,' Churchill said, 'that this is a bad thing. We oughtn't to do it, and I shan't be sorry if we don't.' Eden hopefully redrafted the document omitting all reference to post-war frontiers, while guaranteeing mutual assistance after the war against renewed German aggression.⁴⁸

Molotov was delayed and did not arrive until May 20. He brought with him his secretary-general and a couple of Russian generals. Ambassador Maisky travelled down with them on the special train from Scotland; Eden, Cadogan, and General Nye were waiting to greet the Soviet delegation as the train pulled into a suburban station at Brooklands. Not entirely trusting Winston's security staff at Chequers, the Russians stationed a female Cerberus to guard over each of their bedroom doors in the mansion. The prime minister, who still harboured fantasies about Nazi parachutists arriving by night, ordered a pistol put beside Molotov's dispatch box each night.

when the negotiations on the treaty began in London at eleven-thirty the next morning, Churchill himself unenthusiastically chaired the inaugural session in the cabinet room at No. 10; the other six meetings would be held

in Eden's room over at the F.O. Curiously studying the Soviet foreign minister Cadogan decided that he had all the grace and conciliation of a totem pole; he wore a natty brown suit and a fixed Mongolian smile. Ignoring Eden's draft, Molotov stated, as Churchill reported at that evening's cabinet, that Russia was demanding 'as a minimum' the recognition of the Soviet frontiers at the time Hitler invaded in 1941 – frontiers which included the Baltic States and sizeable helpings of eastern Poland and Romania.⁴⁹

Having stated the Soviet position on the frontiers, as the Soviet transcripts show, Molotov switched to talk about the Second Front. Churchill refused to be drawn on dates or locations, and referred their visitors to General Brooke; the Russian woodenly insisted that 'it was not simply a military problem but primarily a political one, and, what's more, one of great urgency.'⁵⁰ Reverting to the frontiers, Churchill spoke of the need to act in conformity with the United States, and of his reluctance to contravene the Atlantic Charter. Molotov for his part referred both to Eden's proposals, stated in Moscow in December – which he described as similar to his own – and to the onus of Soviet public opinion.

These painful talks lasted for several days. The Russians also had meetings with other ministers and with the King, who found Molotov to be a small, quiet, polite man with a feeble voice; but, the monarch decided, he 'really is a tyrant.' The King gathered, perhaps from Churchill, that Britain now had 'some sort of hold over Russia.'⁵¹ That Friday May 22 Churchill and Eden took their visitors down to Chequers.⁵² Their first conference here revolved around the Second Front. The eastern front, Molotov predicted, would be 'fraught with danger' for many weeks: Hitler's summer offensive would soon begin, and his 'bands of brigands' outnumbered the Russians. The Soviet Union was expecting Britain and the United States to deliver more war supplies and to mount a Second Front with the object of tying down at least forty German divisions during Hitler's offensive.

Analysing the possible target of such a major amphibious operation, Churchill responded that Britain could expect air superiority only over the Pas de Calais, the Cherbourg peninsula, or Brest. As for the date, the limiting factor was the availability of landing-craft: on August 1 Britain would have only 383, and a month later 566. In 1943 the position would be greatly improved. Nonetheless, his government would see what it could do to relieve the pressure on the gallant Russian armies. 'With the best will in the world,' he continued, 'it is improbable that any operation which we can undertake in 1942, even if successful, can draw away a significant number

of ground forces of the Germans from the eastern front.' There were, he argued in mitigation, already forty-four German and Italian divisions facing the British in Libya, Norway, France, and Holland. In 1943, he added, they would have a million British and American troops available for a large landing operation. Sketching the problems of such amphibious operations, he pointed out that poorly armed though Britain was after Dunkirk, in June 1940, even Hitler had hesitated to make the crossing. He suggested that their respective generals and admirals meet to discuss landing operations.

'What precisely,' asked Molotov, according to the Soviet record ('with a hint of irony,') 'are the prospects of such a military staff conference?' Churchill, 'confused,' nevertheless persisted that there should be such a meeting.⁵³

molotov would confess to President Roosevelt a few days later that he had been treated most agreeably at Chequers 'where one evening Churchill had kept him up talking until two a.m.'⁵⁴ The post-war Soviet-Polish frontier remained however the sticking-point. While still at Chequers, the prime minister sent a message to Stalin on May 23 explaining that to sign the treaty as proposed by Molotov would mean Britain going back on her undertakings to Poland.⁵⁵ This he was not, in 1942, prepared to countenance. Molotov sent a parallel cable to Stalin on that same day, confirming that Churchill was at odds with him over both Poland and the Second Front; and that the British government was insisting that after his forthcoming talks with Roosevelt he return through London to Moscow.⁵⁶

The American ambassador was horrified at what the British were doing, warning repeatedly of the horrendous effect that British 'appeasement' of Stalin would have on American public opinion, which was far more anti-Soviet than that in Britain.⁵⁷ It was not until Winant personally explained to Molotov Roosevelt's profound opposition to Soviet territorial claims that the Russian backtracked somewhat, and agreed to commend to Stalin the redrafted treaty which Eden and Winant had between them worked out.⁵⁸

Thus to Eden's surprise Molotov's delegation suddenly gave way. He recorded a meeting at four p.m. on May 24 at which the Russians produced several concessions, notably on the Polish issue. When Eden now produced yet another draft, Molotov took him aside and murmured through an interpreter, 'I cannot understand your attitude. We have made many concessions, yet you act as tho' you did not want agreement.' He said that he knew that Churchill had never wanted the Treaty – having told Molotov himself that

he was half-American. Eden afterwards telephoned Winston, who was greatly cheered to hear that Molotov was capitulating.⁵⁹

Churchill was relieved to get it over. An Anglo-Soviet treaty binding the two parties to friendship for twenty years was agreed on Whit Monday, the twenty-fifth.⁶⁰ It made no mention of the frontiers. Churchill and Eden had a final discussion with Molotov and Maisky – and no others – at No. 10 that night: it began at ten p.m. and ended once again after one a.m., ‘the prime minister,’ as Molotov reported to his master, ‘flamboyantly smoking a cigar and sipping at a glass of whisky,’ as he had done on the twenty-second.

Together they pored over, and Molotov corrected, the map of the eastern front drawn by the war office. Churchill expressed dismay and even disbelief when Molotov predicted that during the coming year Hitler would be able to field as many divisions as Stalin, ‘and perhaps even a few more.’

The P.M. drew up a balance sheet: the Americans were currently producing 3,150 war planes per month, Britain 2,100 (in April) and the Soviet Union 2,900 (at which Molotov interrupted with the words, ‘Far less!’). Germany however was producing only 2,500 per month, Italy five or six hundred, and Japan four or five hundred. The growing Allied preponderance in the air was, argued Churchill, the guarantee of inevitable victory. Britain, he added, would shortly begin huge air raids against Germany, ‘and in these raids about one thousand bombers will take part simultaneously.’

Churchill hinted that he would like to meet Mr Stalin. ‘Well,’ he exclaimed, as they parted, ‘let us clear up northern Norway and upon conquered territory let’s set up our meeting, perhaps even a meeting of all three of us, with the participation of President Roosevelt.’⁶¹ After the Russians left No. 10 the prime minister flattered Eden that the treaty would be far the greatest thing that he had achieved. Molotov hosted a memorable luncheon for them at the Russian embassy on the following day. Only General Brooke seemed to have any qualms. ‘Somehow,’ he wrote in his diary, ‘the whole affair gave me the creeps and made me feel that humanity still has many centuries to live through before universal peace can be found.’⁶² The guileless foreign secretary glowed as the prime minister generously allowed him sole credit for the dubious Treaty. Molotov proposed Eden’s health, and Eden proposed that of Stalin. After so many toasts, the participants retired for a little sleep that afternoon before the Treaty-signing ceremony itself.⁶³

Eden and Molotov signed the document at six-thirty in the foreign secretary’s grand room at the F.O. while Churchill, Attlee, Sinclair, and

assembled foreign office dignitaries looked on.⁶⁴ The text was eventually explained to the cabinet – its start having been delayed from five-thirty p.m. to six, and then until after seven as the carousing at the Soviet embassy went on. ‘Winston came in very jovial,’ recorded Leopold Amery; and Cadogan wrote, ‘Winston relieved and delighted, and bouquets were heaped on A[nthony]!’⁶⁵ ‘Grand parade,’ recorded Eden smugly, recording this cabinet, ‘where Simon could hardly conceal his chagrin. He had written to Winston against earlier draft & hates this one but can find no complaint except to hint that U.S. should have been brought in to sign.’

It was an eye-opener for many to find that the Russians could be out-faced. ‘We had a very good week with Molotof [*sic*],’ Churchill told Smuts, ‘and completely transformed the original draft of the Treaty which is now in my opinion quite inoffensive to the United States.’⁶⁶

The treaty was kept secret for two weeks, to enable Molotov to complete his round of talks in Washington. A communiqué was issued stating that during the London talks full understanding had also been reached on creating a Second Front in Europe in 1942; this was, as Churchill admitted in private, vintage hogwash designed to deceive Hitler. It would cause him not a little inconvenience in Moscow later.

molotov travelled on to Washington.⁶⁷ There the British ambassador would also find that the treaty had undergone this startling change: ‘Having made all our lives hideous,’ as Lord Halifax wrote in his secret diary, ‘by insisting on the recognition by us of their right to absorb the Baltic States, the Russians have almost overnight changed their tune, and have now signed a general alliance with us in quite innocuous terms which will save us all a good deal of trouble.’⁶⁸ From Washington the president sent a message to Churchill, describing his talks with Molotov. He had however gone a long way to commit the Allies to invading France before the end of 1942:

Molotov's visit is, I think, a real success because we have got on a personal footing of candor and as good a friendship as can be acquired through an interpreter. . . . He has made very clear his real anxiety as to the next four or five months, and I think this is sincere and not put forward to force our hand. . . . Therefore, I am more than ever anxious that bolero [the cross-Channel invasion] proceed to definite action beginning in 1942. We all realize that because of weather conditions the operation cannot be delayed until the end of the year.⁶⁹

This angered Churchill. He had handed to Molotov before his departure a memorandum carefully stipulating that he was making no promises whatsoever.⁷⁰ 'We are making preparations for a landing on the Continent in August or September 1942,' this said. Any later month was impossible because of the risk of Channel storms. The underlying problem was, as this document once more made plain, the shortage of landing-craft. 'Clearly it would not further either the Russian cause or that of the Allies as a whole if, for the sake of action at any price, we embarked on some operation which ended in disaster and gave the enemy an opportunity for glorification at our discomfiture. . . We can therefore give no promise on the matter.'⁷¹



In the wake of the Saint-Nazaire raid Churchill's advisers had agreed that there should be more such raids, and larger ones.⁷² Out of this consensus there emerged a potentially dangerous desire to do anything that might assist the Russians. On May 5 Mountbatten had informed the chiefs of staff that *sledgehammer* – the British code-name for an operation against Brest or Cherbourg – could not take place before mid-August; he argued on this occasion that a large amphibious raid which he was currently planning against Dieppe for late June would make up for this delay.⁷³ The French would have to start suffering too now. On May 19 the chiefs of staff asked Churchill to relax the restrictions which forbade bombing raids against France when conditions ruled out accurate attack. Eden supported their demand, but said he was still against any 'indiscriminate bombing' of France at night – except in connection with an amphibious raid on the coast.⁷⁴

The search for viable alternatives to *sledgehammer* continued for several weeks. After a chiefs of staff meeting on May 23 Churchill invited Brooke and Mountbatten round for lunch, and for three hours they discussed ways of raiding France. Carried away by his own optimism as much as by Molotov's demands, as the C.I.G.S. described in his diary, Winston continued the search throughout lunch until three-thirty, and was soon establishing lodgements all along the coast from Calais to Bordeaux, with blithe disregard for the forces needed and the facilities required to put them ashore.⁷⁵

Brooke's was a military mind, congealed in staff college doctrines – basically, the art of what was practicable. Churchill's brain was more fertile – he was prepared to countenance unorthodox solutions. He dictated an inquiry to Mountbatten three days later about building special floating piers

jutting for a mile out to sea from the invasion beaches, to enable freighters to unload. 'They must float up and down on the tide,' ruled Churchill, since the alternative – building permanent structures – seemed unacceptable. 'The anchor problem must be mastered.' The ships should have 'a side flap' cut in their hull so that they could unload alongside the floating piers. 'Don't argue the matter,' he directed. 'The difficulties will argue for themselves.'⁷⁶ This was the genesis of the mulberry harbours used in June 1944.

Discussing with Brooke once more on the following evening the problems of mounting a cross-Channel assault in August or September, Churchill readily appreciated that it was impossible to establish a bridgehead wide enough for a realistic Second Front with landing-craft capable of lifting only four thousand troops and 160 tanks in the first 'flight.' By March 1943 however there should be a radical improvement, with enough landing-craft by then built to carry one hundred thousand troops and eighteen thousand vehicles in the first wave.⁷⁷ We note in passing that there is no reference in Brooke's diary on these dates to Mountbatten's Dieppe planning.

by this time Churchill's attention had reverted – and not for the first time – to North Cape, the extreme northern region of Norway. It was not far from the scene of his 1940 humiliation, and he glared at that coastline with the same kind of fervour that occasionally seized him when he saw maps of Gallipoli and the Dardanelles, where he had first met his nemesis in 1915.⁷⁸ It was from bases in this far northern region that German bombers and U-boats were wreaking havoc on the Allied PQ-convoys to Russia.

He suggested that they embark one or two divisions aboard ships assembling as if for a PQ-convoy, which should then suddenly divert southwards and seize the North Cape region. This brainchild grew into operation *jupiter*. 'He was very amenable to reason,' Brooke found, referring to the postponement of any cross-Channel assault, 'but inclined to transfer the scene of action to North Norway! Which we are now to examine.'⁷⁹

The Norway project became more and more extreme as the spring of 1942 became the summer. Encouraged by Mountbatten, Churchill devised a scheme to build 'armoured fighting snow vehicles' which the two men calculated would afford to the invaders a tactical edge similar to the tanks at Cambrai; this weapon, code named *snowplough*, was to be carried in heavy transport planes.⁸⁰ Relaxing in an expansive, even optimistic mood at Chequers, he had dictated a memorandum to his chiefs of staff directing them to attach 'high political and strategic importance' to an invasion of

northern Norway. Seizing Norway's North Cape would not only open up the northern convoy route, he said, it would open a second front. To these remarks, which had something to be said for them, he added a comment of breathtaking foolishness. 'If the going was good,' he argued, 'we could advance gradually southward, unrolling the Nazi map of Europe from the top.'⁸¹

The going from northern Norway to the south was however anything but good; it was mountainous, and barred by hundreds of fjords; the amphibious crossing to Denmark alone would be an operation of suicidal prospect. Nonetheless Admiral Pound wearily directed his planners to examine such an operation; the admiral suggested that they dig out the records of the 1940 Norway fiasco to illuminate the problems.⁸² Admiral Sir Reginald Drax warned that they would have to put no less than one million men into the selected area.⁸³ The chiefs of staff viewed the operation with unanimous distaste. Their joint planners found that the chances of British forces being able to capture and hold the German air bases in North Cape throughout the winter were 'so slight as to be unacceptable.'⁸⁴

Unwilling to accept this advice from the joint planners, a body he regarded as tainted with defeatism, Churchill ordered the chiefs of staff to study the Norway plan once again.⁸⁵ They refused to hear of it. Telephoning Eden about the latest disappointments in Libya, Winston seemed depressed by this sudden decision to cancel plans to take what Eden, writing with proper caution in his diary, called only a 'certain place' in the north. 'I had not heard of this change,' noted Eden. 'W. feared it had to do with [Admiral Sir Jack] Tovey's extreme reluctance to continue Russian convoys.'

'The politicians,' commented the prime minister sourly, 'are much abused, but they get little help or inspiration from their service advisers.' Eden commiserated with him.⁸⁶

laden with lend-lease goods supplied by the American and British war industries for the Soviet Union, the richly laden convoy identified as PQ. 16 had met near-disaster. One of its ordinary seamen wrote in his narrative, 'We were loaded with war materials including 450 tons of high explosive, loaded fore, aft, and amidships.' He added the sardonic commentary, 'They were not taking any chances on our getting through to Russia.'⁸⁷ For a while the thirty-five freighters, pregnant with American tanks and aeroplanes for Russia, had fared relatively well as they ploughed at a slow eight knots from Iceland toward North Russia. In their first eight days at sea, as Churchill

reported to Roosevelt in a telegram which also mentioned his idea of seizing North Cape, only five were sunk or obliged to return to Iceland. The northern ice pack was however still forcing the ships within range of the German airfields; on May 27 over a hundred Junkers and Heinkel bombers attacked the convoy south-east of Bear island, and six more ships went down, taking 147 tanks, seventy-seven aeroplanes and 770 other vehicles to the ocean floor with them. The Germans operated 245 bomber- and torpedo-plane sorties against PQ. 16.⁸⁸ Shaken by the losses, the war cabinet agreed on June 1 that the next convoy should sail up to two weeks later than planned, to allow more time for the ice edge to recede.⁸⁹

The Soviet military situation was not promising. Reporting on the eastern theatre of operations on that day the Joint Intelligence Committee assessed that during August and September it would be 'touch and go' whether Germany or Russia collapsed first.⁹⁰

that same day, June 1, Lord Mountbatten told the chiefs of staff that having now virtually abandoned plans to launch a major cross-Channel assault in 1942 it was important to execute 'at least one more big raid.'⁹¹ On the same day a telegram came from Roosevelt: he had also gained the impression from his talks with Molotov that the Soviet position was deteriorating; he urged that they go ahead with *bolero*, his code name for the full-scale cross-Channel assault, that same year.⁹² Churchill, closer to the realities of war than was the Oval Office, succinctly minuted his chiefs of staff: 'I do not think there is much doing on the French coast this year.'⁹³ General Brehon Somervell of the U.S. army mocked that Churchill lacked the degree of 'sustained excitement' that was necessary to carry such an operation through; but it was not excitement that was lacking, it was landing-craft. Of the British chiefs of staff, by early June 1942 only Portal supported invasion; Brooke was flatly against, and Pound at best only neutral.⁹⁴

General Brooke attended a cabinet meeting held later that month in Churchill's room at the House to review the prospect of establishing a Second Front. Churchill was in good form. He carried his colleagues with him, as he defined their current strategic policies: Britain, he said, would not put troops into France unless she intended them to stay there; and he would approve even that operation only if German morale was in decline.⁹⁵

It is impossible to reconcile the raid which Mountbatten carried out two months later against Dieppe with either of these sound criteria.

21: *One Thousand Bombers*

Explaining his reluctance to launch a cross-Channel assault merely to impress Stalin, Churchill stated at this time that that a failure ‘would result in terrible consequences to our French supporters.’¹

The welfare of his supporters in Czechoslovakia, a far away country, was of less concern to him. Two days before the end of December 1941 a Halifax bomber had parachuted two units of the Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.) into Czechoslovakia, code-named *silver a* and *silver b*, and two Czech army sergeants, Joseph Gabčík and Jan Kubis, in a unit called *anthropoid*, with orders to execute sabotage or terror acts grave enough to become known abroad. The intelligence chief of the Czech president-in-exile Edouard Benes, Colonel Frantisek Moravec, had suggested they kill either S.S.-*Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, who was Heinrich Himmler’s deputy and the acting ‘Protector’ of Bohemia–Moravia, or his secretary of state Karl-Hermann Frank. Benes hoped that the inevitable Nazi reprisals would be of such a scale and savagery as to jolt his oppressed people out of their passivity. Moravec later stated that *anthropoid* was calculated to provide a spark to ignite the mass of the Czech people.²

It would not be easy. Heydrich, still aged only thirty-eight, had since his appointment in October 1941 pacified the country by a mixture of cunning, blandishments, terror, and far-sighted social reforms; he had brought this backward country into line with neighbouring Germany’s welfare state. With not a little help from the native population his police had succeeded in mopping up almost every S.O.E. unit dropped into the country; by late May 1942 only Gabčík and Kubis were still at large. The local Czech resistance leaders moreover thoroughly disapproved of London’s cynical *anthropoid* plan, of which they had learned, and on May 12 they sent a message to London in protest; Moravec brought this message to Benes and



to 'C' – Churchill's secret service chief – in person. With 'C's' blessing, Beneš insisted that the operation must go ahead.

there had in recent weeks been dissonant voices about the future of the S.O.E., which Churchill had created in 1940, when he had instructed Hugh Dalton, the minister responsible for the organisation, to 'set Europe ablaze.'* A running feud had developed between the socialist Dalton and Winston's favourite, the red-headed, mercurial Brendan Bracken, over propaganda in foreign countries (a comic parallel to the backbiting between Ribbentrop and Goebbels in Nazi Germany on just the same issue). An S.O.E. bomb incident in Tangier had gravely compromised the foreign office; and then the S.O.E.'s organisation in neutral Portugal had been unmasked, causing difficulties with the country's dictator António de Oliveira Salazar.

Dalton was replaced by Lord Selborne, and there was even talk of winding up S.O.E., but Eden urged the prime minister in February 1942 not to take a final decision yet 'as to the disposal of S.O.E. (Dalton's organisation).' Cadogan had convinced him that the machine merely needed a thorough overhaul. Eden recommend that they make S.O.E. answerable to both the chiefs of staff and the foreign office. On April 5, he further recommended that S.O.E. be run by a soldier (the choice fell on General Colin Gubbins). Eden was never comfortable with the organisation, even so; it was always too big for its boots, and up to some scheme or other. He protested to Churchill on April 7 that he had proof that the S.O.E. was communicating with its agents in special cyphers, which put them beyond the control of the foreign office; and certain S.O.E. officials in the Middle East had made broadcasts encouraging Greek political elements opposed to the King and his lawful government in exile. 'This,' Eden pointed out, 'is in direct conflict with our policy.' Everywhere he looked, he found evidence of S.O.E. malfeasance. Lunching with him that same day the Turkish ambassador Rauf Orbay complained that the agency was squandering its funds abroad, and dealing with German double-agents. 'Find out which of your intelligence men sent a telegram under the pseudonym lobster from a Turkish ship a little while ago,' Orbay mysteriously added. In Cairo alone, Eden complained to Churchill, the S.O.E. was now said to employ 190 army officers and four hundred other ranks, not to mention the men from

* See vol. i, page ... [number follows]

other services. Churchill had created a hydra, and it was running out of control.³

On May 27 he was reading John Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*.^{*} Inspired by this thriller, he sent a note to Lord Selborne drawing attention to the importance of providing the oppressed peoples with simple weapons such as sticks of dynamite which could be easily concealed and used.⁴ But at precisely this moment, operation **anthropoid** took sudden effect. The S.O.E.'s Czech assassins ambushed Heydrich's dark-green Mercedes-Benz as it slowed down for a sharp bend on his daily drive into Prague. The Sten gun wielded by Gabčík jammed, but Kubiš threw a grenade which exploded inside the car. Mortally wounded, Heydrich contracted septicæmia and died in agony eight days later.⁵ Deeply angered by the attack, Hitler offered a one million-mark (\$250,000) reward for the capture of the assassins; the Czech president Emil Hácha doubled the amount. While the two S.O.E. assassins and their local accomplices hid in a Prague cathedral crypt, the German security forces exacted draconian reprisals; on the morning of June 10 they raided the village of Lidice, believed to have harboured the fugitives, rounded up every male over sixteen – 173 all told – and machine-gunned them against a barn wall; their womenfolk were deported to concentration camps, and their children (108 of them) sent to Germany. The village of Lidice was razed to the ground, and this reprisal was announced to the outside world.[†] This made **anthropoid** a success beyond even the dreams of President Beneš and Churchill. Lunching with the King five days after Lidice the two prime ministers talked solemnly about the 'outrage' – but Churchill hoped privately that there would be many more.

in czechoslovakia, things looked different. Shocked by the reprisals, and disillusioned by the Beneš government in exile, Sergeant Karel Čurda, a member of the S.O.E. team, **out-distance**, which had parachuted into the country on March 28, denounced Gabčík and Kubiš in an anonymous letter to the police, and then surrendered himself on June 16 to Gestapo head-

^{*} The Viking Press (New York, 1942).

[†] It was not an end of the killing. The Germans re-enacted Lidice at the village of Leáky on June 24, murdering every adult inhabitant. The bishop and all the cathedral officials implicated in sheltering the assassins were executed in Kobilisi; 252 of the assassins' relatives were executed in Mauthausen concentration camp on October 24, 1942. Half of the cash reward went to S.O.E. Sergeant Karel Čurda. He and Karl-Hermann Frank were hanged after the war.

quarters in Prague. The assassins were flushed out of their cathedral hiding-place by the Waffen S.S. two days later and put to death on the spot.

Over lunch with President Beneš, Churchill promised to discuss with his cabinet a project to wipe out two or three German towns of similar size as a reprisal for Lidice.⁶ He instructed Bomber Command to investigate this operation, to be code-named **retribution**. Beneš welcomed the idea. Returning to his Putney headquarters he composed a letter assuring the prime minister that such a reprisal would encourage the Czechs and make the Germans think twice about murdering any more. 'Yesterday,' he wrote, 'the Germans gave the Czech people a new ultimatum expiring on Thursday night: unless the attackers on Heidrych [sic] are discovered by that time they threaten to begin with another sequence of the most brutal reprisals.'⁷

Nothing ever came of **retribution**; nothing ever does. Harris, a realist, advised that it would be no easy task to obliterate without trace a small target like a village of say one thousand inhabitants. It would require one hundred bombers attacking at low level on one of the few precious full-moon nights. A high-level raid would need two hundred bombers, he added, but even they could not guarantee to 'complete the job.' 'I understand that the population of Lidice was 800,' wrote Harris to the prime minister. 'It would make things easier and more economical if we selected, say, one village of 5,000 to 10,000, rather than three of 800. The retribution scale could thus be preserved.' For tactical reasons Harris asked that the objective and the 'reason why' be announced after the event rather than before. 'I am looking out for suitable targets,' he promised.⁸ The war cabinet decided not to follow this up. As Portal said, there was nothing the Germans would like more than to divert Britain's bomber effort from 'their built-up industrial areas' to their villages. In fact, he said, the Germans might well start a regular campaign of shooting hostages just to obtain that effect.⁹

Eden told Portal that he had been approached (by whom, he did not say) with the similar suggestion that after each of their next mass bombing raids they announce that it had been a reprisal for some specified act of Nazi barbarity. Portal dismissed the idea. Sir Archibald Sinclair, his minister, was dismissive: 'The policy of reprisals is to my mind weak and bad,' he continued. 'Our heavy raids will grow more frequent and we shall be in an absurd position if we have to search for an atrocity to justify each one!'¹⁰



That summer of 1942, Churchill's gaze focused on the North African desert. In mid-April 1942, his codebreakers had recovered one of the German army *enigma* keys; from this and intercepted Luftwaffe signals he knew precisely when and how Rommel would start his counter-attack.¹¹ His interventions became consequently more frequent. After dinner on May 25 he telephoned the C.I.G.S. to discuss sending a 'quite unofficial and private' telegram to Auchinleck, drawing comparisons with the Battle of Austerlitz, where Napoleon had delivered a 'preconceived rupturing counter-stroke' – what would more usually be called a spoiling attack. 'Special intelligence,' he advised Auchinleck, 'seems to give us opportunities for timing a blow upon the enemy at his most vulnerable moment.' Anxious to leave his desert generals a free hand, Brooke persuaded him not to send it; Winston sent it to General Smuts instead.¹²

On the twenty-seventh Rommel started his own offensive. He had sprung his attack by moonlight, launching his *Afrika Korps* round the southern, desert end of the British line. For a few days he was held up by one well-fortified desert position at Bir Hakeim, which anchored one end of the British line; the Free French fought so bravely here that Churchill instructed 'Tommy' Thompson to put on his naval gold braid and deliver a message of congratulations to General de Gaulle.¹³ For a few days it seemed that General Auchinleck had things well in hand. Churchill displayed a carefree attitude. When Brooke phoned urgently on May 29 to discuss the latest telegram on the Middle East, he learned that the P.M. was at Chequers 'looking at a film and not likely to be out till one a.m.' Brooke had to wait up for Churchill to call him back.¹⁴ 'Fierce fighting is still proceeding,' General Auchinleck reported from Cairo on the first day of June, 'and the battle is by no means over.' Even this message spoke confidently of Rommel's plan having gone awry, and of what this 'failure' had cost Rommel in men and material.¹⁵

Churchill would later say, only half in jest, that he would ordain that all future wars should be fought in the desert. But now the fighting in the desert was losing its former chivalrous quality. Rommel's troops captured a British armoured brigade's order that German prisoners were not to be allowed 'to eat, drink, or sleep before their interrogation.' The intercepts on the last day of May revealed that Field-Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander-in-chief South, had ordered Rommel to do the same: 'Prisoners are to be informed of the reason for this measure.'¹⁶ A further intercept stated that the captured order was to be forwarded to Hitler 'immediately.'¹⁷ Churchill had these intercepts transmitted in code to Auchinleck without

comment. Yet another showed that Hitler had ordered that any German émigrés captured in this fighting were to be liquidated forthwith. And there was a mysterious message which Churchill read on June 2 which stated that a 'good source' had reported to Rommel that the British had altogether two hundred tanks left with the 4th, 22nd and 2nd brigades, and 160 with other units.¹⁸ People wondered who this 'good source' might be.

churchill refused to cast off his euphoria; it was all the more galling that his admirals were obstructing his plans to run the next Arctic convoy. Twice, on June 1 and 2, Churchill sent for the First Sea Lord, Admiral Pound. Pound reported that Tovey was strongly opposed to running PQ. 17 at this time. If the prime minister insisted on running such convoys during the months of perpetual Arctic daylight, Tovey warned, a disaster was bound to happen.¹⁹ The row continued at the admiralty – the minutes do not fully reflect the heat of Tovey's remarks, particularly at the meeting on the fourth.²⁰

On that day Churchill again proposed to his complaisant First Lord, A. V. Alexander, that Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham replace Tovey.²¹ Two days later he wrote again to Alexander, referring to Tovey's 'naturally negative and unenterprising attitude of mind.'²² He described Tovey as 'a stubborn and obstinate' man.²³ Admiral Pound would not hear of replacing him, writing on June 8 that to do so now would imperil the navy's confidence in the admiralty.²⁴ 'At times you could kiss his feet,' remarked Pound to the First Lord on the ninth: ' – At others you feel you could kill him.' On the day after that, after lunching alone with Cunningham at Downing-street and getting nowhere, Churchill minuted ominously, 'I will see 1st L[ord] *alone* at No. 10.'²⁵ Alexander stood firm. 'Saw the P.M. for half an hour,' he recorded in his brief attempt at a diary, 'pressing for proper status & pay for Adml Cunningham if he goes to Washington. P.M. not receptive. He wishes C. to relieve Tovey, of whom he has poor opinion, whereas Pound considers T. has full confidence of the Fleet. . . . Crisis may loom ahead.'²⁶

Churchill failed to get his way. Tovey stayed with the Home Fleet, and Cunningham left on June 24 for Washington to head the naval mission.

the trouble with Tovey had been long building. He had become a determined opponent of Churchill's bombing policies, arguing that, despite the vociferous advocacy of the Prof. and of 'Butcher' Harris, bombing was unlikely to lead to victory, and it would denude the navy to the point where it might lose the Battle of the Atlantic. New bomber production was going to

Bomber, not Coastal, Command; and the new and innovative centimetric radar devices were going to the squadrons operating over Germany, where there was a real chance of their secrets being compromised, and not to the anti-submarine units operating over water. Like all great military commanders, Harris was wise however to the worth of good public relations; he kept an effective publicity staff at his headquarters, and he plied the prime minister and other visitors with impressive dossiers of statistics and damage photographs that seemed to prove the value of what he was doing.

His detractors were now legion, and opposed him for a variety of motives. Churchill came under renewed pressure that spring to review his bombing policies. In the third week of May 1942 Mr Justice Singleton completed his inquiry into the bombing offensive: while he was broadly optimistic, particularly if it managed to improve in accuracy, he did not regard it as being 'sufficient of itself to win the war or to produce decisive results.'²⁷ Admiral Pound submitted an annihilating critique.²⁸ Lord Hankey too wrote urging that the bombers be used for convoy escort duties instead of fruitlessly attacking German cities. There was word that a caustic telegram in the same sense had come from 'the other side,' meaning from Roosevelt.²⁹ Admiral King was demanding that the attack be switched to Hitler's submarine construction yards and bases.³⁰

The results of the bombing so far were certainly disappointing. Still doubtful, Churchill asked Harris for a statistical comparison of the German air force's attack on Coventry and his own recent raid on Essen – the first to use the *gee* electronic device for navigation. Harris conceded in his reply that while he had dropped 657 tons on Essen in three night raids, the night photographs showed no worthwhile concentration on the actual target (the sprawling Krupps armaments plant). He was still enthusiastic about *gee*, however.³¹ Resourceful as ever, he flew photographic reconnaissance sorties over the heavily bombed British city of Exeter, where two German raids had damaged six thousand houses in April, and he had the resulting photographs interpreted by unwitting damage experts. The experts reported merely forty houses destroyed and twenty severely damaged. 'The results of this very interesting experiment,' he wrote smugly to Churchill, 'have . . . stressed the vast difference between the damage which is visible from air photographs and that which actually occurs.'³²

Nonetheless, ugly questions still overhung their bombing policy. The *defence committee* considered them on Friday May 29. Churchill said that Mr Justice Singleton had applied his judicial mind to the likely prospects if

their bombing of Germany continued for six, twelve, and eighteen months. Singleton's response raised fundamental issues. 'The fact,' he admitted significantly, 'that Germany ceased bombing this country for a long period gives rise to much thought.' The Germans seemed to have deduced that it was doing them little good.³³

churchill decided to devote special attention to the commander of the U.S. army air forces, General 'Hap' Arnold, who was visiting England. On the previous Tuesday he had sent for Arnold, along with Harriman and the air staff, and stated that he could not understand why, if America would be producing sixty thousand planes a year, they were quibbling over the five thousand that Britain needed. Arnold, called on to talk 'openly and frankly,' told Churchill that his country had many calls on its aircraft production.³⁴

Churchill now laid on a spectacular to impress the Americans. On Saturday May 30 Bomber Command dispatched for the first time over one thousand aircraft to attack a single German city, Cologne. Churchill invited a galaxy of Americans to Chequers for the weekend – the ambassadors Winant and Harriman, and the generals Arnold, Somervell, and Eisenhower.³⁵ Still more guests arrived after dinner – including Harris himself and his American counterpart General Ira C. Eaker.³⁶ Obviously in high spirits, Churchill telephoned Harry Hopkins in Washington at about midnight, regardless of the risk of eavesdropping, and boasted that he was sending twice as many bombers over Germany that night as ever before. He was optimistic; he said, and they were going to stay up all night waiting for the results. He added that the fighting in Libya was going well, and added, again incautiously: 'I may see you very soon.'³⁷ That said, he obliged his guests to watch a feature film, then harangued them until two a.m.

The house was asleep when Arnold rose next morning, Sunday – with only Ismay at breakfast with him. Ismay told him that the prime minister was dictating. The 868 planes which had actually found their target during the night had dropped nearly fifteen hundred tons of bombs on the ancient city of Cologne with its famous Gothic cathedral; we now know that they killed 474 people and injured five thousand. That was good going indeed. Churchill said offhandedly in Cadogan's hearing, 'We've had worse weekends.'³⁸ A trifle wishfully, the *New York Times* announced on June 2 that the British bombers had left twenty thousand dead in this Cologne holocaust.

Harris had only a few days earlier revealed to Arnold that Bomber Command currently had 640 bombers, of which only 450 were in commission,

and that he had only 380 crews for these.³⁹ Given this real operational strength, the Cologne operation had clearly been a major propaganda effort, made possible only by scratching together planes from every available command including even the flying-training units. Arnold was very properly impressed. Strolling alone with Churchill for two hours in the gardens of Chequers they discussed again the allocation of American aircraft production. Before he left England the next day the general sent this message to President Roosevelt: 'England is [the] place to win the war. Get planes and troops over as soon as possible.' Churchill returned to London on Monday June 1. 'I hope you were pleased with our mass air attack on Cologne,' he cabled to President Roosevelt. 'There is plenty more to come.'⁴⁰ Bomber Command was planning another mass raid that night; of the 957 planes which took off to attack Essen, 726 eventually dropped 1,235 tons of bombs, but they were widely scattered on other towns across the Ruhr.

After Cologne, Churchill directed Portal, the chief of air staff, to stand by for 'a German retaliation.'⁴¹ The chief of air staff reassured him that he had sent special gun and barrage balloon units to 'the Bædeker towns,' and they were keeping a close watch on the blind bombing beams and code intercepts which would reveal the Luftwaffe targets.⁴²

For a time, the air ministry turned its baleful glare once more to the easier targets in France, like Hitler's submarine bases: but there was no guarantee that bombing would reduce U-boat activity, and Sinclair was still unwilling to incur the odium of ordering such operations. 'Unless,' he furthermore wrote, 'the Air Staff is convinced that the military object can be achieved . . . it would be useless to ask the cabinet to embark upon a policy of ruthless attacks on French towns.'⁴³ Later in June there were similar proposals for night bombing raids against other friendly countries like Norway, Belgium, and Holland. Eden had to remind Sinclair that the Dutch government had been 'rather put out' when the R.A.F. bombed the docks at Rotterdam last year 'with some loss of life.' It was vital, he said, to secure the active encouragement of these little allies first.⁴⁴ This was easier than expected: their governments proved enthusiastic – from the relative safety of London – for such raids to be carried out against their fellow-countrymen. Eden accordingly gave his blessing, and the planning for the raids went ahead – Portal having promised the prime minister that only the best bomber crews would take part, and that they would be under orders to bring back their bombs if they could not identify their targets.⁴⁵

the american forces were starting to enjoy victories of their own. Rather eclipsing Churchill's 'thousand-bomber' feat at Cologne, in a three-day naval action fought from June 4 the U.S. Pacific Fleet inflicted a defeat on the Japanese navy from which it would never recover: in the Battle of Midway, the island on which the Japanese had hoped to land, the Americans sank all four Japanese aircraft-carriers for the loss of one of their own, *Yorktown*. 'I am sure we are inflicting some very severe losses on the Jap Fleet,' Churchill cabled to Roosevelt, with a trace of jealousy.⁴⁶ The use of 'we' was designed to remind the president that Britain had furnished the crucial Intelligence on the Japanese invasion fleet's movements.⁴⁷

Churchill still had little to show his own public other than the bombing. On June 2 he boasted to the House that 1,130 British aircraft had participated in the Cologne raid. 'Last night,' he continued,

1,036 machines of the Royal Air Force again visited the Continent. Nearly all of these operated on the Essen region. From this second large-scale air raid thirty-five of our bombers are missing. These two great night bombing raids mark the introduction of a new phase in the British air offensive against Germany, which will increase markedly in scale when we are joined, as we soon shall be, by the Air Force of the United States.⁴⁸

When he spoke on the third with Dr Wellington Koo, the Chinese ambassador, their talk again turned to the 'thousand-bomber' raids. 'The Germans,' said Churchill, 'had thought that they had a monopoly of the genie of air power.' Now this genie had defected to the other side. When the Chinaman asked for two bomber squadrons to be sent to defend China, however, he declined. Day and night, he claimed, he was racking his brains for ways to help China. The British were not decadent or defeatist, he insisted, despite what had sometimes been alleged in Chungking. They simply could not face one enemy in Europe and another in the Far East at the same time. They had always 'muddled through' from defeats and reverses to final victory, he added brightly. The Chinese ambassador found this strategic philosophy, as espoused by the prime minister, hard to understand.⁴⁹

in general the events at the end of May and beginning of June 1942 had infused Britain and the United States with optimism, even euphoria. The thousand-bomber raids and the announcement of an agreement with Rus-

sia as to 'the urgent task of creating a Second Front in Europe in 1942' had revived expectations of an early invasion of the Continent.

Addressing the House on June 2 Churchill delivered an unduly roseate report on the desert fighting. He quoted from Auchinleck's report of the previous day, which made plain that Rommel's attack had been expected ('Air reconnaissance had clearly indicated enemy preparations for the attack. . .') So far the British seemed to be winning. 'Further heavy fighting is to be expected,' he stated, reading out more of Auchinleck's dispatch,

but whatever may be the result, there is no shadow of doubt that Rommel's plans for his initial offensive have gone completely awry and this failure has cost him dear in men and material.' To the commander-in-chief's confident words he added his own: 'From all the above it is clear that we have every reason to be satisfied, and more than satisfied, with the course which the battle has so far taken.'⁵⁰

Churchill's star was, it seemed, proudly in the ascendant.⁵¹ It was not, however. Over the days following his speech the German *Afrika Korps* regained the initiative, liquidated the stronghold at Bir Hakeim, and reinforced its bridgehead through the minefields. By June 7 it was clear that things were going wrong. On the telephone to Eden, Churchill lamented that Rommel appeared able to retain the offensive. 'I fear that we have not very good generals,' Winston said.⁵²

In a tacit recognition of failure, he two days later wirelessly to Auchinleck that he had decided to commit to the Middle East the two divisions he was slowly moving around southern Africa as a strategic reserve: these were the 8th Armoured Division, at the Cape, and the 44th Division, nearing Freetown. The recent Japanese naval defeats at Coral Sea and Midway, so he reasoned, lessened the risk to Australia; nor did Japan seem likely to invade India at present.⁵³

On that Tuesday, June 9, 1942, Molotov arrived back from Washington. Churchill and Eden, who received him at No. 10, were dismayed to find that he had wangled out of Roosevelt a communiqué on the Second Front.⁵⁴ Roosevelt had assured him, Molotov disclosed, that he would be prepared to accept the loss of a hundred thousand troops in such an operation; since they would be largely British empire troops, Churchill was less willing.⁵⁵ 'Churchill,' cabled Molotov secretly to Stalin, 'became extremely agitated and highly excitable, interrupting at this point to declare that no way would

he embark on a new Dunkirk or countenance the fruitless sacrifice of 100,000 men, whoever recommended him to do so.' The P.M. had added that he would leave the president in no doubt as to his opinion.

They moved to other topics, in particular Roosevelt's notion that only the three or four great powers should be allowed to retain arms in the post-war world. Churchill was more sympathetic to the president's plan for an international police force. He also squelched what Molotov told him of Roosevelt's ideas for a trusteeship of the great powers over the islands of the Dutch East Indies and the Japanese in the Pacific ('I did not mention Malaya,' Molotov told Stalin, 'but I did refer to Indo-China'). Churchill roundly said that all of this merely demonstrated the need to defer such issues to a post-war Peace conference. Before dividing up the bearskin, he lectured the Russian, one had to kill the bear.

Molotov referred to the dwindling rate of supplies reaching the Soviet Union. When in Moscow in October 1941, Lord Beaverbrook had promised to increase aeroplane and tank deliveries by fifty percent in the second half of 1942. Churchill called his attention to the small print – there was a handy proviso about 'any change of circumstances'; the empire was now at war with Japan too, and the United States were diverting some war supplies from Britain to Australia. 'Rather a "sticky" meeting,' recorded Eden. 'We had also to make plain that we could do no more in supplies than keep up present rate. This they took very well.'⁵⁶

As for the Second Front, the prime minister told Molotov that he was preparing to 'mount a raid in France by six divisions' in August or September, 'in the hope that under certain pre-arranged conditions they might hold out on the European shore.' He mentioned too his project (iron-clad) for a landing in the far north of Norway and (having found no support from his own chiefs of staff) he invited the Russians to take an interest in this project. As for 1943, the Allies intended to land forty to fifty divisions in Europe, possibly at five or six points at once; Roosevelt was sending over one million troops for the purpose. Churchill struggled for three hours to din all of this into Molotov and finally invited him to send round Russian experts to audit his own calculations; Molotov crisply told the British government to 'double-check their figures for themselves.'⁵⁷ 'The upshot of all this,' he summarised to Stalin, 'is: the British are not holding themselves to their liability to stage a Second Front this year, but are declaring – and even this with reservations – that they are preparing an, as it were, experimental landing operation. I'll fill you in on the rest in Moscow.'⁵⁸

fortunately churchill repeated all of these arguments in a written memorandum, drafted by the chiefs of staff at his dictation. It was quite categorical. 'We can, therefore, give no promises,' it said. He did however undertake to continue the bombing as well as air operations over France designed to force the Germans to withdraw squadrons from the eastern front.⁵⁹ Casually dressed in what Cadogan irreverently called his 'rompers,' and in 'quite good form,' the prime minister handed this document to Molotov at a farewell meeting on June 10.⁶⁰ The next day Churchill sent a telegram to the White House announcing his intention of phoning Harry Hopkins at seven p.m.⁶¹ He had decided to pay another visit to Washington.

Air Marshal Harris now had to confront opposition in Whitehall scarcely less violent than his crews met in the skies over Germany. He fought back against the navy's criticisms using no uncertain language. He provided to Churchill a list of all the merchant ships known to have been sunk by the mines laid by his aircraft.⁶² He also wrote to him, pointing out that he had put in two raids on *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* where they now lay in Kiel. Naval Intelligence grudgingly admitted that his bombers had damaged the latter warship. Harris reminded the prime minister that in the eyes of the public the Royal Air Force and especially Bomber Command had emerged badly from the escape of *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* up the Channel. 'Yet the facts . . . are,' he wrote, 'that not only were these . . . kept out of action for over a year solely by the R.A.F. but the chances of one if not both of them ever coming into action again are now remote.' He remarked that despite this 'not so much as a thank-you' had yet reached his crews.⁶³ Harris's letter, addressed directly to Churchill (and not his own superiors) provoked outrage at the admiralty, where Alexander called it an 'extraordinary minute' for its complaint at the 'lack of recognition & *publicity*' for the damage which Bomber Command had inflicted on the warships. 'Prima donnas are nowhere in it with this kind of air officer,' noted the First Lord.⁶⁴

But Harris's influence was getting perceptibly stronger. 'Victory, speedy and complete, awaits the side which first employs air power as it should be employed.' So he wrote seductively to Churchill on June 17, setting out a lengthy plea for increasing the weight of bombing on Germany's cities.⁶⁵ Churchill was moved to conform. As Bomber Command planned a second round of thousand-bomber raids for the coming full-moon period, due at the end of June – the target this time would be the port city of Bremen – Churchill instructed the chiefs of staff: 'On the coming occasions it will be

necessary that Coastal Command should participate, and I must ask definitely for compliance with this request.'⁶⁶



During June 1942 Churchill sent two relief convoys to Malta, both departing on the twelfth, though from opposite ends of the Mediterranean. The westbound convoy, of eleven merchantmen, had to return to Alexandria, under heavy air attack, after the escort's commander Rear Admiral Philip L. Vian learned that an Italian fleet including two battleships was at sea to intercept him; he lost one cruiser, three destroyers, and two merchant ships in this fruitless operation. Eight ships had sailed simultaneously from Gibraltar, but only two reached Malta, carrying fifteen thousand tons of cargo, after the convoy came under heavy German and Italian air and surface attack. Morale in Malta was now brittle, and aviation fuel for the island's fighter planes was running low.

That British spirits were flagging in the Western Desert was equally plain. Churchill was struck by a delicately worded report from Auchinleck indicating that of the Eighth Army's ten thousand losses since Rommel began his offensive, 'some eight thousand may be prisoners.' Against that the Eighth Army had taken four thousand enemy prisoners, including 1,660 Germans.⁶⁷ Clearly something 'of an unpleasant character,' as the prime minister no less delicately put it in his memoirs, 'must have happened.' He sent an appropriate message to the Eighth Army's commander General Ritchie.⁶⁸ Auchinleck replied encouragingly that Rommel's situation was 'not enviable.'⁶⁹ But it was — it was. After overrunning Bir Hakeim on June 10, Rommel had punched his way out of the 'cauldron' in which his force had been temporarily contained and turned the battle violently against the British over the next three days; soon Ritchie's divisions were in retreat and the Germans and Italians were masters of a battlefield strewn with hundreds of damaged tanks and guns which the British could no longer hope to salvage. Things had gone so badly that Auchinleck himself left Cairo to oversee the rest of the battle. Throughout that Sunday June 14 Churchill clung to the scrambler telephone, badgering General Brooke to conjure up some better news for him. If Rommel destroyed the British garrison at Tobruk, it seemed that nothing could stop him charging on to Suez. Keeping to himself the cruelly obvious, the C.I.G.S. could only note that Ritchie seemed to have

been out-generalled by Rommel, words which he wrote in his private diary and locked shut before anybody saw what he had written.⁷⁰

fortunately churchill had appointed a capable man on the spot in Cairo to replace Lyttelton as Minister Resident in the Middle East. This was the Australian Dick Casey. Meeting him a few weeks earlier, Brooke had been impressed by his rapid grasp of essentials, though as an Australian he never really gained the P.M.'s confidence.⁷¹ It was from this minister that Churchill received on June 14 a message making plain that Casey had lost confidence in Ritchie.⁷² Alarmed, Churchill sent a vivid response to Auchinleck: 'Your decision to fight it out to the end [is] most cordially endorsed. We shall sustain you whatever the result. Retreat would be fatal. This is a business not only of armour but of will-power. God bless you all.'⁷³ And as an after-thought: 'Presume there is no question in any case of giving up Tobruk. As long as Tobruk is held no serious enemy advance into Egypt is possible.'⁷⁴ The general confirmed that he had no intention of giving up the fortress.

Soon after nine a.m. that day, June 15, Churchill phoned Eden to tell him that the news from Libya was bad. At cabinet he was glum.⁷⁵ There was discouraging news from Malta too. On the sixteenth he told the First Sea Lord, 'It will be necessary to make another attempt to run a convoy into Malta. This can only be from Gibraltar, though a feint from Alexandria will be useful. The fate of the island is at stake, and if the effort to relieve it is worth making, it is worth making on a great scale.' Lord Gort, he said, must be able to tell the islanders, 'The Navy will never abandon Malta.'⁷⁶

Churchill's mind reverted to Tobruk. He again signalled to Auchinleck, so that there should be no doubt, that he must order General Ritchie to pack as many troops into Tobruk as would be necessary to hold it.⁷⁷ A comforting reply came from Cairo, and he put Tobruk out of his mind.



Visiting Washington that June, Lord Mountbatten had warned President Roosevelt candidly on the ninth that practical difficulties stood in the way of sledgehammer, the cross-Channel operation on which the Americans were banking for August or September. Mountbatten reported this conversation to Churchill at Chequers late on the twelfth; from what he said, the president was 'getting a little off the rails,' as General Brooke put it, and needed a good talking-to about the Second Front. Hearing Mountbatten's

report, Churchill decided to invite himself over to Washington as soon as weather permitted. 'I feel it is my duty to come to see you,' he notified Roosevelt the next day, simultaneously instructing his secretary to ask the King's permission to make the journey.⁷⁸ He told Brooke to come to Washington too; it would be the general's first trip to America.⁷⁹

One thing was plain. Given the shortage of landing-craft there could be no operation to liberate France, code-named **round-up**, before the summer of 1943. Churchill circulated a thought-provoking paper on June 15, just before his departure to Washington, in which he visualised six heavy disembarkations with at least half a dozen feints all along the enemy coast from Denmark to the Spanish frontier. Ten armoured brigades would land in France 'in the first wave.' Irrespective of losses – which he expected to be very high – there would be four hundred thousand men ashore 'and busy' in France by D-plus-7, and seven hundred thousand by D-plus-14. There were to be ten infantry brigades, specially trained in house-to-house fighting and furnished with pedal-cycles for mobility, with the task of capturing four important ports by D-plus-14.⁸⁰

Fleet-street immediately leaked word of Churchill's transatlantic trip.⁸¹ While America assumed that he was coming to discuss a Second Front, in Fleet-street it was uncharitably put about that he was 'running away' from the disaster looming in Libya.⁸² At their last luncheon before Churchill's departure, on Tuesday June 16, the King asked him whom he should call upon in the event of his death; Churchill named Eden, calling him 'in my mind the outstanding Minister . . . in the National government over which I have the honour to preside.'⁸³ He took the train north to Stranraer in Scotland on June 17, accompanied by Generals Brooke and Ismay, as well as 'Tommy' Thompson, John Martin, his doctor, and a couple of others, and boarded the Boeing flying-boat 'Bristol,' piloted by Captain Kelly-Rogers, after dinner. He would be away from London for only eight days.⁸⁴

for a while he sat in the co-pilot's seat, marvelling at the ocean unfolding before him in the moonlight. This flight would take twenty-six hours, during which he was out of contact by telephone – which more than one minister counted as a blessing. Unfamiliar with the problems caused by time-lag, he insisted on having all his drinks and meals at their usual times, which was not without effect on either his sobriety or stomach.⁸⁵

In Washington his impending arrival provoked foreboding. There was, his office had notified Washington, 'no specific agenda' for the visit – the

two leaders would probably discuss offensives on the European Continent, in Burma, and in the Pacific, and ‘perhaps some form of *gymnast*.’⁸⁶ The latter, *gymnast*, was the code-name for an Anglo-American descent on French North-West Africa. Hopkins predicted to Lord Halifax that the prime minister obviously wanted to prevent the president from ‘getting too far out on a limb’ about launching a Second Front in 1942.⁸⁷

Talking Roosevelt around would prove easier than persuading the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Learning that Churchill was bound for Washington again, Roosevelt called a war cabinet at Hyde Park on June 17 – primarily the army and navy secretaries and the chiefs of staff Marshall, Arnold, and King – and betrayed what seemed to them an alarming readiness to abandon the cross-Channel operation *bolero* in favour of the new plan, *gymnast*, as the only viable way of assisting Russia. Marshall, forewarned, had brought along a paper arguing against *gymnast*. Admiral King was hesitant. Stimson dictated a note afterwards describing *gymnast* as a worrying proposition which Roosevelt had ‘sprung on’ them, one which jeopardised everything they had done so far on *bolero*. ‘The only hope I have about it all,’ wrote Stimson, ‘is that I think he may be doing it in his foxy way to forestall trouble that is now on the ocean coming towards us in the shape of a new British visitor.’⁸⁸



After partaking of an ample airborne dinner, Churchill found Lord Halifax and General Marshall waiting as his flying-boat taxied to a halt at Anacostia on the Potomac River near Washington at seven p.m. on June 18.

The ambassador broke it to him that Roosevelt was away at Hyde Park; Churchill elected to stay the night in the Washington embassy. It had been an exhausting journey, though he tried not show it. ‘No sooner had he arrived,’ Hopkins wrote to Clementine, ‘than he wanted to get you on the phone and tell you that all was well with him.’⁸⁹ It was a hot and stuffy evening; the prime minister downed several more drinks and a second full dinner on the open terrace behind the embassy without a murmur. The time-difference had little visible effect on him. The next day Halifax would remark to Stimson on ‘the difficult personal habits’ of their eminent visitor, saying that Churchill had kept him up until one or two in the morning.⁹⁰

Meeting the prime minister here the next morning, June 19, General Marshall found him disparaging about *bolero* and full of new proposals

for diversions. Marshall urged on Stimson the importance of making a united American stand against this Englishman.⁹¹ He repeated this in a telegram at noon-thirty to the president, advising that 'your guest' was interested instead in carrying out gymnast during August, and 'another similar movement in Norway.'⁹² He asked that word be got to the president pleading with him not to enter into any serious discussions with Churchill without him.⁹³

The prospect of such secret conversations taking place evoked alarm in Washington – the word used in Stimson's diary was *crisis*. From a letter which Roosevelt had just received from Lord Mountbatten, Stimson rightly gathered that the president had talked out of turn with him, and that Mountbatten had repeated the president's language to his superiors in London and that they were now scared, as Stimson realised reading the letter, that Roosevelt was hell-bent on involving British forces in a possible 'sacrifice attack' across the Channel, while an operation against French North-West Africa seemed more promising. 'Consequently,' deduced Stimson, and he was not far off the mark, 'Churchill's hurried visit.' Learning that their rumbustious visitor was even now flying up to Hyde Park, Stimson felt distinctly uneasy about the prime minister's baleful influence on the president: both men lacked, he noted, the steadiness of balance so vital in the conduct of wars.⁹⁴ He sent a warning letter to Roosevelt using what he called some pretty ripe language about the British intentions.⁹⁵

Nonchalantly wearing his 'siren suit,' and aware of none of these alarums, Churchill followed Stimson's and Marshall's secret telegrams northward in a navy plane on June 19, making a bumpy landing at about midday at the little airstrip at New Hackensack, half an hour's drive from the presidential mansion at Hyde Park.⁹⁶ Roosevelt drove himself over to meet the plane in his special Ford V8 motor-car equipped with hand instead of foot controls to enable him to drive it. The two men chatted for a while as they drove around the estate, playfully trying to shake off their escort.

Roosevelt was taken aback to find that Churchill had five others in his party; he agreed to house and feed Thompson, Martin, and the valet, but had the Scotland-yard men billeted at the local Vanderbilt Inn with the P.M.'s stenographer. 'The president and the prime minister,' noted a secretary,

had a long conference after lunch, then at tea at [Miss] Laura Delano's – [and] dinner at the president's home. The president put on a black tie and white dinner coat. Winnie came down in the siren suit for which he apologised. Okay with the Boss.⁹⁷

Roosevelt's staff were accustomed to the easygoing ways of their chief, but Churchill's informality was something new. Early the next morning they saw him walking barefoot on the lawn, and later crossing the passage, still barefoot, to Hopkins's room.⁹⁸

among the points which Churchill told Hopkins he wanted to discuss urgently with 'the Boss' was their atomic bomb project **tube alloys**. He had sent out W.A. Akers, head of the British **tube alloys** directorate, to America with three professors of physics once in February and again earlier this month, in June. They were however meeting with less than wholehearted co-operation from the Americans. Hopkins persuaded Churchill to postpone the atomic weapons discussion until the next day.

The situation was this: the United States had decided to go all out on atomic research at the end of 1941. Eminent scientists under Dr Vannevar Bush, director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD), had reported on progress to Roosevelt, who without informing the British had appointed a General Policy Group to advise him, consisting of the vice-president Henry A. Wallace as well as Stimson, Marshall, Bush, and Conant; only a few days before Churchill's arrival this group had recommended transferring the project to the army's Corps of Engineers, since it was too costly for the Research Vote. The army's Major-General Leslie R. Groves, builder of the Pentagon, had been put in charge. None of these people favoured prolonging the earlier collaboration with the British.

Nothing of this was known to Churchill when he tackled Roosevelt about **tube alloys**. Roosevelt played his usual 'foxy' self. While according to the prime minister they did reach informal agreement, talking 'after luncheon, in a tiny little room which juts out on the ground floor,' as Churchill wrote, adding the necessary verisimilitude to his memoirs, there was later some dispute as to precisely what was agreed. General Ismay would recall his master mentioning the next day that they had reached some such agreement under which the two nations would jointly develop the atomic bomb.⁹⁹ Foolishly as it turned out, Churchill trusted the president enough not to commit anything on this to writing until eight months later. 'My whole understanding,' he would then write to Hopkins, asking him plaintively to jog the presidential memory, 'was that everything was on the basis of fully sharing the results as equal partners. I have no record, but I shall be very much surprised if the president's recollection does not square with this.'¹⁰⁰

There seemed to be good reason for Britain and America to devote resources to developing the bomb. That same day Lord Cherwell received a tip from a Swedish professor that under Professor Werner Heisenberg, the Nobel prize winning physicist, Nazi laboratories were experimenting with uranium-235 chain reactions and – underlined – ‘results must not be excluded.’¹⁰¹ Some weeks after Churchill’s return to London, Sir John Anderson advised him that according to their own experts any plant for producing enriched uranium-235 would be too big to erect in wartime Britain.¹⁰² The Americans were exploring four production methods. The British method (based on gaseous diffusion of uranium hexafluoride) was probably the best, but the unanimous advice, in which Lord Cherwell concurred, was that both the pilot plant and the full-scale factory should be erected in the United States. In consequence the British design team should also cross the Atlantic. The relative contribution that the British could make to a joint Anglo-American atomic effort was dwindling with each month that passed, Anderson astutely observed. Unaware that the corresponding American experts had already decided to freeze the British out of their own project, Churchill agreed, writing in the margin, ‘As proposed.’¹⁰³



It is certainly true that during Churchill’s visit the American president sparkled in his company. He found the prime minister a delightful companion, although Churchill virtually took over Hyde Park. Once Roosevelt’s staff found John Martin hogging the phone and speaking to the embassy; they had to take him off – it was the president’s only line to Washington.¹⁰⁴

Roosevelt’s staff believed that he was tough enough to keep the British in their place, and had good advisers in Marshall and King. ‘With a softie for president,’ wrote the president’s secretary, ‘Winnie would put rollers under the treasury and open Second, Third, or Fourth fronts with our fighting men. Britannia rules the waves! I do not think the British will pull wool over F.D.R.’s eyes now, nor when the peace comes either.’¹⁰⁵ Roosevelt’s prestige was high since the victories in the Pacific. He regarded Churchill as an equal, perhaps even secretly as his inferior, now that the news trickling in from the Libyan desert was discouraging. There were rumours that Tobruk was about to fall, and the gossips were saying that this might even bring down Churchill’s government. ‘The P.M.,’ noted Roosevelt’s secretary, wrongly, ‘must wish he were back in London to defend himself.’¹⁰⁶

Churchill was glad he was not, and he turned a deaf ear to the rumours about Tobruk. 'Things that one cannot understand,' philosophised Ismay a month later in this connection, 'are so much more upsetting than even worse things that are intelligible.'¹⁰⁷ He received 'C's' daily summaries of the intercepts – the heading **boniface** told him their source, Bletchley Park. The summary on the nineteenth gave an ugly picture of the relentless advance of Rommel's Panzer divisions, with Gambut airfield and Bel Hamed already overrun; Field-Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander-in-chief South, was to visit Rommel's headquarters that day. The one ray of hope was that Rommel was running out of the heavier tank ammunition.¹⁰⁸ On the twentieth, the word was that Kesselring had ordered, 'The fate of North Africa now depends on Tobruk. Every man must know this and act accordingly.'¹⁰⁹

Keeping his eye on the purpose of his visit, Churchill handed to the president a note on the strategic position. This discouraged any notion of staging **bolero** before 1943, and proposed that they land in French North-West Africa later in 1942, rather than allow their armies to stand idle.¹¹⁰

The two leaders set out on the night of June 20 by train for Washington. Roosevelt gave his guest the air-conditioned stateroom in the presidential train – the only bedroom that had a bathroom attached. The train left Highland on the New York Central Railroad at eleven p.m. and after chugging gently south through New Jersey and Maryland all night pulled into the Arlington cantonment at Washington at nine a.m. next morning.

during the previous day Churchill's chiefs of staff had conferred in his absence with their American counterparts in Washington, all happily oblivious to the decisions being reached at Hyde Park by their masters. Marshall had boasted to an admiring and envious General Brooke that his president accepted whatever he advised; Brooke often had to deploy superhuman efforts to wean Churchill away from his wilder plans.¹¹¹ In their benighted leaders' absence now, the generals easily agreed that whatever happened on the Russian front, **bolero**, the cross-Channel operation, was vital. Admiral King, the U.S. navy's bluff and difficult commander-in-chief, displayed unconcealed hostility to **gymnast**, describing an invasion of French North-West Africa as a 'Ninth Front with all the increase in overheads and escort and transportation problems involved therein.'

When Brooke mentioned the idea for a 'sacrifice' operation on the Continent designed to relieve Nazi pressure on Russia, the Combined Chiefs of Staff disliked the idea. The Germans had twenty-five divisions in France,

while the Allies could transport at best six divisions across the Channel with the available landing-craft; this would hardly present a serious diversion to the Germans. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, whom Marshall had just appointed to command the U.S. Army's new European Theater of Operations, expressed qualified support for the project, comparing such a Channel coast bridgehead with Malta and Tobruk; but a drawback in Eisenhower's view was that most of the bombers in Britain were night bombers, which could not provide effective support for an amphibious operation.¹¹²

The day of Churchill's arrival in Washington, Sunday June 21, was another boiling hot day with the thermometer climbing into the nineties. The president installed him in the same air-conditioned suite in the White House as before. 'We felt,' wrote John Martin, 'as if we were coming home.'¹¹³ Soon after he arrived there, 'Pug' Ismay came up to the White House to see him, followed by Brooke. The word from boniface was that Rommel's 15th Panzer Division had claimed on the previous afternoon to be bearing down on Tobruk harbour on a broad front, and that the Luftwaffe had dropped three hundred tons of bombs on the beleaguered port during the day.¹¹⁴ Sir Charles Moran came in to administer a check-up at three p.m. The prime minister potted around reading telegrams, and visited Harry Hopkins across the corridor. Hopkins had just become engaged to Mrs Louise Macy – the Englishman was among the first to be told of this and meet the prospective bride, a very toothsome young lady indeed.¹¹⁵

Churchill and his generals went in to see the president, and continued their meeting after lunch.

Shortly after he strolled into Roosevelt's study a secretary brought in a telegram. The president glanced at it and handed it wordlessly to his guest.

'Tobruk has surrendered,' it read, 'with twenty-five thousand men taken prisoners.'



'No one,' wrote Hopkins to Clementine, 'knows better than you that Tobruk was a great shock to him. There was nothing that any of us could do or say that could temper the blow. He seemed to take the whole overpowering blow on his own shoulders.'¹¹⁶ It was the first time that Ismay ever saw his master wince. Staggered, even reeling with a sense of disgrace, Churchill sent him off to phone London.¹¹⁷ The general returned with a telegram from Admiral Sir Henry H. Harwood, commander-in-chief of the

Mediterranean Fleet at Alexandria: 'Tobruk has fallen,' this confirmed, 'and situation [has] deteriorated so much that there is a possibility of heavy air attack on Alexandria in near future, and in view of approaching full moon period I am sending all Eastern Fleet units south of the [Suez] Canal to await events.'¹¹⁸

'What can we do to help?' asked Roosevelt.

'Give us as many Sherman tanks as you can spare,' was the prime minister's reply, 'and ship them to the Middle East as quickly as possible.'

Roosevelt agreed to send to Egypt the three hundred tanks, the first to come off the production lines, that he had earmarked for his own First Armored Division. It was an act of unparalleled generosity but he was worried that the British might now develop a crippling inferiority complex – a sense that Hitler had the better generals and troops.¹¹⁹ General Marshall, who shortly arrived with General Brooke, undertook to throw in one hundred 105-millimetre self-propelled guns as well.¹²⁰

hopkins now joined these four, Churchill, Roosevelt, Brooke, and Marshall, for a conference on their next strategic operation.

Stimson found that he had been overlooked, but from what Marshall told him later they all went at each other hammer and tongs, with the prime minister delivering the expected verbal onslaught on *bolero* (due doubtless to the 'fairly stories' – as Stimson infelicitously termed them – that Mountbatten had carried back to England from the president). Roosevelt, according to Marshall at least, stood 'pretty firm.'¹²¹ Toward the end of this meeting, said Marshall, all present agreed to go along with *bolero* until the first of September; at that time Churchill would be given a resume of the situation from which he could see whether it would be the disaster that he feared. Churchill, reported Marshall, had then taken up *gymnast* knowing that this was Roosevelt's 'great secret baby' and that for political reasons the brunt of this operation against French North-West Africa would be borne by American rather than British troops; for the time being, Marshall hoped that he had stifled this baby at birth.¹²² (Ismay made a rather muddled note indicating that besides *bolero* and *gymnast* they were to look into operations in Norway and Spain as well).¹²³

The awful news from Tobruk spoilt everything for the prime minister. During the afternoon Eden telephoned from London and urged him to return home immediately to face the music. Peevish and truculent, the P.M. retorted that he was doing more important work here in Washing-

ton.¹²⁴ At five-thirty p.m. Hopkins brought Eisenhower and his assistant, Major-General Mark Clark, up to his suite to talk about round-up, the 1943 cross-Channel operation. Churchill could not fail to be impressed by Mark Clark, whom he dubbed 'the American eagle' because of his stature. Eisenhower left no immediate impression.¹²⁵ Eisenhower and Clark would depart later that month for London to set up their headquarters in a large former apartment building on Grosvenor-square. Their job would be to prepare England to accommodate two million American fighting men.

Churchill had two more conferences in Washington that evening, at nine-thirty with the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and two hours later with his own generals present.¹²⁶ The nine-thirty meeting discussed sinkings off the American east coast, joint naval operations in the Pacific, and Britain's request for the American carrier *Ranger* to help escort the next Malta convoy.¹²⁷ At the second evening session, at eleven-thirty p.m., the prime minister invited the Americans to consider sending troops to the Middle East, starting with the Second Armored Division under General George S. Patton, Jr., which had allegedly 'been specially trained in desert warfare' in California (although Colonel Jacob heard rumours that it had never left Fort Benning).¹²⁸

Roosevelt indicated assent to Churchill's demands, and suddenly suggested throwing a large American force into the Middle East to cover the whole front between Alexandria, in Egypt, and Teheran, in Iran. Marshall was stunned and left the room, refusing to discuss it.¹²⁹ Churchill, eager to clinch the deal, cabled to Auchinleck that this American armoured division would arrive during August. 'Special intelligence,' he said, 'has shown stresses which enemy has undergone.' he added, 'The main thing now is . . . not to accept the freak decisions produced by Rommel's handful of heavy armour.'¹³⁰ Roosevelt's staff were aghast. 'These English,' his secretary privately assessed, 'are too aggressive except on the battlefield. As assertive as the Jews, always asking for a little more and then still more after that.'¹³¹

general marshall indignantly wrote to Roosevelt protesting at sending any Americans to the Middle East, stating that his reasons were both logistical and strategic, 'further complicated,' as he admitted, 'by strong racial and religious prejudices.' He questioned the importance of the Middle East as a base for striking at Hitler. North Africa and even Italy were far from Germany, he pointed out, and there were 'extremely difficult natural intervening obstacles.' 'You are familiar with my view,' he wrote to the president,

that the decisive theater is Western Europe. That is the only place where the concerted effort of our own and the British forces can be brought to bear on the Germans. A large venture in the Middle East would make a decisive American contribution to the campaign in Western Europe out of the question. Therefore, I am opposed to such a project.¹³²

As Marshall had boasted, the president tended to heed his advice. That was the last that was heard of American troops going into the Middle East.

over the next few days – the last week in June – Britain’s humiliation in Tobruk filled the columns of American newspapers. Half of the East Coast newspapers condemned Britain’s poor leaders and bad generals. The New York *Daily Mirror* charitably pointed out that it was American tanks, like the General Grant, which had fought and failed there. ‘We nurtured the phoney optimism prevalent both in America and Britain,’ it said.

Further west, editors struck an uglier note. ‘Those responsible cannot be permitted to retain their commands, political or military, if the purpose of these operations is to win the war,’ wrote the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*.¹³³ Magazines like *U.S. News*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* emphasised the weakness of Britain’s leadership. The Saint Louis *Post-Dispatch* printed stories reporting the crowds of British officers dancing gaily in Alexandria as Rommel’s tanks swept toward the city. The class system, it was said, would have prevented any Rommel from rising above the rank of private in the British Army.

Two-fifths of the Americans now blamed Britain for getting them into the Great War. Gallup, polling the Americans, found that most considered that Stalin had the wholehearted support of his entire people, with Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek coming only second. ‘All the old animosities against the British have been revived,’ wrote one analyst: ‘She didn’t pay her war debts after the last war. She refuses to grant India the very freedom she claims to be fighting for. She is holding a vast army in England to protect the homeland while her outposts are lost to the enemy.’¹³⁴ The damnable thing about this, as Churchill himself would have admitted, was that most of it was true.

from behind the shadows of the disaster at Tobruk, just as they had lurked behind every other milestone of misfortune in Churchill’s premiership, the Zionists now sprang forward hoping to waylay him and profit from Britain’s embarrassment.

To their vexation, Churchill had just appointed Lord Moyne as his deputy minister of state in the Middle East. Before departing to Cairo, Moyne had drawn unflattering comparisons between the Jews with their territorial claims on Palestine, and the Nazis. 'If a comparison is to be made with the Nazis,' he stated in the House of Lords, 'it is surely those who wish to force an imported regime upon the Arab population who are guilty of the spirit of aggression and domination.' The Gentile Zionist Lord Wedgwood had proposed in that debate that the Arabs should be subjugated to a Jewish regime; Moyne pointed out that this was inconsistent with the Atlantic Charter. Adding insult to injury, he further suggested that the world's Jews might look elsewhere for a territory to settle. 'It is to canalise all the sympathy of the world for the martyrdom of the Jews,' he declared, 'that the Zionists reject all schemes to re-settle these victims elsewhere – in Germany, or Poland, or in sparsely populated regions such as Madagascar.'¹³⁵

Settling the Jews in Madagascar was Hitler's favoured 'final solution,' wistfully counselled by him in his Table Talk as late as July 1942. Deeply insulted, the London Zionists recalled that as Colonial Secretary the same Lord Moyne had prevented the Jews raising military units in Palestine. Now as their telegraphic agency stated he 'did not hesitate to align to Hitler's proposals for a settlement of Jews in Madagascar rather than in Palestine.'¹³⁶

If Churchill, now in Washington, had believed himself well out of this fresh Jewish squabble, he was wrong. A telegram arrived at the White House from that familiar supplicant, Dr Chaim Weizmann. The Zionist leader was now living in a New York hotel. The telegram was followed by an argumentative letter. Both messages cried out for the organisation of a Jewish Army to fight in the Middle East under British command. The Zionist accused Churchill of having secretly endorsed this plan in September 1940 but doing nothing since, although the very existence of the six hundred thousand Jews in Palestine was at stake should the German armies arrive. Fourteen thousand Jews had enrolled in the British armed forces, he said, scattered mostly amongst the ground crews of the air force. Weizmann's letter noisily claimed for Jews the right to fight as a Jewish army under their own flag, the Star of David. 'I say that the refusal to grant this right will never be understood,' he wrote.¹³⁷ No reply appears to have been sent.¹³⁸

Well aware of the deeper game which the Zionists were playing, the Colonial Office led the resistance to their agitation for a Jewish Army. Britain still bore the responsibility for the well-being of all the inhabitants of the mandated territories of Palestine, Jew and Arab alike. She could not

afford to upset two hundred million Muslims. This was why she had refused to regard Jews as having a distinct nationality, as claimed by the Zionist organisations. For the British Home Office there were ‘German and Austrian’ internees in Britain, but no Jews; very few had avoided internment.¹³⁹ Every public Jewish pronouncement – including their claims about extermination – was reviewed in the light of this agitation. Frank Roberts of the foreign office minuted that there was more than enough evidence of this ‘extreme Zionist campaign’ for recognition of a Jewish nationality: ‘It is part of the propaganda for a Jewish sovereign state in Palestine,’ he warned. The campaign for a Jewish Army was only one facet of this campaign.¹⁴⁰

At this time the clandestine telegrams passing between the Jewish Agency in London and its officials in New York and Palestine were using cypher channels provided by the S.O.E. At the end of October 1942, having just learned of this secret channel, the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office refused to continue transmitting the Zionists’ messages, pleading that the lines were over-burdened with the traffic of war. The real reason, John Martin would remind the prime minister a few months later, was that the activities of the Jewish Agency in Palestine in such matters as illicit arms made it intolerable to grant them special quasi-diplomatic facilities.¹⁴¹ Months of pleading produced no change of heart. Oliver Stanley and Anthony Eden remained implacable. In 1943 Churchill’s secretary had to inform Sir Louis Namier, a leading Polish-born Jew, that there could be no question of restoring these special facilities.¹⁴² The Jews’ war within a war continued.

president roosevelt’s policy toward the Zionists was similar to the British. In official America there was an even more powerful and institutionalised anti-Semitism than there was in wartime Britain. Even Dr Chaim Weizmann would find that most of the better hotels in upstate New York and in Vermont refused him accommodation. ‘These people are barbarians,’ he generalised.¹⁴³ Roosevelt took active steps to prevent Jews taking over more state or federal government posts than he felt they were entitled to. ‘You can’t get a disproportionate amount of any one religion,’ he had lectured Morgenthau. Outraged by the thirty percent of Jews that hogged the entering class at Harvard, Roosevelt advised the university to trim the number to a less blatant fifteen percent.¹⁴⁴ He would remark in 1943 that he found ‘understandable’ the Germans’ grudge against the Jews, that a fraction of the population swamped over fifty percent of the lucrative professions.¹⁴⁵

It serves no purpose to ignore the archival evidence of how strongly sentiment ran against the Jews.¹⁴⁶ Like Eden, Beaverbrook, and other ministers including even Amery (a Jew), Lord Halifax cluttered his secret diary with the familiar stereotypes. A Mrs Ryan had struck him as 'quite pleasant but . . . evidently a Jewess.' He had two visitors who were 'both very Semitic.' He rejoiced that Jews were not encouraged to hunt in Virginia: 'If a Jew were to come out hunting, it would be intimated to him that he had better go home!'¹⁴⁷ In January 1943 he would attend 'an awful luncheon' at the Jewish Hospital 'with all the Jews, who were terribly Jewish.' Recording an evening at the Jewish centre in Washington he lamented, 'It was a very complete collection of Semites, but they were all very kind.' Few people in official circles had much sympathy with these afflicted people.¹⁴⁸

Lunching with Morgenthau on July 3, 1942 Dr Weizmann would urge him to prevail on the president to telephone Churchill – who had by then returned to London – and insist that he recall Colonel Orde Wingate from India to command a force of forty thousand Jews from Palestine who would 'fight to the last ditch.' 'Every Jew in Palestine is a commando,' rasped Morgenthau down the phone, reporting this to Roosevelt's private secretary. 'And they would follow Wingate to the last man.'¹⁴⁹ When Dr Weizmann came, however, the president pounded the desk and told the Zionists to stop badgering him: this was no time to bring up the matter, he said, with the British already terrified of being 'stabbed in the back' by the Arabs.¹⁵⁰ 'Quite frankly,' explained his secretary, refusing an appointment for David Ben-Gurion, 'in the present situation in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Arabia, he feels that the less said by everybody of all creeds, the better.'¹⁵¹

On January 19, 1943 Weizmann told American officials that Churchill never concealed his view that, despite the May 1939 British White Paper, one day would see Palestine transformed into a Jewish state. When Lord Halifax reported this to London, Eden expressed anger that Weizmann was stirring up feelings against Britain. 'I know well your personal feeling on this,' he reproached Churchill, 'but there has, I think, been no discussion suggesting that the United States Government should be approached as regards the possibility of modifying it.'¹⁵² Churchill confirmed that Weizmann had no authority to speak in his name: 'At the same time I expressed these views to him when we met some time ago, and you have often heard them from me yourself.' He himself was irrevocably opposed to the White Paper, he agreed, which he regarded as 'a breach of solemn undertaking to which I was a party.'¹⁵³ He was in their debt, and he knew it.

22: *The Blame for Tobruk*

On the day after hearing of the fall of Tobruk, President Roosevelt called a meeting of Stimson, Knox, and Hopkins, with Winston Churchill at the White House to review their strategic options.

Henry Stimson felt sorry for the prime minister: 'He was evidently staggered by the blow of Tobruk,' he dictated, 'and showed it in his speech and manner, although he bore up bravely.' Offering no excuses, Churchill admitted that Rommel had out-generalled them and had the better weapons.

As they again raked over all the arguments for and against the cross-Channel operation **bolero** Stimson found himself under attack from both statesmen; but he remained hostile to **gymnast**, citing the shortage of shipping and aircraft-carriers, and the lack of air cover over Casablanca, the landing area. Churchill countered that he had not found one soldier who thought **bolero** possible in 1942. 'The Germans,' he said, 'have spent all their time in digging defences on the northern coast and it is well nigh impregnable.' Landing six divisions of troops here in 1942 would be just sending his troops in to 'another Dunkirk.' Stimson pointed out that **bolero**, renamed **round-up**, was currently planned for 1943, not 1942. He urged them to agree to prepare the operation for 1943, and to launch it earlier if conditions allowed. He left the morning meeting soured by it all, having found the president in a most irresponsible mood. 'He was talking of a most critical situation,' he noted, 'and in the presence of the head of another government, with the frivolity and lack of responsibility of a child.'¹

The most damnable thing about Rommel's triumph was that Churchill knew that the Americans were more than a little to blame. In September 1941 Italian agents had broken into the United States embassy in Rome and photographed the code **black**. Late in April 1942 when the question arose of keeping General Sir John Dill abreast of Middle East developments, the

war office had informed the war cabinet that the U.S. liaison officer in Cairo, a Colonel Bonner Fellers, cabled a daily summary of the Middle East situation report to General Marshall in Washington.² It now turned out that Rommel's codebreakers were reading this summary too. On December 17, 1941 the *Afrika Korps* war diary had referred explicitly to one such intercept. Rommel called them the 'little Fellers.' Even Adolf Hitler knew about it. On June 28, 1942 he would say to Hermann Göring over lunch, 'Let's hope that the U.S. legation in Cairo keeps us well posted about Britain's military planning, thanks to their poorly encoded telegrams.'³

churchill had initially not noticed this sinister aspect revealed by the British intercepts, despite the evident precision of Rommel's source. On May 30, a message sent the day before to the *Fliegerführer Afrika*, Lieutenant-General Hoffmann von Waldau, was shown to him, referring to a report by 'a particularly reliable source' dated April 16 on R.A.F. technical shortcomings in Egypt; Churchill's interest went more to the shortcomings than to the evidence of a security failure. He sent a mild query to the chief of air staff, asking: 'What action?'⁴ Sir Charles Portal also missed the point, stating to Churchill (through 'C') on June 2 that views of this sort – about maintenance problems with the newer American aircraft types – had been freely expressed by Britain's critics in the Middle East some time ago; dissatisfied, Churchill pressed him, 'Please call for a report on the position without of course referring to the stuff.'⁵

It was not long before it dawned on the codebreakers that Rommel was somehow getting detailed Intelligence – and that they would do well to investigate what the Nazi field marshal was now calling 'the good source.'

On June 2 'C' sent over to Churchill a new intercept. This read:

A good source reports: Situation at 30/5 at 1200 hours. The Free French have moved north from Bir Hakeim and maintain that they have control of the area as far as N. or 40 E.–W–Grid. The British have altogether 200 tanks (*Panz.Kampfwagen*) left with the 4th, 22nd and 2nd brigades, 160 tanks with other units.⁶

On June 10, Churchill read another revealing intercept: a German Intelligence summary described a visit by the 'good source' to units of the British Army's Thirteenth and Thirtieth Corps and to divisional headquarters in North Africa:

Battle morale of officers and men excellent, training inferior according to American ideas. Although the decision to attack at the beginning of June has been made, the performance of duties is taken very easily.

On May 11 the same source had noted that the probable date for the opening of a British offensive in Cyrenaica was June 1.⁷ By comparing these intercepts with other materials – probably Bletchley Park’s deciphering of American signals from the Middle East – Brigadier Menzies concluded that the American cyphers had been compromised. On June 10 he alerted Churchill; given the urgency he also warned President Roosevelt, using their private and secret link, and he inked this note to the prime minister. ‘I am satisfied that the American cyphers in Cairo are compromised. I am taking action. C.’ Churchill scrawled back, in red ink, ‘Say what action? & let me know what happens. WSC, 11.vi.’⁸

Now the investigation began in earnest. Portal wrote to Churchill that he had had the gist of the May 30 intercept shown to Auchinleck. The general had confirmed that on April 17 the American colonel Bonner Fellers had received from General Arnold a message containing words ‘practically identical’ to those quoted by Rommel from his ‘secret source.’

This [stated Sir Charles Portal] together with another message from Washington to Cairo quoted by the Germans, has satisfied the Cypher Security Board that the Germans are reading an American cypher in use between Washington and Egypt.

Churchill now challenged his secret service chief: ‘C. Report what steps you have taken about the cypher. WSC 13.vi.’⁹ It was clear that there had been a major American security breach, but they did nothing to plug it. On June 13 he found on top of his dispatch box another intercept of a message from Rommel, retailing more news from his ‘good source.’¹⁰ The Americans still refused to act. National pride seems to have come into it. When ‘C’ himself took it up with them, as he told Portal on June 12, the Americans cast ‘an element of doubt’ on whether the Germans really could read black – they preferred an alternative version, that ‘a traitor’ – by implication, English – was providing the Germans with the American messages.¹¹

In the desert, the battle was reaching its climax. The Americans still dickered. The leak remained unplugged. ‘C’ had to tell the prime minister on June 14 that the joint British–American investigation was still not com-

plete. Until the Americans informed him which of three cyphers had been used by Fellers, it was impossible to say whether the Germans had broken it, or there was a traitor.¹² Reading the latest report from 'C,' Churchill told him on the fifteenth to wire Washington again – using the special secret link – and say that unless the Americans provided a report on the leak within twenty-four hours, Churchill would complain to the President.¹³ On June 16, Washington finally conceded that the colonel's cypher had been compromised. 'I have asked,' Brigadier Menzies notified the P.M.,

that this should be changed immediately to a cypher providing the highest security, but without furnishing any reason for the change-over. Should the Germans obtain any information despatched on the new cypher, we shall then know for certain that there is a traitor in Cairo.¹⁴

For a while, even after Churchill flew to the United States, the leak continued. On June 21, he arrived back in Washington with Roosevelt. That was the day that Tobruk was overrun. On June 23 Rommel's Panzer Army reported, 'On June 19 "good source" describes the tactics of a German reinforced armoured Abteilung in an attack on enemy positions as follows. . . .' Churchill read this intercept on the twenty-seventh. Furious, he wrote on the document, 'C. Is this still going on? WSC, 27.vi.'¹⁵

Only now did the Americans recall Colonel Fellers to Washington. On June 29 – the day after Hitler's mocking remark to Hermann Göring – Brigadier Menzies advised the prime minister that the Americans had also changed their cypher: provided therefore that there was no traitor in Cairo with access to the American telegrams, 'no further leakage should occur as from 25th July, 1942.'¹⁶ On that same day, June 29, Hitler's Intelligence branch, Foreign Armies West, closed the chapter with a memo in its files:

We will not be able to count on these intercepts for a long time to come, which is unfortunate as they told us all we needed to know, immediately, about virtually every action.¹⁷

It was no coincidence that from this day onwards, Rommel's fortunes declined. Except for one occasion, when Mr Churchill's Oracle emitted an uncertain sound (in February 1943), the Desert Fox would never again win a victory. From now on he was fighting blind. On September 23, he would

return to Germany for a rest cure, exhausted. Benito Mussolini, whom he saw the next day, decided that the exhaustion was psychological.

Shown the *ultra* intercept reporting this diagnosis, Roosevelt mocked that the general must have taken quite a knock: 'Up to now he has been accustomed to a diet of victories based on intelligence from inside the British camp which, thank God, we have now terminated.'¹⁸

The damage done by the American security lapse was vast, and it occurred at a crucial pass in Britain's fortunes. The public files in London are reticent about it even now. It was not the last time that the question of American security-worthiness arose. On June 28 the R.A.F.'s deputy commander-in-chief Middle East signalled to Bletchley Park that the American Major-General Lewis Hyde Brereton had arrived from India, to command the U.S. army's Middle East Air Force. After much agonising, Cairo saw no option but to allow his indoctrination in *ultra*.¹⁹ Brigadier Menzies reluctantly approved, but he applied the most stringent conditions. Brereton was to be advised that only one American officer in the entire United States was aware of this secret source, General Marshall himself; and he was to be told that the American cypher in Cairo had recently been changed 'because of suspected leakage, and that position is not yet finally cleared up.'²⁰

throughout this time Churchill had languished in Washington. He could hardly declaim in public his rage about the Fellers scandal, and how American folly had nearly destroyed the British Eighth Army. He had to swallow the newspapers' mockery of his failure. Typical of the local headlines was one reading 'tobruk fall may bring change of government.' For a day he barely showed himself. With the skies lowering on his fortunes once again, he would not have been human if he did not feel the need to hide.²¹ Among those whom Winston phoned privately on the morning of June 23 were Doris Lady Castlerosse at her Park Avenue hotel in New York; he was godfather to her son, whom she had christened Winston. She wrote him an enthusiastic note about her homesickness and her desire to fly home by Clipper after she had settled all her debts. 'Could you ring me up again?' she asked. At four p.m. the Duke of Windsor was smuggled in to see him, but no record of their talk has survived.²²

That afternoon he met with Roosevelt and the generals again to examine how to reinforce the Middle East; there was an unreal flavour to the decisions that were taken.²³

general marshall had invited the prime minister to see Mark Clark's training camp in South Carolina, where infantry divisions were being 'mass produced' along typically American lines. Churchill welcomed the chance to escape from Washington. Their train left Arlington at 10:30 p.m., steamed south by the Southern Railroad and arrived at Fort Jackson, with its arid, open, parade ground shimmering in the summer heat, at 10:45 next morning. Churchill watched as six hundred parachutists made a descent. The Americans let him hold a walkie-talkie radio for the first time too. The afternoon was taken up with a live-ammunition infantry exercise. 'To put these troops against German troops would be murder,' General Ismay murmured to him, unimpressed. More politely, Churchill told Mark Clark only that it took two years training to make a real soldier.²⁴

The English party must have concealed their disdain well. Henry Stimson wrote afterwards: 'Churchill and his comrades were astounded that such progress could have been made in so short a time.' The P.M. congratulated Stimson afterwards: 'I have had considerable experience of such inspections and I can say that I have never been more impressed than I was with the bearing of the men whom I saw. The undemonstrative, therefore grim, determination which was everywhere manifest not only in the seasoned troops but in the newly drafted, bodes ill for our enemies.'²⁵ They flew back to Washington that evening in Stimson's plane, after a hot and wearying day. Churchill took a nap in Stimson's bunk. 'His doctor watched over him the whole day like a hen over a chicken,' the secretary of war wrote, 'but the little man came along in good shape.'²⁶

In the American capital city a minor problem awaited: King Peter of Yugoslavia and his foreign minister Dr Nincic had come to the White House to tackle Roosevelt and Churchill about the plans for post-war Europe. Churchill had other fish to fry, and he rasped a short-tempered warning at the two Yugoslavs: 'You are beginning to tire your friends.' Stung by his attitude, the two Yugoslavs told the Americans that they hoped that their armies, rather than the British, would be staying in Europe after the war. British prestige was not high after Tobruk. Dr Nincic narrated a litany of grievances against them, revolving around intrigues within the Middle East command in Cairo. British generals were already at odds with the foreign office over the future of Yugoslavia; the latter was inexplicably preventing the King and his government from communicating with General Dragolub Mihailovic, the monarchist leader, and his Cetnik guerrillas in Yugoslavia; they were forwarding some messages to him, but withholding others.²⁷

Probably on instructions from Eden, Churchill asked Lord Halifax to stage a family dinner to enable him to avoid attending the state dinner given by King Peter that evening, June 24, at the White House. This shuffling-aside of the Yugoslav problem was to become symbolic of his Balkan policies.*

the ambassador's dinner was diversion enough. Hopkins brought along his likeable fiancée Mrs Macy; the Harrimans and Tommy Thompson made up the rest of the dinner party. 'After dinner,' Halifax tells us, 'there was an entertaining scene arising out of Winston's desire to take a dressing gown back for Clemmy. Various dressing gowns had been brought down from New York, which Mrs Macy and Mrs Harriman showed off as mannequins. I wouldn't have missed it for the world!'²⁸

The curvaceous Mrs Macy was the kind of woman on whom gossip columnists thrive. After Bernard Baruch threw a dinner for her at The Carlton costing forty dollars a plate, the *journalle* went into a frenzy, publishing details of the lavish unrationed menu and the guest list. Upon her marriage to Hopkins, they alleged that Lord Beaverbrook had given her a million-dollar set of emeralds, and added that Hopkins's importance as lend-lease administrator had not been lost on London; and there were wholly untrue allegations of gifts from their Majesties and even Churchill.²⁹ In fact Beaverbrook had given her only an antique brooch (so there was no question of Customs duty, which the newspapers had also raised).³⁰



General Auchinleck sent a cable to Churchill regretting the loss of Tobruk, and looking forward to the arrival of the U.S. Second Armoured Division.³¹ In his reply the prime minister admitted that there was now a snag about that American division ('We find that the shipping of this division within the next month presents very grave difficulties') so he was rushing to Egypt three hundred Sherman (M4) tanks and one hundred self-propelled 105 millimetre howitzers instead. Marshall had made this attractive offer to the British chiefs of staff that very morning; they would arrive in Suez in the fourth week of August.³² Churchill also assured Auchinleck: 'Do not have the slightest anxiety about course of affairs at home. Whatever views I may have about how the battle was fought or whether it should have been fought a good deal earlier, you have my entire confidence, and I share your respon-

* This issue is examined in more detail in vol. iii.

sibilities to the full.' He drew attention however to the 700,000 men on the ration strength of Auchinleck's command, and told the general that he expected them to be made to 'fight and die for victory.'

'You are in the same kind of situation as we should be if England were invaded,' dictated the prime minister from his air-conditioned suite in Washington, 'and the same intense, drastic spirit should reign.'³³

telephoning at length with London on the night after the ambassador's dinner he learned that Parliament had decided to debate a resolution criticising him. Backbenchers from all parties, led by the Conservative Sir John Wardlaw-Milne were tabling a motion of no confidence in the central direction of the war. Unlike earlier crises, the criticism this time was of Winston himself, and no longer of his colleagues. Too old a hand to be worried by this, he decided to smoke out his opponents by demanding a full-scale vote of confidence. 'Parliamentary government can not be carried on by mere debate,' he lectured the Canadian prime minister, who came down on the overnight train from Ottawa, 'but by counting heads.' It was necessary, he said, to fix responsibility.

It was the day of his departure for London, June 25, and he had summoned a conference of Dominions' representatives at eleven-thirty. To Mackenzie King he looked 'remarkably fresh, almost like a cherub' although he had been up until one or two that morning.³⁴ (He had also just spent an hour with a Mr Walton from his New York publisher's G. P. Putnam's). The empire's forces were over-extended, he told these representatives – they were in the position of a fat man with a small blanket. In 1940, he boasted, Britain had 'stood alone' after the fall of France (which was an unfortunate solecism to offer to the very Dominions which had without hesitation come to the mother country's aid in 1939). 'Now we have allies,' he said, 'and one ally which is greater than Russia, greater even than the United States.' He paused for effect, then said: 'It is air power.' He spoke then of the ruin visited already on Essen and Cologne, and the demoralisation caused to an enemy forced to evacuate entire cities and rebuild roads and factories. He admitted that while their bomber pilots would continue to attack only military targets, 'sometimes the airmen might go a little wide.'

He assured them that they could hold on to Egypt; he would prefer to lose the Middle East rather than Australia – this remark was probably for the benefit of Australia's Sir Owen Nixon, who faced him at the far end of the oblong table. Scattering his glowing embers of oratory around to illu-

minate the war's dark horizons, he predicted that if the Russians could hold out to the autumn the Germans would inevitably lose this war. In the Far East too the tide was turning: that April, nothing had stood between India and the Japanese fleet; 'the air force,' he said, had then detected the fleet – to Mackenzie King's disappointment he failed to mention that it was a Canadian squadron – and heavy damage had been inflicted, so he claimed, on the Japanese in the resulting naval battle. As for India itself, he remarked, while Sir Girja S. Bajpai, India's agent-general in Washington, nodded vigorously, it was a continent with many different races and religions.

By such devices, and wrapping them in such platitudes, he tiptoed across the stepping-stones to the question of a Second Front, displaying unconcealed antipathy to the very notion. 'By God,' he swore to general approval, 'nothing will ever induce me to have an attack made upon Europe without sufficient strength and unless I am positively certain that we can win.' To do otherwise would be to court another disaster like Dunkirk, he said. A year later he had an even grimmer cautionary example to offer, Dieppe.

before going downstairs to a formal meeting of the Pacific War Council in the White House's cabinet room – Churchill would descend the stairs clutching Mackenzie King's arm – they all went outside to be photographed with Roosevelt on the veranda. 'One does not know how to look these days,' muttered Churchill, an old hand at this. 'If we smile, the public will think we're taking things too lightly. If we look serious, they will think there is a crisis.' The Pacific War Council meeting itself, set down for the half-hour before luncheon, was almost a farce. Roosevelt sat Churchill on one side and the Canadian on the other, then talked briefly about how the Japanese had now lost five of their twelve aircraft carriers. After cocktails and lunch, Churchill and Roosevelt bade them all farewell.³⁵

Churchill now invited the congressional leaders to meet him 'in secret,' a rather stage-managed affair calculated to draw on their prestige. President Roosevelt himself kept silent while the prime minister, purposefully sipping only water, talked for twenty-five minutes; he looked as fat as a cherub (again that simile), in the words of one participant, and confident too – in fact 'radiating confidence like a pot-bellied stove flushing off heat.' 'The Right Hon. Winston Churchill,' this American politician wrote cynically that day, 'backed by his great and good friend, President Roosevelt, today gave Congressional leaders a preview of the war to come, an expla-

nation of the war developments of the past few weeks, and what he said seemed to make them feel better.'

Churchill said nonchalantly that he was not at all worried by the hullabaloo in London. It had been the same after the fall of Singapore. He predicted that he would get a thundering parliamentary vote of confidence, with 450 Members for him and not more than twenty against. He refused to commit himself on the Second Front, but promised that R.A.F. Bomber Command would soon begin to 'pulverise' Germany. It was his usual powerful performance. One Senator remarked to newsmen outside that they were encouraged by what they had heard. 'The picture, which in some spots might look bad,' said Speaker Sam Rayburn, 'in general doesn't look bad.'³⁶

how bad the situation looked depended on how far down Pennsylvania-avenue one travelled. Further down that majestic boulevard the Washington *News* billboards read 'new british line cracks – axis fifty-five miles inside egypt,' while the *Star* placards shrilled 'axis tanks advance sixty miles in egypt.'

With this frightful cacophony ringing about his ears Churchill left Washington late that day, Thursday June 25, for Baltimore, where the Boeing flying boat was waiting. He was returning to a dubious welcome in England – and he had yet to win the hearts of most Americans, as many letters intercepted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation showed. 'Tell that Churchill,' wrote a man from Ohio, 'to go home where he belongs. . . All he wants is our money.' 'Every time you appear on our shores,' wrote an anonymous Mother of Three from California, in a letter addressed to the P.M., 'it means something very terrible for us. Why not stay at home and fight your own battles instead of always pulling us into them to save your rotten necks? You are taking foul advantage of our blithering idiot of a president.'³⁷ British Intelligence intercepted equally rude letters: 'I knew when I saw your fat-headed prime minister was over here that there was another disaster in the offing,' wrote a New York man to a friend in Yeovil, Somerset. 'His war record,' a writer in Warren, Ohio, dismally informed a friend in Stornoway, Scotland, 'is studded with one failure after another.'³⁸

'We left Washington for Baltimore at 8:30 p.m.,' recorded Ian Jacob that day, 'in the usual atmosphere of secret service men, powerful automobiles, doubt & uncertainty about the luggage.' At Baltimore there was an armed guard on the gangway and an air of agitation – an agent on guard duty had just been arrested after being overheard muttering that he intended to 'do

him in' and slapping his pistol as he said it. The flying-boat *Bristol* was airborne before midnight. Churchill spent several hours in the co-pilot's seat, surveying the shimmering moonlit quilt of clouds beneath, until they crossed the Irish coast; after a two-hour stopover at Botwood for a meal of fresh lobsters, they reached Stranraer on the Clyde at five a.m. on June 27.



Eden and other ministers came to Euston station. They found their prime minister looking well. 'Cabinet [at] 5:30,' recorded the foreign secretary, 'when he told us of his trip which seems to have been successful within its somewhat limited sphere.'³⁹

In the prime minister's pocket there now nestled an autographed dollar bill. Having flown the Atlantic, he had been admitted to an exclusive club called the 'Short-Snorters' by the pilots who had flown him. The club had only one rule: members had to carry about their person at all times this selfsame one-dollar bill signed by the Short Snorters who had admitted them and any others who might be added. If another Short Snorter met him and he could not produce that bill when challenged, he had to pay a further dollar to each Short-Snorter present. Churchill would challenge his transatlantic friends on several occasions to show their Short-Snorters. Nobody knew where the quaint custom had begun.^{40*}

in iceland that Saturday, the ships of convoy PQ. 17, the war's worst disaster convoy, were readying to go to sea. Heedless of the experts' warnings that they faced disaster, Churchill had refused to brook further delay. Stalin needed those cargoes. At four p.m., 'like so many dirty ducks,' as Douglas Fairbanks Jr., one of the American naval officers, wrote, the thirty-five freighters slipped in single file out of Hvalfjord, waddling out past the torpedo nets while every man watching them offered up a silent prayer.

The prime minister spent the quietest of weekends, inviting only the commanders-in-chief of Bomber and Fighter Commands to dine with him at No. 10 that Sunday, June 28. The political situation was grim. In a by-election at Maldon in Essex on the previous Thursday Tom Driberg, a Beaverbrook Newspapers journalist, had stood as an independent and de-

* We include this detail for little other purpose than to put out of their misery fellow-historians who must also have puzzled over the phrase 'Short Snorter' upon finding it countless times in the private records of World War Two.

feated Churchill's candidate. The military situation which had greeted the prime minister's eyes in the map room was unquestionably darker than when he had left for Washington. On the eastern front Hitler's Field-Marshal Erich von Manstein had won Sebastopol, crowning his campaign in the Crimea. In Libya, Rommel had captured thirty-five thousand of the empire's finest troops in Tobruk and been rewarded by Hitler with a battlefield promotion to field-marshal. There were rumours that the fortress's South African commander was a 'Fifth Columnist' – a traitor.⁴¹ From South Africa came a suggestion from General Smuts that Churchill send his entire bomber force – every single available aircraft – to Egypt, to destroy Rommel and pound his army and supply ports to pieces – failing which Smuts feared that they would face the same fiasco as at Singapore.⁴²

Britain's military reputation had hit bottom. On June 24 Auchinleck had had to draw attention to Palestine, Syria, and Iran, warning of the possibility of German infiltration and the fact that these countries were still anything but sure of Britain's ultimate victory. He had taken over command of the Eighth Army himself on the twenty-fifth, and had halted its retreat at El Alamein, a desert milestone – little more – some forty miles to the west of Alexandria, but he left no doubt that if this line were lost as well he was ready to withdraw to the Nile Delta and to Cairo. In Cairo the air was thick with the burning ash of confidential files being destroyed. The British ambassador Sir Miles Lampson shortly telegraphed to ask whether he should stay if the Germans arrived in the city. Churchill did not reply. 'He refuses to contemplate the worst,' concluded Eden's secretary Oliver Harvey.⁴³

when eden saw Churchill on Monday June 29 he found him in inexplicably high spirits. The challenge of this crisis was pumping the adrenaline.⁴⁴

He did not attend the cabinet later that day; he had gone down to Chequers – his colleagues assumed that he was resting, perhaps even brooding on what to say on Thursday in the big debate. Churchill sifted through a sheaf of ultras which 'C' had saved for him while he was away: these revealed that Hitler had visited a new headquarters in Poltava, in the Ukraine, whither three fighter aces had been ordered to report to him on June 24. Buried in the heap of intercepts too was Rommel's triumphant report on his capture of Tobruk – with the *Afrika Korps*, and half the 90th Light division on the right and Twenty Corps on the left, supported by massed bombers and dive bombers. 'After only two hours of violent fighting,' boasted Rommel, 'the German divisions succeeded in forcing a wide salient into

the strongly consolidated double-line of enemy pill-boxes.' By afternoon the two strongest forts, Solaro and Pilastrino, had been taken. 'Such was the impression caused by the penetration of the strongly defended south-eastern front of the Fortress that elements of the Tobruk garrison on the west capitulated when the attack was resumed on the morning of June 21.' Five British generals including the commander of the 2nd South African Division had been brought in. Seventy tanks were put out of action, thirty more were surrendered undamaged, and 'an incalculable amount' of guns and heavy weapons captured. 'Large stores of rations and ammunition, in part also fuel dumps, fell into our hands.'

These raw intercepts made sickening reading for Churchill. In an order of the day on June 21, Rommel had announced, 'We shall not rest until we have annihilated the last remaining portions of the British Eighth Army.' Yes, Colonel Fellers and the Americans had a lot to answer for. Rommel claimed to have destroyed more than 1,000 tanks and taken 45,000 prisoners since the battle began. The intercepts also revealed Kesselring reporting to Berlin on his conference with Rommel that evening, June 21, on what to do next – basically they would mount a feint attack on the main British front, while the Panzer and light divisions outflanked the British by night. The remaining intercepts showed that Rommel depended as much as ever on fuel and ammunition supplies reaching him across the Mediterranean, for which purpose even Italian submarines would be pressed into service.⁴⁵

He made his statement to the Commons at midday on June 30, then had his Tuesday lunch with the King. He was reaching certain decisions about how to extricate himself, and the empire, from the current mess.⁴⁶



There had been planning for a full-scale amphibious raid on the French coastal town of Dieppe on and off ever since early April. As commander-in-chief of the army's South-Eastern Command, Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Montgomery had initially taken charge, but tactical disputes had emerged. He had dismissed Mountbatten's plan to take the town by flank assaults as amateurish, given the shortness of the operation (only fifteen hours from start to finish) and he had called for a bold frontal assault on Dieppe itself; Mountbatten had accepted, provided that a heavy bombing raid would precede it. The chiefs of staff had approved this on May 13. The plan had however passed through several hands and undergone many changes

since then, until it envisaged both a frontal assault over the town's beaches and attacks on the cliffs on either side which were to precede the main landing by half an hour. On June 5, with Mountbatten away in Washington and Montgomery taking the chair, Major-General J. H. Roberts had cancelled the air-bombardment phase, arguing that the ruins would block the streets to his tanks – his 2nd Canadian Division would be providing most of the assault troops.⁴⁷ Heavy warships could not provide artillery support, as that would bring them within range of the Luftwaffe.

By mid-June Mountbatten's original plan had been therefore changed to an assault by raw Canadian troops, unsupported by any kind of bombardment. Driven by ambition, he had not however disowned the enterprise. The truth was that his master Churchill was ensnared in his own imperatives – trapped by the need to be seen to do something, somewhere; and Mountbatten was just the man to do it. All sorts of justifications were both then and later advanced for executing such a raid. One, which surfaced only after the Dieppe disaster, was the need to have an experience, however ghastly, to learn from. Another was to force the German air force into combat – Fighter Command's Spitfires had long been sweeping the Channel coast five hundred at a time in this vain hope.

On June 1, with *bolero* virtually abandoned and the likelihood that the Russian front might soon collapse, Mountbatten had persuaded the chiefs of staff to authorise 'at least one more big raid.' They had put him in charge of planning such a 'desperate venture' under the code name *imperator*. Nobody on that occasion had mentioned Dieppe. Brooke had talked of seizing Boulogne, Abbeville, or Amiens for long enough to bring about a large scale air battle; he thought in terms of maintaining two divisions on the enemy shore for a week or more, but Churchill had discouraged that idea.⁴⁸ 'Certainly it would not help Russia,' he had advised the chiefs of staff, 'if we launched such an enterprise, no doubt with world publicity, and came out a few days later with heavy losses.' It would not help the Soviet Union if Britain came 'a nasty cropper' on her own. On Churchill's recommendation therefore on June 8 *imperator* was abandoned.⁴⁹

In its place Churchill had begun talking of an entirely different operation, code-named *rutter* – what he called a 'butcher and bolt' raid against the Channel coast executed by six or seven thousand troops and designed to last only twenty-four hours. They were to do as much damage as possible before being taken off – those who survived – by sea. Hearing of this 'butcher and bolt' scheme, Cecil King noted scornfully: 'It is an old man's ideal to

send out a lot of young men on a forlorn hope to do a lot of damage (of no military importance, because it cannot be followed up.)'⁵⁰

there is a sense of parallelism, for want of a better word, in the history of these events. While the chiefs of staff and prime minister had been debating what to do and where, all the while Lord Mountbatten's wilful planning for the raid on Dieppe had proceeded, with fits and starts, and seemingly independent of these higher decisions. After a discouraging rehearsal at Bridport on June 13 the Dieppe raid had however twice been postponed.⁵¹ Churchill's surprise absence from London (in Washington) had followed; and now these turbulent parliamentary events following the loss of Tobruk. The Dieppe raid had been shelved temporarily, to await the first favourable day after June 24. A spectacular raid, the prime minister may have calculated, would enhance his standing in the eyes of Parliament and people.

On the last day of June he had the C.I.G.S. summoned urgently to No. 10 from the studio where the general was about to sit for a painting, to review with Lord Mountbatten 'the large raid which is to be carried out next Saturday morning [July 4] on Dieppe' (that being the currently planned date). Brooke trooped into the Cabinet Room at No. 10 at three p.m. with Generals Ismay and Hollis. Mountbatten brought his chief naval planner Captain Jock Hughes-Hallett. As the discussion progressed Churchill asked the latter whether he could guarantee the raid's success, but Brooke instructed him not to reply. 'If he, or anyone else, could guarantee success,' Mountbatten would recall Brooke as saying, 'there would indeed be no object in doing the operation.' Churchill snorted that this was not a time at which he wished to be learning from adversity. In that case, Brooke supposedly replied, the P.M. must abandon the idea of launching any later full-scale invasion of France, as no responsible general would go along with it unless a Dieppe-size operation had gone first. According once again to Mountbatten, Churchill agreed to let the operation go ahead.⁵²

having provided for this distraction, namely the Dieppe raid, his mind turned to other things, though not to PQ.17, now three days out on its ill-fated passage to north Russia; the disaster convoy had slipped from his view. Leading General Brooke out into the garden behind No. 10 he revealed that he proposed to fly out to Cairo on Sunday July the fifth; he wanted the C.I.G.S. to go with him. Brooke was appalled; to descend on Auchinleck in

the middle of a battle, he suggested, was a bit unfair, with the fate of the Nile Delta and Cairo itself in the balance.⁵³

Churchill waved aside his objections, and sent Brooke away. He worked on his speech for the Commons until late that night.⁵⁴ The next morning, July 1, he wired to Auchinleck an anxious inquiry whether he was receiving in good time the priceless *ultras* revealing Rommel's intention, namely 'after feinting at your southern flank' to attack the centre of the British position and thereafter 'turn northwards to cut off [the] El Alamein strong point.' The Germans were inquiring whether the British had carried out any defensive flooding operations, he added: 'Should be glad to have your opinion at leisure about how Rommel's tanks would get on among canals and irrigation of [the Nile] Delta.' He concluded, 'Whole idea here is that Egypt should be defended just as drastically as if it were Kent or Sussex, without regard to any other consideration than destruction of the enemy.'

Over in the House, the first day's debate had simultaneously continued in his absence until the early hours of July 2. It degenerated into something of a farce when Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, sponsor of the confidence motion, suggested that the Duke of Gloucester be made commander-in-chief of the army. In the forenoon, Churchill stomped theatrically into the Commons chamber, as one Member wrote, 'glowering, weighed down with the burden of the war.' He sat at his accustomed place with 'a look of sullen foreboding,' and 'his face from time to time flickering into a smile.'

He rose at three-thirty p.m. and spoke for ninety minutes, his hands thrust cheekily into his trouser pockets although, as one Member wrote, his long statement amounted to little more than the fact that Britain had more men, tanks, and guns than Rommel and he could not understand why they had been so badly beaten.⁵⁵ One observer summed up his message as resentment at his critics and damaging admissions about the failure in Libya, while offering 'no promise of better men or different methods' in the future.⁵⁶ It was however, in Eden's view, one of his most effective speeches, beautifully adjusted to the temper of the House.⁵⁷ He finished knowing that he had carried the House with him. Almost exactly as he had had predicted in Washington, the voting was 475 to twenty-five in his favour, with a score of malcontents deliberately abstaining. He left the chamber to an ovation. His last gesture was that of the triumphant schoolboy: at the side of the Speaker's chair, he faced the Members again and flashed to them a V-sign expressive of his defiance and triumph, while his face beamed at them in sheer goodwill. 'That,' reflected one MP, 'is how a man governs men.'⁵⁸

‘The P.M. is in great form,’ wrote General Ismay soon after. ‘I cannot imagine how he manages to sustain his tremendous responsibilities and work 14–16 hours a day without wilting. A number of disgruntled, discarded and ill-informed people,’ he added, ‘made the most vicious attack on him while we were away. He dealt with them faithfully as soon as he got back.’⁵⁹ The Spanish ambassador was heard reporting to Madrid that as expected the debate had ended in a triumph, but that the speeches had reflected ‘uneasiness’ in face of the military disasters. The Duke of Alba told Madrid that, despite Tobruk, Churchill considered the loss of Egypt unlikely.⁶⁰

the prime minister dined with his brother John and with Eden, who found him ‘in the greatest heart.’ He kept saying that their soldiers had not done as well as they should have; he lamented the paucity of talent in the Army and its ‘trade union’ outlook. To Eden’s dismay, he then began talking of undertaking another journey – of flying out to Cairo – saying that neither Clement Attlee nor Ernest Bevin had disagreed, and he had already secured the King’s permission. Like Brooke before him, Eden was distraught at the prospected journey. Churchill at first refused to listen to reason. He teased Eden by talking of the political testament which he had left with the King’s secretary before leaving for Washington, hinting: ‘It is in your favour.’

They argued for two hours about the Cairo trip, with Eden suggesting that a visit from Winston now, as much as it might inspire the troops, would hamper General Auchinleck. ‘You mean,’ Churchill said, finally conceding defeat, ‘like a great bluebottle buzzing over a large cowpat?’⁶¹

He had merely postponed the idea of the trip, although he gathered that the immediate crisis was past. From an *ultra* shown to him late on July 2, it seemed that Auchinleck was regaining the upper hand. Rommel had signalled in code to Berlin that he was going to make ‘one more attempt the next day.’ Even so, the chiefs of staff ordered Admiral Harwood to invite Admiral René Godfroy to remove the French fleet from Alexandria through the Suez Canal just in case – Harwood was to allow the French just enough fuel for this movement. If Godfroy refused to comply, this would be classed as ‘a hostile act’ and the British would feel entitled to destroy the ships.⁶²

So for Cairo it was now touch and go. An aura of impending disaster hung in the city’s air. After the cabinet on the third, and before going down to Chequers for the weekend, Churchill considered it prudent to examine with General Brooke a worst-case scenario, of the demolitions necessary if Rommel did indeed drive on to Cairo.⁶³

there followed an episode which shows what Brooke had to put up with. That midday Amery had phoned and asked Winston to see his son urgently. Julian Amery had just arrived back by Liberator bomber from Egypt, and was keen to report on the mood in Cairo. Churchill sent word back to Amery that the boy ought to put any suggestions he had in writing. At five p.m. however Amery got hold of him on the phone, and talked him round.

Young Captain Amery arrived in the Cabinet Room as Churchill was in conference with General Brooke. While the Chief of the Imperial General Staff blackened with rage, Amery, 'a most objectionable young pup' in his words, spoke his piece, saying that the Middle East needed better morale, and that this could be achieved only by the P.M. flying out there at once; the troops needed to see and hear him — they had hardly seen Auchinleck at all. They lacked confidence in any officer ranking higher than major, said Amery; their generals like Sir Frank Messervy and Sir Willoughby Norrie were frittering their tanks away; in a regular Charge of the Light Brigade, Norrie had lost one hundred tanks in fifteen minutes to Rommel's guns on June 12. The army was not defeated; it was defeatist.⁶⁴

Brooke swooned with fury. ('The cheek of the little brute,' he wrote that evening, 'was almost more than I could bear.') He questioned Amery closely on the basis for his deductions, and gathered that this was not far from the wine-bar of Shephard's Hotel in Cairo, Randolph Churchill's old stamping-ground. As the bumptious young officer was shown out, Churchill remarked: 'That is a wonderful message that young man has brought back for me from the Middle East.' 'Yes,' Brooke snapped, 'if you are prepared to listen to a bar-lounger.' Churchill raised his eyebrows in query, and the C.I.G.S. repeated: 'A *bar-lounger*.'⁶⁵ For three-quarters of an hour after that Brooke argued with him, pleading against risking the long and hazardous flight through the Mediterranean.⁶⁶ Unconvinced, Churchill saw his doctor the next day to inquire about the medical feasibility of his making the long flight in a Liberator to Cairo.⁶⁷

over the next few days the alarums from Cairo subsided. While we must now revert to other theatres of the war, notably that in the Arctic waters east of Jan Mayen Island, it will suffice to say that the much-maligned General Auchinleck had already fought the decisive battle against Rommel and effectively thwarted his last push. Obedient to the military dynamics and the remorseless dictate of desert warfare, Field-Marshal Rommel's offensive swing had now reached its maximum extent.

23: *The Knight's Move*

The allies had lost 830,000 tons of shipping during June 1942. With the disaster about to befall PQ.17 in the Arctic, the July figure would be far worse – far worse.

The decision to go ahead with this convoy had been political, to appease Stalin; the ships carried seven hundred million dollars of aircraft, tanks, trucks, and gun carriers. On the last day of June the convoy had rendezvoused off Iceland with its thin Royal Navy escort of anti-submarine destroyers, anti-aircraft ships, corvettes, and minesweepers.

As they all moved off toward Murmansk and Archangel, no fewer than three rescue ships trailed along aft of this smoke-streaked cavalcade, ready to pick up the fractured remnants of man and ship that the coming battles might produce. That a great naval action was in prospect now seemed beyond hazard. On June 18 the British naval attaché in Stockholm had cabled to London a German naval signal intercepted by Swedish Intelligence on the landline from Berlin to northern Norway, from which it was clear that Hitler had ordered an all-out attack, code-named *the knight's move*, on this next Arctic convoy. The Germans would throw every available bomber, U-boat, and destroyer as well as *Tirpitz*, *Hipper* and the pocket battleships *Admiral Scheer* and *Lützow* at PQ.17 as soon as it passed Jan Mayen Island.¹ There was little that Tovey's fleet could do to protect the convoy. There could be no replay of the famous 1916 fleet action at Jutland.

Several days passed, with each side shadowing the other – the Germans using floatplanes, direction-finding, and radio-monitoring, the British their skilled codebreakers, agents, and air reconnaissance. Late on July 2 'C' brought over to No. 10 a summary of the latest Intelligence. The enemy had now sighted thirty-eight merchant vessels and was planning to attack them at four p.m. The prime minister was clearly worried. The Intelligence chief

stayed with him until after two a.m. on July 3, while the phone relayed fresh intercepts from S.I.S. headquarters. There had been further sightings: the enemy lost contact with the convoy.² Then the picture turned ugly: an *ultra* intercept decoded later that day, backed up as usual by aerial photographs, revealed that at 2:20 p.m. the berths of *Tirpitz* and *Hipper* at Trondheim were empty. Another intercept revealed that *Scheer* and *Lützow* had already dropped anchor at Altenfjord in the far north, ready for the attack. Thus the greater part of Hitler's battle fleet could be striking out at the convoy, east of Bear Island, in the early hours after midnight of July 4–5.³ If the Nazi battleships arrived on the scene, the freighters would have to break convoy formation and scatter. That would be their only salvation.

The prime minister had retired to Chequers for the weekend. In his view, PQ.17 was doing well. It lost one freighter that Saturday morning, July 4, to a lone air attacker. But as Admiral Sir Dudley Pound watched the convoy come within range of the enemy air bases, he knew that its worst hours were coming: 'I am all against putting out battleships and carriers within range of enemy shore-based aircraft,' he would write a few weeks later, 'and have resisted it in the case of the PQ convoys. . .'.⁴ So when the admiralty transmitted a signal to the cruiser force's Rear-Admiral Sir Louis 'Turtle' Hamilton at 12:30 p.m., authorising his force to proceed east of 25° East, it had certainly been drafted by Churchill himself since this would expose the four cruisers to air attack as well as to destruction by *Tirpitz*.

The commander-in-chief, Admiral Tovey, overrode this authorisation, signalling a categorical order directly to Hamilton to leave the area once the convoy was east of 25° East unless the admiralty could assure him there was no risk whatsoever of his running into *Tirpitz*. Churchill fumed at his commander-in-chief's disobedient spirit, but there was nothing he could do (though he did later protest yet again about Tovey to the First Sea Lord).⁵ During the evening the convoy came under determined bombing attack and lost two more ships, but stayed in formation. The Luftwaffe's attack order, already decoded, was telexed to London soon after.⁶

some time that Saturday afternoon, in other words on July 4, more intercepts reached Churchill. The latest naval section Intelligence summary reported indications, decoded since Thursday midnight, July 2–3, that Hitler's biggest warships, under his Admiral Commanding Battleships at Trondheim and Admiral Commanding Cruisers at Narvik, intended to put to sea.⁷ Early that July 4 evening, regular as clockwork, the codebreakers

broke the cypher settings for the twenty-four hours of enemy naval signals transmitted prior to midday. These now confirmed that *Tirpitz* and *Hipper* had already moved to Altenfjord; one signal, made by the German fleet commander in *Tirpitz* at 7:40 a.m. to his cruiser commander, estimated his time of arrival at nine a.m. and ordered all destroyers and torpedo boats there to 'complete with fuel at once.' It was simple to calculate that those warships could attack the convoy around two a.m. on Sunday the fifth.

Soon after seven p.m. the admiralty – or was it again Churchill? – signalled to the cruiser squadron: 'Further information may be available shortly.'

The members of Admiral Pound's staff have described how he convened an emergency conference in the admiralty boardroom which remained in session through most of this Saturday, July 4.⁸ Years later the prime minister would deny all knowledge of the decisions reached by the First Sea Lord; the admiral was approaching the last year of his life, with an as yet undiagnosed tumour gnawing at his brain – he often seemed inexplicably drowsy. Halifax, when foreign secretary, remembered him slumbering right through one of Winston's 1940 cabinets; the admiral had told him, 'I really don't know what I should do without these cabinet meetings to sleep in.'⁹ By the summer of 1942 those slumbers were becoming longer and more profound, and on the day that PQ.17 sailed A. V. Alexander had recommended the appointment of a 'Deputy First Sea Lord' to share some of the burden.¹⁰ Churchill would not hear of it; he liked things as they were – he wanted the real conduct of naval operations left to his final dictate.

At about eighty-thirty p.m. Admiral Pound went down into the Operational Intelligence Centre, in the bowels of The Citadel, a deep bunker behind the admiralty, and asked whether *Tirpitz* had actually sailed. Nobody could say for certain that she had not. One thing seemed certain: if she had sailed, the Anglo-American cruiser force covering the convoy was in mortal danger and must be recalled immediately. Probably Pound telephoned Churchill at Chequers; returning to the admiralty boardroom, he polled the others on their views, then leaned back, screwed his eyes tightly shut, and meditated for so long that one admiral whispered, 'Look, Father's fallen asleep.' At 9:11 p.m. he reached for a message pad and drafted in neat green-ink handwriting a 'most immediate' signal to the cruiser force's commander, Hamilton. It read: 'Cruiser force to withdraw to westward at high speed.'

Thus, if *Tirpitz* was about to attack, Pound would at least have saved the cruisers. What about the freighters, however? Waddling slowly eastwards at eight knots in convoy formation they would be sitting ducks for the enemy

battleship's big guns. Twelve minutes after the first signal, the admiralty therefore sent a second, addressed this time directly to the convoy's close escort commander and to Tovey too: 'immediate. Owing to threat from surface ships convoy is to disperse and proceed to Russian ports.' This signal was almost immediately followed by a third: 'most immediate. . . . Convoy is to scatter.' The latter was merely a correction of the former – 'scatter' had a more precise tactical meaning than 'disperse' – but its very terseness sounded a knell of imminent doom to those in peril on the sea.

Throughout this, Pound was on the phone to Chequers. Despite his other preoccupations the prime minister was certainly focused on the Arctic that evening: 'Our battle news continues better,' Eden recorded in his diary the next morning, referring to the Egyptian desert, 'but both Russian front & our convoy operations sound grim. Winston rang me up late last night about latter, much displeased with Tovey's attitude.'¹¹ Admiral Tovey however did not share Churchill's enthusiasm for risking his ships in a fleet action in the Arctic, knowing that it would inevitably be fought on the Germans' terms.

in all its sub-zero horror the Arctic tragedy now began to unfold. The admiralty alarm proved within a few hours to have been unfounded. *Tirpitz* had not put to sea. Hamstrung by orders from Hitler himself, the German battle fleet was still straining impatiently at anchor in northern Norway.

An hour or two later, the British codebreakers had proof of this. They read an 'all-clear' signal sent by the German naval Commander-in-Chief Arctic at 11:30 a.m. that Saturday morning to his U-boats, informing them that there was 'none of our own naval forces in the operational area.' At 3:22 a.m. on Sunday Churchill's admiralty transmitted a new, laconic message to the now-withdrawing cruiser force, to the effect that 'reconnaissance' had showed that the enemy had moved his warships up from Trondheim and Narvik, and they were 'believed' to be in the Altenfjord area.

The bell could not be unrung however; the admiralty's earlier signals could not be unmade; the convoy could not be unscattered. Within minutes of receiving the 'scatter' signal on the previous evening, the ill-armed freighters had broken their tight formation, and had been told by the local escort commander to make their own lonely ways across the Arctic to North Russia. Unescorted, proceeding one by one, they would fall an easy prey to the U-boats and bombing planes which roamed the icy Arctic waters. Twenty-three, many of them American, would plunge to the Arctic ocean floor during the next week.

the shipping crisis was now assuming nightmarish proportions. Quite rightly, on July 6 Churchill told the cabinet that he refused to reveal Britain's true shipping losses, even if the House insisted on a secret debate.¹²



The American public were already disillusioned with Britain and her declining military prestige. Less than twenty percent of Americans wanted closer collaboration with Britain after the war. 'England's power,' they pointed out, 'will be gone.' While forty-five percent of Americans admired Churchill himself, they regarded the British as aristocratic, snobbish, selfish, arrogant and cold; the British felt their American cousins were conceited and cocksure, and associated them with gangsters, graft, and corruption.¹³

The casualties among the American ships were the more unfortunate as an historic impasse had been reached between London and Washington on future strategy. The British preferred an invasion of North-West Africa, while the Americans were eager for **sledgehammer** – landing eight to ten divisions near Brest or Cherbourg only two months from now as a bridgehead for a later invasion; Churchill hated the whole idea. It depended on the proper conditions of tide, mood, wind, and visibility all coinciding in the right week of September. There would be a total lack of air cover. The British would have nothing to do with **sledgehammer**, as 'Pug' Ismay later put it; the Americans would have nothing to do with anything else.¹⁴

On Sunday July 5, even as disaster was enveloping Convoy PQ.17 in the Barents Sea, the prime minister warned the chiefs of staff that they could no longer postpone a decision. 'No responsible British General, Admiral, or Air Marshal,' he reminded them, 'is prepared to recommend **sledgehammer** as a desirable or even as a practicable operation in 1942.' The United States had said nothing about providing the additional landing craft that would be necessary, nor would the three American divisions arrive in the U.K. in time to be trained. 'On the other hand,' Churchill sagely reminded the chiefs of staff, 'there is a price to be paid.' If the lodgement succeeded, they would have to nourish the bridgehead and divert bombing effort from Germany to defend it. This piecemeal squandering of their efforts would 'rule out' or delay any major operation such as **round-up** the projected full-scale invasion of France in 1943. Churchill argued that they must break this bad news squarely to Roosevelt and the Russians; they must urge **gymnast**, the invasion of North-West Africa, upon the president.¹⁵

In a message to Roosevelt three days later he repeated the key sentence of this advice: 'No responsible British general, admiral or air marshal is prepared to recommend **sledgehammer** as a practicable operation in 1942.'

the outcome was the most serious dispute yet between Washington and London. Marshall and Stimson were dismayed to see the British welching on the agreement reached only two weeks earlier in Washington, to launch a cross-Channel assault during 1942. General Marshall advised Roosevelt on July 10, that the Americans should turn their backs on the British and take up the war with Japan instead. The U.S. navy (Admiral King) agreed, as did secretly Sir John Dill and the British military mission in Washington.¹⁶ Unsure of this advice, Roosevelt asked them to draft a memorandum on what such a switch to the Pacific theatre would entail.¹⁷ Stimson hoped that this threat would jolt the British to their senses and force them to abandon what he called their 'fatuous defeatist position.' Dill shortly assured Marshall that he had sent a telegram warning Churchill of the danger that the Americans would turn their backs on Europe.¹⁸ At a council of war early on July 13 the American military leaders endorsed this threat.¹⁹

Unimpressed by all this, Churchill again lectured Roosevelt by telegram that nobody in London regarded **sledgehammer** as possible. He therefore proposed once more that the Americans rapidly execute **gymnast**, the descent on French North-West Africa, and that Britain 'in concert with the Russians' try to clear the Germans out of northern Norway in order to open up the only viable supply route to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile they should continue preparations for **round-up**, the invasion of France in 1943. 'All this seems to me as clear as noon day,' he admonished the president.²⁰

President Roosevelt was alarmed by all this, seeing it as a symptom of a deeper disarray produced by Britain's reverses. He had 'a thumping row' with Marshall. The general remained unshakeable in his new conviction that they should resolve the Pacific war first. Roosevelt, to his credit, stood firm. While he professed to be as sound as ever on **bolero**, his name for the cross-Channel operation, he chided Stimson that Marshall's memorandum about switching everything to the Pacific instead was a bit like 'taking up your dishes and going away,' as he put it. Maybe, responded Stimson, but it was the only way to get through the thick hides of the British.

Roosevelt however saw another option – he would send General Marshall and Harry Hopkins over to London with Admiral King, right away, to thrash the whole thing out with Churchill face to face.²¹

Before turning them loose on the British, he instructed them to re-examine the prospects of *sledgehammer*. The document used the words: 'Grave risks are justified,' and urged that the operation be executed before September 15 'on the basis of our remaining in France if that is in any way practicable.' The document did however identify one advantage in *gymnast* (the North Africa landing) – namely that, since it would be a purely American enterprise, no doubt 'resistance on the part of the French would not be severe.' (This was to prove a cruel illusion). On a darker note, the emissaries were also instructed to discuss in London what was to be done if Soviet resistance collapsed that summer.²²

In the final version of these instructions, which he issued the next day, Roosevelt added that, if *sledgehammer* was indeed 'finally and definitely out of the picture,' they were authorised to find a site where a landing was possible, particularly in North Africa and the Middle East. In contrast to Marshall, Roosevelt remained opposed to concentrating American effort against Japan since this would not defeat Germany; on the contrary, to concentrate on Japan would enhance Germany's chances of securing domination of Europe and Africa. 'Defeat of Germany,' he reasoned, 'means the defeat of Japan, probably without firing a shot or losing a life.' He expected them to reach agreement with the British within a week of arriving in England.²³

stimson had drawn Roosevelt's attention to the book *Soldiers and Statesmen*, which appeared to show that Churchill had prevaricated in just the same way before the Dardanelles campaign twenty-five years before.* General Marshall also drew Field-Marshal Dill's attention to the unfortunate similarities, and Dill learned that Admiral King had read the book too. He wired a lengthy warning to Churchill that the Americans strongly opposed the North African adventure, fearing that it would become such a major commitment as to destroy any possibility of crossing the Channel in 1943. 'There is no doubt,' summarised Dill, scarcely bothering to mince his language, 'that Marshall is true to his first love [defeating Germany first] but he is convinced that there has been no real drive behind the European project.' Meetings were held, discussions took place, and time slipped by. They would never again find a Germany so preoccupied with her campaign in the east as now. The two countries could go on 'pummeling each other by

* Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen 1914–1918* (London, 1926) vol. i, chapter iii.

air,' but the decisive chance would soon have gone. Dill had a hunch that certain 'highly placed Americans' believed that they could hope for no better than a stalemate with Germany. Therefore, suggested Dill, Churchill had to convince Marshall that he remained wedded to a cross-Channel invasion. Bridling at the unconcealed criticisms, Churchill responded only that he was glad that 'our friends' were coming over. 'Soldiers and statesmen here,' he mocked, with greater asperity than accuracy, 'are in complete agreement.'²⁴

As Marshall, King, and Hopkins set out for London at midday on July 16, the secretary of war dictated an angry note for his files, recording that if only their president had been firmer with Prime Minister Churchill in June, all of this could have been avoided.²⁵



Churchill still hankered after an Allied invasion of northern Norway, 'unroll[ing] Hitler's map of Europe from the top.'²⁶ On June 13, 1942 he had suggested to his chiefs of staff that if the cross-Channel assault did not go ahead that year, they should send twenty-five thousand fighting men to Norway instead.²⁷ He ordered them to give the job to General Andrew McNaughton, Canadian army commander in England. The chiefs of staff hated the idea. It seemed to Winston that they opposed every plan he put; he was heard to growl on July 7, 'We'd better put an advertisement in the papers – asking for ideas!'²⁸

Bad weather continued to delay the amphibious raid on Dieppe, scheduled for July 4, on which he was banking to restore morale and reputation; shortly, two of the vessels earmarked for the operation were disabled by bombing, and on the seventh the decision was taken to scrub this operation altogether. There was silent relief in several quarters. On the ninth, the chiefs of staff invited in McNaughton to brief him about the Norway project; at Attlee's suggestion, Brooke took the Canadian general aside and privately explained that they wanted him to use his fertile brain to work out all the reasons why it was *not* a feasible operation of war.²⁹

from all around Churchill was conscious of a nervous twittering beginning against him. Visiting the palace on July 7 he described his opponents contemptuously as 'the weaker brethren.'³⁰ Among people unaware of his secret 'testament' letter to the King, there was much idle speculation as to

who might succeed Churchill. Some thought that Sir John Anderson would see them through; most, including Lloyd George, put their money on Eden.³¹ On the ninth, the Churchills dined Lord Halifax, back in London on furlough from Washington, at the Savoy with the Edens, Ambassador Winant, and Bracken; the prime minister was perceptibly tired, and small wonder. 'He is greatly irritated with the few people who make trouble in the House of Commons,' remarked Halifax in one diary; and in the other, more secret, record he described that Winston struck him as being edgy, disposed to exaggerate his minor difficulties with the press and Commons, complaining that he lacked sufficient power, and generally, in Halifax's view, displaying 'symptoms of nervous fatigue.' After they climbed into their respective cars at one a.m., Halifax reflected sympathetically, 'I can't conceive how anybody can live that life and retain reasonable sanity.'³²

General Eisenhower, who was to command the European Theatre for Roosevelt, had now reached London. He found morale at its worst ever.³³ Together with Mark Clark he paid a courtesy visit on No. 10. After a while Churchill decided to compose a telegram to Roosevelt, and sent for Miss Layton – the stenographer had gone up to Mrs Hill's bedroom for a nap. She appeared with her hair awry and her dress dishevelled; the Americans had yet to learn about the odd hours that the P.M. inflicted on his staff.

One after another his plans for a military come-back had gone adrift – the bombing campaign, Dieppe, the Auchinleck offensive, the Arctic convoys. The criticism of Sir Arthur Harris and Bomber Command was mounting. In a brilliant letter of self-defence, Harris drew sarcastic comparisons between the daily victories of his young airmen and the ponderous achievements of the navy at sea and the army in Libya. After immobilising the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* for months at Brest his squadrons had disabled them, perhaps permanently, with the mines they had laid during the warships' withdrawal through the Channel in February. It took 7,000 flying hours, said Harris, to destroy just one enemy U-boat at sea – and the same number of hours for his aircrews to destroy one-third of Cologne, Germany's third biggest city. By destroying the Renault factory in Paris, he claimed, his bombers had permanently deprived Hitler of armoured fighting vehicles for ten to eleven motorised divisions – 'More than our Libyan operations have destroyed in the whole course of the war,' he said and, he reminded the prime minister, 'Almost as much as we lost at Dunkirk.' In short, naval air power might peck at the periphery of this war: 'Butcher' Harris, with Bomber Command, was striking at its heart. 'What shout of victory would

arise,' he argued, 'if a Commando wrecked the entire Renault factory in a night with a loss of seven men! What credible assumptions of an early end to the war would follow upon the destruction of one-third of Cologne in an hour and a half by some swift-moving mechanised force which, with but 30 casualties, withdrew and was ready to repeat the operation 24 hours later!'³⁴

The army had no such spectacular feats to brag about. Despite General Auchinleck's solid military success in halting Rommel's advance into Egypt, Churchill was merciless in his criticism. The C.I.G.S. stolidly defended the general and reminded Winston in cabinet on the eighth that one rash move at this juncture could still lose them Egypt. Churchill was however in 'one of his unpleasant moods.' The P.M. raked over all the old embers of his discontent, asking yet again where precisely *were* the 750,000 men that Auchinleck had in the Middle East command. After this cabinet ended, Churchill went over to him and apologised. 'I am sorry, Brookie, if I had to be unpleasant about Auchinleck and the Middle East.' For Churchill to apologise was rare if not unique.³⁵ On July 10 however he reverted to the same theme. 'Pray explain, C.I.G.S.,' he intoned, 'how it is that in the Middle East 750,000 men always turn up for their pay and rations, but when it comes to fighting only one hundred thousand turn up!' It was, Brooke found, not easy to answer sarcasm like that in the middle of a cabinet meeting. He attributed the prime minister's bad mood to the Convoy PQ. 17 disaster.³⁶

the troops for the Dieppe operation had dispersed, and Montgomery was one of several who felt that no attempt should be made to remount it. Admiral Mountbatten later claimed that he talked it over with Churchill and the chiefs of staff; and that all agreed that executing some such raid was an essential prerequisite to crossing the Channel in 1943. 'But time simply did not permit of finding a new target,' maintained Mountbatten later.

The chiefs of staff minutes do not record such a discussion, but they do show him demanding in July to be vested with 'executive responsibility' for launching the next large raid. Pound and Portal were hostile to the idea and the C.I.G.S., equally unhappy, adopted instead a sorry compromise making Mountbatten responsible for 'marshalling and launching' such raids, while denying him the authority to sign the operation orders.³⁷ If any lesson would be learned from the fiasco that lay ahead, it was the importance of appointing one overall task force commander from start to finish.

To revert to Lord Mountbatten's own narrative on the operation against Dieppe, which unfortunately lacks both precision and dates, his staff held a

post-mortem on the situation. It was here that, to use his own words, Mountbatten made the 'unusual and I suggest rather bold' proposal to mount it again; that would surely be the last thing that the Germans, who had probably learned of all the preparations, rehearsals, and cancellations, would expect.³⁸ He told this version of events many times, and it lost nothing in the re-telling. 'Then we had a brainwave,' he would recount on another occasion, 'so unusual and daring that I decided that nothing should be put on paper. This was to remount the same operation and carry it out in mid-August.' He claimed to have put it first to the chiefs of staff and then to the P.M. 'All were startled and at first argued against it on security grounds.' There is, as he said, no trace of this in the official papers.

Mountbatten would claim to have assured Churchill and his chiefs of staff that the Nazis 'would never for a moment think we should be so idiotic as to remount the operation on the same target.'³⁹ He certainly did not inform the *defence committee*, nor did Admiral Pound inform his minister, the First Lord of the admiralty. A furious General Nye, Vice C.I.G.S., learned of all this only after the troops had gone into the assault.⁴⁰



On July 8, 1942, the prime minister received from Brigadier Menzies, the head of the secret service, a folder containing Bletchley Park's latest naval headlines. He put it aside for a day, unread; it made sickening reading. At 11:50 a.m. on the sixth, the German naval command had been heard signalling in cypher that 'as twenty-seven out of the total of thirty-eight ships [of Convoy PQ.17] appear to have been sunk, and the rest are widely dispersed, there is no worth-while operation target.' The naval codebreakers commented that the claim was in advance of the actual losses at the time – around twenty, of which eight were to U-boats; but as of early this day, July 8, six more had been reported sunk.⁴¹

Presiding over the first *defence committee* he had held since late April, on July 10, Churchill now had to accept that few if any of PQ.17's freighters would survive. Of the thirty-six ships sixteen, he admitted, were already lost. The *Tirpitz* battle group had put to sea for a few hours on the fifth, then turned back, its intervention no longer needed. The radio waves were filled with cries for help from the shipwrecked merchant seamen, cast onto rafts and lifeboats in the middle of the Arctic. Immersion in these icy waters brought death within minutes. Churchill now faced the problem of when

to run the next Arctic convoy for Stalin, and how to fit it in with the forthcoming operation to supply British Malta. That they had no choice but to run another Arctic convoy, he was convinced. 'We could not,' he insisted to his colleagues, 'afford to abandon the running of the next Russian convoy when the great battle was raging on the Russian front.'⁴²

The fate of PQ.17 caused many of his ministers to search their souls. Later that month A. V. Alexander used blunt language to Lord Halifax about their prime minister, and 'the futility of people trying to alter his methods.'⁴³ Casting around for somebody to blame, Churchill sent a note over to Admiral Pound objecting to one signal which the commander-in-chief of the Home Fleet had made – evidently that on July 4, already referred to* – and pointed out that it 'might well read in the sense that Admiral Tovey is not prepared to obey the orders he might receive from the admiralty.'⁴⁴ Pound made plain that he would not be a party to any hunt for scapegoats.

The cabinet now learned that Britain had lost 364,000 tons of shipping in the last week, and the chiefs of staff recommended that they call off PQ.18 – at ten p.m. that day, July 13, Admiral Pound told the *defence committee* that they could not guarantee that one single ship would get through. Churchill was distraught, and still felt that they should go ahead. 'The prime minister,' the *defence committee* minutes read, 'said that he had taken the view that if fifty percent of the ships of a convoy got through it would be justifiable to sail the next.' Eden too said that it was 'very worrying' to have to 'give negatives' to the Russians at this critical time – firstly about the Second Front, then on sending them the six R.A.F. squadrons, and now on sailing PQ.18.

These purely political considerations failed to convince their colleagues. They were unanimous that PQ.18 should not sail. Stricken by a sense of guilt towards those who had already died cruel and horrible deaths during PQ.17, the prime minister asked for 'a liberal distribution of George Medals' among those who had survived – merchant seamen were eligible only for civilian medals.⁴⁵ He harped once again on the need to seize northern Norway and to 'provide assistance for Russia in some other form.' For this, he informed his colleagues with unwarranted optimism, General McNaughton was preparing a plan. Meanwhile, he suggested they offer twenty R.A.F. squadrons to Stalin for his southern front.⁴⁶

* Page 484.

The Soviet government was furious at the way PQ.17 had gone. Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky came to dinner with Churchill and Pound late on July 14. Pound again opposed running any more Arctic convoys. Churchill lamely suggested that since so many American ships were involved the final decision would rest with Washington.⁴⁷ Unwilling to let down the hard-pressed Russians, Churchill examined every means of fighting the next convoy through. He suggested to Pound and A. V. Alexander on the fifteenth that if all went well with the current Malta supply operation they could bring together a force comprising *Indomitable*, *Victorious*, *Argus*, and *Eagle* with at least five auxiliary aircraft-carriers, every available 'Dido' and at least twenty-five destroyers and then fight the two sixteen-inch battle-ships right through to North Russia under the carriers' air umbrella and destroyer screen. Instead of hugging the northern ice pack this force should cruise to the southward seeking the clearest weather and 'fight it out with the enemy.' With ancient visions of the Battle of Jutland still glowing in his head, Churchill suggested: 'If we can move our armada in convoy under an umbrella of at least 100 fighter aircraft we ought to be able to fight our way through and out again, and if a Fleet action results, so much the better.'⁴⁸

the telegram from Sir John Dill in Washington announcing that General Marshall, Harry Hopkins, and Admiral King were to descend on London at once – in two days' time – arrived in Whitehall early on July 15. It inspired mixed feelings. Churchill already harboured a powerful dislike of Dill, having been poisoned against him by Beaverbrook.⁴⁹ It was, as General Brooke brooded in his diary, likely to be a queer party, as Hopkins broadly agreed with Churchill on invading French North-West Africa, Marshall wanted to invade Europe, and Admiral King was determined to concentrate on the Pacific war from now on.⁵⁰ The British chiefs of staff expected great difficulties with 'our American friends,' since only the invasion of North-West Africa made any sense to the British at this time. Talking with Halifax, the chief of air staff predicted that *gymnast* would open up the Mediterranean and hasten the defeat of Italy. The nigger in the woodpile was General Franco: what would he do? Portal wondered whether they might bribe Spain with a slice of French Morocco – rather as Hitler had tried in both 1940 and 1941.⁵¹

Seeing Lord Halifax for ten minutes before luncheon, Churchill made plain that the threatening sounds from Washington about abandoning their strategy of 'Germany-First' did not frighten him. 'Just because the Americans can't have a massacre in France this year,' he snorted, 'they want to

sulk and bathe in the Pacific!’⁵² This was much the same as Roosevelt’s view, of course.

Neither disasters in the field nor the mounting criticism in the media and in Parliament had shaken the prime minister’s vanity and conceit. Wearing his trade-mark blue rompers he received about forty British newspaper editors at five-thirty p.m. that day, July 15, to talk about the shipping crisis. It was the first time he had briefed them since September 1941. From his breezy manner it was plain that he still regarded his hold on No. 10 as unassailable; with the United States in the war he seemed to regard victory as inevitable.⁵³ Addressing the House of Commons in secret session the next day he airily explained that it was because of America’s poor showing that they were having to hold this debate in secret; he regretted that the Americans were making it so easy for the U-boats in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, as it gave the enemy submariners priceless training for use against the case-hardened British convoys. Speaking of Stalin and the eastern front, he called the outlook ‘ominous.’ Of Egypt, he claimed that Britain was ‘holding her own.’⁵⁴

this was true, but only just. Now dug in at El Alamein, Auchinleck had still to throw his long-awaited punch at Rommel’s line. Churchill badly wanted to send yet another telegram to the general, but he was anxious not to be seen to hustle him. On the seventeenth Eden found him going over the file of recent Cairo telegrams with his war office experts, the directors of Military Operations and Military Intelligence. The former, Major-General John Kennedy, said that Auchinleck now stood a good chance of getting in a damaging blow at Rommel, and he added that even General Brooke was worried at its postponement.⁵⁵ Churchill studied the latest decoded messages. Later that day ‘C’ radioed to the Middle East headquarters: ‘Panzer Army is suffering from acute shortage of fuel and artillery ammunition resulting from supply difficulties.’ Rommel was now ‘absolutely dependent’ on three supply vessels, *Menes*, *Trapani*, and *Apuania* which were expected to reach Tobruk in two days’ time carrying nearly three thousand tons of ammunition.⁵⁶ First-rate Intelligence alone was not enough, however. General Auchinleck’s offensive, begun five days later, soon ground to a halt.



Benefiting from the solid backing of Churchill, the British codebreakers were advancing on the biggest challenge yet, the code messages generated by a new generation of automatic German code-machines.

The latest of these was the *Geheimschreiber* ('secret writer'). By early 1942 it had become clear that the enemy had begun supplementing the lower level *enigma* traffic with this new system, which carried messages of far higher grade. Using radio circuits between Berlin, the Führer's headquarters, and all commands higher than armies, the messages were passed using high-speed teleprinters with special automatic encyphering devices made either by Lorenz (the *Schlüsselzusatz*, or sz-40, later the sz-42) or by Siemens (the *Geheimschreiber* T-52); the latter device was codenamed *sägefisch* by the Germans, and *sturgeon* by Bletchley Park – or fish for short.⁵⁷ Bletchley Park devoted enormous effort to intercepting fish traffic and solving the codebreaking problems. Britain was already skilled in intercepting such high-speed transmissions. The Metropolitan Police had been working on them since 1926 and they had joined forces with the foreign office codebreakers in 1930. In March 1942, apart from the Japanese military-attaché cypher (for which it was suspected that the Americans possessed the basic book), and the Japanese and Spanish naval cyphers, the main problem being tackled at Bletchley Park's research section was fish.⁵⁸

Since the fish traffic was passed by radio, not landline, it could be intercepted and this, for the British, was its attraction. In May 1942 the foreign office requisitioned a converted farmhouse with thirty acres at Knockholt for a special listening post for fish; by July they had added 160 acres of surrounding land for the necessary 'rhombic' aerial arrays. The government also built a workshop to manufacture the special wide-band receivers, as fish was transmitted over a range of frequencies. Soon the output, in the form of punched paper tape, was pouring into Bletchley Park. The codebreakers concentrated their attack on the German army version, known as *tunny*, ignoring the Luftwaffe one; they devoted much ingenuity to solving the cypher settings, still using old-fashioned hand methods (the famous *COLOSSUS* computer designed by British engineers for the purpose will not be met until the end of 1943, in the next volume of this biography).

By late 1942 the first dramatic products were reaching Churchill's desk. As each new fish link was set up by the German High Command (OKW), its keys were methodically broken. On November 1, Berlin's fish link with the German Army Group 'E' in Salonica began operations; Bletchley Park broke into it almost at once, and read its messages until it closed down in

the following summer. In December 1942, the OKW instituted a fish link between Army Group 'C' in Rome and Rommel's Panzer Army, now fighting rearguard actions in Tunisia. From January 1943 to the end of May, the codebreakers read this fish link too, almost without a break.

As Hitler expanded his network of fish radio-teleprinters, so Churchill's strategic insight grew. By July 1943 the German army would have six fish links, by the autumn ten, and from early 1944 no fewer than twenty-six. The Germans never suspected that Churchill was listening in to these highly sensitive transmissions.

we must now return however to London in July 1942. President Roosevelt's three emissaries reached London early on Saturday the eighteenth. Their clear intention was to get Churchill to put sledgehammer – the occupation of Cherbourg by six divisions in 1942 – above everything else, and to execute it as soon as possible.

Without waiting for these visitors to arrive, Churchill had gone down to Chequers for the weekend. He had told Roosevelt that he proposed to convey 'our friends' to the usual 'weekend-resort' where the British chiefs of staff would await them. The American chiefs of staff panicked at the prospect of exposure alone to Churchill's oratory, and Roosevelt speedily informed the prime minister that his men would stay at first in London, 'and not go to [the] resort for a couple of days.'⁵⁹ Thus Marshall, Hopkins, and King went into a huddle with their own American army, navy, and air force representatives at Grosvenor-square.⁶⁰ 'keuran, depew, and robert [Eisenhower, Spaatz, and Clark] anxious go ahead with sledgehammer,' reported Harry Hopkins to Washington, using pre-arranged code-names. 'draiss [Admiral Stark] lukewarm. plog [Marshall] had his men working all night on details.'⁶¹ On Sunday July 19 Hopkins came down to Chequers, but without the other two, to spend the night. He found Winston annoyed that the Americans 'had not all immediately flocked to Chequers' – the prime minister had 'taken this very much amiss,' as Hopkins told Halifax weeks later. Churchill ventilated his annoyance on Hopkins, to which, according to his own account, the latter replied in the same coin.⁶² Hopkins reported this to the president after the weekend was over. 'I spent Sunday and last night with moses smith. He [was] pretty restless and quite unhappy at not seeing us. . . moses smith threw the British Constitution at me yesterday with some vehemence, but it did no serious damage. As you know it is an unwritten document. MOSES is his old self and full of battle.'⁶³

It was not until Monday July 20 that the rest of the American party called on Churchill at No. 10 Downing-street. At noon-thirty they held there a preliminary meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Even though it was strictly speaking a meeting of the British and American chiefs of staff, Churchill insisted on being present – he was apprehensive, in Brooke's view, that Marshall might secure a tactical advantage and settle matters of importance behind his back.⁶⁴ Churchill turned his glare on **sledgehammer**. The British, he said with exaggerated courtesy, had failed to devise a satisfactory plan, but 'we would give the most earnest and sympathetic attention to any American plan.' He and his staff were ardently in favour of the larger operation, **round-up**, but they had some reservations about where to target it: did it have to be the western seaboard of France? He felt on the other hand that French North-West Africa (the **gymnast** operation) was worth examining from every possible angle. After that he dilated upon his plan to offer twenty R.A.F. squadrons to help Stalin to defend the Caucasus, and he wandered off onto **anakim**, the projected recapture of Burma, and the Pacific theatre. 'This was,' he volunteered, 'almost exclusively an American sphere, but we should naturally desire to make a contribution.'⁶⁵

The Americans did not like the widening drift of his remarks at all. After lunch, Marshall and King both urged **sledgehammer** upon the British chiefs of staff. The British were unanimously against it, saying that the operation would be too small to help the Russians, and that Hitler's land and air power would wipe out the resulting bridgehead during the coming winter.⁶⁶

Before dining with the prime minister at No. 10, Hopkins sent a report to the president on these unsatisfactory talks. Churchill had also invited Harriman and his friend Lord Beaverbrook to the dinner. Hopkins was much embarrassed and found the conversation somewhat strained, as he told Halifax months later, 'because Winston said nothing, and Harry didn't know what Max knew, and therefore said nothing too.'⁶⁷

it was immediately evident to the Americans that there was little prospect of getting the 'whole-hearted, enthusiastic support' from Churchill that was essential for **sledgehammer**.⁶⁸

Nonetheless they doggedly submitted a memorandum demanding the execution of such an operation by October 15 at the latest.⁶⁹ They also wanted an American general designated as taskforce commander now. By general consent the choice fell on General Marshall himself. (Roosevelt subsequently vetoed this, as that would probably bring the national hero

General Douglas MacArthur to Washington as Marshall's successor, which the president wanted to avoid).⁷⁰

It seems probable that there was a secret communication between Churchill and Roosevelt at this time, because on July 22 the Americans in London suddenly received explicit instructions from the president to work out some other offensive operation for American ground forces in 1942 after all. He suggested an attack on Algiers and Morocco, or failing that the old *gymnast* operation, but confined initially to American troops only; or even northern Norway, or Egypt, or Iran to the Caucasus.⁷¹

It is perhaps a coincidence that on this date, July 22, 1942 the Nazis unscrambled a transatlantic radio telephone conversation between Churchill in London and a 'Butcher' in New York who had phoned him. The transcript – which was at once rushed by S.S. teleprinter to Hitler – did not make much sense. Churchill may well have been using pre-arranged code phrases, like Hopkins to Roosevelt.

churchill: Give my regards to Berdy please.

butcher: Yes I will. Did you see the picture in *London Review* ?

churchill: Yes.

butcher: I heard she's much better and looks ten years younger.

churchill: I find her looking very good too. In her feelings [*Gefühlen*] too. So now come back quickly and I wish you a lot of luck.

butcher: Thank-you. Same to you.⁷²

It is not improbable that Churchill's M.I.5 was also wiretapping the private conversations of the American generals. He certainly knew that he held the winning hand in this contest of will-powers. At their closing discussion at three p.m. on July 22 he solidly backed his chiefs of staff against the Americans, and refused to endorse *sledgehammer* or indeed to consider any invasion operation directed against the French coastline in 1942.⁷³ It was always easy, he conceded, to assemble arguments against any scheme of daring, and he himself disliked adopting such a negative attitude; nevertheless he felt that *sledgehammer* would be unlikely to provoke the Germans into drawing strength off the eastern front. The Germans, he remarked, 'had the knack of calculating these things to a nicety.' The time had now come, he felt, to report to his own cabinet and to President Roosevelt that they had failed to reach agreement.

In effect he had called the Americans' bluff about throwing all they had into the Pacific war. Realising this, Hopkins urged that it was imperative 'that no breath of this disagreement should get noised abroad.' The bull-headed Admiral King, still fighting, suggested that the misgivings about **sledgehammer** were equally valid against Britain's other cross-Channel proposal, **round-up**. Churchill however, declared himself as ardent a believer in **round-up** as he was an opponent of **sledgehammer**. The latter endeavour would, he felt, devour what he called 'the seed corn' of the larger, later operation.⁷⁴ He warned that if the Americans clung to their plan it might well develop into a serious bone of contention between them. This was a difficult argument to set aside. He would report to the war cabinet that afternoon, he continued, and would obtain their reactions by seven p.m.; in all probability, he confidently predicted, the cabinet would confirm his views, as indeed its Members shortly did.⁷⁵

Overnight, a telegram went from Marshall to Washington reporting that the British cabinet was flatly refusing to go along with **sledgehammer**. When Stimson, a determined advocate of frontal cross-Channel assault, took this into Roosevelt's bedroom, the president feigned disappointment; Stimson sneered that Churchill's government was fatigued and defeatist – it was now blocking the help offered by a young and vigorous nation whose strength had not yet been sapped. In a letter written later that day he reminded the president that the British were thus breaking the promise they had given in June to go along at least until mid-September with planning for a cross-Channel invasion.⁷⁶ He even wanted the president to instruct Marshall to rope in General de Gaulle to put pressure on Churchill, but that less than productive idea was soon abandoned. A few days later Henry Stimson finally gathered from Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, who had become the president's chief of staff, that their master, the president, was now paying only lip service to **bolero** or **sledgehammer**: like Churchill's, his heart was already set on French North-West Africa.⁷⁷

as the French say, *faute de mieux on couche avec sa femme*. Making a virtue out of necessity, but with bad grace, on the evening of July 24 General George C. Marshall telegraphed from London to Washington advising that he and Hopkins now agreed that the main 1942 operation should be a descent on French North-West Africa, not France itself.⁷⁸ Marshall's staff drafted a note to the British accepting that **sledgehammer** was off, except as might be necessary for the purposes of deception; that preparations for a 1943

round-up invasion of France should go ahead; that the bombing of Germany should continue; and that if the eastern front should seem likely to collapse, they should stage an invasion of North and North-West Africa, now code-named **torch**, before December 1942, instead of **round-up**.

Roosevelt cabled back accepting their advice, stipulating however that **torch** was to take place no later than October 30. (He wanted to have a military victory to influence the mid-term U.S. elections a few days later). 'Tell Former Naval Person I am delighted that decision is made. We will go ahead full speed. Emphasise absolute necessity secrecy.'⁷⁹ Churchill responded, 'Hurrah! Full speed ahead.' Marshall called Eisenhower up to his suite at Claridge's that afternoon and sourly told him about **torch**, adding that as the Americans were to supply most of the assault troops the task force must have an American task force commander.⁸⁰

Military Washington remained in uproar for several weeks at this fresh victory by the perfidious English. Stimson felt that it was an 'evil' decision, and that they were now heading for a disaster in North Africa. Marshall's deputy, General Joseph McNarney, Henry Stimson, and General 'Hap' Arnold continued to argue in favour of switching all effort to the Pacific instead.⁸¹

in london a very stuffy reply arrived from Stalin to Churchill's wordy explanation of the PQ.17 disaster. Maisky brought it round to him late on the twenty-third; hearing of their stormy interview from Churchill the next day, Eden explained that this was only to be expected. The prime minister asked him to see Maisky and the American ambassador.

'Gil' Winant was particularly critical of Britain's failure to open a Second Front. Eden reminded him that, since even the visiting Americans were not suggesting undertaking any cross-Channel operation before October, it would be too little and too late to help Russia. Although he could offer no counter-arguments, Winant remained obstinate. Eden had never seen him so put out. 'I told him,' he privately recorded, '[that] we both knew American contribution must be of the smallest this year.' Winant made no secret of his dislike of the proposed descent on French North-West Africa.⁸²

At five p.m. Churchill briefed the cabinet on the Anglo-American talks. 'They seem to be going well,' wrote Eden, 'tho' the report is an obscure document.'⁸³ The cabinet considered Stalin's rude message to be unworthy of reply.

outwardly still the best of allies, the Americans and their hosts cruised down the River Thames by barge in the soft evening light that Friday July 24 – past the bomb-damaged, gap-toothed skyline of the City and East End to Greenwich, city of the world's meridian, for a dinner held in the centuries-old Painted Hall in honour of Admiral King. They ended with a sing-song in the officers' gun-room with the First Lord of the admiralty strumming at the piano. For an hour A. V. Alexander conducted the singing, surrounded by the Royal Navy's 'snotties' (sub-lieutenants), admirals, and Wrens. Knowing that he had outwitted his transatlantic visitors, Churchill joined in lustily; in fact it was the most cheerful party that Martin had seen for a long time. As the former U.S. chief of naval operations – now commander of U.S. naval forces in Europe – Admiral 'Betty' Stark entertained the assembled company to a rendering of *Annie Laurie*, in the words of the prime minister's private secretary 'even the grim Admiral King thawed.'⁸⁴

The bonhomie was but a mask. Three days later, back in Washington DC, General Marshall and Brigadier-General Walter Bedell Smith, shortly to become Eisenhower's chief of staff, gave to Henry Stimson a résumé on all they had seen: 'The British leaders,' sneered Bedell Smith, 'have lost their nerve.'⁸⁵ In Marshall's bemedalled breast there still flickered a faint hope that public opinion would force Churchill to abandon the disastrous idea of torch, and launch a 'real' Second Front in France.⁸⁶ Admiral King's contempt for the British was now complete. He gave Admiral Cunningham, now head of the British naval delegation in Washington, a very stormy ride on Britain's request for American submarines for the Mediterranean – 'he was abominably rude,' reported Cunningham privately, 'and I had to be quite firm to him.' The American chiefs of staff had returned from their talks in London with a feeling of exasperation, particularly on the army side. None of them was keen on torch. 'I am quite sure,' wrote Cunningham, 'that [Admiral] King is dead against it.'⁸⁷



With his bothersome visitors now departed, Churchill rang up Eden on Sunday July 26 to boast that he had ultimately sold them on torch. There was to be no cross-Channel operation for the time being. The decision, he triumphed, had been unanimous, even enthusiastic. 'I only hope it is right,' noted Eden dubiously in his diary. 'W[inston] maintains that our staffs are really keen. I hope so, they have a habit of running out at the last.' They

discussed the deception tactics necessary to safeguard **torch**, and Eden urged his master not to say anything about it to the 'Grand Parade,' as he superciliously called the rest of the cabinet, when it met the next day.⁸⁸

They had to do something somewhere. Auchinleck's attack, which had begun on July 22, had failed to penetrate Rommel's still unsteady line facing him at Alamein. After a ten p.m. meeting of the chiefs of staff on July 28 to discuss all of their worries – Madagascar, Rangoon, the PQ convoys – Brooke recorded with much sympathy:

P.M. in very depressed mood as result of Auk's second attack being repulsed. Pouring out questions as to why Auk could not have done this or that and never giving him the least credit for doing the right thing. He is quite heart-breaking to work for. It is very trying having to fight battles to defend the Auk, when I am myself doubtful at times why on earth he does not act differently.⁸⁹

It was at this time that the prime minister's son Randolph arrived back in England to convalesce from his car crash injuries, having flown a seventeen-thousand mile roundabout route from Cairo in a B-24 Liberator; he had passed through Washington a couple of days earlier, made contact there with Roosevelt and Stimson, then flown on via Montréal to Prestwick.⁹⁰ He had written a useful memorandum on the need for the Eighth Army's next commander to be a tank man – Churchill had lunched with the failed commander General Ritchie on the eighteenth – and gave his father a vivid verbal account of the confusion and incompetence in Cairo which matched much of what young Julian Amery had already said.⁹¹

Randolph's report was surely what finally decided his father to fly out to Cairo himself. He had certainly reached that decision by late on the twenty-ninth. He had invited the cabinet to dine with the King at eight-thirty p.m. that evening in the garden room, its roof propped up against air raids by steel stanchions. He had even conjured up for his guests a Jeroboam of champagne. ('In the course of dinner,' Lord Halifax informed his diary, 'Winston told us that he had drunk a pint of champagne on the average every night since he was twenty-one. This seems a wonderful record.')

Eden, sitting next to the prime minister, was dismayed when Churchill now once again started talking of flying out to Cairo; at first he paid little heed, since he and Bracken had already once talked the P.M. out of the idea.⁹² After His Majesty had left, however, at midnight the prime minister

jovially announced, 'Well, now that we're all together we might just settle one or two things in cabinet.' He revealed that he had obtained the King's permission to fly to Egypt on Friday night – in two days' time. Eden now realised that he was one of the last to know. He saw Attlee sagely nod 'as usual.' Bevin also agreed. Mainly to hold the position Eden raised the question of a physician to accompany Churchill. Churchill claimed that Sir Charles Wilson was already in agreement. His mind was made up: he announced that General Brooke would also have to accompany him, as they would conduct an on-the-spot examination of the Middle East command.

With this bold decision, Winston had bowled his cabinet a googly.⁹³ Lord Halifax did not much mind either way; he retired to the Dorchester until one-thirty a.m., and was still doing paperwork when the sirens sounded an Air Raid warning and the guns in Hyde Park began to fire around two o'clock – the Luftwaffe was raiding the Midlands.⁹⁴ Winston's several heirs-apparent were however thunderstruck. As Cripps, Eden, and Anderson left No. 10, they put their heads together on the famous doorstep. All agreed that they didn't much like the plan, noted Eden: 'Stafford undertook to go back to W. to talk Yellow Fever & we agreed to return to the charge at cabinet tomorrow.'⁹⁵

during the night however a personal telegram arrived from Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, their ambassador in Moscow. Perhaps it was no coincidence; at any rate, it urged the prime minister to pay an early visit to Stalin to discuss the Second Front. Eden saw that this changed things completely and brought it over to No. 10 the next morning; at noon the P.M. sent for the C.I.G.S. and told him they would be flying on from Cairo to see Stalin too. At 12:45 p.m. he informed the cabinet: he assured his colleagues, even before sending off the telegram inviting himself to Russia, that he was to meet Stalin at Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea, and that there were no grounds to worry on account of his health.⁹⁶ Faced with this new *fait accompli* Eden told himself that while he would have argued sternly against flying out to Cairo, a visit to Stalin 'put a different complexion' on things.⁹⁷

Appropriate telegrams were drafted to Roosevelt and Stalin. 'Back at F.O. & in bed,' wrote the long-suffering foreign secretary, 'when summons came from Winston about midnight. Found him with chiefs of staff.' At one a.m. an impassive Soviet ambassador, who had become accustomed to these eccentric hours, was brought in to receive the message to Stalin. Maisky seemed taken aback when he read it. After he had bowed out, the prime

minister told Eden once more that he had made his political testament; and this time he revealed that he had told the King that if anything befell him Eden was to carry on.⁹⁸

such a flight under wartime conditions would be a severe test for even a young and healthy person, but Churchill was approaching sixty-eight. Since the planes were not pressurised, he had to go to Farnborough to be tested for high altitudes; he sat in a pressure chamber while air was pumped out to simulate flying at fifteen thousand feet. He felt slight pain, but otherwise passed the test. One of the Farnborough scientists even designed for him a special oxygen mask which would enable him to keep smoking his cigar. It would have burned like a Roman candle if he had ever tried it, of course, but as he had once said, 'Never forget your trademark.' He was ever-conscious of the need to preserve image.

Despite the urgent preparations for this new mission, he made time on the eve of his departure to see the editor of *The New York Herald Tribune*, Geoffrey Parsons. It struck Parsons that while the prime minister cared nothing for public opinion – he expressed disdain at 'the noisy clamour of the communists' for a Second Front – he was deeply concerned about his popularity, which was something else. He brought out bulging albums with all the press clippings about him.⁹⁹ According to another newspaperman, there was even a chart displayed at No. 10 recording the levels of applause when newsreels of him were shown in cinemas; this had fallen off in recent months.¹⁰⁰ (After the Atlantic conference American military Intelligence noted an increase in 'a rather promiscuous booing and hissing' by army audiences when newsreels showed Roosevelt, Churchill, and General Marshall together.¹⁰¹)

Something of this public cynicism had rubbed off on his colleagues. Sir Archibald Sinclair, one of his oldest friends, remarked in private that Churchill was trying to be both warlord and war historian, both Marlborough and Macaulay.¹⁰² None of them could understand the lingering friendship with Lord Beaverbrook either; Ernest Bevin warned repeatedly that he would resign if Churchill made any attempt to bring Max back into the government.¹⁰³ Eden noted similar fears expressed by many MPs. Churchill however confessed to the young foreign secretary, 'That man stimulates me.'¹⁰⁴ It was as though Beaverbrook were a narcotic, a habit he could not kick, and the admiration was mutual. 'Churchill remains predominant,' Beaverbrook would admit, a trifle wistfully, that summer. 'He has no critics, he has no

rivals. . . His critics serve only, in the main, to fortify him in the affection of the public. For when the people compare the critics with the object of their criticism they have no doubt which they prefer.’¹⁰⁵

there were important messages to be sent before they left. Perplexed that he had still not received a reply to his ‘former naval person’ message to Roosevelt, Churchill cabled to Field-Marshal Dill that he was sure that the president’s wish was ‘full steam ahead’ on torch at the earliest possible moment. ‘We regard this as decided absolutely with over-riding priority. No-one here is thinking of anything else. You should ask to see President urgently.’¹⁰⁶ He impatiently phoned the embassy in Grosvenor-square, and when the Americans could not help he put a phone call through to his own embassy in Washington. Sir Ronald Campbell assured him he had sent the telegram straight over to Sumner Welles. Winston choked. ‘Why the state department?’ he snapped. ‘I am not at all sure that I want them to know about it.’ And, ‘What has Mr Welles go to do with it?’ He hung on to the instrument while Washington delved deeper. Eventually Campbell came back on the line and explained that the President had ‘not been up’ when the envelope reached Hyde Park, his country home, and his secretaries had not liked to disturb him. This did not please Churchill at all. ‘Well you won’t do it again, will you,’ he barked.¹⁰⁷ He then phoned Roosevelt himself. It was only now that the president bothered to read the telegram.

The whole episode highlighted the unorthodox manner of Winston’s contacts with his great American friend. Had the telegram been sent through the U.S. ambassador, it would not have touched the state department, Winant pointed out, and would have been delivered within four hours; but it seemed that Winston did not want to send every message through Winant either.¹⁰⁸ When Eden volunteered that the White House might have a secure phone line between Washington and Hyde Park, Churchill did not like the idea either: ‘It is very dangerous,’ he noted to the foreign secretary. ‘I always try to use the American embassy in London as the channel. But sometimes it is necessary to use the British Embassy, Washington. They must do the best they can.’¹⁰⁹ The president now told Campbell that he thought Churchill’s plans were ‘quite exciting’ and ‘a good thing,’ which sounded a bit *1066 and All That*; he also he added that the Russians needed it.¹¹⁰

This time Stalin replied to Churchill with greater alacrity, insisting however that they meet in Moscow, not Astrakhan.¹¹¹ Churchill radioed ahead to General Auchinleck advising of his forthcoming visit, but added: ‘Let

nothing take your eye off the ball.’¹¹² In his reply the general broke it to him that Rommel had now consolidated his defences at Alamein, and no new British attack would be possible before mid-September. This signal was unfortunately timed; Churchill read it to his war cabinet on August 1, the day of his departure, adding grimly that the moment had come for changes in the Middle East and particularly in the command of the Eighth Army.¹¹³

For a while after that cabinet meeting they sat around, lunching in the sunlit garden of No. 10 – Winston and Clementine, with Beaverbrook and Brendan Bracken, the ‘terrible Bs,’ and the prime minister’s brother Jack too. When Winston teasingly revealed his coming odyssey to Beaverbrook, the press lord insisted on going too. He suggested that while the prime minister travelled on to Moscow, he might stay behind in Cairo and investigate what was wrong with the ‘muscle-bound’ British Army there. It was not a bad idea; Churchill drew Eden aside after luncheon to discuss it with him. Eden, already stricken with envy at his master’s journey, advised against it. Winston agreed that the generals would probably not endure Max in Cairo but – and this says much about their relationship – he still felt he might be of help in Russia. ‘I like to have a pal with me,’ was how he put it.

Eden sniffed that Russia wasn’t likely to be all that difficult, and anyway the prime minister would have their ambassador Archie Clark-Kerr out there, and Sir Alexander Cadogan too. Max, he reminded Churchill, was an object of suspicion and downright hatred to many; it might be wiser in times like these not to flout the opinions of colleagues and friends. Churchill was not easily convinced. ‘Let me know when you want M.,’ Eden mocked resignedly, ‘and I will pack him off after you.’

Brendan Bracken hinted that he wanted to go too.

Churchill replied ‘I may yet wire for M & B!’ – a witty allusion to a sulphonamide drug on which he was much dependent. There was much laughter, on which note they parted.¹¹⁴

A letter now came by messenger from the King, wishing his first minister Godspeed on his arduous journey, and signing himself ‘your very sincere and grateful friend.’¹¹⁵ Churchill replied in his own hand, conscious that fate might determine that this was his last letter to his monarch. ‘I wish indeed,’ he apologised in this letter, ‘that it had been in my power to bring about earlier & more decisive success. But the ultimate result is sure.’

Preparing the King for what was to come, he confessed himself shocked by Auchinleck’s latest cable. ‘In Russia too the materials for a joyous meeting are meagre indeed.’¹¹⁶