

Part III: Giving the
Devil his Due

1942

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24: *A Visit to the Ogre in His Den*

On the first day of August 1942, a Saturday, the prime minister left on his great adventure. Flying a long and hazardous route which skirted around enemy-occupied Europe to Cairo and then on to Moscow, he would be away from Downing-street for twenty-four days. This time he was taking Leslie Rowan as his personal private secretary. As he was helped into his car he made a friendly V-sign to the devoted female secretaries crowding the upper windows of No. 10; each was sure he had waved just to her.¹ 'I admire his courage and determination more than I could ever tell you,' wrote one of them in a letter to her parents.²

At Lyneham in Wiltshire, the R.A.F. airfield of embarkation, a message awaited him, phoned through from London: Sir John Dill reported that the Americans were now saying that by accepting torch for 1942 the Allies were ruling out all possibility of executing round-up, the cross-Channel invasion, until not just 1943 but 1944.³ Nor were the Americans happy that he had arranged to see Stalin without them. They rapidly arranged for Averell Harriman to fly out to join him in Cairo. In fact Churchill had urged this on Roosevelt a few days earlier, explaining: 'I feel things would be easier if we all seemed to be together. I have a somewhat raw job.'⁴

Churchill was helped up the ladder into the B-24 Liberator. This plane, named 'Commando,' would be piloted by an American, Captain William J. Vanderkloot. It was draughty and uncomfortable, neither heated nor sound-proofed, and its passenger facilities were primitive. A couple of mattresses with heaps of blankets were laid on shelves above the bomb bay. Churchill took one shelf, his doctor the other. His staff were assigned to various seats affixed along the fuselage of this Liberator and a second plane. They ate picnic meals and drank from Thermos flasks, then Churchill took a sleeping potion and settled down for the night.

As they landed at Gibraltar next morning an Andalusian heatwave was baking the Rock's airstrip, R.A.F. North Front. At the Convent – the crown colony's picturesque, white-painted Government House – the prime minister lay on a bed in his undershorts and declaimed for a while to Cadogan and Brooke. The latest *boniface* supplied by Bletchley Park revealed Rommel's worsening supply plight; the Nazi field-marshal had received fifty anti-tank guns during July, and seventy-five more were on their way, but the *Afrika Korps* was down to 130 tanks, of which only ninety were serviceable.⁵ Churchill cursed Auchinleck for his timidity.

The two planes took off again at six p.m., and flew onward into the darkness over North Africa for fourteen hours, making wide detours of the desert battlefields, before heading north-east toward the airfield at Cairo West. As was many an old man's custom, he went forward into the cockpit and climbed into the second pilot's seat to watch the sun rise for one more time. Seeing its rays glittering on the uneven ribbon of the Nile brought home to him that he himself was now the 'man on the spot.' Instead of fretting at Downing-street, waiting for telegrams from the war's many fronts, he would be sending home those telegrams himself.⁶

They landed at eight a.m. – it was now August 3 and a hot but breezy day – and found the British ambassador Sir Miles Lampson and the principal Cairo officers paraded to meet them.⁷ Churchill moved into Lampson's embassy, taking over the only two air-conditioned rooms including the ambassador's study. He had no pity on the diplomats; he did not think too highly of these local English, expressing profound contempt (from the safety of No. 10) for their panic when Rommel had been advancing. Even Dick Casey had blotted his copybook, by advising people to flee and sending Mrs Casey off by plane; Lady Lampson had indignantly refused to leave with her, but at least one trained foreign office eye noticed that even so her husband had put most of his Chinese treasures into safe storage.⁸

For a day Churchill recovered from the flight, sitting for many hours in the cool shade of a flame-flowered tree in the British embassy garden. Fortunately, Field-Marshal Smuts arrived from Pretoria – one of the few men on earth whom the prime minister really respected, as Cadogan wrote in a letter home, and one to whom he would listen.⁹ The C.I.G.S. did not always come into that category: from the moment they arrived here General Brooke found his attempts to clear his own mind as to what changes were necessary hampered by 'Winston's impetuosity.'¹⁰ At five-thirty p.m. General Auchinleck, unaware that the axe was about to fall, came to confer

with them, apologising that he could not stay for dinner as he had to get back to the battle down the road. Field-Marshal Wavell flew in from India.

Before Churchill told them all in confidence about *torch*, General Brooke explored the possibility that Hitler's armies now probing down into the Caucasus might reach the Persian Gulf, the source of Britain's oil; the chiefs of staff had concluded, he advised, that they might have to evacuate Egypt and all North Africa, because without oil they could not continue the war there. One purpose of their mission to Moscow therefore would be to find out from Stalin how strong the Russians were in the Caucasus.¹¹

Dinner was quiet, dominated if not enlivened by Churchill's monologues.¹² He found the rare combination of fierce desert sunshine and cool breeze so invigorating that he needed less sleep than usual. He went to bed at one-thirty and was up again at five on August 5. A Douglas DC-3 flew him to the Alamein front – it was significant how far American-built planes like this Dakota were already taking over these transport duties.

Churchill and Brooke followed different routes up the line to the front. 'Both,' reported one of the P.M.'s staff, 'came back with faces like boots.'¹³ From Randolph's report and from young Amery too he had already formed a mental picture of what to expect – of poor troop morale and of thousands of able-bodied young army officers lingering far behind the lines (the 'gabardine swine,' as one wit had termed them).

General Auchinleck lived a spartan life, and his forward headquarters could not provide Churchill with his accustomed morning meal but only a snack of canned beef and biscuits eaten in 'a wire-netted cube, full of flies and important military personages,' and washed down with, of all things, tea.¹⁴ Glowering with the silent rage that speaks of lack of oral gratification, the prime minister drove off with Lieutenant-General Gott to visit the headquarters of Air Vice-Marshal 'Mary' Coningham's Desert Air Force.*

The car bringing their packed lunches from the Shepherd's Hotel became lost in the desert but it was eventually found; Churchill's spirits rose, and writing four years later he still recalled the picnic meal that ensued as 'a gay occasion in the midst of care – a real oasis in a very large desert.'¹⁵

A letter came out to Cairo from Clementine. Written on the fourth, it revealed her worries about this long journey on which her husband had embarked. She was thinking of him always, she wrote, and was praying that she could solve the Middle East problem of 'stultification or frustration

* The name was an affectionate corruption of 'Maori.'

or what is it?' Soon, Mrs Churchill reminded him, he would be embarking on the more dramatic and sensational part, 'your visit to the Ogre in his Den.'¹⁶

he had already fixed in his mind the forty-three year old Gott as the new commander for the Eighth Army; perhaps facing a general called 'Gott' would give Rommel's soldiers something extra to fear. Brooke opposed the choice, murmuring to Winston that this general was already exhausted, but he did not press the point.¹⁷ 'I convinced myself,' the P.M. wrote, replying to Clementine a few days later, 'of his high ability [and] charming simple personality and that he was in no way tired, as was alleged.'¹⁸

The real rat-heap was the Middle East command itself. It seemed that General Auchinleck had lost confidence, particularly in himself. His officers were constantly looking over their shoulders toward prepared positions to which to retreat, as one of Churchill's staff stated a few days later.

The units at the front were hopelessly mixed up. The Auk had 180 generals on his staff. . . We should, of course, have hit Rommel hard when he reached his furthest point of advance.¹⁹

Churchill's first instinct had been to turn over command of the Middle East, 'the whole of this vast but baffled and somewhat unhinged organisation,' to General Brooke himself; perhaps this was why he had insisted on the C.I.G.S. coming out with him. Brooke agonised over the offer, then turned it down; he was happy where he was, he said. 'I knew nothing about desert warfare,' he wrote that day, 'and could never have time to grip hold of the show to my satisfaction before the necessity to attack became imperative.'²⁰ (Of course the same held true for men like Montgomery).

Churchill cabled his final proposals to London late on Thursday the sixth – it amounted to a purge, indeed a massacre, of the Middle East generals, beginning with Auchinleck himself. He wanted him replaced as commander-in-chief by General Sir Harold Alexander, currently commanding the First Army in England, whose headquarters was working under Eisenhower on torch.²¹ 'A decision has now become most urgent,' he cabled to London the next day, not having had a reply, 'since Alexander has already started [from England] and Auchinleck has, of course, no inkling of what is in prospect.'²² Gott would take over the Eighth Army. Characteristically unwilling to look the condemned man in the eye, he told Colonel Jacob to fly out the

next day to Auchinleck's desert headquarters taking the letter of dismissal; in this letter he offered the general a new command comprising Iraq and Iran, with headquarters in Basra or Baghdad.²³ 'I felt as if I were just going to murder an unsuspecting friend' wrote Jacob in his diary, but he plunged the hand-written dagger into Auchinleck as he had been bidden.²⁴

Auchinleck came in to Cairo on the ninth and had a showdown with General Brooke. He demanded to know why he was being sacked. Brooke said that it was 'mainly lack of confidence.'²⁵ It is not surprising that Auchinleck turned down the new position offered to him.

Not everybody liked his replacement, Alexander. He had had little chance to display his finer qualities as a soldier. He had presided over the British withdrawals from both France and Burma, which might not augur well for Egypt.²⁶ Some regarded him as a typical 'brave, brainless Guardsman with beautifully burnished boots.'²⁷ London agreed however that the Cairo officers had become corrupted by the atmosphere out there. 'The trade union of generals is very strong,' remarked Eden's secretary approvingly. 'It has taken three major defeats and a personal visit of the P.M. to break it.'²⁸

there were other minor affairs to attend to in Egypt, including an audience of the young King Faroukh on August 6. On the next day an Indian prince called to pay respects, feeling perhaps a trifle outlandish in his high turban with the attached panache of gauze; he registered, as Cadogan wrote to his wife, 'practically no surprise at all' when he encountered the prime minister dressed in his rompers and a ten-gallon Mexican style sun-hat.²⁹

Churchill went down to a secluded local beach for a quick splash in the surf dressed in rather less than this. No sooner had he returned than Colonel Jacob stopped him in the hotel and froze him with the blunt message, 'This is bad about Gott.' German fighter planes had shot down the general's humble Bombay troop-carrier plane, flying in from the battlefield to Cairo that afternoon, and he had burned to death in the crash.³⁰ Churchill went into dinner half an hour late with thunder on his brow. It was, wrote one guest, such rotten luck, meaning for the prime minister; Churchill wondered if it did not mean there had been some treachery – a half-echo of the Colonel Fellers incident – since he had made no secret of the general's forthcoming appointment.³¹ He sat speechless with dismay throughout the meal, leaving the unwitting American general sitting at his left baffled by his own seeming unpopularity.³² Eventually Churchill remarked cryptically

to Colonel Jacob: 'Tragic as the death of Gott may be, it may well be to our advantage in the long run.'³³

His first instinct that evening was to give the Eighth Army command to the paunchy, slothful General Sir Maitland 'Jumbo' Wilson; backed by Smuts, Brooke spoke out for the appointment of Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Montgomery instead.³⁴ Up to this moment, Montgomery had been earmarked to replace Alexander at First Army in England. Only that day he was being briefed by a brigadier in London on the need to bludgeon General Eisenhower into drawing up an operational plan for *torch*, as the chiefs of staff had failed to impress him with its urgency. At seven a.m. on the eighth however the War Office instructed Montgomery to proceed post-haste to Egypt instead.³⁵ He would arrive in the heat of mid-summer Cairo, a few days later, still wearing a heavy English serge battledress uniform.

Like Alexander, Montgomery had been at Dunkirk; indeed, as Eden's secretary wrote when this choice was notified to London, 'Monty' had the reputation of being not only a ruthless soldier – but 'an unspeakable cad.'³⁶ It was a widely held view. Churchill would sum him up a year later as 'unforgettable in defeat, and insufferable in victory.'³⁷ 'If he is disagreeable to those about him,' he wrote privately, having just approved the choice, in lines which clearly echoed the whispered comments all around, 'he is also disagreeable to the enemy.'³⁸ He cabled to the war cabinet, meeting that evening in London, 'Pray send him by special plane at earliest moment.'³⁹

with his own bloody deeds thus done, Churchill stayed on in Cairo for a few more days, visiting units and inspiring them for the somewhat bloodier tasks to come. 'Rommel, Rommel, Rommel!' he cried to Colonel Jacob, walking up and down. 'What else matters but beating him! Instead of which, C.-in-C. Middle East sits in Cairo attending to things which a Minister, or a Quartermaster, could deal with.'⁴⁰ Before flying on he dictated a long letter to Clementine, rehearsing why it had been so necessary for him to come out here. * 'This splendid army,' he wrote, 'about double as strong as the enemy, is baffled and bewildered by its defeats.' Rommel was living from hand to mouth, his army's life hanging by a thread; yet the British troops facing him were beset by a mental apathy and exhaustion, which only strong new hands could dispel. Fortunately he had been able to draw upon the

*Sir Martin Gilbert reproduces this letter in full on pages 167–9 of his vol. vii.

magnificent counsel of Smuts. 'He fortified me where I am inclined to be tender-hearted, namely in using severe measures against people I like.'

He described the inspection by himself and Averell Harriman of the British soldiers training on their handful of battle-scarred tanks while waiting for the Grants and Shermans which were promised to arrive from America.⁴¹ 'Yesterday I spent six hours with the four armoured brigades that are all preparing, and are a magnificent well-trained resolute body of men thirsting for action,' he related to Clementine. 'I told them (in seven speeches) how the president had given me Shermans;* how the Navy were bringing them as fast as possible and how in a few weeks they would be the most powerful and best equipped armoured force of its size in the world.'⁴²

Casting his mind forward to the unquestionably fraught meetings awaiting him at the Kremlin, on August 10 he telegraphed to Attlee about how important it was to run more PQ convoys in September; he must be able to hold out this prospect to Stalin.⁴³ Then he penned a famous directive to General Sir Harold Alexander, instructing the new commander-in-chief: 'Yr. prime and main duty will be to take or destroy at the earliest opportunity the German-Italian Army commanded by Field-Marshal Rommel.'⁴⁴



He concluded his long typescript letter to Clementine with the handwritten message, 'Tender love my dearest. This should reach you in 48 hours. I hope then to be in Moscow. As always, your ever loving husband. W.'

His R.A.F. Liberator took off for Teheran after midnight on August 11. His party had swollen to include Wavell, who spoke Russian, and Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, for whose presence there was less real purpose; General Brooke was probably right in deducing that Churchill felt it increased his dignity to be surrounded by generals, admirals, and air marshals.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, without Winston's being asked, Commander Thompson had delayed the take-off by an hour, to enable them to see the sun rise over Baghdad, and they arrived too late in the Iranian capital to fly straight on to Moscow that same morning, as they would have to fly through the gap in the mountains and traverse the central plains of Iran in daylight. Annoyed at this upset to his plans, Churchill went into Teheran and lunched with the Shah. The young and evidently intelligent ruler professed undying allegiance

* See page 461.

to the Allied cause.⁴⁶ A conference followed with the Americans on their demand to take over the running of the Iranian railway system from the British. Churchill saw only the friction that this would cause, but according to one member of his party 'the atmosphere of deck chairs and whisky and soda in the garden was not very conducive to taking decisions, and the Prime Minister's brain was not working at its best on account of the continuous hooting of the Iranian motor-cars on the road outside.' The Iranian prime minister shortly arrived for an audience, but the 'main topic of conversation was the hooting' – Churchill urging an immediate ban on hooting in the capital. After it emerged that British railway trains could not be driven by any man with less than fifteen years' experience, Churchill spent some time ribbing Harriman – heir to a railroad fortune – and suggested that nobody could improve upon his own job after two years.⁴⁷

He fled the noisy building that night, and moved to the summer legation at Gul Hek a thousand feet higher up in the hills. He cabled from here to Mrs Churchill to say that 'mr green' was recuperating in a delightful Persian garden. Even as he rested, word arrived that the latest convoy to Malta, operation *pedestal*, had come under air and submarine attack. Escorted by two battleships, three aircraft-carriers, seven cruisers and thirty-two destroyers, the fourteen merchantmen were attempting to reach Malta from the west. The aircraft-carrier *Eagle* was already lost. Worries never left him.

He resumed his flight to Moscow at six-thirty a.m. Russian wireless operators had joined the Liberator crews. The countryside beneath his plane gradually changed from desert to a verdant jungle green. Their route took them far to the east, well away from the leading German units hammering south-eastwards into the Caucasus, and then northward toward Moscow.

A welcoming committee of Soviet functionaries had gathered with a luncheon spread out in a marquee on the airfield at Kuibyshev; but having lost its way the R.A.F. Liberator thundered on without stopping. It landed at five p.m. somewhere west of Moscow on an airfield where Churchill found Molotov waiting with a supporting cast of commissars and generals including Marshal B. M. Shaposhnikov, chief of the Soviet general staff. On the drive into the Soviet capital he could not help noticing that the window glass of Molotov's armour-plated limousine was two inches thick, which was certainly thicker than he or Eden had so far found necessary.

he was to be housed at a dacha half an hour's drive outside the capital, along the road to Smolensk; it sounded delightful, but it was in fact State

Villa Number Seven, a new, flat-roofed concrete bungalow, painted green, with several acres of gardens and lavish appointments including a vulgarly furnished bunker a hundred yards from the main building, with marbled walls and light-coloured wood panelling, refrigerators, and two elevators to convey its occupants the seventy or eighty feet below ground. The bungalow itself was surrounded by a double stockade fifteen feet high and had a goldfish pond that took the P.M. back to Chartwell in his mind's eye.⁴⁸

The security guards were provided by the N.K.V.D., the Soviet secret police, while the waiters were ancient English-speaking relics of Tsarist hotels. In the dining-room Churchill found various sideboards laden with every delicacy and liquid stimulant that supreme power could command. He would have fond memories of this room. 'I was conducted,' he described, 'through a spacious reception room to a bedroom and bathroom of almost equal size.' He longed for a hot bath after the ten-hour flight but announced that he would pay an immediate courtesy call on Stalin. Curiosity had seized him. A chauffeur drove him along almost deserted roads and over a bridge into the darkened Kremlin building; Churchill took the British ambassador along with him as well as Harriman, and Major **firstname** Dunlop as interpreter. He made no attempt to bring in the local American ambassador, Admiral William H. Standley; the admiral, as he later wrote, 'sat vacuously' at his embassy that evening waiting for the call and listening to the dinner-table chatter of four American army generals.⁴⁹

As guards conducted the British party through the Kremlin corridors to the appointed conference chamber, Churchill's eyes swivelled, taking in the scarlet and gold furnishings and the other trappings of Tsarist days. Stalin, suddenly standing before them, was smaller than he had imagined, no taller in fact than Beaverbrook.⁵⁰ Eden had described his movements as being rather cat-like. He was a benign old man, with more years on him than the pictures had indicated, soft spoken and often distant in manner; he smelt of scent and his skin had a curious hue, a cadaverous greenish-blue.⁵¹

Those present at this first session – it must have begun around midnight of August 12/13 – were Stalin, Molotov, Marshall K. E. Voroshilov and Ambassador Clark-Kerr, as well as Harriman and the interpreters. The Russians, like the British, made a detailed record which is now available.⁵² Churchill described the first two hours, in a report cabled to London the next day, as 'bleak and sombre.'⁵³ The vivid British record leaves little doubt on this score.⁵⁴ After professing to be not at all tired, he spoke of the changes he had just made in Cairo; he expected the Eighth Army now to win the

coming battle, as they had better equipment and communications than Rommel. They would attack later that month or in September. 'We are confident that we shall conquer the Germans where they stand at the present time' – the Alamein line.⁵⁵

Looking at times grave, as the British notes described, Stalin admitted that things were going badly: 'The enemy is making a tremendous effort to get to Baku and Stalingrad.' He did not understand how the Germans could be gathering together so many troops and tanks 'from all over Europe.'

This was a clear allusion to the need for a Second Front, the part of their meeting that Churchill had been dreading. The prime minister now said that he had come to talk about realities – 'He wished to speak frankly and would like to invite complete frankness from Stalin.' 'Let us,' he said, according to the Russian transcript, 'chat together, like friends.' During Molotov's visit to London, he recalled, he had assured the Russian that he would try to find a means of staging a diversion by attacking the Germans in France, but he had also made it clear to Molotov that he could make no promises for 1942. They had exhaustively examined the problem since then, he said, and they were preparing major operations in 1943.

so there was nothing planned for 1942? As Stalin's face crumpled into a frown, Churchill doggedly added the good news. One million American soldiers were to arrive in England during 1943; but so far there were only two-and-a-half American divisions on British soil. The Allies had enough transport to lift six divisions for an assault on the French coast; but they lacked the shipping to maintain a permanent bridgehead. 'We've gone into the details,' he said. 'Two sites have been reconnoitred. The first operation – on the sector between Dunkirk and Dieppe – would have as its purpose attracting toward France and away from the eastern front the enemy air forces in sufficient strength to make very violent battles possible.' Such air battles, he suggested, were the only benefit expected to accrue from such a raid. This advantage would be purchased however only at the cost of the total destruction of the expeditionary force – 'the enemy would overwhelm us and . . . we would suffer a catastrophe.' Furthermore, continued Churchill, if he were to make this attack on the Pas de Calais this year he would have to interfere with the great preparations for 1943, taking away key men and using up large numbers of landing-craft and other equipment which he was holding in readiness for 1943. 'Therefore we do not think it would be wise to make any attempt on the Pas de Calais region this year.'

Stalin, the record tells us, now began to look 'very glum'; he asked if they could not invade the Cherbourg peninsula. Churchill explained that this operation had been ruled out because they could not obtain air superiority at that distance from British bases. The discussion became heated. Once when Stalin said, 'After all, this is a war,' the British text shows that Churchill retorted: 'War is war, but not folly; and it would be folly to invite a disaster which will help nobody.'⁵⁶

Stalin took stock. He wanted to ask Churchill, he said, whether there was to be no Second Front this year, and whether the British government was also declining to land six to eight divisions in France this year.⁵⁷ Churchill quibbled about what Stalin understood by the words Second Front, then admitted that Stalin's summary was correct. 'He went on to say,' reads the British record of this increasingly restless meeting,

that he feared the news he brought was not good news, but he could assure M Stalin that if, by throwing in 150,000 to 200,000 men* we could render him aid by drawing away from the Russian front appreciable German forces, we would not shrink from this course on the grounds of casualties. But if it drew no men away and spoiled the prospects for 1943, it would be a great error.'

He appealed to Harriman to back him up. The American took refuge in the formula that 'he had nothing to add.'

It irked Churchill that his customary eloquence soon became mired in the stop-go interruptions of the interpreters Pavlov and Major Dunlop: he was listening to Pavlov's English, while Stalin had to content himself with Dunlop's Russian; neither interpreter was able to capture their master's nuances. The interpreters argued between themselves over shades of meaning. Stalin resorted to language that was undiplomatic, tactless, and then insulting. At one point he said: 'A man who is not prepared to take risks can not win a war.' Had he known, he said, that Churchill would welch on the British offer of a 1942 invasion by six divisions, he would have suggested other operations. 'To make your troops real, they need to pass through fire and cross fire. Until your troops are tested in war no one can say what they

* The Russian text here is substantially the same, but states that Churchill used figures ten times larger, 'one-and-a-half to two million men.'⁵⁸

are worth.' He, Stalin, would have acted differently in Churchill's place. 'There's no need to be frightened of the Germans.'⁵⁹

Stung by this remark, Churchill retorted that British troops weren't afraid of the Germans. 'If the British can not invade,' Stalin said, 'I shall not insist. I do not agree with your arguments,' he continued, 'but I cannot force you.' **having got** over the worst, Churchill now turned to what he had to offer. Unfurling a map of southern Europe and the Mediterranean, he hinted that there were other theatres where the Allies were preparing new fronts. First he talked at length about the bombing of Germany. (On this there is no word in the Soviet transcript). What was happening now, he said, was as nothing compared with the bombing offensives beginning in three and six months' time. Stalin showed enthusiasm: 'Yes,' he said, 'and homes as well as factories should be destroyed.' 'Between the two of them,' reported Harriman, writing a few hours later, 'they soon destroyed most of the important industrial cities of Germany.'⁶⁰ Churchill assured the Soviet dictator that he looked upon the morale of the German civil population as 'a military target.' 'We seek no mercy,' he intoned, 'and we shall show no mercy.' Stalin chimed in: 'That is the only way.'

Churchill said that he hoped to wipe out twenty more German cities as he had already shattered Cologne, Lübeck, and Düsseldorf. They had now begun to use four-ton bombs. As he uttered the words, 'We hope to shatter almost every dwelling in almost every German city,' the British noticed that this had a stimulating effect and the atmosphere became more cordial.

'We do not think,' the prime minister now disclosed, preparing to reveal his trump card, 'that France is the only place where a Second Front can be opened.' He had President Roosevelt's authority, he said, to reveal that there was to be a major operation elsewhere, codenamed **torch**, for the seizure of the northern coast of French Africa – 'the whole of it' – from Casablanca and Algiers to Bizerta. Stalin immediately grasped the whole implications of this; he sat bolt upright, began to grin, and eagerly discussed the date of **torch**, its political implications, whether it would force Vichy France and Spain to make common cause with Germany, and the likelihood that the Vichy French forces would offer serious opposition. He also expressed curiosity as to whether they had informed General de Gaulle.

The prime minister said that they had not. The general and his coterie talked too much, he explained. Stalin did not entirely agree, feeling that de Gaulle 'or one of the other French generals' must be brought in. Churchill spelt out the likely outcome of **torch**, including the further oppression by

the Nazis of the Vichy French, which he described as highly desirable. He sketched for Stalin a crocodile, and explained that the snout and armoured head and shoulders were Northern France and Western Europe. 'It would be much easier,' he lisped, 'to strike at the soft underbelly.'⁶¹

'Excellent,' exclaimed Stalin. 'May God prosper this operation.'⁶² encouraged by this display of religious fervour – or was it a mere resort to 'Godstuff' of a Churchillian hue? – Churchill asked Stalin how he would receive the idea of sending an Allied air force to the southern Russian front. 'I would gratefully accept it,' said Stalin, though with less enthusiasm. After talking about deception tactics for *torch*, Churchill revealed – again a passage not included in the Russian minutes – that depending on the weather he intended to spring a surprise raid on the French coast this same month 'in order to seek information and to test the German resistance.' 'We might lose as many as 10,000 men on this operation,' he declared grandly, according to the English transcript; but it 'would be no more than a reconnaissance.'

After nearly four hours' tough talk they went their ways – Stalin still somewhat dismayed, Harriman impressed, Churchill oddly optimistic. 'He knows the worst,' he informed London, 'and we parted in an atmosphere of goodwill.'⁶³ They all drove back to the dacha around five a.m. 'The prime minister,' Harriman telegraphed to President Roosevelt, 'was at his best and could not have handled the discussion with greater brilliance.'⁶⁴

Over the next twenty-four hours the war situation worsened. Hitler's armies swept victoriously onward, thrusting ever deeper into the Caucasus. In the Mediterranean the naval escort battling the *pedestal* convoy through to Malta lost an anti-aircraft ship, a destroyer, and the cruiser *Manchester*, as well as eight of the convoy's freighters to punishing air attacks. In Moscow, Churchill visited Molotov at midday – it was now August 13 – and briefed him on his talk of the previous evening. Molotov expressed doubts that *torch* would ever take place.⁶⁵ 'He listened affably,' Churchill reported, 'but contributed nothing.'⁶⁶ According to his memoirs, he warned this inscrutable diplomatist: 'Stalin will make a great mistake to treat us roughly when we have come so far.'⁶⁷

Cadogan's party had only just arrived in Moscow, a day late, at 7:30 p.m.; with their original plane forced back by an engine fault, Cadogan and General Brooke had spent an extra day at Teheran. Their Russian lend-lease Dakota had first put them down at Kuibyshev, where they had been obliged to eat the day-old banquet missed by Winston the day before. Over dinner with them now, Churchill told them how the Russians had taken the news

that there was to be no sledgehammer. 'Stalin is a peasant, whom I can handle,' he boasted. Air Chief Marshal Tedder was horrified, pointed at the walls, and scrawled a silent warning note in French: '*Méfiez-vous!*' (When General Anders uttered the same warning about hidden microphones the next day, the prime minister would declaim: 'We'll soon deal with that.' Removing the cigar from his mouth to speak more clearly, he said: 'The Russians, I have been told, are not human beings at all. They are lower in the scale of nature than the orang-outang.' He grunted: 'Now let them take that down and translate it into Russian.')⁶⁸

at the rather more crowded second meeting with Stalin, which began at eleven p.m. that night, the air was distinctly frostier. The scene this time was a much more sparsely furnished room at the Kremlin.⁶⁹ Two long tables ran down each side of this room, with Stalin's desk at the far end; three paintings graced the walls above the light-coloured half-panelling – Lenin speaking, Lenin sitting, and Karl Marx. Through an open door at the far end they could see a map room, dominated by an enormous globe. Lounging in his chair, and puffing at a large, curly pipe, Stalin handed over a memorandum which he had prepared, summarising in writing the British (and American) refusal to launch a cross-Channel invasion in 1942, and his own inability to change their mind.⁷⁰ Churchill set this document aside and said he would reply in writing; Stalin must however understand that 'reproaches were vain.'⁷¹ After Harriman had discreetly backed him up, Stalin then turned to **torch**. The operation as such, he said, was militarily correct. 'The difference between us,' he said, 'is that the British and Americans regard the Russian front as being only of secondary importance.' **torch** had no direct bearing on the Russian front, and he did not see how the general interest could be served by discussing it further. What upset him was not that supplies had been not arrived, but that they been promised in the first place, with unfortunate results on his own production planning.

Colonel Jacob, called in by Churchill to take minutes after only about ten minutes, as the mood soured, found Stalin talking in a low, gentle voice, occasionally gesturing for emphasis, while never looking Churchill in the eye.⁷² Turning to the P.Q. 17 disaster – in a passage not recorded in the Soviet minutes – Stalin assailed Churchill in the most intemperate language, declaring that this was the first time that the Royal Navy had deserted the field of battle. 'You British are too much afraid of fighting the Germans,' he taunted. 'If you try it like the Russians you will not find it so bad.'⁷³

Thumping the table, Churchill burst into a spontaneous oration in which he assailed the Russians without mercy: What had they been doing, he demanded, when the British were fighting alone to save the liberties of the world? The Russians had been supplying war goods to the enemy and praying for Britain's defeat.⁷⁴

The outburst lasted, according to Tedder, for fully five minutes and was delivered with such fluency that Major Dunlop stumbled along, unable to keep up with the flow. The P.M. made him repeat each sentence in English first to make sure that it was right, and Jacob and Cadogan found themselves rehearsing the unfortunate interpreter in what Churchill had actually just said. Stalin laughed out loud, and finally held up a hand for silence: 'I may not understand your words,' he said to Churchill, 'but by God I like your spirit!'⁷⁵

As for the Arctic convoy operations, Churchill told him that the Allies had no fewer than 'one hundred fully laden freighters . . . the whole problem was how to get them to the Soviet Union.' As the prime minister's temper rose, Stalin interrupted to suggest that higher sacrifices were called for. Ten thousand men a day were being sacrificed on the Russian front. 'We have arrayed against us 280 German divisions of which twenty-five are Panzer divisions with two hundred tanks in each. However we are not crying.'

'We admire the valour of the Russian armies,' responded Churchill, 'and we grieve over their losses. We hope in the course of the war to show that the British and Americans are no laggards and we hope that we are not deficient in valour either, and that we are just as ready as the Russians to spill blood when there is a prospect of success. But oceans, seas, and transportation — these are factors that we cannot ignore.'

His temper was roused. 'He declared,' the Russian record continues, 'that he is prepared to sacrifice 100,000 British soldiers in a landing on the coast of France if it might help the Russians.' He added, 'He wants Stalin to believe in the devotion, sincerity and determination of Britain to fight.'⁷⁶

Mollified by this reiteration of Churchill's willingness to sacrifice his men, Stalin suddenly invited Churchill and Harriman to dine with him on the morrow. It had however been one hell of a row. As they drove back to the embassy at two a.m. Sir Alexander Cadogan tentatively asked, 'Shall I tell Stalin in confidence that in view of what has happened you are hesitating whether to accept his dinner invitation tomorrow?'

'No,' said Churchill. 'That's going too far, I think.'⁷⁷ He believed he had got Stalin's measure now.

he, Harriman and Colonel Jacob held an inquest into the disastrous meeting as soon as they returned to the villa. What had provoked the insulting tirade from Stalin? Churchill felt that he had got over the worst of their problems the previous evening. He concluded, and he may well have been right, that Stalin was unable to carry the Supreme Soviet with him; he had been speaking as much to the hidden microphones as to the British visitors. Harriman comforted him that Stalin had used just the same 'hot and cold' tactics with Lord Beaverbrook the year before.⁷⁸

'In the public interest,' the prime minister assured Clement Attlee in what Jacob called 'a masterly telegram' to London, 'I shall go to the dinner.'



The dinner with Stalin would begin at nine p.m. on the fourteenth. It was to be a full-scale Kremlin banquet, held in their honour in the state rooms of Catherine the Great: the square marble pillars were faced with bright green malachite, the walls hung with panels of shot silk. There were about two-score guests, eating a meal of nineteen courses. Stalin showed up wearing his usual lilac-coloured tunic buttoned to the neck, and cotton trousers stuffed into long leather boots. To Colonel Jacob, this little shambling fellow looked like the kind of peasant one might meet in a country lane with a pickaxe over his shoulder; he seemed out of place at these banquet tables. After a while Jacob could see that it was developing into the kind of party that the prime minister did not like at all: General Wavell delivered a speech in Russian; Churchill, though placed to Stalin's right, found himself rather left out as his host waltzed around his generals, clinking glasses and wisecracking in a language of which his other guests had no inkling. Churchill counted thirty-four toasts, a self-perpetuating celebration which soon had even him bored, despite the fast-flowing fiery liquor which it involved.⁷⁹ ('Silly tales have been told,' he would write in an unusually defensive passage of his memoirs, 'of how these Soviet dinners became drinking-bouts. There is no truth whatever in this.'⁸⁰)

Churchill perked up momentarily when Stalin took him into an adjacent room to be photographed. After they had been banqueting for four hours, Stalin suggested they see a movie: appalled by the prospect of a flickering black-and-white Eisenstein epic in a foreign tongue, Churchill made his excuses. 'After a cordial handshake,' he reported a few hours later, 'I

then took my departure and got some way down the crowded room but he [Stalin] hurried after me and accompanied me an immense distance through corridors and staircases to the front door where we again shook hands.’⁸¹ Stalin had ragged him mercilessly, however, and as they were driven back to their dacha Cadogan could see that the P.M. had not enjoyed that. ‘I don’t know what I am supposed to be doing here,’ he growled. ‘I’m going to return home without seeing Stalin again.’⁸²

The atmosphere was charged with enmity. Back at the dacha Churchill and his advisers wrangled over the final communiqué. Churchill disliked the Russian draft. Cadogan raged at him so loudly that the doctor, Wilson, was aghast: he had never seen anybody talk to Winston like that before. ‘Do as you think,’ the P.M. finally snapped. ‘But I wanted it recorded that I thought it would be disastrous.’

Cadogan refused to issue the communiqué without the P.M.’s approval. Churchill merely glared, and went to bed.

‘Goodnight!’ called out Cadogan after the figure that ambled off. It was three a.m.⁸³

On the following morning, August 15, another inquest followed. The British party were deeply hung-over. Churchill suggested to Colonel Jacob that perhaps Stalin had not intended to be so insulting at their very first meeting. He now dropped the idea of retreating from Moscow. Everybody agreed that he must seek another meeting with Stalin alone, and that this time he should take a better interpreter, perhaps Major A. H. Birse, who been born in Saint Petersburg and had spent thirty years of his life in Russia. For a few hours the Russians played hard to get, the Soviet operators telling Cadogan at hourly intervals that Stalin was ‘out walking’; finally he agreed to see Churchill at seven p.m.⁸⁴ Meanwhile the British generals extracted from their Soviet colleagues the all-important prediction that they would be able to hold the Caucasus against the German offensive.

That evening, summoned by Churchill, the Polish General Wladyslaw Anders, Sikorski’s army commander, arrived in Moscow from Tashkent where he was doing what he could to salvage an army from the mass of Polish prisoners taken by the Russians in 1939. Anders was a capable, tall officer, his appearance marred only by having shaven his head. He told horror-stories about how the Russians had treated him and his fellow officers after overrunning eastern Poland. ‘Eight thousand of his best officers had been put in a concentration camp in 1939,’ noted Jacob. ‘Today they had all vanished without a trace. When asked about them, Stalin said that perhaps

they had run away somewhere, but apparently had made no efforts to clear up the mystery.'⁸⁵ Having little stomach for the Poles, Churchill asked Cadogan to minister to the skinhead-general until he got back from the Kremlin around ten o'clock.

churchill drove off to the Kremlin with Major Birse at six-thirty. He told this interpreter that he was determined to have one more shot at getting closer to Stalin. Birse would find little difficulty with his style. 'His remarks were prefaced,' he wrote, 'by a kind of suppressed murmur, as if he were trying out the richness of his words while on their way from brain to tongue, as if he were repeating them to himself, testing them, discarding the inappropriate, and choosing precisely the right expression. I could almost hear them travelling from the depths of his being to burst into life.'⁸⁶

Stalin's bodyguard took them upstairs to his conference room. Its windows looked across the Moskva river to the splendid British embassy building on the other bank. The meeting began and ended inconclusively. Stalin stood sulkily beside his writing desk; he offered no smile, nor could the prime minister even catch his eye as they shook hands. The Russian record shows that Churchill expressed sorrow at this tension, but he had felt it proper to bring the painful news about the Second Front to Stalin in person. He wanted, he said, to achieve with Stalin the kind of rapport that he had established with Roosevelt. Stalin admitted that 'their exchange of views' had proved inconclusive, but at least they had met and understood each other.

To inspire the Russian leader, Churchill showed him a timetable from Roosevelt revealing that there would be 1,043,400 American troops in Britain by July 9, 1943. Quite apart from torch, Churchill stated that he intended to keep Hitler in a state of suspense, expecting an invasion across the Channel at any time. 'In order to make Germany more anxious about an attack from across the Channel,' he said. 'there will be a more serious raid in August, although the weather might upset it. It will be a reconnaissance in force. Some eight thousand men with fifty tanks will be landed. They will stay a night and a day, kill as many Germans as possible and take prisoners. They will then withdraw.'⁸⁷ It could be compared, he said, to dipping one's finger into a hot bath to test the temperature. 'The object is,' said Churchill, 'to get information and to create the impression of an invasion. Most important, I hope it will call forth a big air battle.'

Stalin was dubious, declaring the obvious: 'The Germans will announce that the invasion has not succeeded.'

‘The Germans will certainly say this,’ agreed Churchill. ‘But if we take prisoners and kill many Germans then we too can say something about it.’

For a while they talked about the latest news from Malta. On the Russian front, said Stalin, the Germans had broken through near Stalingrad and Voronezh, but they lacked the strength to exploit this success.

Toward the end, Churchill reminisced about how he had deduced from Hitler’s intercepted orders switching three Panzer divisions from the Balkans to Cracow that he was about to attack the Soviet Union, and how he had at once passed a warning to Stalin; he was curious to learn whether it had reached him.* Stalin replied only that he had never doubted it, and he would have preferred six more months’ warning to get ready.

Having hinted at *ultra*, Churchill lifted a corner of the veil on *magic* too, revealing that the Japanese were rejecting the demands of the German ambassador in Tokyo to declare war on the Soviet Union. ‘Stalin,’ the Soviet transcript states, ‘thanked Churchill for this information.’⁸⁸

All of this showed Churchill in an unfortunately garrulous light, as he certainly had no business to be betraying the Allies’ most costly secrets – the breaking of the *enigma* and *purple cyphers* – to the Soviets. Only four months before ‘C’ had discussed with the foreign office whether they should inform Moscow of an intercepted Japanese message indicating Tokyo’s anxiety to find out whether Hitler and Stalin might make a compromise peace. ‘We have an added responsibility in not compromising this source,’ the head of the secret service, Brigadier Menzies, reminded the F.O., ‘in view of the help that the Americans have given us, and it is for consideration whether I should not first enquire from them if they have any objection to your acquainting the Soviet of this enquiry.’⁸⁹

as churchill rose to leave around eight-thirty Stalin asked when they would next meet. Churchill said he was taking off at dawn, and Stalin invited him back to his apartment for a drink. Whatever his memoirs might say to the contrary, Churchill never refused alcohol in his life. Several bottles were uncorked, and Stalin’s daughter Svetlana was called in. The red-head dutifully kissed her papa. ‘I confess,’ Churchill would tell his cabinet a few days later, ‘that I acquired a quite definite physical impression.’

Empty bottles clattered at intervals to the floor. Molotov arrived, and the three men, aided by the two interpreters, tucked into dishes of suck-

* See vol.i, page ••• [number follows]

ing-pig, chicken, beef, and fish. Churchill politely refused the head of the sucking-pig that was offered; Stalin cleaned it out with a knife and ate the rest with his fingers. The feasting went on until after two-thirty a.m.⁹⁰

Churchill had forgotten, indeed abandoned, the Polish general Anders altogether: it was a symbolic lapse of memory. He had solemnly promised the Poles in London to represent their interests in Moscow; this promise he now betrayed.⁹¹ Churchill watched contentedly as Stalin roasted Molotov, but then the dictator rounded on him too and reverted to the disaster that had befallen Convoy PQ. 17. The Royal Navy, he implied yet again, had abandoned those freighters to their fate. 'Has the British Navy no sense of glory?' he roared. Churchill responded that Stalin would just have to take it from him that they did the right thing. 'I really do know a lot about the navy and sea war,' he said.

'Meaning,' replied Stalin, 'that I know nothing.'

'Russia is a land-animal,' retorted the P.M. 'The British are sea animals.'^{92*}

Once, Stalin brought up the question of that British air raid on Berlin in November 1940, timed to coincide with Molotov's visit to Hitler. 'In War,' responded Churchill, 'no advantages can ever be neglected.' Stalin laughed and explained that Ribbentrop was just explaining that the British empire was finished when the sirens sounded and he decided to continue the discussion underground. When Ribbentrop then picked up where he had left off, that there was no longer any need to take account of the British empire, Molotov had asked: 'Then why are we down here now?'

The story, which was true, caused general merriment.

The strait-laced Cadogan, summoned to join them after midnight, found the two dictators bandying reminiscences. 'Whatever happened to the,' hesitated Churchill, 'ah, —,' and Cadogan supplied the missing word: '*kulaks*,' the Russian middle farmers of whom ten million had been exterminated in the course of the Bolshevik collectivisation.

Stalin belched. 'We gave them an acre or two,' he roared, 'in Siberia! But they proved very unpopular with the rest of the people.'⁹⁴

among the gifts that Stalin gave to Churchill was, curiously, a black skull cap; he wore it a few times in private afterwards.⁹⁵ There is no doubt that Churchill's arduous journey had been necessary, and that he had performed

* When Churchill repeated this dictum in public a fellow-admiral wrote to Admiral Cunningham, 'The neglect of the Sea by our "Air" all these years is a madness which would have led to the destruction of any nation less well favoured by the Gods.'⁹³

with skill the feat of holding the Grand Alliance together at this difficult time. Molotov told the British ambassador afterwards that Churchill's dynamic qualities had impressed Stalin. 'Stalin,' the ambassador added, 'is a lonely man and head and shoulders above those about him. It must therefore have been stimulating to meet a man of his own calibre.'⁹⁶ From Stalin's caustic comments later to visiting Americans, however, it is possible that he was less taken with Churchill than the latter believed.⁹⁷ As for Churchill, there was no doubt from his later utterances that he had taken a shine to the Georgian. Speaking to Arthur Hays Sulzberger of *The New York Times* – wearing that skull cap for the occasion – not long after, Churchill piously avowed, 'I would rather never have lived than to have done what Stalin has done.' He added however, 'It is my duty to cultivate him.' Having said which, he quoted to Sulzberger the stirring words once spoken by Edmund Burke: 'If I cannot have reform without injustice, I will not have reform.'⁹⁸

he drove away from the Kremlin at two-thirty a.m. He had a splitting headache whose origin he could not understand. He cabled to Roosevelt the next day, 'The greatest good will prevailed and for the first time we got on to easy and friendly terms.'⁹⁹ Flattering stories, mostly apocryphal, soon circulated in the British working-class pubs about Stalin's admiration of their prime minister. One Durham miner related that Stalin had ushered Winston into a luxurious bedroom with a mother-of-pearl bed upon which lay a Circassian beauty. 'Don't you think this girl is a little young?' the P.M. had gasped. 'As a matter of fact,' replied Stalin, 'she is only fourteen, but I thought she'd be old enough by the time you were ready for her.'¹⁰⁰

Arriving back at the dacha at three-fifteen a.m. they found General Anders, Jacob, Rowan and 'Tommy' Thompson fast asleep on sofas. Churchill woke up Anders, suggested they meet in Cairo, and told him to sleep on.

He himself went off for a bath, and called in Colonel Jacob while he was dressing afterward. For a while he flopped onto a sofa as if in a daze, eyes closed, reciting to the colonel and their ambassador all that had happened; he felt now that he had pulled triumph out of the jaws of the earlier disaster. Reflecting on these last few days, Jacob decided that to make friends with a man like Stalin would be not unlike making friends with a python. Just two hours later they were already boarding their planes to leave, while bands played the three national anthems of the great powers. Stalin had laid on a military guard of honour. The soldiers stood motionless in a torrential

downpour as the Liberators thundered past and trundled into the air at five-thirty a.m., bound for Teheran and Cairo.

Churchill informed London that Stalin intended to start bombing Berlin himself soon. Bomber Command should also strike hard 'as soon as darkness permits,' he added, though care should be taken to avoid Anglo-Soviet clashes over the target city. He even suggested they arrange 'a rendezvous with the Russian pilots' over Berlin.¹⁰¹ Harris was unwilling to commit more than two hundred and fifty of his Halifaxes to such an operation. Sinclair and Portal replied to Moscow that they could send only this number of bombers to Berlin, and not until during the next moon period; but this scale of attack would invite disproportionately heavy casualties. The two men recommended that they should wait until they could send at least five hundred bombers, the minimum number to saturate the defences.¹⁰² Churchill did not buy that. '250 heavies far exceeds [the] weight and number of any previous attack on Berlin,' he retorted. He sensed procrastination. 'What date will 500 be possible?' he pressed. While he would not allow any attack to be made 'regardless of cost,' he recalled that 'Butcher' Harris had mentioned to him, before he left England, that an attack in the August moon period would be possible. 'Can you do it in September?' pressed the prime minister. Very cogently he added, 'I had always understood darkness was the limiting factor. Not numbers.'¹⁰³

Portal replied that even if they sent three hundred in September, they would lose about fifty in the attack, a wound from which it would take the Command at least a month to recover.¹⁰⁴

In Egypt, things already looked different. General Alexander, the new commander-in-chief, Middle East, had moved his headquarters out of Cairo and into the desert, as Allenby had done in the Great War. Montgomery had arrived to take over the Eighth Army. On August 18 Churchill drove out to meet him in the desert. Was there already a change in the spirit of the troops he encountered, or was it his imagination? They seemed somehow more alert and confident. They joined Montgomery in time for dinner. Monty had shifted his headquarters from the arid and uncomfortable patch of inland desert favoured by Auchinleck to the coast near Cunningham's Desert Air Force headquarters at Burg-el-Arab. He took the P.M. down to the beach to bathe, in the nude, before dinner. Everywhere along the beach were soldiers of the Eighth Army; from a distance their white skin where their shorts had kept off the sun looked like neat white bathing trunks.¹⁰⁵

The next day found him inspecting the positions at Alamein. From the intercepts they knew that Rommel was about to attack again, probably at the southern end of the front and on the twenty-sixth, and nothing would tear Churchill away now. General Brooke was not happy at the prospect that the P.M. would be interfering with the new generals as he had with the old.¹⁰⁶ There was however shortly a distraction. During the night word came from 'Pug' Ismay that operation *jubilee* – Admiral Mountbatten's amphibious raid on Dieppe – was going ahead the very next day, August 19.¹⁰⁷ Conscious that this adventure, of which Churchill had spoken to Stalin, might reap great political rewards, on August 19 he set out nonetheless for an all-day visit to the desert front; but unable to contain his curiosity, he telephoned several times from the desert to the embassy asking for news.¹⁰⁸

The files do not reveal whether Mountbatten had consulted him about the renewed and perplexing choice of Dieppe as the raid's target. Churchill had certainly not spoken of this town when talking to Stalin about the planned raid. Thousands of men who had already been briefed twice to raid that port in June and July had meanwhile dispersed around southern England.¹⁰⁹ Even Anthony Eden, who had watched baffled as invasion craft scurried hither and thither off the Sussex coast on the eighteenth, noted on the following day, the day of *jubilee*, that he was 'puzzled by the evidence given by destroyers & barges yesterday,' and he learned that 'the Germans didn't appear to have been surprised.'¹¹⁰



The first message from Mountbatten, covering events to midday, was ambiguous: it spoke of companies storming the beaches at Dieppe, and of strong opposition. On the third of the five beaches, *red*, the initial landing had been successful but later reports indicated that several tanks were out of action and the situation was 'rather serious.' On the fourth beach, *blue*, the tanks had been unexpectedly held up by a wall. Several tank-landing-craft had been sunk. 'The zero hour for the start of the withdrawal was 11 a.m. and the order for this was given according to plan,' the telegram continued. 'At that time the situation was obscure. It was uncertain how much progress had been made on the flanks and how far the troops had advanced. In the centre our troops and tanks were definitely faced with serious resistance and the situation is unpleasant.' After putting losses in the air at forty-eight, with forty-five enemy planes definitely and twenty-five prob-

ably destroyed, the report concluded: 'The withdrawal is still continuing under great difficulties and it is feared that casualties may be heavy.'¹¹¹

This did not look good at all. In fact it smacked of a rout. Churchill prudently signalled to Ismay in London at nine p.m., 'Consider it would be wise to describe jubilee as "Reconnaissance in Force".'¹¹² A few hours later a message came from Ismay in London explaining that Mountbatten was unable to give further details until all the reports were in. 'It is certain however that casualties have been heavy and that generally speaking objectives were not attained.'¹¹³

If this too seemed to speak the unequivocal language of failure, Mountbatten's version, received in Cairo only a few minutes later and evidently circumventing Ismay's channels, was more buoyant: 'It is clear,' reported the admiral, 'that although strategical surprise was impossible tactical surprise was achieved.' The fact that 'our troops were unable to capture the town before the time for withdrawal' was buried halfway down the report, as was the doleful admission that one third of the 6,100 troops were missing. 'Morale of returning troops reported to be excellent. All I have seen are in great form.' The attack had obviously 'rattled' the Germans, the admiral suggested, and he now claimed that they had destroyed ninety-six German planes in the ensuing air battles (the real figure was exactly half). This enhancement was necessary, as he now also had to concede that the R.A.F. had lost ninety-eight planes in the process (the true figure was 107); but thirty of those pilots had survived.¹¹⁴

Seemingly satisfied with the young admiral's report, Churchill cabled to London that his general impression was that the results 'fully justified the heavy cost.' 'The large scale air battle alone justified the raid.'¹¹⁵



Operation jubilee had begun in the small hours of August 19, 1942. Some five thousand soldiers, mostly eager young men of the Canadian 2nd Division, were carried across the English Channel and debouched onto the beaches at Dieppe. Within nine hours, the surf was tinged with blood. In an inferno of machine-gun bullets and grenades, the defenders killed 1,179 of the raiding force and captured two thousand. Out of the 4,963 young Canadians who fought at Dieppe, there were 3,367 casualties, two out of every three.¹¹⁶ Their equipment was abandoned on the beach.

The cover-up began that same day, with Mountbatten writing the laconic entry in his diary: 'Great air battle. Many casualties and some successes.'¹¹⁷ He rendered a colourful account to the cabinet, claiming that his operation had destroyed one-third of the Luftwaffe in the west. This was untrue. The Allies eventually assessed the German losses at between 125 and 150 planes; the true figure was forty-eight. Mountbatten also told the cabinet that nearly two-thirds of the raiding force had returned. These were however only the men who, fortunately for themselves, had failed to get ashore. Even Leopold Amery, one of Mountbatten's less critical fans, found it odd that he had launched a frontal assault on a strongly held place like Dieppe instead of landing at an 'undefended point' and careering around the country wreaking havoc. Speaking with him in private, Mountbatten implied that he had wanted a scheme of that sort, but had been overruled.¹¹⁸

The Dieppe disaster stemmed in part from disjointed planning, which in turn resulted from the lack of one firm-handed task force commander. About the topography and defences in the Dieppe area Mountbatten's hand-picked officers had provided pre-raid Intelligence which proved totally inadequate.¹¹⁹ They had not revealed the anti-tank guns on the beach at Dieppe, the machine-gun posts covering the frontal and eastern landing beaches, or the shallowness of the water at Pourville which prevented the assault craft there from landing their tanks. Lessons were duly learned, primarily the need for a purpose-built fleet of assault landing-craft, and for airplanes and heavy naval guns to bombard the landing beaches. Above all, the fiasco dispelled any illusion that a cross-Channel invasion would be easy. 'It may fairly be said,' wrote Mountbatten's biographer, 'that nobody who remembered Gallipoli should have needed so elementary a reminder.'

It is often overlooked that the Germans too had profited from the raid: the British had crossed the Channel, mocked Adolf Hitler in private, and kindly deposited on the sea front at Dieppe quantities of their latest tanks and guns for him to study; no doubt, he warned, they would now have realised their follies – the real invasion would look very different. Hitler issued orders for the Atlantic Wall to be made stronger than ever.¹²⁰



To Churchill, as he continued his visit to the Eighth Army, the difference since Montgomery's take-over six days before seemed dramatic. 'The highest alacrity and activity prevails,' he reported to London. 'Positions are

everywhere being strengthened and extended forces are being sorted out and regrouped in solid units. The 44th and 10th Armoured Divisions have already arrived in the forward zone. The roads are busy with the forward movement of troops, tanks, and guns.'¹²¹ He fitted in visits to the Hussars, the reborn 51st Highland, and Desert Air Force units. Addressing his old regiment, the Fourth Hussars, on the twentieth he spoke words which one trooper mimicked in an irreverent letter home: 'Gentlemen, you will strike – ah – an unforgettable blow – ah – against the enemy. The corn will be ripe – ah – for the sickle – ah – and you will be the reapers. May God bless you all.'¹²² Like an old but obdurate hunting dog, Montgomery's biographer would write, Churchill had finally picked up the scent that had eluded him for two long and wearisome years of war. It was the smell of victory.¹²³

He returned to Cairo that evening, August 20. The next day he asked General Macreery [**check spelling?**], Alexander's new chief of staff, which armoured force he would rather have – Rommel's or his own? **Macreery** loyally answered: his own. On the twenty-second Winston set out on an excursion to the Touru caves where the slabs which formed the Pyramids had most probably been quarried. Now aero-engines were being overhauled in workshops installed in the caves. His vitality despite the broiling Egyptian heat staggered the wilting diplomats. Even his doctor Wilson had fallen foul of the local stomach ailment, known as the Pharaohs' Revenge. 'Sir Charles has been a terrible anxiety to us the whole time,' Cadogan heard the P.M. cruelly joking. 'But I hope we'll get him through!'¹²⁴

a letter was handed to Churchill. General Wavell had written it in his own hand. 'I have never before asked for anything for myself,' it began – and now he did, to be promoted to the ultimate rank of field-marshal.

In justification he offered that he had defeated the Italians in Cyrenaica in the winter of 1940–1 and in East Africa after that; true, there had been 'setbacks' since then, but having now been put in command of over one million soldiers, he wrote, 'I think I have fair claims to the rank.'¹²⁵ This seemed fair enough to Brooke and Churchill, but the war minister Sir Percy Grigg expressed himself frankly shocked at Wavell's presumption, believing he had neither enough fire in his belly nor iron in his body; he sourly agreed however to put the proposal forward to the Treasury.¹²⁶ In his response on September 16, Churchill denied ever having said, 'I have only to express a wish, for you to be determined to obstruct it;' but he had at least received consideration of his wishes from other ministers. Grigg's views

about Wavell, he felt, would astonish most people who had served under him. He proposed therefore to announce the promotion in the New Year's Honours List.¹²⁷ Cabling to Wavell on October 7, Churchill assured him, after telling him that Hitler's 1942 campaign against Russia would be 'a great disappointment' to the Führer: 'The personal matter which you mentioned to me is arranged, and will be announced in the New Year List.'¹²⁸

This delay to his promotion was for Wavell scarcely less of a disappointment. Though thanking Churchill, he pressed, 'I hoped and still hope that you could announce it forthwith.' He had after all earned his baton in 1941, not 1942: his military career was beginning to draw to an end, and the new rank might help in dealing with the Americans and Chinese over Burma. 'Gingerbread is always gingerbread,' he whimpered, 'but may I have it with the gilt on please.'¹²⁹

Churchill would have met his wishes there and then, but the King had told him that he wanted Lord Gort to have that baton too, and at the same time: Churchill was outraged, but suppressed it; he felt that Gort had never earned it, but he had been 'pushed up by Hore-Belisha,' the former war minister, in a manner most detrimental to the service and to himself.¹³⁰



The air was hot and humid, and the Nile was on the rise. Auchinleck came to say good-bye, having refused the command offered to him in Iraq and Iran; the job went to 'Jumbo' Wilson instead. In a callously worded telegram to Attlee, which bore the stamp of Montgomery's own hand, Churchill criticised both the outgoing commander-in-chief and his chief of staff General Eric Dorman-Smith in these terms: 'I am sure we were headed for disaster under the former regime. The Army was reduced to bits and pieces. . . Apparently it was intended in face of heavy attack to retire eastward to the Delta. Many were looking over their shoulders to make sure of their seat in the lorry.' Auchinleck's biographer called this telegram a 'disagreeable, inaccurate and offensive document.'¹³¹

They were still far from over the hump. The latest news of pedestal merely added misery to all their misfortune so far.¹³² The Germans and Italians had launched a furious air assault on the remnants of this convoy and its escorts, having already sunk the carrier *Eagle* and damaged the carrier *Indomitable*. Bombers, U-boats, and E-boats had picked up the attack. Reports reached the prime minister's travelling map room that the cruisers

Manchester and *Cairo* had also gone down, and one by one the precious merchant ships were being picked off and sunk as well. It was like PQ.17 all over again, with the difference that these seamen could expect to survive immersion in these warm waters for longer than a few minutes. Only three of the freighters survived: he learned of their arrival at Malta at dawn on August 20, followed by *Brisbane*, limping in next day, and then, best news of all, a disabled American oil tanker complete with her lifesaving liquid cargo intact, towed in by a destroyer.

The cabinet at last telegraphed from London its approval of his measures. Delighted about this, the prime minister marched up and down his bedroom, as Colonel Jacob described, exclaiming that he 'knew all along that he had laid a very good egg that morning.'¹³³

more americans in England were now privy to the *ultra* secret. By August 1942 Admirals Stark and Kirk had full access to it; after a suitably stern lecture, Eisenhower had been made 'aware of its existence,' and there was talk of giving appropriate *ultra* decodes to his chief of staff Bedell Smith and to his G-2 Brigadier Mockler-Ferryman.¹³⁴ On August 11, 1942, the R.A.F.'s commander-in-chief Middle East, asked if General Russell L. Maxwell, the American C.-in-C. in Cairo, could also be given access to *ultra*, as General Brereton had been. On August 12 the chiefs of staff ruled that a telegram should go to Cairo authorising disclosure to either Maxwell or Brereton, but not both.¹³⁵ On August 28, the question arose whether it would be right to give the three American chiefs of staff regular briefings on the general trend of events, derived from *ultra*, the actual material being transmitted to the United States 'over C's route and in his cypher' for him to scrutinise 'in accordance with his responsibility' to Churchill as minister of defence.¹³⁶

Until the spring of 1943 there was no formal sharing of *ULTRA* between the Allies. To avoid any breach of security Bletchley Park was adamant that the Americans must promise never to attempt to copy the British '*bombe*' used for breaking the German codes. Frantic to learn the British secrets, the Americans readily gave the necessary undertakings to Captain Eddy Hastings, 'C's' man in Washington, in July 1942, and as readily broke their word.¹³⁷ Thus one more of Britain's costly secrets crossed the Atlantic. Whereas even in October 1942 the U.S. navy department's opposite number to Commander Rodger Winn, commander of the admiralty's Submarine Tracking Room, did not know of the existence of the 'most secret sources'

and was 'puzzled' by the fact that for some months past the admiralty's intelligence about U-boats had been slipping (this was a period when Bletchley Park could not read the submarines' SHARK cypher), soon more people than was healthy in Washington were aware of Mr Churchill's 'oracle.'¹³⁸

Rommel's attack would begin within a very few days; of that Churchill knew from *ultra*. 'There is one thing I would like to make absolutely clear,' he told the assembled press corps in Cairo. 'We are determined to fight for Egypt and the Nile Valley as if it were the soil of England itself.'¹³⁹ The next day, August 23, he decided to leave for home. Once again their flight had to traverse the most dangerous zones in darkness. They took off from Cairo at seven p.m., and touched down at Gibraltar early the next morning. A plain van backed up to the Liberator and delivered him, unseen by the prying Nazi eyes just across the frontier, to the Convent for breakfast and a bath. He was in 'cracking form,' recorded Cadogan. They took off again at two p.m. and descended through cloud into south-western England that evening.¹⁴⁰

'The arrival at the aerodrome,' wrote his waiting secretary, ignoring Churchill's linguistic edict that the word henceforth be airfield, 'was rather thrilling. It was dark, with clouds gathering overhead, and the first we knew was the drone of engines far above. Then a squadron of escorting Spitfires came down into sight, and finally the big Liberator. The P.M. seemed remarkably fit and fresh and so were most of the rest of the party, though they must have had an exhausting time.'¹⁴¹

Churchill found Clementine waiting with Randolph on the airfield with his secretary John Martin. He alighted from their special train at Paddington station at 11:30 p.m., very smart in his air commodore's uniform, and buoyant about the latest word of the Congress agitation in India. The Indian problem! It was good to be back in the heart of things again. 'We've got them on the run,' he said confidently to Leo Amery. The India Secretary was none too sure.¹⁴²

Back at Downing-street the P.M. kept Attlee and Eden up until one-thirty with tales of his great adventure.¹⁴³ He gave the cabinet much the same account the next day, embellishing it with details not contained in the official record – for example that Stalin had decided on his fateful 1939 pact with Hitler after learning that France could muster only eighty divisions and Britain only three. He left no colleague in doubt as to his admiration for Stalin in spite of, or perhaps even because of, his ruthlessness in liquidating the kulaks in the thirties.¹⁴⁴



Back now at his desk in Whitehall, Churchill was profoundly dismayed by all that he learned about the Dieppe fiasco of one week earlier. General Alan Brooke muttered that the planning had been all wrong. Invited to dinner at Chequers with Mountbatten on August 29, together with the Americans Eisenhower and Mark Clark, General Brooke stung 'Dickie' Mountbatten by voicing some very outspoken criticism of the raid. Mountbatten was dumbfounded – so he would write to Brooke that same night – and he tried to task him with it after they left the dining-room; but before he could do so Winston invited him out onto the terrace and tackled him outright: 'I heard the C.I.G.S. complaining that the planning was all wrong for the Dieppe show. What did he mean?'

Mountbatten replied that he had meticulously followed the procedures which the chiefs of staff had laid down. Stung to the quick, he wrote to Brooke threatening to demand 'a full and impartial enquiry' into the conduct of all concerned.¹⁴⁵ It did not help that the Luftwaffe dropped millions of leaflets over Portsmouth with photographs of the débâcle – the bodies, the mangled and abandoned equipment, the hundreds of Canadians being marched off into captivity.¹⁴⁶ Churchill ordered one of the leaflets shown to Admiral Mountbatten.

Whatever his private views about Dieppe, Churchill put a brave face on it. 'It was like putting a hand in the bath,' he told a visiting American newspaper editor three weeks later, repeating the analogy he had used before the event to Stalin – 'to get the temperature of the water.'¹⁴⁷ He rationalised this argument three days after that in the House: 'The raid must be considered as a reconnaissance in force. It was a hard, savage clash such as are likely to become increasingly numerous as the war deepens. . . I personally regard the Dieppe assault – to which I gave my sanction – as an indispensable preliminary to full-scale operations.'¹⁴⁸ Churchill explained to Colonel James Ralston, the visiting Canadian defence minister, that two factors had led to the disaster – the enemy's early interception of the assault force, and the delay to the operation. He conceded that the defences had also been stronger than anticipated, and there had been no aerial bombardment to soften them up.¹⁴⁹

mountbatten would later claim, 'The German records after the war revealed that their High Command had no inkling that any raid was mounted or even planned for August.'¹⁵⁰ This statement was hazarding the truth, because on August 12, one week before the raid, the British code-breakers had picked up a German signal which indicated that the enemy knew of the forthcoming operation against Dieppe.¹⁵¹ The subsequent interrogation of a Luftwaffe officer revealed that a war game held on the fifteenth at *Luftflotte 3* headquarters at Versailles, with opposing officers representing Mountbatten and Field-Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, had suggested that if the Allies landed at Dieppe they would be thrown out within five days at most. Two days after that, the same interrogation report showed, Luftwaffe squadron commanders on the western front were summoned to a conference at the headquarters of the German *Fliegerführer Atlantik* General Ulrich Kessler, in Angers; they were told that the Allies were planning a raid on Dieppe as soon as the weather conditions were right, a five-pronged assault bracketing the town.¹⁵²

After Dieppe the clamour for an early Second Front died down, but the raid and its casualties left a wound which began to fester during the remaining months of 1942. Canadians felt bitterness about the arbitrary manner in which somebody had cast their young men into a charnel house. By December 1942 there was renewed pressure in London for a full inquiry. Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay heard that the Chief of Combined Operations (Mountbatten) was going to have his wings severely clipped. 'But,' wrote Ramsay to another admiral, 'he is as slippery a customer as Rommel, and with the P.M. behind him he may "come again"!' ¹⁵³ Probably put up to it by Lord Beaverbrook, who was one of the most aggrieved Canadians, Churchill began asking questions again as Christmas approached. The more he studied the maps, the less he understood the raid. It seemed to defy all the accepted principles to attack a fortified coastal town without first securing the cliffs on either side, and to use the tanks in a frontal assault off the town's beaches instead of landing them a few miles up the coast and taking Dieppe from the rear. He asked General Ismay to investigate.

'Although for many reasons,' Churchill wrote to Ismay, 'everyone was concerned to make this business look as good as possible, the time has now come when I must be informed more precisely about the military plans' — a startling admission for Britain's minister of defence to make to his chiefs of staff. Who had made these plans, he asked, and who had approved them? What was the part played in them by Montgomery and the Canadian com-

mander McNaughton? What had the Canadian generals concerned thought about the plans, and were they checked by the army's general staff?¹⁵⁴

Naïvely, or out of a misplaced sense of comradeship, Ismay showed Churchill's peremptory minute to Mountbatten, asking him to treat it as 'private, not to be shown even to your staff.' 'It may be that adverse criticisms have reached his ears,' Ismay warned Mountbatten, referring to the prime minister, 'or again, it may be that he wishes to ensure that false deductions have not been drawn from the results. . . Yet again, it may be that his mind is harking back to the incident at the dinner party at Chequers [on August 29] when the C.I.G.S. made a number of allegations which you afterwards cleared up with him, and which were never reported to the prime minister himself.'¹⁵⁵

By way of reply Mountbatten submitted a précis of his own full report on Dieppe. It was evasive at best; Ismay worked the admiral's answers into his response to the prime minister, without saying that they came from Mountbatten himself. The prime minister allowed the matter to drop.¹⁵⁶

When the time came in 1950 for him to deal with Dieppe in his memoirs Churchill set out with the honest intention of telling his readers how and why it had happened. 'It will be necessary,' he wrote to one friend, 'for the whole story to be told.' His 916-page volume eventually devoted only three pages to the fiasco – and these now turn out to have been rewritten by Lord Mountbatten himself, who had obtained the ageing author's first draft from Ismay. Where Churchill had originally stated that the raid was remounted 'on the initiative of Lord Mountbatten,' the admiral crossed out that incriminating phrase and assured the forgetful prime minister that the decision had been Churchill's. The 'Churchill' version also contains the words, 'The Germans did not receive, through leakages of information, any special warning of our intention to attack.' Churchill thanked him for the redraft, which he substantially used, ascribing to his 'poor memory' that he had not remembered all the details 'you mention.'

Into this redraft Mountbatten had slipped the following words, for which there is no support in the archives: 'I personally,' indicating Churchill, 'went through the plans to remount the raid.'¹⁵⁷ The narrative concluded, 'The story is vividly told by the official historian of the Canadian Army and in other official publications and need not be repeated here.'¹⁵⁸ The passage closed on the brief refrain: 'Honour to the brave who fell. Their sacrifice was not in vain.'

25: *In Chains*

There was an unseemly sequel to the Dieppe raid. The Germans had captured a British order stating: ‘Wherever possible prisoners’ hands are to be tied so that they cannot destroy their papers.’ In war, like any gentlemanly sport, there are agreed rules that have to be obeyed, and under these rules the manacling of prisoners is illegal; on August 30, 1942 the German High Command (O.K.W.) demanded a British explanation, failing which all the prisoners taken at Dieppe – who were mostly Canadians – would be put in chains as a reprisal, starting four days later. The War Office formally denied that prisoners had been tied up, but undertook to revoke the order.¹

That would have been the end of the matter, but during Mountbatten’s subsequent Commando raid on the German-occupied Channel island of Sark on October 4 there was a further incident. A raiding force of sixteen Commandos seized a German work party, tied them with ropes, and marched them to the beach where they bayoneted and shot some of them, still trussed, to death before withdrawing. The O.K.W. announced on the seventh that as from the next day the Dieppe prisoners would be placed in fetters. Hitler himself drafted the communiqué: ‘The terror and sabotage squads of the British and their accomplices act more like bandits than soldiers. In the future they will be treated as such by the German troops and ruthlessly put down in battle, wheresoever they may appear.’ Mountbatten’s headquarters issued a denial, while admitting that four prisoners taken at Sark had been shot ‘trying to escape.’ Once again Churchill backed his protégé; on the eighth his government declared the German reprisals unlawful under the Geneva Convention, and without consulting the Canadian government – who had most prisoners at risk – he announced that from the tenth the British would place an equal number of German prisoners in

chains.² It was all very ugly, and after the cabinet discussed it at length on October 8 even Eden privately noted his discomfiture: 'I am not happy about this. We certainly did tie some prisoners at Sark & shot them when they tried to escape. It is not illegal to tie prisoners' hands & [we] have got ourselves into a false position by denying we have done it.'³

Churchill's actions aroused a storm of protest telegrams from the Dominion prime ministers.⁴ There were threats of riots and shooting among the prisoners held in Canadian camps.⁵ With the Germans now holding in chains – more precisely in chromium-plated handcuffs, for twenty-three hours each day – the prisoners who had survived the Dieppe débâcle, the Canadian government was particularly distressed. Visiting London that month, their defence minister Colonel Ralston took it up with Churchill.⁶ He however refused to climb down, and the relentless face-off with Hitler, a 'grisly affair,' as another visiting Canadian official recorded, continued. 'It has now become a matter of saving his [Churchill's] face in part,' he wrote after discussing it with British ministers, 'and he is being obdurate.'⁷

A few days later he learned that the prime minister had sent an 'extremely rude' telegram to Mackenzie King about the reprisals. When Cripps explained that secret Intelligence revealed Hitler's personal role in the manacling, the Canadian lectured him that it all 'left a bad taste in Ottawa,' a taste which Churchill's telegram had done nothing to dispel.⁸ Despite his call for Parliament and the York Convocation to refrain from any public discussion on the subject, for weeks he was bombarded with letters from local Conservative party associations, and from influential Englishmen including Quintin Hogg, Cardinal Hinsley, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishops of London, Truro, and Winchester, expressing their abhorrence and the intense feeling 'of many Christian people.' Several writers pointed out that Germany held far more prisoners as pawns than did the British. There were angry letters from the Prisoners of War Relatives' Association, and from parents of prisoners including hundreds held by the Germans at Colditz Castle who, while 'loyally supporting' Churchill, were anxious that the 'mistaken' policy of reprisals should cease; Churchill noted on one such letter, 'I am most anxious to have our men relieved from this indignity & will certainly act simultaneously with the Germans.'⁹

Neither Hitler nor he wanted however to take the first step. At the *defence committee* that night, November 23, the Canadian government represented that the Swiss Protecting Power should be asked to intervene and to suggest that 'shackling should cease' at an agreed hour on both sides. Eden

approached the Swiss, but Germany did not reply.¹⁰ On December 2, the Canadian government informed Churchill that since he still refused to back down, they would take independent action to bring about the unshackling of the prisoners of war. Churchill told the cabinet the next day that Berlin was seeking a confession that his troops had acted wrongfully, and this confession he did not feel inclined to give. All agreed that an urgent telegram should go to Ottawa asking the Canadians not to step out of line.¹¹ A few days later the cabinet learned that Hitler had unofficially informed the Swiss authorities that he had given orders to unshackle the prisoners during Christmas week.¹² In February 1943, during Churchill's absence at the Casablanca conference the cabinet again debated what Eden called 'this tiresome & tragic shackling business.' 'We are in a bad tangle,' he wrote, '& Winston clearly made a mistake about the applicability of the Geneva convention in an earlier reply.'¹³

Mountbatten's commando raid on Sark had had one darker consequence of which the British were not yet aware – Hitler's infamous top secret Commando Order: in future, all commandos caught in action were to be liquidated out of hand. Hitler justified it by referring to the commandos' methods as being outlawed by the Geneva Conventions. 'Captured papers show that they are ordered not only to manacle their prisoners, but to kill their defenceless prisoners out of hand the moment they feel such prisoners might become a burden or hindrance to them in the prosecution of their purposes.' Hitler's commando order was distributed to his commanders on October 19. This order appears to have escaped the attention of British Intelligence, although the codebreakers caught one fore-echo, a signal radiated by Berlin to Rommel's staff inquiring what they knew about the battle instructions for British commandos, since a captured document recently shown to General Alfred Jodl, of the High Command, was 'said to have contained the order that German prisoners, who were brought in during the course of a commando-operation and who were a hindrance to the further prosecution of the operation, were to be shot.'¹⁴ Bletchley Park telexed this intercept to London on October 19, and 'C' showed it to the prime minister the same day.

Churchill, it should be said, was not a stickler for international law. When General Eisenhower asked that Britain's low-flying Fleet Air Arm aircraft going in with the first wave of the North African landings should carry *American* markings the First Lord A. V. Alexander pointed out that this would involve a breach of the Hague Convention; but the admiralty and

foreign office were prepared to assent, and the prime minister did not object.¹⁵

there were other matters concerning German prison camps on which Whitehall preferred to turn a blind eye. Rumours were still trickling out of Hitler's empire about things happening to the Jews.

Britain already had evidence from codebreaking and diplomatic sources that the Germans were deporting the Jews from Germany and other parts of Europe under their control to ghettos and camps in the Government-General (formerly Poland) where malnutrition, epidemics, brutal conditions, and executions were taking an immense toll.¹⁶ There was no shortage of Intelligence about the continued 'cleansing' operations in the east. The codebreakers had only just intercepted a message from the southern Russian front, reporting a *Judenaktion* on July 23 forty miles south-west of Kamenets, during which seven hundred Jews found incapable of work had been shot.¹⁷

Despite this, the foreign office was inclined to treat the more lurid public reports with scepticism. They were regarded as part of the international Zionist campaign, which was continuing regardless of the war effort. 'Information from Jewish refugees is generally coloured and frequently unreliable,' the F.O. had reminded one diplomatic outpost in December 1941.¹⁸ When such a telegram arrived from Geneva on August 10, 1942, composed by Gerhart Riegner, the youthful secretary of the World Jewish Congress, it ran into this wall of institutional disbelief: Riegner claimed that Hitler's headquarters was planning to deport up to four million Jews from Nazi-occupied countries to the east during the coming autumn, where they were to be exterminated 'in order to resolve, once and for all, the Jewish question in Europe.' Killing methods under discussion included, claimed Riegner, the use of hydrogen-cyanide.¹⁹

There was nothing new in such allegations: after World War One the American Jewish community had raised a similar outcry about what they had even then called a 'holocaust'; the governor of New York had claimed in a 1919 speech that 'six million' Jews were being exterminated.²⁰ In 1936, three years before the war, Victor Gollancz Ltd. had published a book entitled *The Extermination of the Jews in Germany*. In April 1937 a typical article in Breslau's Jewish newspaper had been headlined, 'the liquidation campaign against the jews in poland.'²¹ They had cried wolf too often before. In internal papers, the F.O. remarked that there was no confirmation

for Riegner's story from 'other sources' — a hint at *ultra*.²² There was a marked reluctance to exploit the stories for propaganda, and the files show that there was little public sympathy with the Jews in wartime Britain. A year before, the ministry of information had directed that horror stories were to be used only sparingly, and they must always deal with the maltreatment of 'indisputably innocent' people — 'not with violent political opponents,' they amplified. 'And not with Jews.'²³ Sydney Silverman, a Labour Member of Parliament, asked permission to phone Riegner's report through to Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the American Jewish Congress in New York; the foreign office disallowed this, arguing quaintly that this would merely provoke the Germans who 'always listen to such conversations.'²⁴ While they felt that they might profitably consult P.W.E. (their own Political Warfare Executive) about Riegner's 'rather wild story,' that was the only further action they would take.²⁵ There is no indication that Riegner's message was ever put before Churchill, who was in Cairo and Moscow at that time.

Similar 'wild stories' did however reach the United States. On September 4 the Polish ambassador in Washington produced to Lord Halifax 'an awful report about the Germans exterminating all the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto at the rate of 100,000 a month.' Halifax added: 'They are supposed to make various things they want out of the boiled-down corpses. I wonder whether this horror is true.* A good deal more likely to be true, I fancy, than it was in the last war.'²⁶ A few mornings later he noted heartlessly a visit by Rabbi Stephen Wise and a colleague 'whose talk was exactly like that of a stage Jew.' Grim though the subject-matter of their visit was, as the ambassador privately recorded, 'it was all I could do to keep a straight face when he chipped in.' They depicted in vivid detail how the Nazis were deporting French Jews to the east to kill them. 'If this is true,' Halifax cautioned himself, 'how vile it is of Laval to hand any more poor wretches over.'²⁷

Again the foreign office line was one of scepticism. In September 1944 a British diplomat would argue against publicising the atrocity stories on the heartless ground that it would compel officials to 'waste a disproportionate amount of their time dealing with wailing Jews.'

Later in September 1942 information did reach Churchill from his secret sources lifting a corner of the veil on Hitler's concentration camps.

* It was not true.

Analysis of their commandants' secret returns, transmitted in cypher to Berlin, had begun yielding daily figures for the death rates in a dozen such camps. These included twenty-one deaths during August at Niederhagen, eighty-eight at Flossenbürg, and seventy-four at Buchenwald; in a fast-growing camp at Auschwitz in Upper Silesia the intercepts revealed the notable totals of 6,829 male and 1,525 female fatalities. There was evidently a deadly epidemic raging at the camp, since a message of September 4, in reply to a request for a thousand prisoners for building the Danube railway, stated that Auschwitz could not provide them until the 'ban' (*Lagersperre*) on the camp had been lifted. It was an odd, one-way kind of quarantine: 'It appears that although typhus is still rife at Auschwitz,' the Intelligence report pointed out, 'new arrivals continue to come in.'²⁸

Every other detail, however trivial, was reflected in these intercepts, including a signal to Auschwitz commandant S.S. Sturmbannführer Rudolf Höss in September 1942 regretting that rubber truncheons were unobtainable in Breslau.²⁹ On October 26 the codebreakers found Berlin warning Auschwitz to stand by to receive two visitors from the Führer's Chancellery in Berlin – the agency supervising euthanasia and various other killing schemes – for a lengthy stay, as the radio signal said: they would be setting up an X-ray sterilisation operation (this being the method chosen by the S.S. to keep the Jews from breeding).³⁰ On October 27 Sachsenhausen reported that it was shipping to Auschwitz two hundred Soviet prisoners of war found to have contracted tuberculosis.³¹ After Berlin ordered that all camp fatalities were to be reported, on December 1 Buchenwald dutifully reported, in their secret code, a total of 134 deaths from natural causes during November including four Jews.³² On December 8 Dr **firstname** Wirths reported twenty-seven male and thirty-six female typhus deaths in Auschwitz during the previous week.³³ It is worth noting, as the official historian does, that nowhere in these myriads of intercepted German messages was there any reference to gas chambers or gassings, so the official scepticism which greeted Riegner's report from Geneva is understandable.³⁴



On Churchill's insistence a further North Russian convoy operation, PQ.18, was now run. It ended on about September 21 with only twenty-seven of its forty ships safely reaching Murmansk.

Throughout the Royal Navy feelings ran high about running these murderous Arctic convoys. It did not help that the admiralty's files held disturbing reports about the high-handed and humiliating Soviet treatment of the British sailors who had run the gauntlet of Hitler's bombers and U-boats to deliver cargoes to North Russia. The Soviets refused permission for British hospital units to land at Archangel, arguing that Britain already had too many naval personnel there. Colonel **firstname** Crankshaw, M.I.8's 'Y' (signals Intelligence) officer attached to Britain's 30 Mission in Moscow, reported that having hesitantly begun sharing codebreaking expertise in June 1942, in mid-October the Russians halted all further co-operation having failed to provide anything other than raw undecoded intercepts. After the Russians sealed up the admiralty's **meacon** gear (for jamming radar-beacons) at Murmansk in March 1943, the British retaliated by cancelling the hand-over of the German airforce **auka** codebooks.³⁵ In April and May the Russians would begin serious harassment of 30 Mission, and Churchill ordered the British Scientific Mission to Russia to be postponed indefinitely.³⁶

In June and July the Soviets would seize 106 bags of British mail, and step up their harassment of Royal Navy sailors, often jailing them for petty offences. When this was brought to Churchill's attention he would suggest that the admiralty 'ostentatiously prepare to withdraw our personnel' from North Russia. This move, conveying as it would a threat to abandon the PQ convoy operations altogether, would not be entirely bluff. By the summer of 1943 he was already beginning to harbour doubts about his great Russian ally, as will be seen.³⁷

In September 1942 however the convoy operations still hung round the navy's neck. Admiral Tovey continued to argue for their early cessation. Within the navy's confines, he was becoming an outspoken critic of Churchill's strategic direction of the war. This appeared to him, as he wrote to Admiral Cunningham, to have been based on expediency and bright ideas, without any real governing policy behind it. 'W.C. as prime minister is magnificent and unique,' he continued, aware that even his letters were not beyond being opened by the government's censor, 'but as a strategist and tactician he is liable to be most dangerous. He loves the dramatic and public acclamation. He has, to my knowledge, put up some wild schemes and, again without knowing details, I disliked intensely his original scheme for a Second Front.'³⁸

Faced now with the losses to PQ.18, Churchill had to accept that Tovey was right. He informed President Roosevelt that he was going to warn Stalin that there would be no more convoys until January 1943.³⁹ Without an early cross-Channel invasion to promise to Stalin either, the prime minister was hoist by his own petard: **torch**, the bombing of German civilians, and an increase in American aid were all that he had to offer to Moscow. He did however order that the now idle ships be used to mislead the enemy into believing that the next convoy would go ahead in October – this would induce Hitler to keep his submarines, aircraft and warships in the far north, well away from the **torch** area.⁴⁰



Work on **torch** had begun in earnest soon after Churchill's return from Moscow, although General Eisenhower still did not have his heart in it.

It is proper to remark that relations between the British and American peoples were already raw. The arrival of the first American troops in northern Ireland in January 1942 had led inevitably to friction with the local British population. Eamon de Valera, prime minister of southern Ireland, was equally disconcerted and resentful at these new arrivals; stationing American troops in northern Ireland violated the sovereignty which his government claimed to assert over its six counties.⁴¹ He asked Roosevelt for arms as well, but Churchill brought pressure on Winant not to allow this.⁴² As Harry Hopkins passed through Ireland, the commanders of the American armoured divisions told him that in the event of an enemy invasion they could occupy Dublin, capital of the Irish Republic, within seventy minutes.⁴³

All the root causes of discontent were there. Overfed and overpaid, the American troops bought up all the Irish liquor and other scarce items for prices the average British soldier could not afford. The GIs were bored by inactivity, often drunk, and ill-disciplined. They felt they had been finagled into fighting Britain's war. The American consul general in Belfast, the provincial capital of northern Ireland, reported that they were not immune to the influences of the Irish Republican Army; one U.S. army chaplain declared openly that the British had no right to be in the province.⁴⁴ Washington saw fit to intervene repeatedly on behalf of I.R.A. terrorists. When six young Irishmen were sentenced in August 1942 to hang in Belfast for murdering an Irish policeman called Murphy in 1941 the American embassy in

London expressed strong misgivings, representing that the Irish minister in Washington had protested at the sentences, and that any executions would have the ‘most unfortunate effects’ on Anglo-Irish relations as well as making the position of British and American forces in Ireland even more difficult.⁴⁵ After consulting with Churchill and Herbert Morrison the Northern Ireland government recommended that four should hang, with the other two reprieved and sentenced to penal servitude.⁴⁶ By September 1942 American troops in northern Ireland had already murdered two British soldiers in rowdy affrays.

These incidents mirrored public opinion in the United States. Surveys showed that Americans felt resentment toward British ‘bunglers,’ and toward what they saw as their class-system and the ‘old school tie;’ but mail intercepts showed that they had great faith in Churchill himself, particularly after his parliamentary victory in the July 1942 Vote of Confidence debate. They admired his courage, but there was a prevailing belief that the British soldier would not stand and fight – he just never seemed to stop ‘running.’ One American wrote of the R.A.F. as the ‘run away fast’ boys.⁴⁷ While Churchill was admired by forty-five percent of the Americans, they regarded the British people as aristocratic, snobbish, selfish, arrogant and cold; the British saw the Americans as conceited and cocksure, and associated them with gangsters, graft, and corruption.⁴⁸

at the governmental level too, as Churchill must have realised, there were tensions between London and Washington, and between Harriman, Roosevelt’s personal emissary, and Winant, the ambassador. From inside the American embassy on Grosvenor-square came whispers of prevalent anti-British speculation and discussion.⁴⁹

The most serious sticking-point was Britain’s overseas empire, and more particularly her Indian possessions. In Washington Lord Halifax had privately recommended that Churchill find a new word for ‘colonies’ – ‘whether “territories” or any other that ingenuity can suggest.’⁵⁰ It would take more than cosmetic touches to fob off the Americans, however; President Roosevelt left no doubt of his hostility to any empire – other than his own burgeoning imperium of course. After the fall of Malaya he had bluntly told Sir Ronald Campbell that Britain could never retrieve the *status quo*, and he suggested that Britain, the United States, and China should jointly exert a trusteeship there. In August 1942 Leopold Amery, an old-guard Conservative, taxed Churchill about the president’s unfriendly attitude: ‘I found

Winston rather weak on this,' wrote Amery, 'inclined to think that America's sacrifices would entitle her to some sort of say.'⁵¹ Churchill responded only that it would no doubt be hard on Amery if the Americans did force Britain to abandon her empire – Amery's life's work. The minister replied sharply that he saw no need whatever for that.⁵²

The preparations for *torch* put military relations between the staffs equally to the test. To British eyes, the Americans seemed unable to plan operations on any scale. Eisenhower had asked the Pentagon to appoint General George Patton, a fine cavalry commander, to command the expeditionary force which would land at Casablanca; Patton arrived in London on August 9 and scouted around for a few days during Churchill's absence. Eisenhower would have preferred to mount the entire *torch* operation within the relatively calm waters of the Mediterranean, and to leave the capture of Casablanca, with its terrifying Atlantic surf crashing on the beaches, until a later date; the further east their *Schwerpunkt*, he felt, the more probable an early capture of Tunis would become. Fearing however that Hitler and Franco might at any moment make common cause and seal off the Straits of Gibraltar, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff overruled him.⁵³ Eisenhower remained pessimistic. On August 23 he sent a gloomy letter about the operation to the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington.⁵⁴ In conversations with his private staff he remarked that *torch* might well break his reputation.⁵⁵

Eisenhower had begun the habit of twice-weekly meetings with Churchill – lunching with him at No. 10 early each week and dining with him at Chequers on Fridays. Churchill did not comment on the letter when he had Eisenhower and Mark Clark round for a meal on Tuesday August 25.⁵⁶ He reported that Stalin had told him in Moscow, 'may God prosper this operation,' and this, he felt, committed them all to staging *torch* at the earliest date and on the most ambitious scale.

The more that he saw these two American generals, the more he liked them. Conversely, their private views on him were less flattering. True, the prime minister had on this occasion drunk less than Eisenhower expected – he saw him down only one glass of sherry – and he had smoked only an inch of the over-long cigar. The P.M.'s manners in company had however startled his visitors. Once he accidentally knocked a highball glass off a side table, he continued talking without even glancing round to see where the glass and brandy had fallen. Later that evening Churchill took off his shoes in front of the astonished American generals and changed into fresh socks,

brought him by a valet. This was not his only personal problem. He walked over to the door, put his back against its open edge and rubbed his shoulder blades against it like a cow against a post, explaining: 'Guess I picked 'em up in Egypt.' Eisenhower related these incidents to his staff the next day and demonstrated how Churchill drank his soup. 'Being short and blockily built,' dictated his naval aide afterwards, 'the P.M.'s chin isn't very much above the soup plate. He crouches over the plate, almost has his nose in the soup, wields the spoon rapidly. The soup disappears to the accompaniment of loud and raucous gurglings.'⁵⁷

The dickering over *torch* continued for several days. There now arrived from the American Joint Chiefs of Staff a memorandum insisting on a landing at Casablanca instead of the Mediterranean landing sites at Philippville and Bône.⁵⁸ 'Out of the blue,' as Churchill lamented in an unsent letter to Harry Hopkins when it was all over, 'arrived the shattering memorandum of the United States Chiefs of Staff, which altered the whole character and emphasis of the operation — discarding Algiers, the softest and most paying spot, and throwing all the major weight upon Casablanca and the Atlantic shore.'⁵⁹ General Brooke could not understand why, and on August 26 there was a difficult chiefs of staff meeting, trying to establish the latest position on *torch*. On the twenty-seventh the prime minister telegraphed to the president a rebuke about the 'endless objections, misgivings and well-meant improvements' saying that if the president would only appoint the date and place for *torch*, the rest would fall back into their proper place, and 'action will emerge from what will otherwise be almost unending hummings and hawings.' Brooke was horrified to discover that in this cable from Churchill to President Roosevelt he had arbitrarily set October 14 as the date for *torch* without even consulting his own chiefs of staff, arguing that 'a bold, audacious bid for a bloodless victory at the outset may win a very great prize.'⁶⁰ Meeting with the chiefs of staff on the morning on August 27, General Brooke insisted to Churchill that they must oppose the American view, and undertake landings at Algiers and Oran, as well as at Philippville and Bône.⁶¹ Roosevelt had yet to reply.⁶²

Churchill invited them all down to Chequers on Friday August 28 to unravel all the uncertainties over *torch*. When Brooke motored over he found the two Americans, Eisenhower and Mark Clark, already there with Ismay, Eden and Mountbatten (it was the evening of Mountbatten's spat with Brooke over Dieppe). Eisenhower had agreed only reluctantly to come, conscious that his exposed position between president and prime minister,

and between the British and American chiefs of staff, was fraught with political risks. He was already wary of Winston's ways and feared being misquoted by him to Roosevelt. He was tired of talking about *torch*, and called it all a 'tedious, tiresome rehash.'⁶³ 'After dinner we saw films including a Walt Disney one,' noted Brooke. 'However [we] did not get to bed till after two a.m.'⁶⁴

Impatient at the disputes, Churchill now suggested that he go over in person to Washington yet again. Eden discouraged the idea, putting forward reasons of health; Sir Charles Wilson advised Churchill that his heart would not stand the rigours of another Atlantic flight at this time.⁶⁵ Eden volunteered to make the trip himself. For reasons of domestic politics he seldom shunned the limelight, wherever its dazzling rays were to be sought, as he wanted to reinforce his position vis-à-vis Beaverbrook, Cripps, and other contenders for the prime minister succession.⁶⁶

On the next morning Churchill called yet another conference to discuss *torch*. 'Best not write anything about it,' wrote Eden afterwards.⁶⁷ Less restrained, Brooke recorded that they reached agreement to stage the landings at Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers instead of at Oran, Algiers and Bône. Brooke felt this much wiser, as it conformed to the American outlook; but they would have to withdraw forces from the Pacific, which would not suit Admiral King at all.⁶⁸

Early on Monday August 31 Churchill received a telegram from Roosevelt about *torch* proposing still further changes. It was largely unintelligible, but it seemed that under pressure from General Marshall, the president wanted the Americans to stage the two westernmost landings first, as the vanguard of *torch*, leaving the British to put in their third assault a month later, after the Americans had secured a lodgement; this seemed their best chance of getting the Vichy French defenders not to oppose the landings – they were known to hate the British, and particularly Churchill, since the July 1940 naval slaughter of Mers el-Kébir.⁶⁹ The British hated the idea. Brooke argued with Churchill about it until five p.m., then went to a chiefs of staff meeting with Eisenhower and Clark. The dispute went on. On the morning of September 1 Churchill discussed with his chiefs of staff, and with Attlee, Eden and Lyttelton, the wording of a new message to Roosevelt insisting on landing their troops at Algiers as well as at Casablanca and Oran.⁷⁰

The only one to benefit from all this was Clementine – and her cook. Eisenhower had had the foresight to bring over a bag of lemons for her, a delicacy whose scent was almost forgotten by the English at war. Clemen-

tine decided to keep one on her table to look at from now on. Her cook ‘almost fainted with joy.’⁷¹

This disagreement with the Americans began preying on Winston’s health. To Brooke he seemed tired and dejected, and Eden suspected that Winston’s heart was beginning to give out.⁷² On September 3 Churchill sent a further message about **torch** to the president, and he called another full-scale meeting. ‘Winston depressed by last American telegram,’ noted Eden, ‘and all of us, I think, by this further evidence of “order, counter-order, disorder”.’ Eisenhower and Clark fought to straighten things out, and Eden once more took note of their high quality.⁷³

Unwilling to upset Roosevelt directly, Churchill drafted a furious letter to Harry Hopkins for Mountbatten to carry to Washington, protesting at this interference from ‘across the ocean.’ ‘What is the use,’ he wrote, ‘of putting up an Allied Commander-in-Chief or Supreme Commander if he cannot have the slightest freedom in making his plan or deciding how, when, and where to apply his forces? We are prepared to take his decisions and to obey.’ The letter was never sent, for on the fifth a message arrived from Roosevelt, finally agreeing to throw their full weight behind the invasion of all three cities in French North-West Africa.⁷⁴



In the North African desert the tide of battle was already turning in Britain’s favour.

In the first week in June 1942, even before the loss of Tobruk, the codebreakers at Bletchley Park had begun reading both of the German army’s **enigma** keys with only one day’s delay. They had simultaneously broken a key which they nicknamed **scorpion**, the new Army–Luftwaffe liaison (*Fliegerverbindungsoffizier*) key; from July 11 moreover the British secret service had allowed the deciphering of **scorpion** signals to be done on the spot in Egypt, for which purpose the innocuously-named Combined Bureau Middle East had requisitioned the former Fauna and Flora Museum at Heliopolis, seven miles outside Cairo. ‘It was easy to break,’ reports one of Bletchley Park’s men, ‘for the daily settings could be predicted in advance.’ On such trivia empires can be won and lost. It helped that several actual German cypher machines had been captured, and these only needed each day’s settings typed in.⁷⁵ With the breaking in mid-July of another key, that

used by Rommel's supply line from Greece and Crete, Bletchley Park had taken illicit possession of every cypher in use in North Africa.⁷⁶ All of these secret triumphs had occurred before Auchinleck was replaced.

Montgomery recognised that it was vital for Eighth Army morale to win an early and decisive victory over Rommel. He soon had his chance. On August 13 he had decided that to thwart Rommel they must emplace a line of tanks and guns on the Alam Halfa ridge, south-west of Alamein. The decrypts from the seventeenth onward confirmed this assessment; they revealed Rommel's exact operational plans and the approximate date for his offensive. With his fuel and ammunition supplies reduced to only four or five days of fighting, instead of the fifteen days for which he had hoped, Rommel decided at four p.m. on August 30 to mount his attack that same night. Churchill telephoned the news to General Brooke.⁷⁷

The German attack began on the night of the thirty-first, but Montgomery had already set his trap. Wakened with the news of the attack, he remarked only: 'Excellent, couldn't be better,' and went back to sleep. Churchill radioed the news to Roosevelt and Stalin. On September 1 the codebreakers in Britain heard Rommel warning his superiors in Berlin and Rome that he was already going over to the defensive; this realistic choice was forced on him by the *ultra*-inspired attacks on named tankers and freighters, which had destroyed one-third of his supplies including forty-one per cent of his fuel.⁷⁸ Rommel abandoned his attack on September 2 and retreated to his starting position: it was the first major defensive victory that Britain had scored since he had arrived in North Africa. 'I feel that I have won the first game,' Montgomery wrote to a friend in England, using a tennis analogy, 'when it was his [Rommel's] service. Next time it will be my service, the score being one-love.'⁷⁹

There was a limit to which such analogies were useful. When he mentioned his intention of replacing his chief gunner at headquarters, a senior officer replied that the incumbent was a delightful chap and a great golfer. 'Unfortunately,' snapped Montgomery, 'the game we are about to play is not golf.'⁸⁰



In the absence of military victories, Churchill continued to crush cabinet dissent like a dictator. He refused to recognise that Stanley Bruce, Australia's representative and a powerful opponent of Churchill's bombing

policy, was entitled to contribute opinions other than on purely antipodean matters. Bruce had begun to express critical views on Churchill's strategy, particularly where Britain's shipping losses were concerned, and on the prime minister's vendetta against Germany's cities; he had written him several letters, without getting proper replies. The troublesome Australian privately told Lord Hankey, another powerful critic, that a showdown was coming. 'He knows most of the war cabinet agree individually with him,' noted Hankey, after meeting Bruce in the privacy of his apartment, 'but they are so much under Winston's spell that he is not sure that collectively they will back him.' Hankey, an expert both on cabinet government and on Winston's wily ways, advised Bruce to secure the backing of the other Commonwealth governments.⁸¹

While Churchill's appointment of P. J. Grigg as war minister had been generally praised, his nomination of young Duncan Sandys – he had married Diana Churchill – to be Grigg's political under-secretary created much bad blood. Grigg accused the ambitious Sandys of snooping behind his back and reporting direct to his father-in-law. General Brooke, not one to mince his words in his unpublished diary, called Sandys an 'objectionable specimen.'⁸² He tackled the foreign secretary about it, and Eden promised to do what he could with Winston – 'short of accepting Sandys in the foreign office.'⁸³ Churchill refused to budge. When Grigg threatened to hand in his resignation, Churchill called his bluff.⁸⁴

as Britain's misfortunes continued, Churchill's attitude toward freedom of speech became more intolerant. War censorship rules already barred the press on either side of the Atlantic from touching upon the powder-keg issue of race or the racial affrays between Allied soldiers.⁸⁵ The censorship authorities had confiscated from Claire Booth Luce a dossier of very dangerous information about the damage sustained by *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* and about Sir Miles Lampson's handling of King Faroukh.⁸⁶ Reading in Henry Luce's *Time* a description of Britain as 'oft-burned' and 'defensive-minded' he wrote to Brendan Bracken, minister of information, calling the news magazine a 'vicious rag' and ordaining that '[it] should have no special facilities here.' He was particularly indignant about Luce. 'I took some trouble with him myself,' he grumbled, referring to the publisher's recent visit to Britain.⁸⁷

The left-wing British weekly *New Statesman* caused him similar heartburn and he directed Bracken to see that none of its content was repeated

outside Britain until he had personally been consulted: 'You can recur to me at any hour of the night or day,' he told Bracken, revealing the importance he attached to this.⁸⁸ After the Soviet ambassador protested that the Royal Institute of International Affairs reviewed the publications of the Axis and Nazi-occupied territories in an objective and scholarly spirit while subjecting the Soviet press to passages 'couched in sarcastic and inimical terms calculated to provoke ridicule,' Churchill instructed Eden to threaten to withdraw the foreign office subsidy from the offending journal. 'We cannot indulge in such detachment in wartime,' he wrote.⁸⁹ At a dinner party late in September 1942 Churchill regurgitated to Beaverbrook, Sinclair, and several other cabinet ministers all his old hostility toward *The Daily Mirror*; surprisingly it was Beaverbrook who stood up for the *Mirror*, saying that it spoke for very many people, particularly the younger generation.⁹⁰

Churchill's censorious methods extended to personalities too. When Eleanor Roosevelt invited Harold Laski, a fiery Jewish intellectual, to visit a youth congress in the United States, Churchill persuaded Hopkins to get the invitation withdrawn, explaining: 'Laski has been a considerable nuisance over here and will, I doubt not, talk extreme left-wing stuff in the United States. . . . He has attacked me continually and tried to force my hand both in home and war politics.'⁹¹ Censorship did of course have other privileges: the secret reports compiled by the censors allowed Churchill illicit glimpses into the thinkings of his contemporaries. One report on Isaiah Berlin, the well-known thinker, described him as 'a very clever Jew who works in the British propaganda dept. here' (in Washington). With the understandable *Schadenfreude* of one race upon discovering that another is equally unloved, as the official censors put it, Dr Berlin had written privately to a friend listing no fewer than twenty-three reasons why the Americans disliked the British. In particular, he averred that the 'insincere and artificial sounding' English accent raised hackles in the USA, where Yorkshire and even Cockney was preferred.⁹²

Some months later Churchill's staff invited a Mr I. Berlin to lunch at No. 10. Under the impression that this guest was Isaiah, Churchill asked the puzzled Broadway composer Irving Berlin – for it was he – numerous questions about the American economy and about Roosevelt's prospects of being elected for a fourth term; Churchill, baffled by the composer's ad lib pronouncements, lisped afterwards that their guest did not seem to talk as well as he wrote; while the composer's wife remarked that if the prime minister really still thought her Irving was an economist after two hours,

there were grounds for solid concern about the war. It would be April 15, 1944 before Dr Isaiah Berlin got to visit the prime minister at Chequers; displaying a greater felicity with words than with music, he would write perceptively afterwards that Churchill remained 'a mythical hero who belongs to legend as much as to reality, the largest human being of our time.'⁹³



The P.M. had driven down to Chequers early on Thursday September 3, worried by an attack of tonsillitis, and here he would stay until the seventh.⁹⁴

Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the publisher of *The New York Times*, came to lunch that Saturday. He had been on a three-week tour of British and American units on behalf of the American Red Cross. Over the meal – a baked potato concealing an egg, followed by mutton with onion sauce, green beans and mashed potatoes, and rounded off with an apple tart – the newspaperman studied his host closely. Winston, as was his wont, had appeared in his rompers. As Major Birse had also remarked in Moscow, when Churchill sensed that a Great Phrase was coming, he slowed down, enunciating each syllable with drama and expression. At times his voice dropped so low that, coupled with the lisp, it was at times unintelligible. It sounded inebriated; Beaverbrook would mischievously assure Sulzberger that evening that it was untrue that Churchill drank heavily, but Sulzberger kept silent count as the prime minister downed three or four glasses of white wine, three or four glasses of port, and two glasses of brandy and he noticed that his host had difficulty bringing the lighted match exactly to the end of the nine-inch cigar clamped in his jaw. 'His nose seemed stuffy,' the perceptive newspaperman noted afterwards, 'his eyes watery, and his lips appeared to drool a bit.'⁹⁵

Churchill related in a few revealing phrases what had happened in Moscow. Stalin seemed unconvinced that the British were doing their bit. 'All they have to do,' he grumbled, 'is to walk west, toward the setting sun, and shoot Germans. But when we walk towards the rising sun – we get our feet wet.' Since the fiasco of Dieppe, the idea of the cross-Channel invasion hung over him like a nightmare. The rest of his remarks revolved around Washington's interference in India, and his admiration for Winant, Eisenhower, and Mark Clark, whom he called the 'American Eagle.' Sulzberger professed himself impressed with the prospects that Churchill set out of

increasing their bombing of Germany's cities. Just as Eden often complained, however, the prime minister refused to discuss post-war issues at all. They still had a long way to go yet, that was his excuse. 'The Hun is terribly strong,' 'The man who promised the skin of a lion,' he admonished, 'was eaten by the beast when he went to shoot it.'⁹⁶

The sore throat continued to worry him. He wanted to put on a good show when he reported to Parliament on the eighth about his encounter with Stalin. Editors had been warned by No. 10 to allow about ten thousand words for Churchill's speech, which was two or three times as long as usual.⁹⁷ The Members' reception of the speech was mixed. The 'weaker brethren' were eager to bait him over the dismissal of Auchinleck, the Di-eppe raid, and the failure to start a Second Front. While the Labour Members were disenchanted, the armed services were encouraged by his heartening account of the fighting against Rommel and his emphasis on the importance of Malta. Even Admiral Tovey was impressed. 'The PM's speech in the House was another masterpiece,' he wrote, 'and deservedly he scored a great personal success.'⁹⁸ A Socialist writer felt that Churchill had spoken with such mastery of understatement that he had taken the wind out of his critics' sails. He saw them tear up their notes and remain seated; when the prime minister finished there was a general exodus, and the debate, which had been expected to last two days, fizzled out within an hour.⁹⁹

there was one problem of coalition war which neither Churchill nor his cabinet had foreseen: he had discovered that by an edict of General Marshall ten percent of the American troops coming over were to be Black; that was far too many. The United States were shipping tens of thousands of Negro troops into the southern British Isles which had hitherto been almost entirely white. Nor had the British received, as they had silently hoped, the upper ten percent, the elite of those Blacks; one-third of those GI's currently in British prisons were Black. The cabinet was united in recognising the problems, chief among which was the over-friendly response by an ill-informed English public to these newcomers. At one meeting Anthony Eden articulated fears that American troops would be offended to see certain sections of the British people displaying 'more effusiveness' to the coloured people than they did.¹⁰⁰ While the wealthier classes kept the Negroes at the same healthy distance as did the GIs, observed Eden, the frustrated and man-starved English country girls, lacking the same racial consciousness, saw no reason not to fraternise, and frequent affrays between American and

British troops were the result.¹⁰¹ One Member of Parliament told Lord Halifax on July 23 how difficult things were, what with the factory girls in his constituency throwing themselves at the Negro troops; it was, he added, in no way the fault of the latter.¹⁰² Many other Members also wrote anxious letters to the war office about the arrival of these troops. Several ministers expressed disquiet, among them the Colonial Secretary and the Lord Chancellor. All told, there was a risk that this war might change the fair face of England for a long time to come.

Churchill had assured Sulzberger that he fully understood Eleanor Roosevelt's well-publicised concern for the Negroes' status; he observed that American politics were now bedevilled by race, as each side pandered to the Black vote. His motives for saying this were, it seemed, of deeper root. Twice during their luncheon at Chequers he remarked to Sulzberger that there were depraved women who lusted sexually for Blacks – 'It makes them feel something they have missed for years,' he said.¹⁰³ Sulzberger told Lord Halifax on his return to Washington that the prime minister had been 'a great deal concerned about Negro troops and how they ought to be used, and saw very clearly the dangers of quartering them in areas where nobody had seen a coloured man before.'¹⁰⁴ 'The fact that the English treat our coloured people without drawing the race line,' he told Henry Stimson, 'was sure to make for trouble in the end.' When Stimson admitted that they were encountering difficulties everywhere on that score, the newspaper publisher suggested that they concentrate the Negroes in the crowded English ports rather than in rural areas, where they were more likely to get into trouble.¹⁰⁵ The syndicated columnist Walter Lippmann made substantially the same recommendation after visiting England.¹⁰⁶ Recognising how sensitive the race issue was, Stimson asked Roosevelt to persuade Eleanor not to interfere during her forthcoming trip to England.¹⁰⁷

In fact Churchill had already raised the matter with Harry Hopkins and General Marshall during July, stating that there had been serious racial disturbances involving Negro troops in Londonderry in northern Ireland.¹⁰⁸ His own views on the coloured peoples were robust, if primitive. At a cabinet discussion on July 27 on the disciplinary powers to be exercised by Indian army officers he let fly a flood of 'childish' objections to allowing the poor, harassed British soldier to be bossed around by 'a brown man.'

'Except Grigg,' noted Amery, 'nobody really agreed with him, but they none of them will speak out when Winston is in a tantrum.'¹⁰⁹

it was a serious dilemma and Churchill's government, unlike its successors, tried to face up to it. Washington ignored all hints that it should adjust the coloured influx. At the end of August 1942 Eden regretted to the cabinet that 'the United States authorities were still sending over the full authorised proportion of coloured troops (about 10 per cent),' and that given the likely problems they should again press the Americans to stem the flow.¹¹⁰ The cabinet agreed that they should do what they could to keep English women – and White soldiers – away from this dusky newcomer with 'his good qualities and his weaker ones.'¹¹¹ At Grigg's advice the cabinet decided on October 13 that it was desirable that the British people should avoid becoming 'too friendly' with the Negro American troops. Their own troops should be lectured by senior officers – putting nothing on paper; chief constables should be alerted to the problem; and selected newspaper editors should be supplied with media packs enlightening them on the colour question in the United States.¹¹²

The problem grew more acute as more Blacks arrived over the next two years. They were mustered into segregated units, mostly engineering and labour, housed in segregated camps, and provided with equal but segregated facilities like Red Cross Clubs. The British population, unfamiliar with the problems of race experienced by the United States, saw no reason either to differentiate or to segregate. Editors at *The Sunday Pictorial* and *The Sunday Express* published unhelpful editorials clamouring that the colour bar operated by the Americans must go. Their officers – who were almost all White – were again shocked by the loose behaviour of the British women, who actually seemed to single out the downtrodden Blacks for their sympathies. The women were however not the only ones blamed. Once, when American military police tried to arrest Negro troops, British civilians intervened shouting, 'They don't like the Blacks,' and 'Why don't they leave them alone?' A Black mutiny resulted, with court-martial charges.

By late October 1943, 38,179 Negro troops had arrived. Putting his finger on the real problem, the secretary for war wrote to Churchill: 'I expect that the British soldier who fears for the safety or faithfulness of his women-folk at home, would not feel so keenly as the B.B.C. and the public at home appear to do in favour of a policy of no colour bar and complete equality of treatment of Negro troops.'¹¹³ Expressing his anxiety to Grigg, Churchill asked for the relevant figures.¹¹⁴ Providing to No. 10 the requested statistics on murder, attempted murder, 'carnal knowledge,' and rape committed by these Negro troops, the Duke of Marlborough, attached to the

office of the U.S. Army's provost-marshal, urgently counselled taking preventive action before it was too late. Local people, he said, were now frightened to go out after dark where these troops were stationed. The figures showed that five times more Black than White troops had contracted venereal diseases, the curse of every great war. Moreover, 'The existence of the drug marijuana (a form of hasheesh) has been found in the possession of coloured troops' – they believed that the drug if given to unsuspecting women might 'excite their sexual desires.' The trickle of mulatto children on its way into England's ancient people was about to become a tide.¹¹⁵

Churchill was shocked, and passed the figures on to the war office, while asking them to keep the Duke's name out of it.¹¹⁶ Grigg discussed the behaviour of the American Negro troops with General Jacob Devers, the theatre commander. Devers assured him he had the situation in hand. Writing to the prime minister Grigg blamed the high incidence of crime and V.D. on the Americans having deliberately selected the worst elements among the Negro troops for the European theatre, and on their 'exuberance . . . on coming overseas.' The statistics showed that Negroes were committing twice as many sex offences as White troops, and five times as many other crimes of violence. In both cases, lamented Grigg, the root cause was 'the natural propensities of the coloured man.'

Since there was going to be a vast increase in the Negro troops based in England in the spring of 1944, there were no grounds for complacency.¹¹⁷



Winston Churchill was very conscious of his own White Anglo-Saxon origins, and this was sometimes the despair of his colleagues – albeit a despair tinged with an element of hypocrisy. That same month, after an evening in which he downed eight slugs of whisky, wearing the black skull-cap given him by Stalin, he reacted furiously to Sulzberger's suggestion that he was making a mistake in refusing to see Gandhi. Churchill exploded that he would see the Indian politician in jail.¹¹⁸ 'I hate Indians,' he burst out in a conversation with Amery at this time. 'They are a beastly people with a beastly religion.'¹¹⁹

Gandhi and the extremist Hindu members of his committee had declared a mass campaign of sabotage and civil disobedience in India, and early in August the Viceroy ordered them arrested and interned – Gandhi in a palace, and his followers in less comfortable prison conditions in Bom-

bay. It was an unavoidable action in the midst of a war: India might otherwise have found herself well on the road to another bloody mutiny.¹²⁰ The arrests aroused indignation around the world. When the British refused to take American concerns seriously, Claire Booth Luce placed a large advertisement in *The New York Times* calling for mediation. Lord Halifax noted with private amusement, 'I should like a full page advertisement in *The Times* calling a large meeting at the Albert Hall to consider the Negro problem' in the USA.¹²¹ Another Englishman, arriving in New York, was asked about the Indian problem; he rejoined: 'I didn't know there was one. I thought you had killed them all off.'¹²²

To the Americans however India was no laughing matter. Roosevelt was both disappointed and embarrassed by the Churchill government's attitude on India, which was so out of tune with the 'people's war' that Washington hoped the Allies were fighting.¹²³ The Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek protested to Washington that the Indian Congress leaders only wanted the British out of India so that they might help the Allies the more. Roosevelt forwarded this seductive Chinese argument to London, and Amery mischievously forwarded it to Churchill – by then slugging it out with Stalin in Moscow.¹²⁴ The prime minister dismissed it as 'eye wash.' After Amery urged Winston to tell Chiang and the president to mind their own business, the prime minister cabled the president on August 14:

I take it amiss [that] Chiang should seek to make difficulties between us and should interfere in matters about which he has proved himself most ill-informed which affect our sovereign rights.¹²⁵

(He wrote 'Chiang' but clearly his real target was Roosevelt himself.) The decision to intern Gandhi was, Churchill averred, taken by an Indian executive of twelve men, of whom only one was a European; the other eleven were as patriotic and able as any of the Hindu Congress leaders. 'It occurred to me,' he told Roosevelt, '[that] you could remind Chiang that Gandhi was prepared to negotiate with Japan on the basis of a free passage for Japanese troops through India in [anticipation] of their joining hands with Hitler.' He suspected the hand of the diminutive Madame Chiang behind the message. '*Cherchez la femme*,' he hinted to the president.¹²⁶

He was not frightened of the Chinese. When they demanded later in 1942 that Britain voluntarily terminate her lease on the New Territories which supported Hongkong, Eden recommended to the cabinet that they

tell the Chinese that Britain would be 'prepared to discuss its surrender' after the war. It was neither the first nor the last time that Eden showed himself in favour of appeasement; Churchill however lectured the same cabinet sardonically about 'those people who got up each morning asking themselves how much more of the empire they could give away.'¹²⁷

churchill spent several days drafting a statement on India to the House. By the time it had been mauled over by this minister and that, it was in Amery's words 'a queer document,' and he hoped it would not do more harm than good in India. Churchill delivered the statement after Questions on September 10. 'I therefore feel,' Churchill concluded, 'entitled to report to the House that the situation in India at this moment gives no occasion for undue despondency or alarm.' The statement evoked ringing cheers from the Tories, and disappointment from the Opposition benches.¹²⁸ The impression was that he was glad to sit back and smash the Hindu Congress, and this was not welcomed in Washington.¹²⁹ From there Lord Halifax wrote to Eden, 'Winston's statement on India will not have done us much good here. Why must he talk about White troops when "the British Army in India" would have served his purpose just as well?'¹³⁰

Lord Halifax tried to get Smuts to make a speech commending Britain's purpose and actions in India when visiting London in October, and in Halifax's words 'supplying some of the warmth of feeling and hope' in which Churchill's utterances were so singularly lacking. 'I really begin to think,' wrote Halifax, 'that whatever his merits as a war leader, on many things Winston is little short of a disaster.'¹³¹ In November, Churchill suggested to his cabinet that it might be a good plan to publish a history of the development of the British colonial empire, vindicating their policies, in view of these on-going criticisms from the United States.¹³²

There was one related topic on which Churchill displayed a mulish obstinacy, the huge sterling balances which India had accumulated in her favour through the vicarious arrangements made for her defence. As Montagu Norman, governor of the Bank of England, had pointed out these were already so vast that India had bought back from Britain her government and railway indebtedness, and she might now want to buy out every other British interest in India too.¹³³ Churchill's attitude was that it was 'monstrous' to expect Britain to defend India, and then to have to clear out but 'pay hundreds of millions for the privilege.' Amery reasoned that India had supplied goods and soldiers to the Middle East, Malaya, and other theatres of

this war. Kingsley Wood suggested they adjourn the prickly issue indefinitely. Amery liked that, noting however that they must word things 'so as not to cast doubts upon our genuine intention to honour our obligations.'¹³⁴

The matter of the sterling balances, which by July 1943 amounted to over £800 millions, kept coming up: fed by the Prof. with spurious economic arguments, Churchill rumbled like an only partially extinct volcano throughout such debates, hinting that he was minded to submit 'a counter claim' against India when the time came.¹³⁵

Amery stoutly opposed him. 'It may be honourable or necessary to bilk your cabby when you get to the station,' he observed in a shrewish aside to his diary, 'but I cannot see how it helps telling him through the window that you mean to bilk him when you get there.'¹³⁶ He passionately demanded a private interview with the prime minister. Resorting to a now familiar ploy, Churchill invited his old friend round to see him on September 22 and took off all his clothes. 'I found him,' dictated Amery that day, 'just emerging from his bath and we discoursed while he was drying himself down.' Viewed thus, the prime minister evoked ancient memories of shared showers in their House at Harrow. Winston was, Amery however noticed, 'a very different figure from the little boy I first saw in a similar state of nature at Ducker' some sixty years before. After suggesting that they send Sir John Anderson, whom Churchill in a fit of whimsy referred to as 'Jehovah,' to replace Lord Linlithgow as Viceroy, he refused to discuss the sterling balances at all and, still dripping, genially ushered the India Secretary out.¹³⁷



To fix the final date for **torch** he had the American generals round for dinner on September 8; asked now when the operation could be launched, Eisenhower asked for sixty days, which would expire on November 8. To the prime minister, it seemed 'a tragedy' to wait so long, as he minuted the chiefs of staff the next day. He worried particularly about the risk that the enemy would realise their targets, and gave each of the intended invasion sites French names – Dunkirk, Calais, and Boulogne – as cover. On September 11 he invited the generals down to Chequers again – Eisenhower, Mark Clark, and Brooke, accompanied by Lords Mountbatten and Leathers (the latter was the minister for war transport). After dinner, to Brooke's dismay, Winston again insisted that they watch a movie until one a.m., after which he kept them all up until three arguing over the prospects of **torch**

and the reception which the Americans were likely to receive.¹³⁸ At three a.m. he then announced, as the Vice-Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Moore recalled, 'It's time you people went to bed, I am going to do my papers.'¹³⁹ In the morning they wrangled over his demand that they launch **torch** earlier; for a while they even examined whether they could shoehorn in another PQ convoy to North Russia first, but the dangers were too great that the naval escorts might be damaged and thus be unavailable to **torch**, and that the eighty freighters might find themselves frozen in at Archangel throughout the coming winter. As usual, Brooke noted, Churchill was trying to squeeze the last ounce out of the naval forces.¹⁴⁰

Eisenhower was never keen on the North African assault. Reporting to General Marshall on September 15, he warned that his own carrier-born air forces would be heavily out-numbered by the Vichy French squadrons in Africa. The French ground forces, though poorly equipped, could also delay the Allies long enough to enable the Axis to bring in reinforcements. The Spanish army's attitude was unknown; the indications were however that Hitler did not intend to move into Spain, since he had made no move in this direction so far. 'Based on all the above,' Eisenhower concluded, 'we consider that the operation has more than a fair chance of success.' Even so, he rated the chance of obtaining Tunis, the overall goal of the enterprise, before the Axis could reinforce it at less than fifty-fifty.¹⁴¹

Churchill was more worried than Eisenhower about General Franco's attitude. He had to consider every possibility. With the build-up at Gibraltar already beginning, so many Allied aircraft would have to be parked on R.A.F. North Front, the neutral ground between the Rock and Spain, that Hitler might well demand their eviction or reciprocal permission to base Luftwaffe planes on airfields at Valencia. 'We might,' minuted Churchill, 'be faced with a showdown with Franco over this at an awkward moment.'¹⁴² Eden agreed, worried that the R.A.F. airfield at Gibraltar was well within range of Franco's shore batteries.

so far however the Spaniards appeared keen to avoid disturbing the British. When a Catalina flying-boat crashed off Cadiz without any survivors at the end of September, the corpses were handed over to the British authorities, evidently untouched. This was just as well. As the Governor of Gibraltar, Lieutenant-General Sir Noel Mason-Macfarlane, reported on September 28, a highly secret document had been found on the body of one passenger, Paymaster-Lieutenant J. H. Turner – a letter dated September 14

from Major-General Mark Clark to Mason-Macfarlane himself, announcing the date on which he and Eisenhower would be arriving; the letter also mentioned November 4 as the 'target date.' Churchill told Ismay to find out whether the letter had been tampered with. The admiralty learned that a second letter on the body, dated September 21, was no less revealing, from 'Headquarters, Naval C.-in-C., Expeditionary Force.' British Intelligence initially decided that the sand lodged in the button-holes of Turner's coat indicated that the Spaniards had not reached into its inside pocket; the two seals on the Mark Clark letter had not been tampered with, and they assured the prime minister that **torch** had not been compromised. Within a month codebreaking revealed that the enemy had in fact photocopied all the documents.¹⁴³ It was probably this episode which later inspired his Intelligence to do something like it again, only this time deliberately.



One aspect of **torch** worried Eisenhower. His country was about to launch an unprovoked attack on Vichy France, which was technically a neutral and a country with which they maintained friendly diplomatic relations. As General Eisenhower would later write, it met every criterion of a crime against international law, unless some way could be found of persuading the French to invite the Americans to invade – an artifice of which Adolf Hitler had from time to time made unashamed use, for example in invading Austria.¹⁴⁴ The Americans set great store by politics as a way of sparing blood. Roosevelt briefed Robert D. Murphy, one of the state department's most experienced diplomats in North Africa, about **torch** and sent him over to London in mid-September.¹⁴⁵

Sporting the uniform of a lieutenant-colonel and the code-name 'McGowan,' Murphy arrived to see Eisenhower at Telegraph Cottage, the general's English country hideout, on Wednesday the sixteenth. Since **torch** was to be a primarily American operation, Murphy saw only fellow Americans; he would return straight to Washington without even seeing the British prime minister. He was amused to find that Eisenhower, like most of the others present, had a mental image of North Africa as a country of primitive peoples inhabiting mud huts; he corrected them – it was more like California. That did nothing to cure Eisenhower's instinctive dislike of **torch**; like Marshall, the general viewed it as a side-show, a wholly unnecessary diversion from the 'real' campaign in Europe.

Murphy identified to him several Vichy French officers believed to sympathise with the Allies; he intended to disburse large quantities of Gold bullion to nourish those sympathies.¹⁴⁶ The invasion forces would meet most resistance, he predicted, from France's five-star Resident-General in Morocco, Auguste Paul Noguès, adviser to the Sultan. In what was eventually to prove a cardinal misjudgement, Murphy also recommended that they somehow bring the army general Henri Honoré Giraud out of occupied France; Giraud was reputed to be a great hero in Morocco, having escaped by daredevil means from German captivity. The plan would be to evacuate him to Gibraltar in time to assume command of a friendly Vichy French army in North Africa. The French navy was unlikely to follow suit, as their admirals' hatred of Churchill was all too evident, since the Royal Navy's massacre of two thousand young French sailors at Mers el-Kébir two years before, coupled with de Gaulle's fiasco in Dakar and the further bloodshed in Syria.¹⁴⁷ (Well aware of this, Churchill contemplated allowing all British participants in the invasion force to wear American army uniforms.)¹⁴⁸

Many Vichy officials were likely to oppose the Allies. Murphy casually set out his plans for their elimination – according to notes taken by one of Eisenhower's staff Murphy spoke of assassinations 'as nonchalantly as if lighting a Murad.' Further targets for assassination would be the members of the German and Italian armistice commission in Algiers. Confirming that he would 'lie, cheat, steal, and even give orders for assassination' to beat the enemy, Eisenhower admitted to his staff a few days later that he had already issued one such instruction.¹⁴⁹ After this day-long conference, Murphy flew straight back to the United States.



At Alamein there was a temporary stalemate, as Rommel's and Montgomery's armies eyed each other and wound up for their next offensives. As the days of late summer passed in seeming inactivity Churchill's nervousness increased. Through his Oracle he could follow the progress of Rommel's engineers as they dug-in and fortified, and laid ever-denser mine-fields ahead of the Eighth Army; Montgomery had sent to London his own plan for an offensive, code-named **lightfoot**, but it was not due to start for many weeks. The prime minister wanted General Alexander to bring it forward, so that Spain would be restrained before **torch** began.¹⁵⁰ On September 17 he had sent an anxious cable to Egypt: 'My understanding with

you was the fourth week in September.' Alexander showed this to Montgomery, who drafted a short reply indicating that if the offensive went ahead in September, it would probably fail; if the attack took place in October, however, victory was guaranteed. It all seemed distressingly familiar. Winston replied to General Alexander that he had been unprepared for such bad news, 'having regard to your strength compared with the enemy.' Telephoning Eden, he grumbled that now Alexander was asking for a month's postponement. 'W. naturally depressed,' recorded Eden afterwards, 'and I could give no useful encouragement, consequences being evident.'¹⁵¹

Churchill put through a scrambler telephone call to the C.I.G.S., but Brooke was out shooting on the Yorkshire moors. When the prime minister accused him of being out of touch, Brooke replied unhelpfully that he had yet to solve the problem of how to remain in touch whilst in a grouse-butt. Told of Alexander's arguments for postponing until October, Brooke could only advise the prime minister that they sounded excellent. Still dissatisfied, Churchill wired to Alexander educating him on the need to draw German forces away from torch. On September 23 he wrote again, adding in red ink, 'Whatever happens, we shall back you up and see you through.' As each day passed Rommel's efforts to fortify his defences worried him more: 'Instead of a crust through which a way can be cleared in a night,' he asked Alexander, 'may you not find twenty-five miles of fortifications, with blasted rock, gun-pits and machine-gun posts?' It was a worrying wait all round.¹⁵²



Still fretting, Churchill called his chiefs of staff down to Chequers on Monday September 21 for a joint meeting with the American generals Eisenhower, Mark Clark, and Bedell Smith. Since they were to dissect all their coming operations the prime minister had also invited Eden, General Nye, and Mountbatten as well the transport minister Lord Leathers.¹⁵³ Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff, had arrived in England two weeks earlier; he was a highly capable staff officer of the older generation, with an old ulcer problem about which he kept quiet for fear of being pink-slipped out of the war. He was on a milk diet, and Eisenhower did not find it easy to cover for him in the hard-drinking milieu of Chequers.¹⁵⁴

The American commander hoped that Churchill was now beginning to appreciate the risks involved in torch, and the delay that establishing nine American and four British divisions in French Morocco, with all their sup-

porting echelons, would inevitably inflict on any cross-Channel invasion; he had been pointing this out, via Marshall, to the British chiefs of staff since July. After sitting up all night, they now agreed on November 8 as the date for launching **torch**. This ruled out running another convoy to North Russia in the interim: it was just as well, because PQ. 19's cargo of 151 P-39 fighter planes was being unloaded by the Americans to free them for their role in **torch**.¹⁵⁵

Mark Clark afterwards provided Henry Stimson with a thought-provoking account of this Chequers weekend, and of Churchill's belated discovery of the dispersion of forces that **torch** would involve – and of his proposed further diversion of forces to Norway as a sop to Stalin.¹⁵⁶ The prime minister suggested once again that they launch his little operation **jupiter** against northern Norway, this time as a cover for **torch**. He told the chiefs of staff that he would 'ask for the approval of the war cabinet' to send out General McNaughton to Russia to begin staff studies on this.¹⁵⁷ Since he had already gained Stalin's qualified support for the operation, the chiefs of staff had to develop even more determined means of discouraging him. They turned his 'wild plans' over to their Joint Planning Committee – a body which existed for little other purpose than to tear such projects to pieces. (It was not surprising, wrote Brooke after the war, that Winston in one moment of anger said, 'Those damned Planners of yours plan nothing but difficulties.')¹⁵⁸

after the uninspiring Chequers meeting ended General Eisenhower stepped out into the panelled entrance hall where an aide was waiting to drive him to London. As he signed the guest book, he was heard to mutter, 'Discouraging, discouraging.'¹⁵⁹

More than one man shared Eisenhower's alarm at the dives and sweeps characterising Churchill's grand strategy. From Ottawa, Mackenzie King – evidently alerted to the plan by McNaughton – telegraphed his vehement objections to any invasion of northern Norway. Churchill tried to explain in his response the 'dire necessity of convincing Premier Stalin of our resolve to help him to the utmost of our strength.'¹⁶⁰ In London, the commander-in-chief of the Home Fleet felt that the prime minister was prone to rely on expediency and brainwaves – that he was over-fond of the dramatic, and intoxicated with public acclaim. To Admiral Tovey's knowledge he had put up several wild schemes – he was undoubtedly thinking of northern Norway; the admiral had strongly disapproved of **sledgehammer**, the

original scheme for a Second Front. 'It was impossible not to feel uneasy,' he wrote privately to a fellow admiral late in September, after planning for torch began, 'when I heard a lightning shift had been made to a totally different locality.'¹⁶¹

one such dramatic act which Churchill contemplated that summer, not unlike the naval massacre at Mers el-Kébir, was to wipe out the southern French town of Vichy, seat of Marshal Pétain's government, in a 'severe and immediate bombing' raid in the run-up to torch. Since Britain was not at war with Vichy France, this too would have been a criminal act. 'Let me know what could be done during November,' he wrote to the chief of air staff, 'assuming it was considered necessary.' Not troubling his prime minister with the problems in international law, Sir Charles Portal replied only that the town was small and difficult to find, particularly in such a bad-weather month as November. There would be no good moon before the twentieth: he personally favoured an attack at dusk, despite the inevitably heavy casualties from the ground and air defences. 'Butcher' Harris agreed. Portal suggested they enlist the American bomber squadrons too. 'Yes,' noted Churchill, inking his approval: 'It is prudent to have everything possible up one's sleeve. I regard action as most unlikely and undesirable,' he added.¹⁶²

There was still a troublesome ambivalence about Churchill's bombing policy. His cabinet had defined that bombing enemy-occupied countries, as opposed to Germany itself, must be confined to military objectives, and they had forbidden any attack on their populations as such; indeed, they were to take every reasonable care to avoid killing civilians. Since the enemy was deemed to have adopted a campaign of unrestricted air warfare these restrictions did not apply to the bombing war against German, Italian, or – when the time came – Japanese territory.¹⁶³

thinking ahead to the months after victory in North Africa, he asked the chiefs of staff what studies they had undertaken to exploit torch. 'Sardinia, Sicily and Italy itself have no doubt been considered,' he prompted. 'If things go well we should not waste a day but carry the war northwards with audacity.'¹⁶⁴ These things should not have required saying, but he detected a reluctance of the Americans to operate forcefully in the Mediterranean theatre; the inability to follow through while the enemy was off balance was to plague Allied strategy from the middle of 1943 onward.

26: *Pig in the Middle: Darlan*

In none of these deliberations had any account been taken of General Charles de Gaulle, the Free French leader. It is now easier to piece together a history of Churchill's relations with de Gaulle, as more of the relevant British official files have been opened. From these scorch-marked files, and from private papers of certain Americans, it is clear that there was continuing and corrosive animosity between the two leaders.

The émigré general was the creature of the British foreign office, and Churchill found that it was not easy to disembarass himself of this propaganda monster which he had himself created, in Britain's hour of need. In his opposition to de Gaulle he found frank support from Eisenhower. They had no desire to import all the hatreds inherent in France's burgeoning civil war. 'In our Civil War it was brother against brother, and father against son,' said Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff, a few days after his arrival at Norfolk House in Saint-James's. 'The civil wars are the bitterest, so we are purposely keeping the De Gaullists out of this picture.'¹

Roosevelt's opposition to de Gaulle was to prove even more implacable.² As a democrat, he mistrusted all political generals; if he had to choose one, his instinct was to go with General Giraud as Murphy had advised. In the months before *torch* he recognised de Gaulle as a liability, as all the French forces in North Africa detested him for his abortive attack on them at Dakar in 1940. In September 1942 the president again urged Churchill to leave the initial *torch* landings to American troops, explaining: 'A British-commanded attack . . . or [one] with De Gaullist co-operation, would meet with determined resistance.' To this Roosevelt added a few days later that he considered it essential to give de Gaulle no information whatsoever, 'regardless of how irritated and irritating he may become.' Churchill agreed

with these recommendations, although he did feel it unwise to keep the Frenchman entirely off the North African stage once torch had begun.

De Gaulle had become even more intransigent because of the developing situation in Syria. After Churchill finally lifted the ban on his leaving Britain, on receiving assurances of good behaviour, the general had flown to Beirut in August 1942 and begun talking about forcing the British troops out of the French Levant if they failed to meet his terms. He wanted Churchill to recall his personal friend General Sir Edward Spears, who was now Britain's minister in Damascus and Beirut. The cabinet had however indicated to de Gaulle through their Minister of State in Cairo, Richard Casey, that the general should hold free elections in Syria.³ De Gaulle declared that Casey had no authority to dictate to him. Since he was rude to Casey, Churchill peremptorily recalled the French general 'for consultations'; the general refused to return and suggested that Churchill deal with René Plevén, of his French National Committee, instead.⁴ Churchill retaliated by refusing to allow this committee to take over in Madagascar.

Surrendering to *force majeure*, on September 24 de Gaulle slunk back to London, demanding to see Churchill.⁵ The latter, his ire roused by reports from Spears and the generals, fobbed him off until the last day of September. It was a cold evening, and the heating at No. 10 would not be turned on for another month. De Gaulle acted, as Anthony Eden afterwards described, like a 'second Ribbentrop' – being as stiff, rude, and arrogant as the Nazi foreign minister had ever been. Churchill remained patient but obdurate, refusing to transfer the military command in Syria to the Free French, and again urging elections there. De Gaulle ruled this out; as there were now more French than British troops in Syria, he insisted, command there should pass to the French. Churchill refused and remarked, without elaborating, that the differences between them there did not augur well for other theatres. When de Gaulle said that events in Madagascar called into question future collaboration between France and England, Churchill corrected him. '– Between *General de Gaulle* and England,' he said.⁶

The C.I.G.S. arrived at seven p.m., just as the Frenchman was sweeping out; Brooke learned that de Gaulle had 'adopted a very high-handed attitude.'⁷ Exploiting to the full the privileges of high office, Churchill ordered a stop on all outgoing telegrams issued by General de Gaulle.⁸ Discovering that he was due to broadcast that same evening Churchill also telephoned instructions to the BBC to switch off the microphone the instant de Gaulle departed from the script.⁹ The Frenchman was mortified – *ulcéré*, as his

staff put it – and spoke much about Churchill's injuries to his *honneur*. His generals and admirals made plain that if Churchill had apparently broken off relations with de Gaulle, the Free French navy was on the latter's side 'and would follow him.'¹⁰ Over the next weeks his attitude softened, but Madagascar and the Levant remained unresolved issues between them.¹¹

knowing of Eden's soft spot for the general, Churchill commented to him that he felt sorry for the Frenchman, but he was 'such a fool.'

In their meetings during the coming week he put on a kinder face to the young foreign secretary. Once, he remarked on how much he wished he could always run the war like this – just the two of them, with the chiefs of staff occasionally consulted. As soon as Attlee came back – he had gone to visit Roosevelt – they would have, alas, to revert to the old routine. Eden again pleaded with him to abolish the *defence committee*, which was a hotbed of opposition. Churchill responded that this was the one place where his service ministers (Grigg, Sinclair, and Alexander) still had a show.¹²



He had not abandoned hope of enticing Turkey into the war and invited the Turkish ambassador to see him after lunch on September 24, 1942. A day or two later 'C' sent him the ambassador's report on this, intercepted by the codebreakers. 'He received me with a smiling face and a genial air,' the diplomat had described. Beginning with the 'good news' about Turkey's requirements for war material and munitions, Churchill had read out a list of British and American tanks, anti-tank guns, Bofors guns, and other weapons which, he promised, 'could be' in Turkey within two months. The ambassador shrewdly remarked that he could see no mention of aircraft in the list. 'I am studying that point and I shall do my best,' said Churchill evasively. 'If there is a disaster on the Egyptian front it will naturally be impossible to send these things to Turkey.' Turning to the eastern front, he said that the fact that the Russians were still holding Stalingrad looked hopeful for the future.¹³

montgomery's tactical success at Alam Halfa was not the sort of thing to inspire popular enthusiasm, and murmuring against Churchill resumed.

Among the murmurers was Sir Stafford Cripps. Sensing that his hour might be approaching to seize power, on September 21 he had written to

the prime minister announcing that he wanted to resign as Leader of the House. Churchill begged him to wait. The ascetic Socialist politician came over to see him on the thirtieth – on the evening of the ugly row with de Gaulle – for their first real talk since his return from India in the spring. He cannot have found the Churchillian ambience palatable, with its late hours, small talk, swathes of cigar smoke, and endless whisky.¹⁴ He complained to Churchill that he was being left in the dark about everything, and that Beaverbrook was poisoning relations between them; Churchill did not really care and showed it. For the first hour, according to Cripps' account, the prime minister attacked him, accusing him of stirring up malcontents from all quarters. They went at it hammer and tongs until 2:30 a.m., and Cripps felt that they had reached the parting of the ways.

Seeking allies, he suggested to Eden that they would all get on better without Winston. He wanted to resign as he was 'not satisfied with the conduct of the war,' and he cited several specific instances.¹⁵ He said that he might ask to be sent overseas, for example co-ordinating war supplies in the United States. Eden hurried round to warn Churchill.¹⁶ He 'found the P.M. in a great state of anger,' as his secretary recorded, 'rolling out threats and invectives against C[ripps] and declaring it was a conspiracy.' Churchill warned that they could not afford to let Cripps go before *torch*: he knew too much about the ramshackle ways of this government. Eden bridled: 'I thought we were fighting the Germans!' He persuaded Churchill, though not without difficulty, to do nothing rash about Cripps.

Churchill remained convinced that Cripps was engineering a 'Machiavellian political plot.' He declaimed melodramatically, 'If *torch* fails, then I'm done for and must go, and hand over to one of you.' He flatly refused to treat further with Cripps. They eventually agreed that Attlee and Eden should see Cripps and discuss with him his American idea; alternatively he might take over the ministry of aircraft production without a seat in the war cabinet. The two men appealed to him not to rock the boat at this critical juncture in the war.¹⁷ Cripps agreed to sleep on these proposals.

On October 2 Churchill received Cripps and pleaded with him to postpone the whole question until after *torch*. Cripps asked to talk it over with Eden first. Eden again lectured him about rocking boats. If *torch* failed, he said, they would all be sunk anyway. He urged the minister to think of the poor effect it would have on their troops if a cabinet minister started a general attack on Churchill's direction of the war right now. Cripps pointed out that Eden's suggestion left his principal criticisms unresolved –

namely that they would be better off without Winston. He agreed to think things over and write a letter to the prime minister. Eden, who read the resulting draft, advised him that no prime minister could accept it. Reporting all this to the prime minister, Eden tactfully omitted Cripps's more *ad-hominem* criticisms. Churchill agreed not to force things to a head. Eden prayed that the P.M. would not consult Beaverbrook, who would be less moderate.¹⁸ As for the letter, Cripps redrafted it – the new version undertook not to announce any resignation until *torch* had been launched. Eden telephoned the text through to Winston. Thus what had loomed as the gravest threat yet to Churchill's premiership subsided.

Eden could tell that the prime minister was relieved, though still exasperated by the minister's conduct. 'The hostility between them is bound to deepen,' recorded the foreign secretary in his private diary, 'but the essential is that it should not burst at a time most damaging to the nation.'¹⁹



That Sunday, October 4, 1942, the prime minister again invited the American generals Eisenhower and Mark Clark down to Chequers. The ancient house was chilly; Winston and Clementine both wore heavy overcoats, while the coatless generals shivered. President Roosevelt's son Elliott, a lieutenant-colonel, joined them for dinner, as did Pamela Churchill. She passed on to Eisenhower criticisms she had heard of favouritism in the hiring of female drivers for the American headquarters. The subject of female drivers was not a tactful one to raise with Eisenhower. With scarcely greater tact, Eisenhower suggested to Churchill that the media might speak of American troops assisting Montgomery's forces at El Alamein. (There were no American troops within a thousand miles of Montgomery's army). Eisenhower meant well – the newspapers had somehow got wind of *torch* and he wanted to lay a few red herrings. Churchill told him gruffly that the idea was a non-starter. 'The feelings of our troops have to be considered,' he noted separately for the British chiefs of staff. Rommel's *Afrika Korps* was unlikely to be deceived, and the Eighth Army would be none too pleased either.²⁰ He again required his guests to stay up watching a movie until two-thirty a.m.; Eisenhower had already seen it twice before.²¹

By the time this weekend was over, feelings were ruffled all round. On Monday morning, without waiting for the arrival of their car, the American generals walked out of the gate at Chequers to meet it, 'as if more than

ready to leave,' as Eisenhower's startled aide noted. The generals told him that they had said all the proper farewells, but they had decided to hit the road in case the prime minister raised still more topics of debate.²²

back in London the prime minister dined with Ambassador Winant and Myron C. Taylor, Roosevelt's special ambassador at the Vatican.²³

The conversation soon turned to the possible Allied bombing of Rome. A year earlier, on September 4, 1941 a lone enemy plane had dropped bombs near Cairo, but the cabinet had decided that this isolated action did not justify 'immediate retaliation on Rome.' Taylor, who was close to Pope Pius XII, had already had one secret conversation with Churchill just over a year before about his noisy threats to extend the bombing war to Italy – Churchill had publicly declared in Parliament on the last day of September 1941 that Britain would not hesitate to bomb Rome as heavily as possible when it suited her. The Pope had given Taylor a memorandum warning of the most serious consequences if bombs fell on the Vatican City or any of the very numerous basilicas, churches, or pontifical buildings and institutions in Rome. 'The Holy See could not remain silent,' the Vatican had warned the British minister to the Holy See, Mr D'Arcy Osborne, and his American colleague Harold Tittmann.²⁴

Churchill had been inquiring for some time into what scale of attack could be mounted on Rome, and he wrote even before seeing Myron Taylor to the chief of air staff.²⁵ The response was discouraging, and the air ministry signalled secretly to R.A.F. Middle East that there were to be no attacks on the city without prior sanction. The Americans had been shocked by Churchill's pronouncement, warning that bombing Rome would unite the whole Italian people behind Mussolini. Air Chief Marshal Portal rejected the foreign office suggestion that nuisance raids should presage any all-out attack on the Italian capital. 'I am sure,' he wrote in October,

that the proper course is to hold our hand until the right moment has come and then to deliver attacks on the heaviest possible scale in the centre of the city.

The only factor restraining the air ministry was the fear of enemy bombing reprisals against Cairo.²⁶ 'Incidentally,' the F.O. reminded Lord Halifax, 'no word of condemnation was ever expressed by the Pope in regard to the bombing of shrines of the Anglican Church.'²⁷

In 1941 Myron Taylor had urged the prime minister to make a statement sparing Rome and its non-combatant civilians from this new horror, and he repeated this plea now, on October 5, 1942. Sir Arthur Harris had declared that he entertained no false sentiments about bombing Rome. Although Churchill could hardly say so, he was actually looking forward to sending his heavy bombers to the Italian capital, and he encountered no opposition to this from the air ministry. His friend Archie Sinclair advised that the moment would have to be well chosen because of both international Catholic and 'liberal' opinion – the latter not only regarded Rome as a shrine of European civilisation but was altogether 'a bit sticky' about bombing. 'You were quoting the Archbishop of Canterbury against me at the beginning of the year,' he wrote to Churchill. 'Success is enabling us to carry them with us; but they might come out against bombing rather than acquiesce in the bombing of Rome, as a mere incident in the air war against Italy.' As the air minister irreverently put it, the risks of wrecking the 'churches, works of art, Cardinals, priests and students' were not small, and they could not undertake such risks too often. 'It is no use fiddling with the bombing of Rome,' Sinclair added for the benefit of this modern Nero,

and attacking the outskirts, as was at one time suggested. The blow when it comes should be aimed at the Palazzo Venezia – although it must be realised that it is only about 2,000 yards from the Vatican City.

He anticipated that 'few will condemn it.' As said, it was all a matter of timing. Churchill noted on this document, 'I agree generally.'²⁸

encouraged by the success of the thousand-bomber raids, Sinclair circulated to the war cabinet during August 1942 a paper by 'Butcher' Harris arguing against any diminution of the bomber offensive.²⁹ Churchill now agreed, arguing for an increase from thirty-two to fifty bomber squadrons; he even authorised the transfer of two squadrons from Coastal Command to Bomber Command.³⁰ The Air Staff argued that only if the British and American bomber commanders could raise a force of five thousand bombers by June 1944, and six thousand by December 1944, could they pave the way for an invasion of western Europe.³¹

As Britain's armada of Lancaster and Halifax heavy bombers grew in size, some of them now carrying bombs weighing four tons each, so the grumbling among those branches of the armed forces starved of air power

grew louder; but saturation bombing remained popular with the civilian politicians. General Brooke despaired. 'The policy of bombing Germany occupies such a prominent place in the minds of most cabinet ministers,' he wrote with heavy irony to Sinclair on October 9, 'that it is very difficult to get them to realize that if we are not careful we might lose the war in all theatres for want of air support, and be left with the largest bombing force in the world at home to hand over to the Germans!'³²

To the navy, Britain's senior service, Churchill's predilection for killing enemy civilians was unprofessional at best, and unprofitable and unprincipled at worst. There was not an admiral who agreed with Churchill's saturation bombing campaign. Admiral Tovey described it in a memorandum as 'a luxury, not a necessity.' Put out by this criticism, and declaring that Tovey's paper 'damns itself,' Churchill ordered it suppressed.³³ He told the chiefs of staff that there must be no slackening of the bombing effort, 'but rather that it should be built up.' For a multitude of reasons the Germans were about to face a very trying winter, he said, and he did not want them to think that the bombing campaign was easing.³⁴

Portal circulated at the beginning of November 1942 an estimate of the coming bomber offensive. In the year up to June 30, 1941, Göring's bombers had dropped fifty-five thousand tons of bombs on Britain, killing 41,000 people and destroying 350,000 homes. By 'employing the latest incendiary technique' however the British could achieve much better results. They could drop one-and one-quarter million tons of bombs on Germany during 1943 and 1944: they could kill an estimated 900,000 German civilians, and maim a million more, as well as destroying around six million houses. They could deliver to every major German town and city ten attacks of the intensity of the thousand-bomber raid on Cologne. 'Germany,' he argued, 'is in no condition to withstand an onslaught of this character.' He had no doubt that 'against a background of growing casualties, increasing privations and dying hopes' the effect on morale would be 'profound indeed.'³⁵

Dudley Pound protested that there was not enough tanker capacity to bring in the five million tons of additional aviation spirit this colossal bombing campaign would require, let alone the bombs and other munitions. He demanded a proper inquiry into Portal's estimates.³⁶ Brooke was also worried for the other services.³⁷ Impressed by the bound albums of aerial damage photos that 'Butcher' Harris showed him, Churchill was blinded to such criticisms of the R.A.F. His doubts about the Americans however remained. On November 1, he expressed to the chiefs of staff powerful doubts whether

the American daylight bombing campaign, if it ever began, would achieve worthwhile results.

The first American heavy bomber group had arrived at the end of July 1942, with some 50,000 personnel; yet they had not dropped a single bomb on Germany. The twenty-two daylight operations which they had conducted against northern France and Holland had required massive British fighter support. Churchill suspected that the claims of enemy fighters destroyed were exaggerated. 'Meanwhile,' he grouched, 'the American public has been led to believe that a really serious contribution has been made by the American Air Force. It is not for us to undeceive them, but there can be no doubt that they will find out for themselves before very long.' Since prestige was involved, Churchill warned that they must expect the Americans to persevere obstinately in their daylight bombing method; but he feared that in the meanwhile American warplane production was being cast ever more deeply into 'an unprofitable groove.' What would happen, he asked, if a formation of Fortresses, bristling with its half-inch machine-guns, ran out of ammunition? He predicted a massacre. 'What ought we to do?'³⁸

The American bombing of French targets did not endear the Americans to de Gaulle. The bombing of Rouen left 140 dead and 20 injured, with homes, schools, and churches destroyed. De Gaulle protested vehemently about the casualties, and pleaded for the bombing to be switched to Germany or Italy. The chiefs of staff ignored his objections.³⁹

Churchill's support for Harris became unconditional. When the question arose whether to equip the night bombers or the anti-submarine planes with centimetric radar, he speciously offered to allow his cabinet to decide; A. V. Alexander stood aside, feeling that no purpose would be served by pressing the navy's claim.⁴⁰ In January 1943 Pathfinder bombers began operating over Germany with the panoramic radar known as H2S; by the end of February the first such set was already in the hands of Nazi scientists, salvaged from a Lancaster bomber brought down at Rotterdam.

their inability to do much to aid Stalin, other than bombing German cities, preyed on Winston's mind. He suggested to Lord Beaverbrook on October 5 that he might go to Moscow to explain their supply difficulties. Beaverbrook declined. Still nourishing his own leadership ambitions, he had been eyeing Winston since his return from the Moscow trip and he confided to Eden that in his view Churchill had become quite 'bent'; he did not expect him to last much longer.⁴¹

Churchill held an after-dinner cabinet the next day in his underground War Room, mostly to discuss his next telegram to Stalin. With that disagreeable task behind him, he invited Lyttelton and Eden to stay behind for a drink – ‘Like being asked into the pavilion,’ murmured Lyttelton in an aside. Eden had wanted to talk privately with the prime minister, but young Randolph’s loutish behaviour rendered all intimacy quite impossible. The son shouted at one stage at the prime minister, in words painfully reminiscent of Stalin’s recent barb: ‘Father, the trouble is your soldiers won’t fight.’⁴²

Unable to throw off his sore throat, on the seventh Churchill took to his bed. Beaverbrook eyed him over, and pronounced him ‘bowed’ and ‘not the man he was.’ Bracken also found him ‘very low.’ Eden loyally assured these vultures of Winston’s powers of recuperation.⁴³

winston drove down to Chequers as usual that weekend – with Elizabeth Layton, his stenographer, sitting next to him in the big Daimler. ‘The light was just fading,’ she described a few days later, ‘and most of the way it was “Pull that blind down – that one up – now down again – put the light on – off – etc.” He really was *sweet*.’ The prime minister kept up a train of odd disjointed asides like ‘Frost will soon be here.’ Once he asked her, ‘How fast do you think we are travelling?’ She replied, ‘Oh, about fifty.’ ‘Oh no,’ he murmured, ‘*much* more – at least sixty.’

In a more modern, more cumbrous age his behaviour toward this young secretary might have been seen as harassment; she saw it just as the unbending of a charming elderly gentleman, happy to have companionship. ‘I did most of the Old Man’s work,’ she wrote of this weekend.

He was simply sweet all the time – never barked once. Except when he had said for the fortieth time one dinner-time, ‘Now I must get up.’ So finally I thought he was going to and went to take the work he had done out of his box. Immediately, ‘What are you putting your fingers in my box for? Sit down,’ grumble grumble. So I sat feeling (and I suppose looking) very crushed. A few minutes later, ‘Now you may take the things out of my box. And don’t look so nervous – no one is going to bite you,’ with a grin. One time he came into the office and said, ‘I’m now going up to work. I’ll have my box and Miss Layton.’⁴⁴

On the eighth he left southern England in his special train to spend some days in Scotland and to visit the Home Fleet. The government heaved a sigh

of relief. 'It is an awful thing dealing with a man like Winston who is at the same moment dictatorial, eloquent, and muddleheaded,' wrote one, after another row about losing India; on October 12, the same minister dictated: 'Winston being away receiving the Freedom of Edinburgh, Attlee presided [over the cabinet] and the whole business was over in three quarters of an hour.'⁴⁵

The crowds in Edinburgh on the way to the Usher Hall were sparse, but his staff put this down to the lack of publicity.⁴⁶ He returned to London carrying the scroll in a silver casket.⁴⁷ His attention never left the war's battlefronts. Like Hitler he liked to pry into every facet of the war. As Stalin's military crisis approached, Churchill demanded that his codebreakers break into the Soviets' weather cypher.⁴⁸ Conscious of the great drama now beginning as Hitler's and Stalin's armies grappled for control of Stalingrad, this strategic city on the Volga, he asked General Ismay to ensure that he was given a daily report on weather conditions along the whole Russian front. 'The best possible will do,' he jested.⁴⁹

in north Africa his own armies would shortly begin a drama of no lesser moment. General Brooke, the C.I.G.S., had watched the impatient exchanges between Churchill and his desert generals during late September 1942 with a sinking feeling – a sense of *déjà vu*. Was Churchill beginning to use the same old arguments now against Alexander and Montgomery that he had used against Auchinleck? 'I think I have at last got him to leave them alone and not rush them,' Brooke decided however.⁵⁰

By mid-October Brooke knew Montgomery's detailed battle-plan and even the date for *lightfoot*, his coming offensive – Montgomery had asked the C.I.G.S. to guard the secret closely. As Brooke had no confidence whatsoever in Churchill's ability to keep anything secret, he decided at first against telling him – difficult though this would be, as the prime minister was continually fretting about delays. Eventually, he did divulge the secret to Winston after lunch at No. 10 on October 16. Churchill, pleased that Montgomery had brought forward the date of the attack, solemnly promised to tell nobody else.⁵¹ Only six days later however Brooke found that the prime minister had 'calmly gone and told Eisenhower and [Bedell] Smith!!' The Americans had no business to be told such details – least of all Eisenhower, whose headquarters in Norfolk House was notoriously 'leaky' at that time. Brooke's first instinct was that it was fatal to tell a politician any secret; later he realised that it was the 'newspaper reporter' in Church-

ill which had done the harm. News, to a journalist, was something to be 'cashed-in' at once.*⁵²

On October 13 he dined at No. 10 with Eisenhower, Clark, Bedell Smith, and Admiral Cunningham. Field-Marshal Smuts had just arrived from Cairo brimming with the latest news, and he came in after dinner. They discussed *torch* from every angle.⁵³ Smuts addressed the cabinet on October 14, 'a wonderful old boy,' wrote one witness, 'fresh as new paint.' Smuts spoke well of Montgomery's prospects in Egypt.⁵⁴

early that Friday October 16 they all went to Chequers. Winston had invited Smuts down with his slow-spoken son Captain Jacobus Daniel; he asked the Edens and several others too. Secretary John Martin found Smuts the picture of health though obviously ageing.⁵⁵ Smuts himself described this weekend as 'like a tornado.'⁵⁶ There was much to discuss, with remarkable new developments in North Africa soon commanding their attention.

There is much that still has to be learned about the political background of *torch* – particularly the dealings with neutral Spain, and the clandestine (and separate) British and American dealings with the leaders of Vichy France.

General Franco would remain an unknown quantity. The American plan called for thirty transport planes to cross Spain in the darkness at ten thousand feet, carrying troops to seize a vital airfield at Oran in North Africa. Worried that this violation of Spanish neutrality might prove the last straw for Franco, Anthony Eden passed the buck to Churchill. Churchill gave the go-ahead, but noted, 'It is an audacious plan, and A.M. [the air ministry] are none too sure of its success.'⁵⁷ While France was very much an American responsibility, as he reminded Eden, it was for the British to deal with Spain. Eisenhower, who was to command the *torch* operation, sent a note setting out what he planned to do if Spain did 'go sour.' Churchill hated messages couched in sloppy and opaque Americanisms. 'I am sure he will agree it was a loose expression,' he observed irritably, 'and ought not to remain the basis of our correspondence.'⁵⁸

* Hitler made the same scornful comparison, discussing Churchill's incautious phone conversation with Paul Reynaud on March 30, 1940, which had revealed to the Nazi intercept service – when it was relayed to Finland – the British plan to invade Norway in a few days' time. 'A journalist,' scoffed Hitler. Ambassador Walther Hewel recorded his dinner-table reminiscences on July 5, 1941, thus in his diary: 'If Churchill and Reynaud had kept a still tongue in their heads, I might well not have tackled Norway.'

The codebreakers provided only sparse clues. On November 1 Churchill read an intercepted despatch of the Spanish ambassador. In this, the Duke of Alba reported to Madrid that the Allies were going to open their second front in Africa, since the recovery of the Mediterranean coastline would effectively save them six million tons of shipping space. The ambassador believed that the French and Arab civil population and army would offer little resistance to the invasion because of their hatred for the Germans and Italians. 'Although I do not claim to know the plans of the British General Staff,' the ambassador however advised, 'I believe Spanish territory will be respected.' Churchill himself, concluded the duke, had told him that he approved of Franco's foreign policy, and he had undertaken not to interfere with Spanish sovereignty.⁵⁹

as for Vichy, as noted earlier, Churchill had maintained tenuous and unpublicized liaisons with its leaders ever since the Fall of France.* Notwithstanding what the Duke of Alba believed, the stumbling block was still the antipathy of the French officer corps to the British, particularly in North Africa, resulting from Churchill's 1940 attack on Mers el-Kébir. The Americans knew of this – they had printed leaflets for dropping on Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers when torch began, carrying the Stars and Stripes and Roosevelt's likeness, and justifying the landing of American troops; Eisenhower secretly recommended printing a second leaflet 'to forestall any impression on the part of the French people that they are being double crossed by [the] use of British troops' – when British troops subsequently entered Algiers.⁶⁰

Vichy's liaisons with the United States were far more substantial. Admiral Darlan had extended a discreet feeler to the Americans in mid-1942. As recently as the end of April he had assured Admiral Leahy, before the painfully pro-Vichy American ambassador returned to Washington, that if the Americans should set foot in North Africa with sufficient force he would not oppose them; Darlan had added that he had no desire for friendly relations with Britain.⁶¹ Since May 1942 he had maintained clandestine links directly with Robert Murphy, the U.S. consul-general in Algiers, through Vice-Admiral Raymond A. Fenard, his agent in that city. Murphy reported regularly on these to Washington, and he dwelt upon them during his visit to Eisenhower in England in mid-September.⁶²

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In October, Darlan intensified his efforts, sending Colonel **firstname** Chrétien to Murphy to propose once again a joint Franco-American military operation against the Axis; he spoke of prefacing this campaign with an operation whereby Marshal Pétain would travel to Morocco, escorted by the French fleet, ostensibly to visit the Sultan. Under Pétain and Darlan, France would re-establish her military power in Morocco and rejoin the Allies. The snag was that Darlan was proposing this for the spring of 1943 – the earliest he believed the Americans could land in North Africa.⁶³

The British secret service was in rather more hesitant contact with the French underground. This is confirmed by the papers of General Ismay, Churchill's chief of staff: after seeing the head of the Special Operations Executive on October 13 Ismay confirmed to the secret service chiefs that the chiefs of staff were anxious to know more about the two French underground organisations with which they were in contact before deciding whether to proceed with 'negotiations' through either of these channels.⁶⁴ The Americans acted more decisively. American archives, particularly those of the late Robert Murphy, contain revealing documents on the secret negotiations between Washington and Darlan which have somehow eluded the official historians of both nations. In mid-October Murphy cabled to Leahy in Washington – intending him to relay it to Eisenhower in London – that a representative of Darlan had contacted him with a firm and tempting offer: the French admiral expected, he said, a German military occupation of French North Africa and he had somehow heard word of **torch**, or something like it. Darlan wanted the Americans to know, said Murphy, that

he will be willing to come to Africa and bring with him the French fleet, if he, as Commander in Chief of the French armed forces, can be assured of United States ability and willingness to supply large-scale aid, both material and economic.

Murphy stressed that the intermediary, whom he did not name, was sincere and reliable, and he recommended that they win Darlan's co-operation. He then asked Washington for instructions: 'Please advise me at once as to the limits I may go in replying to Darlan's representative, who desires to know: (1) Are we willing to cooperate with Darlan? (2) If so, will we be able to do so quickly and on a large scale here and/or in Europe?'⁶⁵

What happened to Murphy's cable in Washington is not known. The war department eventually replied to Murphy in Leahy's name, but the reply ignored his carefully phrased questions. He was merely instructed:

Inform your contact we also have information that Germany contemplates occupation of African Colonies and it is our opinion that Darlan should resist aggression by Axis with Army and Navy in which event America will provide at once large scale military, material and economic aid in the colonies.

Marshall also relayed Murphy's cable to Eisenhower in London on October 16, but without however expressing any viewpoint other than to remark that his intelligence chief, General Kenneth Strong, thought that Eisenhower's headquarters could not trust Darlan.⁶⁶ In Norfolk House, Eisenhower called a 'planning session' to discuss Murphy's cable, and this resulted in a proposal which did respond to Murphy's requests. Early on Saturday October 17 he sent this highly secret document both to the war cabinet offices and to Washington. It suggested that they accept Darlan as the commander-in-chief of all French forces in North Africa, and that they propose to General Giraud that he assume the position of French governor of North Africa. After North Africa was secured, Eisenhower would even consider appointing Admiral Darlan as his Deputy Supreme Allied Commander.⁶⁷ This was a clearcut solution of the French conundrum, but a very radical solution indeed.

arriving on Saturday, October 17, Eisenhower's message about the secret approach from Darlan caused turmoil in British government circles. The foreign office, personified in Anthony Eden who was at Chequers at the time, detested Darlan. The young foreign secretary recorded in his diary that morning how the drama began: 'Pug [Ismay] rang up & said mysterious French message had arrived.' They had awaited the message, and it finally arrived at the house at one p.m. Eisenhower confirmed that the Vichy French wanted to take an active part in torch, and were even suggesting that there should be a simultaneous Allied invasion of southern France. According to Murphy, while Giraud also claimed that he alone could rally the French troops defending North-West Africa to the Allied cause, Admiral Darlan, as commander-in-chief, was the one French officer who could issue *orders* to the French forces to allow the Allies to enter North

Africa unopposed, and to place the surviving French fleet at their disposal. The emissaries claimed that they feared a pre-emptive German attack on Vichy France. Murphy, said Eisenhower, had outlined to the messengers the **torch** plan, without revealing the date.

Churchill discussed these tantalising feelers with his chiefs of staff that afternoon, October 17. Smuts and Eden sat in on this Chequers conference. Eden smelt a rat.

A preliminary reading by Winston, Smuts, Pound, Dickie [Mountbatten] & self. I felt suspicious, which may just be my nature but it seemed too much like the way Germans would play this hand if they wanted to know our plans & delay them. Found that Jacob shared my suspicions. After luncheon Smuts proposed adjt [adjournment] to London to discuss with Americans. Off we went, Winston in high tide of enthusiasm.⁶⁸

Back in London at four-thirty p.m. Churchill convened a staff conference, this time with the American generals present, to discuss both the Marshall telegram and Eisenhower's reply. General Brooke objected at once that they could not sustain a bridgehead in southern France at the same time as **torch**, whatever undertakings the Vichy French might give about taking an active part. They decided however to smuggle General Mark Clark into Algiers, the Vichy-occupied capital of Algeria, by submarine, to meet this latest emissary and persuade him that **torch**, an Allied invasion of French North Africa in strength was more imminent than he believed.⁶⁹

The prime minister vaguely recalled the approach he had received from Darlan during his Atlantic crossing in December 1941.* His staff had the file sent for. 'C' reported that Darlan had inquired whether the British would refuse to deal with a postwar French government of which he was a member. Churchill had replied, through 'C,' that if Darlan were to sail the French fleet from Toulon to North Africa 'such a service' would entitle him to 'an honourable place in the Allied ranks.' John Martin told Churchill however: 'It is not certain if the message ever reached Darlan.'⁷⁰ It seems likely that the foreign office had halted it. Churchill however – and this is important – now expressed his approval of the way that Eisenhower was handling this latest Darlan development.⁷¹ Murphy's papers show that Eisenhower shortly notified Washington that Churchill's cabinet approved.⁷² A few hours later

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Admiral Leahy cabled to Murphy in Algiers Washington's instructions to deal with Darlan. Churchill, the message said, had given his blessing to this undertaking.⁷³

anthony eden was beset with misgivings that Churchill had risen to this alluring bait. He and his department backed only General de Gaulle. The foreign office was already unhappy about the way in which torch was becoming an American operation, with the role of British soldiers and sailors being played down to avoid antagonizing Vichy. Using Darlan might have its attractions, but for two years, said the F.O., British propaganda had reviled him as a traitor second only to Pierre Laval: he had fired on British sailors at both Mers el-Kébir and Dakar: he had betrayed British naval secrets to the enemy: he had aided Rashid Ali's uprising against the British in Iraq.

On balance the foreign office preferred to back General Giraud, and they authorised an immediate operation to whisk him out of Vichy France to Gibraltar by submarine (he had explained that he was averse to flying). At some time soon, a showdown between Churchill, Eden, and Eisenhower over Darlan, de Gaulle and Giraud therefore became inevitable.



Eden had hoped to use that Chequers weekend (October 17–19, 1942) to ride his own hobby-horse before the prime minister, the foreign office's plans for the post-war world. Churchill however could not have cared less, and dealt his young foreign secretary a wounding put-down. 'I hope these speculative studies will be entrusted mainly to those on whose hands time hangs heavily,' he wrote, 'and that we shall not overlook *Mrs Glasse's Cookery Book* recipe for jugged hare – 'First catch your hare'.'⁷⁴ Taken aback, Eden and his staff found Winston's reply 'foolish and denigrating.'⁷⁵ When Eden pressed the matter, the prime minister sent another minute, no less hurtful than the first: 'It would be easy to dilate upon these themes,' he wrote on October 21. 'Unhappily the war has prior claims on your attention and on mine.' On the same day he sent to the foreign secretary a paper which was so reactionary that Oliver Harvey, Eden's secretary, wrote these lines: 'With Roosevelt straining to put the British empire into liquidation and Winston pulling in the opposite direction to put it back to pre-Boer War, we are in danger of losing both the Old and the New World.'⁷⁶

The draft foreign office proposals had boiled down to setting up regional organisations covering Europe, the Far East, and the Middle East, all bowing to a Four Power council consisting of the Russians, British, Chinese, and Americans. 'It sounds very simple,' the prime minister lectured Eden in his response, 'to pick out these four big Powers. We cannot however tell what sort of a Russia and what kind of Russian demands we shall have to face. . . I cannot regard the Chungking government [of Chiang Kai-shek] as representing a great world-power. Certainly there would be faggot-vote on the side of the United States in any attempt to liquidate the British overseas empire.' He continued: 'I must admit that my thoughts rest primarily in Europe. . . It would be a measureless disaster if Russian barbarism overlaid the culture and independence of the ancient States of Europe. Hard as it is to say now, I trust that the European family may act unitedly as one under a Council of Europe.' He wanted a United States of Europe to emerge eventually which would exclude Russia, and indeed keep Russia disarmed.⁷⁷

It is worth noting that, even as Stalin's armies were fighting their historic battle at Stalingrad, Churchill could – in private – express such forceful contempt for his Russian allies and their way of life.



If Churchill was unwilling to think beyond this war, others were less shy. When he returned from Chequers to London on Monday October 19 he found Roosevelt's treasury secretary, the shrewd, bespectacled Henry R. Morgenthau Jr, had arrived from Washington. Morgenthau told him over lunch that a cartoon in Washington's evening newspaper had shown British officials phoning Churchill warning, 'Morgenthau is coming over there. Watch your shirt!' The powerful treasury secretary had the president's private instructions to do what he could to dismantle the system of imperial preference on which the empire's trade was based, and to inquire whether Britain would allow United States oil companies into Britain's oil-producing territories after the war.⁷⁸

Morgenthau was, in a sense, Britain's banker and perhaps Churchill should have shown him greater deference. He met him and his chief aide Harry Dexter White – known to History for other reasons – three times, but he neither invited them down to Chequers, nor did anything to alleviate the chill austerity of the clammy London rooms in which they were housed.⁷⁹

there was little now to do in these last days before Montgomery's big push at Alamein began – and then torch. Seeking solitude, Churchill drove out to Chartwell that Tuesday afternoon, then back to London. Eisenhower and his chief of staff Bedell Smith came round late that evening, October 20, but they escaped comparatively early, around one a.m., after a discussion of history, on the trivia of which Eisenhower had for once out-pursued his host.⁸⁰ The next day Winston went to the House to hear the South African prime minister speak for fifty minutes to an audience of peers and parliamentary worthies in the Royal Gallery. There were appreciative chuckles when Smuts said that the empire's peace aim must be 'Japan for the Japanese.' Leo Amery thrilled to the spectacle of this apotheosis of a British field-marshal, this prophet of empire, while finding that their own prime minister looked 'curiously gross and commonplace, a blend of Eighteenth-Century English and Twentieth-Century America.'⁸¹ The South African's fine, weatherbeaten face contrasted with Churchill's putty-faced pallor. Their own prime minister looked tired, pale, and not at all well. 'He said only a few rotund and complimentary words at the end,' noted one Member; Lloyd George, equally pallid, shocked the left-wingers in a different way by talking of 'this terrible and perplexing war.'⁸²

at alamein, Rommel's *Panzerarmee Afrika* glared at Montgomery's Eighth across a few hundred yards of minefield. In London, the eyes of all who knew were on that five or ten-mile wide strip of wasteland in Egypt, this bottleneck barring each army's way past the other. 'All our hopes,' the prime minister radioed to General Sir Harold Alexander, 'are centred upon the battle you and Montgomery are going to fight. It may well be the key to the future.'⁸³

This was so true – the future of Churchill himself was in the balance. Nearly two hundred thousand men under General Bernard Montgomery's direct command were confronting the forty-nine thousand German and fifty-four thousand Italian troops of Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel's Panzer Army, well dug in and shielded by a carapace of one hundred Flak 'eighty-eights' and a hundred more 76·2-millimetre guns. Rommel had spent three months digging his forces in along this line from the sea to the impassable Qattara Depression. Half a million anti-personnel and anti-tank mines had been laid in a patchwork of foxholes, defensive boxes, and belts which could be raked by machine-gun fire, swept by searchlights, and bombarded by

anti-tank guns. Against Rommel's 250 German and 280 Italian tanks, mostly dug in now, hull-down, with only their gun turrets showing above the sands, Montgomery would pit five hundred Crusaders, Grants, and Shermans – the latter, built in America, being tested in battle for the first time.

The prognosis for the British offensive seemed good. Montgomery had a powerful desert air force in support. His Eighth Army had a vast arsenal of artillery; he enjoyed a two-to-one superiority over Rommel in numbers. Above all, he had his 'cheat,' his ultras from Bletchley Park where 'the monotony of the correspondence of the enemy post in the Qattara Depression who daily signalled *Nacht ruhig verlaufen* [night passed quietly] . . . provided Hut 6 with one of its best cribs for a considerable season.'⁸⁴

From the other side of the minefields the enemy was sending increasingly dire telegrams to Rome and Berlin about the dwindling gasoline supplies, and Churchill and his generals were reading each and every such message. On October 20 this Oracle, on which the prime minister relied so heavily, regurgitated the Panzer Army's secret and urgent warning that in five days' time – by which time the battle should have been joined – its fuel stocks would be so depleted as to allow only four-and-a-half days of battle; and that of these stocks, only three days' fuel supply was forward of Tobruk.* In consequence, warned the German commander *General der Panzertruppe* Georg Stumme (Rommel had gone on leave to Austria), his army no longer possessed the tactical freedom of movement which was 'absolutely essential,' given that the British offensive might start any day.⁸⁵

winging across southern England, the Channel, Nazi-occupied Europe and the Mediterranean, Winston Churchill's thoughts hovered silently above Egypt and the terrible events about to begin as dusk fell on Friday, October 23. As a full moon filtered its neutral light across the battlefield – neutral as between friend and foe – the Battle of Alamein opened at the hour that Montgomery had decreed, at eight p.m., with the sudden, blasting roar of almost a thousand guns of the British empire speaking in unison to the soldiers of Hitler and Mussolini cowering in their lines. Shortly the agreed code-word – 'zip!' – arrived in London from Harold Alexander, and Churchill proudly announced the opening of the battle in an urgent telegram ('clear

* Churchill rightly attached importance to such intercepts, although the German commanders inevitably exaggerated their plight. As Hitler pointed out sarcastically months later, 'A gigantic army drove back from Alamein to here [Agheila] – they didn't drive on water.' David Irving, *Hitler's War* (London, 1991), page 509.

the line!') to his great friend President Roosevelt, adding most generously: 'All the Shermans and self-propelled guns which you gave me on that dark Tobruk morning will play their part.'⁸⁶

He found himself dining with Eleanor Roosevelt at Buckingham Palace that evening. His Majesty the King had invited his first minister, along with Field-Marshal Smuts and the Mountbattens, to dine with himself and Mrs Roosevelt that night. The president's lady had been due to arrive in England two days earlier, but bad weather had detained her in Ireland. Her stay in London now proved a rather traumatic time. No effort had been spared in simulating for her, in her own bleak accommodation at Buckingham Palace, the deprivations of the Londoners; the Queen had given up her own first floor bedroom – but the windows of this vast, unheated room had been blown out by bombing and were only roughly filled with wooden frames and perspex.⁸⁷ It was moreover separated by hundreds of yards of blacked-out corridors from the bedroom of her personal assistant Malvina Thompson, about whom there was already scandalised gossip in some quarters.

As for dinner itself, although eaten off Gold and silver plate the meal was blighted by the prime minister's unconcealed dislike of his transatlantic guest. 'I find the prime minister not easy to talk to,' Eleanor dictated as a wan comment to her diary that night, 'which was my experience in Washington. Sometimes I think by the end of the day there has been a little too much champagne, because he repeated the same thing to me two or three times.'⁸⁸

On this occasion, however, Churchill's mind was far away – on Alamein. He was on tenterhooks throughout both the meal and the war movie screened to them afterwards, *In Which We Serve*, in which Noël Coward played the part of his friend the destroyer-hero 'Dickie' Mountbatten. Unable to bear the suspense any longer he finally made his excuses and phoned across to No. 10 Downing-street for the latest news from Cairo. There was very little. He returned however to the King's dinner table lustily singing *Roll out the Barrel*.

For several days the news from Cairo would be excruciatingly thin. In a display of insouciance Churchill took his son Randolph with Henry Morgenthau, and other notables down to Dover the next morning to inspect the coastal defences. He showed his visitors everything, including underground 'shadow' factories which astounded even these Americans. The Dover citizenry received Churchill and Smuts with applause of unmistakable sincerity. The navy staged a gunnery display with live ammunition,

and Churchill made a pleasing little speech introducing Morgenthau as the man who gave to Britain the hundred thousand rifles she needed after Dunkirk.⁸⁹

The two Churchills and Smuts spent much of the journey talking with Rauf Orbay, the Turkish ambassador, and frank words were spoken about Turkey's supply of chrome to Hitler's munitions factories. Orbay replied with a bluntness bordering on bitterness that after concluding her alliance with Britain and France, Turkey had in 1941 found herself deprived of aid by both countries: had she, after the Nazi victory in the Balkans, provoked Germany to attack the Turkish army, which lacked tanks, airplanes, and guns, this would have given Hitler the pretext he needed to seize the Dardanelles Straits. They had had no choice but to honour their obligations to supply chrome: in doing so they had served the interests of the Allies. 'Prime Minister Churchill was most cheerful and sprightly throughout the whole journey,' reported Orbay to Ankara in a cypher telegram which Churchill read soon after. 'He kept on telling us again and again that 130 aeroplanes each carrying three or four tons of bombs had bombarded Genoa and had returned without a single casualty. He spoke of the future and his eyes flashed.'⁹⁰

after that Churchill withdrew once again to Chequers for the weekend, taking Elizabeth Layton as duty secretary. In her memoirs, she recalled the buzz of excitement, the wonderful humour, the hanging-about waiting for reports to come in over the scrambler telephone.⁹¹ The German and Italian minefields were however proving deeper and more tenacious than Montgomery had expected. He had told London anyway not to expect news for some days. Fortunately General Stumme's staff had sent a message to their absent field-marshal that the British had begun an attack late on the twenty-third in the north and early the next day in the south as well; the British were expected to extend the offensive to the whole front on October 25.⁹² 'C' telephoned to Churchill further news of the desert drama. Hitler himself had intervened, and Berlin had signaled to the Panzer Army that he was demanding an update by one a.m., to decide whether Rommel should break off his leave and return. The update left no choice: Rommel's stand-in General Stumme was missing, having fallen into an ambush. General Hans Ritter von Thoma had taken over the army.⁹³

The intercepts which Bletchley Park's chief of security, Wing Commander Fred Winterbotham, telephoned to the prime minister later that day, Octo-

ber 25, were however more unsettling. At four-thirty p.m. the Panzer Army had stated that 'they were satisfied with the situation' and that General Stumme's body had now been recovered.⁹⁴ Giving a broader overall picture the Army's chief of operations had reported to local Luftwaffe headquarters that the British had first attacked with about 150 tanks and night bombers, penetrating the main battle position (*Hauptkampffeld*) at several points, but a counter attack by 15th Panzer Division had restored the situation; on the twenty-fourth the enemy had launched an attack in the south with about 140 tanks, penetrating the minefields, but again the attack had been halted. At five p.m. on October 25 Kesselring had reported from Rome that although battle strengths were down, 'in my opinion there is no danger in consideration of the reserves still available.'⁹⁵ Later that day, October 25, 'C' telephoned Churchill with word that Hermann Göring had been heard asking whether Rommel had arrived back on the battlefield yet. Later still, a telegram from Rommel was intercepted – it was momentous news, and Bletchley Park's Hut 3 sent telexes reporting it to the chiefs of naval, military, and air Intelligence, and to General Alexander in Cairo himself. 'I have once more taken over the command of the army,' the Desert Fox had announced.⁹⁶

So everything was in the balance at Alamein.

winston had felt duty-bound to invite President Roosevelt's wife down to Chequers, and he invited her son Elliott too, and her assistant Malvina, to have lunch and stay the night on October 25.⁹⁷ The signposts around the Chiltern Hills had been removed in 1940, and her driver had some difficulty locating the Chequers estate. She found Randolph's little boy Winston also down here, although there was no sign of either of his parents; Eleanor Roosevelt decided that the two-year-old was as sweet as his father Randolph was surly, while his resemblance to his grandfather the prime minister was so close as to be 'ridiculous.' At the dinner table later she found a 'Sir Wherton,' evidently Lord Cherwell, because she observed rather Wasphishly that he was 'formerly a Mr Hinkelmann' (in fact Lindemann, and not of Jewish origin).⁹⁸

The prime minister fled to his study, leaving his guests, who now included 'Butcher' Harris, largely to their own devices while he composed a memorandum on the 'policy for the conduct of the war.' In view of the onset of *lightfoot* and the imminence of *torch* the 'under-belly of the Axis' inevitably featured prominently in its pages.



Hoping to mend fences with Eleanor Roosevelt before she left England, Clementine invited her to a little farewell dinner in the Annexe to No. 10. Playing safe, apart from the president's wife and Henry Morgenthau she had invited only General Brooke, Lady Denman – head of the Women's Land Army – and some other ladies. Once again her husband squirmed with distaste throughout the dinner. For a long time in fact he refused to speak. Clementine announced, 'I am sorry dear, I could not buy any fish. You will have to eat macaroni.'

'Then,' recalled Morgenthau a few days later, still dismayed at this frugal dinner, 'they gave us little left-over bits made into meat loaf.'⁹⁹

Churchill asked him if America was now sending enough food to the still starving (and still fascist) Spain. Eleanor rose to the bait and snapped that all this was too late, that something should have been done to help the 'Loyalists,' as she termed the unlamented Red Republic that General Franco had dislodged. Churchill had supported the Franco regime, at least until Hitler and Mussolini joined in the civil war, and he was unrepentant about it even now.

'I had a slight difference of opinion with the prime minister,' Eleanor dictated to her diary that night, with these fresh wounds to lick, 'on the subject of Loyalist Spain.' 'I remarked,' she wrote, 'that I could not see why the existing [Red] government could not have been helped and the P.M. replied that he and I would have been the first to lose our heads if the Loyalists won.' Eleanor snapped that losing her head was unimportant, to which the P.M. responded with a tartness that displayed his underlying contempt, 'I don't want you to lose your head – and neither do I want to lose mine.'

Not for the first time Clementine saw a dinner party dissolving in acrimony. She leaned anxiously across the table to agree fervently with their honoured guest. That annoyed Churchill even more. He stood up, and announced: 'I have held certain beliefs for sixty-eight years and I'm not going to change now.'

It was a signal that dinner was over. He had taken a dislike to Eleanor Roosevelt in Washington, and he made no effort to see her again before she returned there now.

Brendan Bracken was aghast at the possible effect of all this on Mrs Roosevelt and went over to console her. She never forgot the episode.¹⁰⁰ She had planned to spend two days with President de Valera in Dublin, but Churchill had managed to get that visit to southern Ireland, as he insisted on calling it (where Eden had written 'Eire') cancelled, having urged Eden to do something to 'cushion her off' this plan.¹⁰¹

Despite all that had passed, she reported favourably in Washington on her trip to England.¹⁰² Morgenthau too would leave England convinced that Hitler had 'seen his high-water mark; that the worst is behind us, and [that] it is not going to be as long a war as I thought it was.'¹⁰³

Like a man who has lived for years in penury but suddenly come into a fortune, Churchill too sensed that the whole mess was beginning to sort itself out. 'My thoughts are with you on this anniversary,' he cabled on October 30 to Dr Chaim Weizmann, now depressed and languishing in a luxury hotel in New York, for the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration falling three days later. He added 'Better days will surely come for your suffering people and for the great cause for which you have fought so bravely.' In a postscript that was as symptomatic of his reliance on the Arabs as it was of his tenuous relationship with the Zionists, Churchill sternly added that this message was *not* meant for publication.¹⁰⁴



It is the opinion of many scholars of this, the greatest war of the twentieth century, that the events of the next four weeks at Alamein and Stalingrad reversed the flow of Hitler's fortunes.

Operation **TORCH** would shortly begin. On Churchill's return to London on Monday October 26, 1942 he lunched with the American generals Eisenhower, Bedell Smith, and Mark Clark, and with his own chiefs of staff Pound and Brooke.¹⁰⁵ Mark Clark, who would be the deputy commander, had paid a secret visit to Algiers by submarine two days previously, to confer there with Robert Murphy and General Charles Mast, deputy chief of the Vichy forces in Algiers; he regaled the others with his adventures – how, returning by small boat to the submarine, he had narrowly escaped drowning when the boat was swamped by the surf.¹⁰⁶

The leading civilian subversive whom they had met was Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie, the brother of a French air-force general still in France; Henri led a vigorous underground youth group in Algiers, the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*,

which had furnished Murphy with much of his secret Intelligence in recent months. Henri d'Astier had chosen General Mast to meet the Americans: together with General Lyman Lemnitzer and members of the American consulate general, Mark Clark had met them near Cherchelle on the morning of October 24. All were agreed that, if he could be sprung from southern France, General Giraud should take charge of the coup – and failing him, General Mast.¹⁰⁷ There was no talk here of Admiral Darlan. Later that same day, October 24, Churchill phoned Eden to report that Clark had had a satisfactory talk with 'those people' and was now returning.

Clearly savouring the element of conspiracy and adventure, Churchill summarised the position in an optimistic telegram to Lord Gort, governor of Malta: 'An American general of high rank visited torch area and held long conference with friendly generals. We have every reason to hope, and indeed believe, that very little opposition will be encountered and that powerful aid will be forthcoming.' The whole operation might therefore move far more rapidly than planned. There was no evidence that the enemy had 'any idea of what is coming.'¹⁰⁸

on october 26 news had at last begun to trickle in from Montgomery's battle. He had taken 1,500 prisoners; it did not seem very many. Rommel's veteran 15th and the 21st Panzer Divisions had attempted several counter-attacks but they were taking heavy casualties from the desert air force. That evening Montgomery took Kidney Ridge, a tactically important elevation on the otherwise featureless desert. The cabinet, informed of this meagre profit from three days' bloody fighting, was uneasy. One member admitted in his diary to an anxiety that they were letting themselves in for 'another Passchendaele' – spending themselves in 'not quite' getting through.¹⁰⁹

What titbits Churchill gleaned came from his Oracle. On the twenty-seventh 'C' sent over to him an intercept which established what had befallen the Panzer Army's temporary commander, who had gone missing on the first day of the offensive: 'In a renewed search of the ground,' the army had signalled to Berlin, '*General der Panzertruppe* Stumme was picked up dead. Cause of death: heart-failure.'¹¹⁰* But what heart were Churchill's generals in? He sent a telegram to the empire prime ministers, praising Montgomery

* We have found that when a German C.-in-C. took his own life – e.g., General Dollmann and Field-Marshal Kluge in the summer of 1944 – his staff inevitably concealed it as a heart-attack.

and Alexander as generals 'determined to fight the battle out to the very end.'¹¹¹ The very end? It was not a language calculated to inspire.

Worse seemed to follow. For a whole day on October 28 General Montgomery relaxed the offensive while he regrouped his forces for the final assault on Rommel's still intact defensive position. When Churchill heard that Montgomery, in a move not foreseen in the original *lightfoot* plan, was pulling the Eighth Army's armour right out, he was alarmed; he was unaware that the previous day had seen some of the heaviest fighting as Rommel's two veteran Panzer divisions threw five determined counter-attacks at the British forces. Churchill had expected rather better news from Montgomery.¹¹² He began drafting a telegram to General Alexander, pointing out that the *ultra* messages left no doubt that Rommel was 'hard run' for petrol and ammunition, while British air superiority was heavily weighing on him too. 'We do not of course know what you have in mind,' he continued, 'and therefore were somewhat concerned to see that on the 27th the attack on Kidney Ridge by two battalions was the only substantial thrust.' Now, by Alexander's own latest report, he appeared to be pulling most of his units back into reserve. 'We should be grateful,' he appealed, 'if you could tell us if you have any large-scale attacks impending because we feel that the intensity and scale of the battle will be hard for the enemy to bear.'¹¹³

He had not yet signed and sent off this message when, later that day Eden came round to No. 10 for drinks at 6:15 p.m. Eden announced that he too was worried about the course the battle was taking. Neither Montgomery nor Alexander, he said, was 'gripping the situation' or showing a true offensive spirit.¹¹⁴ Had their feckless generals already allowed victory to slip through their fingers once again? Churchill approved Eden's proposal that they immediately dispatch Richard Casey, the Minister Resident, from Cairo to the battlefield to find out what was going on, and to remind Montgomery – in case he had forgotten – that *torch* was due to begin on November 8. Churchill also sent an anguished minute over to General Brooke at the war office: 'It is most necessary that the attack should be resumed before *torch*,' this message read. 'A stand-still now will be proclaimed a defeat. We consider the matter most grave.'¹¹⁵ Still nervous for news of victory, he also instructed his son-in-law Duncan Sandys to visit Montgomery.¹¹⁶

Nerves were fraying all round. With his unpleasant draft telegram to General Alexander still unsent, on Thursday morning, October 29, Churchill sent it over to the C.I.G.S. even before he got up. Then, summoning Brooke

to his presence, he bawled him out: 'What is *your* Monty doing now?' he asked, with a scathing emphasis on the possessive pronoun. After being idle for the last three days, he added, Montgomery now seemed to be pulling his troops out of the front. Why had he told London he would complete the battle in seven days, if all he had intended was to fight a half-hearted battle like this? Was there no British general capable of winning a battle? Brooke asked him what had influenced him to adopt these extreme views; the prime minister identified Eden as his source, the night before. The general lost his temper, and asked the P.M. very pertinently why he consulted his foreign secretary for advice on strategic and tactical matters.¹¹⁷ Churchill 'flared' that he was entitled to consult whomsoever he wished.

Meeting with Churchill and the chiefs of staff soon after midday, Eden repeated his gloomy prognosis. He pronounced that Montgomery was 'allowing the battle to peter out' – he had done nothing for the last three days, and was now clearly withdrawing formations to the rear. General Brooke dismissed these views as 'very superficial'; had the foreign secretary not noticed that for the last three days Montgomery had had to repulse a series of determined counter-attacks thrown at him by Rommel, who had suffered such casualties in consequence as must have a bearing on the outcome of the battle? After a withering reference to Eden's rank as a Staff Captain in the Great War, to which rank Churchill had more than once in the past admiringly referred, Brooke added that Eden must appreciate that Montgomery had brought his front line forward several thousand yards, which entailed now moving forward the heavy artillery and ammunition stocks as well before the attack could be renewed. If Montgomery was 'withdrawing formations,' he loyally added, it was undoubtedly to form a tactical reserve.

Churchill turned to Field-Marshal Smuts for his view. Smuts expressed agreement with Brooke. The unpleasant telegram remained unsent.

For a while, back at the war office, Brooke silently wondered if his loyalty was misplaced – was Montgomery, in fact, a busted flush?

it was the lack of news that was generating this hysteria. Until now, the balance of raw anxiety on each side had been approximately even: Rommel and Montgomery had each feared that the other might be winning.

The codebreaking computers gave Churchill, as so often before, the vital edge. Later that day the teleprinter link from Bletchley Park started whirring, churning out panicking messages from Field-Marshal Rommel

to Rome and Berlin.¹¹⁸ He had warned the High Command that his situation was 'grave in the extreme.'¹¹⁹ Another intercept came in, an Order, No. 2878, from Rommel to his own commanders, beginning: 'The present battle is a life and death struggle. . .,' ordaining the immediate court-martial of any soldier who failed in his duty, and ending: 'To be destroyed after it has been read.'¹²⁰

It looked as though Rommel's army was cracking.

After dinner, at 11:30 p.m., Churchill, not often as willing as this to acknowledge his own error, sent for the C.I.G.S., told him he had a 'specially good' intercept he wanted him to see, and showed him this latest Rommel message. To General Alexander he sent off a telegram. 'We assure you that you will be supported whatever the cost in all the measures which you are taking to shake the life out of Rommel's army and make this a fight to the finish.' Aided by the codebreakers, he said, they had succeeded in locating and destroying the three vitally-needed tankers that were rushing gasoline across to Rommel. More important, the intercepts showed 'the conditions of intense strain and anxiety behind the enemy's front,' as Churchill told Alexander, and these had given the *defence committee* 'solid grounds for confidence' in the Eighth Army's ultimate success.¹²¹

perhaps churchill's pressure, exerted by the personal visits of Duncan Sandys and Richard Casey, was not so untoward after all: General Montgomery's diary shows that he now at last appreciated that Churchill had a timetable governed by political imperatives and a deadline – namely the launching of torch. At eleven a.m. on the twenty-ninth he modified his previous operational plan, for a relentless infantry offensive along the coast, replacing it with a punch through Rommel's remaining minefields by the infantry and armour further to the south. To this operation he gave the name *supercharge*.¹²² Churchill was now notified by Cairo that Montgomery was going to resume the attack with a full-scale operation to clear a way through for the main armoured striking force, the Tenth Corps.¹²³ The 2nd New Zealand division would lead the breakthrough with two British infantry brigades and the 9th Armoured Brigade.

After the two-day respite he resumed his general offensive, which had in fact bogged down in Rommel's minefields and anti-tank defences. A full day later a second message came from Alexander: 'Enemy is fighting desperately, but we are hitting him hard and continuously, and boring into him without mercy. Have high hopes he will crack soon.'¹²⁴

Churchill cancelled his weekend engagements and stayed in London in a fever of excitement. On November 1 he informed President Roosevelt of the drama in the desert: the battle was now rising to its climax, he told the president, and 'our hopes are higher than I dare to say.'¹²⁵ 'I wonder whether we pressed on hard enough,' wrote one F.O. official.¹²⁶ This, the 'failure to press on,' would become a question mark in the minds of many who were privy to the *ultra* messages.



Events now had a rising and irreversible momentum of their own, however. It was now November 2 – and *torch* was due to start in six days' time. The troopships from the United States were already on the high seas, bearing down on North Africa. Brigadier Menzies briefed Washington on the arrangements made to furnish *ultra* intercept Intelligence direct to Eisenhower by fast radio link.¹²⁷ After a morning on the firing ranges at Princes Risborough, Churchill hosted a farewell luncheon at No. 10 for Eisenhower and his generals before they flew out to Gibraltar to command the assault.¹²⁸ A signal arrived from Montgomery – *supercharge* had begun at one a.m. Again things seemed to hover in the balance; Rommel had pulled off miracles before. The prime minister presided over a cabinet in London that afternoon; all that they knew for certain was that General Alexander was confident, and that a big battle seemed to have begun.¹²⁹

The night hours passed in dreadful uncertainty. Early on the third 'C' telephoned through the latest *ultra* intercepts. Just after nightfall Rommel had radioed to Hitler that his army was exhausted after the ten-day battle against superior British forces, and would be unable to prevent the tank formations from breaking through, 'which may be anticipated tonight or tomorrow.' Given the lack of motor transport he did not expect to be able to withdraw the six Italian and two German infantry divisions, and the armoured divisions would also be difficult to extricate. 'In this situation,' concluded Rommel, 'despite the heroic resistance and magnificent spirit of the troops the gradual annihilation of the army must be expected.'¹³⁰

This pregnant intercept reached Churchill that same night and it had been rushed back out to Alexander in Cairo too by a secure cypher channel within minutes.¹³¹ Over at the F.O., Cadogan wisely pondered whether The Desert Fox might not just be 'crying wolf' to get Hitler to rush more reinforcements over to him. Three even more desperate Rommel messages

were shortly intercepted.¹³² In a message radioed to Hitler on November 3 he reported fifty percent casualties so far: 'The German *Afrika Korps* is down to twenty-four tanks.'¹³³

The outcome, it seemed, could no longer be in doubt.

nervous about the great victories being wrought in the Egyptian desert even at that moment, Churchill could not restrain his elation at the midday cabinet at No. 10 on November 3. When his colleagues doggedly insisted on discussing post-war Europe he cried out, 'Damn Europe! We'll be strong enough to go our own way.' He was, wrote Leo Amery, in his most rollicking mood.¹³⁴ To coos of approval from Kingsley Wood and Amery, the prime minister declared that the only way to run Europe would be for the Great Powers to keep out and leave a Grand Council to run Europe, composed of Prussia, Italy, Spain, and Scandinavia. Eden sadly informed his cabinet colleagues that he had been trying to circulate to them his own Four Power plan for the post-war world, but that Churchill had decreed that such speculative studies be left to those with 'time on their hands.'

Churchill's excitement continued far into the night. He sent for 'C' at eleven p.m. to plead for the latest news. A historic response had come from Hitler to Rommel, sent from East Prussia via Rome during the day, and this had now been retrieved by Britain's code-breaking computers: the German people, said Hitler – who attached far greater significance to North Africa than to Stalingrad – were following the heroic battle in Egypt; he exhorted the field-marshal not to fall back one step, but to throw every gun and warrior into the battle. 'Despite his superiority,' declared the Führer, 'the enemy will also be at the end of his strength. It would not be the first time in history that the stronger willpower triumphed over the stronger battalions of the enemy. You can show your troops no other path than that which leads to victory or to death.'¹³⁵

'You look very tired,' said Churchill to his Intelligence chief. 'You'd better go to bed.' At two-fifteen a.m. – it was now November 4 – he telephoned 'C' again however, to ask a wholly superfluous question; and then apologised.¹³⁶ He was like a small child on The Night before Christmas. In the morning a telegram came from General Alexander which when unwrapped seemed to set the seal on their desert victory. 'The enemy's front has broken,' it announced, 'and British armoured formations in strength have passed through and are operating in the enemy's rear areas' – a phrase calculated to thrill, or to chill, any fighting man depending on which side of the bat-

tlefield. Rommel's forces were, said Alexander, 'in full retreat.'¹³⁷ Churchill phoned this through to the King. 'Well, read it out, read it out,' stuttered the monarch, excitedly interrupting his rehearsal of his coming Speech from the Throne. 'Good news, thanks,' he then said, congratulating Churchill, and wrote in his diary: 'A victory at last, how good it is for the nerves.'¹³⁸ In a state of excitement, the prime minister sent for Brooke to suggest that all the church bells in Britain should peal in celebration. The general drily recommended that they wait just a little longer.¹³⁹

Rommel's reply to Hitler's stern message, intercepted a few hours later, showed that the Nazi field marshal was losing his nerve. 'The casualties are so severe,' he informed his Führer, 'that there is no longer a coherent front.' He formally requested permission to begin a fighting retreat (which he had already secretly put in motion two days earlier).¹⁴⁰ At 8:50 p.m. Hitler gave permission, 'In view of the way things have turned out.'¹⁴¹ All or most of these signals were decoded; in fact several were in Churchill's hands before they reached Hitler or Rommel.¹⁴²

'I feel sure,' the prime minister now triumphed to his friend in the White House in Washington, 'you will regard this as a good prelude to torch.'¹⁴³

the tide had turned. A Canadian diplomat visiting Britain for financial negotiations summed up the situation on this day, November 4: 'The dominance of Churchill emerges from all these talks. Cripps on the shelf, Attlee a lackey, Bracken the Man Friday of Churchill.' He added, 'It isn't as bad as the political gossips make out, but it's bad enough.'¹⁴⁴ The prime minister again urged that they have all England's church bells pealing victory. He asked Alexander to give him sufficient occasion for this carillon within the next few days: 'At least 20,000 prisoners would be necessary.' Besides, he shrewdly added, this would help to take the enemy's eye off 'what is coming to him next quite soon.'¹⁴⁵

Bracken lunched with Churchill on the fifth and they toasted each other in brandy as the sensational news flooded in throughout the luncheon – Rommel's whole line retreating in disorder, thousands of prisoners captured including nine Italian generals and the German general Ritter Hans von Thoma, commander of the *Afrika Korps*, who had turned up shell-shocked and dishevelled in the English lines, as near to being a deserter as made no difference. Still reeking of alcohol and cigar-smoke, Bracken related an hour later to the weekly meeting of the Political Warfare Executive how he had proposed that now, 'in the hour of our strength,' was the time to unshackle

the German prisoners of war who had been in chains since Dieppe. The sun had gone out of Winston's face at that. 'You want me to grovel in the mud to these scoundrelly Germans?' he lisped. 'No,' Bracken said he had replied. 'At this moment they're grovelling to you in the sands of Africa.'¹⁴⁶

This was true. Montgomery dined the *Afrika Korps* commander in his mess and pumped him for information. Thoma's only plea was to be housed in a different compound from the Italian generals, as Alexander's latest telegram scoffed. A letter came from King George VI, congratulating the prime minister and above all the British Army on the victory.¹⁴⁷ At midday on November 6 Churchill met with his chiefs of staff in high excitement. Wearing his blue rompers, he showed the King's letter proudly to a Conservative Member of Parliament who came to lunch. 'Every word in his own hand!' he commented. The King had concluded his letter with the words, 'I am so pleased that everybody is taking this victory in a quiet and thankful way. . .'

The last few days had drained him. Churchill now seemed suddenly very tired – to the M.P. his eyes look glaucous and lifeless, with just a flicker of surprise in them as though to say, 'What the hell is this man doing here?' When Bracken came in, however, the prime minister gave him the order that all church bells were to be rung on the coming Sunday. This evinced some pettifogging hesitations from the other lunch guests – Lady Lambton, Sir Edward Marsh, Miss Seymour, John Martin, and Lady Furness were there besides Nicolson.¹⁴⁸ The bells might be rusted, one warned, or their ringers might be away in the army, as another chimed in. Winston dispelled these small-minded misgivings with a wave of the hand. 'We are not celebrating final victory,' he said. 'The war will still be long. When we have beaten Germany it will take us two more years to beat Japan. Nor is that a bad thing.'¹⁴⁹

'Ring out the bells,' read General Sir Harold Alexander's telegram from Cairo that night. 'Prisoners estimated at 20,000, tanks 350, guns 400, motor transport several thousand. . . Eighth Army is advancing.'¹⁵⁰ The words conjured forth grim images of tin-helmeted Tommies advancing through the pall of smoke and sand-haze, with bayonets fixed, to the accompanying swirl of bagpipes and the rattle of drums and machine-gun fire. A victory, a famous victory at last. In secret telegrams to Moscow, Washington, and Algiers the prime minister repeated Alexander's triumphant words around the world. Before Alamein the British had never had a victory, he would write, coining one of those easy, harmonic sentences that go into history and make practised writers sigh with envy; after Alamein, nary a defeat.

The cost to the empire had been high, some 13,560 men had lain down their lives since this battle began, of whom Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead's heroic 9th Australian Division, bearing the brunt of the infantry fighting, had given nearly three thousand.¹⁵¹

In northern Africa a military avalanche was beginning. **torch** would start in thirty-six hours' time, and British Intelligence knew that the German High Command was still totally unaware of this immense amphibious operation.¹⁵²

Hitler's armies, it seemed, were in full flight.

27: *A Little Airplane Accident*

The allied forces for *torch* were approaching North Africa. Some two hundred ships carrying 110,000 American and British troops were converging on a score of landing beaches. The landing operations would begin simultaneously at Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers, in the darkness before dawn on November 8, 1942.

Important political problems still remained. President Roosevelt had ordered General de Gaulle kept out of the loop. At the end of October, Churchill had sent his Major Morton over to Carlton Gardens to speak soothing, if non-committal, words of encouragement, but the Free French leader had once again expressed himself 'specially hurt' at being deprived of inside information. The American belief was that *torch* would encounter less resistance if de Gaulle and his troops were kept at arm's length.¹

Indeed, the Americans entertained hopes of winning over the Vichy French forces in Africa to the Allied cause.² They had selected General Henri Giraud as the nominal senior French officer in *torch*; but even this choice caused unexpected problems, since a letter arrived from Giraud, still in southern France, on October 27, demanding to be given supreme command of *all* forces, including the American and British, within forty-eight hours of *torch* beginning. On November 1, a second letter arrived, stating that he could not possibly leave France before the twentieth. Robert Murphy was so wedded to Giraud that he consequently appealed to Washington to postpone *torch* by at least two weeks, arguing: 'I am convinced that the invasion of North Africa without [a] favorable French High Command will be a catastrophe.'³

'The gallant French generals,' mocked Sir Alexander Cadogan, permanent head of the foreign office, 'when hearing how near the operation was, have cold feet & ask for three weeks' delay.'⁴

In chorus, Eisenhower, Marshall, Stimson, and Roosevelt himself all shouted Murphy down. The diplomat thereupon sent a vague message to Giraud assuring him that all would be well; he made no reference to the imminence of *torch*, or to the fact that the English were involved. Sulking, Giraud agreed to come out of France by submarine and join the venture.⁵ On November 3 Churchill 'revealed' this, as he thought, to Roosevelt.⁶ In the same message he included a request that the president's proposed message to Pétain – about *torch* – should indicate less kindly sentiments; Roosevelt agreed to tone it down.⁷ This was a further indicator of how raw British foreign office feelings toward Vichy France were, compared with Washington's. To a message to General Alexander, congratulating him on Montgomery's victory, Churchill appended these lines: 'kingpin [Giraud] is proposing to embark tonight in one of our submarines to go to Gibraltar and meet ikey [Eisenhower]. He will definitely head the movement in the *torch* area under the Supreme United States Command.'⁸

in war there are no 'definites.' No less an officer than Admiral Darlan himself, the Vichy French commander-in-chief, turned up in Algiers at one p.m. on November 4, ostensibly to visit his son Alain, a young naval officer (a French agent of the S.I.S. immediately reported his arrival). Darlan Junior had contracted infantile paralysis, the affliction which had crippled Roosevelt too; the president suggested to Admiral Leahy that they send a letter of sympathy to the Vichy French admiral; later he would invite the son to Warm Springs, Georgia, the clinic which he himself had made famous.⁹

Hearing of Darlan's arrival, even Churchill expressed delight.¹⁰ To Eisenhower, leaving for Gibraltar, he remarked: 'If I could meet Darlan, much as I hate him, I would cheerfully crawl on my hands and knees for a mile if by doing so I could get him to bring that fleet of his into the circle of Allied forces.'¹¹ Eden and the foreign office were less keen.

There was much hard lying in London and Washington after *torch*, and jiggery-pokery with the Allied archives since then, to conceal the background of Darlan's arrival.¹² Churchill learned from his codebreakers two days later that Hitler's man at Vichy had assured Berlin on the sixth that Darlan was in Algiers only because 'his son is dying there.' A well-placed source there had reported that Darlan had been there incognito since the fifth. British Intelligence now learned that at the end of September informed circles in France were stating that Darlan was no longer certain of a German victory – 'and there are signs that he is thinking of changing sides.'¹³

In fact the five-star admiral's presence in Algiers was not coincidental. Roosevelt and Leahy had contrived it in order to eclipse Britain's protégé, de Gaulle, with a *fait accompli*. One French source, visiting London from Algiers, told Cadogan that the Americans had been playing with Darlan all the time. 'I wouldn't put it past them,' remarked the F.O. head angrily. 'But if it could be proved, I would have a God Almighty show-down with them.'¹⁴

Darlan's move to Algiers, just four days before *torch*, created a new situation. He could issue, on the spot, the one order demanded by every French officer with whom Murphy and Clark had clandestinely spoken: an order absolving them from the oath they had sworn to Marshal Pétain; without it, these legalistic officers had all refused to transfer their loyalty to the Allied cause. Bringing in Darlan would save thousands of lives in the push toward Tunis. Leahy entered in his diary the belief that the subsequent raucous press and radio campaign against the admiral was 'instigated and supported by a group of Jews and communists' in the United States who feared his fascist attitude.¹⁵ When Lord Halifax, on Anthony Eden's instructions, urged on Leahy the need for the 'eventual elimination' of Darlan's 'fascist' regime, Roosevelt's man disapproved; and when Darlan was, only weeks later, 'eliminated' Leahy expressed powerful disapproval of the deed and real sorrow for the widow who was about to lose her son as well.¹⁶

general eisenhower and his staff left Britain in a gaggle of five B-17s on November 5 to set up headquarters in the damp, dismal subterranean tunnels hewn by the British into the Rock of Gibraltar. Churchill formally gave him operational command of Gibraltar – a historic abdication of power, and a violation of the ancient treaty under which Britain acquired the colony. 'The symbol of the solidity of the British empire,' mused the bumptious general in a memo, 'the hallmark of safety and security at home, the jealously guarded rock that has played a tremendous part in the trade development of the English race! An American is in charge, and I am he.'¹⁷

Through an oversight, no word of Eisenhower's arrival was at first sent back to London. Worried sick, the prime minister repeatedly telephoned Bedell Smith, who had remained at Norfolk House. When Ismay and Bedell Smith at last came round to bring him the news of Eisenhower's safe arrival, Churchill cried out with alarm: 'Don't tell me he's drowned!' His composure restored by the news they brought, he then assured them: 'I never had the slightest idea that it would be otherwise.'¹⁸

In a belated message of safe arrival Eisenhower said that, if the weather was good enough for Giraud to transfer as planned from the submarine to a flying-boat, he hoped to get him to North Africa before H-hour. 'I should like once again to express to you personally my grateful thanks for your constant support and encouragement during the last few months,' he wrote. 'We are of good heart. . . .' It was now, at four-thirty p.m. on the sixth, that Eisenhower learned from Marshall of Admiral Darlan's presence in Algiers.¹⁹

Uneasy about double-crossing de Gaulle, Churchill again asked the president for permission to inform him of *torch* and its American character; he reminded the president of the solemn undertakings which Britain had given in 1940 recognising de Gaulle. 'I am confident his military honour can be trusted,' he pleaded, though adding 'I will however take all precautions' – a reference to de Gaulle's being kept under surveillance. He was sure, he said, that de Gaulle and Giraud would 'join forces politically, though under what conditions I cannot foresee.'²⁰ Roosevelt flatly refused.²¹

'I am still sorry about de Gaulle,' the prime minister responded on the sixth. 'Of course, we control all his telegrams outwards. But we are ready to accept your view. All goes well.'²² 'We are not telling de Gaulle anything,' he instructed his minister in Cairo, 'until *torch* is lit.' This was an American show, he apologised, and Roosevelt had insisted on this secrecy.²³

During the night the British submarine P-219 had embarked Giraud from unoccupied France. Since Giraud too loathed the English, the submarine wore the American ensign, and had Captain Jerauld Wright USN as her temporary commander; an American flying-boat would take this three-star general, now boasting the code-name *kingpin*, off the submarine and fly him on to Gibraltar – not to Algiers, as originally planned, since both of Eisenhower's political advisers, H. Freeman Matthews of the state department and Harold Mack of the F.O., felt that their puppet general needed straightening-out before proceeding to North Africa.²⁴

Churchill had gone down to Chequers to await the start of *torch*: like Hitler in his heyday, the Allies had learned the value of springing strategic surprises on weekends. Once or twice that Saturday November 7 Eden phoned, and reported that all was well. Then ugly fissures began to appear in the edifice. The admiralty phoned at eleven p.m., and read over a telegram that had just come from Admiral Cunningham, the naval commander of *torch*: '*kingpin* arrived here (Gibraltar) but very difficult to deal with.'

For a time on this Saturday, the F.O. deliberated on whether to hold back all de Gaulle's outgoing cypher telegrams for twenty-four hours to

guard against his sending ill-considered messages to his generals in North Africa out of pique which he might subsequently regret – namely to open fire on the Allied forces. Churchill told Eden he would return to Downing-street at midday on Sunday, for lunch with de Gaulle. He wanted to get to the bottom of this ‘difficult’ general’s intentions. If de Gaulle turned up for this luncheon engagement, the risk of his behaving foolishly could probably be discounted, and he need never know of the twenty-four delay to his telegrams. If he stood Winston up, one F.O. official warned, Britain must ‘fear the worst.’ Other officials thought however that ‘mad though he is’ de Gaulle was unlikely to tell his generals to make war on the Allies.²⁵

at eisenhower’s tunnel headquarters a bizarre problem was developing.

Churchill later would read a first-hand account by a Coldstream Guards colonel. On Giraud’s arrival there, he said, Eisenhower and Clark made plain they knew nothing about France and cared even less. They did not know what to do with General Giraud, or any of ‘these Frenchmen’; neither American, the colonel pointed out, spoke French.²⁶ Upon arrival Giraud, an imposing figure even in plain clothes, had been taken to the Convent to dine with the governor, Lieutenant-General Sir Noël Mason-Macfarlane. Giraud expected to be given the immediate supreme command, as the hapless Murphy had indicated to him.²⁷ The *honneur* of France, he said, would be satisfied with nothing less. In a fraught argument lasting for several hours, Eisenhower and Clark made plain that Giraud would not be allowed even a walk-on role, and that de Gaulle was not being consulted either. Did they say de Gaulle? Giraud bristled and called him a ‘frightful egoist.’ ‘Pot calling kettle black,’ decided Eisenhower’s aide.²⁸

Giraud’s demands for top billing had the makings of a Whitehall farce, were not lives and the fate of nations at stake. ‘Some hours passed,’ Churchill later related, using restrained language in a secret session of the Commons, ‘in persuading him to reduce these claims to the bounds of reason.’²⁹ Telegrams arrived from Murphy in Algiers, demanding: ‘Where is Giraud?’³⁰ The answer was only that he would arrive ‘shortly.’ But thirty-six hours would elapse before then, and events ran their course without him.

Cheated meanwhile of his ambitions, Giraud went to bed after midnight in a bitter mood; they all agreed to meet again in the Governor’s house the next morning.³¹ Eisenhower stayed up, dictating a long and harrowing account of this haggling for the benefit of Washington and London. Giraud

was refusing to allow his name to be used, he reported, or to participate in any way except as overall Allied supreme commander.

kingpin said that there was no possibility of his guaranteeing non-resistance in our attacks tonight, and [he] would not make any attempt to do so. He seems to assume, however, that we will get ashore and that thereafter he would appear in Algiers in the uniform of a French general and take command.

He conferred with Cunningham. The admiral called Giraud's demands preposterous – he just wanted to avoid being associated with the shedding of French blood. 'This is the way the matter stands,' dictated Eisenhower at two-thirty a.m., 'and we are proceeding with the execution of plans.'

There were already reports of 'considerable resistance' to the American landings which had now – it was now Sunday, November 8 – begun.³² In Eisenhower's headquarters tempers ran high, and as Giraud slept his angry sleep, there was a macabre *entr'acte*. Around four-thirty a.m. the Governor came in, bringing his A.D.C. Major Anthony Quayle (later a famous actor). The West Pointer, Eisenhower, was a ruthless general who, the records now show, had ordered several assassinations in torch already.* Over hot cups of Nescafé they discussed how Giraud's arrival had complicated the promising scenario created by Admiral Darlan's coming over. Eisenhower said he had no use for Giraud in torch even as a spectator.

'All felt something had to be done with him – even a little airplane accident,' typed Eisenhower's A.D.C. in a secret note that night; to which the British Governor made a response which the Fates may well have borne in mind a few months later. 'Mason-Mac,' the aide recorded, 'said he had a good body-disposal squad, if needed.'³³ Mason-Macfarlane was an officer with an secret service background and on intimate terms with Churchill.³⁴



The invasion of French North-West Africa which Winston Churchill had pushed through against the concerted opposition of Roosevelt's cabinet and generals, had begun around one a.m. on November 8, 1942 with the Medi-

* President Eisenhower ordered the Central Intelligence Agency to assassinate Patrice Lumumba, marxist prime minister of the Congo; he was shot on January 17, 1961.

terranean landings in the east and centre, and at four-thirty a.m. at Casablanca on the Atlantic.

In Algiers, Robert Murphy set out shortly after midnight to inform General Alphonse Juin, Vichy commander-in-chief in Algeria, who had also been kept ignorant until now.³⁵ He informed the pyjama'd general at his Villa des Oliviers, that 'half a million' American troops were about to land, 'at French invitation.' Juin asked who gave this invitation, and Murphy mentioned the name of Giraud.³⁶ It seems that no lessons of Hitler's bloodless pre-war triumphs had been overlooked by the Allies. Juin pointed out that Darlan was in Algiers and outranked them all. They both agreed to wake the admiral; Murphy was mindful of the authorisation that Roosevelt had given him, as recently as October 17 and no doubt with precisely this eventuality in mind, to strike whatever bargain with Darlan would prosper the military operations. Around one a.m., Juin phoned Darlan, who was staying with Admiral Fenard at the Villa El Alaoun. Darlan came straight over. Murphy repeated to him that 'at the appeal of the French general Giraud,' Allied forces were about to disembark. Darlan turned purple and stated that he would resist any invasion by force. Lying, Murphy now claimed that they had decided on this operation to forestall an Axis invasion.³⁷

'I have known for a long time that the British are stupid,' Darlan exclaimed. 'But I always believed Americans were more intelligent. Apparently you have the same genius as the British for making massive blunders!' If the Americans had only waited for a few weeks, he added, they could have mounted a joint Franco-American invasion of southern France as well.

Murphy formally called upon Darlan to order a cease-fire. Darlan responded, after some thought, 'I have given my oath to Pétain, and preserved allegiance to the Marshal for two years. I cannot revoke that now.'³⁸

He did dictate a message to Marshal Pétain, but when General Juin tried to take it over to the admiralty building for transmission he discovered armed desperadoes, a gang of d'Astier's subversives, surrounding the villa; it took some time for police to arrive to liberate them. As confusion reigned, Darlan became resigned, and told Murphy: 'Giraud is not your man. Politically he is a child. He is just a good divisional commander, nothing more.'

in the English countryside, Churchill's mood was ebullient as he waited for these night hours to pass. 'Any news?' he would ask Elizabeth Layton, his duty secretary. 'Well, ring up and ask again, that was twenty minutes ago.' At one a.m. the duty captain reported that one American troop trans-

port, *Thomas Stone*, had been torpedoed 120 miles off Algiers, but had got all her landing-craft away. At two-thirty a.m. the word was that the landings by the eastern assault force had succeeded at all three beaches at Oran. As each titbit came, Churchill telephoned Eden. 'No word yet received from Western Task Force which is scheduled to begin landing in about five minutes.' '*Thomas Stone*, U.S. Transport. Seven hundred of the personnel got into twenty-four of the landing-craft and set off for their blue Beach.' The news was disjointed, and Eden noted, as the hours passed, that the American landings were running into fiercer French opposition than expected. Winston and others crowded into the study at Chequers, recorded Miss Layton; the air was thick with jokes and laughter, he was trying to dictate through it all, and making her laugh too. Once he began to bark at her, then quickly caught himself: 'No, no,' he said soothingly. 'Quite all right, *quite* all right. Tonight you may rejoice. Tonight there is sugar on the cake.'³⁹

Churchill derived much of his information about the day's events from 'C's' radio monitors. The Vichy high-grade cypher yielded a 6:30 a.m. situation report radioed by the French defenders at Casablanca:

Important landing at Safi, important attack at Fedahla and a Commando raid at Mehdi. At 0800 hour 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron left Casablanca for action off that port and off Rabat. There were at this time 5 submarines between Casablanca and Fedahla, 2 towards Safi. [Comment, not clear if these submarines French or allies.] Aircraft based Port Lyautey operating Mehdi-Fedahla. Aircraft based Casablanca operating to westward of this port. All batteries taking part in action.

Casablanca at noon reported 'internal situation "remarkable for its discipline", bulk of land and air forces being concentrated in counter attack at Fedahla. Naval officer-in-charge in constant touch with General Noguès.' Heavy fighting continued at Casablanca, but at one p.m. the defenders were heard reporting that the French navy had broken off their defensive action after *Fougueux* and another unnamed unit were sunk, *Albatross*, *Milan*, *Brestois*, and *Frondeur* seriously damaged. At four p.m. Casablanca radioed to Vichy that there had been a violent bombardment of their battleship *Jean-Bart* and that *Primauguet*, her boiler damaged, was stopped at the harbour entrance. The Allied forces, this signal continued, had established a bridgehead three miles square at Fedahla.⁴⁰

As for Oran, a cypher signal to Vichy reported the 4:30 a.m. situation: 'In attack on harbour 2 British units destroyed, many prisoners taken. Bo Sfer and Most of Areu occupied. Landing near Fegalo. Defence troops proceeding to counter attack to eastward and westward.' At 8:30 a.m. Oran had reported to Vichy: 'Destroyers *Tramontane* and *Tornade* out of action and missing: and "3/4 of the air force" out of action.'⁴¹

At eleven o'clock the naval codebreakers reported that Oran had been heard signalling in plain language at 2:50 a.m. that 'one thousand Americans' had landed at Les Andalouses, and that at 3:32 a general attack on Oran had been reported to Vichy. Algiers had reported at 3:10 that motor launches had been driven off and at 3:58 that a general attack had been launched.

At 5:25 Algiers had reported to Marshal Pétain that landings were taking place on the coast between Tunisia and Southern Morocco and that British troops were involved.⁴²

Admiral Pound phoned to ask whether he might now announce that a British admiral, Cunningham, was commander of the naval side of torch. Churchill scribbled on the message, 'Not yet.'⁴³

As for Giraud, his pigheadedness had lost him the few friends he had. 'Meanwhile,' Churchill noted that morning, 'we have had to fight a battle which is still going on at all the landing places. We have got nothing out of him so far, and all the trouble has been ours. If Giraud has been playing for time, his bargaining power is much reduced by what is taking place. I am not prepared to agree to any effective diminution of General Eisenhower's authority at this stage.' He proposed that they now tell Washington, 'We support Eisenhower in not giving way to Giraud's exorbitant demands.'⁴⁴



It was therefore time for the historic showdown with de Gaulle. Back in London a few hours later, he invited Eden and Desmond Morton to join him for the crucial Sunday lunch with the general at No. 10. He began their pre-lunch meeting with the less-than-totally-honest assurance, 'The operations in French North Africa [are] an American enterprise,' and blamed Roosevelt for having had to keep de Gaulle ignorant. Eden found the general less *blesé* (wounded) than usual. No doubt coached by him in the proper manners for this meal, de Gaulle was conciliatory, arguing that it would be wrong to split the Free French into two camps and even agreeing to serve

under Giraud if need be, saying he thought Giraud an excellent choice as leader – that ‘he himself did not matter,’ and ‘he was ready to put himself under any other Chief who carried with him the mass of the French people.’⁴⁵ Expecting the general to be shocked and angry, Churchill consoled him with word that the Gaullist General Paul Legentilhomme would become the new High Commissioner in Madagascar: ‘This would show that the British were not abandoning Fighting France.’

The altercations in Gibraltar revealed General Giraud in a less flattering light. Telephoning Eden later this day, Churchill snarled that ‘all Frenchman are either grasping or crawling.’⁴⁶

Giraud finally got off his high horse and agreed to Eisenhower’s original scheme – that he proceed under American command to North Africa and attempt to rally such French forces to his flag as he could.⁴⁷ Churchill now sent a warm message to the Frenchman reminding him of their talks in Metz in 1937.⁴⁸ A reply came through Eisenhower, reporting the French general’s pleasure at the message: ‘Like you,’ said Giraud, ‘through difficulties and trials, I have never had any doubt of the final victory. I am certain today that, thanks to the efforts of all, Alsace and Lorraine will remain French’ – which was setting this ruinous war’s aim in a rather narrower focus than that of the Allied high command.⁴⁹

the hazards of this new theatre gave Washington sleepless nights. Henry Stimson looked at the maps, and saw how easy it would be for the enemy to pinch off the Straits of Gibraltar.⁵⁰ Cordell Hull agreed: suppose Hitler and Franco had entered into a secret compact to this effect all along? Giraud was willing to offer French territory in Morocco to Franco if he would keep out of hostilities. When the British ambassador informed Franco of torch he took it well and, after speaking with the American ambassador, went off for a day’s hunting. ‘All’s well that ends well,’ Churchill said to Ambassador Winant over dinner. Bedell Smith found him elated by Alamein and torch, and talking ‘even more frankly than customarily,’ and for most of the night. ‘For the present at least,’ Smith notified Marshall, ‘he has given up with some reluctance the idea of a British operation in Norway as being too difficult and too bloody.’ Churchill’s glare, he added, had reverted to Turkey, which he believed he could bring into the war ‘at almost any moment,’ provided that the Allies supplied the tanks and modern weapons for her forty-five divisions. All of this indicated that the prime minister was rapidly cooling toward round-up – the cross-Channel invasion – except

perhaps to deliver a final coup de grâce to a tottering Germany. After this dinner-table conversation Bedell Smith sent a suitably-worded warning across the Atlantic to General Marshall.⁵²

All of this time the news from North Africa was tantalisingly thin. Before the American guests left No. 10 Downing-street, Bracken dropped in with 'C,' bringing a report on the Darlan situation from the code-breakers; it was being forwarded to President Roosevelt direct.⁵³ The admiral had radioed at eleven-thirty a.m., 'Algiers will probably be taken this evening.'

There were other messages which have vanished from the files. That same afternoon Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the naval commander of *Torch*, had taken in to Eisenhower, with Churchill's blessing, the startling news from Algiers that Admiral Darlan wanted to negotiate, and where and when could he meet with Eisenhower? Darlan was refusing to deal with any Frenchmen. Churchill, said Cunningham, had this message for Eisenhower: 'Kiss Darlan's stern if you have to – but get the French Navy!'⁵⁴

this put the supreme commander in an awkward spot. He had only just broadcast, through gritted teeth, a glowing laudatio on General Giraud and the importance of the position he was to hold. The local French forces however showed allegiance only to Darlan, who had brought with him the majestic aura of Marshal Pétain. Darlan still had the authority to order one hundred thousand French troops in North Africa to cease fire when he chose, but Eisenhower would look foolish if Giraud was now dropped. Believing himself unheard, here in the depths of the Rock, Eisenhower vented his grief about the encumbrance that Giraud had become. 'Jeeesus Christ!' he shouted. 'What I need around here is a damned good assassin!'⁵⁵

On the following day Mark Clark would at last fly over to Algiers taking General Giraud with him. The renegade Frenchman was given a frosty reception by his fellow officers. Fearing for his life, he went into hiding in the home of Jacques Lemaigre-Dubreuil, a businessman and oil merchant.⁵⁶



As the autumn weeks of 1942 smouldered into history, and the German army tightened its grip on Stalingrad, Stalin's temper turned sour. Propelled by a sense of indebtedness, even of military inferiority, Churchill had become frank to the point of folly. He ordered his diplomats to sign a secret agreement with Moscow on September 29, 1942 allowing a com-

plete exchange between their two countries of new and unknown weapons, including those still to be invented.⁵⁷ The prime minister had told the Soviet ambassador about **torch** under the pledge of absolute secrecy, and Ivan Maisky had replied picturesquely that 'as an old conspirator he could be trusted with a secret.' (On October 15 the foreign office had however to confront Maisky with surveillance reports revealing that the ambassador had twice told British journalists about **torch**, and had lectured them that Moscow would not accept the operation as a 'second front.'⁵⁸)

On occasion, as he had while in Moscow, Churchill even betrayed to the Soviet dictator the secrets he had gleaned from **ultra**. Late in September the Naval Section at Bletchley Park compiled a report on Hitler's preparations to start naval warfare in the Caspian Sea as soon as the army had crossed the Caucasus; the Nazi admiral there would have a fleet including Italian submarines and MTBs. Churchill followed, through his codebreakers, the movements of individual German harbourmasters across Nazi-occupied Russia toward their intended Caspian destinations.⁵⁹ He asked 'C' whether he had passed these important data on to the Russians. Then he changed his mind, telling him on September 30 not to send anything further about this to Moscow until they had talked. 'I think of making it the subject of a personal message to Stalin.'⁶⁰ He dictated a telegram passing this information on to the Kremlin, revealing casually that it came 'from the same source that I used to warn you of the impending attack on Russia a year and a half ago.' He again spoke of his readiness to send twenty British and American squadrons to aid the Soviet air force on the southern front.⁶¹

the terms of war were however turning against Hitler. The rainy season was upon his attacking armies. His mountain units were choking to a halt in the narrow footpath-capillaries of the Caucasus. The decrypts now indicated that Hitler had perforce suspended his plans to expand into the Caspian sea; Churchill informed Stalin of this 'latest information' on October 8, a message to which he received a few days later merely a terse 'Thank you.'⁶² On October 19 the Soviet dictator suggested to his ambassador in London that Churchill was deliberately holding back to ensure the defeat of the Soviet Union so that he could then 'come to terms with Herr Hitler's or Brüning's Germany' at their expense: how otherwise could they explain Churchill's recalcitrant attitude on the Second Front in Europe, the dwindling arms deliveries, and the preservation of Rudolf Hess, the Deputy Führer, in Britain ('whom Churchill is clearly holding in reserve')? Finally,

there had been no systematic bombing of Berlin during September, although Churchill had promised this while in Moscow.⁶³

Stalin probably sent this message to Maisky in the belief that Churchill's clever secret service would read it to him. Alarmed by this ugly mood, on November 5 Churchill informed the Kremlin of the rout of Rommel and the imminence of *torch* 'on a very great scale.' 'Let me further express to you, Premier Stalin . . . our congratulations on the ever-glorious defence of Stalingrad,' he continued. He concluded with 'all good wishes for your anniversary' – namely that of the Bolshevik revolution. Two days later, Churchill passed to Stalin a new warning, fresh from *ultra*, that Hitler had abandoned his plans to capture Baku, the oil centre on the Caspian, and that he was hoping to wreck it by air bombardment instead. 'Pray accept this from me,' he told the Soviet dictator. It earned a marginally warmer response. 'Many thanks for your warnings concerning Baku,' replied Stalin. 'We are taking the necessary measures to combat the danger.'⁶⁴

the landings in North Africa partially melted this ice between them.

Stalin sent a more cordial message to London on that same Sunday.⁶⁵ His ambassador brought it round to No. 10 on the ninth. In high spirits Churchill delivered what Maisky called 'an impassioned and quickfire monologue' about North Africa. Spain had kept out, as expected; and the Vichy French had not declared war on the Allies, indeed their opposition in Algiers and Morocco had been less vigorous than anticipated. In his view the Allies would occupy the whole of North Africa 'in a matter of weeks.' They had put ashore 250,000 troops in the first wave, he claimed. Two armoured divisions had been landed at Algiers and were charging toward Tunis at full speed. 'What a pity,' he remarked, 'that *torch* was not launched until November 8.' Ten days sooner, he explained, and Roosevelt would have swept the mid-term elections – a remark which revealed to Maisky the extent to which western politicians were beholden to party politics. 'I tried to hurry him up,' continued Churchill, 'but he could never steel himself for it.' He now played down the Dieppe raid as one of a number of British 'dirty tricks' designed to deceive the enemy. Attuned to Stalin's views, he emphasised that *torch* was not the Second Front – merely a springboard for it. Now they would seize Sicily and Sardinia, and step up the bombing of Italy; this alone might be enough to force Italy out of the war, he suggested.

He then turned to Turkey. He had set himself the task, he said, of dragging her into the war in 1943 (at this point in the monologue, felt Maisky,

Eden indicated some scepticism). As evidence of his political insight, however, Churchill read out his telegram to Roosevelt of August 26, in which the forebodings of both the British and the U.S. chiefs of staff over **torch** were spelt out, and Churchill had offered to take full responsibility. 'And I was right, wasn't I!' he exclaimed in triumph. 'It will be the same with Turkey too.' He added with a leer, 'The Turks are devilishly afraid of you, you know. We're going to have to reassure them somehow.' Whether or not Turkey came in, he promised, he intended to invade the Balkans – 'This will be our Second Front in 1943.'

The Soviet ambassador asked the obvious question – did that mean that the British plans for a Second Front in France had fallen through?

Churchill, [reported Maisky to Stalin] grimaced and answered that generally speaking the France plans had not fallen through, but that the Italy – Balkans plans seemed to him more attractive, for they were easier to effect and promised more immediate results.

Maisky disagreed, but the P.M. enlarged upon the hazards of launching any invasion of France. 'But not a word of this to Stalin for the moment,' he added ingenuously, 'for it is only a rough outline.'

Maisky laughed gaily, and reported it nonetheless to the Kremlin, while asking Stalin not to let on, 'or else Churchill won't be so loquacious the next time.' When he brought up **jupiter** – invading northern Norway – he found that Churchill had lost all interest in it, in favour of the Balkans. Their interview concluded with words of praise for the Battle of Stalingrad: 'You have won the campaign against Hitler this year,' the prime minister said.⁶⁶

at the following three-hour cabinet, Churchill basked in the afterglow of **torch**. He finished by asking his colleagues to congratulate the C.I.G.S. for the fine work done by the army – the only occasion that General Brooke ever received any mark of appreciation from the prime minister. In a message sent over to Oliver Lyttelton in Washington Churchill jubilantly suggested that **torch** allowed an entirely new outlook on ways of attacking Hitler in 1943. He was quite unwilling to accept the American proposal for invasions of Sicily and Sardinia as being the limit of their actions in 1943; Stalin, he said, would hardly be content with that. He wanted their forces to invade the Italian mainland or, 'better still,' southern France (which was surely an echo of Darlan's recent offer).⁶⁷

Only Field-Marshal Smuts struck a discordant note at the cabinet meeting. He pointed to the importance of Tunisia, the French colony blocking the path of the torch forces to Italy. Hitler knew it too, and after Rommel flew to East Prussia at the end of the month, borne on a cloud of defeatism, Hitler rushed one of his best commanders, Colonel-General Hans Jürgen von Arnim, from the Stalingrad front to Tunis with orders to form a bridgehead and hold on there as long as possible, with no other mission than to delay the Allied exploitation of their new North African springboard. British Intelligence discounted this possibility however, and advised Eisenhower's headquarters on November 11 that in the considered opinion of the Joint Intelligence Committee there were only 500 German troops in the whole of Tunisia, to protect airfields: 'No evidence [of] any large scale movement [of] German troops indicating intention form bridgehead Tunisia.'⁶⁸



Notwithstanding Churchill's bland assurances to Ivan Maisky, the resistance which the Vichy French forces offered to the American landings at Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers, was more than token. They had put up a spirited defence of Algiers for most of the first day, and Darlan had not finally ordered General Juin to call a cease-fire until seven p.m., after Juin informed him that further resistance was useless. When Robert Murphy, with Churchill's secret blessing, offered to Darlan a draft cease-fire agreement covering all of French North-West Africa, the admiral had replied that they were halting hostilities only in Algiers.⁶⁹ At Oran, further west, the fighting had continued for two more days, and at Casablanca even longer.

Darlan continued to play for time until the tenth, when General Mark Clark flew to Algiers and struck a deal with him; Darlan now agreed 'in the name of Marshal Pétain' to extend the cease-fire to the whole territory. Pétain disowned the Clark–Darlan agreement, and ordered the fighting to continue. In Morocco the French navy and shore troops defended the coastline vigorously, and after three days General George S. Patton Jr had still not taken Casablanca. The Americans would lose five transports – one each on November 9 and 11 and three on the twelfth – totalling 53,000 tons.⁷⁰

Casualties would have been heavier but for Darlan. It was he who now persuaded General Auguste Noguès to end the resistance in Morocco; he also induced General Pierre Boisson, Governor-General of French West Africa, to surrender that territory with its important port of Dakar with-

out offering a shot in anger. In the strategically far more vital port of Tunis, Darlan had less luck: since the Americans were not in sight there, Admiral Jean Esteva demurred. To Churchill's disappointment, Darlan also failed to persuade his old adversary Admiral Jean de Laborde in Toulon to bring over the French fleet to Algeria; 'Comte Jean's' negative reply ('*Merde*') needed no interpretation.⁷¹ These were minor blemishes, however, in an otherwise convincing picture of co-operation between Admiral Darlan and the Americans. Appointed the new French High Commissioner for North Africa, Darlan assumed authority there 'in the name of' Pétain. This esoteric arrangement enabled Eisenhower's forces to expand rapidly into Morocco, Algeria, and part of Tunisia without much French opposition.

In London, Anthony Eden expressed pain and anger at Eisenhower's dealings with Darlan, which proceeded without consultation with him or his office, let alone with de Gaulle. In Washington too there was the devil to pay. There was a cacophony of noisy complaint from what Cordell Hull called the 'starry-eyed circles' – a clique of agitators around Frankfurter and Morgenthau. Wendell Willkie joined this anti-Darlan camp.⁷² Stimson declared that any criticism of Darlan would be treasonable; this did not still the criticism. A powerful media campaign clanked into action, and the administration drew in its horns. Roosevelt would publicly endorse Darlan at his press conference on November 18, but by that time his statement would necessarily contain the alibi-word 'temporary' to the point of redundancy.⁷³



In an open car Churchill drove in triumph with Clementine to the City of London on November 10, 1942 – torch plus two – to speak at the Lord Mayor's luncheon at the Mansion House. At the suggestion of the King's Remembrancer, loudspeaker vans had announced Winston's coming, and the P.M. and his staff made a triumphal progress indeed along the Strand and Fleet-street, up Ludgate-hill and past Saint Paul's Cathedral; there were large and boisterous crowds, with hardly enough police to control them. The luncheon itself was 'an unusually sumptuous repast,' given that there was a war on, and feelings were unfettered.⁷⁴ Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England, remarked loudly how very much he preferred Gentile to Jewish Lord Mayors – his neighbour, a cabinet minister, squirmed in embarrassment having sighted 'a very Jewish looking old boy' right opposite them.⁷⁵ It was on this glittering, white-tie occasion that Churchill,

referring to their victories, said: 'Now this is not the end; it is not even the beginning of the end, but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.'⁷⁶

The chiefs of staff had sent in a rather milk-and-water plan of action for the coming year, featuring landings on Sicily and Sardinia. The capture of these two islands was unlikely to impress Stalin. 'Is it really to be supposed,' the prime minister minuted his chiefs of staff, 'that the Russians will be content with our lying down like this during the whole of 1943, while Hitler had a third crack at them?' On the contrary, he said, the Allies must do what they could to cross to the mainland and 'fight in the line' against the enemy in the remaining months of the current year.⁷⁷

That evening he held another banquet, this time at No. 10. He had invited eighty members of his Government to hear an advance reading of the King's Speech. As he dressed for this dinner he sent for General Brooke to make certain that the war office was taking all steps to exploit their North Africa victories.⁷⁸ In the dining room his guests heard the speech read before dinner, as had been the custom in earlier years, the doors being closed after all the servants had withdrawn. 'After dinner,' wrote John Martin, 'an excellent feast . . . there were speeches by Smuts, Attlee, and the P.M.'

there was one fly in the ointment that evening. The prime minister took Eden aside and showed him an intercept just telephoned through by their codebreaking agency: Oshima had just reported to Tokyo that torch had taken the Germans by surprise, and they would now reinforce their air units in Sicily and Tunis. Pétain had consented to the use of Tunis 'on the ground that the French Possession had been attacked.' Hitler had summoned the Italian foreign minister and French prime minister to see him in Bavaria; he was going to try to persuade France to declare war on the Allies. 'It seems that Laval, Ribb[entrop] & Ciano are to meet at Munich,' noted Eden, who had met all of these characters. He now began to share Churchill's worries about the French fleet, including three battleships, an aircraft-carrier and thirty destroyers, which had lain at anchor in Toulon since 1940.⁷⁹

After receiving the travel-stained Laval, Hitler was taking action even as Churchill was wining and dining his parliamentary supporters: he ordered operation **BROWN**, the immediate occupation of southern France ('in accordance,' this now being the fashionable phrase, 'with the wishes of the French government.') The operation began at once. By the following day German forces had seized the whole of the rest of France except for an enclave around the French fleet's base at Toulon. From Laval he had also

demanded immediate right of entry for his forces into Tunisia. Too late the Allies now realised Hitler's Tunisia plan. Within a few days thousands of his best troops were pouring into the new Axis bridgehead there, far in advance of the arrival of Eisenhower's troops.

to his audience at the Mansion House, Churchill had delivered what one observer called 'a reasonably sober' speech.⁸⁰ 'I have not become the King's First Minister,' he had said, 'in order to preside over the liquidation of the British empire.' He also remarked that 'we should not chatter ourselves out of India.'⁸¹ When Cripps put to the war cabinet the modest suggestion that they invite a moderate Hindu politician, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, to London to examine his plan for a provisional Indian government of Hindu-Muslim unity, Churchill responded with what Amery called a 'terrific tirade against the whole conception of Indian self-government.' The prime minister, in Amery's words, went off the deep end 'in a state of frantic passion on the whole subject of the humiliation of being kicked out of India by the beastliest people in the world next to the Germans.' He threatened, if pressed further, to stump the country rousing the Tories against this shame. His listeners sat mutely around the cabinet table studying its surface intently.⁸²

'This is, after all,' wrote Amery, informing the Viceroy of this, 'in essence a one-man government, so far as the conduct of the war is concerned, subject to a certain amount of conversation in cabinet.' 'His greatness,' he added prudently, 'is such that we have to accept him as he is.'⁸³

Thus the deadlock in India would remain for the duration, which was just as Churchill wished.



'Altogether,' wrote the prime minister's principal private secretary, John Martin, 'it has been a triumphant and most cheering week for the P.M. — a well deserved triumph.'⁸⁴ The Battle of Alamein, Britain's first great land victory, had repaired Winston's injured pride; the evident success of **torch**, coming immediately thereafter, had left him feeling immortal. After all, he had himself appointed these generals. He was afloat in a sea of euphoria. He remarked to General Walter Bedell Smith that with **torch** now 'in the bag' they should divert the remaining forces arriving in North Africa to other targets. Bedell Smith alerted Eisenhower at Gibraltar to this new danger. Irritated, Eisenhower declared that he was 'unalterably opposed' — the situ-

ation in Tunisia was now touch and go. 'We should plan ahead in orderly fashion on strategic matters,' he agreed, 'but for God's sake let's get one job done at a time.'⁸⁵

His Majesty the King reopened Parliament on Tuesday, November 11. Churchill announced to the House the promotion of Montgomery to full general. Answering his July critics, the 'fainthearts' (the weaker brethren, as he had called them to the King) he said:

See then how silly it is for people to imagine that governments can act on impulse or in immediate response to pressure in these large-scale offensives. There must be planning, design, and forethought, and after that a long period of silence, which looks – I can quite understand it – to the ordinary spectator as if it were simply apathy or inertia, but which is in fact steady indispensable preparation for the blow.

He now suggested that although he had implied there would be a Second Front in 1942, this had been necessary to deceive the Germans.⁸⁶ Talking with Eden on the phone afterwards, he boasted of how well he had spoken, and scoffed that the subsequent debate had been about 'the unsatisfactory character of almost all Frenchmen.'⁸⁷ The Fleet-street newspapers, *The News Chronicle*, were positively fulsome.⁸⁸

It may have stilled some critical voices at home, but not those abroad. Montgomery's entire offensive was engaging only four German divisions, and by postponing the Second Front Churchill was allowing Hitler to deal with his enemies piecemeal. The prime minister sent round to Eden the latest position-paper by the chiefs of staff, which they had admittedly drafted before torch blossomed into success. 'It is certainly thin gruel,' noted Eden, 'so far as next year's operations are concerned.'⁸⁹

lingering in the background of all these celebrations, like a mulish gate-crasher at a party, was de Gaulle. Under Eden's nagging influence, Churchill telegraphed to Washington on the eleventh reminding President Roosevelt that the British government did have solemn obligations to de Gaulle. For the first time he suggested that they avoid creating rival French émigré governments, backed variously by London and Washington.⁹⁰ Ducking the main issue, Roosevelt replied that they must drive it home to 'all three of

* 'Yellow-bellied s.o.bs.'

these *prima donnas*' – namely de Gaulle, Giraud, and Darlan – that whatever they decided was subject to approval by Eisenhower alone.⁹¹ This effectively remained his policy for the next two years.

Among the Americans there had ever been an element of callous cynicism. After one unhelpful session with Darlan, Juin, and Murphy on November 12 General Mark Clark reported to Eisenhower: 'We can always get rid of [the] uncooperative ybsob's later' – Clark's private acronym.* For a while Clark contemplated setting up Juin as the supreme authority – and locking up all the rest.⁹² On the thirteenth, Eisenhower flew to Algiers with the British Admiral Cunningham to confer with Clark and Murphy on this unappealing situation. Clark again advised dealing only with Darlan. It was a hot potato, but Allied lives were being lost. Darlan had already ordered a local cease-fire three days earlier. As it was a purely military matter Murphy stood aside. Before flying back to Gibraltar that night Eisenhower formally acknowledged with his own signature the provisional deal that Clark had struck with Admiral Darlan. He did this without consulting either Churchill or Washington. The deal (the Americans called it a 'protocol') recognized Darlan as head of state in French North Africa, administering the country politically, with Giraud as his military commander in chief; in return the French formally allowed the Allies to operate in their territory.⁹³

Reliance on Darlan brought rapid benefits. The French troops heeded his call for a cease-fire. General Marshall had originally expected to take six weeks mopping up North Africa, but he now predicted to President Roosevelt that he could do it in two. How long would the deal last? 'You can walk with the Devil as far as the bridge,' commented the president to his staff, quoting what he averred was an old Bulgarian proverb, 'but then you must leave him behind.'⁹⁴ Stalin would quote to the prime minister a not dissimilar proverb, namely that they should use 'even the Devil himself and his grandma' if military circumstances dictated.⁹⁵

Churchill telephoned Eden on the thirteenth about these French developments.⁹⁶ Single-mindedly, he remarked that if Darlan could bring over the French fleet, he might earn a seat on the bandwagon. 'If he fails to,' observed Eden's secretary, 'as he has, he deserves nothing from us.'⁹⁷

The foreign office's attitude toward Darlan was malevolent and already bordered on murderous. Far from the fall of shot and shell, the career diplomats were aghast at the soldier Eisenhower's handling of the affair. By dealing with four different Frenchmen – Darlan, Giraud, Juin, and Noguès – they felt that the Americans had let Britain in for a barrel-full of trouble.

Cadogan reflected that there would be grounds for gratitude if Darlan handed over the French fleet and Tunisia; after which they could 'throw him down a deep well.'⁹⁸ 'We shall do no good till we've killed Darlan,' observed the same diarist – Eden's most senior permanent official.⁹⁹ 'This Judas will not hang himself,' scribbled Brendan Bracken to Eden. 'On the contrary he will bask in office. . . The Hoare–Laval business may look clean by comparison. . . We must get a time limit to the Quisling sailor's rule.'¹⁰⁰

Relenting to these nagging voices, Churchill sent to Eisenhower a similar easy disclaimer: 'Anything for the battle, but the politics will have to be sorted out later on.'¹⁰¹

the great Churchill brain was firing in many directions. The chiefs of staff would have been content to wait until the Red Army had exhausted the Germans, in other words until 1944. This was not good enough for the prime minister. He telegraphed to Stalin that Friday, 'You know how anxious we are to take off you some of the undue weight which you have steadfastly borne in these last hard months.'¹⁰² He began to explore ways of knocking Italy out of the war, possibly by bombing Rome.¹⁰² President Roosevelt cabled to London asking that they now examine their Mediterranean strategy for the coming year.¹⁰⁴ Churchill telephoned Eden several times on Thursday the twelfth, then asked him down to Chequers for 'staff talks' with Smuts, Mountbatten, 'Pug' Ismay, and the chiefs of staff.

It became something of a celebratory weekend, at which Churchill kicked over the traces and thoroughly enjoyed doing so.¹⁰⁵ Eden motored down to Chequers on Saturday singing lustily to himself most of the way. The prime minister received him, not for the first time, in the bath; sponging himself down, he discussed who should be the next Viceroy of India. They lunched alone together; afterwards Churchill began to talk of reconstructing his government and sent for pen and paper, saying that he particularly wanted to end the uncertainty generated by Sir Stafford Cripps.¹⁰⁶

Among the guests this weekend were Benno Moisiewitch and his wife, who had raised money for Clementine's 'Aid to Russia' fund. The secretaries listened from the gallery as the pianist played one of Chopin's *Ballades*, a favourite of Winston's, on the piano below.¹⁰⁶ Smuts and Eden retired firmly to bed at midnight. Besides, Eden was having trouble with his health. 'Cocaine,' he noted in his diary, hinting at the problem, 'makes me feel giddy.'¹⁰⁸

the ostensible purpose of the get-together had been to make decisions on the Mediterranean and future strategy, but the weekend dissolved in alco-

holic jubilation and produced little else. 'Feet came off the ground,' heard Admiral Tovey, commander-in-chief of the Home Fleet, 'and heads went into the clouds.' In his view no real 'business' had been done. To a fellow admiral he quoted a poker player who once told him that the secret of success was 'patience in adversity and calmness in prosperity.'¹¹⁰

The professional soldiers and sailors disapproved of these high jinks: 'This sudden strong dose of success has gone rather too violently to people's heads,' observed Tovey, 'even among the high-ups, and not least amongst those affected is the P.M.' Discussing the numbers of U-boats sunk, Dudley Pound revealed that seven were definite and six probable; Churchill however urged that they publish grossly inflated figures; when Brooke informed him that, despite the exaggerated figures circulating elsewhere, only twenty thousand prisoners had been taken so far in the North African fighting, Churchill again insisted that they officially announce only the larger figures.¹⁰⁹ He also wrote this weekend to Lord Selborne, minister of economic warfare, directing him to step up S.O.E. operations in the newly occupied regions of France 'in order to make the relations between the torpid French and the German invaders as unpleasant as possible.'¹¹¹ He wanted more 'Lidices' to inflame people against the Nazis. Thinking ahead, he now spoke to his generals of entering Europe through the Balkans or Italy; nobody relished the idea of a frontal cross-Channel assault.¹¹²

Confirming their Mediterranean decisions in a note to the chiefs of staff, which he copied to Roosevelt in a telegram at the end of this weekend, Churchill said that the intention now was to strike at the soft 'under-belly of the Axis' from bases in North Africa, using American bombers against Italian targets, supported by British night bombers whenever the weather was unsuitable over Germany. They should do everything they could, he told Roosevelt, to make Italy feel the weight of the war, with intensive bombing designed 'to terrorise and paralyse the population,' as he put it.¹¹³ He also asked Admiral Pound to persuade the United States navy to release twenty or more destroyers to escort another convoy to North Russia late in December - the Americans, he argued, could easily spare these destroyers from the 'excessive escorts' they were using for their convoys in torch.¹¹⁴ Roosevelt declined, explaining that they had lost many destroyers in the Pacific recently. The Royal Navy also strongly disapproved of what Winston was up to. 'The P.M. and some others,' wrote Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, 'have been inclined to think all is over bar the shouting.' Churchill was impatient to get on with the next move, by 'cutting the tail of torch.'¹¹⁵

the other horrible problem which seized Churchill that weekend was Darlan. The public could not see why he was needed. Allied Forces HQ propaganda had spoken of overwhelming Allied might; it had exaggerated the numbers of American troops landing, and had inflated the prowess of Giraud; to compound this poor handling of public relations, there was a blackout on news from North Africa from November 10 to the fourteenth.¹¹⁶

The unexpected news of General Eisenhower's formal deal with Admiral Darlan arrived at Chequers that weekend, at eleven a.m. on Sunday November 15. It was just before the start of the conference on their future Mediterranean strategy. The foreign office telephoned through the text of a telegram from Eisenhower announcing his agreement with Darlan. Giraud's name, he explained, had proven worthless; only Darlan's counted for anything, which was why they had made his 'pact with the Devil.'¹¹⁷ A fierce debate began at Chequers on the wisdom of Eisenhower's move. Eden, wedded as he was to de Gaulle, 'didn't like it a bit,' as he wrote in his diary, 'and said so.' The discussion revolved around the wisdom of allowing Darlan to take charge of the French in North Africa. 'Eden opposed,' Brooke observed. 'P.M. for it.'¹¹⁸ Eden thereupon left the house, without joining in the remaining discussion on their future strategy and Italy. The meeting continued without him.

The Darlan problem was only just beginning. Broadcasting from London for the Columbia Broadcasting System that Sunday, Ed Murrow, one of those journalists who most readily call to mind the quip about the prerogatives of the harlot, delivered the first fearsome denunciation of the admiral. In Washington, Morgenthau announced that he agreed with Murrow. Henry Stimson warned that anybody criticising Darlan now would be a traitor to the cause. Shocked at the news, de Gaulle's staff in New York appealed to the Office of War Information. The columnist Walter Lippmann, who had championed de Gaulle's cause in Washington for two years, denounced the deal as contrary to Allied war aims; other Jews winced at the prospect of Darlan importing antisemitism to North Africa under the American umbrella. One Washington correspondent told Eisenhower's staff later that the noisiest criticisms over Darlan came from a vociferous one percent, 'mostly from sensitive Jews of press and radio who wish to make certain we were "fighting a war to make the world safe for Jews".'¹¹⁹

That same Sunday Churchill sent a telegram to President Roosevelt about Eisenhower's dealings with Admiral Darlan. It had not failed to impress

him that Cunningham and others on the spot had endorsed Eisenhower's decision, but he asked to be consulted in future. 'Great care must be taken that we are not double-crossed,' Churchill warned. 'There were some disquieting evidences in our *magics* two days ago. On the other hand we have these men in our power and should be vigilant lest they escape from us.'¹²⁰

The British newspapers on Monday morning November 16 joined the American clangour. They fairly bristled with caustic reports about the 'collaboration' between Eisenhower and Darlan, and Churchill's Alamein victory was all but forgotten.

general de Gaulle came to see Churchill at 12:45 p.m., before lunch. The press uproar undoubtedly fed his arrogance, even though Eden found that the general 'behaved with great restraint and dignity.' De Gaulle held a trump card and knew it. He refused to be party to a pact with the traitor Darlan and declared that he would issue a communiqué to that effect.¹²¹ Seemingly unruffled by de Gaulle's withering remarks, the prime minister guided him downstairs to the basement-level garden room for lunch.

Churchill had also invited the American minister in Dublin, David Gray. Winston's feelings for Eire were ambivalent. Not many Dubliners knew that their Special Branch collaborated throughout the war with his security authorities.¹²² Gray, an uncle of Roosevelt by marriage, would report afterwards that Churchill was in fact more admired in Ireland than any other Englishman. 'The Irish,' he wrote, 'like courage and justice.'¹²³ The room's chintz curtains and white steel stanchions, put in to support the low ceiling, gave Gray the feeling that he was in a ship's cabin, and when Churchill appeared wearing rompers he assumed this was some sort of battledress. Gray inquired whether the P.M. would ever intervene in Eire. Churchill's reply, in substance, was: 'At great disadvantage we have conducted the war at sea without the [southern] Irish bases which would have been so valuable to us, and I believe now that we can win the war without the help of Mr. de Valera's Eire.'¹²⁴ Gray said that De Valera had recently predicted to the correspondent of a Tucson newspaper that after the war Britain and the United States would be at each other's throats. Churchill replied that it would probably take two years after the collapse of Germany to defeat Japan, and this alone would hold the present Grand Alliance together.¹²⁵

From the documents, despite their circumlocutions, it seems that American diplomats feared that Churchill would at some time invade southern Ireland. Gray had referred in a letter to Winant in January to the need to

avoid any 'ill-considered or unnecessary action' being decided at Westminster.¹²⁶ Explaining his outspokenness on the Irish question, at this luncheon with de Gaulle, Gray wrote afterwards to Winant about the need for Americans to sit on the P.M.'s head, as he put it:

I have a hunch that if we conciliate Churchill . . . as most of the people in his entourage seem to feel it necessary to do, his genius and that of the White House might succeed in devising some original and perhaps startling solution that would settle this unhappy question for a long time to come.¹²⁷

Inevitably it was General de Gaulle who provided the main drama of this meal. Seated to the left of Churchill, this Gallic volcano erupted throughout with often unintelligible mutterings. Mrs Churchill artlessly asked him what the French would have done if the British had sunk their remaining fleet. The general turned to Winston and replied, eyes flashing: 'We should probably have shot you.' As hostess, she found it perplexing that her husband's guest chose to speak in such terms in their own house.¹²⁸

They reverted to Darlan. 'The prime minister,' reported Gray,

handled the situation with a patience and gentleness which I had not heard ascribed to him. He told de Gaulle that it was obvious that the military command in North Africa, dealing with an acute situation, had an obligation upon it to avail itself of every means that would save American lives and gain priceless time.

De Gaulle was intransigent. 'This war,' he said, 'is supposed to be based on moral principle. In treating with Darlan, moral principle is vitiated. The French people are left entirely confused. Are you dealing with the France of Pétain, or the France of the Fighting French, or the France of Darlan?'

Gray responded, leaning across Churchill. 'Mon Général,' he said, 'from the American point of view there is only one France. That is not your France or the France of Vichy, nor the France of Darlan, nor yet occupied France, but it is the France for which we fought in the last war and which will be restored at the end of this war. But believe me it will be the French people themselves who will decide how that restoration is to take place!'

This was Roosevelt's doctrine too, as he shortly again made clear in his reply to Churchill's telegram.¹²⁹ The Frenchman again rounded on Mrs

Churchill, but Clementine spoke passably fluent French, and she used it to educate this mannerless and ungrateful young general.

After this luncheon, Clementine Churchill loathed de Gaulle; her hatred of the general became the bane of the foreign office. Cadogan would observe in a note, later excised from his diary record: 'She has poisoned the PM's mind & goes about London screaming abuse of de G.'¹³⁰ Writing to the president, Gray used prophetic language, 'You will have to deal with de Gaulle. Your difficulty will be the kind that you might have with Joan of Arc. De Gaulle has a mission and the temperament of a prima donna, he has no fear and so no prudence. In his own honest eyes, he is France.'¹³¹

On the same day as this luncheon, on November 16, Churchill agreed to a very different message to Roosevelt, drafted by the F.O.; it urged that any agreement with Darlan be strictly temporary. The telegram spoke of the deep feelings roused among the ordinary British by the revelation of the dealings with Darlan, who had an 'odious record,' and it used terms like 'Quislings' and 'turncoat.' Any deal with the admiral, the telegram stressed, should be 'a temporary expedient, justifiable solely by the stress of battle.'¹³² The hand of Eden was unmistakable in drafting this item.

At the six p.m. cabinet, Field-Marshal Smuts argued that Eisenhower had acted properly, and the president should decide how and when the dealing should be ended.¹³³ Returning home to Pretoria via Algiers, Smuts had a long talk with Eisenhower and Cunningham on the morning of the twentieth. They told him that the most recent Allied statements about Darlan had had an unsettling effect on the other French leaders, who were beginning to suspect that they were being misused by the British. The French General Noguès, who controlled all of Morocco, was threatening to resign. 'Nothing,' reported Smuts, 'could be worse than [the] impression that we were merely using leaders to discard them as soon as they have served their purpose.' This of course was what Eden, Cadogan, and the F.O. had proposed. 'There can be no doubt,' emphasised Smuts, 'that Darlan and his friends have burned their boats and are doing their best to fight the Axis and consolidate [the] French behind us in this fight.' It would be a 'great mistake' to create the impression that Darlan was to be discarded at an early date, and he urged that Roosevelt be so advised. The difficult military situation might demand Darlan's retention for a long time to come.¹³⁴ Churchill replied with a letter of congratulations to Eisenhower, expressing the hope that he was not too 'preoccupied' with the politics of Algiers, and assuring him that Smuts had given him the inside picture. 'I am ear-

nestly hoping that we can all get eastward as quickly as possible,' he added, as a gentle hint to the supreme commander.¹³⁵

as darlan's position strengthened, so did the concerns of the foreign office. In a public statement on the eighteenth, Roosevelt had publicly adopted Churchill's (or rather the F.O.'s) phrase, that Darlan was only a 'temporary expedient,' which resulted in a pained letter from the admiral to the American commanders in Algiers and their remarks to Smuts. Darlan had protested to General Mark Clark about 'the view that I am "only a lemon which the Americans will drop after they have squeezed it dry."' ¹³⁶ Winston furnished Eisenhower with a helpful answer to this letter – though he took care that Eden did not see it.¹³⁷

A few days later Eden's representative on Eisenhower's staff in Algiers, W. Mack, sent a private hand-written letter to Sir William Strang at the F.O. counselling a more flexible approach to the problem: he understood, he reported, that Darlan's letter to Mark Clark had appealed to the prime minister so much that he had ordered that there 'could be no question of treating him like a lemon,' and that 'he deserved a pat on the back.' Darlan's co-operation with the Allies was one hundred percent: the facts spoke for themselves, and 'one must give him credit.' He added, prophetically, 'No one expects Darlan to be allowed to end his days in peace. There are too many who want his blood.' He drew Strang's attention to a phrase in Darlan's message to the fleet at Toulon, in which he had urged them to come to Oran 'where you will be received as friends by the Allies.' 'The PM's message may have helped induce this phrase.'¹³⁸ Eden must have choked on reading this letter, not least because it was the first he had heard of any Churchill 'message' to Darlan. Using 'C's secure link, he instructed Mack to return immediately to London for consultation.¹³⁹

Whatever Darlan wished, he could not guarantee that the French fleet would come over. He had expected Admiral Jean Pierre Esteva, commanding the French garrison in Tunis, to do so, but on November 17, Vichy was heard signalling to Esteva orders to allow Hitler's forces to establish their bridgehead in Tunisia.¹⁴⁰ Blinded by their own optimism and propaganda, the Americans had believed that the French and Arab populations of North Africa would rise in revolt against Nazi and Vichy tyranny after torch began. The truth was different, as the local French attitude varied from indifference to blazing hostility to the Anglo-American presence.¹⁴¹



At the weekend staff conference at Chequers on Sunday, November 15, 1942, the chiefs of staff had asked Churchill to study the long-term review of Anglo-American strategy which they had drawn up and put forward his own suggestions. He did so at ten p.m. on Monday the sixteenth, presiding over his first *defence committee* meeting in fact since July 13.

Much had happened since then – the disastrous raid on Dieppe, the failed PQ convoys, the awkward visit to Moscow, the invasion of North Africa. Churchill paid particular attention to the proposal to create an ‘enormous bomber force’ of four to six thousand aircraft. He was worried by the implications; it would involve transporting to England one and a quarter million American personnel. The resulting transportation bottleneck, he suggested, would rule out other large scale military operations. The Allies could not then open land operations in France during 1943 as he had promised while in Moscow. The chiefs of staff could offer only minor amphibious raids during the period that the Allies were building up this ‘gigantic bomber force.’ The third result he feared would be to encourage the ‘Japan first’ elements in the United States. Field-Marshal Smuts agreed, and Churchill said that the chiefs of staff paper would have to be redrafted.¹⁴² Meanwhile they must make ‘every effort’ to resume their PQ convoys to North Russia in January 1943; he had undertaken this in a telegram to Stalin. Admiral Pound said he hoped to start a convoy of thirty ships from Iceland on December 20.¹⁴³

There was one dark cloud on the horizon, the continuing success of the German submarines against the Allied shipping lanes. In February 1942 the German navy had introduced a fourth wheel into their *enigma* cypher machine, and this effectively stopped Bletchley Park’s Hut 8 from reading their signals for ten months.¹⁴⁴ Now, in the autumn of 1942, the enemy’s U-boats had returned to the North Atlantic in force, communicating in a new cypher key, *shark*, which Bletchley Park could not yet read. The U-boats had sunk twenty-nine ships in convoy during October, and fifty-four more sailing independently. The November figures would increase to thirty-nine and seventy respectively – a total of 721,700 tons. Churchill established an Anti U-Boat Warfare Committee, and this met under his chairmanship on November 18. In December however, the German cypher was broken, enabling the admiralty to route convoys around the U-boat packs. On December 13, Pound informed Washington of this breakthrough.¹⁴⁵ In December, the

ship sinkings dropped to nineteen in convoy and twenty-five sailing independently, and the next months saw them reduced still further.



Parliament did not give Churchill an easy time over Darlan. On November 19, Eisenhower appealed to the Combined Chiefs of Staff for an end to the political delays in agreeing the Protocol with Darlan.¹⁴⁶ The problem was Anthony Eden. It wounded and irritated Churchill deeply that the foreign secretary and his office continued to stand by de Gaulle. After tea on the twentieth he telephoned Eden several times, and the foreign secretary snarled at him about the hateful Eisenhower–Darlan document. The prime minister was anxious to give Roosevelt his agreement to the protocol, while Eden insisted they first subject the text to considered criticism. ‘We wrangled away at intervals throughout the evening,’ recalled Eden in his diary. They eventually agreed to send no message to Washington at all. ‘One of our telephone talks lasted over half an hour,’ Eden complained to his diary. ‘I cannot get W. to see the damage Darlan may do to the Allied cause if we don’t watch it. He can make rings diplomatically round E[isenhower].’

At one point in their ‘shouting match’ Churchill, making no secret of his feelings, had remarked,

Well Darlan is not as bad as de Gaulle anyway. That man hates us and would give anything to fight with the Germans against us.¹⁴⁷

Eden blamed ‘this nonsense’ on Clemmie and her row with de Gaulle at that luncheon – ‘I suspect because Clemmie misunderstood him.’¹⁴⁸

First thing the next morning, November 21, Winston telephoned Eden to say that he had now heard from Roosevelt, who was happy to leave full discretion to General Eisenhower; could he telegraph at once that we agreed? Eden sulked, and said that he preferred the amendments that he had suggested, and that he was sorry the prime minister hadn’t agreed to his sending them to Washington. Churchill became impatient: ‘Do you agree or don’t you?’ ‘I should like a chance to read Roosevelt’s reply and consider it,’ said Eden. ‘Then you don’t agree,’ snapped the prime minister. ‘Very well, cabinet at 12!’ It was indeed an odd relationship that was developing between the prime minister and his heir apparent. An hour later he rang up Eden

again, to ask him to stay on to luncheon, and he inquired solicitously about Anthony's cough.¹⁴⁹

The cabinet, called at twelve, produced a furious row between them. Only Lord Salisbury dared to oppose Winston, as he ended with a tirade against de Gaulle, snarling once again: 'He has been battenning on us and is capable of turning round and fighting with the Axis against us.' Cadogan was horrified at this libel, but noted in his diary afterwards: 'Tiresome he may be, but sound on essentials.'¹⁵⁰

Eden remained unconvinced: 'I am certain that Darlan has outwitted our people,' he recorded, 'and that [this] process will continue.'¹⁵¹

As promised, they lunched in style after the cabinet at Bucks, with 'Bobbety' (Lord Salisbury) joining Winston and Eden for a plate of stout-and-oysters, and steak-and-kidney pie, washed down by two bottles of claret. 'W.' Eden was relieved to find, was 'in splendid form, certainly seemed to bear no malice for our set-to.'¹⁵²

winston's mind had already moved on. In his imagination he was in a landing-craft leading the assault on the beaches of Sicily. On November 23 he wrote to Colonel Julius G. Holmes of Eisenhower's staff criticising the current arrangements to move thirteen divisions into North Africa; even though, as he said, all enemy opposition had ended 'except in the Tunis tip,' he added. 'We are naturally looking forward to operations in the nature of *brimstone*' – an operation to hurl Allied troops across the Straits from Africa to Sicily. Everybody was being far too timid again. He criticised the admiralty and other planning staffs for not wanting to launch *brimstone* until after *torch*. 'I never meant the Anglo-American Army to be stuck in North Africa. It is a spring-board and not a sofa.'¹⁵³

Over these weeks British and American foreign and military policy drifted violently apart. Criticism of the Darlan deal mounted. Churchill had to issue a 'D-notice' to newspaper editors forbidding them to attack the Americans for using Admiral Darlan. The Mirror Group skirted round this veto by agreeing that he should be used but discarded immediately. On the twenty-second they mischievously changed the phrase to 'squeezing him like a lemon' and throwing him away.¹⁵⁴ Inspired by Fleet-street, the public clamour mounted at all levels of London society. Pamela Churchill wrote privately to Harry Hopkins: 'All sorts of different types of people are united in their horror of the appointment [of Darlan]. . . You get the same reaction from the factory worker as you do from the more advanced politically

minded people.' She wished, she wrote, that if there were some good reason for Darlan's appointment, it could be made public, 'cos just in black and white it is very difficult to swallow.'¹⁵⁵

The split of opinion closely followed the Anglo-American divide. A British Intelligence officer based at Gibraltar assessed: 'At the moment the Americans are treating the French, one and all, as poor deluded folk who have been rescued from their waywardness by a Salvation Army, and an American one at that.' The French would soon realise their error, he predicted; they would end up 'disliking our Cousins far more than us.'¹⁵⁶

In London this manufactured outrage over Darlan increased, as U.S. Ambassador Winant reported to Roosevelt, primarily 'in Parliament, trade unions, Jewish organisations and other groups.' He found the foreign correspondents like Raymond Daniell of *The New York Times* and Ed Murrow of C.B.S. 'difficult to reason with.' It did not help when Darlan, announcing that he was assuming the reins of government in North-West Africa, proclaimed that he would 'represent France in the world'; this language was hard to reconcile with Roosevelt's statement that the 'arrangements' made with Darlan were temporary and local only. Winant informed the president that de Gaulle was seething with rage.¹⁵⁷ The misgivings about Darlan would not go away. Even the King was perplexed, and after discussions with his courtiers he mused in his diary, 'I wish I could understand this Darlan business. We must use him now, but for how long?'¹⁵⁸

The fact remained that Darlan was delivering on his promises. The Governor of French West Africa turned over Dakar to the Allies, together with the battleship *Richelieu* and three French cruisers. The rift between Churchill and Eden's foreign office widened further after another strained meeting with de Gaulle on the twenty-fourth. The record showed the prime minister becoming more enamoured of Darlan than ever; he told de Gaulle that it was 'most unfair to call this man a traitor.'¹⁵⁹ Two days later Churchill pained Eden by snapping that Darlan had already done far more for the Allies than his man, de Gaulle.¹⁶⁰

Eden reminded the prime minister on the twenty-sixth that Britain had publicly agreed with President Roosevelt's use of the word 'temporary,' and he added the warning that Darlan was becoming dangerously entrenched in Algiers. Darlan himself, he said, had written to Mark Clark on November 21, that to him 'temporary' meant 'until the liberation of France is complete.' It was an unsatisfactory state of affairs, Eden advised, and Britain could not safely allow it to continue once the military situation allowed

her to 'take steps' to change it. The same went for Generals Boisson and Noguès, he argued. 'We are dealing with turncoats and blackmailers,' he insisted, 'and until the French administration and armed forces in North Africa are in better hands,' – meaning of course those of de Gaulle – 'it would not be safe to arm them with modern weapons.' Dealing with these men would undermine Britain's moral authority in France, and give heart to the 'filthy race of Quislings.' 'I feel strongly that if we do not eliminate Darlan as soon as the military situation permits, we shall be committing a political error,' Eden advised the prime minister. He enclosed a telegram which he proposed to send to Lord Halifax, discussing at length 'by what methods Darlan is to be eliminated,' and 'how to get rid of Darlan.' They could pave the way, he suggested, by making impossible demands of him, to force an open break.

Churchill refused to be swayed. He preferred to wait, he said; Eden red-inked: 'So be it – for the moment. AE, Nov 29,' and put the letter back into its jacket.¹⁶¹

On the weekend of November 27 to 30, Churchill invited Generals de Gaulle and Catroux down to Chequers. He showed the Frenchmen a film of the popular welcome accorded to the American troops in Algiers. De Gaulle suggested that it was not for Darlan that the crowds had been cheering and making their 'V'-signs. Flattering the prime minister, de Gaulle put it to him that Roosevelt was losing the moral leadership of Europe, and that was it was essential that Churchill himself now take this upon his shoulders – the world was waiting for a clear word from London.¹⁶²

Just as Admiral Darlan had always promised, on the twenty-seventh his officers scuttled the French fleet at Toulon, no fewer than seventy-three warships, to prevent Hitler getting his hands on them. Churchill read into this sombre act the first sign of overt resistance by France to Germany.¹⁶³ He rang Eden up early the next day, expressing delight at the news. Amongst other things, he hoped, it would lessen the parliamentary concern about Darlan. Eden however wanted Darlan out of the picture. He told Oliver Lyttelton, lunching with him in the flat at the F.O. on the last day of November, that Darlan was the one 'serious blot' on the horizon; Eden was seriously worried about the attitude of the Americans and the prime minister toward the Vichy French admiral.¹⁶⁴

Whatever Churchill personally intended at No. 10, over in the foreign office the assassin's pistol was now taken out and oiled.

28: *Getting Rid of Darlan*

ON NOVEMBER 21, 1942, Churchill called a cabinet meeting. That was nothing unusual, but this was a Sunday. He wanted to read out a telegram from Stalin. It announced that he had unleashed a major offensive on the Stalingrad front. His armies had torn a fifteen-mile wide gap in the enemy line.¹ Hitler was still far more interested in North Africa, however. He had rammed 31,000 troops into Tunisia and more were arriving every day, along with dive bombers and tanks. Within two weeks of this cabinet meeting, Eisenhower was warning that he might have to retreat.

On the last day of November Churchill celebrated his sixty-eighth birthday. Apart from Brendan Bracken, who braved the glares of Clementine to attend, it was an all-female family party – Winston's daughter Sarah, wife of the popular Jewish entertainer Vic Oliver; her sister Mary, and Randolph's wife. 'It was most gay and pleasant,' Pamela wrote. 'I have never seen Winston so happy as he is when he has all his family around him.' She had moved into a 'wonderful new apartment' in Grosvenor-square, which she had just finished fixing up, and she had brought her little boy home to live with her.² Nobody mentioned Randolph, nor Pamela's liaison with Harriman.

Winston's problems with his son paled in comparison with those of his old friend Leo Amery, the India Secretary. On the seventeenth, German propaganda had announced that Leo's son John was working for Dr Goebbels in Berlin; he was housed in style at the Adlon, Berlin's equivalent of the Ritz. Under pressure from Bracken, all the newspapers except *The Times* and *Daily Mirror* agreed to suppress this juicy story. Driving over to Harrow for the annual school concert, Winston spoke 'very nicely' to Amery about the family tragedy and said, when the latter offered to resign, 'Good God, I wouldn't hear of such a thing.'³ After hearing his son broadcast on the nine-

teenth from Hitler's capital – surely an unimaginably bitter experience for a cabinet minister – Leo noted sadly, 'It was just the ordinary anti-Semitic tripe that is poured out by the German propaganda headquarters.'⁴ (John was brought back to England for trial after the war and hanged as a traitor).

Churchill could afford to be magnanimous. Alamein and torch had pushed his Gallup approval rating to ninety-one percent.⁵ Lyttelton asked him to see a rather difficult person; the prime minister inquired what to say, and the minister replied, 'Oh, just a whiff of the old gas!'⁶ Beaverbrook continued to grouse. He told Amery that Winston 'undoubtedly did himself a little too well' – a reference to the eating and drinking.⁷ He privately criticised Churchill for his intolerance, his dictatorial attitude, and his arrogance, all of which he felt derived from his late ascension to supreme office.⁸

RETREATING ACROSS Libya, Rommel was not yet defeated. Somehow, victory had slipped through General Montgomery's fingers. Keeping watch from Bletchley Park, the codebreakers were baffled. On November 9 the Panzer Army *Afrika* had been down to eleven tanks, a figure which had improved to only fifty-four a month later, while Montgomery had 270 in Tenth Corps alone. He should have finished off the Panzer Army months before. 'From secret sources,' wrote General Brooke, the C.I.G.S., on the eighteenth, 'it is plain that Rommel is at present in a very bad state, lacking reinforcements, tanks, ammunition, transport and petrol.' Montgomery's dithering, wrote one specialist whom Bletchley Park had sent out to Cairo, 'seemed to cast doubt on the whole point of our work.' He would write of the frustration, and dismay, felt in Bletchley Park's Hut 3 at Montgomery's 'painfully slow' advance from Alamein to Tripoli, 'incomprehensible in the light of the mass of ultra intelligence showing that throughout his retreat Rommel was too weak to withstand serious pressure.'⁹

As the weeks passed however Montgomery was under an increasing strain himself as his supply lines lengthened. On November 29 Hut 3 phoned Churchill with three intercepted signals showing that Rommel had suddenly flown out of Africa, feeling 'in duty bound to report on the situation' to Hitler and the High Command.¹⁰ Meanwhile the winter rains descended on northern Africa. Brooke felt that Eisenhower did not appreciate the urgency of pushing on into Tunisia. Those studying the ultras saw little cause for rejoicing. 'There may be a battle at Agheila,' wrote Sir Alexander Cadogan at the foreign office, 'but we already knew something about that from our "best source." I am only rather puzzled about Tunisia: hope it's all right.'¹¹

Churchill's mind was already far from Africa and fixed on the cross-Channel venture, which he now insisted (in a message to naval commander Admiral Ramsay), must come in the summer of 1943.¹²

It was easy for him to keep up the pressure. He was Winston Churchill – but not everybody else could take the strain. His secretary, the formidable Mrs ••**firstname** Hill, became ill late in November, and one of the other two secretaries suffered a nervous breakdown.¹³ Her departure left Elizabeth Layton holding the fort, midst crises large and small: his Gold pen had ceased to function: his eye-glasses were no longer the right prescription.¹⁴ Throughout November and December, the war's other things – Darlan, Tunisia, Stalingrad, de Gaulle, Cripps, U-boats, the bombing war – crowded in upon those around him. He was reshuffling his cabinet which always had him in an excitable mood.¹⁵ He refused to think about anything but the war. When Field-Marshal Smuts went over to say good-bye to Eden, they talked about post-war planning, and Eden lamented that it would not be easy, because 'W.'s mind had a [full-] stop in it at the end of the war.'¹⁶

CHURCHILL NOW no longer needed to fear Sir Stafford Cripps, and he prepared to shuffle him out of his pack. After the stout-and-oysters luncheon that followed the cabinet meeting on November 19, he had taken Eden back to No. 10 to re-examine the government changes that he now proposed. They were all designed to neutralise the influence of Cripps. He told Eden that since Lord Cherwell (the 'Prof') wanted John Llewellyn out of the ministry of aircraft production, the M.A.P., he would give that ministry to Cripps and send Llewellyn over to Washington to handle Supply.¹⁷ Churchill telephoned Lyttelton in the United States later that day and told him of the changes, including Cripps' new post which he camouflaged rather transparently thus: 'You know Staffordshire, the county, of which Stafford is the capital. You know where it is on the map, ah, M–A–P,' and more of the same. Lord Halifax feared that the Americans would see the reshuffle as clear evidence of Churchill re-establishing the Tories' domination.¹⁸ He thought the new arrangement spelt trouble; evidently Winston had conducted this game of musical chairs to create a suitable niche for Cripps. The reshuffle put British noses out of joint in Washington, particularly that of Arthur Salter, who was heading the ship procurement mission.¹⁹

Cripps resigned from the war cabinet on November 22 and accepted the M.A.P. Meeting him that day Churchill, according to Cripps' secretary, wept several lifelike tears and said that Stafford's acceptance of the new

ministry was the noblest act of self-negation in public life that he had ever encountered. He had pulled off another masterstroke. 'Nearly all of Cripps' mystique is now gone,' wrote fellow-socialist Hugh Dalton, 'and he has missed all his chances – never really very good – of resigning with credit. He has I think been very skilfully played by the P.M. He may of course be quite good at M.A.P., but seldom has anyone's political stock, having been so outrageously and unjustifiably over-valued, fallen so fast and so far.'²⁰

Completing this reshuffle, Eden became Leader of the House, as Smuts had urged; and Herbert Morrison, a little Cockney Londoner of socialist leanings but with an honest soul and greatly admired on both sides of the House, entered the cabinet as Home Secretary.

heading north, Churchill left London on December 3, 1942. His desk diary said '8:15 p.m. leave for trip. . .' but the words 'to Yorks [Yorkshire]' had been crossed out. Wherever he went, it mattered not: he was out of London. Angrier than ever at seeing Admiral Darlan's future in North Africa now seemingly assured – nobody was using the word 'temporary' any more – Eden drafted a strongly worded telegram to Lord Halifax expressing his dismay. Although it conflicted with his own views, Churchill meekly initialled it, and it went off on the fifth.²¹ Eden instructed Strang to produce an equally firm draft minute about Dakar – he refused to see the Allies being 'squeezed' by the governor of West Africa, Pierre Boisson, and he also declined to put any more pressure on General de Gaulle. Churchill complained that the F.O. was failing to square up to de Gaulle; but fearing to antagonise his young heir-apparent he shortly phoned him to congratulate him on the draft, which he called 'a very good piece of work.' Eden decided that the P.M. was incalculable; his bark was worse than his bite.

It was the fearsome English weekend, when everything ground to a halt. Eden had gone to the 'uttermost region' of Sussex, as the exasperated permanent head of the foreign office observed, while 'the P.M. *might be* reached (somewhere in the N of England) by field telephone about 12:45 p.m. "What a way to do business!"²² The next day there was a teenage party in Mary's honour at Chequers; Winston was evidently back. Since it was the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Winant also came.²³

They all returned to London on Monday, December 7. Winston held a cabinet at five p.m. and took 'a snap decision at the end to unshackle [German] prisoners,' recorded Cadogan, wringing his hands at this administrative shambles. 'Everyone talking at once, whispering, and passing notes.'



Because feelers had started to reach the foreign office, Churchill had begun expecting Italy to make peace with Britain. He was ready to do so. Bomber Command's air raids had played their part, although it was said that that 'Butcher' Harris was bored because Italian towns didn't burn as well as German – 'too much marble and stuff.'²⁴

The Vatican expressed pained surprise at the bombing raids. D'Arcy Osborne, the British chargé at the Vatican, made the tart observation to His Holiness that the Italian air force had hastened to join in the 1940 blitz on London, applying the lessons of the Italian general Giulio Douhet in his book on air power; that Italian civilian casualties were still low compared with Rotterdam, Warsaw, and other Luftwaffe targets; that damage to artistic property was inevitable; and that there could be no distinction between Mussolini and his people.²⁵ These arguments would probably not have sustained world opinion if Harris had destroyed Saint Peter's or the Sistine Chapel, and the U.S. envoy to the Vatican, Myron Taylor, urgently recommended to Roosevelt that the United States follow an independent line.²⁶ He had already asked Churchill in September 1941 to make a statement discouraging such raids.²⁷ Churchill's ambition to call down fire and devastation upon Rome burned ever brighter, as will be seen particularly in our next volume. On November 30, 1942 Taylor phoned Roosevelt's office to ask whether he might tell the Pope that the United States would take this independent line; this would, he said, enhance their reputation with the Italian people. 'I am sure the British will never be in such a favorable position,' added Taylor, 'because even the Italian public are without enthusiasm for them.'²⁸ Roosevelt however declined.

The usages of war would have made it improper to bomb Rome if the military command and government had left the city. This step the Italians now proposed and executed. On December 18, 1942 London received word from D'Arcy Osborne: the Vatican had informed him that the Italian supreme command and headquarters staffs were leaving Rome, as was Mussolini's headquarters as commander-in-chief. 'In these circumstances,' the envoy communicated to London, 'the Pope would protest if Rome were bombed.'²⁹ When Eden arrived at No. 10 before lunch that day, he found Cardinal Hinsley, head of the Roman Catholic church in England, with the prime minister, having brought over the same message from the Vatican.

Eden revealed that he too had just heard from the apostolic delegate in the same vein. 'This seemed to us all,' recorded Eden, 'to open up engaging possibilities which it was agreed I should follow up.'³⁰

The cabinet discussed this opportunity of luring Italy out of the Axis three days later, at Churchill's suggestion. Then noble anti-Fascist elements stirred in several ministerial breasts, and the cabinet decided to lay down horrendous conditions to enable the war to continue: if Mussolini accepted, it would render him contemptible; if he did not, bombing could begin.³¹

The chiefs of staff wished in any case to bomb the railway lines running through the city, with all that that might imply in collateral damage.³² The soldier Smuts, whose opinion was asked by cable, also opposed giving immunity to the city. 'The possible bombardment of Rome must be a great factor in the Italian mind,' he cabled from Pretoria.³³ In Washington, where the Vatican had made a similar *démarche*, Cordell Hull also came out against sparing Rome.³⁴ There for the time being the matter rested: in practice, though for other reasons, Rome was embargoed from aerial attack; no assurances were given – but no bomber squadrons were sent either.

The unofficial approaches from Italy continued all winter. Eden reported that among those trying for a separate peace were the Italian minister in Lisbon, perhaps acting for the foreign minister Count Ciano, behind the Duce's back; the Governor of Montenegro; and the consul-general at Geneva, acting on behalf of the Duke of Aosta. Eden righteously decided that to pursue any of these contacts might weaken the perception that Britain was out to destroy Fascism. The prime minister, less certain, noted merely, 'There is certainly no hurry, but the cabinet shd. be informed.' Eden was against dealing with anybody like Count Dino Grandi, the former ambassador to the U.K. Again, Churchill noted, 'We can discuss this at leisure.'³⁵

A few days later Eden learned that the Duke of Aosta was offering to lead an uprising against Mussolini with the support of the Italian navy. There followed however a slew of conditions – the Italian navy to remain intact: the monarchy to be preserved: the air force to be held down. Eden was 'not greatly impressed,' even though Churchill himself inclined toward keeping open this line of communication.³⁶ In cabinet on December 3 he talked, to Eden's disquiet, about negotiating with Grandi. To the anti-Fascist Eden a Grandi ruling in Rome and a Darlan in North Africa did not make for an attractive Mediterranean picture. He arranged for an M.P., Walter Elliott, to ask a Question in the House which enabled him to stress that Britain did not recognize Darlan in the role for which he was casting himself.³⁷

a few weeks later Eden circulated a note on secret feelers from more trustworthy anti-Fascist elements in Italy. The S.O.E. was in touch, he reported, with Marshal Pietro Badoglio and the eighty-year-old Marshal Enrico Caviglia; Badoglio was offering to 'take over' at the right moment and establish a military government. He proposed sending an emissary to Cyrenaica to talk this over with the British. Eden agreed that the S.O.E. should try to get this emissary, a general, out for talks, but with no strings attached.³⁸

Displaying little of Eden's anti-Fascist fervour, Churchill always displayed a certain fondness for Spain and Franco. Lunching with the Spanish ambassador, the Duke of Alba, on November 25, he revealed the desire to see a Spain that was '*fuerte, próspera y feliz*' – strong, prosperous, and contented. He expected France and Italy to be ruined by the war, 'which will result in Spain occupying a position such as it had not had for centuries.'³⁹

Twice during December he again received the duke before the latter's return to Madrid for Christmas. 'Before I came home,' remarked the duke to the Japanese ambassador there at the end of the month,

I had personal interviews with Churchill on the 6th and 11th December. He said, 'The war is 50 percent over. In the battle of North Africa we used 850 ships, 600 of which were troop transports. On the way not a single ship was attacked. . . British and Americans are again rulers of the waves. America's entry into the war, accompanied by the assurance that we would get plenty of arms, makes our victory absolutely beyond doubt.'

The duke reported that Churchill was predicting that North Africa would be in Allied hands by March 1943, and that they would then strike into Italy from Sicily, while in another direction they would plunge forward through the Balkans and Turkey. The duke had also commented, reported the Japanese ambassador, upon Churchill's admiration for the Japanese: 'You know, in Government circles here in London,' the prime minister had allegedly said, 'there are plenty of people who remember the Tokyo–London alliance and who say it was a mistake to have forsworn it for the sake of America.'

The only dispute that the Duke of Alba could discern between London and Washington was on global strategy. Churchill had felt that the Americans were making a mistake in pressing the war against Japan: 'These Japanese have a lot of stamina. I fought in the Boer war and other wars too and have known well warriors of various climes, and judging from what I have seen of Japanese prisoners, I can only express admiration for the fine military

spirit of the Japanese race.' As for the Germans, he had scoffed, they had passed their peak. He expected Britain's relations with America to freeze over after the war, the duke had told the Japanese diplomat in Madrid.

A few days later Churchill was shown an intercept of this embarrassing message from Madrid; he disclaimed 'paternity' of the words that the Spanish ambassador had 'fathered' on to him. He told Halifax to show a copy to Roosevelt, knowing that he would have seen it anyway, and to assure him that there was 'hardly anything' in it of what he had actually said.⁴⁰



The foreign office allowed the prime minister no rest over Admiral Darlan. Churchill did little to repair de Gaulle's bruised feelings. The general demanded air time to broadcast against Darlan; Churchill glanced at the script and forbade its transmission.⁴¹ Eden and Churchill remained at loggerheads. The foreign secretary called Eisenhower a dunderhead for having fallen for the admiral and his wiles; an F.O. official said that Churchill, being 'half-American himself,' had approved the gangster mentality behind his use – 'the end sanctified the means.' Seeking back-up from Roosevelt, Churchill had several intimate talks with Bedell Smith in the last week of November, and arranged for the general to dine alone with the president in Washington and put the Darlan matter before him.⁴²

Thus Churchill went one way and the foreign office and Brigadier Menzies, head of the secret service, another: 'C' had brought the former air force General François d'Astier de la Vigerie out of France to join de Gaulle's forces; he arrived by Lysander plane in England on November 17, and would play a sinister role in the events related later in this chapter. De Gaulle told Eden that the general was bringing 'something of interest' from General Alphonse Georges for the prime minister to hear; this was probably just bait – Winston had a soft spot for the elderly Georges. De Gaulle mysteriously recommended Eden also to see d'Astier, as he had a lot of interest to report. While Eden did so, on November 23 at 3 p.m., Winston asked Major Desmond Morton to see the newcomer first, saying he would receive him later if he felt like it.⁴³ Eden and de Gaulle came to see him with Morton the next day; d'Astier may have attended, but the prime minister's appointment card mentions only the other three.⁴⁴ It is now known that Menzies authorised de Gaulle's officials to use his M.I.6 radio liaison channels to contact d'Astier's brother Henri in Algiers (Churchill had shut down the

clandestine wireless link between London and the local Gaullists in Algiers with the onset of torch).⁴⁵ Henri d'Astier, officially Darlan's deputy minister of the interior, had his finger in many pies in the Algerian capital: we first glimpsed him as one of Murphy's five main contacts there; he was also a monarchist and on intimate terms with the Comte de Paris, a pretender to the French throne who was living in North Africa, and who some hoped would replace Darlan.

There were further contacts between Gaullist and anti-Darlan elements during early December. On his way back to Cairo, General Catroux spoke at Gibraltar with General Emile-Marie Béthouart and an emissary of Giraud.⁴⁶ Béthouart afterwards asked the governor of Gibraltar to transmit this message to General de Gaulle in London:

Henri d'Astier wishes me to confirm his message regarding the urgent confidential communication of highest importance which he wishes to make to you.

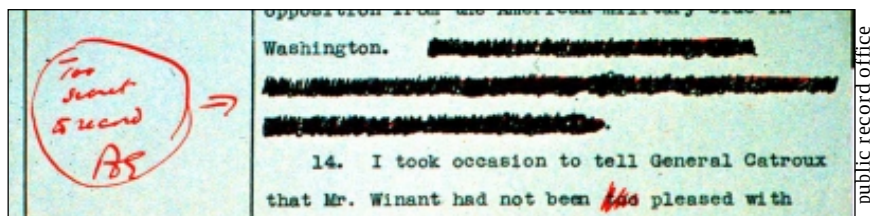
General Mason-Macfarlane refused to forward the message without Eisenhower's consent.⁴⁷

on december 1, 1942 the new German troops arriving in Tunisia counter-attacked the British. On the sixth, Eisenhower was talking of retreat.⁴⁸ Brooke recorded, 'I do not like much the way things are going there.'⁴⁹ In his view Eisenhower was far too busy playing politics with Darlan and General Pierre Boisson, the one-legged governor-general of French West Africa, while all this time Hitler was beefing up his forces in Tunis and Bizerta, the country's naval base. Eisenhower wrote privately to Churchill on December 5 to bring him up to date.⁵⁰ Eden continued to be 'much troubled' by the Darlan developments. The admiralty shared none of his concerns. The First Sea Lord wrote to Admiral Cunningham, the naval commander-in-chief in Algiers, assuring him that the chiefs of staff had never doubted that Eisenhower was doing the right thing. Cunningham too now liked Darlan; he responded that Eisenhower was easy to deal with, but 'the hesitations and hair-splitting of our foreign office' were worrying him. Eden should not allow his General de Gaulle to upset the Algiers apple-cart. There had been a big parade at city's war memorial on Wednesday, Cunningham added. 'It may amuse you to know that the representative of *perfidie Albion* got quite an ovation from the large crowd present.' So had Darlan, he wrote.⁵¹

While this political tempest was raging in London, Eisenhower got on with the job. Darlan signed an accord with Boisson, turning over Dakar to the American forces. At 12:55 p.m. on December 7 Eisenhower reported this in a simple message to London boasting, 'Dakar is with us.' That he had succeeded where de Gaulle had been humiliated in 1940 just added insult to injury. The F.O. put it about that American commercial interests in Africa were being pushed under military cover.⁵² Churchill sent a generous telegram to Eisenhower, repeating his support of the general's dealings with Darlan, while 'feeling sure you will avoid formal long term commitments.' 'Anyhow,' he continued, 'please think of me as a fairly solid fortification covering your rear and go for the swine in front with a blithe heart.'⁵³



Despairing of his prime minister ever seeing reason on Admiral Darlan, Eden had decided upon his 'elimination' in favour of one of the more consistently pro-Allied French generals like B  thouart. Dining comfortably with Charles de Gaulle at the Savoy on December 8, he asked the Free French general outright whether, 'if Darlan could disappear from the scene to-morrow,' de Gaulle could reach an agreement with the French authorities in North Africa and unite the French empire in the war. Cadogan and the French general Catroux were also present at this little cabal.



De Gaulle did not mince his words in his reply: Darlan was the only obstacle, nobody else mattered. As soon as he disappeared, his regime would fade away; the 'mystique' of Vichy would then give way to the 'mystique' of Gaullism. Any change, he added however, would have to be effected by Frenchmen, not by foreigners.⁵⁴ That was an interesting point.

Eden dictated a memoir on this dinner conversation, but it evidently revealed too much; first his own hand, using red ink, and then another hand, using black, obliterated one particular sentence of the typescript

record; next to these lines Eden noted in the margin, with almost teutonic thoroughness: 'Too secret to record. æ.'^{55*}

Cadogan, also present, made a note as well. 'Get rid of Darlan,' he quoted de Gaulle as saying. 'My answer is, Yes, but how?'



Unaware of these plottings, Churchill continued to stand by Darlan. He announced that he would address a Secret Session of the House on December 10 to put the Members straight about Britain's relations with the French.

He devoted great care to preparing this speech; in it, he emphasised that Eisenhower had struck the deal with Darlan with his blessing – but it was a purely temporary expedient, to save British and American lives. 'In war,' he said, 'it is not always possible to have everything go exactly as one likes. In working with allies it sometimes happens that they develop opinions of their own. Since 1776,' he added with a trace of irony, 'we have not been in the position of being able to decide the policy of the United States.'⁵⁶

'I hold no brief for Admiral Darlan,' he declared; and he continued, unable to resist a dig at Richard Stokes, who was one of his sharpest critics in the House: 'Like myself, he is the object of the animosities of Herr Hitler, of Monsieur Laval, and of the Hon. Member for Ipswich.'[†]

He reminded the Members that until the onset of torch Roosevelt had maintained an intimate relationship with Vichy France, particularly through his ambassador, who was until recently Admiral Leahy – now his chief of staff. He asked the House to understand the intricacies of the French mentality, reminding them: 'The Almighty in His infinite wisdom did not see fit to create Frenchmen in the image of Englishmen.' In a nation where the *droit administratif* rendered any officer who obeyed a command of his lawful superior absolutely immune from subsequent punishment, disobedience was anathema: he rubbed this point in, saying that many Frenchmen regarded General de Gaulle 'as a man who has rebelled against the authority of the French State.' 'All our information,' he continued, 'showed that the

* Eden also softened the draft wording, in his own handwriting, from 'I asked General de Gaulle whether if Darlan *could* disappear from the scene *tomorrow*. . .' to read: 'I then asked General de Gaulle whether if Darlan were to disappear from the scene. . .' The Avon papers contain only the sanitised printed text circulated by Eden to the cabinet (Public Record Office, file FO.954/8, fols. 330–2).

† Churchill omitted this jibe from the text printed in his 1951 memoirs.

real red rag to the bull would be de Gaulle.' The Americans had refused to allow him into the theatre. Giraud was, on the other hand, a national hero: Churchill related how a British submarine wearing the American flag had picked him up from southern France and delivered him to Gibraltar on the afternoon before *torch* began – and how Giraud had then demanded to become Supreme Commander himself. It was thanks to Admiral Darlan, he continued, that the French troops facing them in North-West Africa, particularly at Casablanca, had put their rifles away. 'It makes a lot of difference to a soldier whether a man fires his gun at him or at his enemy; and even the soldier's wife or father might have a feeling about it too.'

Bringing his speech to an end, he delivered a scathing attack on Aneurin Bevan and his consorts in the Labour Party, stating that it was a 'poor creature with a jaundiced outlook and disorganised loyalties' who could find in this African episode nothing to excite his interest except the deal done by Eisenhower with Darlan. 'The struggle for the Tunisian tip is now rising to its climax,' he advised the House, 'and the main battle impends.' That and the coming battle in Cyrenaica were to be fought entirely by British soldiers. He invited the House to treat with proper reprobation 'that small, busy, and venomous band who harbour and endeavour to propagate unworthy and unfounded suspicions.'⁵⁷

The speech was a great debating success: well-crafted and researched, beautifully turned on the lathe of Churchill's rhetoric; biting and sarcastic, yet affording to the Members a privileged insight into the problems facing the Anglo-American alliance; and even spiced with hints at the treacherous deeds of the much-lauded General de Gaulle – it converted the House at one stroke. The caterwauling in the printed press died down.⁵⁸

after the war Churchill sold this speech to *Life* for a substantial sum, while making the necessary financial provisions to ensure that he paid no income tax on it.⁵⁹ Before it was published, in February 1946, he instructed the magazine's editors to remove the passage revealing Britain's coruscating difficulties with de Gaulle, and they were also omitted from the collected speeches published twenty years later.⁶⁰

In this particular passage he had spoken of how his government had recognised de Gaulle in 1940, and financed the Free French movement and had loyally aided the general since then. To console him for the snub dealt to de Gaulle at *torch*, Churchill had given him control of Madagascar, which would have greatly preferred Darlan. 'However,' he continued,

now we are in Secret Session the House must not be led to believe that General de Gaulle is an unfaltering friend of Britain. On the contrary, I think he is one of those good Frenchmen who had a traditional antagonism engrained in French hearts by centuries of war against the English.

Everywhere he went, he had left a trail of anglophobia behind him. Speaking to the Chicago *Daily News* in August 1941 de Gaulle had suggested that Britain coveted France's colonies, and he had even charged that England was afraid of the French fleet. 'What in effect England is carrying out,' de Gaulle had sneered, 'is a wartime deal with Hitler in which Vichy serves as a go-between.' In July 1942, the prime minister continued, de Gaulle had wished to visit Syria, and gave his word to be of good behaviour. 'No sooner did he get to Cairo than he adopted a most hectoring attitude and in Syria his whole object seemed to be to foment ill-will between the British military and Free French civil administrations.'

His remarks about de Gaulle infuriated the foreign office. Eden's secretary noted that the speech 'left an unpleasant taste in the mouth.'⁶¹ Word of Churchill's rebukes inevitably reached the editors, and on Sunday December 13 the *Sunday Pictorial* again talked of using Darlan until he was 'squeezed like an orange,' to freshen up the cliché.⁶²

Churchill was reinforced by the knowledge that both Roosevelt and Stalin considered that Eisenhower had done the right thing in bringing Darlan into the Allied camp. Writing to the president, Stalin referred to it as a great achievement, and he described Eisenhower's policy on Darlan, Boisson, and Giraud, as 'perfectly correct.'⁶³

Churchill cabled a report on his secret speech to Roosevelt, and then to Eisenhower, writing: 'I have never seen the House so unanimous as it was to-day in Secret Session.' 'I explained the whole story to them and they understood it as well as you and I do ourselves.'⁶⁴ He used the same positive language a few days later to Lord Halifax: 'I have never seen the House so unanimous,' he again dictated, 'and I am not conscious of any political difficulties. Of course there are certain sections of the press and public who want to have the advantages of Darlan without Darlan.'⁶⁵

Three days after the speech he repeated these reassurances to Eisenhower's London representative, Colonel Stirling. At the secret session, he said, the Members of Parliament had not asked him even one Question. He was minded to make a public statement. Learning that the admiral had

written a letter to him on December 4, which Eisenhower had yet to forward, the prime minister expressed great pleasure. 'Prime minister intimated,' Stirling told Eisenhower, '[that] he would like to receive such a letter but would prefer to see it first.'⁶⁶

Eisenhower duly forwarded the Darlan letter to London on December 14.⁶⁷ It rehearsed the history of France's relations with Churchill and justified his conduct since they had last met at Briare on June 12, 1940. 'Darlan,' Churchill had besought him at that time, taking him aside, 'I hope that you will never surrender the Fleet.' 'There is no question of doing so,' the admiral had answered, as he now reminded Churchill. 'It would be contrary to our naval traditions and honour.' He had repeated those words on several occasions since then.* He admitted to harbouring a 'great bitterness' toward England because of the events of July 1940 at Mers el-Kébir. The scuttling of the French fleet at Toulon proved that his orders had been obeyed to the very end, observed Darlan. All that mattered now was to defeat the Axis, he said – 'The French people when liberated will later choose their political regime and their leaders.' Churchill ordered the letter circulated to the cabinet; whether to reply would, he said, need thought.⁶⁸

Eden perhaps listened to all of this – the secret speech, the Darlan letter – with only half an ear. He had made his own dispositions. There had been further conspiratorial transactions at Gibraltar. On December 12 Mason-Macfarlane (the British governor with the 'excellent body disposal squad') met the French generals Catroux and Béthouart on the Rock. Both insisted that Admiral Darlan and General Noguès must be disposed of. Major Beaufort, an emissary from Giraud, asked to see the governor on December 12. 'He was emphatic that Darlan must be got rid of eventually,' Mason-Macfarlane reported to Eisenhower. 'But he agreed that this was *no* time to make a *putsch* which could only have disastrous consequences.' Beaufort wanted the Allies to force Darlan to resign and to nominate an Allied puppet as his successor.⁶⁹

Eden had been trying for weeks to shoe-horn de Gaulle's men into Algiers. On November 14 he had informed his man there that de Gaulle wanted to send a mission under René Plevén to 'explain' their viewpoint; Plevén had assured him that he would not 'start an agitation,' but Eisenhower discouraged any such visit. General d'Astier, whom the S.I.S. had flown out of

* Vol. i, page ... [number follows]

France, was a different matter altogether, and on December 2 de Gaulle asked Churchill to enable this d'Astier and three experts to visit Algiers. They recruited Admiral 'Betty' Stark's assistance and he wrote to Eisenhower ('Dear Ike'), saying that d'Astier had struck him as 'a gentleman and soldier of the first caliber' – indeed, when he had argued that Eisenhower was right to accept Darlan's assistance, the French air force general had replied smoothly that 'it was a pleasure to meet someone whose ideas coincided almost exactly with his own.' Eisenhower no longer resisted, telling Eden that while Darlan 'would be glad to receive' the general, a large party would not be welcome. 'Ike' now replied to Admiral Stark, his own misgivings echoing through every word, that if General d'Astier just came alone for 'a quiet meeting' with his brother Henri and others, 'it might be all right.' Thus 'Ike' himself authorised the French hit-man's arrival in his city. Reading the messages from Mason-Macfarlane about the conspiratorial meetings in Gibraltar, Sir Algernon Rumbold minuted on one of them, on December 15, 'We shd. perhaps wait to see how Gen. d'Astier de la Vigerie gets on in Algiers. a. rumbold, 15/12.'⁷⁰

Perhaps, years later, some faceless official somewhere noted, 'We should perhaps wait to see how Mr Oswald gets on in Dallas.' That is how these things are decided; and that is the only kind of note that the historian can expect to find in official archives when foul play is afoot.

still prevented from travelling to Algiers, de Gaulle fulminated against Giraud and Darlan. The American beatification of Darlan only raised his hackles further, and the British public did not like it either. Reporting the war memorial ceremony, the *Sunday Pictorial* featured photos of the Grenadier Guards parading past Darlan with the caption, 'Pictures we are ashamed to print.' Clementine lunched at the Dorchester with Lady Bonham-Carter, whose son was in that regiment, and suggested that the tabloid press was not exactly helping, particularly that 'horrid newspaper' the *Pictorial*.⁷¹

A related matter, but one of scarcely less importance, was the future of the French fleet bottled up at Alexandria under the command of the French Admiral Godfroy. Admiral Harwood wrote telling him of Churchill's 1940 pledge that after victory was achieved he would re-establish the greatness and glory of France.⁷² But neither bluster, bluff, nor blandishment could lure this squadron over to the Allied side. The First Sea Lord admitted to Admiral Cunningham that Godfroy had the whip-hand, since he could scuttle those ships any time he chose. The cabinet, said Pound, had wanted to tell

Godfroy that if he did he would be shot.⁷³ On December 14 the prime minister sent a personal minute to Cunningham, advising that although this situation could not drag on indefinitely, there was no harm in waiting until the fighting in Tunisia was over. 'We can then proceed against the malignants in due course. We certainly ought not to go on paying them out of British funds.' Godfroy and his 'accomplices' were to be warned that they would be 'held responsible' if they scuttled their ships.⁷⁴

Reporting to Marshall on December 18 on Darlan's difficulties in finding suitable officials to replace Vichy French office-holders in North Africa, Eisenhower asserted that the admiral was doing his best.

there was another complication in all this. Since early December 1942 Roosevelt and Churchill had been preparing to meet in French North Africa. A courier was coming to London with a secret message from Roosevelt, but for two or three days his arrival was delayed by weather. Churchill phoned Eden several times, on tenterhooks. 'P.M. is getting more and more restive,' observed Harvey, Eden's loyal secretary, on December 21.

Just before Christmas Eve, Roosevelt's courier arrived in London with the letter from Roosevelt: it proposed a meeting in Africa in mid-January, and it specifically asked that their foreign advisers Eden and Hull be left at home. ('This means,' said Churchill, spelling it out to Eden, 'that Roosevelt does not want you there.')

⁷⁵ The two leaders did however plan to invite both Giraud and de Gaulle. This raised a further problem: What should they do about Admiral Darlan, as French High Commissioner? How could they avoid being photographed with him, even shaking hands with this 'Quisling'? Could they force him to resign before then?

Eden and his underlings had made their own dispositions about the tiresome admiral. Brigadier Menzies had now flown out to Algiers in person.⁷⁶ General d'Astier had also been there since the nineteenth, sent out by de Gaulle to 'advise' on ways 'to hasten unity in the war effort.'⁷⁷ De Gaulle had been, as a foreign office memorandum later put it, 'sufficiently encouraged' by Mason-Macfarlane's Gibraltar talks* to despatch d'Astier to Algiers 'on a secret mission.' As an afterthought, the same foreign office hand later crossed out the tell-tale word *secret* in the memorandum. Eisenhower afforded to General d'Astier the minimum of courtesies; to pre-empt criticisms by d'Astier that the Americans had impeded him, Eisenhower

* See page 645

reported to his superiors on December 22 that he had felt that d'Astier's personal conversations with his brother Henri might throw light on a complicated situation, but that the general had declared that his was an 'official mission.' 'Temporary difficulty, reported the supreme commander, 'was encountered in soothing his wounded feelings and in assuring local people that he did not mean to attempt a *coup d'état*.' Giraud was furious with this interloper and urged Eisenhower to send him packing: with a military crisis in Tunisia they could not afford complications in the rear. 'Because of these things,' explained Eisenhower to London and Washington, he had decided that the general would now return to London 'promptly.' He noted that d'Astier stated he had orders to appease local Gaullists so that they would not hinder present operations, but Eisenhower found this hard to reconcile with the continued propaganda blare from Gaullist radio at Brazzaville. Before returning to London, earlier than expected, the French general had given his brother written instructions to 'suspend strictly personal attacks' on the Darlan regime. In the light of events, the alibi purpose of such a document seems transparent.⁷⁸

The foreign office spread an anodyne view of d'Astier's reception in Algiers. 'He appears to have made a favourable impression,' the office informed Moscow and Washington, 'in spite of initial mistrust of his mission.'⁷⁹ Eisenhower's version was less positive. Informing his own Washington superiors of this visit from 'de Gaulle's lieutenant,' he narrated all the general's indiscretions, and emphasised how patient he, Eisenhower, had had to be with him.⁸⁰ He nevertheless signed a *laissez-passer* for General d'Astier, unaware that he had imported \$38,000 in American banknotes, earmarked for Gaullist circles in Algiers, which he transferred to his brother Henri.⁸¹

The Algerian capital smouldered with mutual suspicion. The Gaullists angrily told J.E.M. Carvell, the British consul-general, that if Darlan and his men were not removed soon, Britain's remaining supporters there would lose faith in her.⁸² On December 20 Carvell warned that the Darlan situation was deteriorating – 'Several people have hinted that it will not be very long before Gaullists will make an attempt on his life.'⁸³ Asked by the foreign office whether these supporters should be brought out to England, General de Gaulle replied that his General d'Astier would discuss this in Algiers; he preferred to wait for his report.⁸⁴

on december 16 Churchill had sent to Eisenhower a long and cheery message reassuring him that boniface – his name for the ultra intercepts –

showed that the enemy in North Africa were running into supply difficulties. Though still noticeably reluctant to impose his will on the Americans, as he had on his long-suffering British generals, Churchill lectured Eisenhower on the need to burn up the enemy's reserves 'even if we sustain equal losses.' As for the irksome Darlan matter, he had made arrangements, he said – the appointment of a British political adviser – to relieve the burden on Eisenhower's shoulders.⁸⁵

At a cabinet meeting a few days later, Churchill set out his proposals to attach to Eisenhower's staff an English counterbalance to Murphy, with the title 'His Majesty's Government's Political Representative.'⁸⁶



The attitude of Brigadier Menzies and the British security services toward Darlan was plain from the letter that one official wrote to the Intelligence attaché at the U.S. embassy in London: this protested that the American adoption of the 'Quisling' Admiral Darlan was undermining 'the morale of all patriots in occupied countries.'⁸⁷ Churchill refused to agree; on the contrary, in cabinet on December 21 he argued that they must force de Gaulle to come to terms with Darlan. Some ministers thought that his arguments took no account of de Gaulle's psychology. The Gaullists had made it clear that they would not serve under Darlan, said Eden. Churchill still demurred. 'The Prime Minister doubted,' the cabinet minutes stated,

whether General de Gaulle realised that the French administration in North Africa under Admiral Darlan might develop in such a way that it would overshadow the Fighting French movement. He thought that it was neither in the public interest nor wise on General de Gaulle's part to maintain his present aloof attitude.⁸⁸

Sooner or later, Churchill suggested, the general would have to get off his high horse.⁸⁹

As the differences deepened between Eden and No. 10 over Darlan, Churchill read a signal that Admiral Cunningham had made to Pound, warning of the dangers of 'this policy of drift.' In fact the admirals were united in support of their fellow sailor. Cunningham saw him as the only Frenchman who could hold North Africa together. 'If he goes,' he advised, 'we shall have a number of nonentities scrapping for office and shall bitterly regret

the change.' Cunningham recommended an immediate declaration that Britain was backing Darlan. Churchill read this, liked it, and ordered it circulated to the cabinet and *defence committee*; he also sent a copy to Eden on December 23, marking it: 'Foreign Secretary, please comment.'⁹⁰

This may have brought matters to a head.

In Algiers the witches' cauldron was already beginning to bubble. Meeting the foreign office representative, W.H.B. ••**firstname** Mack, on the afternoon of the twenty-third, General d'Astier demanded the restoration of 'some kind of secret communication' between de Gaulle's headquarters in London and the Gaullists in Algiers (Churchill had also ordered radio communication interrupted with the onset of **torch**). Eisenhower smelled a rat and warned d'Astier that 'he could not tolerate any underhand activity.' He explained to Mack that this was the way to win the confidence of all the French. It was essential, he continued, to pursue an honest path. Anticipating that fewer scruples might hamper the man from Perfidious Albion, d'Astier confided 'most secretly' to Mack that General Giraud was 'ready to cart' (*i.e.*, abandon) Admiral Darlan when the right time came. The Englishman doubted that any of this was true: Giraud had repeatedly said that he and Darlan were working in loyal co-operation.⁹¹ Evidently d'Astier was playing a deep, and dirty, game.

On December 23 Darlan invited Murphy and Admiral Cunningham to dinner and proposed a toast to British victory. Afterwards, he took Murphy aside, into his study, and told him that he knew of at least four plots to kill him. He pulled out a list of possible successors: surprisingly, it included de Gaulle; for de Gaulle to take over now, amplified Darlan, would be premature — perhaps he could succeed him in the spring of 1943. To Murphy it seemed a surrealistic scene, as though the admiral were discussing the fate of somebody other than himself. On the following morning, they met for the last time. Much of their talk centred on the Jewish question in Algiers — the need to relax the security measures enforced by the *ancien regime* against the Jews without inflaming the Arab majority.⁹²

by late December 1942 the British losses in **torch** totalled some 460 killed, of which two hundred were infantry, four armoured, and 77 artillery. Wounded and missing increased the British casualties to 3,273.⁹³ Eisenhower had planned to spring his final assault on Tunis on December 22–23; the Battle of Long Stop, near Medjez el Bab, began on Christmas Eve. The rain poured down, it was bitterly cold at night, casualties were appalling,

and on the twenty-sixth he called a retreat. The torrential rain ruled out any offensive in the near future. As soon as the armoured vehicles and trucks left the roads, they became bogged down. There was talk of a two-month delay. Reading of this on December 27, Churchill noted to the chiefs of staff, 'This affects all your plans and movements.'⁹⁴

Christmas Eve at Chequers had been a cheerless feast. On December 24 Eisenhower's friend, the American Major-General Everett S. Hughes, came to give Churchill a globe, a gift from General Marshall. Hughes found him dressed in his rompers, and 'pleased as a boy' about the gift, though he remarked: 'Stalin has a bigger one.' For a while he played with it, then had a photographer brought in. He now announced: 'Stalin has a bigger one – but it is artificial and apt to fall to pieces at any moment.' Hughes reflected that there was something of the urchin in this sixty-eight year old prime minister. ('That's what makes for wars,' he also mused).

Thoughts of his own mortality had occurred to Churchill that day. When Eden arrived at Chequers, Churchill emphasised what a key role Roosevelt played. Whatever might happen to him, he continued, or even to all three of them – Roosevelt, Churchill, and Eden – there were enough 'resolute men' to carry on and see the business through. In the United States, however – here, he paused and their conversation turned to the vice-president, Henry Wallace. Churchill remarked that he had been astonished to hear Wallace tell an off-colour joke. 'It was several moments before I saw it,' he explained to Eden. 'But then, I had no reason to expect it.'⁹⁵

eden had already left for home when two telegrams arrived at Chequers, just before midnight that Christmas Eve. They were from the consul-general in Algiers. The first read, 'Admiral Darlan was shot five times this afternoon. His condition is not yet known. *No* announcement has been made here.' The second stated simply, 'Darlan is dead.' A third, despatched by Intelligence sources in Algiers at 9.21 P.M., confirmed:

Darlan was fatally shot by a young Frenchman who came from France two months ago. Act took place at 16.00 hours local time inside Palais d'Été, his residence. Political sympathies and identity of the *same* [replaced by 'assailant'] not yet known. He is under arrest. Strict censorship imposed; an announcement is, however, anticipated tonight. Giraud and Allied Commander-in-Chief returning from forward area.⁹⁶

Churchill telephoned the appalling news through to Eden. The foreign secretary's cynical handwritten note betrayed only a minimal distress: 'We agreed,' he noted, 'that the event could be turned to profit, *and*.^{*} I have not felt so relieved by any event for years. I have never believed that D. was indispensable for N. Africa, but it would have been a problem to shift him. Now even the Americans must surely take Giraud.'



This episode – the brutal assassination of Darlan, shot by a heavy-calibre revolver from behind – marked a new *baisse* in Anglo-American relations. Several subsequent British consular telegrams from Tangier and Algiers concluded with the sentence, 'Please do not show this telegram to any United States official.' Other items had to be edited for American eyes.⁹⁷

At the time the fatal shots rang out, in mid-afternoon, Eisenhower was away in Tunisia, visiting the front with Giraud. Murphy telegraphed his first report to Washington barely ninety minutes after the murder, then drove over with Mark Clark to the hospital to pay their last respects to the dead head of state. The French and Americans then concealed the news from the British for several hours.⁹⁸ Just a mile or two away from the murder scene, the head of the British secret service was sitting on the sun-drenched roof of a little house with Wing Commander Fred Winterbotham, of Bletchley Park, taking coffee with two French agents who had just been flown out of France. As news of the killing came Brigadier Menzies showed no surprise.⁹⁹

Admiral Darlan had been shot in the Summer Palace, just outside his office. The French autopsy report states that he was rushed into the Maillot hospital and put on the operating table, but died at 3:55 p.m. before they could prepare him. A 7·65-millimetre bullet was extracted from his skull; it had been fired from behind at point-blank range, less than fifty centimetres.¹⁰⁰ 'Whether the assassin was of German or Italian inspiration,' the Allied propaganda station Radio Algiers announced, 'is not yet known.'¹⁰¹ In fact the assassin had been caught red-handed, reported Murphy; he was a twenty-year old student of French Algerian descent, Fernand Eugène Bonnier de la Chappelle. On his person had been found some of the dollar bills which General d'Astier had brought from London five days before.

^{*} The word '*and*' is crossed out.

writing in his diary, the American Lieutenant-General Everett S. Hughes tersely called the killing 'somebody trying to give us a Christmas present.'¹⁰² When the first news reached Washington, Stimson, Marshall, and Hull sent an immediate telegram to Darlan expressing their 'best wishes for a speedy recovery,' although they appreciated that it might well not find the admiral alive.¹⁰³ Lord Halifax pleaded with the foreign office to stop journalists from saying 'the obvious thing' about Darlan's killing, namely that it had cut the Gordian knot of political difficulties.¹⁰⁴

While the foreign office was jubilant, Chequers was less directly affected. Churchill spent a quiet, good-natured Christmas Day, as a secretary wrote. '[He] left us in peace most of the time and just sat up in bed reading a book and looking like a benevolent old cherub.'¹⁰⁵ At the F.O., Eden wrote a diary note that differed little in cynicism from the previous day's: 'Much telephoning on the consequences of D.'s murder & the action that must follow in various spheres. The consequences all uniformly good so far as I can judge. It looks as tho' Giraud will be chosen.'¹⁰⁶ From Algiers, Carvell cabled that the governor-general had asked for a successor to be named at once to prevent an Arab rising. Some spoke of Noguès, others of de Gaulle.¹⁰⁷ Eden instructed his office to inform Eisenhower's headquarters that, as seen from London, Giraud seemed to be the only possible appointment.¹⁰⁸ Mack telegraphed that the assassin was believed to have Gaullist and Royalist leanings. 'There is no evidence so far that his action was other than individual.'¹⁰⁹

General de Gaulle's reaction to the killing of his rival was ambivalent, indeed opaque. Speaking with Charles Peake, the British representative to his French National Committee, he called it a 'detestable crime' and suggested that Darlan's disgruntled followers were to blame. De Gaulle expressed a fear that the murder would 'usher in a period of assassination.' General d'Astier had just returned to London, he said; he claimed to have met Darlan, Giraud, Fenard, and Darlan's deputy General Jean-Marie-Joseph Bergeret in a private house. 'All had shown real eagerness for de Gaulle to co-operate with them,' Peake recorded, 'and had paid tribute to the influence of his Movement in Metropolitan France.' Murphy, d'Astier described with evident distaste, had thrice in one day called him to visit Darlan – he had generally behaved more like Darlan's lackey. De Gaulle now saw no obstacle to co-operating with Giraud.¹¹⁰ The foreign office were delighted at the gullible Charles Peake's account, and called the general's attitude 'highly satisfactory.' A few days later, still diverting suspicions from him-

self, General d'Astier suggested that General Bergeret, whom he called 'a first class crook,' might himself have 'murdered Darlan to further his own ends.'¹¹¹

Nazi propaganda shed no tears over Darlan. Churchill was shown a transcript of Luxembourg radio's ten a.m. broadcast: 'The death of the French traitor Admiral Darlan,' mocked the commentator, 'comes very conveniently for the English.' 'With a sharpness unusual for "Allies",' the voice recalled, 'the English and the Americans declined to recognise each other's French mercenary,' meaning de Gaulle and Darlan. The radio concluded that Churchill had now applied 'a radical solution of the Darlan problem.'¹¹²

the killing had outraged Britain's Allies, and split her own leadership. Roosevelt called it a 'murder of the first degree.' Cordell Hull branded it 'an odious and cowardly act' — words which evoked intense foreign office indignation.¹¹³ The Royal Navy was quietly troubled; they had respected Darlan as an adversary and appreciated him as an ally. Writing privately to Admiral Cunningham, the First Sea Lord observed that the murder was 'rather a tragedy' for the Allies, because Darlan had meant to play fair with them. 'I did not myself hear the B.B.C. broadcast about Darlan,' Pound added, 'but I am told that it was in the worst possible taste.'¹¹⁴ Cunningham recommended an official British condemnation of the killing. Pound brought this suggestion to Churchill's attention, but it was ignored. 'I agree,' noted Eden. 'There can be no question of any such statement, by me anyway!'¹¹⁵ That was the universal sentiment in the foreign office. When Eden's man in Tangier reported that the American service attachés had attended the requiem mass held for Darlan there, William Strang noted: 'A pity.'

Even so, it would have looked bad for the British in North Africa to abstain completely from the public mourning. Their legation in Casablanca, like the American, flew its flag at half-mast. Eisenhower obliged British troops to file past the dead admiral's bier and all the Allied commanders to attend the military funeral. The state funeral included a march-past by French, British, and American contingents, attended by Eisenhower, Giraud, and Noguès with Admiral Cunningham and their staffs.¹¹⁶

This was not an end of the perfidy. The young French gunman, Bonnier, who had been promised immunity by his paymasters, was permanently silenced by a French firing squad at seven a.m. on the twenty-seventh, less than three days after firing the fatal shots.¹¹⁷ Before meeting this unexpected end, he named two accomplices, the Abbé Louis Cordier, who had

given him a gun, and Henri d'Astier under whose roof both his brother (the general) and the Abbé had been living.¹¹⁸ French police pulled in a dozen of the usual suspects in Algiers for questioning.¹¹⁹

As for General d'Astier, the bagman in the assassination, he had returned from Algiers to London on Christmas Day, and actually came to lunch with Churchill two days later, as witnessed by the Chequers police detail's log – the only time d'Astier's name figured in the book.¹²⁰ De Gaulle had been due to fly to Washington for his first meeting with President Roosevelt; but now Churchill persuaded the American headquarters in London to delay the general's flight to Washington by forty-eight hours, and Roosevelt made quite plain that in the circumstances his invitation to de Gaulle was withdrawn. Churchill invited de Gaulle down to Chequers instead.

Eisenhower had appointed General Giraud to step into Darlan's shoes. In a long discussion that December 27, the prime minister urged de Gaulle to work with Giraud, but the curmudgeonly general refused to concede that Giraud was qualified for any political role.¹²¹ Eden was pleased however. 'Talk with Winston too about De G. and Giraud,' recorded Eden this day. 'This seems to be going well.'¹²² Curiously, he did not mention d'Astier's presence in his diary note. Churchill, who had no reason for such inhibitions, cabled the next day to President Roosevelt:

I had some long talks yesterday with General de Gaulle and d'Astier, the latter just returned from Algiers. De Gaulle holds it of first importance to create a strong, united, National French authority. He is anxious to meet Giraud, in whom he sees the Commander who will lead the French troops to the liberation of France after North Africa has been cleared. He considers that Giraud is more suited for military than for political functions. He is quite ready to work with Noguès but apparently less so with Boisson, though I cannot think he would be obstinate about it.¹²³

The prime minister hoped to bring de Gaulle and Giraud together, and a message went this same day from 'de Gaulle' at Chequers to Giraud, bearing more than a hint of Churchill's hand in the drafting, with stirring references to the 'mind and soul' of Frenchmen, and to 'the liberation and the salvation' of France. The telegram described Darlan's assassination as 'an indication and a warning.' 'I propose, my General, that you should meet me as soon as possible on French soil,' the message read, and suggested

either Algeria or Chad. It went to the U.S. embassy and Roosevelt, and then via Marshall and Eisenhower to Giraud.¹²⁴ De Gaulle's reluctance to meet Giraud when the time came two weeks later may be seen as proof that he had very little to do with the authorship of this message, which went via American embassy channels to Giraud in Algiers. 'I strongly favour,' the P.M. explained to President Roosevelt the next day, 'a meeting between de Gaulle and Giraud as soon as possible, before rivalries crystallise.'¹²⁵

the rumours linking the British secret service or more particularly the S.O.E. with Darlan's assassination hardened.¹²⁶ The Free French made no secret that the hitman was one of theirs.¹²⁷ The French military in Algiers shortly obtained evidence that the British secret service was operating an assassination ring there; on December 29 they told the Americans that the British had put Generals Giraud and Bergeret and even Robert Murphy on their hit-list. British Intelligence had only recently warned Churchill that the Irish-American Murphy was an anti-British firebrand.¹²⁸ Admiral Cunningham was deeply shocked to hear of the plot, and urged Eisenhower to protest to his superiors. Eisenhower did so, by cable to Washington:

The French authorities report they have definite evidence of existence here of assassination ring for eliminations of kingpin [Giraud] and others in Government and including Murphy. Unfortunately some French officials seem suspicious that some portion of the British S.I. [secret intelligence] has in some way been involved in this type of activity. In spite of our emphatic denials they apparently think that such a move is plotted in order to set up de Gaulle here as the highest French authority.¹²⁹

The alleged British assassination plot rattled the Americans to the core. Eisenhower complained to the British chiefs of staff, and asked them bluntly to call off the dogs.¹³⁰ Admiral Cunningham also reported to London that the French in Algiers had uncovered an assassination ring: 'They have been led to believe the British Secret Service is behind it.' Moreover Eisenhower had reported these facts to Marshall. 'The story has obviously a German ring about it,' conceded Cunningham, covering his own rear, but the French were taking it seriously and had provided protection for the three men.¹³¹

* The next page of Eden's file is sealed until later this twenty-first century.

Churchill's defence committee that night discussed the 'disquieting' although 'probably mendacious' reports about the S.O.E., 'including the allegation that the British were responsible for the assassination of Darlan.' Across Cunningham's signal Cadogan minuted for Eden: 'A.E. This is disgusting nonsense, and Cunningham should receive very firm reply. Will you concert with 1st Sea Lord? P.M. was indignant at Dfce Cttee. . .'¹³²*

At the defence committee Churchill had asked the foreign secretary, of all people, to conduct 'a further enquiry.'¹³³ It must have been a cursory investigation, because the next day the foreign office drafted for Admiral Pound a personal reply to send to Cunningham, authorising him to deny this charge.¹³⁴ The telegram took the line that

whatever French may have discovered it cannot incriminate any branch of British Secret Service, who do not indulge in such activities, and you may of course give General Eisenhower formal assurance to this effect.'¹³⁵

the dollars had come from Britain, and the murder weapon too – supplied by the S.O.E. specifically for this hit.¹³⁶ General d'Astier could not have made his flights from London to Algiers and back without British foreign office sanction. One may wonder too how he would have legally obtained thirty-eight thousand dollars in wartime London except through official channels. When Wing Commander Hulbert mp put down a Question in the House, asking whether the government would make a statement on the assassination, the foreign office went into several pages of internal contortions about the right answer to make, before Cadogan finally instructed Richard Law to reply, 'No Sir, there is nothing I can usefully say on this subject.'¹³⁷

When Giraud, now High Commissioner, refused to release the arrested plotters, convinced of the evidence against them, a foreign office civil servant wrote the cryptic note, 'We have enough data to judge how real the plot was.' 'At the same time, the note added, 'S.O.E.'s infn. [information] does not bear out the statement in Gen. Eisenhower's Tel. that only [a] few of our friends are involved, for they have received the names of a number of prominent sympathisers said to have been arrested.'¹³⁸

Whatever dirty fingers had manipulated the trigger, Darlan was dead. 'Let him rest in peace,' Churchill would write at the end of a noble epitaph to the fallen admiral, 'and let us all be thankful that we have never had to face the trials under which he broke.'¹³⁹

29: *All the Usual Suspects*

During 1942 Britain had suffered a series of reverses; her empire was in decline; she had lost Singapore and Burma, but better times were coming, and people knew it. While its Members had no cause to fear a general election during the war, Churchill had Parliament eating out of his hand again. As the New Year, 1943, opened, his popularity as prime minister stood at ninety-three percent, two points up on even the improbably high November 1942 rating.¹ The Gallup Poll was now producing results which even Hitler and Goebbels, with their very different methods, would have found an embarrassment. Later in January 1943, Ambassador Winant remarked to Lord Halifax that Churchill struck him as being more self-possessed and contented than for a long time.²

The dramatic initial success of **torch** seemed to demand a revision of their strategy for 1943.³ Roosevelt was concerned at the slow progress which their chiefs of staff, meeting separately, were making. 'Always,' he recalled a few weeks later, 'there was the personal equation. Churchill and I were the only ones who could get together and settle things.'⁴

This was how the Casablanca summit meeting came about. In a telegram on December 2 Roosevelt expressed to him the optimistic view that by the time such a conference could be held, which would be in the middle of January, Rommel's army might have been 'liquidated' – expelled from North Africa altogether. Roosevelt would have preferred a location south of Algiers or near Khartoum; as he explained, 'I don't like mosquitoes.' He thought that the conference should be held in secret, and he suggested that General Marshall and the other participants should not visit England first, in case Stalin gained the impression that the Allies were ganging up on him.⁵

Churchill had even begun toying with the idea of a Big Three meeting, at which he, Roosevelt, *and* Stalin would deliberate upon the future of the

world. He had been talking of such a tripartite conference ever since August: he had hinted at it to Stalin, proposing Iceland as a location.

Jealous of the limelight that would accrue to Churchill, Anthony Eden did what he could to discourage such a Big Three meeting. He criticised the autocratic tendencies which such summits gratified and engendered. 'We haven't a dictatorship here,' he grumbled to his staff, 'whatever the P.M. may imagine.'⁶ The papers of the time show that he himself was occupied at length with finding some way of getting Churchill to send him to Washington on a mission which would bolster his own prestige.⁷

Preparing for the new conference, on December 3 Churchill had confronted his chiefs of staff with his ambitions for 1943. 'After urging attacks on Sardinia and Sicily,' a weary General Sir Alan Brooke summarised, 'he is now swinging away from there for a possible invasion of France in 1943.' He met the chiefs again that evening and delivered a harangue on the need to engage the German Army all the time. 'You must not think,' he rebuked Brooke, 'that in 1943 you can get off with your "Sardines",' – as he called the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. 'No – we must establish a Western Front, and what is more, we promised Stalin we should do so, when in Moscow.'

'No,' Brooke retorted, 'we did not promise.' As Churchill paused and glared, the C.I.G.S. reminded him how limited their forces still were.

roosevelt's gaze had already leapt ahead beyond 1943 to the post-war world. By word of mouth, Oliver Lyttelton had brought to Churchill details of the president's visions. They were so sensitive that the president had refused to commit them to paper. Neither France nor Poland would be permitted to rebuild the armies which Hitler had defeated in 1939 and 1940; they would be invited to contribute to an international police force. Any German peace offer must be rejected, Roosevelt had said, as the Allies must be 'satisfied with nothing but complete surrender.' The Allied armies would then march into a defeated Germany and, over the following months, destroy every weapon, gun, and aeroplane, and all machine tools capable of manufacturing such things. The international force would police this arrangement. If Germany resumed such manufacture, he would after due warning 'bomb a selected town.' Roosevelt, said Lyttelton, had also spoken of the possibility of meeting with Churchill and Stalin, perhaps at Dakar, if the enemy looked like collapsing suddenly.⁸

The idea of Stalin's participation came to nothing. On December 4 Churchill formally invited him to join a three-power meeting somewhere

in North Africa.⁹ Maisky brought Stalin's response round to No. 10 three days later. Peering over his half-rimmed glasses, Churchill asked: 'Am I going to like this?' 'You will at least like the fact that it is well-founded,' responded the Soviet ambassador, which indicated that the invitation had been declined.¹⁰ Stalin explained that he was unable to leave the Soviet Union at this crucial time. 'At Stalingrad,' he reminded the prime minister, 'we have encircled a large group of German troops and hope to complete their destruction.'¹¹

'I fully understand the gravity of Stalin's reasons,' the prime minister said to Maisky. 'But it is all the same a shame that we shall not be meeting.' From having opposed the Second Front in 1942, he now assured the Soviet ambassador, he had become latterly a fervent supporter; but he had his doubts about the Americans. During the London talks in April, Hopkins and Marshall had insisted on opening up that Second Front in September and promised to transfer sufficient forces for this purpose. During July, when Stimson came over, they had however admitted that by September 1942 they would still not have enough troops over; now even 1943 was beginning to look unlikely. He asked Maisky how many American divisions he thought there were in Britain. Maisky shrugged, he did not know. Pressed by Churchill, Maisky shrugged again and volunteered, perhaps four. Churchill laughed out loud and said, 'No. Just one. The rest have gone to Africa.'

Churchill asked Maisky to say nothing to Moscow yet, as he intended to write to Stalin later about it. Maisky 'laughed this off.' He reported to Stalin that he suspected that the British and Americans were just flirting with the Second Front idea; what they really wanted was to have an easy war.¹²

it is true, as Churchill explained to Eden on this occasion, that Roosevelt was unable, or unwilling, to voyage further than the North African coast. He was also averse to meeting Churchill in England, explaining to him quite frankly on December 11: 'England must be out for me, for political reasons.' The president also had private reasons which he did not spell out for not wanting such a meeting in his own capital. He told his staff that he had had a bellyful of Churchill's showboating visits.* 'He wanted no more of Churchill in Washington,' Hopkins recorded.¹⁴ Besides, he wanted to see the American troops now going into action. Africa was the obvious choice.

* Ten years later, during his post-war premiership, Churchill generated the same inhospitable sentiments in President Eisenhower, as the latter's telephone conversations with John Foster Dulles reveal (Dwight D Eisenhower Library).¹³

Given Stalin's absence, it was agreed, there would be no need for them to bring either Hull or Eden along.¹⁵ As for the location, the president suggested to Major-General Walter Bedell Smith that he check out a few tourist oases. The president reassured Churchill, aware of his reputation: 'One of the dictionaries says, "An oasis is never wholly dry." Good old dictionary.'

The word 'oasis' soldiered around the corridors of Whitehall documents for some time. Brooke noted on December 23 'discussions as to where this oasis is to be found.'¹⁶ Brigadier Ian Jacob was sent out after Christmas to reconnoitre Casablanca, on the Atlantic coast, and he selected the Anfa Hotel, in an affluent coastal suburb. The building provided wide verandas with inspiring views either over the Atlantic or overland to the white-painted buildings of the city. The sunlit sea, recorded Jacob, was a dazzling blue, and the red soil was dotted with palm trees, bougainvillea, and begonia.¹⁷



The news from Tunisia contrived to depress spirits throughout the remaining weeks of 1942. The rains poured down. As Christmas approached, the British, French, and American forces, undertrained and ill co-ordinated, were still struggling to advance into the Tunisian highlands. The British chiefs of staff sent a cable to the Combined Chiefs in Washington expressing their deep concern at this 'state of affairs.' General Eisenhower, they observed, was now estimating that if Rommel could withdraw his army relatively intact from Tripolitania into Tunisia, the Axis could concentrate twelve to fourteen divisions there by March 1. Disillusioned, Churchill began to suspect Eisenhower of incompetence. His fury ran surprisingly deep. When the American general asked for a signed photograph, the prime minister refused to provide one. Drawing the sting from this rebuff, General Ismay replied that Churchill was not happy to provide such a photo unless the American commander were to ask for it specifically privately. 'I fear you must all be going through a very trying time at the moment,' Ismay added. 'This wretched rain seems to have upset our apple-cart properly.'¹⁸

On December 28, at Churchill's first cabinet meeting after Christmas, he was oppressed by both the still-unsolved murder of Darlan and the worsening news from Tunisia. He presided over the defence committee later that day to review their strategy for the coming year. The alternative facing them was either to hold fast in North Africa and concentrate all effort on launching bolero (the cross-Channel invasion of France); or vice versa.

The British chiefs of staff were seriously worried about the American command in North Africa. Meeting after dinner on December 28 the defence committee conducted its first review of the strategic situation. There was little praise for General Eisenhower. 'We joined in deploring the Tunisian position,' wrote Eden afterwards, 'the lack of depth in our defences, the failure to reinforce or build up behind [General Sir Kenneth] Anderson, & Eisenhower's new plan to divert to attack in [the] south forces which should surely be made available to Anderson for defence or an earlier offensive.' Eden concluded that these Americans were 'very green.'¹⁹

The defence committee met again at ten-thirty p.m. on the twenty-ninth, and Churchill read out the message which his chiefs of staff had sent to Washington asking the Combined Chiefs to give Eisenhower 'appropriate instructions.' Churchill said that in his view the strengths of the German divisions given by Eisenhower's latest review were 'most misleading.'²⁰ He fretted that if the general were more of a soldier and less of a politician this stalemate in North Africa would never have arisen. He feared another Dunkirk – that General Walter Nehring's Afrika Korps might attack along the coastal flank, just as his own generals Alexander and Montgomery had at Alamein, with the same disastrous consequences to General Anderson's British First Army to the south as had befallen Rommel's Italians.²¹

The goodwill that Churchill had felt toward Eisenhower until torch had all but expired. The American expressed displeasure that the British had failed to live up to promises which they had authorised him to make to the French generals. On the first day of 1943 Churchill replied, denying that he had let Eisenhower down in this respect. Revealing the underlying cause of his disquiet, he added: 'I am deeply concerned about the unfavourable turn in Tunisia, and our Staffs take an even more serious view.' Eisenhower's political concern was however very real – that an impression was gaining currency among the French that the Allies were indifferent toward their solemn engagements.²² On January 5, Churchill approved a new telegram to the Joint Staff Mission in Washington criticising Eisenhower's strategy; but he ordered these criticisms withheld from the general himself pending the coming summit meeting at Casablanca.²³ His bitterness toward Eisenhower now was but a pale foreshadow of the rage that would seize him against the same general at the end of June 1944.

on december 30, 1942 the French authorities in Algiers had arrested a dozen prominent suspects in the assassination of Admiral Darlan. Among

them were the Abbé Cordier; Henri d'Astier; and the city's chief of police, André Achiary. 'Reason given is, I understand,' W.H.B. Mack cabled to the foreign office, '[the] discovery of evidence that [a] murder plot has been hatched against not only Darlan but Giraud, Bergeret, and others, including at one stage Murphy.' Giraud, he said, accepted this 'story.' Mack advised the British government in a telegram to say nothing about it in public.²⁴ British Intelligence checked their files, and claimed to have found virtually nothing about the twelve. Churchill kept his own counsel. 'A bag of snakes,' he scrawled on Mack's telegram, and drew a ring round the phrase.²⁵ When Robert Murphy called on Giraud and Bergeret to discuss the arrests, Giraud pointed out that he had fifty thousand French troops fighting for the Allies in Tunisia. 'My life has been threatened,' he complained, 'as well as Murphy's. I cannot condone murder nor can I permit irresponsible persons in Algiers the liberty of conspiring to commit murder.'²⁶

On the last day of 1942 the well-informed British consul-general in Algiers sent an oddly worded message to the foreign office, demanding the release of the police chief and his associates, failing which irreparable damage would be done to the Allies' name, particularly in France. 'Does not a thief's code of honour,' he asked, 'include loyalty to friends?'²⁷

The Americans' loyalties were placed elsewhere. Eisenhower insisted on a public trial; the French warned that this would open a can of worms. Secretly stating their preliminary findings to Eisenhower's liaison chief, General Bergeret revealed that the police chief had confessed to having witnessed General d'Astier and the Abbé Cordier plotting the murder: he had seen the general arrive from London and hand over \$38,000 to his brother Henri. Of the hit-money only ten thousand francs (about twenty dollars) had been given to the young French assassin, together with the two pistols – the youth had confirmed all this in written testimony before facing the firing squad. The British plan, said Bergeret, had been to liquidate not only Darlan but also Giraud, Bergeret himself, and even the troublesome Robert Murphy, to clear the way for de Gaulle. 'This fact,' stated Bergeret, 'is brought out by a signed statement of the boy who did the killing and which was found in the possession of a police officer, who had kept it in anticipation of using it for the purposes of blackmail against d'Astier at some later date.' The Abbé had obtained the floor-plans of the Summer Palace, and an ancient pistol. In the event, a better weapon was relied on, a Ruby 7.65 mm pistol. The French, added Bergeret, were going to put the twelve on trial within a week.²⁸ As for de Gaulle's henchman

General d'Astier himself, he was beyond their reach, having flown back to London.

It was, as Churchill had observed, a bag of snakes. Probably suspecting the truth, Harold Macmillan, whom he had foisted onto Eisenhower's headquarters as his political representative, was horrified at the energy with which the Algiers French were pursuing their murder investigation. On January 8 he warned the foreign office that General Giraud seemed convinced that there was a plot (here Macmillan deleted the words, 'organised by people of some importance in and about government circles') to murder the general himself and Robert Murphy. Learning on the tenth of the arrest of Henri d'Astier, the general's brother, Macmillan warned Churchill that, given the prominence of the d'Astier family in Gaullist circles, General de Gaulle was bound to take it very badly. Macmillan suggested that they advise him that the Allies could not interfere with the course of justice. On the eleventh, a member of Macmillan's staff suggested that the arrest of Henri had all the elements of becoming a 'Dreyfus case,' and rather significantly urged that the name of his brother General d'Astier 'should be not in any way' be publicly linked with the assassination, in the courtroom, the press, or elsewhere. The British government should apply pressure to General Giraud to ensure that the prosecuting attorney complied, 'if and when the trial takes place.' Macmillan admitted that on the surface there did appear however to be a justifiable case for the arrest of Henri.²⁹

The wider ramifications were so disturbing that General Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff, pleaded with the French military authorities in Algiers to hold off any trial until after the coming meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt.³⁰ Predictably, Eden reassured his officials that all of this was just a foul plot to blacken the name of de Gaulle. Even Sir Alexander Cadogan would not buy that. 'Go easy,' he advised himself in his diary. 'I won't guarantee that De Gaullists aren't in the plot, and if [the] Americans can show, or think, that we're trying to shield potential murderers the Washington-London situation will become much more acute.'³¹



At the Casablanca meeting, symbol, the Americans hoped to push through their strategic concept, the cross-Channel invasion, against the British preference, attacking the soft under-belly of the Axis, in the Mediterranean. The Americans wanted all forces regrouped, as soon as North

Africa was securely in their hands, for a frontal assault during 1943 on France's Brest or Cherbourg peninsulas. Henry Stimson's view was that even if such an invasion failed, the losses inflicted on the Germans would cripple them throughout 1944. 'The British are afraid of this,' he dictated privately, referring to the invasion – this was why they wanted to proceed from Tunisia to Sicily, and to force Germany to defend Italy. To him this seemed too costly, given the proximity of German air power, and too indirect. Marshall felt the same.³²

The fighting in Tunisia had bogged down. Increasingly perplexed by Eisenhower's generalship, the British chiefs of staff signalled to Field Marshal Sir John Dill, their representative in Washington, on December 29 the comment that the American general had now spread the British First Army (or rather one corps of it) along a front of sixty miles. 'Hitherto we have had the initiative and superior numbers,' this anxious telegram read. 'The former is now passing to the enemy, and during January his reinforcing power may well be greater than ours.' The Germans might launch an offensive; they might drive the Allies back into Algeria, and even defeat them.³³ Beset by the same fears, Churchill began agitating for Eisenhower to relinquish his command of the Tunisian front – but he feared offending the sensitive supreme commander. He discussed this dilemma with Ismay. 'On the one hand we say, "Do keep clear of politics,"' he mused, 'and on the other "Do keep away from the front."' He wondered what the Combined Chiefs of Staff would make of these British remonstrances. 'It is odd that we have not heard from them yet,' he told Ismay on the second day of 1943.³⁴

On January 5, as the chiefs of staff proposed sending yet another protest to Washington, the prime minister asked whether they realised how hurtful these strongly worded messages might be when taken together; they constituted, he said, 'a criticism of the C.-in-C.'s tactical proposals amounting to a want of confidence in his generalship.'

Their only hope was the nature of the terrain on the northern flank, and the Germans' lack of transport in Tunisia, which would prevent General Nehring from mounting the kind of large-scale, deep ranging thrust for which Rommel was famous. Anyhow I am not at all convinced that the proposed operations in the South will not be helpful. Notice in *boniface* Rommel's anxiety on this score.

He wondered how the American chiefs of staff would respond to this severe criticism. 'I rather wish we had some knowledge of how they have taken it,' he concluded, writing to Ismay, 'before we fired this new broadside. . . Indeed I am disturbed at the American silence.'³⁵

There were also political strains on the alliance. Eisenhower had not been pleased with Macmillan's unannounced arrival at his headquarters. When the scion of the publishing family sent his first dispatch to London on January 9 he proposed that a political council should advise Eisenhower. He had found General Mark Clark 'very friendly,' he said, and blessed with a stronger character and with a 'quicker, more intelligent brain' than Eisenhower. Everybody was glad that Britain's Cunningham was remaining there, and that Mark Clark would be taking over the U.S. Fifth Army.³⁶ (Others however would voice a divergent view, finding an anti-British bias in this wilful and ambitious general, and that Eisenhower was 'far too easily swayed and diverted' by Mark Clark to be a great commander-in-chief.³⁷)

delayed for several days by bad weather, Churchill was impatient to fly out to Casablanca for the meeting with President Roosevelt. He even debated going out on a cruiser; Admiral Sir Dudley Pound opposed this because of the threat from U-boats.³⁸ It was 1:30 a.m. on January 13 before the prime minister's *Liberator* finally took off for North Africa. He took his doctor Sir Charles Wilson (now Lord Moran), Harriman, 'Tommy' Thompson, and the valet Sawyers with him. They landed on a steel-mesh military landing strip at Medouina, near Casablanca, just before half-past ten a.m.³⁹

The Americans knew that Churchill's generals were better organised for such summit conferences as these, and they feared being outsmarted. The British had the advantage of knowing exactly what they wanted – to clear the Axis out of North Africa, to re-open the Mediterranean route to the Far East, and to stage an early invasion of Sicily – and they pursued these goals with single-minded determination.⁴⁰ The Americans, it might be added, were clear only as to what they did *not* want – they were reluctant to proceed any further into the Mediterranean, which they regarded as a murky cul-de-sac which Hitler might at any moment seal off at the neck, the Straits of Gibraltar. Admiral King was interested only in the Pacific, General Arnold only in the air war against Germany. General Marshall worried that the Mediterranean would become a strategic sinkhole which would devour the precious Allied resources collected for the cross-Channel attack; like King, he wanted the Allies to shift their emphasis to Japan.

under general George S. Patton Jr., the American army had taken over the Anfa hotel to house the conference. They had also seized eighteen surrounding villas to accommodate the main notables, and cordoned the area with barbed wire. Patton had requisitioned for himself a small but gaudy marble palace owned formerly, as Brooke's diary observed, by 'a Jew newspaper owner,' and thereafter by the German armistice commission.

Within this armoured perimeter everything was free, provided by the Americans – a cornucopia of wine, liquor, food, cigars, and other wartime unobtainables like candies, soap, and razor blades. It was a veritable oasis in this uncivilised wasteland of war. Walking on the beach, the conference officers could watch the Atlantic rollers roaring in or, like Brooke and his Director of Military Operations Kennedy, go bird-watching ('I think,' recorded Brooke one day, with the enthusiasm of a youthful trainspotter, '[we] located a pair of spur-winged plover.')

⁴¹ Once, the prime minister persuaded a group of American bluejackets with a guitar to play a sea shanty to him on the beach. They gathered around his limousine as he climbed back in, and serenaded him with *You Are My Sunshine*.⁴² It was, wrote one of his staff, Paradise enow.⁴³ Winston plainly concurred. 'Conditions most agreeable,' he wired to the cabinet. 'I wish I could say the same of the problems. I think at least a fortnight will be required.'⁴⁴

Clementine had just cabled to him, 'My Darling, The Annexe & No. 10 are dead & empty without you – Smoky [the Annexe cat] wanders about disconsolate.' She assured him however, 'Everything is quiet – so far at this end "the secret" is water-tight.' Secrecy was a prime concern. President Roosevelt would become – even on Churchill's own appointment card – 'Quixote,' 'Don Q,' or 'Admiral Q.' The code-breakers intercepted a message from the Turkish ambassador in Washington informing Ankara that the two leaders were conferring abroad.⁴⁵ The Nazi *Abwehr* learnt that the location was 'Casablanca,' but the linguist in Admiral Canaris told him this was the White House. The Dominion prime ministers were equally in the dark. Churchill had as usual done nothing to inform them.⁴⁶ From Canberra, Curtin sent a message to Washington for Churchill; Lord Halifax could only tell the Australian Sir Owen Dixon that Winston wasn't there.

No, Churchill was at Casablanca, in Morocco, comfortably ensconced in Villa No. 3, the Villa Mirador, guarded by Royal Marines, and known officially as 'Air Commodore Frankland.' With an eye for their Cervantes, or possibly on Winston's waistline, the Americans dubbed him Sancho Panza.

General Patton called him 'B-1' in his diary, without offering a key, which was perhaps just as well.⁴⁷ The president lived in Villa No. 2, a modern California-style bungalow, surrounded by a posse of G-men with guns.

'Churchill,' described Hopkins in a hand-written diary, 'has a house about fifty yards away' –

I went over to bring him back for a drink [with Roosevelt] before dinner. He was in fine form but looks older. We walked back and the three of us had a long talk over the military situation. The British Eighth Army is attacking tonight. The two staffs are in the big hotel across the street and just before dinner I found them all having a cocktail. The president invited the British and American chiefs to dine with him and Churchill and Averell. Much good talk of war – and families – and the French. I went to bed at 12 but I understand that the Pres. and Churchill sat up till 2.⁴⁸

Macmillan wrote in a letter of Winston's 'curious routine' of spending much of the day in bed, and all night up, which made it 'trying' for his staff. 'He ate and drank enormously all the time, settled huge problems, played bagatelle and b  zique by the hour, and generally enjoyed himself.'⁴⁹

to brooke's enjoyment, the American Admiral King became increasingly sozzled as this dinner wore on, and began arguing with Roosevelt and Churchill (over how best to use the French to control North Africa). The prime minister affected not to notice the 'condition' that King was in, wrote Brooke.⁵⁰ After a week he recorded impressions of Roosevelt's advisers that were so unfavourable that they were edited out of the published version, though he certainly aired them to Churchill at the time. 'Marshall,' wrote the C.I.G.S., 'has got practically no strategic vision, his thoughts revolve round the creation of forces and not on their employment. He arrived here without a single real strategic concept, he has initiated nothing in the policy for the future conduct of the war. His part has been that of somewhat clumsy criticism of the plans we put forward.' Admiral King rated little better in Brooke's esteem – he was 'a shrewd and somewhat swollen headed individual,' who lacked a truly global viewpoint. 'His vision,' recorded Brooke, 'is mainly limited to the Pacific, and any operation calculated to distract from the force available in the Pacific does not meet with his approval.'⁵¹

There was one other participant. Churchill had insisted that his son Randolph join torch, and Ismay had sent him out as Intelligence officer to

the Commando force. There was little or nothing for him to do, and Mountbatten had willingly packed him off to Casablanca to join his father; here he became attached to the British party, as Brigadier Jacob acidly commented, 'as a kind of fungus, his only function being to annoy everyone, constantly interrupt business, be present when the P.M. was talking on important subjects with Hopkins, Harriman, etc., and to play *béziq*ue when the P.M. should have been working or resting.' Jacob, having seen a fair amount of Randolph, decided that he had most of Winston's weaknesses without any of his compensating virtues: he was pugnacious, energetic, brazen, and intelligent, but had an impish tendency to disagree for the sake of disagreeing. Hitting the point that Clementine had feared, Jacob added: 'He seems incapable of settling down to do an honest job of work.' Winston's fondness for Randolph was evident, but they embarrassed others by their squabbling.⁵²

Macmillan would liken the Casablanca conference to a mixture of cruise and summer school, but this negative perception did the participants an injustice.⁵³ With thirty meetings packed into ten days, invigorated by a tropical backdrop that seemed so very remote from wartime London, they all worked very hard.⁵⁴ 'The dawns and sunsets were a joy to behold, and the oranges lovely to see as well as to eat,' wrote Ismay at this time. The climate, the sunshine, the beaches, the food – all these things fostered a new spirit of Anglo-American co-operation. 'It was very satisfying to argue vehemently and frankly round the council table all the morning, then to lunch together in intimate parties at small tables: so different from those ghastly official meals that are usually associated with Allied gatherings.'⁵⁵

One of their principal tasks was preparing for the next stage, the invasion of Sicily – an operation now code-named *husky*. Churchill and the Americans preferred this Italian island to Sardinia, while Mountbatten and other British experts felt that there were reasons why Sardinia could be invaded three months earlier. 'I refuse to be fobbed off with a sardine,' Churchill, never one to fear flogging an exhausted pun, had again told his staff. He wanted *husky* brought forward; he was afraid that if, as still seemed possible, they could clear Tunisia of the Axis armies during March there might follow three or four months during which the Allies were not in contact with the Germans on any front (except in the bombing war).

The British got their way at Casablanca. Churchill's men had come formidably well prepared.⁵⁶ Addressing them on January 13, he had coached them to be patient with the Americans. They were not noticeably to force the pace, but they were to make progress, he said, like 'the dripping of

water on a stone.' The essential thing was to bring forward *husky* as much as possible; not only that, but that there should also be some kind of cross-Channel assault that year, and *anakim*, Wavell's reconquest of Burma, in the autumn of 1943 as well.⁵⁷ Southern Europe, the 'soft under-belly of the Axis,' must come first. 'This,' he urged in a memorandum sent over to the Americans on the fourteenth, 'surely remains our obvious immediate objective.' Hitler's unexpected occupation of Tunisia might of course delay them. 'We know,' said Churchill, drawing without attribution on his secret sources, 'that Rommel is withdrawing into Tunis with the intention of standing on the Mareth position near the frontier.' Churchill hoped nonetheless to clear the enemy out of Tunisia before the end of March.⁵⁸

What then? Told that the earliest date for *husky* was the end of August – a delay on which Hitler was in fact banking – the prime minister stipulated early July for the operation instead. Applying this kind of pressure was what he was very good at, but he also told his chiefs of staff of his ambition to launch a cross-Channel operation in 1943, which seemed unrealistic.⁵⁹

they all dined together on January 14 – the two war leaders and their staffs. 'Everyone,' wrote General Arnold that night, 'tried to keep [the] President and prime minister from making plans to get too near front. Both seemed determined. [They] could see no real danger.' He quoted Churchill as exhorting the Combined Chiefs, 'This is the most important meeting so far. We must not relinquish [the] initiative now that we have it. You men are the ones who have the facts and who will make plans for the future.'⁶⁰

Churchill sent a typewritten report to Clementine, assuring her that they were protected by a ring of anti-aircraft guns. 'I have a very nice villa,' he told her, 'except for getting hot water, but this difficulty has now been overcome.' *don quixote* had arrived the previous evening. 'I played a good deal of bezique with Averell [Harriman] who pretended to be entirely ignorant but has inflicted a number of defeats upon me.' He was currently waiting for news of battle – he had 'every reason' to believe that the Eighth Army attacked last night. As for the conference, 'It is wise [to] let everything develop quietly . . . and to allow opposite or divergent points of view melt themselves down. This can only be done by time and patience, but so far it seems a great change to me from my daily grind of papers and decisions.'

The conference opened in full session on the following afternoon, the fifteenth.⁶¹ The two Allied commanders, Eisenhower and Alexander, set out their plans; speaking with Roosevelt, Eisenhower even hazarded his

own guess at the date when the Axis forces in Tunisia would finally collapse: 'May 15,' he said (he later described it as his most miraculous guess of the war).⁶² Both Roosevelt and Churchill assured Eisenhower that they were loyally adhering to the strategy of an eventual cross-Channel invasion. 'General,' Churchill told Eisenhower, 'I have heard here that we British are planning to scuttle round-up. This is not so. I have given my word and I shall keep it. But we now have a glorious opportunity before us,' he added, referring to Sicily. 'We must not fail to seize it. When the time comes you will find the British ready to do their part in the other operation.'⁶³

For the next two days most of the progress was made in staff conferences and over the dinner table. The American Joint Planners, Brooke found on the seventeenth, would not agree that Germany was the primary enemy, and wanted to tackle Japan first.⁶⁴ They would retain their crudely anti-British stance throughout the war. In an attempt to resolve these differences, at five-thirty p.m. on the eighteenth Roosevelt called a second full session of the Combined Chiefs, with Churchill also present. To quell American fears, articulated during earlier sessions of this body, that Britain might pull out after the overthrow of Hitler, Churchill now solemnly committed the British empire to defeating Japan after Hitler had been defeated, asserting that Britain's 'honour is engaged.' At this session he again betrayed his obsession with bringing Turkey into the war.⁶⁵ He agreed privately with Roosevelt that Britain should 'play the hand' in Turkey, while the United States should continue to take the lead in China and French North Africa.⁶⁶

by january 19 it would be plain to those left in Washington that Churchill was once again forcing the Americans' hand.⁶⁷ Two days later there was talk that Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs had capitulated all down the line to the British.⁶⁸ General Stanley Embick, the anti-British head of the war department's Board on Future Strategy, was particularly upset by these decisions.⁶⁹

Idyllic though it was here at Casablanca, Churchill felt out of touch. He bullied London to flesh out the daily war reports with interesting titbits; he asked 'C' to ensure a regular flow of *ultra* intercepts and on the eighteenth he was already demanding to know why he was not being supplied with five times as many. Naval Intelligence began putting together for him an evening telegram based on the intercepts of each day. Bletchley Park was now deciphering thirty-nine thousand *enigma* messages each month; the monthly tally would rise to ninety thousand by the year's end.⁷⁰ Even so Churchill felt starved of news. He received no account of the big R.A.F.

raid on Berlin of January 16–17, 1943 until about six p.m. on the seventeenth. The news of a second raid on Hitler's capital on the following night then came out to Casablanca in a rush of telegrams from Sinclair ('who always does his best,' wrote Jacob in a tart diary comment, 'to suck up').⁷¹ Concerned for Clementine's safety, should Hitler command reprisals, Winston dictated this message for No. 10: 'Personal and private. air commodore frankland wishes you to ensure that mrs frankland and the servants go down to the shelter in event of air raids warning.'

stalin by contrast had good news to report. On January 15 he announced that the Red Army was finishing the liquidation of the German troops at Stalingrad.⁷² Anxious not to be outdone, Churchill cabled to Stalin on the seventeenth about the great air raid on Berlin the night before: 'We dropped 142 tons of high explosives and 218 tons of incendiaries on Berlin last night,' he boasted, and he instructed Eden to send a further telegram reporting the second night's Berlin raid – if it had been on an 'appreciable scale.'⁷³

The Casablanca conference continued. Statesmen and staffs, they were still all eyeing each other like girls at their first high-school prom. Diaries crackled with caustic comments and feline sniping. Lord Leathers said that friendly and buoyant though Roosevelt was, he had nothing like Winston's grip on the problems facing them. Hopkins inspired more jealous than idle chatter; the British suspected that he exercised a hidden, baleful influence on American affairs.⁷⁴ Patton, a shrewd observer and prolific diarist, found him clever and intuitive – 'like a pilot for shark.'⁷⁵ Initially, he found himself warming to Churchill. General Marshall had instructed him to talk things over fully with the prime minister during one dinner invitation, and they got on better than he had believed possible. 'He strikes me as cunning, rather than brilliant,' decided Patton, 'with great tenacity.' Then he wrote, 'He is easily flattered – all of them are.'⁷⁶

churchill and Roosevelt had decided to invite General de Gaulle out to Casablanca to meet and make friends with his rival, General Giraud. It was unlikely to go well. The renegade de Gaulle had been only a colonel when Giraud already attained his fifth star. Before leaving Washington the president had repeated to his military staff that he had no confidence in the British foreign office, which was trying to foist a de Gaulle government onto the French people. The United States had the whip hand, he added: he would remind Churchill that de Gaulle was just a soldier, with no authority

over France until the French had had an opportunity to decide.⁷⁷ The British were in a different position, however, as Macmillan remarked to Murphy: Britain had already invested seventy million pounds in de Gaulle, and they were looking for a return on their investment.⁷⁸

The Americans had expended a similar effort in buttering up the French governors of North Africa. On January 17 General Charles A. Noguès, the Resident-General at Rabat in Morocco, came to confer with Roosevelt.⁷⁹ Churchill also saw him; in fact Patton remarked with irritation on the way that Winston hogged Noguès and invited the Americans in only later. 'B-1,' wrote Patton, chilling toward the prime minister, 'speaks the worst French I have ever heard. His eyes run, and he is not at all impressive.' According to Patton, Noguès told him that he would much rather 'play with' the Americans, as Churchill wanted to have the whole world run his way.⁸⁰

Roosevelt had already persuaded General Giraud to come to the conference. He invited the British to produce de Gaulle. Churchill accordingly wrote to the general: 'I shall be glad if you would come to join me here by the first available plane which we will provide, as it is in my power to bring about an immediate meeting between you and General Giraud under conditions of complete secrecy and with the best prospects.' De Gaulle did not respond (Macmillan suspected that it offended his pride to be invited by an Englishman to a French territory). Hours passed. 'I've got the bridegroom,' Churchill now cabled to Eden, 'where is the bride?' Over the weekend he had sent a telegram inviting the general to come and meet Giraud, with a view to union. Eden put the idea to de Gaulle in England that Sunday January 17. The lofty, complicated Frenchman turned up his notorious nose, scenting a second 'Munich'; he was willing to meet Giraud at any time, he said, but not at the *Diktat* of Roosevelt and the P.M. Eden informed Churchill of this snub on Sunday: 'despite long argument' he had been unable to persuade de Gaulle.⁸¹ Hideously embarrassed, Churchill discussed with Macmillan the options if they were not finally to sack the intransigent Frenchman. Macmillan persuaded the prime minister to make a final approach to de Gaulle, 'in spite of the rather humiliating position in which we had been placed vis-a-vis the Americans.' A 'shotgun wedding' seemed inevitable.

Churchill and Macmillan discussed this unhappy situation with the president and Murphy over lunch on the eighteenth. Roosevelt relished Winston's discomfiture. He cabled to Cordell Hull in Washington, 'We delivered our bridegroom, General Giraud, who was most co-operative on the impending marriage, and I am sure was ready to go through with it on our terms.

However, our friends could not produce the bride.' 'Lady de Gaulle' had got quite snooty, he continued, and was showing no intention of getting into bed with Giraud.

Soon the joke turned sour. A whole day passed with no news from London about de Gaulle's coming. Churchill's temper flared. In England however de Gaulle had gone to ground, 'fearing no doubt a dusty answer,' as Eden conceded. Time was running out. Roosevelt was anxious to leave – no later than the twenty-third – and Churchill had as yet unrevealed plans to fly on to Cairo, and then to meet the president of Turkey, to invite that country into his war.⁸³ He told Hopkins he was going to threaten to turn the Russians loose on the Dardanelles Straits, if the Turks proved recalcitrant.

De Gaulle's gauche behaviour overshadowed that evening, January 19. Winston took Roosevelt off for dinner.⁸⁴ 'Randolph arrived,' wrote Churchill's secretary in his diary; he quoted the bumptious son as shouting: 'Any news of that bloody chap?'⁸⁵ With visible impatience, Roosevelt asked who paid the general's salary. 'I should suggest to him,' he added, 'that salaries are paid for devoted and obedient service, and if he doesn't come, his salary would be cut off.'⁸⁶

Churchill took the hint. He informed Eden that his General de Gaulle was finished if he did not show up now. On January 21 Churchill drafted a flippantly worded programme, 'based on the assumption that the bride arrives tomorrow morning.'⁸⁷ The shotgun wedding image was hard to dispel or to deny. 'The Bride has not arrived,' pencilled General Arnold into his diary, 'so perhaps that will cause us a delay.'⁸⁸ Soon everybody at Anfa was referring to de Gaulle with unbecoming nuptial metaphors. He finally condescended to arrive from England at noon on January 22, 1943. A press conference had already been fixed for that day. Hopkins came into Churchill's bedroom late that morning to suggest postponing it until they got the measure of their respective Frenchmen.

one of Churchill's staff had written, back at Downing-street, that seeing the P.M. in bed reminded him of his grandmother. She had the same slothful physical habits, and slow movements – negative traits which, when combined with an 'extremely masterful brain' demanded continual employment of a stream of helpers and servants fussing around her. Winston was the same: 'Sawyers brings the breakfast, then Kinna is sent for, to take something down; meanwhile the bell is rung for the Private Secretary on duty, who is asked for news, and told to summon someone, say C.I.G.S. or

Pug [Ismay]. Then it is the candle for lighting cigars that is wanted. Then someone must get Hopkins on the phone.'⁸⁹ On this particular morning in Casablanca, January 22, Hopkins was startled to find Churchill still in bed, despite the lateness of the hour, wearing his customary pink robe and already swigging at a bottle of wine for breakfast.

'On the one hand,' explained the prime minister, following Hopkins's gaze, 'I have a profound distaste for skimmed milk. On the other, I have no deep-rooted prejudice about wine: so I have reconciled this conflict in favour of the latter.' Throughout his life, he added, he had found the advice of doctors usually wrong, and he had no intention of giving up alcohol.⁹⁰

After sending Sawyers off to fetch his dentures, he agreed to delay any press conference and photographs until afternoon. 'I do not look my best at midday,' he said. 'I can put on a very warlike look whenever I want to.'⁹¹



In the forenoon of Friday, January 22, 1943, de Gaulle finally turned up at Casablanca. He refused at first to confer with Roosevelt that day, but spent the first hour with Giraud, vilifying the names of Darlan, Peyrouton and Boisson. 'What a bunch those Frenchmen are,' commented General Arnold in his diary.⁹² Visiting Mack and Murphy, de Gaulle complained of having been excluded from torch, said he had 'rejoiced at Darlan's assassination,' and remarked upon the curious setting of this meeting – on French soil with only American troops in sight; he had been assured that Darlan's death would bring about a change in North Africa, but he now saw no sign of it. When he came in to see Churchill at six-thirty, the P.M. saw him alone and rudely told him that if he did not come into line he would have to go. He threatened to make public that de Gaulle was the only real obstacle to French unity. Roosevelt, who saw the general only briefly, was more kindly and paternal. 'He reminded him about the American Civil War,' reported Churchill, 'where brother had fought against brother, yet had come together.' Roosevelt would recall a few weeks later that while Winston had been quite rough on de Gaulle his own posture, of a sorrowful Father-Confessor, had proven more effective. De Gaulle had said to him that he could not forget how the British had once overrun his country and France had been liberated by Joan of Arc; he felt that his role now was much the same as hers.⁹³ Roosevelt saw de Gaulle briefly at 10:15 p.m., and told Winston afterwards that he found the 'spiritual' look, the 'light' in the French

general's eyes, disconcerting. The president had never seen a man like de Gaulle before, he seemed quite impractical; Roosevelt wanted a body of three, Giraud, de Gaulle and some unnamed third, to run French affairs — but not as a government. Churchill propounded his idea of *deux grands chefs*, of equal stature.⁹⁴

On the following morning, Saturday, January 23, Giraud refused to accept such a junior officer as de Gaulle as his equal. Roosevelt and de Gaulle had their first formal meeting in the president's villa. It was stiff and unsatisfactory. De Gaulle conceded that he and Giraud could perhaps get along together — if Giraud played the part of Marshal Ferdinand Foch and de Gaulle that of Georges Clemenceau. Roosevelt slyly remarked upon the difference between Joan of Arc on Friday and Clemenceau on Saturday. This was totally lost on de Gaulle.⁹⁵ He remained austere and inflexible. He instinctively rejected Giraud, since he drew his authority from Vichy. Giraud, he implied, might join the French forces; but de Gaulle's forces would never join a Giraud government. Unlike Giraud, he attached more emphasis to French national politics, and to his own ultimate ambitions, than to getting on with the war. Lunching with Giraud, de Gaulle made no overtures to him at all; instead, he demanded the dismissal of the Vichy-appointed governors like Boisson and Noguès. 'De Gaulle,' wrote Ismay, 'could scarcely have been more tiresome. He seems to get more and more *mystique* and more and more opinionated with the passage of time.' Roosevelt and Churchill discussed this situation with Hopkins, Macmillan, and Murphy at four p.m. Giraud was now asked to produce a statement of his talks with de Gaulle that morning and they confronted de Gaulle with it. Hopkins said that evening that Roosevelt was now so hostile to de Gaulle that he was ready to destroy him before American public opinion if he did not come to line.⁹⁶

after de Gaulle had left for his first brief meeting with Roosevelt late on January 22, Winston had prepared for the evening's state dinner with the Sultan of Morocco, though inadequately as it turned out. The ruler of Morocco was a diminutive Berber of thirty-two; he was like Roosevelt a head of state, but of course a Moslem. He arrived robed in white silk and bearing artefacts of solid gold for the president; these included a tiara for Eleanor — as Hopkins noted with an unkind chuckle it was of the kind that he had last seen being worn by circus girls on white horses. The sultan asked for twenty minutes alone with the American president before Churchill arrived, and

he disclosed that a small deposit of oil had been found in Morocco. 'Would you pardon a piece of advice,' Roosevelt drawled – 'After all, I am old enough to be your father. You will need oil to run your own factories and your own lighting plants and transportation systems, and so forth. You will need all that you have.' Astonished by the artful president's apparent selflessness, the sultan rose to his feet. 'No foreigner has ever given me advice like this before,' he said solemnly and repeated what had been said in Arabic to his Grand Vizier.⁹⁷

Churchill fared less well. British stock was not high around these parts, and his demeanour did little to improve it. The sultan had disposed that no alcohol was to be drunk in his presence, only orange juice and water.⁹⁸ The story of Winston's consequent ill-temper ricocheted around the world of diplomacy for weeks afterwards, losing nothing in the telling; like his nude bathroom 'audiences,' and his inebriated condition when he had received Sumner Welles in the admiralty in 1940, soon everybody heard of it. Roosevelt saw to that. He afterwards told Henry Stimson that he had placed the sultan on his right, as was proper, and the prime minister on his left; Churchill had failed to down more than one whisky-and-soda before the meal began, and 'therefore, according to the president, was morose and cross all through the dinner.'⁹⁹ Like other chronic alcoholics deprived of their sustenance, Winston became first glum, then sullen, then downright rude, to both the sultan and the Grand Vizier.¹⁰⁰ He did not conceal his *ennui*, although he had evidently contrived one diversion – a Royal Marine marched in and handed him a despatch which he perused with an air of gravity. Hopkins wrote the next day, 'I have a feeling Churchill cooked that up beforehand, because I saw the despatch later and it certainly wasn't one that required the Prime Minister's attention at the dinner.'

Soon after the sultan left at ten p.m., the prime minister rushed out of the room, to 'recover,' as he put it.¹⁰¹ The ruler of Morocco afterwards told a friend of the president that 'Mr Roosevelt was most charming and gracious,' but that he 'didn't like that man Churchill.'¹⁰² As Patton drove him back to his palace, the Arab monarch remarked to him: 'Truly your President is a very great man and a true friend of myself and of my people. He shines by comparison with the other one.'¹⁰³

husky was to go ahead on July 9. That much was now fixed. The Combined Chiefs met for the third plenary session with the two war leaders from five-thirty p.m. on January 23 in the dining room of Roosevelt's villa. It was to be the last meeting of the ten-day conference.¹⁰⁴ Here they agreed that if the losses in running the Arctic convoys ran at a rate which threatened the success of husky, the convoys must be halted and Stalin must be told why. Defeating Germany still came before Japan; and operations in the Mediterranean before any cross-Channel offensive. 'Our ideas,' noted Brigadier Jacob in his diary, 'had prevailed almost throughout.'¹⁰⁵

After midnight Churchill and his journalist son settled with Roosevelt and Hopkins the final draft of a cable to Stalin reporting on this, their coming strategy: he was told only in general terms of large-scale amphibious operations in the Mediterranean, an Allied re-entry of the continent of Europe 'as soon as practicable,' and meanwhile – that old stand-by – an increase in the weight of the combined bomber offensive against Germany. 'We believe,' wrote the two leaders, 'that an increased tempo and weight of daylight and night attacks will lead to greatly increased material and moral damage in Germany and rapidly deplete German fighter strength.'¹⁰⁶

Some time after that, very late that night, de Gaulle was called in to this meeting at Roosevelt's villa – now joined also by Murphy, and Macmillan. They talked far into the night, trying to resolve the intransigence of the two French officers.¹⁰⁷ Murphy has recorded how Churchill, ablaze with fury at de Gaulle's continued stubbornness, wagged his finger in the general's face and shouted, with his dentures clicking, '*Mon Général, il ne faut pas obstackler [sic] la guerre!*' – meaning evidently that if de Gaulle could not help the war he should not hinder it.¹⁰⁸ Finally Macmillan and Murphy drafted a formula on French military unity, Roosevelt and Churchill approved it, and they invited de Gaulle and Giraud to sign it. De Gaulle demurred. Roosevelt's log shows that the Churchills left Roosevelt at two-thirty a.m., 'the president retired a few minutes later.'¹⁰⁹

de Gaulle dug his heels in. He said, according to Roosevelt, over and over again that he represented the spirit of France – the spirit of Joan of Arc which had driven the English out of France five hundred years ago. 'That spirit,' de Gaulle had declaimed, 'must be reincarnated.'¹¹⁰ Evidently the

* The two most *lethal* words are surely Harry S. Truman's, beginning his signal in-178 to Stimson, July 31, 1945: 'Suggestions approved. Release when ready but not sooner than 2 August' (H. S. Truman Libr., Naval Aide Files, box 5, Communications to Map Room).

British had not got a bargain in purchasing his services in 1940. Macmillan felt that the problem had a narrower focus; he told Murphy that de Gaulle wanted to be 'top dog.' Hopkins, a seasoned negotiator, advised Roosevelt to box cunning, and *not* bludgeon de Gaulle too hard – to leave any beating that had to be done to the perfidious English. 'I told the Pres.,' he recorded privately, 'I thot [*sic*] we could get an agreement on a joint statement issued by de Gaulle and Giraud – and a picture of the two of them.'¹¹¹

The Americans told Macmillan that it was up to Churchill to bring de Gaulle to heel. Later that morning, January 24, while Roosevelt was once again berating de Gaulle for his refusal to agree the joint communiqué, Churchill was brought in; Hopkins went off to haul in Giraud.¹¹²

De Gaulle appeared, looking bewildered; Churchill grunted at him, de Gaulle half agreed and half hesitated, and before the Frenchman could catch his breath, according to Hopkins's amusing note, Roosevelt suggested the all-important photograph. The lawn outside the Roosevelt villa was swarming with photographers and war correspondents who had been flown in the day before without the slightest idea who was inside.

De Gaulle and Giraud found themselves conducted into the garden by the Americans – the word 'frog-marched' suggests itself, but would be tasteless here; Roosevelt was carried out to a chair and loudly invited the two generals to shake hands. The two bickering Frenchmen did so with expressions of hideous joy, but to compound their agony some of the cameramen missed the historic moment and they had to do it again. The photograph shows them shaking hands; de Gaulle is nonchalantly puffing a post-coital cigarette; Churchill is wearing a pearl-grey Homburg, cigar, and puckish grin; the shotgun is, figuratively speaking, only just out of sight.¹¹³

It was at this press conference that possibly the two most fateful words of the war were uttered.* The president reaffirmed the decision to spare no effort to bring about the 'unconditional surrender' of the Axis. He undoubtedly intended this as a quiescent to the mud bath to which he had been subjected by the Jews, communists, anti-fascists, and others over the deal with Darlan two months before: there would, he implied, be no more deals.

Churchill, who had also suffered indirectly because of Darlan, endorsed Roosevelt's words, encouraging the newspapermen to convey a picture of the unity, thoroughness, and integrity of the political chiefs. 'Make them,' said Churchill, 'feel that there is some reason behind all that is being done.'

Even though there is some delay, there is design and purpose and, as the president has said, the unconquerable will to pursue this quality, until we have procured the unconditional surrender of the criminal forces who plunged the world into storm and ruin.¹¹⁴

Churchill is thus on record as having heartily endorsed Roosevelt's announcement. Unconditional surrender became the adamant *leitmotif* that shackled Allied wartime foreign policy.

The two words, so lightly spoken, soon gained capital letters. Learning four months later that both the British war cabinet and the exile governments in London were, during Churchill's renewed absence, debating possible armistice terms, Roosevelt instructed his ambassador to inform Eden of his concern: 'The president and the prime minister were in complete agreement that our joint present position is that there shall be no armistice but that the policy of Unconditional Surrender be the sole criterion of this time.'¹¹⁵ In August 1944, over a private dinner in Rome, Churchill would attempt to distance himself from the phrase, saying, 'The president announced the policy of "Unconditional Surrender" at Casablanca, while I did not agree with it. I said I would go along with F.D.R., but I always had reservations.'¹¹⁶ This was a lack of candour unusual in the prime minister.

What were the origins of the phrase? Roosevelt had already used it at a meeting of the Joint Chiefs on January 7 at the White House. The battle of Stalingrad was still in the balance. Concerned to rescue Stalin from what he sensed was a 'feeling of loneliness,' he had suggested that George Marshall visit him in Moscow, and when the general had asked him, 'What would I be expected to accomplish there?' the president replied in these terms: 'He was going to speak to Churchill about the advisability of informing Mr Stalin that the United Nations were to continue on until they reached Berlin, and that their only terms would be Unconditional Surrender.'¹¹⁷

American historians believe that on January 18 the prime minister had recommended issuing a press statement using the phrase; certainly the archives show that on the nineteenth Churchill notified his cabinet that he proposed to include in the communiqué a 'declaration of the firm intention of the United States and the British empire to continue the war relentlessly until we have brought about the "unconditional surrender" of Germany and Japan.' The use of quotation marks is as significant as his addition that Roosevelt had 'liked the idea' of making such a declaration (the logic in omitting Italy was to encourage an internal break-up).¹¹⁸ Whose 'idea' was

it? The president's son Elliot believed that he had heard his father deploy the same two-word phrase unopposed during lunch with Hopkins and Churchill on the twenty-third; Churchill agreed later in the House of Commons that the phrase did come up during these mealtime talks with Roosevelt.¹¹⁹

Thus it was not by happenstance that Roosevelt used the words during the press conference on January 24. He even referred to the American general Ulysses Simpson Grant: 'In my and the prime minister's early days he was called "Unconditional Surrender" Grant. The elimination of German, Japanese, and Italian war power means the unconditional surrender by Germany, Italy, and Japan.' The transcript shows that Churchill then spoke:

Tremendous events have happened. This enterprise which the president has organised – and he knows I have been his active lieutenant since the start – has altered the whole strategic aspect of the war. It has forced the Germans to fight under the very greatest difficulties. And I think that it gives us in a very marked way the initiative. Once we have got that precious treasure into our hands, we must labour hard to keep it.

'Hitler,' continued Churchill, 'said you never could tell what would happen because he wasn't dealing with competent military experts, but with military idiots and drunkards.* . . . That was a preliminary foretaste of the explanation which he will no doubt offer to the Nazi party for the complete manner in which he has been hoodwinked, fooled, and outmanoeuvred by the great enterprise which was launched on these shores.'

Informing Clementine of their ten days of hard work, Churchill reported reaching complete agreement on the distribution of war resources between five or six theatres of war, and on the timing of their future plans. 'It is in every respect as I wished and proposed.' He had had nearly all his meals with the President. 'He came here and dined one night, the special ramps necessary for his movements being put in by the American Army Engineers. We had a very agreeable and successful evening, showing him our

* Churchill's reference was to Hitler's radio address to the German people on September 20, 1942, explaining the problem of predicting the Allied leaders' next moves: 'With paralytics and drunkards,' said Hitler, 'you can never tell what they'll be up to next.' It was a favourite jibe of the puritanical Führer. He had secretly told a Balkan diplomat five days before Dieppe that those mad British might venture anything. 'As lunatics like that drunkard Churchill, and Maccabeans and numskulls like that brilliant dandy Eden, are at the tiller [in England], we have to be prepared for just about anything!'

Map Room which . . . records all the movements, of both ships and troops wherever they may be, from day to day. And then Harry Hopkins produced five Negro soldiers who sang most melodiously to us.' 'Comic relief,' he added, had been provided by the attempt to bring de Gaulle to the altar where Giraud had been 'waiting impatiently' for some days. 'He thinks he is Clemenceau,' mocked Churchill, 'and wishes Giraud to be Foch, *i.e.* dismissible at Prime Minister Clemenceau's pleasure! Many of these Frenchmen hate each other far more than they do the Germans, and all I have met care more for power and place than for the liberation of their country. . .'

immediately after their press conference Roosevelt's motorcade left Casablanca, ostensibly for the airfield but in fact for Marrakech. De Gaulle delayed his return to London, as he refused to fly in an American plane since, he claimed, their pilots had no idea of navigation, and he had 'no desire to be landed in France.' Churchill also headed east. Patton's troops line the route out to La Saadia where the president and prime minister would spend the night, a Moorish palace which was said to have been placed at the disposal of Kenneth Pendar, one of Murphy's youthful 'vice consuls' there, by the widow of an American millionaire banker, the late Moses Taylor.* The villa had six master bedrooms, each with a sunken marble bath. The state department had leased it at a peppercorn rent.¹²⁰ Mrs Taylor had ruled that her suite on the ground floor, was not to be used; but in this suite the Secret Service installed their president, arousing later controversy. Lord Halifax would record her dismay upon hearing that young Pendar had entertained the two leaders at her villa. 'He had opened the whole house up,' wrote the ambassador, 'and given them the best of her cellar.' She would not have minded if newspapers had not described the villa as belonging to Pendar – and if she were not violently opposed to this president.¹²¹ She threatened to sue the federal government for allowing Roosevelt to sleep in her bed.

The villa stood in an olive grove, its courtyards aflame with orange trees and shrubs. From a sixty-foot tower atop the villa Roosevelt and Churchill watched the sun setting across the Atlas mountains far away (strong and willing hands had carried the president up the winding staircase, his useless legs dangling, in Sir Charles Wilson's phrase, like those of a ventriloquist's dummy).¹²² 'How can God make such a beautiful sunset and then permit so

* Brooke's notes identify Kenneth Pendar as being an American archaeologist and 'secret agent' in North Africa prior to torch.¹²³ This was evidently a preferred cover for such agents – Britain's late S.O.E. chief in Crete, John Pendlebury, was also an archaeologist.

much misery and war in the world?' one of them asked. All life is war, the other responded: it brings out the best in men; there is progress only in time of war. In peace, there is only complacency. 'There is no peace on earth,' he concluded, rounding off these remarks, 'save that in death.'¹²³

The next morning (it was now January 25) Roosevelt departed; Churchill accompanied him in his limousine, clad in bathrobe and slippers, and watched as the presidential plane took off on its first leg, to Bathurst, south of Dakar. Bathurst had been a British empire possession since 1620 – and all too evidently so, because Roosevelt found the natives still running around half naked, an unedifying spectacle as he told his cabinet upon his return, via Brazil, to Washington.¹²⁴ 'I think I picked up sleeping sickness,' he wrote, with feeling, to Churchill six weeks later, 'or Gambia fever, or some kindred bug, in that hell-hole of yours called Bathurst.'¹²⁵



We all have, scattered around our globe, points of the compass to which we return throughout our lives, as though to seek our bearings after life's great storms and gain intellectual nourishment. The Atlas mountains, rose-ate in the setting sun, were one such station for Churchill, over which he would shortly be flying further to the east.¹²⁶ 'He had been in Marrakech about six years ago,' Brooke explained to his diary, 'and did some painting then. So on this trip he brought out his paints with the determination to go back there to paint again.' Yes, for once 'Charles Maurin' had brought oils, palette, and easel with him. 'We are here in a fairyland villa in Marrakech,' he wired to Clementine. He was going, he said, to paint a little from the roof – a view of the 'pink gateway.' 'My friend has gone,' he added, referring to Roosevelt. 'We motored here together yesterday 250 kilometres, being guarded by sentries all the way. They all admit I had not overstated the beauty of this place. I hope to be with you by week-end. Winston.'¹²⁷

He painted the mountains all afternoon, before history's implacable embrace gripped him again; the only painting he completed in this war.

as brooke walked out of the Mamounia Hotel to set out on a day's partridge shooting in the Atlas Mountains, a shout stopped him; Winston had ordered him fetched over to the Taylor villa. The prime minister was lying in bed, and Brooke found it hard to keep a straight face. Mrs Moses Taylor had elected, with all the quiet good taste for which wealthy Jewish widows

are renowned, to decorate her bedroom in a Moorish style: the ceiling was an ornate fresco of green, blue, and gold-leaf; the head of the bed on which Winston lay rested in an alcove of Moorish design, with what the Chief of the Imperial General Staff decided was a religious light on each side. The bed was covered with a blue silk, trimmed with six-inch wide lace. The rest of the room was in restrained harmony with the ceiling. The centrepiece of this Palladium of decorative extravagance was the prime minister himself, wrap'd in his 'dragon' dressing-gown of green, red, and gold; his reddish hair was tousled, his cheeks were aglow with the religious lights, and a large cigar jutted from his jaw. Brooke would have given a large sum to take a colour photograph of him at that moment.¹²⁸

'We're off at six p.m.,' Winston said. Off? 'Where are we going?' Brooke asked. Churchill shrugged, then volunteered: 'I am either going to answer Questions in the House tomorrow – or I am going to Cairo.'

Brooke did what he could to head him off. The last time they were in Cairo, he reminded the prime minister, the latter had hogged both the ambassador's study and Lady Lampson's bedroom, the only two air-conditioned rooms in the embassy. Flying to Cairo now would hardly give the Lampsons enough time to alter the rooms for him again, snatch some sleep, and motor out to the airfield to meet them. The telegram sanctioning the Cairo excursion arrived soon after, and the partridge-shoot was off.

Churchill had told Hopkins while still at Casablanca of his secret intention to fly on from Cairo to Turkey. When he had cabled this wish to London the cabinet unanimously disapproved.¹²⁹ The public frowned on Winston's jaunts, they implied, though choosing more judicious language; moreover, he might well embarrass the Turks: 'We do not want you to court either a rebuff or a failure,' the cabinet had said. Two days later they had received another telegram from him, insisting on going ahead.¹³⁰ Still the cabinet had frowned on the idea, sensing that Stalin would strongly mistrust any move by the British and his old enemies the Turks toward the Balkans. On January 25 however the truculent cabinet approved the trip.¹³¹ Eden viewed it as another unwarranted intrusion into foreign affairs.¹³²

Churchill had difficulty explaining this cabinet obstructionism to Roosevelt, and he drafted an abrasive telegram to Eden about it. He did not ultimately send it off, but he told the foreign secretary of its content on his return to London. He had studied Europe for forty years, he said, and he really must be allowed to go where he liked.¹³³ As it was, he ruminated in

his response to London, until midday he had been faced with either answering Questions in the House as usual on the morrow, or meeting 'Jumbo' Wilson, the C.-in-C. Middle East, in Cairo. That evening he sent another message, with a hint of mischief about it, to London: 'We are just off over Atlas Mountains which are gleaming with their sunlit snows. You can imagine how much I wish I were going to be with you tomorrow on the Bench but duty calls.'¹³⁴ Thus he now resumed his airborne odyssey, circling to a height of 14,500 feet in a freezing Liberator, then heading through the 'pink gateway' as the sun set on the snow-capped Atlas mountains.

after an eleven-hour flight they reached Cairo at 7:30 a.m. Having already fortified himself with two whiskies-and-soda, he turned away the chaste cup of tea which Lady Lampson proffered and asked for a glass of white wine; this he knocked back in one draught and licked his lips, as Brooke looked on in wonderment.

To Brooke this visit to Cairo revived nightmare memories of its August 1942 precursor, 'with all the unpleasantness of pushing Auchinleck out.'¹³⁵ Telegrams had come from the Turkish government, professing to be delighted at Churchill's coming visit. 'This is big stuff!', Churchill kept repeating, as he read and re-read the cables: once again, he had been right and his cabinet advisers wrong.

He took the opportunity of this visit to Cairo to grill Admiral Harwood on ways of coercing the remaining French fleet units in Alexandria harbour. Winston saw no reason why the British empire should continue to provide their rations and pay, maintaining them in shameful sloth, as Jacob put it; Harwood favoured letting sleeping dogs lie, and this was his undoing.¹³⁶ General Montgomery, who made no secret of his distaste for the Royal Navy, spoke in harsh terms about this admiral in particular, and in March 1943 Churchill ordered the dealings with the obstinate French admiral Godfroy turned over to the British minister-resident in Cairo, Casey, and Harwood relieved of his command. The admiral wrote privately a few days later, 'On both his visits to Cairo I have had to bear the full blast of the Prime Minister's venom against this Squadron.' Casey fared no better after a month or more of bluster to Godfroy; Harwood had always said that the fleet would not come over until the capture of Tunisia.¹³⁷

Cunningham wrote privately to Admiral Pound that Admiral Harwood was very upset at being relieved by Churchill, and ascribed it to having stood up to the prime minister. 'Quite rightly in my opinion,' commented

Admiral Cunningham: 'So did I, when the P.M. was here, and subsequent events have shown how right we were.' Montgomery, he learned, had furthermore complained at the admiral's slowness to reopen the port of Tripoli. 'I feel,' added Cunningham later, 'that Harwood has been very hardly dealt with.'¹³⁸ It has to be said however that Admiral Pound shared Churchill's assessment of Harwood's capabilities.

Churchill sent Harold Macmillan to tackle Admiral Godfroy. The urbane British diplomat lunched with the French admiral on March 6, and found he had met his match. 'I do not think you can bully Admiral Godfroy,' he advised London, summarising their lengthy talk. 'He is contemptuous of such methods, and especially of the Prime Minister's efforts. He is too sure of himself and too well bred to submit to being bullied by what he regards as the rather middle-class methods of a nation of shopkeepers.' Godfroy was clearly waiting until the Germans had been ejected from Tunisia, and he would then sail the fleet to a French port. This was the policy that Macmillan now adopted; the payments continued, and it enraged his prime minister: 'What you propose,' Churchill harrumphed in a telegram to him on April 12, 'is exactly [the] opposite of what was explained through you to Giraud in my telegram 276, which you said he entirely agreed to and was grateful for. No pay of any kind should reach the recalcitrant squadron in Alexander harbour until they definitely come over to Giraud.' Macmillan ignored this telegram, and Churchill sent another on the last day of April: 'The course you propose is exactly the opposite of what I have repeatedly prescribed. No payment should be made till they come over to HMG and declare themselves under Giraud's orders.'¹³⁹ Macmillan again ignored it.

brooke flew off on a sightseeing trip to the oasis at Siwa on January 28. Churchill decided that such a jaunt would be taking an unnecessary risk, and remained in Cairo. Hearing that General 'Hap' Arnold was in the city, he called him round for a talk on American aircraft production. He was still working on getting the Turks into the war, he said; Turkey would need enough planes for twenty-eight squadrons. Arnold warned in vain of undertaking such a fresh obligation. Churchill assured him that he would tailor his actions so as not to interfere with America's planned air operations.¹⁴⁰

* 'Muh' was well known to the British. He was 'Muhamet' – Hans-Peter Schulze, a 28-year-old SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) agent disguised as a German attaché in Tangier.

Sir Alexander Cadogan arrived, flown out from London by a worried foreign office to chaperone the prime minister for his meeting with the Turks. Churchill burst into this suave diplomat's room early on January 29 and expatiated on the coming visit, pacing up and down, and boasting of how he was going to handle the Turks. Cadogan merely grunted from time to time through face towels.¹⁴¹ Their meeting was to take place in Adana, in southern Turkey. Since the British could not wear uniforms in a neutral country, they were all issued with 'plain clothes' – Commander Thompson was handed an electric blue suit which would have shamed a spiv in London's Whitechapel-road; Brooke's trousers were too long, and hoisted up by braces to somewhere near his chin; while 'Jumbo' Wilson was issued with a suit too large for him.¹⁴² Writing up his diary of this episode, Brooke recorded the fear that they looked like a third-rate repertory company.

The rain beat down throughout the journey – they actually saw two waterspouts from the air as they flew up the coast to Turkey – and when they reached their rendezvous with the president, Ismet İnönü, at a curve in the railway track, miles from house or habitation, they found themselves surrounded by ploughed fields soaked into a morass by rains. With only two Scotland-yard detectives to protect him in this strange land, Churchill was taking a risk – in fact greater than he knew, because when Brooke asked one of the detectives why he was not occasionally patrolling outside, the officer retorted: 'Am I expected to work all night as well?'¹⁴³

The president was a white-haired, deaf old man. Churchill conducted the negotiations at first in his own French *patois* – in Ian Jacob's words he 'waded resolutely on and came out at the far end bloody but unbowed.' General Brooke's French was of a more intelligible variety. The Turks were too polite to display any emotions, let alone amusement, and when Winston at last took refuge in English their faces lit up as they realised that he would not be forcing them to join his war.¹⁴⁴ Cadogan had never seen men so resolutely disinclined to be drawn in. Churchill left empty handed.

At first he was inclined to stop here for one more night. Brooke warned of the risk to his security, as 'most of Turkey' now knew he was there, and Churchill reluctantly gave up on the Turks – though not for good.

He decided to fly to Cyprus, then changed his mind for Cairo. 'We had already got into the plane,' recorded Brooke, 'when we found the pilot thought he was still going to Cyprus.'¹⁴⁵ As the pilot walked off, Churchill called out: 'Stop – no, I shall not go to Cairo, I shall go to Cyprus after all!'

The plane decided otherwise. Taxiing around a corner, it sank up to one axle in the slime. Captain J. H. Ruggles, Churchill's pilot, later described privately how Churchill had insisted on taking the co-pilot's seat and steering the heavy aircraft; it took two and a half hours to extricate the machine.¹⁴⁶ Hours later, they were finally airborne – for Nicosia, Cyprus. Turkey succeeded in staying clear of Churchill's morass until 1945.

Later still that day, Churchill flew on from Cyprus to Cairo. He was received with an alarming signal from 'C' in London: Hitler's ambassador in Turkey had correctly reported to Berlin in code, late on the thirtieth, the location of the Adana conference, and the identities of those attending.¹⁴⁷

On February 2 he watched a newsreel of Montgomery and his troops entering Tripoli. The Axis forces were being thrown out of North Africa, but it was all taking much too long. Over dinner Churchill snarled at his dreadful son, across the lap of Cadogan who sat trapped mutely between them. The foreign office chief reflected that Randolph had been an incubus on their party ever since Casablanca. 'Very silly of Winston to take him about,' he inked into his diary that night, but he kept this thought to himself.¹⁴⁸



Churchill's prolonged journeys overseas irritated the British public and alarmed and vexed King George VI. 'Ever since he became my prime minister,' the monarch wrote to his mother, the formidable Queen Mary,

I have studied the way in which his brain works. He tells me, more than people imagine, of his future plans & ideas & only airs them when the time is ripe to his colleagues & the chiefs of staff. But I do hope & trust he will return home at once.¹⁴⁹

There was reason for alarm. Hitler's Intelligence services were furious that nobody had reported on Casablanca in good time. British codebreakers intercepted a flurry of indignant code messages. Berlin expressed astonishment to Himmler's SD agent in Lisbon. A witless Tangier official apologised to the *Abwehr* in Madrid that they had heard only of 'senior officers,' Roosevelt being referred to as 'Admiral,' and Churchill as 'Commodore.'¹⁵⁰

To some Nazis there still seemed time to act, however. On February 3 Bletchley Park intercepted a cypher message from Tangier, signed 'Muh.'* This informed Berlin that Churchill would probably return to England via

Algiers and Gibraltar.¹⁵¹ 'Muh' promised to smuggle agents into Algiers and Casablanca in time. 'As it takes at least five days to get people across the frontier,' he warned, 'it appears doubtful whether Churchill can still be reached.' Attlee sent a telegram through ultra channels, marked 'clear the line,' to Churchill, stating with the nonchalance for which the English are justly famed that 'attempts are going to be made to bump you off.' The cabinet urged him to fly straight home. In further signals 'Muh' reported that he had now sent four killers into Algeria 'to take action against Churchill' and he asked for fifty machine-pistols, magnetic- and limpet-mines, skin-contact toxins, and poisons for lacing drinks.¹⁵²

The prime minister's personal weaknesses were, after all, well known.

early on February 3, 1943 he left Cairo for the western desert, flying over El Alamein, Buerat, and the other famous battlefields so recently vacated by Rommel. He landed at Castel Benito, outside Tripoli, at tea-time and drove to Montgomery's headquarters. The Eighth Army was winding up for its frontal assault on Rommel's new Mareth Line. He slept that night in an oil-heated caravan, as the desert was bitterly cold at night. On February 4, taking another of those risks which he seemed so much to relish, he drove in an armoured car with Montgomery into the centre of Tripoli, a sprawling city from which Rommel's army had been expelled only days earlier. It seemed as if the entire Eighth Army had been drawn up in formation, and unit by unit they gave the visiting prime minister three cheers as his car paused abreast of them. This was one of those unforgettable moments. The men he saw looked bronzed and fit, their equipment was freshly oiled and spotless. These 'Desert Rats' had not even known he was in their midst. Under the eyes and ears of the newsreel cameras Montgomery greeted the prime minister with prolonged and fulsome flattery; Churchill felt bound to match it. When he saw the newsreel later, he pinked at his own verbal torrent of purple prose and directed his staff: 'Cut that scene out! It makes me almost as big a cad as Montgomery.'¹⁵³

Censoring the newsreels was one prerogative of being a warlord, but there were others too. On Tripoli's main square he took the salute as the 51st Highland Division, veterans of every major campaign since France, marched past to the skirl of bagpipes and drums. The tears streamed down his face as he stood at attention wearing the uniform of an air-force commodore. To many an onlooking British officer the sweetness of this day was

more than recompense enough for that awful hour in the White House just six months earlier, when the news had come of Tobruk's surrender.¹⁵⁴

winston's new code-name was *mr bullfinch* (and one may wonder what abbreviation Patton would have used for that). It was used in the telegram he had just received in Cairo from Clementine. 'The cage is swept,' she wrote, 'and garnished fresh water and hemp seed are temptingly displayed. The door is open and it is hoped that soon *mr bullfinch* will fly home.'

'Keep cage open for Saturday or Sunday,' replied Winston.

He was heading home. At five-thirty a.m. on February 5 he took off from Tripoli for Algiers, accompanied by 'Brookie.' They had made this early start because of the assassination rumours. At Algiers, Eisenhower met him, nervous at having a 'marked man' as a guest. An armoured car with oil-smeared windows drove him to Cunningham's villa, a stone's throw from Eisenhower's. Bedell Smith came to ask if Noguès and Marcel Peyrouton, whom Murphy had appointed as Governor-General of Algiers, would be welcome at lunch with them. Churchill, his eye on the hot water and the admiral's soft bed, decided to stay on and he suggested to Brooke they hang on for another day. Eisenhower, still worried, hit the roof: 'He wanted the P.M. out of town as soon as possible,' noted his aide. He told the prime minister that in London he was worth two armies to the Allies, but that in Algiers he was 'a liability.' The refusal of that signed photo still rankled. Since Hitler had spies everywhere, Eisenhower laid on an elaborate ritual of readying a B-17 bomber, to simulate Mr Churchill's departure for Gibraltar; at The Rock, Governor Mason-Macfarlane had to toil round to the airfield to meet the empty airplane to complete the deception.

Eisenhower went ahead with the luncheon for Churchill, inviting Giraud, Boisson, Noguès, Peyrouton, to join the English guests. Churchill was still under-impressed by the American. He told his Major Desmond Morton that he was upset by the situation in Algiers, and shocked by the sheer unpreparedness of the American troops. Despite having already mobilised over six million men, they still had only five divisions operational. Of the seven divisions promised for North Africa, they had so far produced only two. This was what entitled the British to such clout in the Mediterranean command structure, with General Alexander commanding on the ground, Cunningham at sea, and Tedder in the air.¹⁵⁵

Mercifully this day too ended, and Eisenhower dined with Churchill at Cunningham's villa. At eleven p.m. he escorted him to Maison Blanche air-

field and left him there. After a while revving the engines, the pilot – it was now Vanderkloot – announced a mechanical failure. Finding his father's departure delayed, Randolph Churchill opened the aircraft trapdoor and clambered in. ('We thought we had got rid of him,' recalled Jacob, aghast, 'as he was to rejoin his unit in Algiers. However he seemed determined not to miss a minute for conversation – and a drink – and it wasn't long before the usual bickering began.' He seemed to delight in baiting his father in public).¹⁵⁶ Toward one a.m. the pilot announced that a magneto had failed; Winston seized the opportunity to prolong his absence from London, and they all returned to the villa in Algiers – with the exception of Sir Charles Wilson, who had taken his usual knock-out draught and was allowed to snore on in the bomb bay of the parked and otherwise empty Liberator. 'It was obliging of the magneto to cut out before we started,' Churchill joked in a telegram to Eden, 'rather than later on.'¹⁵⁷

Eisenhower was not pleased to be woken with the news that Britain's prime minister was back under his roof.¹⁵⁸ At Admiral Cunningham's villa too there were indelicate comments about 'The Man Who Came to Dinner,' and strange rumours flew around. The admiral's flag secretary Shaw told Eisenhower's staff that the P.M. had been so determined to stay on that he had sent his personal detective Thompson to remove a wire from the magneto; Shaw insisted that Churchill himself had hinted at this otherwise improbable story during the day.¹⁵⁹ 'Tommy' Thompson was certainly not much liked by the P.M.'s staff; while Winston and Randolph went off to play *bélique*, Rowan and Jacob held what they called an indignation meeting about him, finding it monstrous that their beloved chief should be served by 'so insignificant, so selfish, and so undignified an object.'¹⁶⁰ It was just like any other family row before an extended seaside vacation ended.

Churchill finally left for England at eleven p.m. on the sixth, flying home in his trusty Liberator AL.504, 'Commando.' His mind seems to have been less on assassination than on airplane crashes – he had learned that Brigadier Vivian Dykes and three others of his staff had gone down in a Liberator on the flight back from Casablanca a few days earlier.

'It would be a pity to have to go out in the middle of such an interesting drama, without seeing the end,' he remarked to Ian Jacob as they sat face to face in the bomber's fuselage and his valet rummaged around for the Quadrinox sleeping draught. 'But it wouldn't be a bad moment to leave. It is a straight run in now, and even the cabinet could manage it.'¹⁶¹

30: 'Use Force if Necessary'

Prime ministers had rare prerogatives – they could name the wars they fought and the code names and words used in fighting them. Shown a list of possible names for the current global conflict, since the Great War no longer seemed appropriate for the first, in June 1944 Churchill ruled that the two global conflicts were to be known in future as the 'First' and 'Second World War.' Like a proud father naming his infant son, he inked a ring around the latter, and that is how it got its name.¹

Sometimes statesmen became hostages to their own terminology: 'Unconditional Surrender,' which sounded so magnificent when spoken, was an example. Sometimes histrionics supervened: at Casablanca, discussing the security of their sea communications, Churchill had announced to the Combined Chiefs that he wanted German submarines referred to henceforth only as 'U-boats' rather than dignified with the word 'submarines.'² 'We must call them U-boats,' demanded the P.M. 'We must distinguish between those stealthy, murderous monsters that lurk under the water to destroy our ships and our gallant merchant seamen; and those wonderful weapons of modern warfare, the submarines, which our gallant officers and heroic seamen are using to bring our enemies to their knees.'³

He suggested to Eisenhower that they use 'aircraft' instead of aeroplanes, 'airfields' instead of aerodromes, and 'airport' for long-distance or overseas traffic.⁴ He knew, as the writer Eliot Cohen remarked, that men are ruled by words. Thus he had renamed the Local Defence Volunteers the Home Guard; and christened the soup kitchens the British Restaurants.⁵ After the Combined Chiefs' Casablanca directive took shape, Churchill continued to fret over the loose language usages of the Americans, and he asked Hopkins to put these 'points of nomenclature' to FDR: 'Our object,' he defined, 'is "the liberation of Europe from German tyranny" –

We *enter* the oppressed countries rather than *invade* them. The word *invasion* must be reserved for the time when we cross the German frontier. There is no need for us to make a present to Hitler of the idea that he is the defender of a Europe which we are seeking to invade. He is a tyrant and an ogre from whom we are going to free the captive nations.⁶

Commonsense applied the same insight to the selection of codenames. While crossing the Atlantic to Canada later in 1943 he would study the latest list of proposed code names, and score through many as unsuitable. Operational codenames should neither be boastful, he explained, as in *triumphant*, nor calculated to disparage, as in *woebetide*, *massacre*, *flimsy*, *pathetic*, or *jaundice*. The code names should be neither commonplace words nor the names of ministers (one example of the latter was *bracken*). It would hardly cheer a widow or mother to learn that her husband or son had been killed in an operation *bunnyhug* or *ballyhoo*. 'Proper names,' he lectured Ismay, 'are good in this field. The heroes of antiquity, figures from Greek and Roman mythology, the constellations and stars, famous racehorses, names of British and American war heroes, could be used, provided they fall within the rules above.' Once again he had referred to 'British and American,' without reference to the empire.

churchill saw no reason to go easy on 'the Huns.' From his codebreakers he knew more than did most of the Germans about the atrocities being committed in their name.

The 'German police' section at Bletchley Park had now amassed thousands of intercepts of police units on the eastern front, police headquarters in Germany, and concentration camp commandants reporting to Berlin. From them, a clear picture was emerging. Every smallest detail was reflected in these messages, including a signal to the commandant of Auschwitz, S.S. *Sturmabführer* Rudolf Höss, in September 1942 regretting that rubber truncheons were 'unobtainable in Breslau.'⁸ On October 26 the British codebreakers observed Berlin warning the huge facility at Auschwitz, in what had been Poland, to stand by to receive two visitors from the Führer's Chancellery in Berlin – the agency supervising euthanasia and various other killing schemes – for a lengthy stay at the camp: they would be setting up an X-ray sterilisation operation, the radio signal said (this being the method chosen by the S.S. to keep the Jews from breeding).⁹ The next day the

system's headquarters at Sachsenhausen reported that it was shipping to Auschwitz two hundred Soviet prisoners of war found to have contracted tuberculosis.¹⁰ After Berlin ordered that all camp fatalities were to be reported, on December 1 Buchenwald dutifully reported, in their secret code, a total of 134 deaths from natural causes during November, including four Jews.¹¹

The typhus epidemic at Auschwitz now appeared to be under control. On December 8 Dr Eduard Wirths, chief physician in Auschwitz, reported twenty-seven male and thirty-six female typhus deaths during the previous week.¹² During early 1943 the intercepts were found to contain with greater frequency the word *Sonderbehandlung*, special-treatment – evidently a thinly veiled reference to the termination of the Nazis' enemies. In one such message on January 17, the chief of police in Kiev reported laconically, 'So far 853 screened and 614 special-treated.'¹³ A month later, after completion of the anti-partisan sweep HORNUNG, a report to the same police chief in Kiev listed the body count as '(a) enemy dead eighty-two, (b) suspects and special-treated 1,124.'¹⁴ Notwithstanding that these hundreds of thousands of secret code intercepts are often brutally explicit, it is worth noting, as the official historian has also pointed out, that nowhere in them is there any reference to or hint of gas chambers or gassings.¹⁵

This hard evidence of atrocities was backed by despatches of varying reliability from the Polish secret army. These suggested that the Germans had intensified their policy of extermination against the Poles and Jews: 'Over 640,000 people' had already perished at Auschwitz by the end of 1942; there were 40,000 prisoners there, and about 27,000 more in a campaign at Majdanek; a series of Jewish ghettos across Poland had been wholly or partly liquidated.¹⁶

General Wladyslaw Sikorski, the prime minister of Poland in exile, pleaded with Churchill to allow the Polish squadrons of Bomber Command to bomb 'certain targets' in Poland, as a reprisal for the German atrocities. Presiding over a chiefs of staff meeting on the last evening of 1942, Churchill read out Sikorski's letter and invited Sir Charles Portal to comment; he suggested that R.A.F. Bomber Command execute two or three heavy raids on Berlin in January 1943, dropping leaflets which would tell the people below that these raids were 'reprisals for the persecution of the Poles and Jews.'¹⁷ Sikorski's proposal came up again at Casablanca in January. The chief of air staff dismissed it as impracticable, and offered in-

stead the notion that the participation of Polish airmen in the raids on Berlin 'might be considered partly as a reprisal'.¹⁸

The air ministry had always set its face against reprisal operations. The aftermath of Lidice was an example. The Dutch prime minister Pieter Sjoerds Gerbrandy had suggested during the summer that they threaten to bomb a German village as a reprisal, if the Germans shot a large number of Dutch hostages as they were intending to do. Portal had to point out once again how counter-productive it would be to bomb villages – and inevitably the empty fields around them – instead of factories and cities.¹⁹

the american heavy bomber squadrons, established at such a cost in production resources and training, were not ready even now to penetrate German air space. For months Churchill had brooded on the ineffectual nature of their contribution so far. By December 1942 nearly six months had elapsed since the first bomber unit had arrived in Britain. They had raided into France; their operations to the Biscay ports – under heavy British fighter escort – had achieved little. The British air-force commanders still believed it unlikely that they they would be able to sustain operations into Germany in daylight, let alone without fighter escort, an intention which Churchill disparaged as laughable.

On December 16 he circulated a paper on the need to keep up the weight of bombing against Germany during the winter months. The increase of 'bulk deliveries' of bombs to Germany remained the top priority. He became increasingly doubtful of the American proposals for bombing Germany in heavily armed daylight squadron formations. He predicted: 'The danger of having all their ammunition teased out of them by minor attacks by enemy fighters increases with every mile of penetration.' If the American plan failed, it would be a bad shock to public opinion. Their industry was however geared to the production of daylight bombers only.²⁰

At a *defence committee* meeting at the end of 1942 he again disagreed with the confidence vested by the chiefs of staff in the coming American daylight attacks.²¹ On January 10 he wrote that they should on the contrary discourage the obstinate persistence of the Americans and urge them to make their bomber force capable of night bombing instead: 'What I am going to discourage actively is the sending over [to England] of large quantities of these daylight bombers and their enormous ground staffs until the matter is settled one way or the other.'²² Harris, seeing a way to increase the saturation of the enemy's night defences, backed Churchill's plan. At Casablanca the

prime minister forcefully put this proposal to Roosevelt, talking of the harrowing losses being sustained by the young Americans.²³ General 'Hap' Arnold wrote in his diary that he dined afterwards with Ira C. Eaker, the U.S. Eighth Air Force commander whom he had flown out from England to Casablanca, and talked over what Churchill had called the 'grief of bombing,' evidently meaning this unresolved tactical dispute. Meeting Arnold later out on a walk, Churchill agreed to give Eaker a hearing.²⁴

They met at noon on January 20.²⁵ Eaker handed him a one-page document arguing that the Eighth Air Force should continue its daylight operations, however costly. Winston liked one-page documents. He read it slowly and deliberately; since his lips mouthed the words, the U.S. air-force general could follow his progress down the page.²⁶ The P.M. particularly liked the young American general's words about bombing the Germans 'around the clock,' and he silently rehearsed the phrase. It was an angle he had not considered. 'You know,' he told Eaker, 'my mother was an American, and it breaks my heart to see these tragic losses you're suffering.' The Americans were losing ten per cent, he pointed out, Harris only two. He proposed however to suggest to Roosevelt that they allow Eaker to continue daylight operations, painful though their losses were.



'Winston arrived back yesterday in terrific form,' Eden reported to Lord Halifax on February 8, 1943, reporting his chief's return from Casablanca. 'These trips appear to buoy him up tremendously, and I hope that this time there won't be the reaction that there was after the last American flight.'²⁷

If he was referring to the public irritation with such excursions, particularly in the North of the realm, Eden was not far off the mark. In Scotland the newsreel of the parade in Tripoli evoked mixed feelings. From a Glasgow cinema audience watching the newsreel of the parade there was no applause even for the skirl and circumstance of the massed Scots pipers of the Highland Division. When Churchill himself came on the screen, looking pudgy in his air commodore's uniform, just one woman clapped in the darkened cinema.²⁸ Later that year, in June, somebody decided to give his reputation a leg-up, and London blossomed with poster-billboards depicting British heroes of the past – Sir Francis Drake and William Pitt among them. Similar prints of Winston Churchill were never far away.²⁹

The prime minister's Liberator bomber had landed at Lyneham. A special train brought his party to London's Paddington station.³⁰ Meeting his cabinet at five-thirty p.m. that day, February 7, 1943 – a meeting called although it was a Sunday – he entertained them with an account of his journeys. He told them that Roosevelt harboured the strangest ideas for France and her possessions after the war – that she should not be allowed an army, that Dakar should become an Allied base, and that the United States should hold on to her Pacific islands regardless of the undertakings that he had given to both René Pleven, French minister for the colonies, and to General Giraud to restore the integrity of the French empire.³¹

De Gaulle's behaviour was to blame for this hardening American aversion to all things French. In a message to Eden, Roosevelt expressed annoyance at the propaganda still emanating from de Gaulle's headquarters in London, calling it 'a continuing irritant.' 'He knows,' wrote Hull, 'that the prime minister would agree with him, and hopes that you can take further steps to allay the irritation.'³² Considering himself a loyal admirer of de Gaulle, King George VI was bewildered by their American allies' readiness to deal with rival French officials like Bergeret, who had been uncomfortably close to the Vichy regime. Eden of course shared that view. After reading a foreign office paper on Eisenhower's dispositions in Algiers the king decided that the whole position in North Africa was 'an enigma.'³³

Churchill felt very differently. Sitting next to Eden as they watched the latest Humphrey Bogart movie *Casablanca* – it had been released in January, the same month as his own performance in that city – Churchill fulminated in the darkness against de Gaulle, while Eden nagged him for two more hours about Turkey, and whether the journey to Adana had really been worth it. Of course it had not, but Churchill grumbled that as prime minister he could go where he liked.

Anyway, he retorted to Eden, who recorded his words from memory, if he had been killed, it would have been a good way to go; and then Eden would have come into his 'inheritance' even sooner. 'There is old Anthony,' he said he had remarked at the time, in *Casablanca*, 'thinking all I want is a joyride. He has got it all wrong.' 'But,' he told Eden now, 'I bear no rancour.' He kept his young foreign secretary up until two a.m. that night with this argument. When Eden referred to his own plans to visit Washington, Churchill implied that there was no need – that he was on better terms with Roosevelt than ever before.³⁴

Unarticulated and unidentified, there was now an awkwardness, a nameless tension between the two men. Eden was impatient to inherit; but he saw no way of accelerating the process, tiresome though Winston could be. The next day the prime minister floored him with the casual remark that he had not yet actually mentioned to Roosevelt anything about Eden's burning desire to visit Washington.³⁵

relations with the French would remain a watershed issue between Eden and Churchill, and between London and Washington, until the war ended. When Churchill proposed on February 8 that he announce to the House that he had placed the Eighth Army under Eisenhower's supreme command and that they had appointed Alexander and Tedder as his deputy supreme commanders, Roosevelt sent back the smooth response that the British appointments were better kept secret: 'It is my opinion,' he reasoned, 'that co-operation by French Forces will be best if the American supreme command in North Africa is stressed.' He positively purred the concluding words, 'I am so glad you are safely back. You have accomplished marvels.'³⁶

The king was also pleased to see his first minister looking so well and cheerful, and not visibly fatigued after his long journey. After lunching with Churchill on February 9 he confided to his diary: 'He gave me a good account of the Conference, delighted with his Turkish visit & was eulogistic over the smartness of the Eighth Army. He is furious with de Gaulle over his refusal to accept F.D.R.'s invitation to meet him & Giraud. The latter made friends with F.D.R. & got on well.' The king pleaded with him not to go too hard on de Gaulle and his men. 'I told W,' he wrote, 'I could well understand De G's attitude, & that of our own people here, who do not like the idea of making friends of those Frenchmen who have collaborated with the Germans.'³⁷

churchill continued to find serious fault with Eisenhower. The general was now estimating that General von Arnim's strength in northern Tunisia was increasing by 950 troops each day, and that out of 75,400 Axis troops on his front no fewer than 62,100 were ground combatants, while only 10,100 were in the rear; the rest were Luftwaffe personnel. Eisenhower also estimated that on the southern front Rommel had 64,000 men, of which 40,500 were combatants, 14,500 were service troops and 9,000 Luftwaffe.³⁸ Churchill disputed these figures. He challenged his chiefs of staff on February 10: 'How is it that there are seven German combatants to

one non-combatant, whereas with us it is pretty well the other way round?' Referring to the intercepts, he added: 'The figures quoted about Rommel's army are very different from those which we saw in *boniface* some weeks ago.'³⁹ Ismay replied on February 16: 'Information received from *boniface* in the last 48 hours substantially confirms our estimate of the strength of German troops in the Mareth area' – namely 34,100 army troops and 8000 in GAF field units, which was close to the War Office's own estimates.⁴⁰



By this time the prime minister was ill. Wilting at first only from a head cold, he had driven over to the House on February 11, 1943 to report on Casablanca. The next day the cold took him to bed. It rapidly became more serious, and a worried hand – not his – drew a line through all the appointments on his desk calendar.⁴¹ Summoned to Winston's 'cage' at the Annexe – to discuss whether to offer to General Auchinleck the Iraq–Iran Command – Sir Alan Brooke found him in bed running a temperature. The prime minister struggled out of bed on February 15 for lunch with a predecessor, Lord Baldwin ('I can't help liking the old miscreant,' he would tell Lord Halifax), and again for a cabinet meeting later that day, though now battling with a painfully sore throat as well.⁴² With only Clementine at his side he could feel his fever worsening by the hour the next evening; his physician diagnosed a lung inflammation and prescribed 'M&B,' a sulphonamide drug. Finally the truth could not be denied. X-ray photographs confirmed that he had contracted pneumonia, or what Dr Geoffrey Marshall, who came over from Guy's Hospital, called 'the old man's friend.' Churchill inquired how it had earned that sobriquet; in a matter-of-fact tone the doctor explained, '– because it takes them off so quietly.'⁴³

The world learned nothing of this, but for days his staff, hovering around the forlorn apartment, believed that their chief was on the brink of death.

He shared this month of physical discomfort with an illustrious, if far-away, opponent. On February 8 Mahatma Gandhi had declared a fast to the death to secure his release from imprisonment. While Churchill had been away in Cairo in August 1942, the war cabinet had ordered the Viceroy of India to imprison Gandhi and several hundred of his rebellious followers. Gandhi himself was held in conditions of some comfort in the Aga Khan's villa in Poona, and he announced his intention, repeatedly, of going on hunger strike.

Gandhi's well-publicised fast was an event for which Churchill's cabinet was therefore well prepared. He and the government of India had debated repeatedly how best to deal with it and opinion had wavered. In September 1942 they decided quite simply not to intervene.⁴⁴ The governor of Bombay, Sir Roger Lumley, disagreed, expressing concern that there would be riots if Gandhi should die while in his custody; when the war cabinet again discussed the possibility on January 7, 1943, it now felt that if he did begin the fast he should be released from internment on compassionate grounds.⁴⁵ Prompted by Leo Amery, the viceroy objected, and the cabinet decided to allow Gandhi, if foolish enough to start, to complete his fast to the death.⁴⁶

On January 29 Gandhi announced his intention of doing so. Opinion in London again wavered. Attlee hoped to deal with it behind Churchill's back on his return on Sunday, February 7, but the prime minister decided against going straight down to Chequers that day, and held his cabinet meeting. He was in a belligerent mood, and muttered loudly; he finally told Simon, Amery, and Anderson, the three of them, to draft a telegram to the viceroy. Hearing that there had been protests from the viceroy's Indian Council, he was not put out in the least: 'What if a few blackamoors resigned!' he exclaimed, according to Amery. It was time for the British to show the world that they were governing. Amery shuddered, and decided that the improvement in the fortunes of war had turned the P.M.'s head.⁴⁷

Accompanied by great and unseemly publicity, Mahatma Gandhi began his fast the very next day, on February 8. Churchill was now going down with his pneumonia, but he was resolved to outface this Asian agitator. Over the following days, as the fast ran its course, the Hindu newspapers in India fell in behind Gandhi and voiced grave concern; the Moslems treated it with more levity. Sir Roger Lumley pleaded for Gandhi's unconditional release – a display of softness which killed his chances of Churchill appointing him to succeed Lord Linlithgow as viceroy.⁴⁸ The doctors warned that Gandhi would die on or just after February 21; Lumley quoted the view of his European civil service and police officers that irreparable damage to Anglo-Indian relations would result. Churchill however remained firm.

As the days passed, it became a battle of wit and willpower. Speaking in the unnaturally weak and gentle voice characteristic of pneumonia, he dictated a message to the viceroy inquiring whether it could be verified that, as he had heard, Gandhi usually took glucose in his water when 'doing his various fasting antics.' The viceroy replied that his information was that Gandhi was absolutely refusing to do so.⁴⁹ Churchill was unmoved.

mahatma gandhi's *coup de théâtre* gave Washington an excuse to resume its interference in the affairs of British India. Once before, in 1942, Roosevelt had told his vice-president that his great ambition was to destroy the British empire, commencing with India.⁵⁰ (It was an irony of history that Adolf Hitler, Churchill's principal enemy, had often expressed the opposite desire.*)

Roosevelt left no doubt of his hostility to any empire other than the burgeoning American one. After the fall of Malaya he had told Sir Ronald Campbell that Britain could never revert to the old situation there, and he suggested that Britain, the United States, and China should exert a triple trusteeship there. Leopold Amery, an old-guard Conservative, tasked Churchill with this attitude of his great ally. 'I found Winston rather weak on this,' wrote Amery, 'inclined to think that America's sacrifices would entitle her to some sort of say.'⁵¹ Churchill commiserated with Amery that he knew it would be hard on Amery if the Americans forced Britain to abandon his life's work. Amery replied that there was no need whatsoever to abandon the empire, and its members could trade amongst themselves as they liked.⁵²

Roosevelt never lost sight of his goal. Driving alone and talking politics with George Patton in January 1943, he 'discussed the P.M. to his disadvantage,' as the general privately recorded, and gloated that India was all but lost to the British.⁵³ To speed that process he had sent the Hon. William Phillips to Delhi in November as his personal representative, an officer whose principal qualification appeared to be a barely concealed disdain for Churchill, and who routinely wrote his private letters on the printed letterhead of Roosevelt's new espionage service, the O.S.S.⁵⁴

Phillips stopped in London before proceeding to India. Both Amery and Cripps met him.⁵⁵ He also lunched at No. 10 Downing-street, sending to Washington a dispatch the next day that rather dwelt on the prime minister's 'siren zipper-suit' and boots. During the two-hour luncheon, which had begun at one-thirty, Churchill conducted his guest on a tour of every corner of his world; upon reaching India, he remarked that he was willing to grant Dominion status if the parties there should be in agreement (knowing that they were not). The British, reported Phillips, were saying that if

* See David Irving, *Hitler's War* (millennium edition, 2000), pages 22ff, 37f, 45f, 135, 274, 299f, 309ff, 316f, 459, 846f, 873. Hitler repeatedly expressed the desire for an alliance with the empire: *ibid.*, pages 437, 444, 886.

they pulled out a bloody civil war would ensue between Hindu and Moslem.⁵⁶

This was a prediction on which Roosevelt's agent offered no opinion. Arriving in Delhi, he passed on to the viceroy a request from the president to release Gandhi; it was evidently inspired by that noisome duo, Eleanor Roosevelt and Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who was staying at the White House. Leo Amery reassured the viceroy that they were taking a robust line against American interference. 'I do hope,' he also asked Churchill, 'you will make it quite clear to the president that his people must keep off the grass.'⁵⁷ He had little cause to fear. Churchill did not like Gandhi, that was plain. His views on India, as Amery remarked in private, remained those of the army subaltern Winston Churchill at Poona in 1892.⁵⁸

As Gandhi seemed to near his highly publicised end, Churchill instructed Lord Halifax to educate Hull, Hopkins, and all the other meddlers in Washington that he was not about to change his mind, and that any intervention from the United States would be the cause of 'great embarrassment' between them.⁵⁹ Gandhi however did not die. Writing to the king on the day after the Indian's expected demise, Churchill referred with feeling to 'the old humbug Gandhi,' and scoffed that he was lasting so much longer than one had been assured was medically possible, that 'one wonders whether his fast is bona fide.'⁶⁰ Whatever the origins of this miracle, Gandhi began to gain weight; his doctor was heard on the twenty-fourth telephoning friends in Delhi that he was in no danger, and Churchill received a telegram from the viceroy to this effect.⁶¹

He believed that the Hindu doctors had fed glucose to the politician to sustain him during his well-feigned fast. His experts had told him, he said, first that the fourth day would be critical; then it was the seventh, and then the eleventh – and all the time Gandhi was quite clearly taking surreptitious nourishment. He told Field-Marshal Smuts that he did not think Gandhi had the slightest intention of dying yet: 'I imagine he has been eating better meals than I have for the last week. What fools we should have been,' he reflected, 'to flinch before all this bluff and sob-stuff.'⁶² Gandhi was no doubt counting, mocked Churchill, on a couple of Japanese army corps being forthcoming to enable his Congress Party to rule over the rest of India.⁶³ He urged the viceroy to use, judiciously, the weapon of ridicule in dealing with 'the old rascal' in future.⁶⁴

Of course he was relieved that Gandhi did not die, and pleased too that for once Washington had allowed things to run their course.⁶⁵ Gandhi abandoned his fast early in March and was freed soon after.

ill though he was, Churchill's displeasure with Eisenhower deepened. A telegram came from the general explaining that they might not have cleared the Axis out of Tunisia even by May and that husky – the invasion of Sicily – might have to be postponed until July.⁶⁶ From his sickbed Churchill dictated on February 13 an indignant response, calling it 'a disastrous hiatus': 'I hope that we need not take this as conveying your final decision but only as presenting many serious difficulties to be solved.' A three-month delay in launching husky, he repeated, seemed 'a very serious disaster for the Allied cause.'⁶⁷ Upset, he also sent a cable to Harry Hopkins, asking him to point out to their friend, meaning Roosevelt, that the British generals felt that they could have their side of husky ready by June. 'I think it is an awful thing,' wrote the prime minister, 'that in April, May, and June not a single American or British soldier will be killing a single German or Italian soldier, while the Russians are chasing 185 divisions around.' Anticipating powerful reproaches from Stalin he reminded Hopkins, 'We should not have had any torch if we had yielded to the fears of the professionals.'⁶⁸

Eisenhower was faced however with the military realities. By mid-February 1943 the situation in southern Tunisia had become tense as the German forces threw violent punches at the now greatly over-extended Allied ring around them. Rommel was back in the fray, and the Americans facing him were a motley and still inexperienced force. The Germans had several companies of the new Mark VI Tiger tanks, mounting the deadly 88-millimetre guns, and they were making good use of dive bombers. The American troops evacuated Gafsa late on February 14, and there was stiff fighting around Faïd. Eisenhower went forward briefly to take command.⁶⁹

As the American setbacks at Gafsa became apparent, Eisenhower was asked by his staff whether the British might not now claim the credit for throwing the Germans out of Africa. Eisenhower reassured them in terms which revealed the anti-imperialist strain of American foreign policy. President Roosevelt, he said, had talked to him quite frankly about the eventual peace conference. 'I will dictate the peace,' Roosevelt had said. He would prevent Tunisia from becoming a British asset. 'Perhaps,' wrote Eisenhower's naval aide, 'Lend-lease gives him [Roosevelt] a feeling [that] Uncle Sam can foreclose on its mortgage.'⁷⁰

By the seventeenth the U.S. First Armored Division had lost eighty tanks to Rommel's well-prepared surprise attack. General Sir Harold Alexander came to see Eisenhower on that day; the American made to his new deputy a somewhat inarticulate reference to Rommel's move, calling it a real 'son of a bitch.' He blamed faulty British Intelligence. It turned out that Lieutenant-General Kenneth Anderson, commanding the First Army, had attached too much credence to an *ultra* intercept supplied by his Intelligence officer, Brigadier Eric Mockler-Ferryman, which had implied that Rommel's thrust was only a diversionary move. In consequence Anderson had held back his reserves in the north, rather than sending them south to help Major-General Lloyd Fredendall's U.S. Second Corps.⁷¹

General Alexander could see that Rommel intended to 'gobble up' the Allied units one by one, while they were widely dispersed. This was classic Clausewitz. The next *ultra* intercept that Bedell Smith (and Churchill) saw showed Rommel reporting confidently to Berlin that he proposed further such strikes 'on account of the low fighting value of the enemy.'⁷² Eisenhower winced at this slight, but it was well-deserved. Rommel went on to punch a hole through the Kasserine Gap, giving the American forces here the worst hiding they had had so far. The word 'disaster' figured in American newspaper headlines. Eisenhower relieved General Orlando 'Pink' Ward and appointed another to command the First Armored Division.⁷³ This was no minor setback. It was one of the most resounding defeats ever inflicted on the Americans in war. 'We sent out some 120 tanks,' noted Eisenhower's aid Harry Butcher on February 23, 'and 112 didn't come back.'⁷⁴ What added insult to injury was the courteous and understanding attitude of the British generals.

In London the American disaster at Kasserine evoked naked *Schadenfreude* and dismay. Using the scrambler at his bedside, Churchill phoned Brooke at home about the news.⁷⁵ Late on February 22 Rommel abandoned the attack through the Kasserine Gap, adjudging that he had pushed ahead too far. The codebreakers deciphered his message to this effect.⁷⁶ 'The enemy,' Churchill informed Stalin in a confident message on the twenty-fourth, 'have shot their bolt and will now be brought into the grip of the vice.'⁷⁷

after kasserine Churchill made little attempt to conceal his contempt for the American forces and their fighting value. He scoffed at the enormous numbers of Americans in uniform in the 'tail' for each man actually in the front line; an American division, he marvelled to his cabinet, numbered

fifty thousand men. All talk of getting twenty-seven American divisions into Britain by April vanished, because thanks to the U-boats there was not enough shipping to bring them over.⁷⁸

The king was much disturbed about both the political and the military situation in North Africa. He noted in his diary, 'I am not happy about either.'⁷⁹ Churchill's illness had prevented their regular Tuesday meetings. On February 22 he wrote a long, worried letter to the sick prime minister: 'I feel the underhand dealings of Murphy with the French in North Africa, and his contacts with Vichy, have placed both America and this country in an invidious position,' he explained.* He was concerned about the setbacks at Gafsa and Kasserine, and said quite bluntly: 'It looks as if the U.S. Forces have had a sound defeat last week . . . and as if we shall have to do all the fighting there.' According to the telegrams he had seen, said the king, the situation seemed to be deteriorating, and now the Americans were proposing to delay husky: 'This fact,' the king added, showing a remarkable grasp of the essentials, 'will throw out all our careful calculations for convoys and escorts, and will upset our import programme again.'⁸⁰

Churchill was in no mood for such a letter. To General Brooke, visiting him on this day, he still looked ghastly, though he joked that his temperature was right down to only one hundred degrees. Brooke felt it reprehensible that he should have been bothered with such a letter while so ill.⁸¹

In his reply – parts of which Brooke advised him to tone down – the prime minister discounted the king's belief that Murphy was hand-in-glove with Vichy.⁸² He predicted, rightly, that Rommel had so denuded the Mareth line to win his victory at Kasserine that Montgomery's two corps, the Tenth and the Thirtieth, would have an easier task. 'What a providential thing it was,' continued Churchill with a certain relish, 'that I perpetually pressed for General Eisenhower to take the command, as the defeat of the American corps, if it had been under a British general, would have given our enemies in the United States a good chance to blaspheme.'⁸³ This satisfied the king, who concluded that the Allies had no option but to use the French who were 'there,' in North Africa. 'The Americans will learn through defeat,' wrote the king, summarising Churchill's views; 'and,' he added as a

* The king's forceful language about Robert Murphy suggests that the French findings that he figured on a British secret-service hit-list were not fanciful. This sentence was omitted from the text published by both Churchill, vol. iv, pages 655ff, and Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI: His Life and Reign* (London, 1958), pages 561f.

neat codicil, 'the Germans will learn from the Eighth Army when they meet in Tunisia.'

as his fever increased during February 1943, and the congestion in his lungs made it harder for him to speak, his memoranda became more terse. One message to General Brooke on February 17 – asking about Rommel's surprising resurgence in southern Tunisia – was less than one line long: 'Was it necessary to evacuate Gafsa?'⁸⁴ By Friday the nineteenth the illness was entering its crisis. A fever of 101 degrees was entered in the desk diary, and more people were necessarily brought into the secret.⁸⁵ Lord Moran and two nurses were constantly in attendance; while they massaged the P.M.'s head each night in oil of wintergreen, he bombarded them all with questions, which masked his real anxiety, about how sulphonamides worked.⁸⁶

For several days the flow of memoranda completely stopped. He asked the foreign secretary to delay his trip to Washington. As Churchill's designated successor, Eden followed the illness more closely than most.

Whitehall held its breath: pneumonia is such a wayward and arbitrary killer – so little under man's control. On Saturday night his fever worsened, but then it declined, and the crisis was past.⁸⁷ The Lord had decided not to send for him just yet. On Sunday February 21 Averell Harriman wired the better tidings across the Atlantic to Hopkins, informing him that the P.M. was somewhat improved now. Now Winston had to be patient, while his scarred lung-tissues healed. Visiting her father that day Mary Churchill was distressed to see him slumped back in his bed, looking very old and tired.⁸⁸ He was taking no papers of state at all.⁸⁹ 'It was miserable having him ill and knowing how he hated it,' wrote one of the shorthand secretaries most attached to him. 'He was so sweet, too, any time one had to go in; [he] seemed quite glad to see one.'⁹⁰ Partially offsetting the world's prolonged uproar about Gandhi's 'near death,' the British Sunday newspapers now disclosed that their own prime minister was suffering from a touch of pneumonia. In an elderly *bon vivant* with a taste for alcohol, noted one journalist in his diary, such an illness could only be serious.⁹¹

He was not too ill to view a film, sent by Stalin, of the Stalingrad ordeal; he ordered *Desert Victory*, Britain's film of the victory at Alamein, flown out to Moscow in response. On the twenty-second Eden's staff learned that the prime minister's health was 'still stationary.'⁹² On the twenty-fourth the temperature was returning to normal. 'Had bad time,' he admitted in a cable to Hopkins, 'and might easily have been worse. Am feeling definitely

better now. So,' he added cynically, 'is Gandhi' – he had taken a marked turn for the better once he saw that his antics were getting him nowhere. 'I am so glad,' added Churchill, 'that you did not get drawn in.'⁹³

Cables flew around the world to reassure Churchill's many friends. 'Winston is well on the way to recovery,' Brendan Bracken informed the financier Baruch in New York: 'He passed through a rough time but he is tough like you Bernie and I think you will both achieve centenaries.'⁹⁴ On the last day of February he picked up the phone and called Hopkins in person, to announce that his fever was gone. He was still feeling 'pretty rocky,' he said. He was also taking an interest in the war again, telling Hopkins that the battle in Tunisia had gone pretty well – presumably he meant, for the British – and that he expected it to go better. Hopkins gathered from his hints that General Montgomery was intending to strike back at Rommel sooner than the Americans had anticipated.⁹⁵

On March 1 his private secretary John Martin, returning from a vacation in Scotland, found Churchill still in bed but much better.⁹⁶ Brooke, visiting at ten p.m. to discuss appointments to various commands, agreed. It was a sign that something of the old Winston, and his obsessions, were returning that while talking of their next approaches to the Turks, he explained to Eden: 'We must start by treating them purry-purry puss-puss. Then later we shall harden.'⁹⁷ After a while Churchill was better again. His voice regained its old bark and bite, his secretaries squealed with silent delight at the snorts of impatience and the words of scorn, coupled with what one called 'the final twinkle of forgiveness.'⁹⁸



While the U.S. bomber squadrons had yet to fly their first missions over German territory, R.A.F. Bomber Command, Churchill's main striking force, was now well prepared to batter by night at the heart of Germany. Sir Arthur Harris had gathered a force of many hundreds of heavy four-engined bombers, each capable of lifting many tons of bombs. They were led by a Pathfinder force equipped with revolutionary precision radar devices like *OBOE* and *H2S*.

They had a clear purpose too: the Casablanca directive of January 21, 1943 had defined that they were to aim at the 'progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial, and economic system, and

the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.'

Overriding these military considerations there was also a strong political purpose in the offensive – the need to impress Stalin; for this reason Churchill insisted that Harris had to attack Berlin. During their summer conference in Moscow, Stalin had gained the impression that Churchill had promised to bomb the city in September, but he had not kept his word.⁹⁹ In fact Harris was deeply reluctant to risk his force over Berlin as yet. He once said that, like Admiral Jellicoe in the Great War, he was the only commander who could, by a false move, lose his entire force, and thus the war, in one night. Dissatisfied, Stalin repeatedly asked over the ensuing months when Berlin was going to be bombed. Churchill in turn harried Portal and Harris. But the city was a long way from British bases; for half the year, short nights put it out of range and even then only the moonless nights were suitable. In September 1942 Portal had told the prime minister that they would need three to four hundred bombers and crews to saturate the defences, and these they would not have before January 1943. Contemplating this lack of real success at a cabinet meeting on January 4 the prime minister gave voice to his sense of frustration: he had poured Britain's industrial resources into the strategic bombing offensive, to the exclusion and almost the ruination of the other services – had he been over-optimistic in doing so?¹⁰⁰

Harris had agreed to raid Berlin, but on January 6 Winston was baffled to learn that this would employ only 150 Lancasters. Had not the air staff, arguing for delay in September, told him that three or four hundred bombers were essential to saturate the city's defences? 'I do not understand this process at all,' he had complained to Portal, and ordered him to come with Sinclair and Harris to discuss the matter at No. 10 Downing-street. At this meeting, on Friday the eighth, Harris mounted a wordy and technical defence, revolving around the mixed types available in September, compared with the all-Lancaster force now which could still carry five hundred tons to Berlin. Harris set out his plan for operation *tannenberg*, a raid on Berlin eight or nine days later. Churchill hastened to pass the news to Stalin.¹⁰¹

As the pattern of carnage was spread ever wider across Europe, not only the Germans suffered. Anxious to defeat the U-boat menace, Churchill turned his glare on the heavily bunkered submarine pens which Admiral Karl Dönitz had installed in France's Biscay ports like Lorient and Brest. Since the pens themselves were invulnerable, the admiralty wanted Harris to execute 'area bombing' raids on the surrounding towns. There would be

heavy casualties among the French dockyard workers and their families, which raised serious political implications, and at an Anti U-boat Warfare meeting on December 9, 1942 Churchill said they would have to discuss these with the foreign office first.¹⁰² The foreign office gave the go-ahead. On January 11, before leaving for Casablanca, Churchill authorised the saturation bombing raids on the two French ports. He ordered the civilian population given a brief warning to get clear of the towns – a courtesy that was neither desirable nor feasible in Germany.¹⁰³

On January 14 Bomber Command began a five-week blitz on Lorient. This series of raids would absorb over half of Harris's entire effort for these weeks. Harris's operational research experts had learned from Britain's own experience in Plymouth, and his bombers attacking Lorient were loaded with both high explosives and fire bombs. Altogether 1,952 sorties were dispatched against this target, and 1,833 tons of explosives and 2,453 tons of incendiaries cascaded onto the town; twenty-nine British bombers were lost, and five of the thirty-five American planes attacking on January 23 were also lost. By February 17 the town was devastated. The submarines continued to sally forth unscathed. The effect on U-boat sorties was barely perceptible. Admiral Pound urged that the attacks on Lorient and the other U-boat bases should go on; the air staff considered that the raids had failed.¹⁰⁴

As the Allied bomb damage to French cities grew, the Bey of Tunis appealed through the Swiss government for his city at least to be spared; he wanted it recognised as an open town, as the bombs were falling on the militarily meaningless Mohammedan areas of this ancient metropolis of Islam. The Foreign Office privately inquired of the chiefs of staff whether there might be any military advantage in accepting the Bey's proposal, then rejected the appeal and the bombing continued.¹⁰⁵

the two January 1943 raids on Berlin had been executed while Churchill was still at Casablanca. On the twenty-seventh he had cabled to Sinclair, 'It seems to me most important to keep on at the big city whenever the weather allows, lest it be thought their feeble but vaunted reprisals have damped our ardour.' On his return he again ordered heavy raids on the German capital. On the night of March 1–2 his squadrons dropped over seven hundred tons of bombs on the city, including the new four-ton 'blockbusters.' Informing Stalin of this in a three-line telegram, he did not neglect to mention the losses, nineteen planes (with over 150 highly trained men) out of

the 302 dispatched.¹⁰⁶ During this raid, Harris reported to him, the fire brigades had been overwhelmed and thirty factories damaged. The block-busters sucked the windows out of every building within a radius of five hundred yards, which laid their contents bare for the fire-bombs. Archie Sinclair also sent a raid assessment to the prime minister. One of the four-ton bombs had detonated in a courtyard of Hermann Göring's air ministry building, destroying two to three hundred rooms of the sprawling complex. The greatest damage of these raids was now caused by two factors, said Sinclair – the use of phosphorus incendiaries (which caused hideous painful burns as people tried to tear the blazing phosphorus from their skins), and the heavy bombs which blew out all windows within a range of 500 yards.* Churchill noted 'good' on his copy.¹⁰⁷ He called for a repeat of this raid. Berlin's deathroll from this one raid topped six hundred.¹⁰⁸

London's east-enders expected Hitler to retaliate for this raid; this expectation led to a tragic incident two days later.

The half-finished Tube station at Bethnal Green had been turned into a deep shelter in 1940 offering refuge for up to ten thousand from the Blitz. The Fleet-street papers had published a gloating account of the raid on Berlin, the boastful reports that 'ultra-heavy' bombs had been used this time added to the fears; late on March 3 they were fully expecting the Luftwaffe to appear overhead. By evening, five to six hundred were already crowding into the underground tunnels. When an Alert sounded at 8:17 p.m., the awful, chilling, unforgettable rise-and-fall wailing of thousands of sirens across the entire city, hundreds more stampeded toward the entrance. As the sirens kept wailing, the neighbourhood movie theatres halted their projectors, and staff turned their audiences out into the streets; three London Transport buses stopped at the shelter entrance to unload their frightened passengers. This was the real people's war as the Churchills and Edens never experienced it in their lives. Within ten minutes fifteen hundred East-Enders had elbowed their way through the darkened narrow entrance of

* The use of phosphorus bombs was illegal, and was not admitted by the Allies. See e.g. the secret Press Censors' Guidance No. 816, issued on the authority of 21 Army Group by the Combined Field Press Censorship Group (Rear) at shaef (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) Headquarters on February 15, 1945. This put a stop on 'all mention of the use of White Phosphorus Bombs as anti-personnel weapons,' explaining: 'This [use] is a contravention of the Geneva Conventions' (Hoover Libr., Daniel Lerner papers, Box 35: 'shaef, Other Branches'). So much for conventions.

the shelter, its upper steps lit only dimly by one 25-watt bulb. Soon, distant gunfire could be heard; then a salvo of rocket missiles suddenly thundered into the sky a mile away at 8:27 p.m. Somebody shouted, 'They've started dropping them.'

Urgency was replaced by panic, then pandemonium. At the foot of the staircase a woman carrying both a bundle and a child tripped over. Within seconds, layers of people built up across the width of the stairway, each layer trampling to death the one beneath. No enemy bombs fell that night, but the toll was deadly: 173 people were suffocated to death, of whom twenty-seven were men, eighty-four were women, and sixty-two children.¹⁰⁹

If Churchill had had his way, there would have been no mention of this incident at all. The ministry of home security drafted a press release. 'A large number of people,' this stated, had been suffocated to death 'yesterday evening' during a serious accident. Churchill crossed out the word 'large,' and much of the rest. In a recent Boston fire, Morrison was reminded, six hundred had lost their lives (the real figure was 499), but only a 'small amount of publicity' had been given to this.¹¹⁰ As released, the ministry's brief statement now held that it was clear from 'a large number of eye witnesses' that 'there was no sign of panic.' This cover-up, the government soon learned, led to 'strong feelings' in the East End.¹¹¹

For several days ugly rumours flew – blaming alternatively 'the Fascists' or 'the Jews.' A metropolitan magistrate conducted an inquiry. 'The [latter] canard had a much wider circulation,' he found, 'and was, I understand, endorsed by the broadcast utterances of a renegade traitor from Germany,' – a reference presumably to William Joyce. 'Not only is it without foundation. It is demonstrably false. The Jewish attendance at this shelter was, and is, so small as to constitute a hardly calculable percentage.' The Home Secretary stated in the House on March 10 that the findings would be published, but he changed his mind on reading the report, with its evidence of panic. The enemy might use it 'in an attempt to show that London can no longer "take it".' Morrison rightly argued that Hitler might be tempted to start a campaign of minor nuisance raids.¹¹² The cabinet ordered the report suppressed, and the tragedy remained a wartime secret.

As these Londoners were being trampled to death in Bethnal Green on the rumours of bombs falling, on the night of March 3–4, Churchill's squadrons were dumping eight hundred tons of explosives and fire bombs on Hamburg. Stalin sent a telegram welcoming these raids and praised Churchill's intention to increase them during coming months.¹¹³ On the night of

the fifth the R.A.F. aimed 468 tons of high explosive and 518 tons of fire bombs at a two-square mile area of Essen, home of the Krupp armaments works, and Churchill had a telegram sent to the Kremlin accordingly.¹¹⁴

the doctors had ordered a ten-day convalescence for Winston. Averell Harriman lunched with the Churchills and Eden on March 3, before he retired to the Chequers country estate. 'The prime minister is better than I expected,' Harriman reported to Washington, 'but still obviously weak and definitely must take it easy for a period to recover fully.' They talked of de Gaulle – about what Harriman called his 'antics' and Eden, more delicately, his 'activities.' 'Clemmie,' Eden was interested to see, recording this evening in his diary, 'showed none of the reported hatred of De G.'¹¹⁵

The 'shotgun wedding' charade at Casablanca had however charged Churchill with fresh loathing for this Frenchman, and he talked openly of 'breaking' him before he broke the Atlantic alliance. In his letter of February 22 the king had expressed dismay at this continuing friction; in his response, Churchill had left little doubt as to his views on North Africa: 'The irruption of de Gaulle or his agents into this field,' he had responded, 'especially if forcibly introduced by us, would cause nothing but trouble. De Gaulle is hostile to this country, and I put far more confidence in Giraud than in him.' He had reminded the king of the insolence with which de Gaulle had rejected the invitation to come out to Casablanca and shake hands. 'He now wishes to go on a tour round his dominions,' he had then explained to the king, '*mes fiefs* as he calls them. I have vetoed this, as he would simply make mischief and spread Anglophobia wherever he went.'¹¹⁶

If Eden had hoped that Darlan's death would dispose of the problem, he was disabused by the prime minister's edginess toward him. On February 24 he flared up when the still feverish prime minister had approved a suggestion by Giraud that they appoint Pierre Flandin to the French National Council in Algiers. Flandin was a former prime minister whom both Churchill and Randolph had befriended before the war. But Flandin had damaged his good name by his support for appeasement in 1938.

'Pay no attention,' Churchill had nonetheless dictated in a message to Harold Macmillan in Algiers, 'to the newspapers' clack and chatter.'¹¹⁷

Alerted by John Martin, Eden tackled the bedridden Churchill about 'that telegram you thought of sending last night to Algiers.'

Churchill realised that Eden had arbitrarily stopped the cable: 'How dare you!' he shouted. 'By what right do you interfere with my private corre-

spondence? I shall send what telegrams I choose.' He growled that whenever he was away, or ill, Eden now seemed to be trying to cramp his style. He was not dead yet, he pointed out, and he would send any messages he chose.¹¹⁸ Eden flounced out, recommending to Martin that he get Lord Moran and Bracken to intervene. Relenting, Churchill asked to see him; Eden sulked, and lay doggo until late evening. He then found Winston in bed, rather more mellow about the telegram. Churchill said: 'Perhaps we had better not send it.'

Recalling this episode in his memoirs, twenty years later, Eden wrote that although there was nothing he could say that evening, the prime minister was aware of how he felt, and knew of the affection that bonded them.

As for de Gaulle, Eden continued to defend his general, but with scant assistance from the cabinet. On February 28 Churchill dictated to Eden that he wanted 'force used if necessary' to thwart de Gaulle's plans to tour his '*fiefs*' – Syria and North Africa. This ill-chosen Frenchman, he ruled, was Britain's 'foe.'¹¹⁹ Attempting to bring things to a head on March 2, General de Gaulle asked Charles Peake, British liaison officer on the French National Committee, point-blank to let him know within twenty-four hours whether he could start on his tour, or 'whether he was a prisoner.'¹²⁰ We shall inevitably return to him later.



As ordered, Churchill had driven down to Chequers on March 4, 1943 to convalesce after his pneumonia. Two hospital nurses accompanied him. They put him through a rigorous routine including chest exercises and little red pills, no doubt the 'M&Bs,' to be taken after dinner. It was during this stay at Chequers that he began reluctantly drafting a broadcast on his post-war plans. One of the nurses, Doris Miles, observed how he prepared his speeches; he did so in the bath – he had developed the art of turning the water taps on and off with his toes – then padded around in the nude or draped in a bath-towel, rehearsing the script out loud to Lord Moran or the Prof. They had all, nurses and cabinet ministers alike, seen it all before.

He continued to work on the script as he drove over to Dytchley Park for lunch on the seventh, taking just one shorthand-secretary. Throughout the drive, as her pencil flew across the jolting paper, his ideas tumbled forth. 'He spoke of Reconstruction,' she would recall in a private letter after-

wards, 'of National Insurance; of Employment, the Export Trade, and Agriculture; he continued with Health and Education.'

It was about an hour's drive, she wrote, and all the way there the prime minister 'spouted hard and I had an awful time trying to hear everything and get it all down.' It was no joke, she added, when the car lurched round corners and her pencils fell to the floor, and his papers, matches, and spare cigar slid to the rear while his despatch box slammed shut and slid in the other direction. 'It is a bit apt to put you off your [shorthand] outlines,' she wrote, 'but I managed it all right, thank heavens.'

At Dytchley, Lady Diana Cooper, Duff's beautiful wife, threw her arms around Winston's neck and shrilled: 'Darling, how glad we are to see you.'¹²¹ 'After lunch,' wrote their millionaire host, Ronald Tree, 'there was a discussion on what should be the basis for post-war credit. The P.M. said it should be a dollar-sterling based on forty-eight commodities.' He then called for a blank postcard and deftly sketched the symbol he proposed for this new currency – it showed the pound sign cleverly piggy-backing on the dollar and wrapping its arms around it; or perhaps even engaged in an immoral act.¹²² Although he was joking, he had obviously discussed his whimsical ideas with the American president, because Roosevelt had told MacKenzie King a year earlier that he and the P.M. liked at odd intervals to talk over the future financial structure, of which admittedly neither of them knew very much. Roosevelt himself, he said, thought some standard might be fixed, which would be based on Gold but would carry a sign of the pound and of the dollar, and be known as the 'demo.'¹²³

On the twenty-first he delivered the broadcast; under pressure from Herbert Morrison he included a passage about state ownership of industries, particularly where monopolies had developed.¹²⁴ The speech did not go over well. International finance and the post-war world were not the basis for the prime minister's popularity. Perversely, Hitler was. 'I often think,' an American agent in London cynically reported, 'watching Churchill, that just as the Eighth Army owes a great deal to Rommel, so Churchill, in his present dimensions, owes a hell of a lot to Hitler.' When Churchill turned to the home front, he became a smaller figure – the politician, master of the telling phrase and the useful monetary compromise. 'You can tell by the change in his voice,' suggested the agent, '– the practised oratorical tone – when he is slipping into this role.' In this broadcast Churchill had shown himself innocent of any knowledge of economics. He had delivered a full-throated roar against Britain's declining birth-rate, but simultaneously slashed

the Beveridge Plan's proposed 'family allowance' from eight shillings per child to only five. 'War' reported the agent, 'open or concealed, seems the only thing in which he is really interested.'¹²⁵

At a special war cabinet session on post-war commercial policy a few days later, Churchill apologised disarmingly that he was rusty on such matters, and declared testily that it would be better to reach agreement in bilateral conversations with the United States, and not to bring in the Dominions – 'these people,' as he disparagingly called them.¹²⁶ It was plain that anything not about the war bored him. When the highly technical discussion reached the creation of buffer stocks, he interrupted Sir William Jowitt to apologise, 'I thought you said Butter Scotch. I am getting very hard of hearing.' He hankered after the 'beautiful precision' of free trade and the Gold standard, 'though not in this disastrous century,' he said with feeling, 'but in the last.' 'He said,' noted Hugh Dalton, 'that he had spent forty years of his life opposing imperial preference. He believed that it had done nothing but harm.' When Oliver Lyttelton remarked that Britain was now a debtor nation, Churchill roared in fury and offered the same ingenious bankrupt's defence that he had proposed several times before. 'The P.M.,' wrote Dalton, 'vehemently denied that we should owe anybody anything at the end of the war. On the contrary, we should send in a bill to the whole world for having defended them. We should begin,' he added, 'with India.'¹²⁷

The more experienced ministers found the prime minister's ignorance of economic theory or history quite painful. 'I confess,' dictated the dispirited India secretary after this cabinet meeting, 'I cannot conceive his presiding over a period of reconstruction in which economics will play a major part and which the attitude of the government here towards the empire may be vital for the whole future.'¹²⁸



By early March 1943 there were signs of decaying morale among the Axis troops in North Africa. One day early in March Churchill found in his box an intercept of a recent Hitler order, 'No. 7,' instructing officers to shoot out of hand any soldiers showing disobedience during the difficult withdrawal and evacuation movements that lay ahead:

It is wrong to wait for a later punishment by court-martial. Immediate steps must be taken. I will protect such energetic Commanders at all times from any juristical consequences of their actions. . . Those who do not act against the unruly shall receive the same punishment. . . (sgd) *adolf hitler*.¹²⁹

After his victory at Kasserine, Rommel had quickly pulled his strike force around preparatory to attacking the Eighth Army. Montgomery's advance guards had reached Medenine, sixty miles from the frontier of Tunisia. A week before the Germans could strike, *ultra* intercepts had already revealed his battle plan, enabling Montgomery to mass his defences at just the right point.¹³⁰ When Rommel's tanks attacked on March 6, he was ready and waiting; he had dug in five hundred anti-tank guns, four hundred tanks, and much artillery. 'It is an absolute gift,' he wrote privately to Brooke, 'and the man must be mad.'¹³¹ Churchill phoned Eden during March 7 from Chequers. 'He didn't like First Army's retreat in North,' noted Eden, 'but had high hopes of Rommel's attack on Eighth Army, which should have begun at dawn yesterday.' Later the prime minister phoned again, to say that all Rommel's attacks had been repulsed, with the loss of thirty enemy tanks for none of Montgomery's.¹³² After fifty of his tanks had been knocked out, Rommel threw in the towel. Pleading ill health, he returned to Germany three days later. *ultra* detected that too. Rommel never returned.

Churchill decided that he could stay on at Chequers for the rest of the week. Before he returned to No. 10 on March 8, the king drove over briefly from Windsor Castle to visit him.¹³³ After practising all morning, the Coldstream Guards detachment at Chequers snapped their smartest salute as the long black limousine came through the gate; out stepped the Prof. The salute did not seem quite the same when the king himself arrived.

Stalin wrote a sharp reminder on March 16 that Churchill had expected to end the operations in Tunisia in February; the new date now was the end of April; this respite, he alleged, had enabled Hitler to pour more troops into the eastern front.¹³⁴ There was little Churchill could offer in response: the next PQ convoy had been cancelled because of the shortage of escort vessels. When Montgomery opened his assault on the Mareth Line it bogged down in the Axis minefields, and Brooke was greeted on March 24 by the news that this attack had failed. Two days later however the Eighth Army, with heavy air support, battered through elsewhere, and forced the enemy to withdraw. Early in April, Montgomery delivered a successful attack at

the Gabes Gap. He radioed his own illicit account of the operation direct to Churchill, by-passing both Alexander and Eisenhower. It took forceful arguments from Brooke to stop the prime minister issuing this 'bootlegged' information at once.¹³⁵



Eden left for his oft-postponed trip to Washington, DC. Spending the night at Chequers on March 10, on the eve of his flight, he found Winston looking older, and he appeared to have lost weight.¹³⁶ He told Eden that whereas he had always thought the war would last until 1944 or 1945, he did not now exclude the possibility of the Germans cracking in 1943, although he would not be prepared to bet much on it.¹³⁷

The now permanently entrenched bitterness against de Gaulle evidently germinated some ill-considered remarks by the prime minister on this occasion. Back in London later that day Eden discussed with his own private secretary his fears that the prime minister might take some 'desperate action' against de Gaulle during their absence. 'We must keep our hands off the French,' agreed Oliver Harvey, confiding in his diary. 'It would be fatal for us to touch De G or to try to remove him' – an explicit indication that Churchill had adumbrated action against de Gaulle on two distinct levels of finality. 'It would be burning Joan of Arc all over again,' the private secretary added, spelling the prospect out even more vividly.¹³⁸

with eden away in Washington, Churchill took over the foreign office. One official commented that he obviously enjoyed it; Lord Beaverbrook answered, with a trace of envy, 'You bet – he'd like to take over anything he can lay his hands on.'¹³⁹ (Beaverbrook himself was now rather out of the picture. He confessed to Sam Hoare: 'I see Churchill seldom. I say that it is Churchill's fault, but Bracken says it is my fault.'¹⁴⁰) The prime minister's hostility toward de Gaulle continued undiminished. He ventilated it in the cabinet on March 15, predicting to his colleagues that if the general ever assumed power in France he would prove an enemy of the United Kingdom.¹⁴¹ Apart from rare meetings like this, his Downing-street agenda remained undemanding throughout early March 1943, mostly taking in one appointment a day, or two, and then only in the form of an invitation to lunch or dinner.

Generals, admirals, and air marshals again crowded the rooms at Chequers on the weekend of March 19–22. On the twentieth Nye, Pile, Mountbatten, and 'Butcher' Harris came down to see him.

Churchill still felt it necessary to placate the Church on the increasingly murderous activities of his bombers. Once, on March 24, he invited the American Archbishop Spellman, visiting London for the funeral of Cardinal Hinsley, to lunch, knowing that the Catholic dignitary was a personal friend of Roosevelt. The foreign office had strongly recommended Churchill to use flattery on the archbishop, but he tried a different trick. 'If it is not irreverent,' Churchill inquired of His Eminence, knowing that he too had flown the Atlantic, 'may I ask if you are a Short-Snorter?' 'If so,' he challenged, 'show me your dollar.' From a wallet that looked to Brendan Bracken as though it might well house the Vatican's entire financial reserves, Spellman produced a dog-eared and heavily autographed dollar-bill to prove that he was indeed a Short-Snorter: in fact he was any length of snorter that Churchill cared to name, and lunch went well as the alcohol flowed fast and free. Churchill assured the 'lively and cheerful' archbishop that they were made for each other. Both certainly abjured the evils of abstinence that day.¹⁴²

Instructed by his experts that Britain must maintain at least the threat of bombing Rome, Churchill tackled Spellman on the subject. 'I told him,' he dictated afterwards, 'we would not bomb Rome without talking it over with the President first, but there was no reason why the enemy should be relieved of their anxiety on the point. He quite agreed.' In fact the prelate proved so amenable that Churchill found himself comparing him favourably with his British 'archiepiscopal [*sic*] opposite numbers.' 'But,' he reassured Eden afterwards, 'my adherence to the Protestant faith remained unshaken in spite of all this.'¹⁴³

the last strains of the pneumonia had left him, conceding defeat. He was back at No. 10. He sent for Brooke – who had been laid low for ten days with influenza – and was 'very nice' to him. Two days later he was even nicer; he sent for the C.I.G.S. again, and then hopped into his bath in the Annexe so as to receive him there, wrapped in a large bath-towel like a Roman senator (or like Charles Laughton portraying one); this he immediately removed in front of the goggle-eyed general, and nonchalantly began to dress – 'A most interesting procedure,' wrote the general that night in his diary, thus recording a scene which posterity might otherwise have failed to enjoy:

First he stepped into a white silk vest, then white silk drawers, and walked up and down the room in this kit looking rather like 'Humpty Dumpty' with a large body and small thin legs. Then a white shirt which refused to join comfortably round his neck and so was left open with a bow-tie to keep it together.

While he 'rippled on' about Montgomery's great battle, the prime minister sprayed scent on a handkerchief and rubbed it on the sparse wisps of hair, which he solemnly brushed and then sprayed again direct with scent. The ensemble was rounded off with trousers, waistcoat and coat.¹⁴⁴

Harris had again sent his heavy bombers to Berlin.¹⁴⁵ On March 28 Churchill cabled to Stalin boasting, 'Last night 395 heavy bombers flung 1,050 tons on Berlin in fifty minutes.' For once the Soviet dictator seemed appeased, and he dished out plums in reward. He revealed in his reply that he and his colleagues had just watched the British film *Desert Victory*, which

depicts magnificently how Britain is fighting and stigmatises those scoundrels (there are such people also in our country) who are asserting that Britain is not fighting at all but is merely an onlooker.¹⁴⁶

Churchill reported on March 30 again to Stalin 'last night we went back with 370 machines and threw 700 tons upon Berlin. The first reports show excellent results.'¹⁴⁷

The raids were getting heavier and so were the losses, but he had little alternative. On March 30 Churchill had to admit in a long and explicit telegram to Stalin that he was reluctant to send to North Russia the next planned PQ convoy or indeed any more convoys until at least September, because of the powerful German battle fleet stationed at Narvik including *Tirpitz*, *Scharnhorst*, and *Lützow*, and because of their summer commitment to operation *husky*.¹⁴⁸ In his terse reply on April 2 Stalin called this a 'catastrophic' diminution of supplies, but on the twelfth, after not responding at all to Churchill's six following telegrams, trumpeting the latest successes in Tunisia and in the bombing war, Stalin sent a somewhat warmer response.¹⁴⁹

Casting about for new ways to enhance the bombing offensive, Churchill suggested that three hundred heavy bombers might attack Berlin with twenty 250-pound bombs, each timed to explode at random over say two

days, to disrupt the entire government district: there would be, he calculated, six thousand violent explosions, at two-minute intervals. Portal replied that desirable though this would be it took no account of the loading characteristics of the Lancaster bomber: five percent or more of their bombloads were moreover already made up of long-delay fused bombs with the object of hampering the fire-fighting operations while the fires were taking hold and spreading.¹⁵⁰ The art of killing enemy human beings was becoming more deadly and refined.

Stalin was the only person who applauded; although the bombing campaign did enjoy a crude popularity at street level, few of Churchill's colleagues saw the point. General Brooke told them that he deplored Churchill's 'infatuation' with bombing at the expense of increasing air transport capacity, for example. The other night, he revealed, the costly bombing raid against the Skoda arms factory in Czechoslovakia had obliterated one unfortunate Czech village six miles away.¹⁵¹ Rome was still embargoed from air attack. A message went to D'Arcy Osborne at the Vatican on April 6 reassuring him that while the Allies intended to maintain the threat of bombing, the State department had made plain that the United States would not want to join in such a bombardment.¹⁵² It was a restriction that irked Churchill, and in the summer of 1943, after the devastating fire raids on Hamburg which we shall witness in the next volume, the prime minister would press unsuccessfully for the bombing of Rome 'to the utmost' possible.¹⁵³

Bombing, he understood; much of the rest of cabinet government, he did not. Economics, the post-war era, the empire – all bored him. For a while, it might seem to the reader that the memorable silvery phrase, however ephemeral, meant more to him than the substance. Shown a plan for the recapture of Burma, the American operation *anakim*, he snarled: 'You might as well eat a porcupine one quill at a time.' It was one of those priceless sayings that seemed worth commending to posterity. Churchill repeated it three days later to Peirse and Somerville, likening the Burma plan to 'munching a porcupine quill by quill.'¹⁵⁴

when talk turned to porcupines, he was bound to think of de Gaulle. Speaking to his junior ministers on April 6, Churchill did not mince his words about the prickly French general: 'Though he has undeniable qualities,' he said, and not for the last time, 'he is a great fool and very anti-British.' At Casablanca, he said, he could have obtained fifty-fifty for de Gaulle and Giraud: *les deux grands chefs militaires*. As it was, General Giraud,

with his decorations and wound stripes, and with his story of how at age sixty-two he had slid down a rope smuggled into prison by his wife to escape, had become the hero of every American. If de Gaulle should ever come to power in France, he predicted, he would try to build up popularity by being anti-British. If he now went out to Algiers, he might fly off to Brazzaville or Syria, and would do much harm in either.¹⁵⁵

At their embassy in Grosvenor-square the Americans were building up a very ugly dossier on de Gaulle and on his brutal Intelligence organisation, run by the young thug André Dewavrin (alias 'Passy'), in Duke-street, a few hundred yards away. The first secretary, H. Freeman ('Doc') Matthews had on March 27 warned that the Gaullist movement carried in it the seeds of future difficulties. 'The reports show Passy as a budding Himmler, whose aims in the creation of an organisation subservient to an individual, rather than to the nation, may eventually achieve results similar to those in Germany.'¹⁵⁶ The embassy was continuing to investigate the disturbing evidence that de Gaulle had planned several assassinations in Algiers.¹⁵⁷

The problem nearly solved itself, if messily, late in April 1943. The general was scheduled to decorate Free French sailors in Glasgow; the air ministry provided an airplane for the flight north from Hendon airport. Traveling with him in this converted Wellington bomber, No. L.4237, on April 21 were his aide, Captain François Charles-Roux; the commander-in-chief of the Free French navy, Admiral Philippe Auboyneau; and four other senior aides. At 10:05 a.m. the British pilot, Flight-Lieutenant Peter Loat, taxied onto the runway. As there was a well-known obstacle at the far end, a railroad embankment, Loat, an experienced aviator, braked and revved up his engines until the tail lifted – intending to race down the runway already 'rotated' to flying position. Unexpectedly, the elevator controls went slack: the tail dropped to the ground, and Loat aborted the take-off. After de Gaulle and his party disembarked, Loat and his maintenance flight-sergeant checked the control lines in the tail with the airport security officer: the lines had snapped, reportedly because of the use of an acid.¹⁵⁸ De Gaulle transferred to a Hudson, M.7220, which he was allowed to select at random, and with the same pilot he continued north to Abbotsinch airfield at 10:20 a.m. The General's aide-de-camp, 'very white in the face,' told a British naval passenger that there had been a sabotage attempt. The experts at the Royal Aeronautical Establishment, Farnborough, confirmed it.¹⁵⁹

The general avoided flying in Britain again.¹⁶⁰

31: *The Hill of Goats*

In his memorial day speech in Berlin on March 21, 1943 Hitler had revealed the current figure of the German Reich's war dead as 542,000, two hundred thousand more than November 1942. Stalingrad had cost him dear. The records show that he was giving an accurate figure, but the Russians were claiming that Germany had lost ten million men, and Churchill had boasted in May 1942, that Hitler's casualties already exceeded those of the Great War (of 2,043,000 dead).¹

In this war the value placed on human life was ever smaller. Assassination was a device to which governments increasingly resorted. Unable to destroy Rommel by fair means, both Mountbatten's commandos and the S.O.E. sent out teams – in November 1941 and in July 1944 respectively – to get rid of him by foul. Hugh Dalton made frequent sly references to such methods in his diary; and one wonders what was his 'proposition for dealing with certain Turks,' for which he had gained the support of the commanders-in-chief in the Middle East, over which he clashed with Eden.² At least one man, an Oxford don, inadvertently saw evidence that pages blanked out of cabinet minutes early in the war related to the assassination under certain circumstances of the Duke of Windsor, the king's headstrong brother, for which act of near-regicide, so the minutes reported, the blessing of the Archbishop of Canterbury had already been sought and obtained.³

The French, as Britain's traditional enemies – and particularly Pétain, de Gaulle, Darlan, Laval, even Giraud – figured in records as the target of such murderous discussions. General Charles Huntziger, who signed the armistice with Hitler in 1940, was liquidated in November 1941. Mountbatten remarked in January 1942 that they ought to have slipped Pétain an overdose six months earlier: 'It would have been easy to put this old "gaga" out of the war,' he said, 'and the results would have been splendid.'⁴ (The

Irish Republican Army may well have reached the same conclusion, as they assassinated Mountbatten thirty-seven years later.) Not for nothing was de Gaulle known in Whitehall as 'Joan of Arc'; wistful conversations at Chequers occasionally touched upon the manner of her disposal by the British.⁵

No, the Allied record on political assassinations was not inspiring. Butcher's diary reveals Eisenhower and Murphy planning to liquidate members of the Axis armistice commissions in North Africa.⁶ American diplomats reported on at least one wartime 'hit' in Sweden, when the British secret service rubbed out a Norwegian girl wrongly believed to be a German informant.⁷ William Stevenson, 'agent 48,000,' the head of Churchill's secret service in North America later claimed that his agents bumped off the leading isolationist William Rhodes Davis in 1941.⁸ Be that as it may, there survives enough documentary material to indicate that Churchill was less averse to assassination than his 'secret circle' later asked people to believe. At a luncheon for American newspaper correspondents on April 24, 1942, he remarked off the record that if news came that some patriot had 'done in' Laval, he could not say that he would enjoy his dinner any less.⁹

Where others issued such orders, the prime minister seems to have turned a blind eye. Two weeks after that London luncheon, the U.S. state department learned that Stevenson's man in Bogotá had received orders to liquidate Colombia's foreign minister; this British officer had thereupon asked the amazed American ambassador for 'technical assistance' in carrying out the hit, which is how the matter came to Washington's attention. The purpose was evidently to implicate the Nazis, since the target, Dr Lopez de Mesa, was known to be pro-British. The British official blandly admitted to American colleagues that Mr Churchill was also trying to lure Colombia into the war by circulating certain forged documents.¹⁰



The British atomic-bomb project, tube alloys, was more secret than any planned assassination, more sensitive even than the codebreaking effort. By early 1943 however it had stalled. Co-operation with the Americans had begun to dry up. The background to this is plain. Now turned over to the U.S. army, the parallel American *manhattan* Engineering Project had made extraordinary progress toward ultimately producing atomic explosives at a number of secret sites. The *manhattan* director, Major-General Leslie R. Groves, had erected colossal factories scattered across North

America. At the end of 1942 however the war department had learned of a memorandum which the British had signed with Molotov in Moscow on September 29, agreeing to a complete exchange between Britain and the Soviet Union of all new and unknown weapons, including any still to be discovered. This was an unhappy surprise. Stimson thought immediately of 'S-I,' their atomic bomb project, and of microwave radar.¹¹ He took it up with President Roosevelt at once, who was easily persuaded that there was no alternative but to freeze the British out of *manhattan* in consequence.¹²

For some reason, the British were never told of this background. On January 7, 1943 Dr James B. Conant, Roosevelt's scientific adviser, handed to Mr W. A. Akers, the *tube alloys* representative in the United States, a memorandum restricting exchanges of atomic data. All interchange of information was to become a very one-way affair to the American advantage.¹³ The British were told of an executive (*i.e.*, presidential) ruling that there was to be no exchange of atomic weapons information unless the recipient were in a position to take advantage of it in this war.¹⁴ It was a very great shock for the British. Akers rushed a copy of the memorandum over to Sir John Anderson, the minister overseeing *tube alloys* in England.¹⁵

Churchill was just departing for Casablanca. His own scientific adviser, the physicist Lord Cherwell ('the Prof.'), warned him that co-operation with the Americans was breaking down. They intended, he said, to build a full-scale plant for enriching uranium-235 based on the 'diffusion' method pioneered by the British. This made this gradual attempt to extrude the British 'the more unfair,' he wrote. It was vital for the British to stay in the atomic arms race. 'Otherwise,' the Prof. warned Churchill, 'we shall be at the mercy of any other country possessing the equipment.' He concluded: 'You may wish to take this matter up with the President, who, I am sure, does not desire to cheat us out of rights accruing from our early co-operation and [from] what virtually amounts to a partnership agreement.'¹⁶

Sir John Anderson concurred in this. There was no time to be lost. On January 11 the two men urgently recommended that the prime minister take up with the president, while at Casablanca, the repressive new policy as applied by Groves and *manhattan*. The American army was forbidding the release of atomic data to the British, but they apparently still expected the British to furnish data from *tube alloys* where they were in the lead. This had come as a 'bombshell,' wrote Anderson, 'and is quite intolerable.'¹⁷

While at Casablanca, Churchill received a further message from Anderson. This reported that the position was now even more serious than they

had thought. His colleagues had now seen Conant's memorandum. He felt that secrecy was only a 'pretext.' The U.S. army generals, 'who are now in complete control,' were trying to steal a march on the British, 'having now benefited from the fruits of our early endeavours.' 'We hope,' the telegram from London to Casablanca continued, 'you will be able to prevail upon the president to put matters right. If not, we shall have to consider drastic changes in our programme and policy.'¹⁸

Churchill replied in an optimistic, if cautiously worded, telegram and raised the matter with the Americans at once.¹⁹ He received no response. His secretary Martin then handed a brief note to Harry Hopkins reminding him.²⁰ It seems however that Churchill's 'gunpowder' here at Casablanca had been momentarily dampened by the spat over de Gaulle – by his inability to 'produce the bride.' Accordingly he raised the ticklish atomic matter not with Roosevelt himself, but with Hopkins; Hopkins assured him that all would be put right as soon as the president returned to Washington.²¹

Over the next weeks and months the British wrote a series of notes on *tube alloys* to their American counterparts, some of almost painful brevity; to which their allies, being now in total possession of Britain's atomic secrets, replied either with like economy of words or not at all.

It is fortunate that this entire exchange took place under the wraps of heightened secrecy, because these exchanges on *tube alloys* brought Anglo-American relations to their lowest ebb since Pearl Harbor. The 'secrets' treaty with Moscow had inflicted nothing but harm. Lord Cherwell wrote to the prime minister on January 20 urging a halt to all further technical and scientific exchange with the Russians. He was more than a little uneasy: 'According to the Treaty, this should have been reciprocal,' he pointed out. 'Apparently we are getting absolutely nothing in return.'²²

Churchill jogged Hopkins's memory a few weeks later about their conversation at Casablanca on 'that very secret matter' called *tube alloys*: Hopkins had, he recalled, assured him that the flow of information would resume as soon as the president returned home. 'At present,' chided the prime minister, 'the American war department is asking us to keep them informed of our experiments while refusing altogether any information about theirs.'²³ Hopkins responded, 'In a casual inquiry here I find that our people feel that there has been no breach of agreement.'²⁴ It was a reply that was nonchalant to the point of studied impertinence. Churchill dictated – but then did not send off – a memo in response, making clear: 'We

do not wish to allege breach of agreement. Until recently,' he added, 'we were too mixed up together in this for any agreement to be necessary. And that is the state of affairs I should like to see restored.'²⁵ He ultimately sent instead a very full history of Britain's originating role in the project: for example, he had allowed American scientists to attend all the secret meetings of the *maud* committee in April and July 1941, where they had been given complete reviews of all the British progress on the atomic project.*

London's high-level dismay about Washington's tactics deepened during March 1943. During this phase, the messages on the British file betray by their deletions and edits the anguish that was felt. Churchill brooded for days over a fresh message to Hopkins, hinting that Britain was about to go it alone: '*I must shortly commit myself to full scale action*,' he dictated on March 18, '*towards which* we have made some progress in the last three months.' This looked like bluff, and the words indicated were scratched out before the draft was retyped and despatched ('in a locked box') to Washington. The weeks were passing, he added, and the exchange of atomic information had come to a halt.²⁶ Hopkins again fobbed him off, sending a telegram reading: 'I . . . will let you know as soon as I know something definite.'²⁷ These were patent delaying tactics, and it was most unsatisfactory.

The dossier began to reek of recrimination and mutual distrust. Roosevelt passed it to Dr Vannevar Bush, director of his Office of Scientific Research and Development.²⁸ Dr James Conant updated Bush the next day on the logic behind their attempts to exclude the British from *manhattan*. 'From the point of view of the security of the United States,' he wrote, 'knowledge of the design, construction, and operation of these plants is a military secret which is in a totally different class from anything the world has ever seen.' As for Britain's expertise, he disputed that they needed it from now on. 'There is little to be gained by our bringing British scientists . . . into the work.'²⁹ This high-handed argument missed the point of entering into an alliance, of course. On the last day of March 1943, Bush recommended to Hopkins that they continue to stall the British. He added the insidious suggestion that what really lay behind London's frustration were commercial interests, anxious to exploit the manufacturing processes after the war.³⁰

Thus advised, Roosevelt and Hopkins stonewalled the exasperated British inquiries. Churchill cabled to Hopkins on April 1, again expressing concern. 'That we should each work separately would be a sombre deci-

* See page 315 (and chapter 16, *passim*).

sion,' he said. There was no response.³¹ Three days later, Churchill sent a letter, marking it that it was to be opened by Lord Cherwell personally, stating that he wanted to see him and have explained to him 'all about element Forty-Nine' (the element now known as plutonium).³²

reports had come in since July 1942 of similar German research efforts. London was aware that the Germans needed a large quantity of 'heavy water' – deuterium-oxide – to use as the moderator in an atomic pile (the British and Americans had correctly calculated that they could use graphite instead). British Intelligence had identified Germany's sole source of heavy water as the Norsk Hydro hydroelectric plant at Vemork, near Rjukan, in southern Norway. The war cabinet ordered a Commando attack on the plant. The job was eventually given to the S.O.E., which parachuted a party of four Norwegian agents into the mountains twenty miles away.

On November 15 the Norwegian manager of the plant, who had been smuggled out of Norway to London, reported that only attacking the 'High Concentration' plant at Vemork would do the requisite damage. Four days later, Combined Operations despatched a raiding party of Commandos in two aircraft, each towing a glider laden with airborne troops. The result was tragedy: one of the aircraft and both gliders crashed while still a hundred miles short of the dropping zone; the survivors were hunted down. On November 21 British codebreakers heard the message: 'Seventeen saboteurs were dropped in the neighbourhood of Stavanger; three were recaptured by Norwegian police.' Police and Gestapo units were now combing the area. 'All battalions are to keep watch.'³³ In line with Hitler's Commando Order the survivors were all executed by firing squad.

On February 16–17, 1943 a small S.O.E. party was dropped, of six men. They landed on the frozen surface of Bjarnesfjord, rendezvoused with the earlier advance party, and carried out a textbook sabotage attack on Norsk Hydro eleven days later which demolished the high concentration plant. It was March 10 before the message reached London reporting that the operation had been carried out 'with 100 percent success.' The operation had destroyed four months' supply of heavy water, and it might take eight to twelve months to resume production.³⁴ Knowing what was at stake, as he reviewed the S.O.E. report on this attack, Churchill minuted on April 14, 'What rewards are to be given to these heroic men?'³⁵

nothing was told to the Americans about these operations, since the co-operation had broken down. Unaware of the S.O.E. success the Americans began pressing for a bombing attack on Norsk Hydro.³⁶ The chief of air staff replied that the S.O.E. had destroyed the plant, 'which they now consider to be ineffective for at least two years.'³⁷ It was uncertain whether this remained true. Only a few weeks later, on August 20, one of the British scientists reported that Germany had received two tons of heavy water, and that Vemork had been repaired and production restarted. Moreover, if the German scientists hit upon the same technology as Imperial Chemical Industries (I.C.I.), they could increase monthly production of heavy water from 150 kilograms to about a ton with comparatively little effort.

Leif Tronstad, the S.O.E. captain involved in the sabotage attack, opposed any bombing raid because of the destruction; besides, the Allies would need the plant after the war.³⁸ The R.A.F. rejected the idea of bombing from low-level; the S.O.E. said they could not do further effective damage by sabotage; so in October 1943 the war cabinet asked the Americans to lay on a high level attack.³⁹ General Ira C. Eaker (commander of the U.S. Eighth Air Force in England) agreed to tackle the plant when weather was unsuitable for raids on Germany.⁴⁰

astonishingly, a complete report appeared in *The New York Times* on April 4, 1943 under the headline 'nazi heavy water looms as weapon. super explosive indicated.' This spoke of Allied anxieties that the Nazis had managed to harness atomic energy for war. Heavy water, the newspaper continued, could be 'used in the manufacture of terrifically high explosives.' Dr Bush sent the clipping to Hopkins to show 'what can happen when control is loose and security insufficient.' This newspaper account gave sufficient basis, he argued, to restrict knowledge only to those who really needed it.⁴¹ (It is worth commenting that Dr Bush sent both his letter and the clipping to Hopkins by ordinary mail.)

The prime minister had sent a further courteous inquiry about tube alloys to Hopkins on April 1, hinting that Britain would henceforth 'work separately,' which he called a 'sombre decision.'⁴² Receiving no response, on the ninth he wrote again: 'I am troubled,' he said, 'at not receiving any answer to my telegram.' Hopkins's reply was evidently uncompromising, because Churchill now answered: 'I cannot help being much disappointed by your telegram.'⁴³ In Washington, Hopkins offered to Lord Halifax the bland observation that each side had a tendency to hold information back

from the other. He suggested that their two leaders, Roosevelt and Churchill, would have to agree first to carry over any wartime exchange of knowledge on tube alloys into the post-war period.⁴⁴

Britain now prepared to go it alone. From Lord Cherwell, Churchill obtained a five-page outline of the atomic bomb project. Using simple terms the Prof. explained the difference between uranium-235 and the alternative explosive, what is now called plutonium; he estimated that the atomic bomb's uranium core, less than six inches across, would pack an explosive punch equivalent to ten to forty thousand tons of TNT. The British diffusion process for enriching uranium-235 was more likely to work than the electromagnetic process favoured by the Americans, he added; the American plant, with all its imponderables, was not likely to be running before the end of 1944. As for the likelihood that Hitler's scientists might get the bomb first, the S.O.E. had destroyed their only heavy-water plant in Norway, and the Germans in consequence probably had only one and a half tons, less than they needed.⁴⁵ Churchill couriered this blueprint for nuclear war over to Eden and Anderson. He inked on the outside of the heavily sealed envelope: 'We must have a talk about this during the next week.'

It was all very worrying. 'I have read your notes,' he wrote to the Prof., 'and now understand the broad outline of the story.' He would arrange, he said, for them both to meet with Eden and Anderson. 'Meanwhile,' he continued, 'I should like you to talk to C.A.S. [Portal] and ascertain from him whether there is the slightest chance of the Germans having erected a large scale plant.' Air Intelligence would surely be able to detect any such very large installation. While he was about it, Cherwell should also consult 'C,' the head of the secret service.⁴⁶

The Anglo-American grand alliance counted therefore for naught where atomic weapons were concerned. It was a sorry pass, inspired by greed and nurtured, one must suspect, by the flair for intrigue of Hopkins. It brought about the ultimate parting of the two countries' nuclear ways. In mid-April 1943, Churchill met at No. 10 with the ministers involved, then formally directed Anderson to explore how much time, money, and manpower would be involved in Britain pressing ahead with 'tube alloy projects Nos. 1 and 2,' the uranium and plutonium bomb production, herself, and 'at full speed.' Lord Cherwell told him that if Britain were to go it alone, it would be six or nine months before she could begin the actual construction of a bomb. Churchill did not want such a weapon to be in American hands alone. 'In my view,' he wrote on April 15, 1943, 'we cannot afford to wait.'⁴⁷



March and April 1943 had seen R.A.F. saturation attacks on the Ruhr cities and Nuremberg. Hitler wanted retaliation, but his bomber force was extended and far away, fighting conventional battles on the eastern front and in the Mediterranean. For retaliation, he would bring in new 'secret weapons.' British Intelligence became aware, through *ultra* intercepts and the overheard conversations of prisoners, that he was preparing some kind of long-range missile attack. But what kind of missile? On April 15 'Pug' Ismay brought these reports to Churchill's attention: 'The fact that five reports have been received since the end of 1942,' he commented, 'indicates a foundation in fact, even if details are inaccurate.' The chiefs of staff suggested that Winston appoint his son-in-law Duncan Sandys, now a joint parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Supply, to investigate in secret. 'So proceed,' agreed Churchill, writing on Ismay's minute.⁴⁸ On April 22, the prime minister asked the Prof. how real the secret-weapon threat was.⁴⁹

He did not dismiss the new threat lightly. Satisfying the greedy gods of war, military technology was making rapid strides. A few days later he set eyes for the first time on a jet-propelled plane being test-flown at Hatfield aerodrome – an aircraft, Brooke noted, 'without propellers, driven by air sucked up in front and squirted out behind!' It was, so the general heard, likely to become 'the fighter of the future.'⁵⁰

Ablly assisted by the air ministry's chief expert on scientific Intelligence, the young Dr Reginald V. Jones whom Churchill recalled as having distinguished himself by his work on the German blind-bombing beams in 1940, Duncan Sandys surveyed all the evidence, including the intercepts from the 'most secret sources.' Jones told him that one report, written by a German traitor of proven value and forwarded from Oslo in November 1939, had given the first warning of such rocket experiments. Later months had brought word of rocket trials near Swinemünde on the Baltic. As recently as March 1943 the former Afrika Korps commander General von Thoma, captured at Alamein, had been overheard making sarcastic comment that the London he had seen did not yet seem to have suffered from the rockets which he himself had witnessed being tested at Kummersdorf, the missile testing range near Berlin.

The *ultra* evidence on missiles pointed elsewhere – to Peenemünde, a remote former seaside resort on a sandy Baltic peninsula. R.A.F. photo

interpreters pulled out the old covers of the region: one air photo revealed factory buildings being erected at Peenemünde in May 1942, and an elliptical earthwork at the peninsula's northern tip of almost pre-Columbian dimensions. New photographs taken in March 1943 showed land-reclamation work on the foreshore. Sandys called for large-scale cover to be flown in April; these new pictures revealed a strange aircraft on Peenemünde's Luftwaffe airfield – an airplane without a tail. Other intelligence sources linked all this Peenemünde activity to a site hundreds of miles away at Watten, not far from the Channel coast of northern France. In May photographs over Watten showed major excavations beginning. On May 14 a further photographic reconnaissance flight took in the Peenemünde area, and three days later Sandys circulated to the war cabinet a summary of the evidence which he had seen so far. The enemy weapon, he had decided, was a rocket with a range of 150 miles and a warhead of ten tons. He asked for detailed high- and low-level photographic cover of Peenemünde, since the evidence of the *ultras* and other radio intercepts was that the site was engaged in rocket development of some kind.⁵¹ In another report, later in May, he described the evidence as still inconclusive, but he was continuing his investigation. Churchill ordered a copy of the report sent to 'Bomber' Harris.⁵²

Rocket missile or tailless aircraft? Lord Cherwell, for whatever reason, disagreed with Sandys. Big rail-served sites were seen under construction in northern France during the summer at Martinvast, Valognes, Yvrench/Conteville, Domleger, Sottevast and – early in September – at Mimoyecques. That month, one of the tailless planes was seen standing on a launching rail at Peenemünde. Reconnaissance planes detected a rash of the 'Yvrench/Bois Carré' type of sites breaking out all over northern France, in an arc between Dieppe and Abbeville, centred roughly on London, and in the Cherbourg peninsula.⁵³



Most of the early evidence on the secret weapons came from signals Intelligence. The radar units tracking the test launchings of one weapon reported to Luftwaffe headquarters in code. Rocket tests were mentioned in other signals. None of these sources could be compromised, and for this reason the Americans were deliberately deceived. The secret Intelligence was sometimes used in unusual ways. The *chaffinch* key used by Rommel's army in Africa, broken since August 1942, provided details of the make-up

and importance of each ship's cargo. As the fighting in Tunisia approached its end, the Allies were able to order ships known to be carrying foodstuffs to be spared from attack – otherwise they could not have fed all the prisoners taken in this fresh Axis débâcle.⁵⁴

By the end of 1942 feelings were running high among British codebreakers about the meagre contribution made by the Americans to the breaking of the newest high-grade cyphers like TUNNY and the manual German military and Luftwaffe cyphers. All practical research work was being done in Britain, where skilled manpower was scarce. Bletchley Park felt strongly that the Americans would do better to shut down their own 'unpractical' training and ship their manpower over to Britain.⁵⁵ The situation at the end of 1942 was that Bletchley Park was regularly exchanging its Japanese diplomatic traffic (purple) with the war department in Washington, and London was also supplying copies of the Japanese military attaché traffic. From Washington, Stevenson's agents (Nos. '48,946' and '48,947') were providing hard copies of Japanese messages which Bletchley Park also decoded.⁵⁶

With the German intercepts however the British had so far maintained a very different policy. Until the spring of 1943 there was no formal sharing of *ultras* with Washington. Early that year, the Americans formally complained, and not for the first time, that their British cousins were holding out on them. In a secret letter to Ambassador Winant, preparing the ground for a visit to Britain by the American codebreaking expert, Colonel Alfred McCormack, the state department complained about the reluctance of the British to exchange 'MAGIC-type' information – the reference was of course to the *ultras*. 'A feeling has grown up in certain circles,' the state department wrote, 'that while there is full interchange on our side, certain information has not been forthcoming from the British side.'⁵⁷

McCormack, William F. Friedman, and Telford Taylor, representing the US Army Intelligence 'Special Branch,' visited London in April 1943 and demanded access to both the military *ultra* products of Bletchley Park and the diplomatic decrypts obtained by its out-station at Berkeley-street in London. Bletchley Park strongly opposed releasing the *ultras*.⁵⁸ In May 1943 however a formal agreement was signed with the United States, agreeing to share the *ultra* secret.⁵⁹ It was also decided to concentrate the Japanese codebreaking resources in Britain and India on their army-air cyphers, especially one known as '3366.'⁶⁰

The British now had another major secret up their sleeve, the progress they had made with fish – the Nazis' secret code radio-teleprinter, the *Geheimschreiber*. In conjunction with Post Office scientists, the wizards at Bletchley Park had built a machine affectionately known as 'Heath-Robinson,' through which an endless loop of punched-paper 'key-tape' was run at high speed until it found a match with the cypher intercept. At the end of April 1943 the cypher used for the fish link between Berlin and Field-Marshal Albert Kesselring's Army Group South was solved by Bletchley Park. From the end of May onwards Bletchley Park were able to read all the fish traffic between Berlin and Kesselring's headquarters near Rome. It was a more valuable breakthrough than usual, as Kesselring was regularly informed of all top-level decisions, including those affecting other theatres.⁶¹

Thus from the very first few days this yielded full details of Hitler's coming operation *citadel*, his offensive at Kursk on the eastern front. By July 1943 the German army already had six fish links, by the autumn ten, and from early 1944 no fewer than twenty-six. They carried the highest grade traffic, between Hitler and his commanders; with the help of *colossus*, Churchill often received the signals at the same times as they did. At no time did the enemy suspect that he was listening in to these highly sensitive transmissions.



He engaged in more conventional planning on *husky* after a long weekend at Chequers, inviting the C.I.G.S. to an informal, even intimate, dinner at No. 10 on Monday March 29. They dined on plover's eggs, followed by chicken broth, chicken pie, chocolate soufflé, and a bottle of champagne, which the two convalescent old gentlemen – Brooke had also been ill recently – chased down with port and brandy. The prime minister expressed renewed disappointment with Eisenhower. Eisenhower, he felt, was committing too much force to *husky*, and they could surely be invading southern Italy and even Greece at the same time as Sicily.⁶² From the overheard conversations of Rommel's generals in British captivity he knew that they feared this most – that once the Allies dominated the Mediterranean they could readily 'knock out' Italy, then conquer Europe from Italy and Greece.⁶³

Anglo-American strategic agreement was already wanting in the Mediterranean, and this showed itself in minor ways. Dining with the war cabinet at No. 10 Downing-street on March 31, the king obtained their approval

for him to visit the Allied armies in North Africa.⁶⁴ He had sent a message direct to Montgomery concerning this proposed visit. Eisenhower expressed dissatisfaction to Macmillan with this bypassing of his own headquarters. Eisenhower insisted on proper protocols being followed. When Churchill found that General Alexander had ceased sending him messages – he was still receiving messages direct from Montgomery – he suspected the supreme commander of interfering with his new deputy's direct radio link to him, and he sent an angry message round to the C.I.G.S., Brooke.

eden was back from his talks in Washington. He telephoned Chequers from Hendon airfield on April 4, and the prime minister insisted that he come straight down. Eden reported that President Roosevelt had seemed to like his ideas on World Government and on an international police force; summoned to Chequers the next day, Ambassador Winant cabled to Roosevelt afterwards that the overall British concept fell 'ninety-five percent' within Roosevelt's general area of agreement, and he noticed that both Churchill and Eden seemed to warm to the American idea of a General Assembly. Churchill had mentioned, said the ambassador, that he would invite Harry Hopkins and General Marshall over for another visit to London soon.



Churchill had not spoken to his junior ministers for some time. He did so at length on April 6, telling them of his confidence about the battle in Tunisia, despite Hitler's 'usual obstinacy' in pouring in more men and materials. He knew, he said, without elaborating on how, that Hitler was playing for time. 'We have reason to know,' he added, 'that he hopes we shall not start any new large land operations till July 1.' He boasted that he was flirting simultaneously with Moscow and Washington. His relations with Roosevelt were intimate, while the Kremlin was more unpredictable, save for one thing: 'Stalin,' he revealed, 'always telegraphs congratulations whenever we raid Berlin.' Concluding his speech, Churchill admitted that the American build-up of forces in Britain and North Africa had been slower than planned. There should have been thirty divisions in Britain by now; in fact they had one, plus seven or eight in North Africa. 'This is due to the U-boats,' he explained.⁶⁵

Still focusing his mind on operations even beyond Sicily, on April 5 Churchill wrote to ask Roosevelt precisely that question: 'Where do we go

from husky?' The Americans were still shaken by Kasserine, and unwilling to think that far ahead. On the seventh, Eisenhower sent a telegram to Washington expressing pessimism about husky if the actual invasion area on the island contained substantial numbers of well-armed German troops. The British chiefs of staff disagreed, but from April 7 to 9 there was a further setback to American self-confidence in Tunisia as Major-General Charles S. Ryder's 34th American infantry division faltered seriously in its attack toward Kairouan. Coming under heavy artillery and rifle fire, the still green U.S. infantrymen dug in and refused to leave their foxholes. The Americans tried to blame the British corps commander, General Sir John Crocker. Coming so soon after Kasserine, the incidents further weakened Eisenhower's position. General Alexander stated that he would use only the 1st and 9th Divisions in the final operations into the tip of Tunisia, and he ordered the American 1st armored and 34th infantry divisions to the rear, since they were not up to this difficult task.⁶⁶ With his flair for expressing himself, George Patton described Eisenhower's morale as being as low as 'whaletracks on the bottom of the sea.'

At ten a.m. on April 15, Colonel John Bevan, chief of the suitably anonymous 'London Controlling Section' which handled strategic deception, was brought down into Churchill's bedroom in the Annex. With the backing of the chiefs of staff, he had a macabre plan to propose, code-named *mincemeat*, to mislead the Germans on husky. It had been born of the Catalina aircraft accident late in September 1942.* The plan was to float a corpse ashore in Spain, dressed in British uniform, carrying fake documents indicating that the next operation would be an invasion of Sardinia or Greece. The coroner, Mr Bentley Purchase, had provided a suitable 'stiff' to the secret service, and since April 3 it had been dressed in Royal Marines undergarments and gaiters. Bevan handed to Churchill the details on a sheet of paper. He afterwards hand-wrote this account:

To my surprise I was ushered into his bedroom in the annex where I found him in bed smoking a cigar. He was surrounded with papers and black and red cabinet boxes. After explaining the scheme, in which he took much interest, I pointed out that there was of course a chance that the plan might miscarry and that we would be found out. Furthermore that the body might never get washed up or that if it did, the Spaniards might hand it over to the local British authority without having taken the crucial papers. 'In that case,' the P.M. said, 'we shall have to get the body

back and give it another swim.'

There were other risks. The Spaniards might detect that the dead man – a Welsh vagrant, Glyndwr Michael – had in fact taken his own life by swallowing a phosphorus weed-killer? The forensic pathologist Sir Bernard Spilsbury thought this unlikely, explained Bevan; this poison was difficult to detect. Churchill gave the go-ahead, provided Eisenhower agreed.⁶⁷ He did, and on the seventeenth, the body was removed from its deep freeze, dressed, and its pockets filled with carefully crafted items that established beyond any doubt the new identity of Major William Martin, a courier, who had just become engaged to 'Pam' and, as the letters showed, had a bothersome bank overdraft. Into a black case chained courier-fashion to his neck were placed three fake letters addressed to Generals Eisenhower and Alexander and Admiral Cunningham; one referred jokingly to 'bringing back some sardines.' Packed in dry ice to expel the oxygen, in a specially built steel tube, this dead and unwitting hero sailed for Spanish shores aboard the submarine *hms Seraph* (Lieutenant N. L. A. Jewell) on April 19.⁶⁷

Late that same day, the land attack on Tunis was due to begin. After tea on April 17 Churchill had received a telegram from General Marshall suggesting they might commence *husky* even before Tunis was cleared. He liked the idea, and phoned the C.I.G.S. Brooke choked with rage, but the prime minister said the idea had 'high strategic conception,' as he put it. For half an hour Brooke used some pretty frank language to put the idea out of Winston's mind.⁶⁸ There were other, lesser command problems on the British side, mostly betraying inter-service rivalry. Admiral Cunningham complained privately about General Montgomery in a letter to the First Sea Lord written at the end of the month, calling him 'a bit of a nuisance.' 'He seemed to think that all he has to do is to say what is to be done and everyone will dance to the tune of his piping. [General] Alexander appears quite unable to keep him in order.' He added that Air Chief Marshal Tedder was, like him, opposed to the new plan for *husky*. In fact Cunningham prophesied that they would not have cleared Tunisia before the end of May. The fighting was heavy, and the enemy were contesting every yard. There were no signs that the Axis were pulling out, 'rather the contrary.'⁶⁹



* Pages 567–8. The Spaniards were now known to have provided these papers to Berlin.

Churchill had grand plans, romantic and probably wholly unworkable, for the future of Central and Eastern Europe. The problem was getting the Czechs, the Poles, and the Russians to agree among each other, let alone with him. President Beneš caused the fewest problems. They had been in cahoots at the time of Munich in 1938, and often lunched together now. The Poles were more distant. When Beneš lunched at Chequers on April 4, Churchill again revealed his obsession with uprooting what he called 'Prussianism' and destroying the 'German general staff' (to historians of the Second World War, both must seem nebulous concepts indeed). 'Germany must not be left with one single aircraft or warship,' he said. He set out plans to dismember Germany, and he spoke of making Vienna the capital of a Central European federation. The prime minister told a delighted Beneš that he was wholly in favour of population-transfers as the best way of solving the minorities problems in Central Europe.* At the time of Munich, continued Churchill nostalgically, he had tried to rouse people in London and Paris out of their lethargy. 'He wanted to send us a telegram,' noted Beneš, meaning after the talks which Churchill had with Georges Mandel and Paul Reynaud in Paris on September 23, 1938; the telegram would have urged the Czechs to fight. 'But,' Beneš told his private secretary afterwards, 'he [Churchill] ultimately changed his mind because he did not want to accept such a personal responsibility.'⁷⁰

Speaking to Beneš on this occasion he voiced sharp criticism of the exile Polish government, whereas in a private conversation with their prime minister, General Władysław Sikorski, as recently as the end of August 1942, at a time when the Soviet Union was in military difficulties, he had promised to support the Polish frontier claims at the Peace Conference at the end of the war. He now told Beneš that he wanted the Poles to accede to Stalin's demands on their eastern frontier, in which case he, Churchill, would be willing to transfer the German provinces of East Prussia and Upper Silesia 'and maybe even more' to Poland. To Churchill it all seemed simple – effectively pushing Poland from east to west a bit, at Germany's expense – but the proud and stubborn General Sikorski was refusing to agree.

Sikorski worried both the British and the Americans by his *folies de grandeur*. He saw himself as the leader of all continental Europe.⁷¹ He had already

* Hitler also favoured population-transfer: it had been his preferred solution to Europe's Jewish problem.

trodden on British toes on a number of sensitive issues; intercepted Jewish Agency messages revealed for example that in a message to the 'new Zionist organisation' he supported a Jewish state in Palestine.⁷² This was not the British government's position. In 1943 Eden told the Americans that Sikorski had wanted to name a newly acquired destroyer *Łwów*, which would have been an outright provocation of Moscow; he was prevailed on to call it *Gdansk* instead. During his recent visit to Washington, Eden had warned against their Polish allies, stating: 'Poland has very large ambitions after the war.'⁷³

As relations between the Russians and the Czechs warmed, those with the exiled Poles had gradually congealed. It became plain that if the Red Army occupied Poland's eastern territories, Stalin intended permanently annexing them, with or without Allied agreement. Much Cyrillic writing to this effect was on the wall: on January 16, 1943 the Russians had arbitrarily declared that all inhabitants of these territories were to become Soviet citizens. Heeding Eden's warning, on April 12 Roosevelt wrote to Sikorski asking to be kept informed on the frontier question, and pleading with him to prevent 'any rupture of Polish relations with the Soviet Union.'⁷⁴

more immediately disturbing was the fate of 180,000 Polish prisoners taken by the Russians in September 1939. These included fifteen thousand Polish officers, who had been taken from their prison camps at Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Ostashkov in early April 1940 and not seen since. Among them were many of General Sikorski's former personal staff officers and relatives of his present ones. The railroad wagons on which they left had returned empty, with markings scribbled on them in Polish – one said they had been unloaded at a small station near Smolensk, another warned urgently: 'Don't believe that we are going home!' Nothing more was heard of these missing legions, the elite of the pre-war Polish army. Half of Poland's officer corps, the cream of her leadership, had vanished seemingly without trace. After Hitler's attack in June 1941 converted the Soviet Union from foe to friend, in October 1941 Sikorski's government began pressing Moscow to release the missing officers. The Russians provided many excuses why they could not do so – all different, and most beggaring belief. 'This confusion,' said Sir Owen O'Malley, British ambassador to Sikorski's government, later, 'cannot easily be understood except on the assumption that the Russian government had something to hide.'

Rumours reached the German occupation forces during the winter of 1942–3 about what had happened to the 15,000 officers, and where. On March 29, 1943 the ground had thawed sufficiently for them to uncover mass graves which local villagers had identified to them at one such location called 'The Hill of Goats,' at Katyn, in a forest near that railroad station in Smolensk. For days the Germans exhumed the hundreds of bodies. They were of Polish officers, many with their hands tied behind their backs with barbed wire; they were stacked in several layers, trampled flat, face down, sardine-fashion. Some corpses, like that of a Major Adam Soliski, had unposted letters in their pockets, or notebooks and diaries; all the entries ended in the second or third week of April 1940, when this region was still in Russian hands. By the end of April 1943, seven such graves had already been opened, yielding 982 corpses. Each had been shot with a single bullet in the back of the head, the traditional N.K.V.D. mode of execution. When this holocaust was finished, the murderers had planted little conifers to cover the traces.

The total at Katyn alone would eventually rise to 4,500. Seen in retrospect, it was not a large figure in the age of Auschwitz and of R.A.F. saturation bombing raids – the raid on Wuppertal one month later would kill as many innocents in one hour. But news of the find, expertly released by Dr Goebbels, created uproar among exile Polish government circles in London.⁷⁵ Sikorski called a Polish cabinet meeting at eleven a.m. on April 15: the reports coming out of Berlin were compelling, and cited names of former army colleagues known to have been among the missing fifteen thousand.

Churchill was in a most unenviable position. He had to put the Grand Alliance, of which he was the architect, above all else. He invited the deeply worried Polish leaders round to lunch with him at No. 10 Downing-street. Sikorski arrived at one-thirty p.m. with his foreign minister, Count Edward Raczyński. They sat down at the polished dining table between the white-painted wooden balks of timber in the reinforced servants' quarters. To Raczyński, the prime minister seemed bowed and his face was puffy. Speaking in his own brand of French – as Sikorski spoke no English – and sometimes allowing Raczyński to interpret his words into Polish, Churchill urged the Poles to see reason. He offered to mediate with Moscow, but simultaneously warned against any provocation of the Russians. 'Alas,' he told Sikorski, 'the German revelations are probably true. I know what the Bolsheviks are able to do, and how cruel they are.' With inevitable cynicism he suggested that the Soviet ruthlessness was actually a source of strength

when turned against their common enemy, the Germans. He hoped however that the Poles would recognise that, in politics, one often could not press delicate matters too far, for the sake of the common cause.

'If they are dead,' he cruelly advised Sikorski, 'nothing you can do will bring them back.'⁷⁶

The Polish prime minister disregarded his warning, and it is difficult not to sympathise with him. He issued a public protest about the Katyn massacres the next day, April 16. In a statement drafted by his defence minister General Marian Kukiel, he unambiguously implied, as had Dr Goebbels, that the murderers were Russian; and he called upon the International Red Cross to mount a formal investigation. Sikorski privately admitted to one diplomat that during his talks with Stalin in Moscow in December 1941 he had gained the impression from the dictator's 'marked evasiveness' that he knew full well that something terrible had befallen those Polish officers.⁷⁷

Dr Goebbels at once joined Nazi Germany to Sikorski's appeal for an International Red Cross investigation, and the fat was in the fire. On April 21 Stalin sent identical complaints to Roosevelt and Churchill about this Polish 'campaign of calumny.' This was routine Kremlin language, but what followed was not: Stalin alleged that there was evidently collusion between Sikorski and Hitler.⁷⁸ Ambassador Maisky delivered this ill-tempered message to Churchill on the evening of April 23. The prime minister telephoned Eden about it the next morning. Eden reacted more strongly than Churchill had: Churchill now admitted that he had felt that during their interview with Maisky, Brendan Bracken had harried the Soviet ambassador adequately enough and had finally subdued him. Playing for time, Churchill informed Stalin that he would find out how Sikorski reacted to these charges, and telegraph him. 'His position,' he explained in this first message, 'is one of great difficulty. Far from being pro-German or in league with them, he is in danger of being overthrown by Poles who consider he has not stood up sufficiently for his people against the Soviets.' Perhaps significantly, in the light of tragic later events, Churchill added this further admonition: 'If he should go, we should only get somebody worse.'⁷⁹

'Go?' Somebody had to talk some sense into the Polish prime minister before it came to that. Churchill told the foreign secretary to do it at once: Eden invited 'Moley' – Sir Orme Sargent – to luncheon first, to discuss their 'plan of campaign' in advance.⁸⁰ Sikorski arrived at the F.O. at four p.m., and Eden informed him that Stalin was threatening to break off relations with the Polish government in London if Sikorski did not at once

personally and publicly deny the Nazi allegations about the massacre. Whatever his private feelings, Eden had no compunction in taking Stalin's side in this discussion, impressing upon the Poles strongly that they also had to withdraw their demand for a Red Cross investigation 'under Nazi auspices.'

While going some way toward agreeing to 'soft pedal' the affair, Sikorski refused this, the main demand.⁸¹ The voices of his dead comrades were calling to him from beyond their graves. Eden picked up the phone and reported his failure to Churchill. The prime minister said he would therefore try to persuade Stalin not to break with the Sikorski Poles.⁸²

He did so in an impassioned message to Moscow. 'We shall certainly oppose rigorously any "investigation" by the International Red Cross or any other body in any territory under German authority.' As the prime minister put it, 'Such investigation would be a fraud and its conclusions reached by terrorism.' He hoped that the Russians would reconsider their threat to 'interrupt' relations with the Poles.⁸³ Churchill further reported to Stalin:

Mr Eden saw General Sikorski yesterday evening. Sikorski stated that so far from synchronising his appeal to the Red Cross with that of the Germans, his government took the initiative without knowing what line the Germans would take. In fact the Germans acted after hearing the Polish broadcast announcement. . . Sikorski emphasised that previously he had several times raised this question of the missing officers with the Soviet government, and once with you personally. . . As a result of Eden's strong representations, Sikorski has undertaken not to press request for [a] Red Cross investigation and will so inform the Red Cross authorities in Berne.

This was not true, but Mr Churchill continued:

He will also restrain the Polish press from polemics. In this connection I am examining the possibility of silencing those Polish papers in this country which attack the Soviet government and at the same time attack Sikorski for trying to work with the Soviet government.

In view of Sikorski's undertaking, I would now urge you to abandon idea of any interruption of relations.

Such a break would, he suggested, only bring comfort to their enemies.⁸⁴ Stalin was not appeased. He had the British and their Poles on the run. He

had been waiting for just such an opportunity as this. He informed Churchill on April 25 that 'public opinion' in the Soviet Union was outraged by the Polish government, and he could not avoid breaking off relations with them.⁸⁵

British officials at every level were already quite aware of the Soviet guilt for the Katyn massacres. The British ambassador in Moscow cabled to Lord Halifax in Washington that the Soviet break with the Poles was clearly an attempt to cover their own guilt in connection with the massacres.⁸⁶ The foreign office vented its impotent fury on the weaker party, General Sikorski. Eden telephoned Brendan Bracken on Tuesday April 27 and said he was for 'beating up' the Poles. Bracken's advice however was that they should play it down.⁸⁷ The Poles did little to assist; it was after all their comrades lying in those mass graves. Churchill told his cabinet about the growing crisis. The cabinet decided that the BBC and the press would have to be brought into line.

The fundamental error was the belief that anything that London could do at this late stage would change the Kremlin's intentions over Poland.

At 5:45 p.m. on April 27 Sikorski and Raczynski brought round to No. 10 a communiqué which they had spent all day drafting. It seemed to Churchill like a 'declaration of mortal war.' He at once notified Eden. Arguing that there was no use 'prowling morbidly around the three-year-old graves of Smolensk,' Winston redrafted the document during the night; he directed Eden to force the Poles to swallow this new line. They must set aside forever the issue of Katyn, and look ahead instead to a resumption of Polish-Soviet co-operation in the war against Germany. 'If you can get the Poles to adopt this line,' he indicated to Eden next morning, 'it is important that it should come from them and not seem to be inspired by us.'⁸⁸

Eden confronted Sikorski and Raczynski with the Churchill draft the next day, April 28; the foreign secretary explained that if they would issue 'something along these lines' it would put his prime minister in a better position to make a personal approach to Stalin.⁸⁹ The two Poles refused to play along. At three o'clock that day Churchill had them brought into the cabinet room. He sat there, flanked by Cadogan and Eden, and faced them without speaking. After a few moments, Sikorski broke the silence. Churchill responded with a string of reproaches to the ungrateful Poles about their disgraceful lack of tact. He demanded that they issue the unctuous 'Polish' communiqué which he had drafted, and not their own version. Whether or not with Sikorski's consent, the Churchill draft was issued over his signa-

ture that night.⁹⁰ He cabled to Roosevelt afterwards, 'You will see that we have persuaded them to shift the argument from the dead to the living and from the past to the future.'⁹¹ He never saw General Sikorski alive again.

Later that afternoon, Thursday April 28, Churchill dictated a draft telegram to Marshal Stalin. When Eden came round at four p.m., he expressed the view that it was too soft on the Russians and came down too hard on the Poles.⁹² The draft was shelved for a day or two.

small wonder that the prime minister, anxious to put these warring Poles and French behind him, now suddenly announced that he was going to leave for Washington. Given the uncertainties between the Allies over the next operations after husky, Churchill decided that he must confer with Roosevelt again. Besides, there were other burning issues including India, the Far East, and now inevitably tube alloys too. It was relatively short notice, and of course Roosevelt had not invited him. On April 29 Winston therefore sent a telegram to Roosevelt, effectively inviting himself to Washington less than two weeks hence.⁹³ He would leave for the United States on Sunday night, May 2, 1943. Among his large retinue, he would take with him one Czech, the president Dr Beneš; but he would not take one Pole, an omission which the Poles interpreted as a deliberate snub.⁹⁴ The announcement of this new trip evoked murmurs of protest in cabinet, but nobody except Brendan Bracken dared oppose him out loud. 'P.M. blithely rode down all opposition,' observed Cadogan, having made no protest himself.⁹⁵

During Winston's remaining days in London, the Soviet clamour against General Sikorski became vitriolic, and spilled over from the *Soviet War News* into the liberal and left-wing British press. The popular cartoonist Low was able to publish a cruel caricature showing a Polish machine-gunner turning his weapon against the Allied side. For a few days, Churchill did put up a more valiant protest than did Eden; he called in the Soviet ambassador, in Cadogan's presence, and verbally kicked him all around the room. He reminded Maisky that if Sikorski's government was 'émigré' in character, this was not unconnected with the joint occupation of his country by Hitler and Stalin in 1939. It was window-dressing in a war of words, no more. Power was what mattered now, not prose. Maisky referred in an aside to Poland as a country of twenty millions, adjacent to one of two hundred millions.⁹⁶

Still failing to appreciate what lay behind the Soviet moves, on Friday April 30 Churchill composed a warmer message to Stalin, assuring him

that he had instructed the exiled Poles not to make 'charges of an insulting character' against the Soviet government. 'So far this business has been Goebbels's triumph,' he dictated, which cannot have helped. The final text drew stern attention to Dr Goebbels's claim that Moscow intended to set up a puppet government on Polish soil; Churchill warned that Britain would never recognise such a government (he did, in 1945). The Poles, he promised, now earnestly desired to work loyally with the Soviets again and Britain, for her part, would ensure 'proper discipline' in the Polish press on her soil. Much of this would have sounded more convincing coming from the Poles themselves, rather than from their host government. Matters 'to our joint detriment,' Churchill assured the Soviet dictator, must and 'will be stopped.'

A further letter was drafted to Stalin on this last day of April 1943. Its two harshly worded opening paragraphs were drafted for Winston by the foreign office: they tackled head-on the thorny questions of the surviving Polish soldiers and next-of-kin still held in Russian territory. By Saturday, May 1, Churchill had second thoughts about the opening paragraphs and told Eden so. Cadogan came round at eleven-thirty that morning, bringing further amendments to the cigar-smoking P.M.'s bedside which their man in Moscow had suggested. The foreign office stuck to its guns. Those questions could not be ducked; Roosevelt had not hesitated to raise them. It went off as drafted and Winant repeated the text to Roosevelt.⁹⁷

General Sikorski meanwhile refused to refashion his London cabinet as Moscow was demanding. Nor would he withdraw his appeal to the International Red Cross in Geneva to investigate the graves. In a broadcast on May 4, he solemnly told his listeners: 'There are limits to servility beyond which no Polish citizen will step.'

Throughout the next weeks the row festered. After Churchill left London to visit Roosevelt, General Sikorski and his ambassador Count Edward Raczynski would resume their even more recalcitrant line, and they issued unhelpful statements to the press.⁹⁸ From Washington, Churchill sent Eden a telegram proposing that they 'beat up Sikorski,' as Eden summarised it, for provoking Stalin.⁹⁹ There it was again: the language in these private exchanges was becoming similar to the language that some are found to have used about the late Admiral Darlan, and others about de Gaulle. The underlying ethical issues were not addressed, in public anyway. On the phone to Eden, Cadogan argued that the Soviet government had always made a habit of butchering its own citizens on a grand scale. It was all very nasty,

Cadogan however admitted to his diary, asking the obvious, if rhetorical, question: 'How can we discuss with Russians [the] execution of German "war criminals," when we have condoned this?'¹⁰⁰

churchill's own later account of the Katyn massacre did no credit to his reputation as an historian. By that time there can have been no doubt about the truth of the affair, yet in his memoirs long after the war he quoted extensively from the 1944 Russian inquiry into the atrocity, which surprised nobody by concluding that the Nazis had committed the crime. The same signatories issued the 1945 report on the Nazi crimes at Auschwitz.¹⁰¹

On May 24, 1943 Sir Owen O'Malley, Britain's ambassador to the Sikorski government, would report secretly to Eden on the Katyn massacre, leaving no doubt that the Russians were the murderers, and insisting that His Majesty's Government were in a far better position than the public, press, or Parliament to form an opinion as to 'what actually happened.' The public knew that they were being duped, he said, and worse: 'We have been obliged to . . . restrain the Poles from putting their case clearly before the public [and] to discourage any attempt by the public and the press to probe the ugly story to the bottom.' Not mincing his language, O'Malley charged: 'We have in fact perforce used the good name of England like the murderers used the little conifers to cover up a massacre.'¹⁰²

Churchill was embarrassed by Katyn. On August 13 he urged Roosevelt to read O'Malley's letter, commenting that it would repay the trouble. '[It] is a grim, well-written story,' was his cynical comment; then the author in Winston added, 'but perhaps a little too well-written.'¹⁰³

Disregarding the evidence, Eden's foreign office, and that of his successors, allowed Stalin's Big Lie to prevail. The victorious governments put on trial several unfortunate German officers in November 1945 and hanged them for Katyn.¹⁰⁴ In 1952 an American congressional committee concluded unanimously that the N.K.V.D. committed the murders. The British authorities still refused to accept it. In 1976, when Poles in West London unveiled a Katyn monument with the accusing year '1940' engraved on it, the Labour government boycotted the ceremony and threatened to court-martial any serving officers who attended. As late as 1988 the foreign office minister Lord Glenarthur still insisted that there was no conclusive evidence of responsibility. The United States feels differently; on the Baltimore waterfront there is now a monument to the 'twenty thousand' Poles murdered at Katyn. Only the figures are now disputed. In March 1990 Soviet

historian Natalya Lebedeva, writing in the *Moscow News*, named the Soviet officials and seventeen N.K.V.D. officers responsible for the murder at Katyn of 15,131 Polish officers. A few days later, on April 13, in its dying weeks in office, the Soviet government made a formal death-bed confession, putting the blame for the massacre on Lavrenti Beria, Stalin's secret police chief, and Vsevolod Merkulov, head of his security organisation, the M.G.B.



One other matter occupied Churchill before his departure for spring-time Washington. For some months he had worried over whom to send out to India to replace Lord Linlithgow as viceroy, who had officiated in Delhi since 1936. That he procrastinated was a product of his general uneasiness about India – his refusal to face up to Britain's shrinking future in the sub-continent, and his reluctance to become involved in what was clearly going to be a most distasteful affair. The most obvious contenders were in his view either too old, left-wing, tired, petit-bourgeois, or otherwise unacceptable. He flatly and frequently rejected Sam Hoare as an 'appeaser.' Eden asked Lord Halifax diffidently if he would consider going back to India, if Winston so desired (he had previously served in Delhi as Lord Irwin); Halifax left him in no doubt that he would not accept the post so long as Churchill was prime minister. 'Our approach to the problem was too different,' was how Lord Halifax summarised his position in his diary.¹⁰⁵ Several other names were mooted, including those of Sir John Anderson and Anthony Eden.¹⁰⁶ Anderson however was most effectively running Britain's domestic affairs and the tube alloys project, while Churchill ran the war; and Eden was reluctant, recognising that to accept India would kill his hopes of ever succeeding Churchill – and that might be at any minute – as prime minister.

Two or three weeks after Eden's return from Washington, on April 20, Churchill raised the matter with him, in a roundabout way; they both conceded that it would be 'very difficult' for Eden to go out to India, given Winston's fragile health. Churchill accordingly suggested to Amery, the India Secretary, that sacrificing Eden to Delhi would be a great loss for London.¹⁰⁷ When Churchill wrote to the king urging Eden's appointment the king also expressed misgivings; Eden was Winston's right-hand man, with a formidable reputation on the stage of international politics.¹⁰⁸ Eden came round to see the prime minister about some telegram, after dinner on the twenty-first, and Churchill began – around midnight – to take quite

a different line once again: he now waxed enthusiastic about Eden as viceroy, and argued that it would be a calamity if Britain were to win the war and to lose India; and that Eden was the only really intimate friend among his colleagues and that he would hate to lose him: but that he was convinced that Eden might be their last hope of saving India. He cunningly hinted that from the viceroy's palace Eden could also direct the war in the Far East.

To this prospect Churchill however added the suggestion that they might send his old friend 'Max' Beaverbrook to Washington, bringing Lord Halifax home, with Lord Salisbury to succeed Eden at the F.O.¹⁰⁹ 'In short,' commented Eden cynically in his diary, 'Winston's imagination has clearly caught fire, encouraged no doubt by the difficulty of finding anybody else & by the fun of reconstructing his Govt., which he proceeded to do straight away!' Even so, for a while Eden himself wavered. He was flattered and tempted. He was losing his appetite for foreign affairs. 'I don't want to have to resign again,' he told his secretary; but his own staff warned that the posting would take him away from England for two years or more.¹¹⁰ The idea was put into cold storage, as the Polish crisis boiled over.

after dinner on Easter Sunday, April 25, the king's secretary Sir Alex Hardinge telephoned Eden, saying that His Majesty also did not like the idea of Eden as Viceroy of India in wartime. Hardinge added that the king would probably oppose any hurried decision; more importantly he confirmed Eden's suspicion that once he was out in India he could no longer be regarded as Winston's successor. When Hardinge insisted that Eden's place was in London, where he could 'have some influence on Winston,' Eden grumbled that Churchill was increasingly taking over the reins at the foreign office, as witness his leading role in the current Polish-Soviet impasse, and that he was far from sure how much real influence he could exert on the prime minister. 'It might well be,' he stated, giving voice to his previously unspoken fears, 'that Winston, even unconsciously, now favours my going to India in order to give him a freer hand at home.' The king's secretary agreed, and concluded that it would after all be better if Eden did not go out to India.¹¹¹

Churchill had hoped that Eden would make up his mind about India before he left for Washington. On May 3 he invited Eden to see him at five p.m., after the cabinet, and told him that if he was keen on going to Delhi, then he would persuade the king; otherwise he would look elsewhere.¹¹² Churchill showed him the exchange of letters with the king, which im-

pressed Eden however that he ought not to go.¹¹³ Eden reassured his worried staff afterwards to that effect.¹¹⁴ 'Poor Anthony,' recorded the India Secretary, Leopold Amery, beset for months by this problem of the succession, 'is very much torn between real keenness to go and what he feels his duty here.'¹¹⁵

On May 18, 1943 somebody suggested to Winston the name of Mountbatten, and there the matter rested for the time being.¹¹⁶ The problem plagued him for months. Arriving in Washington, he told Lord Halifax he would not hear of Sam Hoare, partly for political reasons; Roger Lumley had spoiled his chances by wanting to let Gandhi out of prison, and so it went on.¹¹⁷ After his return from the United States, Churchill had another long talk alone with Eden, far into the night, pleading with him to accept the appointment, as only he could redeem the situation; if he were Eden's age, he urged, he would go himself. On the following day he resumed the contest, arguing now for either Lyttelton or Eden to accept the posting. Churchill however was forced to agree that it would be a misfortune to take any important piece out of the war cabinet machine now that it was working so well. He sent for Lyttelton and asked him if he would accept; Lyttelton responded, 'I will do whatever I am told.' 'That' sighed Churchill, 'is exactly what Anthony says – making it quite plain at the same time that he has no intention of going.'¹¹⁸

In June 1943 he finally hit on Field-Marshal Wavell. It seemed, in retrospect, an obvious choice and it would prove to be widely popular. The choice struck only Lord Halifax as an odd appointment, but Roosevelt was pleased by it.¹¹⁹ Churchill invited the taciturn, one-eyed field-marshal to dine with him on the fourteenth, and he formally offered him the post.¹²⁰ Eden was both relieved and disappointed. He found in his box a letter from Winston about the appointment, on which the prime minister had marked a note that Eden himself must read it. Eden now said to Bracken on the phone that if Winston really wanted him to go out to India, he was ready, and that he had several times told him so. Bracken replied it was really out of the question. 'There is Parliament, the Tory party, and a peace to make.' It was too late anyway. After dinner Churchill phoned Eden and announced, in top form, that Field-Marshal Wavell had accepted. 'Winston,' recorded Eden, 'seemed very pleased & asked me to lunch tomorrow.'¹²¹ Over that lunch, Churchill said to Beatrice Eden with a chuckle that she would never get her elephant ride now.¹²²

Everybody was relieved that the field marshal had accepted. The prime minister announced it to the war cabinet the next day; Auchinleck, an Indian Army officer, would become Commander-in-Chief, India. Churchill capped this happy conclusion to his weeks of agonising with the less fortunate proposal, later in June, that they now substantially reduce the size of the Indian Army. Leo Amery was appalled, and objected. 'Winston,' he dictated to his diary, 'has a curious hatred of India and everything concerned with it, and is convinced that the Indian Army is only waiting to shoot us in the back.'¹²³

having so recently recovered from pneumonia, it was out of the question for Churchill to fly to the United States, at a necessarily high altitude, in a Liberator; icing problems would prevent the lower-altitude Clippers from using the northern route until the end of May. Lord Leathers, minister of war transport, offered to carry Churchill and his staff aboard the fast transatlantic liner *Queen Mary*. Her next crossing was due to begin in a few days' time. The great ocean liner was now a troopship; she had been stripped down to the barest essentials. On each eastbound trip she carried fourteen thousand American troops, sleeping eight men to a cabin in three shifts, with thirty thousand eggs cooking in her galleys for each breakfast; her great speed gave her considerable protection against U-boat attack, particularly when zigzagging. Churchill was assured that *Queen Mary* could withstand half a dozen torpedoes without sinking (but then *Bismarck's* luckless crew had been told much the same). Nevertheless he asked for a machine gun to be mounted in his lifeboat, resolving, perhaps quaintly, to sell what was left of his life dearly if captured.

Off the coast of Spain near Huelva, Major William Martin was prepared for his 'swim.' Early on April 30, 1943, his remains were removed from the mincemeat container ('the body was very high,' the submarine commander reported).¹²⁴ Opening the shroud revealed a heavily tanned face, unexpectedly covered with mould from the eyes downwards. The thousands of Poles now being exhumed at Katyn can not have presented a less nightmarish picture. It was a war in which the value placed on life and human dignity was ever smaller. At four-thirty A.M., the corpse was lowered into the sea, and an empty aircraft dinghy tossed in after him. The submarine turned round, and used the backwash from its screws to start the dead major drifting towards Spain.

32: 'Is that you, Winston?'

Thus Mr Churchill sallied forth from Downing-street on yet another transatlantic adventure on May 4, 1943. 'Left the Annexe at midnight to join the train,' wrote Elizabeth Layton, his shorthand secretary seeing things still with a girlish eye. 'Terrific security. . . Gourock at four p.m. Went aboard a little tug where all the red tabs and gold braid in creation were congregated – just over 100 in the party – and were taken out to the *Queen Mary*.' The tugboat crew were astonished to see Britain's best-known faces parading aboard; but their knowledge availed them little, as they were taken further up the Clyde and moored in mid-river until word arrived that the Churchill party had safely reached the New World.¹

There were about 125 in the party, including the chiefs of staff and the Lords Moran, Leathers, and Beaverbrook – Winston was still thinking of putting Max into Washington and sending Halifax back to India as viceroy.²

On this westbound trip *Queen Mary* was effectively returning to New York 'empty.'³ She carried below decks a cargo of five thousand German prisoners, unaware of the identity of their illustrious fellow-passenger. The prisoners shared their quarters with rats and other vermin which had escaped from a previous cargo of kit-bags stored in Suez; Churchill's quarters, the main deck, had been disinfested with 'Zyklon,' but those travelling below were less fortunate.⁴ *Queen Mary* herself would maintain radio silence. There was some concern lest the German ambassador in Dublin learn of his journey, but Churchill's Intelligence services were confident they would intercept any message that he sent.⁵

The war situation now was more favourable. The Atlantic U-boat war was being won, thanks to the operation of hunter-killer groups on the American side, but more particularly to the introduction of centimetric radar – based on the cavity magnetron, yet another product of British genius. Relying

on a different version of the radar, Sir Arthur Harris's bomber squadrons were pulverising Hitler's industrial cities. On the ground, General Eisenhower's armies were rolling up Tunisia, destroying Colonel-General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim's armies, while the Mediterranean forces cut off their supplies of fuel, arms, and men. The codebreakers had identified the sailings of three vital ammunition ships and all three were now 'full fathom five,' thanks to the efforts of the Royal Navy.⁶ On May 5 *ultra* indicated that the Germans were pulling out of Tunisia.⁷ From fish intercepts however the British knew that Hitler was massing forces for the biggest tank battle in history, at the inviting Soviet salient at Kursk.

The Washington talks would be dominated by the Allied differences over how to proceed after the invasion of Sicily. Roosevelt wanted to commit the British to a firm date to invade northern France in 1944. Churchill was haunted by the 1942 Dieppe disaster. He argued that the Allies should invade the Italian mainland, then continue from there into the Balkans, and southern France.⁸

The romance in the Anglo-American alliance was fading fast. After the war Churchill would go to some lengths to maintain the fiction of the unselfish grand alliance, but the dealings between London and Washington were growing tougher with each year that passed. The Americans found they had to blank out compromising passages from records like the diary kept by Eisenhower's naval aide, and Eisenhower later apologised to Winston for the insult and injury that even its published pages still contained.⁹

there were many reasons why Roosevelt awaited this British invasion without enthusiasm. Some were personal. Winston Churchill could be a trying guest, he told his secretary: he drank 'like a fish,' he chain-smoked immense cigars, he worked at night, and he slept by day.¹⁰ The prime minister's popularity had begun to wane. When Roosevelt had mentioned Churchill, Stalin, and Chiang Kai-shek in a speech to the House of Representatives in January 1943, the applause for the British prime minister was noticeably the weakest.¹¹ 'India' and 'de Gaulle' were to blame for the surge in anti-British feelings among American officials. In the new Pentagon building in Washington and inside the U.S. embassy on Grosvenor-square there was much anti-British speculation.¹² Britain's principal concern, it was said, was to gain post-war control of the Mediterranean. It aroused suspicion when Churchill insisted that a British general be appointed military governor of Italy.¹³ The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (the J.C.S.) mistrusted Winston

and his people. On General Marshall's orders, they purged all their records of any evidence that they had connived to thwart Britain's ambitions.¹⁴

There were instances of this when they conferred with the president at the White House at 2:30 p.m. on May 8, and again on the ninth, while the British were still on the high seas.¹⁵ The only surviving vestige is the resulting J.C.S. policy document; the record of the preceding deliberations was destroyed.¹⁶ Perversely, Roosevelt indicated that he wanted the J.C.S. to push for a British supreme commander for General Marshall's cross-Channel invasion – but only so that the blame for any new 'Dieppe' would not fall on an American.¹⁷ Henry Stimson, the U.S. secretary of war, confessed himself 'very troubled' by this new round of talks. He shared Marshall's doubts that their president would stand up to Churchill. 'I fear,' wrote Stimson, 'it will be the same story over again. The Man from London will arrive with a program of further expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean and will have his way with our Chief, and the careful and deliberate plans of our staff will be overridden.'¹⁸ Churchill was 'evidently equipped for war on us,' as Stimson dictated to his diary, and 'determined to get his own way.' He dreaded Churchill's eloquent and vigorous presentation of cases that were themselves 'unstable and dramatic rather than military.'¹⁹ Other Americans shared his fears, summed up in the words of another general: 'Churchill in Washington. What is stewing now?'²⁰

looking down-at-heel and drab in her blue-grey Atlantic camouflage, the liner *Queen Mary* berthed off Staten Island on May 11. A tender ferried the English visitors across to American soil, where Hopkins was waiting to escort them to a special train. Lunching on plate-sized slabs of meat, which were described on the menu as 'small steaks,' Churchill's party set off for Washington at 1:26 p.m. and arrived at the Bureau of Engraving siding at 6:45 p.m.²¹ White House staff carried the prime minister's bags up to the suite in which Queen Elizabeth had stayed, looking out over the front lawn.

Churchill would stay in Washington precisely two weeks for this conference, code-named *trident*. The size of his 'travelling circus' raised eyebrows. Roosevelt commented that he had taken only twenty men with him to Casablanca. Lord Halifax saw it as an amusing form of megalomania on Winston's part.²² Not knowing quite how to break it to Eleanor that 'that man' was coming again, Roosevelt had decided not to tell her at all. She had not forgotten her visit to No. 10 in October 1942. Finding out only now, at the last moment, she made her views clear by staying away. Winston de-

tected this after a while, and explained to Clementine: 'Mrs Roosevelt was away practically all the time, and I think she was offended at the President not telling her until a few hours before I arrived of what was pouring down on her.' He tried to put a less malign spin on her absence: 'He does not tell her the secrets, because she is always making speeches and writing articles and he is afraid she might forget what was secret and what was not.'

Halifax came to see Winston at ten a.m. on the twelfth. The prime minister was still in bed, enveloped by cigar smoke and state papers, and wearing an elaborately apologetic air for having brought Beaverbrook along. Roosevelt had received a letter from Lord Beaverbrook hinting at coming to Washington as ambassador; Max had declined the offer because, so he wrote, he did not know enough about Churchill's policies. To the president the letter seemed 'unhinged'.²³ Now that Beaverbrook himself had arrived, looking more than slightly sheepish, Churchill seemed unwilling to enlighten Halifax on why Max was here; nothing came of it anyway.²⁴

To Stimson's dismay, Churchill had almost twenty-four hours to work on the president before the J.C.S. could intervene.²⁵ He need not have worried. Winston does not seem to have spoken at any length with Roosevelt before the first full meeting of the British and American chiefs of staff – the Combined Chiefs – was held at two-thirty p.m. in the Oval Office.

Here, Churchill spoke first, setting out his own grand strategy: with **torch** now concluded, and **husky** approaching, the next great prize must be to force Italy out of the war during 1943 'by whatever means might be best.' This fell some way short of the fateful phrase 'unconditional surrender.' He believed that the Turkish government would then allow the Allied air forces to bomb the Romanian petroleum fields at Ploesti from bases on Turkish soil. Furthermore, Germany would have to replace the Italian divisions policing the Balkans. The Royal Navy would no longer have to police the Mediterranean, and could use her warships elsewhere. He expressed particular concern about the months immediately following **husky**. Hitler had 185 divisions on the Russian front, but the Allies would soon not be in contact with the German forces anywhere. 'They could not possibly stand idle,' Winston lectured those sitting around him in the Oval Office. 'And so long a period of apparent inaction would have a serious effect on Russia, which was bearing such a disproportionate weight.'

Churchill had not abandoned hope of a sudden collapse in Germany just as in 1918. The British, he said, were standing by to exploit a sudden German collapse, 'should this by any chance take place.' Against that bright

prospect he painted in much darker hues the problems of the cross-Channel invasion that Marshall preferred – the difficult beaches of northern France, the tides, the strong enemy defences, the superiority of Hitler's internal communications. He added, however, as the record showed, that

he wished to make it absolutely clear that His Majesty's government earnestly desired to undertake a full-scale invasion of the Continent from the United Kingdom as soon as a plan offering reasonable prospects of success could be made.

After that he addressed the more distant problem of recapturing Burma. He suggested an alternative operation against the tip of Sumatra and the waist of Malaya at Penang, where the Japanese would be less likely to expect it.²⁶

Admiral Leahy, the president's personal chief of staff, had listened attentively to all of these opening remarks and they seemed promising enough: 'He made no mention of any British desire to control the Mediterranean regardless of how the war may end.' Moreover, Winston was undertaking to join the fight against Japan. On the cross-Channel invasion however he diverged from the American view. 'There was no indication in his talk,' summarised Leahy, 'of a British intention to undertake a cross channel invasion of Europe either in 1943 or 1944 unless Germany should collapse as a result of the Russian campaign and our intensified bombing attack.'²⁷



The fighting in Tunisia was nearly over. During the day the code-breakers reported that General von Arnim had signalled to his superiors: 'I report [that] the order to defend Tunisia to the last cartridge has been carried out. (Sgd.) ar nim.' To which the German radio operator had added, 'We are closing down forever.'²⁸

on this first evening in Washington, Churchill drove over to dine at the British embassy, and he stayed on until nearly one a.m. 'Every imaginable topic,' recorded Lord Halifax, 'past, present and future, ranging from the story of his own unhappy speculations in American bonds when he was out of office at the time of the crash, in which all his expected reward for writing *Marlborough* was pledged in advance and lost,' and then India, France,

and general strategy. Halifax saw a very different Churchill from the tired and jittery old gentleman whom he had visited the previous summer in England. After the ladies had withdrawn, Winston told the latest joke about the technologically advanced Yanks. One had said to the other, 'I think we ought to see Coventry. They tell me that a naked woman rides through the streets on a horse.' To which the other had replied, 'A naked woman riding through the streets on a horse? Yes, let's go. I haven't seen a horse in years.'²⁹ Churchill, who had probably not seen a naked woman in years either, laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

Legends of female activists on white horses conjured up images of Joan of Arc, and others. Churchill told Halifax that he had recently refused de Gaulle an airplane to go to North Africa; the general had said: '*Enfin je suis prisonnier! Bientôt vous m'enverrez à l'Île Man.*' 'So I'm a prisoner. You'll soon be packing me off to –' and the general had to repeat it three times before Winston deduced that it was the 'Isle of Man,' whither he had consigned Sir Oswald Mosley and other subversives under Regulation 18b. He retorted, '*Non, mon général, pour vous, très distingué, toujours la Tower of London.*'*

The French were nothing but an *ennui* for Winston now. He was 'rather bored' too with what he called Macmillan's 'long and flowery' telegrams from Algiers. As for the even more boring African desert, Churchill had one bright idea about what to do with it: it should be reserved as a kind of stadium, a gameboard, for authorised wars – people who could not settle their differences by other means might lease it for, say, one, three, or six months, to stage a one-, two-, five-, or ten-division war. The United States and Britain could umpire and supply the material.³⁰ This zany insight into the madness of war, displayed by one of its more illustrious exponents, showed Winston at his cynical best.

while here in Washington, he was due to meet the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House, and he asked Halifax what ticklish questions he might expect. The ambassador murmured something about whether Britain anticipated ever repaying Lend–Lease. 'Oh, I shall like that one,' retorted the prime minister. 'I shall say: Yes, by all means . . . but I shall have my account

* Halifax secret diary. The confrontation was on April 2, 1943 according to Max Gallo, *De Gaulle*, vol. ii, *La solitude du combattant* (Paris, 1998), page 258. With eye-witness René Massigli as his source, he cites the same wording, omitting *toujours* – 'always.'

to put in too. And my account is for holding the baby, alone, for eighteen months, and it was a very rough, brutal baby I had to hold.'³¹



'The end is very near,' General Alexander, Eisenhower's deputy supreme commander, wired to Churchill direct from Tunisia that day, May 12, 1943. 'Von Arnim has been captured, and prisoners will most likely be over 150,000. All organised resistance has collapsed, and only pockets of [the] enemy are still holding out.'³² The next day, Thursday, May 13, he reported that the Allies were masters of the North African shores.³³ Letters of congratulation came from the king and from Clementine.³⁴ 'Talking of telegrams,' gushed Mrs Churchill, 'that was a splendid one the king sent you. I am so glad about it. I do wish you were here my Darling so that we could jump for joy at this great & glorious Victory.'

That night Roosevelt and Churchill dined *en famille* with Averell Harriman, 'Pa' Watson, Frances Perkins, and James Forrestal, secretary of the Navy.³⁵ Again we have no record of what was discussed, but the importance of bringing off a successful invasion of France before the U.S. presidential election of November 1944 was evidently one matter that came up – incongruous though such an argument might sound to British ears. Winston would write privately to Clementine a few days later,

In my long talks with the President I naturally discussed American politics. Although after 12 arduous years he would gladly be quit of it, it would be painful to leave with the war unfinished and break the theme of his action. To me this would be a disaster of the first magnitude. There is no one to replace him, and all my hopes for the Anglo-American future would be withered for the lifetime of the present generation – probably for the present century.

On the other hand the Constitution says there must be an election, and even now when it is twenty months away all thoughts are turned to the question of who is to hold the power. We should certainly not allow such a state of affairs in our country, but a written Constitution makes slaves of its subjects and is in this case totally unfitted to the waging of war.³⁶

On Friday May 14, the Combined Chiefs held their second conference from two to four p.m. at the White House. This time they concentrated on the India–Burma–China theatre. While still crossing the Atlantic, Churchill had prepared a paper, explaining why Britain had failed to fulfil the commitment agreed at Casablanca to recapture Akyab in Burma before May.³⁷ He disparaged the American plan *anakim* as physically impossible for 1943, arguing that going into swampy Burmese jungles to fight the Japanese was like going into the water to fight a shark. They should rather try to entice the Japanese into a trap somewhere else, staging a landing where it was not expected. Backed by the dour and charmless Field-Marshal Wavell, commanding the British Army in India, the prime minister again canvassed a landing in Sumatra and Java where, he pointed out, the Japanese were weak, and Britain's effective sea power would soon be augmented by the neutralisation of the Italian fleet.³⁸ Wavell and Churchill failed to convince the Americans. Wavell, Leahy noted a month later, displayed such a defeatist attitude that his replacement was inevitable.³⁹

churchill left Washington that evening for a weekend with the President. Before he went, the British Joint Staff Mission asked him to authorise the use of *upkeep*. In time of war, one is inevitably soon adrift in a welter of code names, and he queried: 'What is this?' In fact *upkeep* was a special weapon for No. 617 squadron of R.A.F. Bomber Command to attack the most important dams in the Ruhr. Booms and nets protected these dams from conventional weapons like bombs or torpedoes. But *upkeep* was different, an 11,000 pound 'dambusting' bomb that was spun to a high rotational velocity while still clamped in calipers in the bomb-bay of its Lancaster, so that when released it would skip over the surface of the water and clear these defences.⁴⁰

The operation itself, operation CHASTISE, was the product of a very special English genius, Dr Barnes Wallis. A few months earlier, he had written a proposal, modestly titled, 'An Engineer's Way to Win the War.' In this he had pointed out that there were five dams in the Ruhr: 'Without them, Germany's power stations can't make steam, her canals will either overflow or run dry and her most vital factories will be devastated by flooding. One dam, in particular, regulates the supply of the only sulphur-free water available to the Ruhr's steelworks.' It took one hundred tons of water to make one ton of steel, and this one dam, the Möhne Dam, held back 134,000 tons of water. Wallis had written about this to Lord Cherwell on the last day

of January, enclosing a twenty-page secret report, with photographs and diagrams that explained the aerodynamic and hydrodynamic theory behind his spinning bomb.

He carried out experiments using models in a shipping tank and showed the impressive film of these to Portal and Pound on February 19. Portal ordered Bomber Command to establish a special squadron for the attack.

Harris had no time for people like Wallis – he had run into inventors who thought they had a simple way to win the war before. He wrote to Portal, complaining, 'All sorts of enthusiasts and panacea-mongers are careering round the Ministry of Aircraft Production suggesting that about thirty Lancasters should be taken off the line and modified to carry a new and revolutionary bomb, which exists only in the imagination of those who conceived it.' Churchill simply ordered him to prepare the attack on the dams as a top priority, and he now authorised the use of the upkeep bomb.

The attack was carried out at a suicidally low-level in the early hours of Monday, May 17, at a terrible cost to the Lancaster bomber crews and with a display of heroism by No. 617 Squadron's leader, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, which earned him the Victoria Cross. The German defenders watched transfixed as the heavy bombs bounded across the lakes, hopping right over the defence booms, and crashed into the dams, where they sank to a preset depth with their spin now forcing them hard against the concrete dam wall.

Wallis's upkeep bombs breached two of the colossal dams – the Möhne and the Eder – emptying the contents of the lakes suddenly onto the sleeping villages below. Immense though the resulting deathroll was – eight hundred foreign labourers were drowned in the tidal wave that engulfed one camp – the industrial effect was less than the more intangible effect of this operation on enemy morale.⁴¹

The ultra intercepts revealed a disappointing lack of chaos *après le déluge*. By 9:50 a.m. the Möhne police had already set up an operational headquarters to handle the emergency. Nothing indicated any public disturbances. By May 21 repair units were already withdrawing; the damaged Ruhr bridges were reopened. By May 23 Bletchley Park had heard no police messages about the dams, 'although most air raids have been reflected in requests from German policemen on active service to come home on compassionate leave or, if at home, to have leave extended.'⁴² Even so, Churchill told the Prof. to report on what was being done to protect Britain's reservoirs from similar attacks.⁴³

roosevelt had intended to spend the weekend of May 14–17 up at Hyde Park, on the Hudson. Eleanor retaliated by announcing that she would invite some of her 'reformer' friends, so he invited the prime minister out to 'Shangri-La,' a log cabin encampment in Maryland, instead. Accompanied by a motorcycle escort, they drove out to this former holiday camp at Thurmont, two thousand feet up in the Catoctin hills (now more famous as 'Camp David').⁴⁴ Through the car's windows at Frederick, Churchill caught sight of a 'Barbara Frietchie' candy store. Roosevelt explained that this Dame Frietchie was an elderly Northerner who had defied Stonewall Jackson's Confederate Troops in the Civil War; the prime minister interrupted him with a spirited recitation of the famous poem about this folk hero –

'Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag,' she said.
A shade of sadness, a blush of shame,
Over the face of the leader came;
The nobler nature within him stirred
To life at that woman's deed and word;
'Who touches a hair of yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!' he said.

He apologised that he must have read it forty years ago, and had not given it a thought since.⁴⁵ Roosevelt and Hopkins exchanged appreciative looks. It is not fanciful to believe that episodes like this may have done more to prosper Anglo-American relations than all the formal conferences of this May 1943 visit to North America.

At Shangri-La, Roosevelt settled into his stamp collection, while the prime minister, who did not share his enthusiasm for these little squares and triangles of gummed paper, watched contentedly. Shortly however Eisenhower's chief of staff, General Walter Bedell Smith, arrived and the albums had to be set aside. General Marshall had half-approved of Churchill's desire to bring forward the date of husky, the invasion of Sicily, but Eisenhower, in Algiers, had now turned that down. Churchill sighed; he recalled Hitler's 'blunder' at the end of May 1940 in failing to hurl his armies across the English Channel in hot pursuit after Dunkirk. On May 15 he wrote to his chiefs of staff in Washington that history might blame them for having now made the same mistake. It might well be, he added, that with a quarter

of the force launched into Sicily now they could achieve the same result as with the whole force currently two months from now.⁴⁶

For a while their talk hovered around *husky*.

The omens were good. A cryptic message suddenly arrived from Brigadier Hollis in London, reading: 'mincemeat swallowed rod, line and sinker by right people and from best information they look like acting on it.'⁴⁷

On May 1, the Spaniards had notified the British naval attaché in Madrid that the body of a Royal Marine had drifted ashore at Huelva; a post mortem had confirmed death by drowning, and the victim, a 'Major Martin,' had been buried with military honours. After a proper interval, London had directed the attaché to make discreet inquiries about 'important papers' the officer had been carrying. On the eleventh, the Spanish chief of naval staff handed back 'Martin's' black case and, separately, the sealed letters it contained, addressed to Eisenhower, Cunningham, and Alexander: British Censorship experts determined at first that the letters had not been opened – the wax seals were unbroken; but a few days later this disappointment turned to elation as the first *ULTRAS* came in revealing that the Spanish had in fact supplied copies of all the crucial documents to Berlin. As recently as Friday, even as Churchill and Roosevelt were being driven up the winding roads to Shangri-La, the German High Command had been overheard passing the data on to Naval Group Command South, using the fish code, and ordering them to take steps to reinforce the areas mentioned in the documents. A panzer division was extracted from France, and Hitler dispatched Rommel himself to Greece to reinforce the defences.⁴⁸

Other intercepts brought to the United States were less encouraging. One revealed that on May 10 the Turkish president had reassured the Nazi ambassador that he saw no cause to join the Allies. Franz von Papen thought that the loss of Tunisia was unlikely to 'have very much effect.'⁴⁹

on their return to Washington on May 17 Henry Stimson listened closely to the British visitors' remarks. He perceived that they still had cold feet about any full-scale cross-Channel assault. Churchill's intention, in Stimson's words, was to have Britain and America each hold one leg of the deer, while they left it to Stalin to do the actual skinning. President Roosevelt reassured Stimson that he would read the Riot Act to the British about this.⁵⁰

Churchill had engaged to speak to the Congress on Wednesday afternoon, and he retired to his suite that Tuesday, May 18, to work on the script. He began dictating from his bed at nine-thirty that morning to Miss Layton; he telephoned Halifax to come over after breakfast and read out to him some bits he had already dictated, for example a 'purple passage' about bombing the Japanese (he spoke of beginning the process 'so necessary and desirable of laying the cities and other munitions centres of Japan in ashes.') He lunched privately with the Duke of Windsor at the embassy, then continued dictating 'without a break' until four-thirty p.m.⁵¹

Just before six o'clock the Canadian prime minister was shown in. The teetotal Canadian was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking-chairs. Travelling down by train from Ottawa, Mackenzie King had opened his private diary and reminisced in it about how, once before, Roosevelt and Churchill had tried to tempt him with a drink; on that occasion he had fought off the inner demons that urged him to accept. This likeable Liberal statesman's eyes then chanced upon a passage in a book, reading: 'It was human passion and human cowardice that failed the League,' and he piously thanked the Lord that he would once again not allow himself to be tempted to accept any 'stimulants' that his two hosts might offer.⁵² Mackenzie King's other moral guardian was, as always, his pocket watch – this trusty timepiece, guarding over his every action and silently lecturing him on its propriety. All that morning the hands had been teasing him, wide open, in a perfect straight line, each time he pulled out his watch to examine it – at ten-twenty, at 11:25 a.m., and again at 1:35 p.m. as his train drew into Union Station. When a flunky told him that he would be driving to the Capitol next morning with Churchill, he glanced at the clock face and, confound it, now the timepiece was flashing the 'bad omen' sign: 'Hands exactly together at 4:20,' he recorded in his manuscript journal.⁵³

Despite the early evening hour the Canadian statesman found Britain's prime minister still, or already, lying in bed, clad in a night-gown of black-and-white silk. Gone was his florid complexion, despite the opened bottle of Scotch next to him. He was studying documents on a small bed-tray balanced across his midriff, while resting his arm on a kind of rubber pad. Churchill put the writing aside, and welcomed the Canadian with the announcement of their victory in Tunisia. 'It was really shocking,' he said, 'the way the Germans came in at the end, giving themselves up, falling and crawling. . . When they thought they could win they were most savage and

brutal.' Mr Churchill mimed their different postures – supplicant, pleading, brutal – on that frail, flabby white face.

What next, after North Africa? He said that his own grand strategy envisaged enticing Italy out of the war. He spelt out the conditions he had in mind for her surrender. She would not be treated too badly if she would yield up her fleet. He wanted to invade Europe through Sicily – he briefed the Canadian in confidence on *husky* – and Sardinia; from there, noted Mackenzie King, proceeding through the Balkans or through southern France. The Americans wanted an invasion of northern France, said Churchill with evident distaste. 'I do not want to see the beaches of Europe covered with the bodies of slain Canadians and Americans,' he said. 'We might have several Dieppes in one day unless everything is properly prepared.'⁵⁴ It was a vivid image; it was the first time that Churchill had admitted that it haunted him, and he would conjure with it more times over the next twelve months.

Britain, he said, could provide sixteen divisions (including the Canadians) for a cross-Channel enterprise; the Americans had at present only one division in England.⁵⁵ Hitler on the other hand had the advantage of excellent internal lines of communication. He briefly sketched the plan they had prepared for *round-up*, in the event that Germany suddenly cracked, which might well happen later that summer.

Before they parted Churchill asked the Canadian prime minister cautiously whether he knew anything about a certain something which they ought to agree upon together with the Americans. Knowing nothing about *tube alloys*, to which Canada was already contributing so heavily, Mackenzie King answered, 'No.' Churchill arranged therefore for the Prof. to indoctrinate him.⁵⁶ As Mackenzie King rose to leave, the hands of the clock were smiling at him, at precisely five past seven. That being so, he reminded Churchill that one night at Chequers in the summer of 1941 they had danced a jig together. Churchill's recollections of that dance were necessarily hazy. 'Perhaps,' volunteered the Canadian premier whimsically, 'we might have another one tomorrow night.' Rowan, the P.M.'s private secretary, advised him not to bank on that. Churchill resumed work on the script, continuing his dictation now from midnight until two-thirty a.m.⁵⁷

Allowed to read Miss Layton's typescript draft, Mackenzie King noticed once again that Winston used the word 'we' to mean British and American (thus, 'our' air forces had worked together in Africa). It was another slight by Churchill which the Canadian statesman felt the empire's soldiers would take quite hard.⁵⁸

churchill's last speech to the Congress had been a triumph; this one was taking a calculated risk. Dressed in black, he walked down the stairs to the Oval Office at midday on May 19. He found everybody already waiting for him – among them he saw President Roosevelt, Lord Moran, General Wavell; the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and Eleanor Roosevelt. He had butterflies in his stomach – he felt, as he told Mackenzie King, like somebody being led out to be shot. As the motorcade flashed down Pennsylvania-avenue toward the dazzling white Capitol building, he made his V-sign to the crowds, and told Mackenzie King that he intended to address both houses like one big family.

It was 12:32 p.m. as they arrived in the chamber. The audience included both Houses of Congress, the Supreme Court, the cabinet, the diplomatic corps, Crown Princess Martha of Norway, Bernard Baruch, the Windsors and a galaxy of other notables in the Executive Box; Roosevelt was missing – he listened to the broadcast at the White House.

Winston reaffirmed Britain's strategy of dealing with Germany first; he undertook that Britain would thereafter help to defeat Japan; and he announced that they were winning the battle of the Atlantic. As he reached the words about the process 'so necessary and desirable' of laying Japan's cities in ashes it was noticeable they drew applause.⁵⁹ The journalists in the press gallery above him could see that these words, typed on small sheets of paper before him, had been heavily underlined for emphasis. Opinion was divided, he admitted, as to whether bombing alone could bring about the collapse of Germany or Italy, but he remarked, to hearty laughter, that 'the experiment is well worth trying.' The aim of bombing was to disperse the munitions workers. 'If they don't like what's coming to them,' he said to more laughter, 'let them disperse beforehand.' He drew more laughter when he spoke of 'the military intuition of Corporal Hitler,' he spoke highly of the recent North African victory, and he heaped praise on the names of both General Eisenhower and Giraud.⁶⁰ The 'butterflies' had flown.

'It was not a great speech,' wrote one of Roosevelt's cabinet,

but it was interesting. I was particularly interested in studying Churchill's platform manner. He knows how to handle an audience. He is somewhat of an actor, although he never lets himself get out of hand. I consider him one of the great speakers of his generation. He expresses himself clearly, in good simple English, and seems to me to be as much at home

on the platform as he must be in bed.⁶¹

Far away, across the Atlantic, it warmed the heart of England to hear his voice ring out so strong and resolute; and Clementine told him so in a letter the next day.⁶² As he walked out, the chamber echoed with cheers for the man whom Speaker Sam Rayburn had introduced with permissible American hyperbole as 'one of the outstanding figures of all the earth.'⁶³

After lunch in the Senate building, members of the powerful Foreign Relations committee subjected him to their quiz. He cockily invited them to 'try and knock me off my perch.' With perhaps a surprising lack of secrecy – or was it in fact deliberate? – he repeated that his strategy now hinged upon knocking Italy out of the war; he was inclined not to go too hard on her after that. He personally would then favour attacking Europe through southern France or Sicily or further east. He spoke 'fiercely' of the bombing of Germany, and said that he would use poison gas if the Germans attempted to do so. Despite the powerful explosives already being used, he admitted, German morale was not cracking. 'The Germans,' he said, 'are either at your throat or at your feet.' He hoped, he said, that the United States would send to 'the Peace Conference' representatives from both Houses and both parties. (Roosevelt, listening on the radio, was dismayed: who had said anything about a Peace Conference? There would in his view be only the total, unconditional surrender of the Axis powers.⁶⁴)

When a Congressman asked whether the Senate ought to pass a resolution requiring the Soviet Union to stay within her present boundaries, the P.M. discouraged this idea. Stalin was in enough difficulties as it was. The rest was his usual vapourings about Germany and the 'state of Prussia.' De Gaulle, Darlan, Katyn, Sikorski, Beria, the great purges, the Polish frontiers, were neither remembered nor touched upon.



At the Combined Chiefs meeting on May 19, Brooke suggested that a cross-Channel invasion on May 1 or June 1, 1944 would be preferable to a date in the coming winter. This would give time, he believed, to conclude the bombing offensive. Over dinner that evening Roosevelt pointedly referred to the Canadian troops in England and their impatience to see action. Churchill vaguely retorted, 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'

When there was a further reference to crossing the Channel, the P.M. mused out loud: 'Sooner or later we all have to die.' He had been drinking, it is true; but he evidently meant, the later the better.

They all watched a Sherlock Holmes movie, about Chinese vases and 'secret messages.' Mackenzie King nodded off, and awoke to hear these words coming from the screen: 'Such great powers should never be given to men. . . .' He could only agree. The democracies were drifting away from cabinet government, and into dictatorships. He noticed that Churchill's influence at the White House seemed to be on the wane. Taking the Canadian aside, Roosevelt revealed that he had just sent a 'secret message' – there was that phrase, but what about the Chinese? – to Stalin proposing that they meet somewhere alone, *i.e.* without Mr Churchill present: and why not? Had not he gone to Moscow alone in August 1942? 'I feel embarrassed at how Winston might react,' said the president two days later, as they examined creating a pretext for the trip to, say, Alaska.⁶⁵

thursday may 20 was dominated by two large-scale conferences, both staged at the White House.

The first was of the Pacific War Council, meeting at midday. After it, Churchill lunched with the president and Mackenzie King in the Oval Office. As they chatted across a centrepiece of red-white-and-blue carnations, the conversation turned to the empire. Roosevelt remarked on the incongruity of Ottawa asking the British monarch's consent before appointing ambassadors; Churchill lectured him: 'He is the King of Canada just as much as of England.' Shortly, he made this passionate appeal to the president: 'I beg of you not to keep aloof from the European situation once this war is over or in arranging a final settlement of the war. . . . There will have to be a Council of Europe, a Council of Asia and a Council of the Americas. Over all will be a world council in which there will be a final appeal.' Roosevelt should have a seat on all three councils, as should Britain, though Churchill would not be averse to Canada representing him on the council of the Americas. Roosevelt was not keen on America being on the European council. Churchill reminded him: 'We have had two wars into which you have been drawn, and which are costing America a lot. . . . They will arise again unless some of these countries can be kept in proper control by the rest of the world.'

What they were looking for, said Churchill, was some kind of 'world dictator'; or, interposed Roosevelt, a 'sort of Moderator,' as in the old Pres-

byterian assembly. Field-Marshal Smuts would have been ideal, suggested Churchill, were he not so old. He nominated Mackenzie King, but the Canadian chuckled, and pulled out his watch. It offered no advice. The wise old Canadian quietly reflected that he had now been prime minister for seventeen years, and that their mothers had all been born in New York State. How tired he felt; he could hardly speak. He could sense invisible electrical influences flickering around the table like St Elmo's Fire. On the wall above Roosevelt's left shoulder he glimpsed a new painting of the president's mother, and she was smiling straight at him.⁶⁶

from six p.m. that evening Churchill invited the heads of the empire's delegations round to the White House to discuss the war. Roosevelt, who had probably arranged to have the room electronically monitored, just like his own study at that time, provided the White House dining room for the purpose of the meeting. It must strike us as incongruous that such a meeting was not held in the British embassy; indeed even Churchill suggested to them that they keep 'very secret' the fact that it had been held here in the White House. He invited Mackenzie King to speak first; to general assent the Canadian said that they were all anxious to hear Winston, an anxiety in which the P.M. could only concur, as it gave him the chance to repeat his more successful epigrams, like the one about the Huns being 'always at your throat or at your feet.' Mackenzie King noted that Churchill successively used the expressions 'British Commonwealth,' 'all parts of the British empire' and something he called the 'British Commonwealth and empire.'

He again developed his preferred strategy for 1943, namely invading Europe from North Africa, after seizing some Mediterranean islands as stepping stones, in preference to a premature cross-Channel invasion against coastlines that only lent themselves to the defence. 'We will have a dozen Dieppes in a day,' he now said. This startling escalation of his earlier estimate jangled badly in Mackenzie King's ears ('I thought this was pretty strong language'), since it implied that Dieppe had been a total disaster, not the qualified success that the British officially claimed soon after. Italy, continued Churchill, must be weaselled out of the war, even if it meant offering relatively soft peace terms. He was not anxious to see Italy destroyed, and if he could get his hands on her fleet that would be an immense gain.

Altogether Churchill spoke for fifty minutes to this important and secret Dominions gathering. Lord Halifax mocked afterwards: 'I never saw anybody who loves the sound of words, and his own words, more.'⁶⁷



Churchill had also touched briefly on the Chinese – though only most unwillingly because, as Roosevelt once said to Mackenzie King, he still thought of them only as being ‘so many pig-tails.’⁶⁸ This attitude did not surprise the Canadian. ‘Something still has to go in about China,’ he had heard Churchill grumble, dictating his script on the eighteenth. ‘The Americans attach a great deal of importance to the Chinese. I do not know what would happen to them [the Chinese] if we do not succeed in Europe.’⁶⁹ This trivialisation of such a populous nation jarred more than one politician in Washington. The Hon. David Bowes-Lyon, head of the Political Warfare Executive in Washington, told Henry Luce, proprietor of *Time*, that Britain would not give up Shanghai after the war. ‘You will give it up,’ replied the American, ‘because we shall make you.’⁷⁰

Since 1938 China had been in a state of siege. After the Japanese had seized Burma the isolation was complete, and the Chinese urgently wanted the Burma Road, the land route from India to China, reopened. In January 1943 General Joseph W. Stilwell – ‘Vinegar Joe,’ the Chinese-speaking commanding general of the U.S. Forces in China, Burma, and India – had recommended launching an offensive by Chinese troops in northern Burma, code-named *anakim*, early in March. The Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had replied that this was logistically impossible. The British also knew of ample tactical reasons to discount *anakim*, from monsoons to malaria. Stilwell’s handwritten diaries since then made no secret of his hostility toward the British and their snootiness. Here at Washington he found them still ‘belly-aching’ about *anakim*: ‘Can’t–can’t–can’t,’ he wrote, and he immediately locked horns over it with General Brooke. Arriving together with General Marshall at the Combined Chiefs meeting on May 14, Stilwell objected that the alternative and indirect operations that Churchill was proposing, against Sumatra or Malaya, would ‘greatly prolong’ the period during which no steps were being taken to open the Burma Road. Churchill retorted that he was not prepared to undertake an operation as foolish as one to reopen the Burma Road merely to placate the Chinese –

he did not see any particular value in carrying out costly operations to no purpose.⁷¹

Those words stuck in Stilwell's craw. 'Hard to say my piece,' this taciturn and almost painfully shy general confessed to his private diary. '[Admiral] King . . . helped out. Insisted on *anakim* as indispensable. Churchill said he wasn't going to do anything "silly" just to pacify the Chinese.'⁷²

General Wavell reinforced Churchill's arguments, declaring that if they campaigned in Upper Burma in the rainy season they could expect twenty-five percent non-combat casualties each month. He said much the same to the Combined Chiefs on May 20; he warned that they had to expect heavy casualties from malaria. Of the fifty thousand Australians who had fought in the tropical jungles in New Guinea, seven thousand were killed or missing; malaria had brought the casualties up to over forty thousand. Those were impressive figures, but the Americans, again led by Admiral King, argued that the Burma Road had a powerful symbolic value to the Chinese.⁷³ For a second time Stilwell failed to make his case. (Stimson, interrogating him afterwards, found 'Vinegar Joe' to be very timid. 'Apparently Stilwell shut up like a clam and made therefore an unfavourable impression.'⁷⁴)

Speaking to the Pacific War Council later on May 20, Churchill expanded on the problems of fighting in Burma – the length of the supply lines, the rainy season, the heat of the jungle. It was immaterial that Britain had two million fighting men available in India: the forests and swamps made the defence of Burma by a few thousand Japanese quite possible. Dr T.V. Soong, the Chinese foreign minister (and Madame Chiang's brother), spoke with bitter feelings about Britain's 'failure' to engage the Japanese in Burma. 'How can the Englishmen,' he asked, 'who were so feeble in their conduct of the war in Malaya, fight such magnificent battles as they have fought in Africa?' The problem, he suggested, was one of military leadership.⁷⁵ The British had, he said, made at Casablanca 'a commitment' to reopen the Burma Road. To Soong's annoyance, Churchill denied this. Soong insisted that Sir John Dill, General Wavell, and others had signed the document.⁷⁶ Roosevelt had to intervene to calm them down. Churchill became so heated that Mackenzie King, a judge of character, privately decided that he 'must have been in error.'⁷⁷

Over the lunch that followed this Pacific War Council meeting the Canadian noticed once again that while Roosevelt and Hopkins talked with warmth and sympathy of China, Britain's prime minister referred to her only as a liability.⁷⁸ There were clear racial overtones in Winston's beliefs. Meeting the empire representatives in the White House later on the twentieth he again described China as a liability and this time added a remark

about 'the yellow races,' about which India's Agent-General, Sir Girja S. Bajpai, was less than ecstatic.⁷⁹

His high-handed treatment of Madame Chiang Kai-shek was a further instance. The wife of the ruler of China was dwelling at this time in New York city; she had invited Churchill to visit her a week before. When Wellington Koo asked Halifax on May 15 to arrange this, the British ambassador replied that he could not see Winston going to New York just for that.⁸⁰ On May 20 Madame Chiang repeated her now imperious invitation. Churchill formally declined. Roosevelt hastened to invite both to lunch at the White House.⁸¹ Now she declined. Churchill proposed a point half-way between the two cities, but it was too late – not that he minded. Mrs Ogden Reid, proprietor of the influential *New York Herald-Tribune*, would accuse him of insulting China by his 'childish' behaviour in not coming to see Madame Chiang, who was a woman and, she said, ill, in New York.⁸² It would be winter before the two primadonnas finally met.

there was another revealing near-bathtime encounter on May 21, 1943 when Mackenzie King came to the White House to say his farewells. Churchill sent for him, but evidently mistimed the audience because he was already half-dressed when the Canadian arrived. 'As I came in,' wrote the latter that day, 'he appeared in his white linen under-garments.'⁸³

Halifax hosted a dinner party that evening for Churchill, attended by many influential Americans. 'Winston talked to them well about the impossibility of isolationism and about the importance when he got to the Peace Table of the president bringing with him a delegation which would represent both parties.' So he wrote in his diary.⁸⁴



Two deeply unpleasant days followed, a showdown over General Charles de Gaulle. In agreement with Cordell Hull, President Roosevelt challenged the British premier outright to face up to the problem once and for all. The Americans had decided to use Churchill's separation from Eden, the general's protector in this controversy, to persuade him to put down this French mad dog. 'Not a day passed,' the prime minister would later write, 'that the president did not mention the subject to me.'⁸⁵ There is small wonder that the corresponding 'premier' files in the British archives relating to de Gaulle for April and May 1943 were ordered sealed for fifty years; and some re-

mained closed until the new millennium.⁸⁶ The suddenness of the onslaught now clearly unbalanced Churchill. He had made no mention of the general in his speech to the Congress, but he did privately tell the Congressmen on May 19: 'I have raised him as a pup. He now bites the hand that feeds him.'⁸⁷

In a memorandum dated May 20 Roosevelt asked him to settle the general's hash once and for all. He handed to Winston a dossier of extraordinary documents, generated both by the Americans and by the British security services, which the latter had handed to the U.S. embassy after obtaining no satisfaction from the foreign office.⁸⁸ These suggested that de Gaulle was using criminal means, regardless of his obligations to the Allies, to impose himself on France as a future dictator. He forced his officials to swear a secret oath recognising him as the 'sole legitimate leader of Frenchmen.' His brutal young 'Himmler,' the secret service chief 'Passy,' had been heard boasting that he was going to 'do away' with de Gaulle's rival, Giraud, just as he had done away with Darlan.⁸⁹ Weeks earlier, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Sunday Times* had urged Churchill to defuse the 'time-bomb' that de Gaulle and 'Passy' were building; when Major Desmond Morton, Churchill's expert on such matters, had asked him for 'proof that will stick,' the journalist said the P.M. should resort to intercepting letters, bugging telephones, and codebreaking 'to stamp out this viper in our bosom.'⁹⁰

On May 17 Mr Winant, the American ambassador in London, had cabled to Washington, as they all returned from Shangri-La, a report that de Gaulle had confided to certain French generals that he had lost confidence in Britain and America and would base his policy solely on Russia 'and perhaps on Germany (repeat, Germany)' in the future.⁹¹ On the following day Scotland-yard had told Winant that it had 'come to their notice,' no doubt through monitoring, that de Gaulle had undertaken, in conversation with the Soviet ambassador, to play along with the Russians after this war since it was impossible for him to get on with 'the Anglo-Saxons,' as he called them.⁹² De Gaulle was alleged to have bribed sailors of the French battleship *Richelieu* to come over to his faction. Cordell Hull had sent all these documents round to the White House. 'I feel,' hinted the secretary of state,

that you and prime minister Churchill are becoming more and more equally interested in disposing of this increasingly troublesome, serious, and not to say, dangerous problem.⁹³

One of Roosevelt's officials scribbled this memo: 'Is it possible to ask Churchill to detain de Gaulle in England until Churchill's return and to then accomplish a further delay – a permanent delay if possible?'⁹⁴



Cordell Hull's word *disposing* was not idly chosen. How best to dispose of a house-dog that has gone rabid and started to savage friends and neighbours? The documents used guarded language and jargon. It is in the nature of things that such papers always do. Whether the South African boss, or the Nazis, or the abortionists, or the C.I.A., the 'pro-choice' advocates of murder have ever resorted to ambiguous, harmless – though scarcely opaque – euphemisms like 'special treatment' to mask an essentially homicidal intent. Later, in the 1970s, such papers would have spoken of 'terminating with prejudice.' In London and Washington circles the current word of choice was 'eliminate' – we saw it surface at the time of Darlan's murder: it could mean as much, or as little, as speaker and spoken-to desired.

With the aid of Scotland-yard, the Americans were amassing material against de Gaulle and his closest officers, implicating them in treason, kidnapping, and murder. Under Eden, the foreign office was turning a blind eye on these activities. Scotland-yard's Inspector Richardson told Ambassador Winant that 'Passy' had even denounced agents of the British S.O.E. to the Germans to further de Gaulle's struggle for absolute power. De Gaulle had given 'Passy' *carte-blanche* to consolidate his stranglehold on the French. Within the headquarters of his terror-organisation, the *Bureau Central de Renseignement et d'Action* (B.C.R.A.), installed at No. 10 Duke-street, behind Selfridge's department store, Passy ruled as an unscrupulous thug. The coal cellars had been converted into dungeons. There had already been four 'suicides' by hanging in them; since they measured barely five feet six inches from floor to ceiling, and one of the victims, an alleged spy called 'Manuel,' was three inches taller than that, the Scotland-yard pathologist, the famous Sir Bernard Spilsbury, remarked dryly that this wretch must have been 'a very determined suicide.' It all had a very Central European ring. 'Better that nine innocent [people] are killed,' Passy was heard however saying, 'than that one who is guilty should escape.' As he read the Scotland-yard report on all this, American embassy official Jacob Beam was reminded of his years in Hitler's Berlin, and of the Gestapo's cellars. On May 12, the ambassador himself had tackled Eden about Duke-street. Eden had referred

him to William Strang, who merely drawled that Duke-street did leave something to be desired. 'He admitted,' reported the embassy to Washington,

that the interrogation methods employed by de Gaulle's organisation had produced examples of extreme brutality. . . He further admitted that these Gestapo methods had resulted in at least several deaths. He insisted, however, that following the 'suicide' of Manuel last January the Duke-street interrogation center has been cleaned up, the head of it removed, and that all is now sweetness and light.

The idealistic Ambassador Winant called the affair a blot on the record of the United Nations. Eden's indifference baffled him. 'I presume,' noted the embassy's 'Doc' Matthews, 'it was all part of their stubborn refusal to admit that de Gaulle, their creation, has any flaws in his shining armor.'⁹⁵ When police arrested a certain Mrs Roberts, an acquaintance of de Gaulle's, for smuggling narcotics, this hardened U.S. embassy suspicions, derived from other sources, that 'de Gaulle's sometimes curious actions were due to his taking drugs,' as their first secretary reported to Washington.⁹⁶

The atrocities-scandal would come to a head when a French army sergeant issued a British High Court writ against de Gaulle, 'Passy,' and half a dozen of their officers.* He claimed damages and a declaration that he was not a member of their 'Free French' forces – the name was now beginning to ring hollow. Two of de Gaulle's co-defendants had beaten the sergeant repeatedly with a steel rod bound in leather. 'We have arrested [your girlfriend], they warned him, 'and we shall make her speak by whatever means are necessary even if we must rape her one after the other.' The torture continued for ten nights; he said he was taken down each day to a tiny bare coal cellar at No. 10 Duke-street. Surviving this ordeal, he was taken to French offices at Dolphin-square, then to a French prison camp at Camberley, from which he had escaped in December and hidden out in London.⁹⁷ All in all, there seemed little to distinguish General de Gaulle from the 'enemy of mankind' against whom Churchill was fighting this war.

* The plaintiff, one Maurice Dufour, was injured in June 1940; he had been released from German captivity in March 1941, activated in Vichy by British Intelligence, and brought out to England on March 28, 1942. De Gaulle interviewed him in April. Since he declined to join the 'Free French' he was summoned to Duke-street, where 'Passy's' staff then did, in the words of the writ, 'assault, beat, imprison, and otherwise maltreat and injure' him, attempting to force him to reveal his activities for the British secret service.

'How can they believe,' wrote the embassy, forwarding this dossier to Washington, 'that this incipient French Hitler, bent on acquiring personal power for the post-liberation era, will pursue that policy of friendship toward England from across the Channel which is so vital to them and which they might expect from a democratic France?'⁹⁸

on thursday, May 20, Roosevelt handed this disturbing dossier to the prime minister. Churchill's fury was boundless. It placed him in the most awkward position – in retrospect it can be seen to have weakened his bargaining position with the Americans on matters of far greater moment, including Allied military strategy and tube alloys; he promptly offered to the president to move himself and his party, if their presence in the White House was burdensome for Roosevelt, to spend their last weekend (May 22–23) at the embassy.⁹⁹ He was furious with Eden for continuing to cover for this French general. His fury turned into a blind and murderous rage. He drafted two long telegrams, totalling over five thousand words, suggesting that the war cabinet urgently consider eliminating de Gaulle.

It would take many hours for London to decipher the long telegrams, and the Americans wanted action this day. Heedless of the time difference, at two a.m. on May 21 Churchill put through a call to Eden in England. The American telephone censor secretly recorded that 'he was obviously very upset, as his voice indicated.' The scrambler telephone circuit was poor and, the censor reported, Eden 'did not seem sure just who was speaking at first, having been awakened by the call. [Churchill] said he was just going to sleep.' The identity of Churchill was 'clear from [his] voice and also from fact that after [a] circuit interruption [Eden] said, "Is that you, Winston?"'

In this dramatic phone call, Churchill said that there had been a 'serious development' with respect to 'Joan of Arc.' Firstly, his men had been using their British-supplied funds to bribe people away from the gun crews of ships. 'It is intolerable,' he said. A rush of details followed. Churchill added that he had sent Eden a long telegram, with the entire dossier given by his 'friends.' 'It is the most serious situation I have ever known.' There was a danger that great affairs might be compromised. 'The man is intolerable. He owes everything to us and the indictment is very severe. You must strike now.' He continued that his friends had given him another note that evening, and that the long telegram he had just sent told the whole story. This call was, he said, just to prepare Eden for the telegram – he 'should bring the message before the cabinet and see what he can do.' All the important things

were going well, he continued, and it was only the 'antics of malignant careerists' that might upset their plans. The censors made a garbled note of remarks by Churchill about being not pleased at having to 'give in' to somebody, and 'what else can we do but defend the islands until after the war.' 'These weak tendencies are what led us into this terrible war,' he lectured Eden. Significantly, Churchill was even heard telling the young foreign secretary that he 'breaks his heart.'¹⁰⁰

According to what Mr Attlee now told the cabinet, telegrams were coming in from Winston about de Gaulle. The former, noted Cadogan, wanted 'to execute' the latter.¹⁰¹ The actual cypher telegrams that Churchill had sent to Eden and Attlee were very blunt (though not as explicit as that). 'I must now warn you solemnly of a very stern situation developing here,' he wrote. 'I see real danger developing if matters are not gripped.'¹⁰²

I ask my colleagues to consider urgently whether we should not now eliminate de Gaulle as a political force and face Parliament and France upon the issues. I should be quite ready myself to defend this policy in Parliament and will show them and the world that the 'no surrender' movement in France, around which the de Gaulle legend has been built up, on the one hand, and this vain and even malignant man on the other have no longer any common identity. . . . He hates England and he has left a trail of Anglophobia behind him everywhere.

'When we consider the absolutely vital interest which we have in preserving good relations with the United States, it seems to me most questionable that we should allow this marplot and mischief-maker to continue the harm he is doing.' It was just like Winston to use a word that would send his colleagues in London scrambling for dictionaries: a *marplot* was 'a person who hinders or spoils an undertaking.' He urged them to cut off all financial aid to the Free French unless they rid themselves of de Gaulle. To a second telegram, accusing de Gaulle of 'fascist tendencies,' he appended the sheaf of documents given him by Roosevelt, including an F.B.I. report on illegal Free French activities in the United States, and several U.S. embassy telegrams, including some from Winant, alleging that de Gaulle planned to deal with Russia and 'perhaps Germany.'

Talking about de Gaulle after dinner on May 22, Churchill lamented: 'I brought him up as a pup, but never got him properly house trained!'¹⁰³

Attlee convened an emergency meeting of the war cabinet at ten p.m. On Sunday night May 23, to consider Churchill's telegrams. In Winston's absence, Eden had little difficulty in persuading the cabinet to do nothing. He professed himself unimpressed by these telegrams: the items that Churchill had included were, as Oliver Harvey, Eden's personal secretary, put it, 'a miscellaneous collection of "dirt" which covers a number of minor cases of tiresomeness, none of them new.'¹⁰⁴ Churchill's demand for the elimination of de Gaulle was overruled. 'Everyone against,' recorded Eden, adding the ironic comment: '& very brave about it in his absence!' The F.O. drafted a reply rehashing all the old arguments about how Churchill and his government had entered into solemn agreements in 1940 with de Gaulle.¹⁰⁵ Ministers in London cackled that the atmosphere in Washington seemed to have gone to the P.M.'s head – what with Roosevelt's dictatorial powers and all. Attlee and Eden accordingly replied to Churchill accusing him of straying dangerously close to Roosevelt's view of the war:

A precipitate break with de Gaulle would have far-reaching consequences in a number of spheres that the Americans have probably never thought about. . . The Americans are wrong in this and advocate a line that would not be understood here, with possible evil consequences for Anglo-American relations.

Without de Gaulle, both the Resistance and the Free French forces would collapse. 'The de Gaulle whom they follow is of course an idealised semi-mystic figure very different from the man we know,' the reply argued. 'But nothing that Allied propaganda could do would convince the French that their idol has feet of clay.' In any case, the cabinet now informed Churchill, de Gaulle was about to fly to Algeria, ostensibly to strike a deal with Giraud. Churchill's London was obviously getting to be too hot for the French general, and Eden wanted to spirit him out of harm's way. In Algiers he would be among friends. De Gaulle indeed announced that he would leave London for Algiers at the end of the week.

Churchill condescended with the worst possible grace. He had to accept that the general's departure put a different complexion on things, but he made it clear that he would hold Attlee and Eden personally to blame if anything went wrong. 'I should be very sorry to become responsible for breaking up [Anglo-American] harmony for the sake of a Frenchman who is a bitter foe of Britain and may well bring civil war upon France.'

With the London cabinet's blessing, the French general left England on Saturday May 29, 1943 for Algiers. He had escaped 'elimination' by the skin of his teeth. By the end of the year Morton, Churchill's principal liaison to the Free French, was secretly confessing that as they had failed to 'cut de Gaulle down,' they could in future only 'hamstring' him by restricting the size of his army.¹⁰⁶



While still awaiting Eden's reply, and anxious to repair the political fences blown down by this hurricane, Churchill and Halifax hosted an intimate lunch for American cabinet-level officers at the embassy on May 22, 1943.

Before it began, Churchill received General Stilwell once again. Coached by Stimson in how to deal with the prime minister, the tongue-tied general put more vigour into his presentation.¹⁰⁷ He now found Churchill 'very friendly.' The Englishman paced up and down, while Stilwell gave him 'the works' for half an hour, explaining his objections to the decisions taken on Burma. 'Need of aggressive leadership,' he jotted afterwards in his notebook. 'Hopes for comprehensive plan. Fears for result. Said he understood and was for an impressive fight with every man available in it. Wants me to understand he would help.'¹⁰⁸ Churchill asked him if he thought the British forces had been dilatory, or lacked energy. Stilwell replied simply, 'Yes,' and he felt that the P.M. agreed. Churchill asked if they could not reopen the Burma Road in 1945; Stilwell shook his head, that was too late. 'No,' he said, 'It should be operating by the middle of 1944.'¹⁰⁹ Churchill's attitude was that the 'only way to help China within [the] next two months was by air.' Stilwell replied that 'Peanut,' as he called Chiang Kai-shek, was greatly overrated, and that he was trying to replace the Chinese army with American air power. Churchill warmed to him after that.¹¹⁰ He promised the secretary of war after lunch that he was going to dismiss several commanders over Burma, and put some 'new punch' into it.¹¹¹

In an evident reference to the prime minister's informal attire when they met, Stilwell concluded his diary entry: '[He] had to make a speech at one – old clothes, dirty shirt, collar unbuttoned, walked the floor.'

after a brief word outside with Sumner Welles, Churchill did up his necktie and walked into the dining room, clutching his trademark cigar in one hand and a drink in the other. Around the oval lunch table sat ten of the

most influential men in Washington, including Wallace, Ickes, Stimson, and Senator Tom Connally, chairman of the Foreign Relations committee. Ickes noticed that their host dispatched several glasses of white wine, four of brandy, and two large cigars, but he decided that his brain was still keen and that he was 'on the ball' throughout.¹¹² Skilfully dominating the table, Winston called upon Halifax to explain Munich and the Czech president Dr Beneš (to whom he derisively referred in this company as 'Beans.')

The Americans explored his thinking about the post-war world. He explained that he felt there should be one world organisation – comprising Britain, the United States, Russia, and China. The body would arbitrate regional disputes; it would have armed forces – and particularly an air force – to which all member states would contribute troops. 'He frankly admitted,' noted Ickes, 'that he has not much feeling one way or the other about China but is willing to give consideration to American sentiment with respect to that country.' Below this body would be three regional councils, for Europe (in which Britain and Russia would speak with greatest authority), for Asia (in which China would predominate), and for the Americas (in which Washington would hold sway).

Speaking explicitly about a 'United States of Europe,' Churchill revealed that he envisaged post-war Europe as consisting of a dozen states or confederations forming a regional European Council. Germany should be dismembered; Prussia should be amputated – with her forty million inhabitants she seemed a more manageable European unit; Bavaria should also be detached and annexed to Hungary and Austria in a Danubian federation. He talked vaguely of a Balkan federation. He said that he wanted a strong France to arise from the ruins, 'whatever we might think about French [getting their] desserts,' explaining quite candidly that 'the prospect of having no strong country on the map between England and Russia was not attractive.'

Complementary to this idea was Churchill's belief that the United States and what he called the 'British Commonwealth' must work together in some un sinister way, in a fraternal association. The citizens of each should be able to settle and trade with freedom and equal rights in the territories of the other. 'There might be a common passport or a special form of passport or visa.' He hoped, he said, that the practice of Combined Staff discussions would be continued after the war. After the war, the United States would have automatic right to use all bases in British territories.¹¹³ Of course, the king's first minister had neither the right nor the mandate to offer this startling abridgement of the British empire's sovereignty to his hosts, and

in sketching this luncheon in his memoirs he was careful to add that he was expressing only personal views.

'The bait was attractive,' summarised the left-wing vice-president Henry Wallace afterwards, 'and most of the Americans present swallowed it. It was better bait than I anticipated, but Churchill really was not as definite as he sounded.' 'Churchill on the whole was quite complimentary to Stalin,' added Wallace, 'but nevertheless was all the time . . . building an atmosphere of "we Anglo-Saxons are the ones who really know how to run the show".'¹¹⁴ Wallace said to Halifax, as he left, that he thought it the most encouraging talk he had heard for two years.¹¹⁵ 'He thinks that Stalin is a man of his word,' recorded Ickes after this luncheon.¹¹⁶ Which was, the archives would later reveal, how the late Neville Chamberlain regarded Hitler at the time of Munich.

After tea Churchill entertained two score Congressmen to cocktails. He handled them admirably, felt Halifax, delivering an address that was as brief as it was good humoured, and saying that when here in June 1942 at the time of Tobruk he had been the most miserable Englishman in America since 'Gentleman Johnny' Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga. 'It could not have been better done,' felt Halifax, 'and they were greatly delighted.'¹¹⁷

Over lunch on May 23 with Halifax he developed his 'fraternal association' idea more – the citizens of the United States and British Commonwealth being allowed to move freely in each other's territories. 'A good thought,' said Norman Davis, 'it had never struck me before.' 'I only got it in my bath this morning,' fibbed Churchill happily (in fact he had mentioned it to Halifax the previous night.)¹¹⁸



There was one other operation discussed here at trident which we can deal with as one entity.

As a base for their long range aircraft and warships, Churchill wanted the Allies to seize the Azores, the Portuguese islands far out in the Atlantic. They were a neutral territory, but mere neutrality had not stopped Churchill in the past. While still bound for Washington aboard *Queen Mary* he had sent to Eden a long telegram proposing a sneak invasion of the islands by night. Eden was 'intensely' annoyed by the plan, and suspected that Beaverbrook was egging Churchill on.¹¹⁹ The London cabinet equivocated.¹²⁰

In Churchill's view the demands of the Allied anti-submarine war and the Battle of the Atlantic outweighed the prerogatives of neutral Portugal; besides, there was an ancient treaty dating back to the year 1373, which he felt entitled to invoke.¹²¹ He hoped that the Portuguese would accede to the islands' occupation. Hopkins thought this unlikely, and advised the Combined Chiefs to be sure in their own minds that they were prepared to use force if the request should be refused. Using wording that was of questionable tact, the Combined Chiefs took note that 'on the face of it, it might appear to be an action savoring somewhat of German or Japanese technique.' They quietened their collective conscience by telling each other that Portugal, like many other small nations, depended for her existence on the victory of the United Nations. 'It should not be forgotten,' ruled the Combined Chiefs, 'that it was on the margin of shipping that the Allies depended for their war-making capacity.'¹²²

In London, Eden was horrified by all this. He too felt that they were now trying to legitimise a Nazi-type rape of a small nation. What price the Atlantic Charter now? The war cabinet, emboldened as ever by Winston's absence, opposed the plan.¹²³ 'Attlee,' inked Cadogan into his seditious diary that day, 'read out [a] ridiculous telegram from P.M., demanding immediate (and surprise) occupation of Azores. 'After some discussion,' he added, 'Everyone (except Morrison) against P.M., which they wouldn't have been if he'd been here!' Attlee and Eden sent to Churchill a telegram asking him not to press the cabinet for the decision that he had demanded by Monday. 'At a full discussion this afternoon,' stated the London telegram, 'the war cabinet felt very strong objection to the course proposed on grounds of principle.' They asked him to postpone the decision until he returned.¹²⁴

Washington was unimpressed by these legalistic arguments. At the Combined Chiefs meeting in the White House at five p.m. that same day, May 21,

the prime minister reiterated the view which he had expressed at the previous meeting that nothing would be gained by a diplomatic approach to the Portuguese government which was not backed up immediately by force. In his opinion, the Portuguese should be presented with the fact of an imminent occupation with only sufficient time in which to send a message in order that there should be no resistance.

This was the 'negotiating' technique which Hitler had used to good effect when determined to invade Prague in March 1939.

At the Combined Chiefs meeting on May 24 the P.M. embroidered on his plan, suggesting that from seven to ten hours before the arrival of the invasion force, 'the Portuguese government might be approached diplomatically and told that the force was on route.' He carried the day. The Combined Chiefs recommended that operation *lifebelt* be carried out, whether or not the Portuguese dictator Dr Salazar permitted, as it was 'essential to the efficient conduct of the anti-U-boat war.'

That was not however the end of the matter, which we must briefly see through here to its conclusion. For weeks the indecision over occupying the Azores continued. On July 24 Eden noted, '*lifebelt* becomes troublesome again, with Salazar dilatory and Winston impatient. . . We shall have to force the pace, at least to [the] extent of determining a day.'¹²⁵ The date determined was September the fifteenth. After dinner on August 2, the defence committee meeting degenerated into 'something of a shouting match' which lasted for over an hour. Churchill fumed that Britain could have seized the Portuguese islands in June, July, or August if it were not for his foreign secretary's silly insistence on approaching Dr Salazar first; that he had been quite satisfied with Eden's progress there at first, but that it was now quite clear that the dictator had merely been fooling them. Eden retorted that Britain had been absolutely right, and that she could not have acted otherwise before the end of August anyway; General Brooke confirmed that by acting through diplomatic channels, Britain had freed up vital shipping for *husky*. As this fraught defence committee meeting ended, Winston took Eden aside and apologised for having been obstreperous, but he felt that Salazar had been intolerable. In the spirit of conciliation, Eden conceded that he feared he had been a mite obstreperous too. 'Oh, you,' chortled Churchill, 'you were bloody!' On which note, recorded the foreign secretary, they said Goodnight.¹²⁶

Churchill instructed Sir Ronald Campbell to convey the ultimatum to Dr Salazar. He had little choice, and he agreed to allow the British – but not the Americans – to use airfields in the Azores.¹²⁷ The prime minister himself made the announcement in the House on October 12, a speech effulgent with glowing references to Britain's 'oldest ally.'¹²⁸

hitler's u-boat offensive had collapsed. 'Churchill was happy as a lark with the report on submarine sinkings,' observed Henry Wallace on May 24. The enemy had lost twenty-six U-boats already that month, more than one a day. Lunching with the Prof. and the president's staff at the White

House, Churchill drank heavily and mocked the Prof. for his abstemiousness. He boasted that he had drunk thirty-four toasts at Stalin's farewell dinner for him last August. With the brandy now burbling in his sinuses and producing the characteristic 'snuffling' sound that several Americans had noticed during his visit eleven months earlier, the P.M. kept reverting to this triumph. 'A submarine a day,' he lisped, 'keeps the famine away.'¹²⁹

He had received a letter from Clementine, with all the London gossip about society weddings, the birth of Duncan Sandy's baby Celia, and four sleepless nights caused by Luftwaffe nuisance-raids: 'Alerts at midnight, two, and four, with the parks' guns and Prof.'s rockets barking and shattering.' He replied, 'I am afraid you have been having disturbed nights lately. But the enemy's spite is only equalled by his feebleness, while we are hitting him really massive and frightful blows.' The R.A.F. had now delivered colossal air raids on individual industrial towns like Düsseldorf and Dortmund in the Ruhr industrial heartland, sometimes dropping two thousand tons of bombs in one night.¹³⁰ Backed by the Prof., Churchill predicted at this luncheon that they could defeat Hitler with their bombing war and the war at sea, and that a cross-Channel invasion might prove unnecessary.

This was not the view of their American hosts, but Churchill claimed to have solid evidence of lowering enemy morale – of Nazi bomber crews who failed to press home their attacks, and of a Dutch movie audience which called out, to hoots of laughter, 'Give our regards to Rudolf Hess!', as a newsreel showed Hitler importantly boarding a plane. More whisky flowed, and Churchill called Roosevelt's presidential rival Wendell Willkie 'a German.' As the remains of this White House luncheon were cleared away, he ignited a cigar and expanded on his new pet theme, joint citizenship for the British and Americans. 'He made it more clear,' wrote the vice-president dubiously afterwards, 'than he had at the luncheon on Saturday [May 22] that he expected England and the United States to run the world and [that] he expected the staff organizations which had been set up for winning the war to continue when the peace came.' The supreme council and three regional councils of which he had earlier spoken were evidently to be only a facade.

Henry Wallace found this notion of an Anglo-Saxon master-race objectionable, and said so. The prime minister was however warmed by the alcohol, of which Wallace recorded he had had 'quite a bit,' and demanded to know why their race should be apologetic. 'We are superior!' When the liberal vice-president mischievously suggested that some other races might

be valuable additions to this joint citizenship, Churchill became a painter and explained: 'If you take all the colours on the painter's palette and mix them up together, you get just a smudgy greyish brown.'¹³¹

'So you believe in the pure Anglo-Saxon race,' observed Wallace, and added the rude comment: 'Anglo-Saxondom *über alles!*'

when the Combined Chiefs reported to the two leaders from 4:30 to seven p.m., Churchill refused to accept the agreement they had reached about the Mediterranean and spent an hour urging the speedy invasion of Italy with a possible extension to Yugoslavia and Greece. They postponed a final decision at his request until the morrow. 'The prime minister's attitude,' recognised Leahy, 'is in exact agreement with the permanent British policy of controlling the Mediterranean Sea regardless of what may be the result of the war.'¹³²

They all conferred in the president's study at 11:30 next morning, May 25. Churchill's contention of the previous day was not brought up again.¹³³ There was another big White House luncheon, this time for the Combined Chiefs, that day. General Stilwell, recording Churchill's speech, noted words evidently spoken afterwards to Roosevelt: 'It must have been *Divine Providence* that draped these great events around your personality and position.'¹³⁴

At a forty-minute press conference with Roosevelt and 151 newspapermen on that day, Churchill did virtually all the talking, advising the Italian people to get out of the war while they could, and announcing that the Allies were winning the submarine war. Plans for a second front had been laid, and he hinted that de Gaulle and Giraud would soon end their rivalry.¹³⁵ Questioned by a Miss May Craig – who remained a press corps fixture until the John F. Kennedy era – as to what was going on in Hitler's mind now, Churchill answered amidst laughter, 'I have very little doubt that if he could have the past back he would probably play his hand a little differently. I think he would have hesitated long, before he rejected all the repeated peace efforts that were made by Great Britain, which even brought the name of our government into disrepute, so far did we go on the path of trying to placate and appease.' Hitler was no longer interested in merely restoring Germany's place among the countries of Europe. 'Appetite unbridled, ambition unmeasured – all the world! There was no end to the appetite of this, ah, of this wicked man.'¹³⁶

At the end of the questioning he climbed onto his chair and gave the V-sign, to prolonged applause.

he was going to fly home the following morning. On the evening of May 25 and far into the night Churchill attempted a showdown with Roosevelt on tube alloys and the American generals' attempt to keep the future work to themselves. Then their talk turned to the Mediterranean, and Churchill's desire for an invasion of Sardinia to follow that of Sicily. According to Roosevelt, Churchill acted 'like a spoiled boy' when he refused to give up this project. He persisted until Roosevelt said that he was not interested in it and he had better shut up.¹³⁷

After a long solitary duel, Churchill said: 'Well I will give up my part of this if you will let me have George Marshall to go for a trip to Africa.'

This was a new idea. He would return to London via Algiers. Surprisingly, Roosevelt agreed to this horsetrade on the spot. It is not certain what was in Churchill's mind except an uneasy feeling that he had failed to carry the Combined Chiefs on the main point, the military follow-through into the Italian mainland. Trying for a second chance, he would tell General Eisenhower that nothing less than Rome would satisfy the requirements of the year's campaign.¹³⁸ Since he frankly admitted this, that he intended pressuring Eisenhower, he wanted the president to attach General Marshall to the party as a balancing spokesman for the American viewpoint.¹³⁹ Marshall, who now appeared at the White House to say his farewells to the British, as he thought, found himself sent literally packing, with instructions to be ready to join Winston's plane in a few hours' time. Marshall told Stimson he hated it – it felt like being traded as a piece of baggage. Stimson too felt that to risk Marshall's life on such a trip seemed to be going 'pretty far.'¹⁴⁰ They were left no choice.

The Americans hoped that for once they had partially got the better of their allies. The British had had to compromise on some of their Mediterranean ambitions. They had even had to set a date for round-up.¹⁴¹ Stimson agreed that Churchill had had to make a number of concessions.¹⁴²

The British too were not displeased with how things had gone at trident. Sir John Dill wrote to Admiral Cunningham, 'It has all gone far better than any of us expected.'¹⁴³ Halifax told the departing prime minister that his visit and contacts with Congress at every level had been valuable. Halifax followed this flattery with a letter that would greet Winston on his return to London. He felt in his bones, he assured Churchill, that the visit had done immense good. 'The more I think about our future relations with these people, the more convinced I feel that the solid foundation on which

it must be built on our side is that of respect.' ¹⁴⁴ Bernard Baruch wrote to Bracken that Churchill had done a good job in Washington: 'We think he is honest, straight, sincere and a tough, hard-fighting man. The best thing he ever said was when he said he had not been made His Majesty's servant to liquidate the British empire.' That had stopped 'a lot of globaloney.' ¹⁴⁵

All of this did much good for Winston's ego, as it was intended to. Privately Halifax felt that the prime minister was disposed to overrate the value of the Americans' falling for him whenever they met him – their falling for his vigour, his humour, his freshness, and his indiscretions. ¹⁴⁶ There was even so a lot to be said for face-to-face meetings like these. Churchill revealed to Halifax 'rather wistfully' that Hitler had twice invited him to meet him in 1937 or 1938, but he had not felt able to do so, since he would have been the Führer's guest, and unable to say what he thought; or if he had said it he would have been generally charged with a desire to warmonger. Both explanations seemed a little unreal. ¹⁴⁷

By two in the morning (it was now the day of their departure, May 26) they had still not agreed on the wording of a message to Stalin. 'Let me take it with me tomorrow,' said Churchill. 'I will tidy it up and send it back to you from Botwood.' 'It will be a good thing if Marshall comes with me,' he added. 'There is plenty of room in the plane.'

He slept for only a few hours. In the morning, Captain Richard Pim, who commanded the P.M.'s travelling map room, brought to him a distinguished-looking document, a specially typeset edition of the Atlantic Charter printed on hand-made vellum. The president's naval aide Lieutenant George M. Elsey was hoping to get Churchill's autograph on it. At the time, in August 1941, both Churchill and Roosevelt had taken extravagant care *not* to sign the charter; ambushed like this however Winston saw no alternative, and he scrawled his name at its foot. He mumbled to Lieutenant Elsey a few days later that it was first time he had signed it. ¹⁴⁸

Roosevelt was mightily relieved to see the English go. For the next three or four days he slept eighteen hours a night, to recuperate from the irregular hours that Churchill had inflicted on him. Winston reminded him of a fictional gentleman –

a certain Count Hermann, a respectable German,
who smoked like a chimney and drank like a merman.

Unlike Churchill, he said, who had nothing on his mind but the war, he as president still had all the domestic cares of a great nation.¹⁴⁹ He remarked to his old friend Judge Felix Frankfurter at a White House banquet, a few hours after Winston left, that Churchill's horizons, as a prime minister of Britain, were limited. When the judge suggested that the P.M. was an old man, who just wanted to get the war over, the president shook his head. 'That's the way he talked in all my meetings with him until Casablanca and this one,' he replied. 'But now he no longer says what he used to say – that all he wants is one big victory and he'll quit.'

Roosevelt reflected briefly and added: 'I suppose I ought not to say this, and you keep it to yourself: but when I'm with Winston I have a feeling that I'm twenty years older than he is.'¹⁵⁰ It was a curious pre-echo of what Winston's doctor Lord Moran heard him say in 1952, reflecting out loud on Roosevelt's death: 'I always looked up to him as an older man, though he was eight years my junior.'¹⁵¹ Had the American president become something of a father-figure in Winston's declining years, a ghost of the long dead Lord Randolph Churchill?

33: *Cheated of the Bomb*

We momentarily leave Mr Churchill in his Clipper flying boat thundering down the Potomac River in Washington on May 26, 1943, its four engines hurling plumes of spray behind them, as he sets out from Washington D.C., accompanied by a perceptibly ruffled General George C. Marshall, on the first leg of his journey home. This is the place at which to resume the parallel narrative of tube alloys, the atomic project, and the widening gulf between the Allies.¹

Any independent British bomb effort would require large supplies of uranium ore and, it seemed, heavy water (the potential use of graphite instead of heavy water as the moderator in an atomic pile was at this time recognised only by the Americans). The fractional electrolytic distillation of heavy water required prodigious quantities of electric power. Uranium and power on this scale were available only in Canada. The United States had little native uranium. The British now learned that Washington had gone behind their backs, and that the director of the Manhattan project, Major-General Leslie R. Groves, had stitched up Canada's entire uranium and heavy water output in contracts signed with Canada's minister of munitions Mr C. D. Howe, in one of the war's less-explicable transactions.²

Churchill received this 'most disturbing information' from Sir John Anderson when he arrived in Washington. Two days later, Anderson cabled him that Ottawa had had full knowledge of the contracts.³ Whatever the truth of that, the fast footwork by the Americans had exploded Churchill's dream of building an independent British atomic bomb at this stage.

In justice to them, the Canadian signatories may have had no knowledge of the tube alloys aspect of the deal. Lord Cherwell had first briefed the Canadian premier Mackenzie King on the project while at the White House on May 19, 1943. Accompanied by the Prof., Churchill had a further talk

on the wider political problems with the Canadian the next evening; he intimated that the British and Americans seemed to be drawing closer on the matter, and assured Mackenzie King that he would let him know if there was a need for him to talk to the president.⁴ The next day, May 21, Malcolm Macdonald, the British High Commissioner in Canada, told Mackenzie King that it was not until his recent visit to England that he learned that Howe had signed that contract. 'Britain,' noted Mackenzie King, 'had been expecting we would control the supplies for them.' Churchill now admitted that they might indeed need him to intervene with Roosevelt, because the U.S. army generals were keeping everything to themselves.⁵

Churchill reviewed this most unsatisfactory position with Lord Cherwell. Britain could not afford to ignore so deadly a weapon so long as Stalin and, it seemed, Hitler might develop it. If Germany got there first, Hitler might win the war after all. 'What is the [American] objection to continued complete collaboration?' asked the Prof. 'We have had frank and intimate exchange of information for many months and it has worked well.' Britain had contributed what she believed to be the best method to extract the fissile uranium-235 isotope, and she had persuaded the Americans that the '49 process' (the plutonium alternative) was feasible. 'What reason,' inquired the Prof. in a note to Winston, 'has emerged for excluding us now?'⁶

They both raised the matter with Roosevelt in Hopkins's presence on May 24; at Churchill's request, Roosevelt called a meeting the next afternoon at the White House, inviting Hopkins, Lord Cherwell, and Dr Vannevar Bush to attend. Challenged here by Cherwell to explain the restrictions on the exchange of information, Bush again referred evasively to security. It seemed clear to the British that the Americans were hoping to gain an unfair lead, and Cherwell stated as much. It would take years for the British to catch up after the war, he said: 'Unless this manufacturing information was furnished to the British,' minuted Bush afterwards, quoting Lord Cherwell, 'they might feel impelled to alter the plans and go into manufacturing themselves, to the disadvantage of the balance of the war effort.' Otherwise, he said, the British would find themselves without this weapon after the war, which would leave them insecure – 'He made it clear, of course,' wrote Bush, 'that he did not mean secure as against the United States.'⁷

That evening, May 25, Churchill met Roosevelt; by the time he left at two a.m. they had reached yet another agreement ostensibly restoring the interchange of atomic information to the old conditions, the *status quo*, but again it was a gentlemen's agreement, *i.e.*, purely verbal.⁸

this was the position as Churchill's Clipper lifted off the Potomac the next day. Gentlemen's agreement or not, it was important to create what would now be called a paper-trail. 'I understand,' the Prof. accordingly wrote to Hopkins, 'that the matter we discussed was concluded satisfactorily and I am sure that this is largely due to your efforts. I am very glad, as it is certainly to everyone's advantage that the old conditions should be restored.'⁹ Churchill sent a telegram to Sir John Anderson reporting, 'tube alloys. Conversation with the president entirely satisfactory.'¹⁰ 'The president agreed,' he amplified in a second telegram, 'that the exchange of information on tube alloys should be resumed and that the enterprise should be considered a joint one, to which both countries would contribute their best endeavours.' This agreement was predicated on the basis that the atomic bomb might well be developed in time for use in the present war, and that 'it falls within the general agreement covering the interchange of research and invention secrets.'¹¹ It might perhaps have been more useful if the message that they sent to Hopkins had spelt it out so clearly.

Churchill wrote to Hopkins, architect in fact of most of the obstacles, on June 10, thanking him for settling the question 'so satisfactorily.' 'I am sure that the president's decision will be to the best advantage of both our countries,' he wrote. 'We must now lose no time in implementing it.'¹²

The stonewalling by the Americans however continued, as Hopkins and the army generals had always intended. Two years later Lord Cherwell would admit that, seen in retrospect, the talks at both Casablanca and Washington had in fact been inconclusive.¹³ London sent Mr W. Akers, British director of tube alloys, to Canada; weeks passed, and he did not even receive permission to go to Washington. On June 10 Churchill reminded Hopkins of the recent agreement (of early May 26), and asked him to telegraph as soon as possible so that Akers and his experts could proceed to Washington.¹⁴

A week passed before Hopkins sent back an unhurried reply: 'The matter of tube alloys is in hand and I think will be disposed of completely the first of the week.'¹⁵ But it was not. On July 9 the prime minister telegraphed again, directly to the president, about the matter. 'Since Harry's telegram of 17th June I have been anxiously awaiting further news about tube alloys. My experts are standing by and I find it increasingly difficult to explain delay. If difficulties have arisen I beg you to let me know at once what they are in case we may be able to help in solving them.'¹⁶

The situation had barely changed when Henry Stimson and George Marshall visited London later that summer (we shall meet them there in

the next volume). On July 17, 1943 Secretary Stimson explained at tortuous length to Churchill what he claimed had happened. He had extracted, he said, five hundred million dollars from the Congress for *manhattan* while refusing any explanation. He was quite frank about the project's commercial importance, because the bomb might not be ready for use in time for this war. 'There would be difficulties,' Churchill quoted him as saying to him, writing to Anderson the next day, 'in sharing the commercial fruits.' Roosevelt had told his secretary of war nothing of the previous debates with Churchill, and Stimson professed to be alarmed at the British impression that they were being cheated of the bomb. 'We based our demand,' Churchill explained to him, 'entirely upon the engagement entered into and the fact that this was a war secret which might play a great part.' Stimson, he told Anderson afterwards, seemed very friendly and receptive.¹⁷

All of this was not without effect. On July 20 the president did write to Vannevar Bush confirming the thrust of his agreement with the British: 'While I am mindful of the vital necessity for security in regard to this, I feel that our understanding with the British encompasses the complete exchange of all information.' He therefore directed Bush to renew the 'full exchange of information' with the British on *tube alloys*.¹⁸

securing compliance from those who were less gentlemanly, the American scientists and U.S. army generals, was a different ball-game. As Lord Cherwell, unaware that Roosevelt had personally broken the log-jam, warned Churchill on July 22: 'The U.S. generals (especially Groves) think they are on to a good thing and want to keep it for themselves.' American industry had identified major possibilities to cash in on *manhattan* after the war. Some of Roosevelt's top scientists like Vannevar Bush and Conant, who were, in the Prof.'s informed view, 'apt to receive large donations from American industry,' had fallen into line with the generals. 'In the present political situation,' he advised, 'it is no doubt difficult for the president to make headway against an alliance of such formidable interests.'¹⁹ Visiting London for talks with Churchill and Stimson at No. 10 Downing-street on July 23, Dr Bush adhered rigorously to, and defended, the restrictions.

President Roosevelt put on a display of trying to enforce the agreement. Three days after this meeting a telegram came from him stating simply: 'I have arranged satisfactorily for *tube alloys*,' but it gave no details. He invited Churchill now to send over his 'top man in this enterprise,' to 'get full understanding from our people.'²⁰ A few days later another reminder

came from Anderson, that even if Roosevelt was now back in play, they had still not touched the U.S. army generals: 'Is there not a danger that General Groves at any rate will simply tell Stimson and Bush that – like all Americans who come to our misty island – they had been taken in by our hypocritical cunning and carried away by our brilliant prime minister?' Lunching in London with Stimson and Marshall, Anderson heard from the former that their fear was that the British intended to profit from the atomic research after the war, having let the Americans incur all the expense.²¹

As the prime minister was reminded, Groves had a stranglehold on the empire's uranium and heavy water. Churchill had it in his mind now to do what he should have done in Washington, namely set down the Anglo-American agreement in writing. He directed Anderson to prepare a suitable draft; he wanted to send it round to Stimson that same day.²² This was the birth of the Québec Agreement. Cherwell and Anderson prepared a draft in the form of a memorandum from Churchill to the president. They discussed it first with Stimson's special assistant Harvey H. Bundy. Even in draft, which Anderson sent round to No. 10 on July 23, it represented a total abdication by Britain's prime minister of all future atomic rights to the United States.

It assured the United States that Britain would never use this weapon against them; nor against anybody else without their consent; nor would they pass atomic data to third parties without American agreement; and

fourthly, in the event of this project proving capable of industrial application, I [Churchill] am prepared to undertake that we will abide by any agreement which you [Roosevelt] may tell me that you consider to be fair.²³

As Dr Bundy later pointed out, it was a unilateral offer by the prime minister; but Churchill evidently saw it as the only way to buy back Britain's right – her birthright – to participate in a project out of which the Americans, by their finagling and prevarication, had cheated her. During talks between Anderson, Stimson, and Marshall, it was agreed to add a fifth clause, setting up a Combined Policy Committee to supervise the project and its use.²⁴ On July 29 the P.M. sent off the draft, virtually unchanged, to Roosevelt. Some days later, the British ambassador in Washington heard that Anderson 'had had a good talk with Stimson and Marshall about his particular problems and hopes to see Conant tomorrow.'²⁵ We shall witness the agreement being signed at Québec in August 1943.



Our narrative last glimpsed Mr Churchill as he departed from Washington on May 26, 1943. Roosevelt had come down to the Potomac river with Lord Halifax to see them off. Churchill was in a good temper, having just been handed the news that another enemy U-boat had been killed, but his fellow-passenger Lord Leathers could see how tired he had become over the last two days, and the prime minister had in fact left a number of matters with Roosevelt – like tube alloys – unresolved in consequence.²⁶

They had what Winston, in a letter to Clementine, called 'an absolutely perfect journey,' flying from Washington up to Newfoundland in one seven-hour 'hop.' The Clipper landed at Botwood in the evening; here they transferred to an American C-54 cargo plane, as Churchill wanted to proceed straight to North Africa. It was the first time a C-54 had attempted this flight non-stop, but he wanted to avoid landing in England in case Eden and Attlee, those two spoilsports, prevented him undertaking another long trip so soon after his recent illness. He dined on Canadian soil, then covered the 2,700 miles to Gibraltar in a further seventeen-hour flight. On the way, Churchill wired to Eisenhower announcing his coming to Algiers with General Marshall; he planned to stay for a day or two and to visit 'the front.'²⁷

The plane rolled to a halt on the Rock's short airstrip, 'R.A.F. North Front,' at five p.m. on May 27. It was too late to go straight on to Algiers before dusk. Wearing his pith helmet and plumes and full imperial regalia, the Governor of Gibraltar, Lieutenant-General Sir Noël Mason-Macfarlane, met him, and made him comfortable at The Convent; after dark, 'Mason Mac' had all of the Rock's guns fired in an anti-aircraft exercise, a spectacular display. General Marshall was much taken by Churchill's methods and by the exaggerated courtesies which the Crown colony accorded to him: Marshall privately referred to Churchill's 'super-salesmanship.'

Harold Macmillan arrived in a Flying Fortress from London the next morning and drove around the Rock to visit Winston, still in bed. Churchill irritably accused him of having disobeyed instructions about the French squadron at Alexandria. Macmillan had been working on Admiral Godfroy to soften him up ever since his appointment in December, and he calmly pointed out that whatever the methods employed, at least they had worked – blackmailed by General Giraud and Macmillan, who had threatened to cut off the fleet's funds, Godfroy had brought the fleet round to Dakar on May 17. 'No thanks to you,' grumbled the prime minister. 'I don't know,'

retorted Macmillan. 'You would have blamed me if the thing had gone wrong, so you must give me the credit when it has gone right.'²⁸

for the onward leg of his journey to Algiers the next morning, Churchill switched to a third plane; an Avro York had been converted for him, an adaptation of the R.A.F.'s Lancaster bomber. Unlike the Liberator in which he had flown to Moscow in August 1942, this was fitted as a V.I.P. plane, with comfortable seats, a galley, and a private cabin. Accompanied now by Macmillan, he and his party flew on from Gibraltar to Algiers at eleven a.m. on May 28.²⁹ The York's autograph book shows that otherwise on board for this trip to North Africa and back to England were Churchill, Eden, Marshall, Brooke, Ismay, Tedder, and General Alexander; and Peck, Rowan, Thompson, Millard and Kinna of prime minister's personal staff.³⁰

Churchill travelled this time in his guise as an 'Air Commodore.' Flying in between continents in this comfortable plane, he dictated an affectionate letter to Clementine. 'My darling Clemmie,' this began, 'You really have been splendid in writing to me. Hardly a day has passed that I have not had a letter to give me so much pleasure and delight. I, on the other hand, have been most remiss but I really have been hunted altogether beyond the ordinary.' Not only had he transacted all the 'big business' about which he went to Washington, but he had taken advantage of all the time that the President could give him. 'They all made great complaint I had not brought you with me and made me promise that next time you must surely come.'

Churchill retained the most pleasant memories of the coming eight days in Africa. He had been dog-tired when he arrived, but the sunshine and sea-bathing soon revived him. The York landed at Maison Blanche at four-thirty p.m. on Friday afternoon, May 28. Upsetting Eisenhower's arrangements Churchill moved into the general's villa in Algiers instead of Admiral Cunningham's, where he was supposed to stay, and settled straight into a comfortable chair on the porch, with a glass and some ice. (One morning Eisenhower's valet saw that the P.M.'s breakfast consisted of a bottle of white wine, a bottle of soda water and a dish of ice.³¹) Eisenhower's staff now routinely referred to Churchill as 'The Man Who Came To Dinner.'³²

They talked until dinner over at Cunningham's. Churchill criticised Eisenhower's failure to follow through quickly with an invasion of Sicily after Tunisia – the 'Dunkirk' argument; the P.M. was completely overlooking the need for landing-craft, said Bedell Smith.³³ They also talked about Hitler's coming battle for Kursk; the ULTRAS showed that Hitler had 'teed up'

a gigantic tank offensive, a combined attack by the army groups of Field Marshals Hans-Günther von Kluge and Erich von Manstein, but that Stalin was preparing for it in great depth. The Americans expected Hitler to lose a million men in the coming battle. Eisenhower yawned, wearying of this rehash of the strategic debate. 'The P.M. recited his story three different times in three ways last night,' he sighed to his staff the next day. 'His method is to talk loudly until he has worn down the last shred of opposition.'³⁴ He was now glad that General Marshall was there to share the load.

Late on the thirtieth, Commander Thompson telephoned Harry Butcher, his counterpart on Eisenhower's staff, inquiring if the P.M. might go over at 10:45 p.m. to see him. Eisenhower agreed, though reluctantly, anticipating another session grinding on until one-thirty a.m. while the prime minister ploughed the same furrow, namely: 'Keep on until you get Italy.' Churchill arrived fifteen minutes late, which infuriated Eisenhower – who had momentarily forgotten which was the more important, an American lieutenant-general or the prime minister of Britain. Churchill began by flattering Eisenhower – after all, he said, he was the Allied supreme commander, coming directly under the Combined Chiefs, who represented two great allies of which Britain was one; he complimented him on having created a unified Anglo-American command in which national prejudices were submergled. He added that he had 'sensed' a strong feeling by the Americans that the British were more eager to fight it out in the Mediterranean, than to launch a cross-Channel assault. He urged that the difference was only a matter of 'emphasis' – now that they were gaining the upper hand here in the Mediterranean, they should knock out Italy while they had the chance.

Eisenhower responded that he would be much wiser about such a decision once husky had begun: if the Italians fought stubbornly there, as they had in Tunisia when well dug in, it was going to be 'hard sledding' all the way. Churchill had Italy on the brain, however. The British people would be glad to go on half rations, he volunteered, if this released enough shipping to solve the supply problems for the conquest of Italy. 'I confidently look forward to having Christmas dinner with you in Rome,' he concluded.³⁵

General Eisenhower hated these nocturnal arguments. Around one a.m. Churchill noticed Captain Butcher pacing around at the door with a flashlight. 'I have used a variety of schemes to hustle visitors away at night,' this aide later recalled: sometimes he paraded in his bathrobe before the lingering guests. Whether or not the prime minister took the hint he left ten minutes later, and trudged up the driveway to Admiral Cunningham's villa.³⁶

He could see that Eisenhower had profound misgivings about *HUSKY*. Six weeks later, with the worst behind them, Churchill would scoff to his cabinet that the Americans had been in terror of *husky*, and that Eisenhower had declared that even two enemy divisions holding the island would render any Allied landing impossible; yet these same Americans, said Churchill, kept pressing for a cross-Channel invasion operation which would fill the Channel with the bodies of 'untrained American troops.'³⁷

There was a deeper reason. The Americans never liked campaigning in the Mediterranean. Both Stimson and Hull distrusted British intentions. 'They are straining every nerve to lay a foundation throughout the Mediterranean area for their own empire after the war is over,' reflected Stimson.³⁸



It will not surprise us to learn that, even now, most of Churchill's energies in Algiers were expended on the continuing political crisis over the French. On his orders a British plane had evacuated his elderly French friend, General Alphonse Georges, from occupied France on May 16; Georges, as a five-star general, far outranked de Gaulle. Churchill revealed to Eisenhower on May 30 that the rescue had gone without a hitch, though there was evidence that de Gaulle's 'nasties' had betrayed details of the general's escape plans to the Gestapo.³⁹ Although Georges was now sixty-eight, Winston intended to use him in London as chief of a French military mission attached to H.M. Government.⁴⁰ In Algiers he had long separate talks with General Georges and with General Giraud.⁴¹ He told Georges to keep his head down here in Algiers, and to stay out of the way of de Gaulle, to whom Winston, ever the linguist, referred four times as a 'prime sonofabitch,' when conferring with the American diplomat Robert Murphy on May 29.⁴²

Lieutenant-General Charles de Gaulle arrived at Algiers' French airfield on May 30. His departure from London did not end his private war with the British, and the British foreign office continued to protect and pander to him; on their orders the B.B.C. that day announced, in the same bulletin, the transfer of the French fleet from Alexandria to Dakar and his arrival in Algiers, as though the credit for the fleet movement belonged entirely to him.⁴³ Churchill continued to loathe him intensely. On hearing of the prior arrival of General Georges, de Gaulle knew who was behind it and was displeased.⁴⁴ On May 30 Jean Monnet, a leading French economist whom the Americans had imported from Washington, found the newly ar-

rived de Gaulle bristling with rage at both the British and the Americans, and again talking quite openly of allying France with Germany and the Soviet Union after the war; he felt that de Gaulle was either mad or bad, or both. The hostility to him as a 'renegade' was widely shared by the French officer corps in Algeria; feelings were running so high that Murphy, Roosevelt's point man here, fully expected somebody to assassinate de Gaulle, and said so out loud.⁴⁵ Nobody took the hint, if hint it was.

Negotiations began between the rival Frenchmen; it was Casablanca all over again. On June 1 Churchill went over to see Eisenhower, disparaged de Gaulle as an 'ego-maniac,' and declared that when the 'divorce' finally came through Britain would cut both the general and his 'Gaullist' followers off her payroll, and he would require the B.B.C. and all Britain's other propaganda agencies to drop them simultaneously. 'However,' noted Eisenhower's aide, recording this emotional conversation, 'much depends upon the outcome of the current discussions.' They were now victims of their own efforts to create a French leader. Like Frankenstein's monster, said Churchill, de Gaulle was out of control.⁴⁶ Seeing fresh trouble brewing Macmillan must have alerted the foreign office, because Anthony Eden flew out from England posthaste to 'untangle' the warring French generals. He arrived at three p.m. on the last day of May. Macmillan fetched him personally from the airport and brought him to the admiral's villa, where Churchill had a long talk with him. 'He is worried about French negotiations,' recorded Eden on a sheet of notepaper,

& strongly anti de Gaulle in part at least as a result of stories told him by [General] Georges whom I met later at dinner & who struck me as a reactionary old defeatist. Winston said I might have to intervene if matters took a turn for the worse.

Eden professed to be most reluctant to do anything of the kind. The matter was not pressing anyway, they agreed, since he and Churchill were off to 'the front' in Tunisia for forty-eight hours. (Churchill at one point panicked Eden by asking what he thought of one or both of them flying on from here to Russia, to see Stalin, from which quarter further real trouble was also coming. He asked Eden to think it over until the morrow.⁴⁷)

Churchill called a staff conference at five p.m., and Eisenhower invited them all to dinner. Grateful that Eisenhower was taking Churchill off his hands, Cunningham declined the invitation and fled to his cabin on a battle-

ship. At Eisenhower's villa that evening, the others – fourteen of them crowded round a table with barely room for ten – ate and drank their fill. Boozily sizing them up, Eden decided that he rather liked Generals Eisenhower and Marshall after all. Churchill, raising pressure on his second Scotch and coming up to a full head of steam on his third, invited Eisenhower to come along with him on his trip to 'the front' the next day in Tunisia. Eisenhower pleaded that he had work to do.⁴⁸

Eisenhower and Cunningham boarded a British cruiser at Bône and steamed toward Pantelleria, a fortified Italian island between Tunis and Sicily, to watch its bombardment the next day. Their bombers would hurl six thousand tons of bombs at this little rock. Churchill and his party, which now included Randolph once more, flew over to Tunis, stopping briefly to watch an American bomber unit being briefed for the mission. Churchill had wanted to go along on the invasion of the island, but Pantelleria surrendered without a shot. He had estimated there were 3,000 soldiers on the island; Eisenhower said there were far more. Churchill said he'd give him five centimes for each one over that figure. Eleven thousand Italians were taken prisoner here. Churchill paid up, remarking that at one-twentieth of a cent each he'd take all the Italians Eisenhower could get his hands on.⁴⁹

He motored out to the Roman amphitheatre at Carthage, where thousands of troops were waiting to hear him speak. At dinner with Eisenhower, back in Algiers, Churchill would reflect, 'I was speaking from where the cries of Christian virgins rent the air while roaring lions devoured them.' He paused for a moment, visualising in his mind's eye the not unpleasing prospect. 'But I am no lion,' he said, 'and certainly not a virgin.'

For a while he motored down the route of the battle, past tons of destroyed Nazi weaponry. There was a giant troop-carrying Messerschmitt transport plane with six engines. It was a rarity – so many of its fellows now lay at the bottom of the Mediterranean with their late cargoes. He also saw a captured Tiger tank; its big 88-millimetre gun was the terror of its opponents.

the days were baking hot and the sunshine of a quality not often encountered in southern England. On June 2 Churchill held court at Air Vice-Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham's luxurious sea-shore villa at Hammamet. 'Mary' Coningham was commander-in-chief of the Tactical Air Force which had contributed powerfully to Montgomery's victories. This villa, marvelled one air marshal, summoned now to meet Churchill and Tedder, was com-

plete with a bridal suite and a sunken marble bath. 'Before lunch a bathe,' he wrote in his private diary – 'P.M. refused to be persuaded to go in pool but walked through house clad in a cigar and shirt tails. Found him in sea – also Anthony Eden, C.I.G.S., Alex[ander], Ismay, Mary, Randolph, George B., Tedder, – not a costume among the lot.' The sea was colder than elsewhere. They had a good lunch in the patio alongside the pool with Macmillan and General Richard Keightley, commanding the Armoured Division.* Churchill and Eden addressed assembled ('properly clad') R.A.F. men before parting, then rejoined the York after lunch and flew back to Algiers.⁵⁰



During, or perhaps even because of, Churchill's absence from Algiers, on June 1, 1943, the French commanders began to resolve their differences. They all met, including Churchill's ancient friend General Georges. Georges, as the most recent arrival from France, warned that de Gaulle was overstating the strength of his own following there; he told Macmillan afterwards that de Gaulle was another Hitler in the making. Small wonder that, speaking to Macmillan, de Gaulle spoke very ill of Georges; he also insisted on the dismissal of a number of Vichy-oriented French generals in North Africa, and snarled to Murphy, in Macmillan's presence, 'I represent future France, and it will be better for us all if you will support me.'⁵¹

Wild reports filtered around Algiers. That day, rumours reached Eisenhower that de Gaulle had infiltrated two thousand French troops, hardened in the fighting for Tunisia, into the city of Algiers, where he was planning to stage a coup against Giraud and take over from Allied Forces headquarters and the acting governor General Juin. Eisenhower ordered a survey of the American and British troops available to quash a Gaullist putsch; they were not many, but the firepower of two British battleships and an aircraft-carrier would give him the whip hand.⁵² No coup happened. On June 2 Giraud sent a letter to de Gaulle demanding that he rid his entourage of 'his fascist generals' and in particular of 'Passy,' whom he accused of 'Gestapo methods' and maintaining 'secret torture chambers' in London.⁵³ This was the state of play as Churchill and Eden returned from Tunis that evening.

* Both would be implicated in the controversial forced repatriation in April and May 1945 of thousands of civilians from Austria to Marshal Tito's Yugoslavia. – Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Minister and the Massacres* (London, 1986).

back in Algiers, both Churchill and Eden had private and separate interviews with both Giraud and de Gaulle. It was the first time that Churchill had met de Gaulle since the frustration of his edict that the general was to be 'eliminated.' Macmillan and Murphy urged Giraud to be conciliatory. Georges, who had seemed 'more Giraudist than Giraud' only a few days earlier, now moderated his attitude. The talks went on far into the night (June 2–3) while Eisenhower's patrol cars still scoured the streets of Algiers looking for signs of a Gaullist putsch.

After that angry letter from Giraud impugning de Gaulle, the storm was spent. A sudden calm descended, and June 3 saw the seven feuding French primadonnas meeting, agreeing, and setting up what shortly became the French Committee for National Liberation (F.C.N.L.). Giraud gave de Gaulle a cordial if nervous greeting. De Gaulle made a speech and even embraced Giraud. 'Moved and embarrassed,' reported an O.S.S. observer, 'Giraud returned the embrace.' Later that day, June 3, Macmillan spent a delightful evening with Eden, Churchill, Eisenhower and the latter's staff – Tedder, Cunningham, and Montgomery. There was cause for celebration. Macmillan's methods had forced the French to see reason.

there had also been a final military conference with Eisenhower and Marshall on June 3, 1943 at Algiers, at Eisenhower's house. They agreed that Eisenhower should advise the Combined Chiefs to exploit the campaign after husky into the toe of Italy. So Churchill had got his way.⁵⁴ They also agreed that Eisenhower should go ahead with bombing the railroad marshalling yards just outside Rome, subject to approval from London and Washington. There was a danger that the Italians might bomb Cairo in revenge but Churchill was fully prepared to take this risk as it might finally cause Egypt to declare war.⁵⁵

The press published news of the de Gaulle–Giraud rapprochement on June 4, 1943. Giraud, it was announced, had had several conferences with de Gaulle in the interests of national unity and was on the very best of terms with him.⁵⁶ A new French Committee of National Liberation had been set up in Algiers, to which de Gaulle and Giraud could each nominate two members. De Gaulle would now move his organisation from London to Algiers.⁵⁷ Admiral Cunningham hosted a celebratory luncheon for the seven members of the new Committee to meet Churchill and Eden before they left. The prime minister spoke, still seated, a few words in his own

French patois, speaking with an alcoholic *tendresse* of his fondness for France and the French Army since he had first made their acquaintance thirty-five years before.

Generals Giraud, de Gaulle, and Georges repaid his eloquence with speeches of their own – the one moment of black humour being when the General Georges made an innocent reference to 'Joan of Arc' which won belly-laughes from the British present, a response which both baffled and pleased the French guests. Giraud paid tribute to Churchill, and expressed gratitude for the kindness shown him as he passed through Gibraltar; he was unaware of the nocturnal scene that his posturing had provoked, causing Eisenhower to cry, 'What I need around here is a damned good assassin,' and Mason-Macfarlane to offer a little airplane accident and the services of his excellent 'body-disposal squad.' For reasons we can without difficulty surmise, de Gaulle announced at this time that he intended to stay here in North Africa, rather than London, 'until the invasion of France.'⁵⁸

After that June 4 luncheon, Churchill rode out with Eisenhower to the airfield for the flight back to England. The York took off at 3:40 p.m., and landed at R.A.F. North Front at 6:30 p.m. for a refuelling stop. It took off at ten-thirty from Gibraltar for England, landing at six a.m. on the fifth. Word was sent ahead that they were flying direct to Northolt airfield, just outside London. The English welcoming party waiting at Northolt, deprived of such Mediterranean vacations, seemed a pale and sickly lot. Eden's private secretary Oliver Harvey found Winston 'strangely brown.' 'I arrived at the airfield,' wrote Churchill's secretary, John Martin, 'in time to see the great aircraft arrive with its escort, like a lot of small birds round a cuckoo.'

churchill told his cabinet that, while he had now formed a high opinion of George Marshall, both as a man and as an intellect, his Joint Chiefs seemed incapable of grasping how important it was to knock Italy out of the war. 'It was only by getting the president to agree to Marshall's tying up the loose ends of the spot,' recorded one participant in this cabinet meeting, 'that Winston feels that he has altered reluctant acquiescence in our plans to wholehearted support.'⁵⁹ He repaired that afternoon to Chequers for two days' well-earned relaxation, inviting besides Clementine and Sarah only the Prof., Bracken, and John Martin, to whom Winston's return brought 'an end to the convenient lull at No. 10.'

There was one other guest at Chequers, 'Butcher' Harris, chief of R.A.F. Bomber Command.⁶⁰ As an enthusiastic area-bomber and unrepentant mass killer, Sir Arthur Harris was not everybody's idea of the ideal weekend house-guest. Lord Halifax, who spent a night with him a few weeks later found however that while he was 'a rough fellow, and not very attractive to me as an individual,' Harris was 'exactly the right man for his present job.'⁶¹ Churchill liked him, and was much in his debt.

The relationship between the prime minister and his bomber commander Sir Arthur Harris was one of the pillars of the war effort. Each provided courage to the other in the darker moments of their campaigns – Churchill was notoriously prone to fits of manic depression, what he termed his 'Black Dog.' He might be disappointed when foul weather thwarted the bomber squadrons, but he would end his harangue, down the telephone line to Bomber Command headquarters at High Wycombe, with the words: 'I am not pressing you to fight the weather as well as the Germans; never forget that.' He often invited Harris down to Chequers now. The air chief marshal watched with fascination the spectacle of Churchill 'on the prowl,' as he later described, in siren suit, embroidered slippers, and as he mastered, with sonorous phrase and valiant gesture, each crisis which arose.⁶² It had sufficed for Winston to mention to 'Tommy' over dinner – with Harris as guest of honour – on the Sunday night before he left for Washington that he wanted a list of 'important German towns and their population,' and the list and map were rushed across the Atlantic as soon as they were ready.⁶³

Now Harris was back at the country mansion, bringing the famous Blue Books, the bound volumes of maps, pie-charts, histograms, bomb-plots, and damage-photos showing where the thousands of tons of high explosive and firebombs had rained down on the enemy during Churchill's absence. There were photos of the flooding caused by the breach of the Ruhr Dams, and of the swathe cut through the valley town of Wuppertal-Barmen by Harris's 791 bombers on the night of May 29–30, the first such raid to kill people in their thousands. The raging fires and exploding bombs had killed over 2,450 civilians in thirty minutes, most of them burned alive; forty Pathfinder bombers had first cascaded loads of pure incendiaries onto a tight ring of red 'target-indicator flares' laid down precisely by Mosquito bombers flying blind on the new *oboe* radar-beam system.

There was one disturbing factor that Harris mentioned: their own loss rate was climbing fast, as the Germans developed new night fighting tactics

and better radar equipment. The five-percent casualty threshold was approaching beyond which, so popular wisdom had it, the bomber crews' morale would be fatally affected. Each aircrew member, and they were the cream of Britain's younger generation, knew that when the five-percent loss-rate was reached, his odds on surviving a tour of operations were zero.

It was only these steadily mounting losses that caused concern among the public, according to the morale reports. The public were perversely proud of the saturation bombing campaign, though some people did condemn newspapers for publishing pictures of Guy Gibson and his fellow airmen after the brilliantly executed raid on the Ruhr dams, fearing that if they were taken prisoner the Germans would subject them to 'cruel treatment.' According to these surveys, the public expressed bitterness at the few who ventured to suggest that the R.A.F. bombing was 'inhuman.'⁶⁴ The public was of course in the dark as to the real nature of the strategic bomber offensive, and remained so until the official history appeared in 1961.

those were the days when one of the B.B.C.'s most successful weekly radio comedies was *When Ignorance is Bliss*; it was an era before television networks competed to bring the visual-image realities of war right into the living room. Other than at Wuppertal, the war's civilians, in Britain, Germany, and Japan, still did not know what was in store – the terrifying V-weapons, the firestorms, the machine-gun strafing attacks, the sealed air-raid bunkers superheated by the outside conflagrations until their thousands of human inhabitants had been reduced to foot-thick layers of ash. To Churchill, the raids were a vital political tool essential to impress Joseph Stalin. He never troubled himself with thoughts of the horrors the bombers were inflicting. That same month, June 24, 1943 would bring the first firestorm to Germany, an R.A.F. attack on Elberfeld, the other half of Wuppertal, which killed nearly three thousand Germans in this little industrial valley town.

Was it however having any effect? Until now, the enemy had seemed to be taking the bombing in their stride. An analysis of German mail captured in Algiers, much of it from the worst bombed areas of Germany, revealed little hatred of the British. Eden was perplexed to find that these letter-writers betrayed no remorse, no understanding that 'they began it.' While a longing for peace generally ran through the letters, there was 'no hint' against Hitler and his regime. 'Goebels [*sic*] has done his work well,' concluded the foreign secretary.⁶⁵ The strategic bombing offensive would have to become crueller still.

34: *'Soldiers Must Die'*

They had all but forgotten about General Wladyslaw Sikorski, prime minister of Poland in exile.

Some time before Churchill's arrival in North Africa at the end of May 1943 he had received a letter from the general, expressing Poland's resolute desire to take part in the invasion of the Continent: 'As you know,' the letter concluded,

I am leaving shortly for the Middle East to inspect the Polish forces in those parts, but before my departure I feel I must congratulate you with all my heart on your American speeches. I am sure you will like to know that all Poles, those who fight and suffer in Poland as well as those who are within the orbit of the British empire, put an almost mystic trust in Great Britain and in your leadership.¹

Having signed that letter, General Sikorski had left England.² His position had become virtually untenable. The Kremlin was clamouring that he must restructure his government; he was adamant that he would not.³ He would spend June in the Levant, touring Polish units in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine.⁴ The two prime ministers were at opposite ends of the balance-arm of fortune: as Sikorski went his unhappy way around the Middle East from unit to unit of Poland's crushed and – since Katyn – virtually officerless forces, Churchill was savouring the early fruits of victory. He was being driven through raucous City crowds to receive the Freedom of the City at the Guildhall, cheered by people of every Allied tint, in overalls, in uniform, and in office garb, who had lined the streets to see their premier.

One unexpected event clouded Churchill's horizon: the Vatican announced that it was recognising Sikorski's government. His was the first

exile government to receive this blessing. It was a slap at the Kremlin. Then a larger and more sinister cloud loomed: on June 28 the Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky called at the foreign office, and told Eden that Moscow was recalling both him and his colleague A. Y. Bogomolov, ambassador to the exiled governments, to Moscow 'for consultations.' In diplomatic language, this was a very stern rebuke; Cadogan commented: 'I don't like this.'⁵

relations with Joseph Stalin were under a strain. There were rumours that he was contemplating doing a deal with the Nazis for the second time. Churchill was assiduously feeding Stalin with reports – originating from Bletchley Park, although the Russians were not told this – about the colossal tank offensive, *citadel*, which Hitler was now expected to start early in July. This flow of ugly news may have been counter-productive. In Stalin's view, his armies were bearing 'almost single-handed' the pressure of the Wehrmacht in the east. He was all the more disheartened to learn from Roosevelt that the Allies had decided to postpone the cross-Channel invasion. He had been promised after Casablanca that it would take place this coming summer.⁶ He lodged a furious protest with Roosevelt, and he ordered his ambassador Ivan Maisky to visit Churchill on June 9 to inquire precisely what the Allies did intend to do for the rest of 1943.

Freshly back from Algiers, Churchill could only reply that their current intent was to knock Italy out of the war. This would indirectly assist the Soviet Union, as Hitler would have to replace the missing Italian divisions in the Balkans and elsewhere. He also referred to how R.A.F. Bomber Command would be stepping up its onslaught on Germany; this would tie down one and a half million Germans in flak defences and factories. Harris's 'Battle of the Ruhr' was at its climax. The spring of 1944 would be 'terrifying' for the Germans, he promised. Of course he regretted the postponement of the cross-Channel invasion but, he said, they were doing the best they could. Maisky asked if the European war would end in 1944; Churchill avoided definite reply. He turned the conversation instead to Turkey, saying that he would press her to grant air and naval bases to the Allies. He described at some length the conflict in American public opinion over whether the defeat of Germany or Japan should come first; some 'ill-informed' Americans, he added, even considered the Chinese militarily more valuable than the Russians. He mentioned in conclusion that while in the United States he had often been asked 'why Russia did not join in the war against Japan.' He had always answered, 'We have never asked her to do more.'⁷

This was mostly guff and easily recognised as such. Stalin's reply was correspondingly uncompromising: the Allies were in default on their military obligations. On June 12 Churchill had a long telephone talk with Eden about the underlying implications of such a remark. Eden did not take it too seriously; Stalin, he said, had always preferred to see Britain striking across the Channel rather than into Italy or the Balkans.⁸ After waiting a week, Churchill replied to Stalin in language of unprecedented frankness, saying that he would not allow a senseless massacre of British troops just to dispel Russian suspicions. 'I am getting rather tired,' he wrote to Stalin,

of these repeated scoldings considering that they have never been actuated by anything but cold-blooded self-interest and total disdain of our lives and fortunes.

It would be of no help to Russia, he lectured Stalin, 'if we threw away a hundred thousand men in a disastrous cross-Channel attack.' The Germans could reinforce a counter-attack through Europe's roads and railways far faster than the Allies could maintain their build-up across the beaches. 'I cannot see how a great British defeat and slaughter would aid the Soviet armies,' he said. The Allies were winning other victories elsewhere, he reminded Stalin. As for the lack of consultation, about which Stalin had complained to Roosevelt, Churchill again invited him to come and meet them, perhaps at the main British naval base in the north of Scotland, Scapa Flow.⁹

president roosevelt heard these distant sounds of Kremlin disquiet and decided on a different approach. He now explored the possibility of a meeting with Stalin – but only the two of them, a summit *à deux*, without Churchill and without their staffs, just as he had discussed with Mackenzie King. Bearing secret messages to this effect, Averell Harriman, the president's special emissary, arrived from Washington in London on June 23; he was accompanied by Lord Beaverbrook, who had shared the two-day plane journey with him. Churchill invited them to dine that same evening.

Robbed of two nights' sleep, Beaverbrook was short-tempered; dinner, with Clemmie and Harriman's daughter Kathleen, brought out the worst in Winston too. He was visibly testy, and Beaverbrook sensed the prime minister's old 'anti-Red' blood coming to the boil again. Since the pneumonia, Max told one associate, the P.M. was losing his grip; his legs had begun to fail him, and his buoyancy and capacity for work had diminished.¹⁰

Harriman saw none of these symptoms. He assured Hopkins that he found the prime minister better in both health and vigour.¹¹ After Beaverbrook left around midnight the American stayed on, because the president had entrusted him with several messages for Churchill's eyes alone: he revealed Roosevelt's ambition to meet alone with Stalin somewhere. Churchill was to be excluded, 'so as not to disturb the intimacy' of their *tête-à-tête*, as Harriman put it. This cannot have pleased Winston. For two hours they discoursed on every other topic that currently possessed the two great Allies – de Gaulle, China, India, and Poland, and then back through the Soviet Union to the delicate matter of that Roosevelt–Stalin meeting.

Churchill concealed his alarm. Maintaining his bonhomie toward Harriman, he argued firmly for a Three-, not Two-, Power meeting, and one held if possible on British soil. When Harriman explained that American public opinion believed that their president was too much under his influence, Winston suggested that British public opinion would not take kindly to what Roosevelt was proposing either. Arguing subtly, Harriman said that in precisely the same measure as it annoyed the British, it would both flatter Stalin and impress American opinion. He suggested that there was no urgency, but Churchill was deeply upset, and he sent for Eden at midnight, after the American withdrew; he then had Harriman brought back in at one a.m., and told him to explain all this to the foreign secretary, along with current American views on Portugal (operation *lifebelt*), France, and a projected visit by the American emissary Myron Taylor to the Vatican in Rome – a visit which Eden did not 'much like' just now.¹²

Churchill detained the foreign secretary until two-thirty a.m. Again Eden tried to placate him: he thought it unlikely that such a Roosevelt–Stalin meeting would ever take place, given that 'Joe doesn't much like wasting his time.'¹³ Churchill however drafted an argumentative reply to Roosevelt the next day with Eden, and he called Harriman back to No. 10 Downing-street at one a.m. on Friday morning, June 25, to receive it.

he invited Harriman down to Chequers that weekend. Their remaining talk revolved around the knotty problem of de Gaulle. Harriman could now report secretly to Roosevelt that the prime minister was indeed ready to seize any opportunity to lay the general's ambitions, even to the point of his 'elimination,' if it should come to that; it was that word again (the passage is omitted from the printed version).¹⁴ From the language being used, and the august station of its users, it could have seemed that sooner or later

an inconvenient general was going to meet with an airplane accident; and that Mason-Macfarlane would be needing his body-disposal squad.

De Gaulle continued to obsess Churchill. It was as though Algiers had changed nothing – the enemy was no longer that German in Berlin, but this Frenchman in Algiers. He had again been heard threatening to deal with Moscow and Berlin. Churchill filled a cabinet meeting on June 28 with the subject, stating that he had no intention of allowing de Gaulle to affect relations with Roosevelt – 'he would be quite prepared to dispense with his [de Gaulle's] services if he gave trouble,' as Brooke summarised their talk.¹⁵

The storm signs multiplied. Just as the Vatican had recognised Sikorski's government, Moscow unexpectedly recognized the French Committee of National Liberation without consulting London or Washington. Churchill recommended that they not follow suit until the F.N.C.L. proved its good intentions.¹⁶ He found support from the Americans – Eisenhower, Murphy, and Winant – for this, but not from his own foreign office. Macmillan, taking an independent line that bordered on insubordination, favoured the Soviet line, lamenting that he was unable to get London to impress the true position about de Gaulle on Washington.¹⁷ Eisenhower eventually backed his line; at least, on July 6 a telegram arrived from Macmillan stating this.¹⁸

De Gaulle seems to have cast a spell on Macmillan because, 'disgusted' with the stupidities of London and Washington, and despite strict orders to the contrary issued for precisely the reason that the Free French had always been regarded as security risks, the minister informed de Gaulle at six p.m. on July 9 that *husky*, the invasion of Sicily, was to begin at dawn.¹⁹

it had been agreed that before any bombing of Rome began Eisenhower had to obtain the approval of both the cabinet in London and the Combined Chiefs in Washington. It was not an easy decision. After seeing Archbishop Spellman the prime minister had assured Roosevelt that he would not bomb Rome for the present; but during discussions in Algiers on *husky* he had decided that whatever the objections to bombing the Eternal City itself, the marshalling yards were proper objectives.²⁰ He had seen enough of Harris's post-raid photos to know that there was no real distinction.

Tedder had explained to Churchill the tactics he would be using to disrupt the enemy communications through Italy. Tedder 'much wished,' as Churchill reported to Roosevelt, to bomb the railroad facilities in Rome. The two principal targets were the rail junction at San Lorenzo and the Littorio marshalling yard, said Churchill, each over three miles from the

Vatican. A large force of bombers would attack them in daylight; there would be a 'small chance' of damage being done to Rome, but 'none' of damage to the Vatican.²¹ On June 8 the British chiefs of staff asked Churchill for a go-ahead.²² Churchill secured cabinet backing for this operation on the tenth.

Communicating this British opinion to Cordell Hull on the eleventh, Admiral Leahy said that the Joint Chiefs now agreed with the British; Hull directed Myron Taylor, his emissary to the Vatican, to indicate this in confidence to the Pope. Taylor did so, 'discreetly.'²³ Eden asked for the Pope to be reassured that the bomber crews would not attack the Vatican City; but he could not exclude the possibility that the Axis powers would deliberately do so and blame the Allies.* Everybody who had seen Harris's famous Blue Books knew what even such limited air raids would do to Rome. People around Churchill began to get cold feet. Eden, who had not previously opposed bombing civilian targets, pointed out to the chiefs of staff on June 18 that four important Papal buildings were located outside the Vatican, and quite close to the marshalling yards.²⁴ Churchill told the president on June 21: 'I think we ought to instruct our pilots to observe all possible care in order to avoid hitting any of the Papal buildings in the City of Rome listed in Article 13 of [the] Lateran Treaty, especially St. John Lateran.' The latter, San Giovanni in Lateran, the 'Mother Church of Christendom,' was a mere thousand yards from the San Lorenzo marshalling yards. Though telling young British or American airmen to avoid this or that building, when striking from altitudes of twenty or thirty thousand feet, was pure sophistry, it salved Winston's conscience; and Roosevelt's too, for he seized on it and called it an excellent suggestion.²⁵

Cadogan, ever the diplomat, advised the chiefs of staff to argue that their right to bomb Rome derived from the Italian participation 'at Mussolini's personal request' in Hitler's bombardment of London in 1940.²⁶ The Italians had not bombed Washington however, and American planes would be doing much of the bombing. The Combined Chiefs sent a slew of directives to Eisenhower cautioning him. Their cumulative effect can be assessed from a follow-up telegram from the R.A.F. delegation in Washington to Sir Charles Portal: 'There is no question of running out,' this assured him, 'but the reverse, as they are most concerned not to tie Eisenhower or frighten him into abandoning the project.' Marshall remained in favour, referring to

* Hitler did in June 1943 consider bombing Italy's Brenner Pass using unexploded British bombs; but not the Vatican. David Irving, *Hitler's War*, millennium edition, page 591.

the bombing of St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in London and of the churches in Malta, and saying that if Americans had had their churches bombed 'they would have no qualms about Rome' either. If it would 'reduce casualties on beaches,' Marshall would accept the risk of 'destroying the churches' in Rome. The Joint Chiefs endorsed this robust view.²⁷ Their British colleagues held to the view that Rome contained military objectives 'in the strictest sense,' and 'there is therefore no reason why it should be immune for all time merely because it happens to contain a number of religious and cultural monuments.' If, by good luck, the treasures escaped damage, then photographs proving this should be immediately distributed.²⁸

Their superior inter-Allied authority, the Combined Chiefs, were however nervous, urging Eisenhower to be the first to get out word of the attack, to pre-empt any 'enemy version.' 'This will avoid [the] enemy seizing an opportunity of asserting that we have attacked the shrine of Christendom and thus attempting to create misapprehension which might not be confined to the Catholic world.'²⁹

Fearing that the time was not far off when Rome would start to burn, the Vatican did what it could. The Italian government repeated its attempts to have the city recognised as an 'open city,' since they had removed their military commands months before. On June 9 the Italian government confirmed to the Vatican that the German liaison offices had also left Rome. The Vatican declared that the entire city was 'the Episcopal See of the Holy Father' and if the British bombed it the Pope would protest to the world and arouse Catholics everywhere.³⁰ The Vatican diplomats informed Myron Taylor of this on June 28; they added a warning that should a 'spontaneous uprising' follow an air raid on Rome, they could not guarantee the safety of the Allied diplomats harboured within the Vatican walls.³¹ Taylor's outraged British colleague termed this 'blackmail,' and he informed London that if the Vatican tried that language on him, he would respond that the result would only be 'further and more severe' bombing of Rome.³²

The prime minister wanted to see Rome in flames. President Roosevelt cabled him on July 5 that Field-Marshal Sir John Dill had told him of this desire: 'It is my opinion,' he wrote, 'that Eisenhower should be given full discretion as to the necessity from a military point of view of bombing the marshalling yards and should be given full discretion as to the time if and when he considers the attack advantageous.'³³ Dill signalled to the war cabinet offices July 11, discouraging any effort to prepare the religious community or public opinion in advance for the bombing of Rome.³⁴

to the irritation of the prime minister, political considerations still constrained the main force of heavy bombers. 'Butcher' Harris now repeated to him a proposal which he had first made in December 1942, to use his No. 617 Squadron, the 'Dambusters,' to deliver precision attacks on Benito Mussolini's office at the Palazzo Venezia and his residence at the Villa Torlonia.

In an operation which Harris provisionally code-named *audax*, Guy Gibson's Lancasters would fly across France under cover of darkness, and roar in across the city at rooftop height at nine-thirty one morning – dropping thousand-pound bombs fused with three-second delays on the Fascist leader's office, and simultaneously on his residence 'in case the Duce is late that morning.'³⁵ At the time Harris had first mooted the plan, it was turned down because of the general ban on bombing Rome. Portal liked the idea and asked their Intelligence service to check up on the Duce's latest routine. He passed it on to Churchill. 'I suggest that if Mussolini were killed or even badly shaken at the present time,' the chief of air staff added, 'this might greatly increase the chance of our knocking Italy out at an early date and I therefore ask your permission to lay the operation on.'³⁶

It is noteworthy that on all sides of this brutal conflict the warring statesmen instinctively shied away from killing identifiable opponents (vexatious ex-opponents like Darlan and allies who had become an inconvenience were a different proposition). No R.A.F. air raid would ever be launched against Hitler's 'Wolf's Lair;' and now Anthony Eden proved oddly averse to this particular idea of striking at the Duce in pompous person. Of course, Eden had conferred with Mussolini face to face, and like Churchill had at one time even professed an admiration for him. 'I do not like this,' he wrote, referring to Harris's proposal. 'The chances of killing Mussolini are surely very slight, and those of "shaking" him not much greater. If we fail to kill him, we shall certainly not do his reputation any harm, we may even raise his stock of waning popularity. Meanwhile we shall have incurred the odium of knocking the older part of the city about' – again, an uncharacteristic squeamishness in Eden – 'and causing civilian casualties without achieving any military result.' Churchill agreed, though not for those reasons. He was after a more all-encompassing bombing raid on Rome than that.³⁷



In the month after his return from Washington, Averell Harriman saw a lot of Churchill. He believed that everything was functioning just as

Roosevelt had wanted, except for the tricky business with 'Uncle Joe.' Churchill received two lengthy messages from Stalin dated June 24 and 26; the second was a cold, offensively worded missive which even hinted in its closing remarks that he suspected that the British were considering approaches by Nazi Germany. Stalin reminded Churchill that the British had assured Molotov earlier in 1943 that no such feelers would be entertained.³⁸ Couched in such terms, it was an ominous and insulting message. Ambassador Maisky telephoned Cadogan at the foreign office upon receiving it, on the afternoon of the twenty-sixth. A flurry of phone calls between Churchill and Eden followed, about what the latter, in a marked understatement, called a 'bad telegram from Joe,' as they discussed a suitable reply.³⁹

Churchill wondered what was behind Stalin's ill humour. Was it still rancour over Poland and General Sikorski, or was it in fact the Soviet dictator who was planning a change of policy – perhaps nervous in the face of the German onslaught about to begin at Kursk? We now know that Hitler's foreign ministry had received on June 21 what he regarded as a feeler from Moscow via Stockholm, and there were similar straws floating in the wind which British Intelligence may have intercepted. Churchill showed Stalin's rude cable to Harriman as well as his own no less robust retort. He admitted that he had already sent it off, without consulting Roosevelt. On reflection, perhaps it had been a mistake to succumb to this temptation; but he could not ignore the charge of bad faith implicit in Stalin's final paragraph.⁴⁰

It was on the very next day, June 28, that the Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky announced that Moscow was recalling him and his colleague A. Y. Bogomolov, Soviet ambassador with the Polish and other exile governments in London, 'for consultations.' Two days later Churchill sent a message out to General Sikorski at Cairo. 'Am delighted to hear from Casey of general success of your visit,' it read. 'Should be glad to welcome you home.'⁴¹

Eager for re-acceptance, the Poles took the second sentence as a sign of impatience, but it was not; it was urgency. Recalling an ambassador is an act just one step short of breaking off relations, and two steps short of war.



In Germany, speaking at the impressive mass funeral ceremony for the six thousand air raid victims at Wuppertal, Dr Goebbels hinted at the coming of reprisals. This added to the sounds of alarm in Whitehall that Hitler was preparing a secret and deadly revenge for Bomber Command's air raids.

On Friday June 11 a summary reached Churchill about the interrogation of a German soldier, who had spoken of giant rockets he claimed to have seen in production.⁴² The next day the R.A.F. obtained further high-altitude photographs of the mysterious site at Peenemünde, on the Baltic coast; it appeared to have huge launching arenas and test rigs. The Prof.'s diary shows that he spent much of that weekend at Chequers. On Monday June 16 Churchill called a secret meeting at the underground Cabinet War Rooms off Whitehall to show his ministers the detailed plans of these strange weapons.⁴³ When he viewed them under a stereoscope, the photographs of Peenemünde, with its mysterious factories, elliptical earthworks, gantries, and cranes, were deeply interesting. Just what was Hitler up to? 'I have myself given many hours of thought and attention to it,' he wrote to Sir Stafford Cripps, now minister of aircraft production, on June 17.⁴⁴

Codebreaking filled in part of this disturbing picture. Bletchley Park had been watching a low-grade cypher, **brown**, used for signals between missile scientists working on the Baltic coast. They found references in them to rockets and to 'heavy water.'⁴⁵ To Lord Cherwell's personal annoyance, Churchill had put his son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, in charge of the Intelligence attack on the enemy missile threat. Sandys shortly decided that the Germans were building giant rocket missiles; the Prof. therefore announced that they were not. By June 18 Sandys had evidence from these intercepts and other **ultras** of frequent test launchings of some kind of missile or missiles from Peenemünde. Since the **ultras** now generated better clues about precisely where to look, he called for photographic cover of Peenemünde, Rügen, and Bornholm island, and of all enemy-occupied territory within 130 miles of London, the presumed target for the missiles; he suggested that they bomb the research and production sites, together with any suspicious works found in north-western France.

Harris was not keen to see any diversion of effort from his area bombing offensive against the cities. Churchill insisted however that Peenemünde must be bombed. The nights were short, and the air staff explained that this target was too distant to reach before August. Meanwhile, on June 23 an aircraft brought back new photographs of Peenemünde. These were of great clarity; they showed two finned rockets near the mysterious elliptical arena at Peenemünde. One was thirty-eight feet long. On the airfield were four tailless aircraft. Sandys postulated that the Germans were developing both a rocket and jet-propelled aircraft, as well as what he termed 'airborne torpedoes' – pilotless weapons, a fore-runner to today's cruise missiles.

He was right on all three counts. Under Dr Wernher von Braun, a team of army scientists was working on the A4 rocket – later notorious as the 'V-2'; in competition with them, on Peenemünde's airfield, the Luftwaffe was developing a cheap pilotless missile, later christened the 'V-1' or 'doodlebug'; and that very week, inspired by a test flight by Colonel Adolf Galland, the German fighter ace, Hitler's air ministry had taken the risky step of ordering the Messerschmitt-262 jet plane straight into serial production.

Remarking, 'We cannot delay much longer taking stock of this serious matter,' on June 25 Churchill ordered a defence committee meeting called for late on Tuesday the twenty-ninth.⁴⁶ Sandys circulated an update to the cabinet. He was redeploying the capital's gun defences, and adapting the early-warning system to watch for rocket-launchings from France. He warned that the German missile attack might start within a very few months.

When it met on June 29 to consider this threat, the defence committee decided to step up the air reconnaissance effort; they asked Bomber Command to eliminate Peenemünde and any missile launching points identified in France. These were seen sprouting all over the Pas de Calais, near to the Channel coast. By July two huge excavations had also been sighted – at Watten near Ypres and at Bruneval near Fécamp. The shock of all these discoveries was considerable. It might be said that all the pleasure goes out of a saturation bombing campaign when it turns out that the target population has been secretly developing a means of response. Making certain assumptions about the size and nature of the warhead, Sandys predicted that each rocket missile might kill six hundred Londoners. The government laid plans for the partial evacuation of London.

On that same day, June 29, the foreign office received a report that the Germans were preparing an air attack on Britain during August using 'liquid air bombs of terrific destructive power.' 'Attack will be novel in method and irresistible in intensity, and the effect is promised as a major rebuff. Probable decisive Axis victory.' Was this a reference to the Nazis' atomic bomb research? Churchill inked on it in red: 'Lord Cherwell and Mr Sandys. WSC, 1.7.43,' and ordered it printed for distribution to the war cabinet.⁴⁷

On July 16 the chiefs of staff authorised the bombing of Peenemünde and Watten (the latter was indeed a ballistic rocket-launching silo). Sandys came down to Chequers on Sunday evening, the eighteenth, to show Churchill the latest photographs and models, and on the nineteenth he reported to the war cabinet that there was evidence that the enemy were speeding up the construction of special railway sidings, locomotive turntables, and con-

crete launching structures for the missile programme in north-western France.

Under Lord Cherwell's jealous influence, Churchill began however to take a more sceptical line about the nature of the weapon. The Prof. thought that Sandys's rocket scare was a 'mare's nest' or even a Nazi hoax. Accordingly Churchill decided that, while it would be prudent to move extra Morrison shelters into London, there was no need to manufacture more. 'If,' he ruled, 'as is on the whole probable, the rocket peril does not materialise, those extra shelters now concentrated in London can be sent back to their present storing places.' He was anxious to see Peenemünde bombed, but he now agreed to wait for longer hours of darkness, and for Sandys's experts to find out more about the Pas de Calais construction sites.⁴⁸

Even so, with all this talk of 'liquid air bombs' about, it seemed that August 1943 might be an excellent time for Mr Churchill to leave England for a month of talks with that great statesman, his friend Franklin Roosevelt.



Much of the wrangling between Churchill and his heir-presumptive, Eden, at this time still centred on the personality of Charles de Gaulle, as Eden's private manuscript diary shows. The public was also showing its frustration at the very public snarling between Giraud and de Gaulle.⁴⁹

The harmony in Algiers had not lasted long. No sooner had Churchill and Eden left for London than the bickering broke out again. At the very first 'cabinet' meeting of the new French committee on June 9, de Gaulle demanded the post of Commissioner for National Defence himself and he asked for the dismissal of General Boisson, the commander at Dakar who had co-operated with the Americans in *torch*. Admiral Leahy, observing de Gaulle's tactics, decided that he was becoming a drag on the Allied wheel, and he told his private diary that he would have to be 'completely eliminated,' however difficult this might prove.⁵⁰

President Roosevelt sent furious telegrams to both Churchill and Eisenhower about this problem on June 10, expressing firmly the views that he wished to be respected.⁵¹ If de Gaulle should move into Dakar, he said, then he would send American warships and regiments into the port to stop him taking over in French West Africa. 'Such things would be highly unfortunate,' pointed out the president, using stiff and formalistic language of the kind that Churchill had recently used over tube alloys. Churchill tel-

ephoned Eden early on June 11 to tell him of this latest telegram. Even Eden admitted that de Gaulle's behaviour left much to be desired. 'American hatred is keen,' he agreed, '& maybe they want Dakar too. But de Gaulle has done much to shake all confidence in him.' This was one of the first signs of self-doubt, even remorse, to be found in Eden's private diaries.⁵²

General Giraud flatly refused to subordinate the French army to the new seven-man French Committee of National Liberation. De Gaulle boycotted the next F.C.N.L. meeting, again insisting that he have control of the French armed forces.⁵³ After Murphy conveyed Roosevelt's extreme anger to these French generals, Giraud merely said '*très bien*,' but de Gaulle launched into an hour-long, tricolour-waving diatribe which included the remark that he expected double-dealing from the British, but never from the Americans.⁵⁴ In the circumstances, Churchill felt it unwise of Roosevelt to have invited Giraud to Washington right now, as he had, since de Gaulle was capable of staging a putsch in Algiers against his absent rival.⁵⁵

Concerned by the favours that sections of the British press were still bestowing on de Gaulle, Churchill issued a confidential briefing note to editors on June 12. Although de Gaulle owed everything to British aid, this warned, he could not be trusted, as witness his antics in Syria and his notorious Brazzaville interview of August 1941. The prime minister prophesied that he would ditch both Allies just as soon as he could – he had described the British to French paratroops on February 4 as France's 'hereditary enemies.' De Gaulle's organisation, he added, had leaked to the Nazis details of General Georges' escape plans.⁵⁶ On June 14 the entire British press carried editorials which faithfully followed these confidential guidelines.⁵⁷

Roosevelt fired off increasingly acidulous telegrams to Churchill and Eisenhower, warning against allowing the Frenchman his own way. In one, on June 17, he used frank language: 'I am fed up with de Gaulle,' he wrote,

and the secret personal and political machinations of that Committee in the last few days indicates [*sic*] that there is no possibility of our working with de Gaulle. If these were peace times it wouldn't make so much difference but I am absolutely convinced that he has been and is now injuring our war effort and that he is a very dangerous threat to us.

Eisenhower was instructed to break off all dealings with de Gaulle and to treat French North Africa as he would an occupied territory.⁵⁸ Shown these uncompromising telegrams arriving in Algiers, Macmillan had to ad-

mit that the French general's temperament made him unreliable, but to break with him now would make a bad situation worse.⁵⁹ In London the next day, June 18 – an English summer morning, pouring with endless rain – Churchill read out the telegram over the phone to the foreign secretary. It seemed 'pretty hysterical' to Eden, and he decided that somehow they would have to pull the Americans back into line, to prevent them committing some nameless folly which would give de Gaulle a martyr's crown, or the control of the French army, or both. 'F.D.R.'s mood,' he noted, 'is now that of a man who persists in error.' Churchill drafted a reply to Roosevelt; Eden and Attlee inevitably disliked it, but were able to secure only one amendment each.⁶⁰

Summarising this worsening situation a week later, 'Doc' Matthews reported from the U.S. embassy in London to Washington. Eden and his foreign office, he feared, had converted Churchill; but de Gaulle was using tactics 'reminiscent of the early days of Adolf and his boys.' The British had built up 'this French Adolf' for the last three years as the symbol of courage, democracy, honour, and the soul of France, and they were now hoist with their own petard. A great many people would one day ask, 'Why, if de Gaulle is a Fascist, Anglophobe, intriguer against the Allies, etc., have we backed him and played him up for three years?' 'Why have we permitted this man freely to operate a Gestapo headquarters of the most brutal type in the center of London while negotiating agreements with him giving him free and generous access to our Exchequer and to our propaganda facilities?'⁶¹ In both Washington and London the knives were out for de Gaulle.



Despite or perhaps even because of the war, anti-Semitism was increasing, even outside Nazi Germany. This may explain why so few people, whether in Churchill's cabinet or elsewhere, expressed concern at the horrors rumoured to be happening in Hitler's new dominions.⁶²

In Canada and the United States, as letters intercepted by Churchill's Intelligence services showed, more hotels than ever were refusing to accept Jewish guests. 'In every [American] city, village and settlement,' found one letter-writer, 'there are hotels and boarding houses bearing the sign **restricted**, which means Jews may not stay there.' Malicious rumours spread readily. A non-Jewish resident of a Jewish 'ghetto' area of North London wrote on June 28: 'I don't think Jews can do as much to stop it as

non-Jews. . . I have heard things said myself in the shopping queues and I don't know how much is justified, but hatred very easily grows and spreads.' In the Middle East, the Arab-Jewish conflict had led to the most virulent strains. 'I don't think there is a single British person out here,' ran a typical British soldier's letter, intercepted in Palestine, 'who isn't anti-Jewish.' This writer felt that Jews were the people who should have most respect for the British, as the British were fighting Hitler. 'They whine about the sufferings their people have to put up with in Europe, but they do absolutely nothing to alter the conditions. They are not interested in the war in the slightest, all they are interested in is making money. . .'⁶³

Other agencies of the British Intelligence services were forming a stark picture of how the Nazis were solving 'the Jewish problem.' The German word *Sonderbehandlung*, 'special treatment,' was cropping up more frequently in the S.S. and police messages deciphered at Bletchley Park. From clues worked into some of the intercepted letters, like the Hebrew words for *help*, *passport*, *killing*, and *despair*, it seemed that Jews were being deported from Norway, France, Belgium, Holland, Bulgaria, and the Government-General of Poland, and meeting an indeterminate fate in camps in Poland and Silesia. 'Transport in cattle trucks nine days without eating and drinking,' one writer had heard, 'on arrival the dead are shovelled out.' 'Every Wednesday fifty persons are taken from Sosnowice to Oswiecim [*Auschwitz*] into the lime kiln as victims,' read a letter, mailed from Jerusalem to Australia. 'If the prescribed number is not complete they take newly born babies away from their mothers in the hospitals and throw them into the transport van.' The signs were conflicting. What was hysteria and what was cruel deception? 'We are all right,' read one card dated May 1943, from a Jew incarcerated with her child at Trawniki, near Lublin. 'We are not lacking anything. I should be quite content if I were not totally without news.'⁶⁴

the zionists cynically sought to instrumentalise this very real suffering of others to achieve their own long-term political ends. In April 1943 Churchill's office received a letter from Dr Chaim Weizmann, the world Zionist leader, writing from the luxury of the St. Regis hotel in New York. This again implored the prime minister to adopt a policy which, notwithstanding the 1939 British White Paper on Palestine, would deal with what Weizmann himself called 'the Jewish problem,' namely 'by assigning Palestine to the Jews.' 'The slaughter of European Jewry,' he argued, 'can only be redeemed by establishing Palestine as a Jewish country.' Eden had privately

assured him that no commitments would be made to the Arabs regarding Palestine. 'I appeal to you,' wrote the Zionist leader, 'to . . . open the way for a new dispensation in Palestine.'⁶⁵

Churchill sympathised with the Zionists' position, but only tacitly. While avoiding replying in person to Weizmann, he forwarded the letter to Oliver Stanley and Lord Cranborne, commenting that he could not agree that the White Paper was 'the firmly established policy' of their government. He added a postscript which suggests that he never really grasped the single-mindedness of Zionist ambitions: 'The Colonial Secretary would be well advised to consider at the same time the use of Eritrea and possibly of Tripolitania as additional Jewish national homes.'⁶⁶

Stanley had to warn him that the Jewish agitation in Britain and the United States was provoking reactions in the Middle East. 'Our primary concern now,' he explained, 'is with the war and the first object of our policy [is] to prevent military operations being hampered by a serious outbreak of disorder throughout the Middle East.'⁶⁷ Lord Cranborne wrote much the same, expressing surprise that Dr Weizmann did not understand this.⁶⁸ Annoyed by Winston's independent line, Eden insisted that the cabinet must discuss any reply before it went to Weizmann.⁶⁹

weizmann never gave up. While Churchill was in Washington, another letter arrived from Dr Weizmann addressed to him c/o the White House. He pleaded for the prime minister to receive him, and offered this time the argument that he had been in North America for more than a year and had gathered impressions of great value:

The sufferings of the Jews and the great anxieties which beset the communities have of late produced certain phenomena which cause everybody interested in the good relations between England and America a great deal of pain.⁷⁰

Was there not a hint in this that Weizmann was prepared to mobilise the Jewish lobby in the United States to disrupt those 'good relations' to get his way? Caught between his sense of obligation and the dictates of the foreign office, Churchill decided not to reply. Three weeks later Weizmann went to see the president instead; Roosevelt asked him, 'Did you see Churchill here?' Weizmann replied: 'No, Churchill doesn't like to see me because he has very little to tell me.' The American president assured him that he would

attempt to bring together the two sides in the Middle East – the Jews and Arabs (it had a familiar ring even then). Weizmann insisted that the democracies must go into any such conference prepared to din into the Arabs 'the Jewish rights to Palestine.'⁷¹

Reading these words in the Zionist leader's own *mémoire* on this conversation a few weeks later, Oliver Stanley dryly pointed out that this was very different from Jewish rights *in* Palestine.⁷²

in Britain, as the government learned from its mail censorship, the Jewish lobbying had largely subsided, despite a string of functions organised by the Committee for a Jewish Army with 'wealthy Jewish business men' at May-fair hotels. This committee, run by a Captain Helpern with the backing of Commander Stephen King-Hall, American broadcaster Ed Murrow, and none other than Randolph Churchill, had found itself left high and dry; and Helpern's entire correspondence with New York now consisted of protests and entreaties. Their principal American backer had now turned its attention to demanding Allied intervention to rescue Europe's Jews.⁷³

On July 2, 1943 the cabinet routinely discussed the case for and against a Jewish Army. Richard Casey, the Minister Resident in Cairo, left no doubt about his feelings that the Jews in Palestine had 'gone extremist and terrorist.' Endorsing Eden's plea for a joint Anglo-American warning to these terrorists, Casey said that they were endeavouring to enforce a Jewish State in Palestine, by means of the illicit stores of arms which they had accumulated: the Jews had begun fighting a private war of their own.

Churchill then spoke. He had already circulated to the cabinet the text of his famous May 1939 speech attacking the White Paper. His own interest was at that time perhaps less well known than it is now: while living in the political wilderness 1936–39, he had been almost wholly sustained by Jewish financial contributions.* The statement which he made at this July 1943 cabinet meeting was one of such pronounced Zionist leanings that, after lunching that day with Baffy Dugdale, the Gentile Zionist, the India Secretary Leo Amery noted in his diary that she would have been thrilled had she only known the line that Churchill had taken just that morning: the prime minister spoke for the partition of Palestine between Jew and Arab (regardless of the injustice this would do to the Arabs dispossessed of their ancestral land); he demanded that the British forces allow into the territory

* Vol. i, chapter 6, 'The Hired Help.'

the balance of the seventy-five thousand Jews allowed by the White Paper, even after the March 1944 deadline for closure, and he added that meanwhile they ought to allow into Palestine as 'illegal' immigrants all and any Jews who escaped the German terror.⁷⁴ All of these things were easily said in secret, where they could occasion no Arab uproar. In public however there was nothing that Churchill was willing to be *seen* to do. A few days later Dr Weizmann, now back in London, wrote to John Martin asking yet again if there was any chance that the prime minister would see him.⁷⁵ Winston scrawled on the letter, 'No.' He directed that either Stanley or Eden should see the Zionist leader. Eden ducked out, and the lot fell to Stanley.⁷⁶ Weizmann angrily put it about, to Brendan Bracken and no doubt to others, that because Churchill refused to see him their enemies were now saying that the Jewish Agency was a *quantité négligéable*.⁷⁷

It would be October before Churchill relented and invited him in for a luncheon. Immediately after that Weizmann tackled Martin to demand the restoration of the Jewish Agency's communications facilities to Palestine through the secret S.O.E. cypher channels. Churchill hedged; he could not say yes, but was loath to say No. His panic was infectious. Terrified of refusing Weizmann himself, Martin wrote an internal minute to a junior secretary directing him to write to the Zionist leader ('on behalf of Martin, who is away for a few days') refusing to restore the cypher facilities.⁷⁸

early on July 5 Churchill was awakened with terrible news. There had been an airplane accident. General Sikorski was dead. A telegram had arrived in Whitehall from Lieutenant-General Mason-Macfarlane, the governor of Gibraltar, at 3:55 a.m., reporting this and the disposal of the bodies:

Regret Liberator with General Sikorski's party crashed shortly after take off at 2300 4th July. Have recovered four dead bodies including General Sikorski and General [T.] Klimecki. Pilot badly injured is only live body recovered. Very little hope of any other survivors. Will keep you informed.⁷⁹

Shortly after eleven p.m. the night before, the general's plane, provided by No. 511 Squadron of Transport Command, had plunged into the Mediterranean only seventeen seconds after take-off from the North Front airstrip. Among those killed were the general's only daughter, and two Members of Parliament, Brigadier **firstname•••** Whiteley, and Victor Cazalet, who

was the godfather of Mary Churchill. The odds against such a serious accident occurring were great. Of 52,418 aircraft movements from North Front in 1943, this was the only such crash.⁸⁰ As though by a miracle the pilot alone had survived (and not in fact 'badly injured' having suffered only a damaged ankle); he owed his escape to the fact that he alone had had the foresight to put on a 'Mae West' life-jacket, for the first time in his career, before the take-off run.⁸¹ There may have been other survivors, for the bodies of the co-pilot Squadron-Leader Wilfred Herring and two unofficial passengers who joined the plane at Cairo were never found.⁸²

With an ease born of many such sorrowful occasions Churchill wrote to the Polish prime minister's widow, telling of his grief to hear that morning of the death of her husband and daughter. 'No words of mine can ease the pain of this double loss. Nevertheless I trust you will accept my sympathy with you in the death of one who was a personal friend of mine.'⁸³

It has to be said that thirty years of reading in private diaries or in foreign office and other files, so far as they have been released, have not turned up, in connection with Sikorski, any of the euphemisms for murder that we have found circling like vultures above the names of de Gaulle and Darlan. In our view however the revelations of the S.O.E.'s role in the murder of Darlan have significantly shifted the balance of probabilities. The desk diary of Mason-Macfarlane contains one entry which can be read as 'Sweet Escot;' Bickham Sweet-Escott was a high-ranking officer in S.O.E.*

The Nazi propagandists inevitably announced that Sikorski, like Darlan, had been assassinated. *Das Reich* published a gleeful cartoon of a British diplomat asking an exiled prime minister, 'Which is it to be, the tea or the aircraft accident?' To some senior diplomats, the same unworthy notion occurred immediately. 'The pilot,' recorded Lord Halifax, 'oddly enough, was the only person not killed. . .'⁸⁴ And, later: 'No more information at present about Sikorski's plane; I wonder whether it can have been sabotage;

* We did not mention this in *Accident*, (London, 1967), as Mr Sweet-Escott denied to us that he was in Gibraltar. He was later successful in a British High Court libel action against a foreign author who claimed otherwise. His memoirs, *Baker Street Irregular* (London, 1965), one of the first inside accounts of the S.O.E., make plain that he flew from London 'early in July' 1943 (page 166) and landed in Algiers on July 5 (page 168). This would have put him in Gibraltar on July 4, but in 1967 Sir Roger Makins, the later Lord Sheffield, who flew with him, denied any stopover there. All this may be coincidence, and nothing more sinister. Some writers have made out that the entry in the governor's diary reads 'swear escort,' and even 'swear Carrera.'

it looks very mysterious.'⁸⁵ Britain's information services refrained from answering the German allegations.⁸⁶ Upset at the Nazi claims that the British government had 'deliberately compassed,' as he put it, the death of Sikorski, the Polish chargé d'affaires in Cairo urged his own government in London to call for the publication of the findings of the R.A.F. inquiry.⁸⁷ The general's widow was sure that there had been foul play. She heard that the governor of Gibraltar had urged him to take another plane without explaining why.⁸⁸

For two weeks speculation about this airplane accident dominated the secret morale reports in Britain. People spoke of the need for an inquiry, expressing puzzlement 'how four engines could "cut out at once".'⁸⁹

When the suspicion was voiced that Churchill himself might have engineered this troublesome Pole's death, it was robustly rebutted by his war-time colleagues; one of them would write that assassination was utterly foreign to the P.M.'s nature, and added that he never hid anything from his 'secret circle,' as it came to be known.⁹⁰ Another recalled that when he remarked that their agents had never succeeded in assassinating Hitler, the prime minister replied: 'Political assassination is something I would never countenance.'⁹¹ Adolf Hitler had however said much the same to his colleagues.⁹²

As for Sikorski, the records that have been released do not assist us, even now. The official court of inquiry was inconclusive, but ruled out sabotage and pilot error.⁹³ No technical evidence of any malfunction was found in the wreckage when it was raised. Sir Archibald Sinclair also rejected overloading of the plane as a factor.⁹⁴

on july 6, 1943 Churchill paid tribute to the general in the House, calling his death 'one of the heaviest strokes we have sustained.' He referred, quite wrongly in the light of what we now know of their arguments about the Katyn massacre and Poland's eastern frontier, to Sikorski's conviction that 'all else must be subordinated to the needs of the common struggle.'⁹⁵ Broadcasting to the Polish people, Churchill mourned their tragic loss, and added these oddly chosen words:

I knew him well. He was a statesman, a soldier, a comrade, an ally, and above all, a Pole. He is gone; but if he were at my side I think he would wish me to say this – and I say it from my heart – soldiers must die, but by their death they nourish the nation which gave them birth.

'Prepare yourselves to die for Poland,' he adjured in his peroration; and: 'We shall not forget him.'

Harsh reality soon overbore such noble sentiments. Sikorski's body was brought back to England aboard the destroyer *Orkan*, formerly hms *Myrmidon*, which had been loaned to the Poles. Supported by Eden, the First Lord hinted to Churchill that it might be fitting to make a public gift of this warship to the Polish nation. Churchill demurred, expressing the fear that the Norwegians, Greeks, and other Allies who had borrowed British warships might take this as a precedent.⁹⁶ When the Polish president hinted that he would appreciate a formal visit from Churchill to thank the British for their help to Poland in her travails, Churchill again demurred, and asked Eden to go.⁹⁷

As with the murder of Darlan, the British investigation into Sikorski's plane crash turned up no hard evidence. On July 17 Churchill asked the air ministry why he had not received the further report about 'the accident in which General Sikorski was killed.'⁹⁸ But the R.A.F. court of inquiry was sitting at Gibraltar, and the Liberator's wreckage still had to be lifted from the seabed. On the eighteenth Churchill wrote to Portal that he had now heard that Air Marshal **firstname•••** Bowhill, chief of Transport Command, had informed Mason-Macfarlane of the probable cause: 'Pray inform me at once of the position without awaiting the result of the Court of Inquiry.'

Portal replied that on July 12 the pilot Prchal had stated to Bowhill that the aircraft had taken off normally, and upon reaching about 130 m.p.h. he had pushed the nose down slightly to obtain more speed; he had then found 'his controls locked solid.' He had shut off his engines and shouted 'crash land.'⁹⁹ In September 1943 the government formally announced that the reason for the crash was this 'jamming of the controls' – for which there was only the pilot's word; the technical investigation provided no evidence that it ever occurred.

Polish aviation experts protested to the air ministry that since this 'would not normally happen on a Liberator,' Nazi propaganda would have a field day with this explanation. Far from insisting that this explanation was the truth, the ministry insisted that there had to be a technical explanation, 'as otherwise there would be far more publicity and public enquiries.'¹⁰⁰ Like Katyn, the controversy would continue until the late 1960s and beyond.¹⁰¹

the yellow roses heaped on the dead general's coffin had already begun to fade. Churchill paid his last respects to General Sikorski at the Requiem Mass, and many saw tears in his eyes; he and Clementine were noticed to kneel for some moments before taking their seats. Newspapermen noticed that otherwise he was obviously at ease: 'He's always so natural,' one remarked. His eyes were red-rimmed and swollen with tears as he filed out with the congregation past the widow, Helena. She kept her thoughts to herself. Over the coming years she maintained a firm distance from him.¹⁰² Invited to sit next to him at the Victory Parade in 1945 she wrote back refusing, saying she could not accept until Poland was free again.¹⁰³

Although Churchill's colleagues expressed proper regret, Sikorski's untimely death eliminated an obdurate politician who had, since April, caused Churchill scarcely less *ennui* than General de Gaulle.¹⁰⁴ The two generals had been very similar personalities; in fact, de Gaulle had once stalked out of a banquet when he found that Sikorski, as head of an exile government, was seated higher up the table than he.¹⁰⁵ Churchill invited the Polish *éminence grise*, Dr Joseph Retinger, to come round after the cabinet meeting at midnight on July 5–6, to talk about successors, because this delicate task could clearly not be entrusted to Polish machinations alone.

We have Retinger's account of their interview. 'I found the prime minister alone,' he wrote, 'wearing his light blue siren suit. As soon as he saw me he got up and started to cry. He told me that he had loved General Sikorski as a younger brother, and had watched his career not only with interest but with affection.' Retinger advised him that Sikorski once stated that he saw Stanislaw Mikolajczyk as his successor – adding, 'Though not for a long time, of course.' Churchill affected not to know Mikolajczyk. Retinger described him, and Winston asked: 'The man who looks like a fat, slightly bald old fox?'¹⁰⁶ His disparaging remarks about Mikolajczyk would continue throughout the war, whether at Moscow or at Potsdam.¹⁰⁷ He wanted a Polish prime minister whom he could boot around. Mikolajczyk was pliable, and he lacked Sikorski's warrior-charisma. Retinger would later observe that Churchill treated Mikolajczyk with none of the courtesy that was his due, steamrolling through anything that stood athwart his own views on Polish-Russian relations. Churchill owed him nothing, and he had sworn no promises to him, like those that he had sworn to Sikorski on June 19, 1940, at Britain's darkest hour.

After the next day's agenda had been prepared, there was a late insertion on his desk card: 'C,' head of the secret service, at ten a.m.¹⁰⁸ The P.M.

then lunched as usual with the king at one-thirty. Eden asked the president of Poland, Wladyslaw Rackiewicz, not to appoint a new supreme commander until the foreign office had had time to inquire in Moscow as to Stalin's preferences. The Poles do not appear to have heeded either Eden or Stalin's desiderata, as they appointed General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, whom the Soviets did not like. At the same time Raczynski was however replaced by Tadeusz Romer as foreign minister, at the demand of the Polish socialists.¹⁰⁹

after the demise of Sikorski, the remaining unfinished business was more easily liquidated with his successors. On June 30 the Gestapo had captured General Stefan Grot-Rowecki, commander-in-chief of the Polish underground army. The Polish exile government asked Churchill to intervene with the Germans for his release, and perhaps even to threaten harm to Rudolf Hess if anything happened to Rowecki; or perhaps they might even exchange him for a top German general held by the British. The matter was raised in cabinet on July 19. Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, chief of the Joint Intelligence Committee, spoke in favour of an exchange; he suggested that they let General von Thoma return home, where this anti-Nazi panzer general would probably be bumped off anyway. The problem was that Grot-Rowecki, as an irregular, had no claim to be regarded as a prisoner of war.¹¹⁰

Stricken perhaps with conscience about Poland, Churchill said he would agree to the exchange, but he did not believe that the Germans would. As it turned out, Himmler had a soft spot for Grot-Rowecki; he was held in Sachsenhausen camp, and not executed until after the Warsaw uprising in August 1944.

On July 21 Churchill had his first meeting with Mikolajczyk. The new Polish prime minister thanked him for having taken up so much of his time with the funeral arrangements. In warmest language, Churchill described Sikorski as a personal friend, and his death as a great loss. Sikorski had known how to deal with people, especially the Russians. 'The Russians are odd people, however,' mused Churchill, 'sometimes it is impossible to understand their motives.' He had observed their savagery during the talks with Stalin in August 1942. Stalin had often expressed himself in brutal terms, so that more than once Churchill found that he had to react with equal brutality, even rudeness. 'We're going to have a lot of trouble with him yet, believe me,' he added. 'But believe me, I shall be on your side.' He asked the Poles what prospects there were of compromise in their dispute with Moscow. Mikolajczyk replied that this depended on the Russians re-

specting Poland's sovereign rights. Churchill asked if the Poles would object to Britain making use of the Polish troops in the Middle Eastern theatre in four or five months' time. Mikolajczyk replied that, judging from Sikorski's telegrams, it seemed that their forces would be ready.¹¹¹

A few days later, on Monday July 26, the Polish president invited Churchill to lunch at Claridges; Count Raczynski, now ambassador, O'Malley, and August Zaleski were the other guests. While couching his remarks in his familiar old-world courtesy, in this conversation the British prime minister made cruelly clear that he had no intention now of defending the integrity of Poland's pre-war frontiers; but he undertook to fight for the rebirth of a strong and independent Poland after the war. 'I promise that I shall do what I can as long as I live,' he said. 'I am, of course, a servant of the House of Commons' – a favourite phrase of his – 'and not a dictator; but I am not its lackey either. I say what I think, and expect the House to take notice.'

According to Raczynski's note he then mused out loud:

I wonder how far Stalin is really master in his own country and the source of all decisions? In some ways I am more so than he – well, perhaps not more, but anyway not less. That does not mean that I can have somebody's throat cut five minutes after I have been talking to them. I have never asked Parliament for such powers as that, but I can get my own way in ordinary matters.¹¹³

Having 'somebody's throat cut'? It was a callous remark to make to the Poles, their hearts still riven by the sudden death of their prime minister and the murder of their own soldiers at Katyn; it was not entirely innocent of a soupçon of menace to the new Polish leadership in exile.



One day that July there was another unexplained death. Eden broke it to Mr Churchill that 'Munich Mouser,' No. 10's famous black cat, had passed away that afternoon in a room at the foreign office. Churchill had never liked the F.O. He joked heartlessly that the cat must have died of remorse, and had chosen his deathbed accordingly. He feared the dead cat had probably been thrown into a trash can – he would have been prepared to give him a decent burial in the garden behind No. 10. 'Yes,' scoffed Eden. 'r.i.p munich mouser would look well there.' Together the two men laughed a

lot about that wretched cat, a last relic of Neville Chamberlain, architect of Munich and the 1939 White Paper on Palestine alike.¹¹⁴

'We are avoiding publicity,' recorded Winston's private secretary, 'for fear of being flooded with black cats from all over the country to take his place.'¹¹⁵

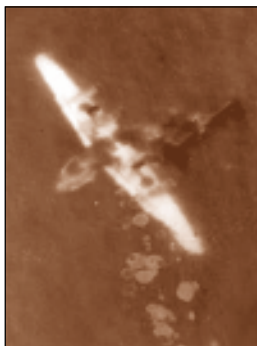
a few hours after Sikorski's plane crashed, on July 5, fifteen hundred miles from Whitehall, the Battle of Kursk began. Hitler had thrown two thousand tanks into the battle – half of them the now ageing Mark III, but the rest the more formidable Mark IV, the still trouble-plagued Mark V Panthers, the Ferdinands, the dreaded Mark VI Tigers, Hornets, and hundreds of self-propelled guns. Stalin had three thousand tanks dug into his defensive lines. The Luftwaffe's Fourth and Sixth Air Forces flew over four thousand sorties on this first day. Hitler had been preparing this grand attempt to excise the Soviet salient ever since April, with great attention to detail, and he had kept postponing it as his generals offered better tank-strengths later. But now it had begun, and by July 7, the operation, which Churchill's military experts had at first taken all too lightly, seemed very serious indeed.¹¹⁶

The press spoke of bloody fighting between thousands of tanks, supported by armadas of Luftwaffe bombers and fighter planes. In Winston Churchill's Britain, the ordinary people were heard voicing dismay at the sheer size of it. By the eighth of July, Hitler's field-m Marshals had destroyed 460 Soviet tanks. With that common sense, that grasp of the heart of the matter, that is the despair of authoritarian governments, the man in the street asked his neighbour, as the secret reports told Churchill, 'where such numbers of tanks are produced by the Germans, if we have smashed their industrial centres.'¹¹⁷ What price Harris now? To bolster Stalin's spirits, Churchill informed him that *husky* was imminent. In this telegram, he ruthlessly inflated the figures of Allied forces, ships, and enemy involved. The enemy had three hundred thousand troops in '*husky-land*,' he said, without being precise about its location. 'Meanwhile,' he added, 'we have sunk fifty U-boats for certain in seventy days.'¹¹⁸

On the night of July 9 the amphibious Allied operation, the invasion of Sicily, began. As the squadrons of bombers, gliders, and escorts stood by for their dawn assault, nearly three thousand vessels carrying some 160,000 warriors and their implements, sailing from many different harbours in North Africa, bore down on the shores of the Italian island.

The weather that night in London was vile, with winds and heavy rain.

These were unstable, troubling, times. Churchill remarked to Roosevelt's special ambassador Averell Harriman a few days later that he had received no answer to his messages to Stalin, announcing the husky assault. Nor would he for many weeks.¹¹⁹ The uncertainty was worrying him. 'My guess,' observed Harriman, reporting to President Roosevelt, 'is that this is what Uncle Joe wants.'¹²⁰



'Soldiers must Die...'

Sikorski's plane lying on the Mediterranean seabed,
July 5, 1943 (author's private collection)