

THE EARLY MILITARY THOUGHT  
OF WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

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Presented in partial fulfillment  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



Faculty of History  
University of Oxford  
Trinity Term 2015

## SHORT ABSTRACT

Winston S. Churchill was a war leader during two world wars, and yet there are few substantive studies of his younger years when he was a practising soldier. This thesis aims to study the early intellectual development of Churchill in those areas which have direct impact on the art of war. The chapters are arranged narratively (Chapters 2-3) and thematically (Chapters 4-8). The introduction covers the scope and methodology of the work. Chapters 2-3 give an account of Churchill's early years, and trace the development of several prominent features of his character that helped form and inform the presuppositions of his later military intellectual development. Chapter 4 addresses Churchill's interactions with late Victorian cavalry doctrine and debate. Chapters 5-7 each address themes of an expanding scope of influence and conceptualization: first, the tactics of war; second, the policy and strategy of war; and finally, Churchill's conceptions of war. The conclusion summarizes the hallmarks and syntheses of Churchill's early military intellectual development, and identifies judgments which can be drawn about his perspicacity as soldier and commander.

## LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis is interested with the early formative years of the man who would warrant a State Funeral replete with military iconography that heralded a distinctively martial political career. That is its general purview. Its special interest is with the early intellectual development of the man, Winston Churchill, in those areas which have direct impact on the art of war. It asks the question of how a man who would later administer world wars came to think about war in his youth, when he was actually a practising soldier, and answers it by studying the way Churchill's education (formal and self-actualized), relationships, and experiences affected his military thinking and informed his early military intellectual capital.

These questions are a response to the oft-asserted notion that the young Churchill in war—as almost in everything else—was primarily a romantic adventurer: headstrong, ill-informed, and too concerned with self-advertisement and self-aggrandizement to be seriously bothered with learning a business like war. Alongside these accusations there are usually presented exhibits of later tactical and strategic blunders which serve to justify the indictments.

Though certain authors have been instrumental in helping to shape the content and arguments in the chapters that follow, none have specifically undertaken to explore fully the development of Churchill's early military intellectual capital in the context of contemporary debates concerning the art of war. None have explored the degree to which Churchill, as a young soldier, was thinking like a military man, or like contemporary professional soldiers and military theorists. None have attempted to place him within the military debates of his time, debates often centring on the “nuts and bolts” of war—strategy, yes, but also the more detailed tactical considerations that surrounded the three principal arms of the British Army as it sought to cope with varying colonial demands during a period of significant evolution and change.

This thesis hopes to do just that. It means to study the contemporary writings and relationships and education of Churchill from his birth to 1900, when he left the army for the Commons. It aims to pay particular attention to Churchill's interactions with and thoughts on matters martial. It does this under the persuasion that far from gallivanting across three continents motivated solely by the sentimentality associated with the glory of the Empire and the glory of himself, there was behind Winston the young warrior a rather keen mind, one that—though perhaps neglected during his school days—came to realize and understand and prescribe things about and for war that have hitherto remained uncharted. Such a task becomes all the more relevant given the context: Churchill went to considerable lengths to orbit influence, and kept close proximity to those figures with a hand on military training, thinking, and doctrine—and, as an interminable observer, he learned from what he saw.

Given his station as a future war leader, how Churchill came to think about and regard war in his youth, and understanding the detailed tactical and doctrinal aspects of war as Churchill understood them, especially when he was on the battlefield, is of no small consequence and helps to legitimize this thesis.

Wishing to preserve the humanity of the subject, this thesis does not adhere to a strictly thematic arrangement, but rather incorporates narrative too. Many of the considerations they attend to are best kept contiguous with Churchill the man, and not some one-dimensional abstraction. Churchill's personality is not insignificant to the argument of this thesis; neither are the relationships and experiences that helped to shape, from a very early age, the aspects of his character which could be regarded as martial.

The first two chapters are thusly more disposed to narrative and chronology. The first tells the story of Churchill's 1874-1893 youth, and while focusing on those areas most pertinent to his later war-thinking, argues that through Churchill's formal military training began at Sandhurst, any study of his military intellectual development would be incomplete without a discussion of the pre-Sandhurst years. It was during those years that several prominent features of Churchill's later character gained serious foothold—including his stubbornness, unwillingness to be taught, personal courage, and most notably, the romanticism through which he saw most things historical and martial. These characteristics helped form and inform the foundation for his later military intellectual development, and the mental posture with which he approached even the more technical aspects of war as a practising soldier, politician, minister, and military leader.

The next chapter recognizes that it was at Sandhurst that Churchill combined his imagination and juvenile, uninformed thoughts about war with the real training and practice of war. It continues the story of Churchill's intellectual development as begun in the chapter before it, but couples that with a discussion of the training and curriculum he received as a Gentleman Cadet at the Royal Military College. It seeks to develop further the growing presuppositions about war—as informed both by his own thinking and the programme of Victorian cavalry training—that Churchill would eventually take with him to the battlefield. In this sense it is the second of two chapters that “set the stage” for Churchill as soldier.

Chapter Four begins the turn to the thematic. Given that it was as a cavalry officer that Churchill first served, this chapter addresses his interactions with late Victorian cavalry doctrine and debate. Of specific interest are tactics and strategies surrounding the use of cavalry, both in the Victorian settings of frontier and small wars, and in leading up to the First World War. As a cavalryman Churchill spent much of his time thinking and writing about the mounted arm, and of interest is whether he was simply restating the common conceptions of

his day, or whether he was offering any new insight demonstrative of critical military thinking about mobility on the battlefield and the problems created by new weapons technology.

Chapters 5-7 each address themes of an expanding scope of influence and conceptualization. The first, "The Tactics of War", discusses Churchill's thoughts on the mechanics of war: infantry, artillery, supply, training, education, offence, defence, manoeuvring, intelligence and the like. It spends considerable time establishing the theoretical debates taking place within and between the infantry arm and the artillery arm, and explores the degree to which Churchill grasped the fundamentals of those debates, which typically centred on the arms coming to terms with the changing character of war.

Taking one step back and looking at the larger picture, Chapter Six discusses Churchill's military intellectual development on matters of war as they relate to British imperial and foreign policy. It encompasses issues like conscription, frontier wars, forward policy, regular versus irregular warfare, and punitive warfare. It first examines the ways in which Churchill thought about wartime strategic dynamics, before proceeding to study his understanding of how military strategy might fit into overall grand strategy. Chapter Seven removes itself one step further from the practice of war, and explores Churchill's conceptions of war, the nature of war, the positions of war as a human activity and a genuine phenomenon, as well as the role of race and national character in war, while not omitting his reflections on civilization, glory, barbarity, and heroism. Finally, the concluding chapter gives a summary of the hallmarks of Churchill's early military intellectual development, and contends that in his war thinking he was almost always more pre-modern than modern. It considers how Churchill fitted in with the larger matrix of changing warfare, and attempts to connect the past with the future by asking two questions: what was the synthesis of Churchill's early military intellectual development, and what conclusions can be drawn about his perspicacity as a soldier and commander?

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the first instance gratitude must be extended to those who have extended to me the lion's share of intellectual support, patience, and grace as I endeavored to complete a project which has taken far longer than it was ever intended to take. My supervisors, first Hew Strachan, and then Adrian Gregory, have both, on countless occasions, lent me their guidance and considerable intellects. Equally important, they did not lose hope when I too often allowed the tyranny of my extracurricular commitments to infringe upon my academic industry.

Several individuals, who in their roles as custodians, extended their stewardship not only to their professional purviews, but also to this thesis, and through it to me. It is unusual that an historian can call upon, as often as he fancies, a central setting of his subject, and the team at Blenheim Palace, especially Karen Wisemen and Antonia Keaney, adorned that luxury with hospitality and amicability to spare. In the same fashion, the team at the Churchill Archives Centre took exceptional care of me whenever I visited, undoubtedly in line with the constant generosity of their director, Allen Packwood.

To Thomas Conner I owe my thanks for first whetting my appetite for a lifelong study of war, and to Larry Arn for doing the same for me and Winston Churchill.

The abovementioned extracurricular commitments came mostly in the form of employment, and I am indebted to those employers who have continually allowed me to tread upon their forbearance so as to spend countless hours on productivity of a different kind. To Robert and Tim and Adam, and to Stuart and Chris: thank you.

Grace came my way not only in academia, but also in the rich tapestry of hearty friendship which has undergirded my work. My closest friends know who they are, and each in their own way have been pillars of support, encouragement, and care for me when I was often distant, overburdened, or both. But to Daniel, David, and Sebestyén, you sons Ecgtheow: "Bear up and be the man I expect you to be" is what you so often charged; for what more could a man ask?

And singularly, to my family: you lent me your character and heritage, and gave me your love and a name. You, and those things, are inestimable. And uniquely to my father and grandfather: despite all appearances, I am more happy to have known the two of you than were I to have known Churchill. You should take heart in the fact that after he lived a long and full life, he returned to his roots and was laid to rest in a simple country churchyard. I too shall return, once my work elsewhere is done, as I too am tied to you, and to the land.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Broadwater Collection	BRDW
Churchill Archives Centre	CAC
Clementine Churchill	CC
Chartwell Collection	CHAR
Lady Randolph Churchill	LRC
Lord Randolph Churchill	RC
<i>The Boer War</i>	TBW
<i>The Daily Graphic</i>	DG
<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	DT
<i>The Morning Post</i>	MP
<i>My Early Life</i>	MEL
<i>The River War</i>	TRW
<i>The Story of the Malakand Field Force</i>	MFF
<i>Thoughts and Adventures</i>	TAA
Winston S. Churchill	WSC

:: I ::

## INTRODUCTION

London on Saturday, 30 January 1965, dawned melancholy as crowds gathered to pay tribute to Winston Churchill, who had died five days earlier after a parliamentary career spanning the reign of six British monarchs. He was afforded a State Funeral, the first given to a commoner since the death of the Duke of Wellington. Thousands upon thousands of onlookers stood solemnly behind some three thousand five hundred soldiers who lined the three-mile route from Westminster Hall to St. Paul's Cathedral.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the soldiers belonged to military units recognizable to the public; among these were the mounted Horse Guards, adorned in their red capes and plumed helmets, and the Royal Navy sailors who pulled the gun carriage which carried his casket, covered by the Union Jack and on which rested his Order of the Garter insignia. Others, not so recognizable to the general public, would have nevertheless pleased Churchill. Many of these units were incorporated as a living testament to his many years of soldiering. In the New Palace Yard, Churchill, for the last time, passed by uniformed Officer Training Corps cadets from Harrow School where he, as a young boy in the late-1880s, received his first military training as a member of Harrow School Rifle Volunteer Corps. A detachment from Sandhurst marching in front of the Horse Guards marked Churchill's time at the Royal Military Academy some seventy-one years earlier. Also in the procession was Major Tim May, who led a small Territorial Army detachment from the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, representing Churchill's service in that unit as an army reservist from 1902 to 1924. The pallbearers were from the Grenadier Guards, and paid tribute to Churchill's training with them in France in 1915 for service in the First World War.<sup>2</sup>

What was on display in January 1965 could not have been foreseen ninety years earlier when Churchill was born. And though it could be argued that from his birth the stage was set for army service if not for possible moderate military success, anything to the extent of warranting a State Funeral would have come as a surprise to anyone.<sup>3</sup>

The chapters that follow are interested with the early formative years of the man who would warrant a State Funeral such as this. That is their general purview. Their special interest

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Lewis, "Churchill Buried in day of Sorrow and Regal Pageantry: Funeral Is Attended by Dignitaries of 110 Nations", *The New York Times* (New York City, USA), 31 January 1965; *The Illustrated London News*, Vol. 246, No. 6549 (London, England), 6 February 1965.

<sup>2</sup> "Processions to St. Paul's", *The Times* (London, England), 30 January 1965, p. 12; "Detachments of the Few", *ibid.*; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, Vol. 8 (London: Heinemann, 1988), pp. 1362-63 [volumes in the official Churchill biography, by Randolph S. Churchill and Martin Gilbert and published from Heinemann from 1966 to 1988, are hereafter referred to as *Churchill*].

<sup>3</sup> Douglas S. Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier* (London: Brassey's, 2005), pp. 11-13.

is with the early intellectual development of the man, Winston Churchill, in those areas which have direct impact on the art of war. They ask the question of how a man who would later lead during world wars came to think about war in his youth, when he was actually a practising soldier, and answer it by studying the way Churchill's education (formal and self-actualized), relationships, and experiences affected his military thinking and informed his early military intellectual capital.

These questions are a response to the sometimes-asserted notion that the young Churchill in war—as almost in everything else—was primarily a romantic adventurer: headstrong, ill-informed, and too concerned with self-advertisement and self-aggrandizement to be seriously bothered with learning a business like war. Alongside these accusations there are usually presented exhibits of later tactical and strategic blunders which serve to justify the indictments.

Furthermore, these questions are in response to a dearth of critical historical research when it comes to pre-1900 Churchill. Much is known and discussed about his early childhood; the same can be said for the period from his assumption of the Admiralty in 1911 till his exit from Parliament in 1922; and, understandably, histories have least neglected his role as Prime Minister of Great Britain in the Second World War. But when histories focus on Churchill from 1896-1900—and here mostly is meant his military campaigns on the North-West Frontier (1897-1898), the Sudan (1898), and South Africa (1899-1900)—the result is usually cursory at best and much more devoted to erecting the scaffolding that will support the famous Churchillian reputation of the Second World War.

Only a few authors have sought to remedy this historical exiguity, and their works stand in closest parallel to the aim of this thesis. The best and most substantive volume considering the early development of Churchill as soldier is Douglas S. Russell's *Winston Churchill: Soldier*.<sup>4</sup> Russell devotes almost the entirety of his work to an exceptionally thorough record of Churchill's early life as seen through the lens of a soldier in training. Few details are left unmentioned; for example, page upon page is given over to chronicling Churchill's early school marks, to descriptions of Churchill's various uniforms, and to the history and arrangement of Bangalore, his first frontier post.

Carlo D'Este's *Warlord: A Life of Churchill at War, 1874-1945*,<sup>5</sup> is perhaps the definitive overarching account of Churchill the warrior, which Andrew Roberts hailed as “the best single-volume work on Winston Churchill the soldier ever written.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, as its title suggests, D'Este takes the broader view and devotes only 150 pages to pre-1900 Churchill, and even less

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<sup>4</sup> Russell, *Winston Churchill*.

<sup>5</sup> Carlo D'Este, *Warlord: A Life of Churchill at War, 1874-1945* (London, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, cover.

on his fighting years of 1896–1900. In the same vein, Geoffrey Best has produced another related single-volume work, entitled simply *Churchill and War*.<sup>7</sup> At just over one third of the length of D’Este’s work, Best’s treatment is more of an overview.

Alongside these, David Jablonsky has produced some very helpful work on Churchill and war, starting with his *Churchill, The Great Game and Total War*,<sup>8</sup> a volume discussing how Churchill fitted into the Late-Victorian era, and what impact that era had on his abilities to cope with and manage total war. One article by the same author addresses his introduction to small wars, while an additional chapter traces the impact of technology on Churchill, and vice versa.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Jablonsky’s monologue, *Churchill: The Making of a Grand Strategist*,<sup>10</sup> takes a step back and questions the degree to which Churchill grasped strategy and, later, grand strategy.

Though each of these authors, and countless others, have been instrumental in helping to shape the content and arguments in the chapters that follow, none have specifically undertaken to explore fully the development of Churchill’s early military intellectual capital in the context of contemporary debates concerning the art of war. None have explored the degree to which Churchill, as a young soldier, was thinking like a military man, or like contemporary professional soldiers and military theorists. None have attempted to place him within the military debates of his time, debates often centring on the “nuts and bolts” of war—strategy, yes, but also the more detailed tactical considerations that surrounded the three principal arms of the British Army as it sought to cope with varying colonial demands during a period of significant evolution and change.

This thesis hopes to do just that. It means to study the contemporary writings and relationships and education of Churchill from his birth to 1900, when he left the army for the Commons. It aims to pay particular attention to Churchill’s interactions with and thoughts on matters martial. It does this under the persuasion that far from gallivanting across three continents motivated solely by the sentimentality associated with the glory of the Empire and the glory of himself, there was behind Winston the young warrior a rather keen mind, one that—though perhaps neglected during his school days—came to realize and understand and prescribe things about and for war that have hitherto remained uncharted. Such a task becomes all the more relevant given the context: Churchill went to considerable lengths to orbit

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<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Best, *Churchill and War* (London: Hambledon, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> David Jablonsky, *Churchill, the Great Game and Total War* (London: Frank Cass, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> David Jablonsky, “Churchill’s Initial Experience with the British Conduct of Small Wars: India and the Soudan, 1897–98”, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1–25; David Jablonsky, “Churchill and Technology”, in Maurer, John H. (ed.), *Churchill and Strategic Dilemmas Before the World Wars: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 121–58.

<sup>10</sup> David Jablonsky, *Churchill: The Making of a Grand Strategist* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, U. S. Army War College, 1990).

influence, and kept close proximity to those figures with a hand on military training, thinking, and doctrine—and, as an interminable observer, he learned from what he saw.

It goes without saying that he was neither the only war correspondent nor the only war correspondent with military training and experience; furthermore, neither was he the only soldier thinking and writing about matters distinctly military. And yet, given his station as a future war leader, how Churchill came to think about and regard war in his youth, and understanding the detailed tactical and doctrinal aspects of war as Churchill understood them, especially when he was on the battlefield, is of no small consequence and helps to legitimize this thesis.

Given the desire to preserve the humanity of the subject, this thesis does not adhere to a strictly thematic arrangement, but rather incorporates narrative too. After all, it should not be forgotten that the words that follow centre, at their simplest, around a man; many of the considerations they attend to are best kept contiguous with Churchill the man, and not some one-dimensional abstraction. Churchill was a man before he was a soldier. In other words, Churchill's personality is not insignificant to the argument of this thesis, as do the relationships and experiences that helped to shape, from a very early age, the aspects of his character which could be regarded as martial.

The first two chapters which follow are thusly more disposed to narrative and chronology. The first tells the story of Churchill's 1874-1893 youth, and while focusing on those areas most pertinent to his later war-thinking, argues that through Churchill's formal military training began at Sandhurst, any study of his military intellectual development would be incomplete without a discussion of the pre-Sandhurst years. It was during those years that several prominent features of Churchill's later character gained serious foothold—including his stubbornness, unwillingness to be taught, personal courage, and most notably, the romanticism through which he saw most things historical and martial. These characteristics helped form and inform the foundation for his later military intellectual development, and the mental posture with which he approached even the more technical aspects of war as a practising soldier, politician, minister, and military leader.

The next chapter recognizes that it was at Sandhurst that Churchill combined his imagination and juvenile, uninformed thoughts about war with the real training and practice of war. It continues the story of Churchill's intellectual development as began in the chapter before it, but couples that with a discussion of the training and curriculum he received as a Gentleman Cadet at the Royal Military College. It seeks to develop further the growing presuppositions about war—as informed both by his own thinking and the programme of

Victorian cavalry training—that Churchill would eventually take with him to the battlefield. In this sense it is the second of two chapters that “set the stage” for Churchill as soldier.

Chapter Four begins the turn to the thematic. Given that it was as a cavalry officer that Churchill first served, this chapter addresses his interactions with Late-Victorian cavalry doctrine and debate. Of specific interest are tactics and strategies surrounding the use of cavalry, both in the Victorian settings of frontier and small wars, and in leading up to the First World War. As a cavalryman Churchill spent much of his time thinking and writing about the mounted arm, and of interest is whether he was simply restating the common conceptions of his day, or whether he was offering any new insight demonstrative of critical military thinking about mobility on the battlefield and the problems created by new weapons technology.

Chapters 5-7 each address themes of an expanding scope of influence and conceptualization. The first, “The Tactics of War”, discusses Churchill’s thoughts on the mechanics of war: infantry, artillery, supply, training, education, offence, defence, maneuvering, intelligence and the like. It spends considerable time establishing the theoretical debates taking place within and between the infantry arm and the artillery arm, and explores the degree to which Churchill grasped the fundamentals of those debates, which typically centred on the arms coming to terms with the changing character of war.

Taking one step back and looking at the larger picture, Chapter Six discusses Churchill’s military intellectual development on matters of war as they relate to British imperial and foreign policy. It encompasses issues like conscription, frontier wars, forward policy, regular versus irregular warfare, and punitive warfare. It first examines the ways in which Churchill thought about wartime strategic dynamics, before proceeding to study his understanding of how military strategy might fit into overall grand strategy. Chapter Seven removes itself one step further from the practice of war, and explores Churchill’s conceptions of war, the nature of war, the positions of war as a human activity and a genuine phenomenon, as well as the role of race and national charter in war, while not omitting his reflections on civilization, glory, barbarity, and heroism. Finally, the concluding chapter gives a summary of the hallmarks of Churchill’s early military intellectual development, and contends that in his war thinking he was almost always more pre-modern than modern. It considers how Churchill fitted in with the larger matrix of changing warfare, and attempts to connect the past with the future by asking two questions: what was the synthesis of Churchill’s early military intellectual development, and what conclusions can be drawn about his perspicacity as a soldier and commander?

It is equally important to establish what this thesis does not aim to do. Most importantly, given length restrictions its focus is understandably narrow. Its context is distinctly

British, and where it does venture off into the experience of other countries or their militaries, it does so to explain more fully the British experience. Its focus on the protagonist is also understandably narrow: it does not aim to discuss Churchill's interaction with every aspect of war, and those aspects it does discuss do not always receive an exhaustive treatment. This thesis is distinctly interested in those years when the young Churchill served as a soldier, or as a war correspondent in the company of soldiers. The narrative chapters which begin the work have as their central aim the tracing of the development of Churchill to the point of his commissioning, and the chapters which follow it take the reader, via a more thematic journey, through the years leading up to that point when he would trade professional soldiering and war corresponding for professional politics. There are few occasions where the argument reaches forward to Churchill's military thinking in, for example, 1906 and 1909, when he attended foreign military manoeuvres; however, these allusions are used to buttress points about his military thinking as a practising soldier. In the main, it seeks to examine Churchill's pre-1900 military intellectual capital as it was, purposefully forsaking the benefit of foresight.

As is often the case with projects such as this, it is in the creation of one work that one stumbles across a myriad of other questions that warrant exploration and answers in treatments that would be sufficiently lengthy as to render them prohibitive here. It is testament to Churchill's life and character that after being the subject of so many books and articles, which must by now number in the thousands, there is still unexplored territory. For example, comparatively little has been said about Churchill and sea power, and though Christopher Bell has recently made substantive inroads into that subject,<sup>11</sup> more could probably be explored about how the thinking of young Churchill the soldier might have helped shape his future naval authority. Likewise, there is ample room for some enterprising scholar to complete an exhaustive study of Churchill's private library, and consider the many impacts his reading must have had upon the autodidactic *littérateur*.

The final caveat is personal. I am not a soldier, and nor have I fought in any war. I have been on battlefields, but never during the heat of battle, and never even near one during the heat of battle; I have held rifles and ammunition, but never those pointed or fired at me; I have seen many uniforms, but never donned one myself. My experience with soldiering and battlefields is second-hand at the very best, knowing full well that even that expression suggests far too close a proximity to the battlefield, or approximation to knowledge of it. The little I know, or think I know, about war comes to me from the things I have read, or the (mostly dramatized) things I have seen in the cinema or on television, or, more importantly, the things conveyed by those who have actually faced battle, or by those of sufficient scholarly adroitness

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher M. Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

to realistically and passionately express what they have learned about wars and battles. In this way, I suspect that my relation to the words that follow are unremarkable, and accordingly I claim no special privilege; what comes after this is merely a humble attempt at deliberation over what another young man, serving as a soldier, came to think about war whilst on those all too foreign battlefields.

## :: II ::

## TOY SOLDIERS AND MARTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Brendan Bracken, who was close enough to Churchill to be considered by some as his illegitimate son,<sup>1</sup> noted that “to understand Winston you must go back to his childhood.”<sup>2</sup> This chapter does this for at least two reasons. The first is that a formative influence in Churchill’s early years was his relationship with his father and mother, one of many “early environmental influences which shaped Churchill’s character.”<sup>3</sup> Parts of this character are recognizable not only in his early years, but later on as well, when Churchill was a practising soldier or influencing military policy from the Commons and in Ministerial or Cabinet level positions. Included here are traits like his love of power,<sup>4</sup> his ambition,<sup>5</sup> his hostility toward authority,<sup>6</sup> and the element of fantasy, based less upon a correct understanding of one’s abilities and more on his playing the heroic part, which Lord Moran famously called “the inner world of make-believe in which Winston found reality.”<sup>7</sup> This character, formed in his early years, helped influence both his military intellectual development and his constitution as a soldier.

The second reason is that Churchill’s later influences on war were directed at least in part by his early interactions with things martial. In 1893 he enrolled at Sandhurst where he received his first formal military training. Afterwards, as a commissioned cavalry officer, he would fight for four years on varied fronts in several campaigns. But even before Sandhurst, Churchill was thinking about war.<sup>8</sup> Whilst at Harrow he had his first (albeit jejune) brush with organized preparation as a member of both the Rifle Volunteer Corps and the Army Class, and letters and memoirs and school records tell of a young boy fascinated with soldiers and battlefields.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1983), p. 781.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Moran, *Churchill: The Struggle for Survival, 1940-1965* (London: Constable, 1966), p. 747.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Storr, “Churchill: The Man”, in A. J. P. Taylor, *et al.* (eds.), *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p. 212. Other influences include his relationship with his nanny and his early experiences in school.

<sup>4</sup> Marvin Rintala, “The Love of Power and the Power of Love: Churchill’s Childhood”, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Sept. 1984), pp. 376-81; A. J. Mayer, “Winston Churchill: Power Politician and Counter Revolutionary”, in K. H. Wolff and B. Moore (eds.), *The Critical Spirit: Essays in Honor of Herbert Marcuse* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 330; Robert Payne, *The Great Man: A Portrait of Winston S. Churchill* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1974), p. 347.

<sup>5</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 441.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Baring, *The Puppet Show of Memory* (London: W. Heinemann, 1922), p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Lord Moran, “Diaries of Churchill’s Doctor”, *Life*, Vol. 5, No. 17 (April, 1966), p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> WSC, *My Early Life: A Roving Commission* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1930), p. 90 [hereafter referred to as *MEL*].

<sup>9</sup> Clare Sheridan, *Nuda Veritas* (London: Butterworth Ltd., 1927), p. 14; Winston S. Churchill, “The Engagement of ‘La Marais’, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1914”, Harrow School Archives; *MEL*, p. 90; Randolph S. Churchill (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill, Companion*, Vol. 1, Part 1 (London: Heinemann, 1966), pp. 166,

Knowing where Churchill ended begs the question of where he started. And though in his very early, pre-Sandhurst years he received no real military instruction, during them he did acquire certain foundational building blocks upon which the structure of both his character and his later military intellectual development would be built. This chapter explores that foundation.

One of the many potential shortcomings which played out with sometimes devastating consequences in his later years, Churchill always seemed to be guided first by the intangible rather than the tangible. Put a different way, Carl Jung described the “extroverted intuitive”—a delineation which Churchill fitted<sup>10</sup>—as one who “has a keen nose for things in the bud pregnant with future promise”, and for whom “thinking and feeling, the indispensable components of conviction, are...inferior functions, possessing no decisive weight; hence they lack the power to offer any lasting resistance to the force of intuition.”<sup>11</sup> Ideas and sentiments, or intuition, captivated Churchill, and often formed the main thrust behind certain policies and actions. And yet intuition can be right just as often as it is wrong. Churchill’s later intuitions of the usefulness of a machine that would eventually become the tank, as well as, in 1917, of a landing craft for tanks and also of portable harbors not wholly unlike what would be used in the 1944 invasion of France, proved to be, for the most part, solid. Other intuitions, like the importance of a Gallipoli invasion, turned out to be a disaster. As Field Marshal Brooke later wrote of Churchill: “Planned strategy was not his strong card. He preferred to work by intuition and by impulse...He was never good at looking at all the implications of any course he favoured. In fact, he frequently refused to look at them.”<sup>12</sup> Some of these early military intuitions started whilst he was still playing with toy soldiers and roaming the corridors of Blenheim as a young boy. Long before he was strategizing about war or engaged in *bona fide* soldiering, Churchill was dreaming about battlefields in ways that would help to inform his later conceptions of war as a romantic struggle, the “greatest of all adventures.”<sup>13</sup>

A later chapter will consider Churchill’s conceptions of war; this chapter simply aims to show how his early relationships, pastimes, and education helped both to engender certain intuitions about the profession of arms and to form a martial character. Neither Churchill’s

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255-56. [The Companion Volumes to the official Churchill biography are hereafter referred to as *Churchill*, CV].

<sup>10</sup> Storr, “Churchill: The Man”, pp. 213-14.

<sup>11</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (London: Kegan Paul, 1946), pp. 464-65.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939-1943: A Study Based on the Diaries and Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal the Viscount Alanbrooke* (London: Collins, 1957), p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Violet Bonham Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode and Collins, 1965), p. 313. See also Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, Vol. 1 (London: Odhams, 1939), pp. 1-2; Basil Liddell Hart, “Churchill: The Military Strategist”, in A. J. P. Taylor, *et al.* (eds.), *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 155-57.

intellectual disposition nor his military thinking were immune to these influences. When Churchill entered Sandhurst he did not do so as a blank slate, but already as a creature of habit and temperament. He was, among other things, stubborn, a rule-breaker, and unwilling to be taught anything against his will or his interest.<sup>14</sup> He was no friend of unsought advice, and driven by an alliance with the practical that made an enemy out of anything he did not deem useful. Above all Churchill was a romantic,<sup>15</sup> and from a young age held war, not unlike other boys, in a romantic reverence.<sup>16</sup> He held history, too, in the highest regard; it “permeated everything he touched, and it was the mainspring of his politics.”<sup>17</sup>

Winston made his start at Blenheim Palace, one of the grandest of all English homes, and a place brimful with martial flair, history, and influence. It was built to commemorate the military triumph of John Churchill, the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, who served as Captain-General under Queen Anne and who successfully checked the hopes of the ‘Sun-King’ Louis XIV to establish foreign domination over Britain. As a reward for his victories the Crown conveyed to the Duke the Royal Manor of Woodstock, a 15,000-acre estate in Oxfordshire, as well as a gift for the construction of a stately home “primarily intended not as a home but as a monument, [a] symbol of British pride”, “the finest view in England.”<sup>18</sup>

It would be hard to survey the palace or the grounds for long and miss the purpose for which it was built. It is a testament to military victory. Its many roofs of varying heights are embellished with statuary blatantly martial in theme, among them an English lion greedily eating a French cock and, above one entrance, Britannia standing proudly above two chained French prisoners. The state rooms are lined with tapestries telling the stories of the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke’s military victories at Ramillies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet, Blenheim and elsewhere. Inside the chapel the martial overtones are also prominent, and a large bas-relief depicts the surrender of Marshall Tallard. The rear of the house leads to the tallest monument on the grounds, a victory column topped by a six-foot, eleven-inch statue of John Churchill who dominates the landscape. Around the plinth is inscribed a 7,500-word panegyric. “These are the actions of

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<sup>14</sup> A. W. Siddons, “Spencer Churchill, W. L.”, in E. D. W. Chaplin (ed.), *Winston Churchill and Harrow, Memories of the Prime Minister’s School Days, 1888-1892* (Harrow: Harrow School Bookshop, 1941), p. 17; Manchester, *The Last Lion*, pp. 153-54; Victor Wallace Germain, *The Tragedy of Winston Churchill* (London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd., 1931), p. 13; Churchill Archives Centre, CAC, CHAR 28/43/16-17 [hereafter referred to as CAC, CHAR].

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Mr Churchill in 1940* (London: John Murray, 1964), pp. 12-25, 29-30; C. P. Snow, *Variety of Men* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 120, 124.

<sup>16</sup> MEL, pp. 26, 78-79; D’Este, *Warlord*, pp. 14, 29; Virginia Cowles, *Winston Churchill: The Era and the Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. 31; Carter, *Winston Churchill*, pp. 335-36.

<sup>17</sup> J. H. Plumb, “Churchill: The Historian”, in Taylor, *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man*, p. 123; Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. 439.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Jenkins, *England’s Thousand Best Homes* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 593; Ralph G. Martin, *Jennie: The Life of Lady Randolph Churchill*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1969, 1971), p. 38; David Green, *Blenheim Palace* (Woodstock: Blenheim Estate Office, 1950), p. 1.

the Duke of Marlborough, performed in the compass of few years; sufficient to adorn the annals of ages”, part of the inscription reads.<sup>19</sup>

It was to this estate that Churchill’s father, and third son of the 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough, Lord Randolph Churchill, introduced his new wife, Jennie Jerome, on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1874. Six months later, in the Blenheim Palace, was born their first son: Winston Leonard-Spencer Churchill. His cousin, Shane Leslie, later observed that “historians will suppose that the band struck up martial music for his entry.”<sup>20</sup>

From the very beginning Blenheim Palace informed Churchill’s thinking about war. The palatial and distinctly martial estate was a life-long nursery—both for Churchill the boy and for Churchill the idealist. Throughout his childhood he would often return to the Oxfordshire palace, spending holidays roaming the forests, exploring the house, and swimming in the lake. Later, as a Captain in the Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars, he often participated in parades and training exercises on, or near, the palace grounds. All this was done in the shadows of monuments erected to celebrate feats of glory done in service of cause and country. Those shadows, and their meaning, left a lasting impression on Churchill and assisted in illuminating his sometimes naïve conceptions of the glory of the battlefield.

Beyond the emotional and romantic attachments to war that Blenheim must have enlivened and encouraged in young Winston, one must remember the grounds’ obvious setting: a detailed palace set upon an expansive vista. The façades were finely decorated, as were the Corinthian columns supporting them; inside there were engraved cornices, sculpted marble hearthstones, and intricate chandeliers. But from the courtyard one could see, in some directions, the horizon. It is interesting to consider how the Blenheim context is not unlike the military one—with its tactical detail and strategic big picture—and how Churchill, with Blenheim as his playground,<sup>21</sup> could have perhaps, at an early age, adapted his mind to think on a similar plane. In the 1930s Churchill furthered his study of and interest in Blenheim by publishing the four-volume biography of the first Duke of Marlborough. If one hallmark of a successful military commander is the ability to keep an eye on the horizon whilst still grasping the finer nuances of tactics, then perhaps Blenheim, with both its grand scale and more subtle components, helped inform Churchill’s military intellectual development. If so, there remains

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<sup>19</sup> Inscription on the Triumphal Column, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom. My thanks to Karen Wiseman, Head of Education, The Estate’s Office, Blenheim Palace, for confirming many details regarding the buildings and the grounds at Blenheim Palace.

<sup>20</sup> “Annotated notes of ‘Long Shadows’ manuscript”, GTM.GAMMS163, Box 35, Folder 3, Sir Shane Leslie Papers, Georgetown University Special Collections, p. 5. My thanks to Ted Jackson, Manuscript Archivist, for supplying this manuscript at very short notice.

<sup>21</sup> One historian records hearing the Churchill family archivist tell of Winston and his cousin, Sunny, the ninth Duke from 1892, playing, as boys, “rowdy games of ‘French and English’ up and down the palace.” Best, *Churchill and War*, p. 2.

the question of whether it was helpful or harmful to Churchill the soldier and especially to Churchill the commander. As one military historian recognized, “At times he revealed a long view, helped by his historical sense, yet was inclined to act on a short view, prompted by his tactical sense as well as blinded by the force of his feelings.”<sup>22</sup>

Churchill’s childhood was that of the traditional upper-class Victorian family. His parents have been described as “remote and tantalizingly glamorous. Randolph’s glittering, bulging eyes and oversize whiskers hiding a small, intense face caused him to resemble a tenacious miniature Schnauzer, while darling ‘Mummy’ was another spectacle altogether, remembered by her son as clad in a riding jacket, tight as a second skin, ‘beautifully spattered with mud’; or with a diamond pin in her piled-up, raven hair.”<sup>23</sup> Both Lord Randolph and Jennie, constant and preoccupied politician and socialite, relegated the task of parenting to a nanny, Mrs. Everest, who, in the context of distant and absent parents, became Winston’s dearest friend until her death in 1895.<sup>24</sup>

Few psychiatrists have turned their attention to Churchill, a reality that Churchill himself, who dismissed psychology as irrelevant, would have appreciated.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, a brief consideration of certain environmental factors surrounding Churchill’s childhood help one to understand facets of character demonstrable in his early military intellectual development and in his fighting of future wars.

“Churchill, in spite of his aristocratic birth and social position,” wrote Anthony Storr, “started life with disadvantages which he never wholly conquered; although his whole career was an effort to overcome them.”<sup>26</sup> “The neglect and lack of interest in him shown by his parents were remarkable, even judged by the standards of late Victorian and Edwardian days”,<sup>27</sup> and Churchill grew up a very lonely boy.<sup>28</sup> When he did eventually gain his only sibling, John Strange Churchill, Winston was five years old and soon thereafter sent away to boarding school. But even had the youthful brothers been afforded more time together, Lord

<sup>22</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, “Churchill in War”, *Encounter*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (April, 1966), p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Simon Schama, *A History of Britain, The Fate of Empire, 1776-2000* (London: BBC Worldwide, Ltd., 2002), pp. 397-400.

<sup>24</sup> After reading Gibbon’s autobiography, Winston wrote: “When I read his reference to his old nurse: ‘If there be any, as I trust there are some, who rejoice that I live, to that dear and excellent woman their gratitude is due,’ I thought of Mrs. Everest; and it shall be her epitaph.” In *Savrola*, Churchill’s only novel, he paid tribute to her by praising the hero’s nanny, who “had nursed him from his birth up with a devotion and care which knew no break.” *MEL*, p. 126; WSC, *Savrola* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [190-?]), p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Storr, “The Man”, p. 213; Giovanni Costigan, *Makers of Modern England: The Force of Individual Genius in History* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 252; Moran, *The Struggle for Survival*, p. 400.

<sup>26</sup> Storr, “The Man”, p. 206.

<sup>27</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill*, pp. 25-28; *MEL*, p. 19; Howard Cummins, *Mao, Hsiao, Churchill, and Montgomery: Personal Values and Decision Making* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1973), p. 32; Manchester, *The Last Lion*, pp. 116-18.

Randolph's obvious preference for his younger son<sup>29</sup> further emphasized his denial of love, disapproval, and absence.<sup>30</sup>

The deprivation “by parental neglect of that inner source of self-esteem<sup>31</sup> upon which most predominantly happy persons rely, and which serves to carry them through the inevitable disappointments and reverses of human existence”, was a significant contributing factor of the “prolonged and recurrent fits of depression”, the “black dog” from which Churchill suffered all his life.<sup>32</sup> As one historian asserted, it was a mood neither resistant to heredity nor uncommon in the Churchill family; it was particularly conspicuous in two of Winston's heroes: the first Duke of Marlborough and Lord Randolph Churchill—the latter, like his son after him, though being “a very quick and piercing judge of a situation,” possessed a judgment “not really reliable. He was self-willed and impulsive, above all impatient... He had the defect of... tremendous high spirits and racing energy on the upward bound, depression and discouragement on the down.”<sup>33</sup> In 1911 Winston went to the Admiralty for what he would later call “the four most memorable years of my life”;<sup>34</sup> a loyal friend called them also his happiest: “He felt to the quick the traditional glamour of his new office, the romance of sea-power, the part that it had played in our island history, the conviction that it was today the keystone of our safety and survival.”<sup>35</sup> This was the upward bound. In 1915 came the down, and after the defeat at Gallipoli he was left powerless and deeply depressed. “I am finished”, he said repeatedly,<sup>36</sup> and later his wife recalled: “I thought he would die of grief.”<sup>37</sup> Militarily, the Dardanelles disaster was certainly not the only incident of the First World War in which Churchill fell victim to his own volatility and ill-judgment.<sup>38</sup>

Churchill reacted to and compensated for the vulnerabilities inherent in his black dog in other ways, too, many of which were traits of character evident in his childhood, his

<sup>29</sup> Ted Morgan, *Churchill: Young Man in a Hurry, 1874-1915* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), pp. 57, 65; *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 469; Rintala, “The Love of Power and the Power of Love”, p. 381.

<sup>30</sup> Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, *Churchill: The Making of a Hero* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1942), p. 25; Rintala, “The Love of Power and the Power of Love”, pp. 381-82.

<sup>31</sup> Having lacked it as a child, Churchill was often dependent upon—and sought out—external sources of approval. *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 862, 864, 866.

<sup>32</sup> Storr, “The Man”, p. 207; Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1991), p. 230; Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War, 1914-1916* (London: Oldbourne, 1959), p. 118; Manchester, *The Last Lion*, pp. 23-24; Moran, *The Struggle for Survival*, pp. 167, 181, 310, 313, 477, 600, 756-46, 754, 755, 786; Robert H. Pilpel, *Churchill in America, 1895-1961: An Affectionate Portrait* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1976), pp. 71, 76, 264-65.

<sup>33</sup> A. L. Rowse, *The Later Churchills* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 287.

<sup>34</sup> Churchill, *The World Crisis*, Vol. 1, p. 51.

<sup>35</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill*, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 402-03; Moran, *The Struggle for Survival*, p. 745.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Soames, *Clementine Churchill* (London: Cassell, 1979), p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> See Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power*, p. 2; A. Temple Patterson (ed.), *The Jellicoe Papers*, Vol. 1 (London: Navy Records Society, 1966-8), pp. 26-27.

military intellectual development, and the way he approached and fought war. The most obvious of these is his ambition.<sup>39</sup> In a letter to his mother, written in 1899 while serving in India, Churchill wrote: “What an awful thing it will be if I don’t come off. It will break my heart as I have nothing else but ambition to cling to.”<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, psychiatrists have recognized that “extreme ambition, of the Churchillian variety, is not based upon sober appraisal of the reality of one’s gifts and deficiencies.”<sup>41</sup> Instead, there is an element of fantasy, or, as this chapter has already referenced, Churchill’s “inner world of make-believe”, an outlook very similar to the romanticism which he embodied. With depressives like Churchill, this took two seemingly contrasting forms: both a preoccupation with death (especially his own), and the conviction that he was being preserved for some greater cause. “Curse ruthless time! Curse our mortality! How cruelly short is the allotted span for all we must cram into it!”, he bemoaned in 1906, before famously adding: “We are all worms. But I do believe that I am a glow-worm.”<sup>42</sup> “The worst of it is”, he later said, “that I am not a good life. My father died too young. I must try to accomplish whatever I can by the time I am forty.”<sup>43</sup> But while concentrated on the inevitability of his own early death, he was at the same time convinced of his eventual success. “He had no doubts about his star”, an acquaintance remembered, “Even in those early days he felt...that he had been preserved from many perils to fulfill its purpose.”<sup>44</sup> To his physician he confided of his May 1940 appointment to the Premiership: “This cannot be by accident. It must be design. I was kept for this job.”<sup>45</sup>

What is remarkable is that Churchill did not grow out of this inner world of make-believe. In his later years he still considered himself on a heroic mission, just as he predicted at the age of seventeen: “I repeat—London will be in danger and in the high position I shall occupy, it will fall to me to save the Capital and save the Empire.”<sup>46</sup> As a child he dreamt of the glory of war, of victory as the heroic commander, and did so in an age when such dreams and accomplishments were not beyond the realm of possibility. War was about greatness of soul born and demonstrated on the battlefield. For this to happen people had to remain the principal actors; it was the human protagonist who could, through heroism, achieve a glory

<sup>39</sup> Storr, “The Man”, p. 224; Sarah Churchill, *A Thread in the Tapestry* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967), p. 17. See also the protagonist in *Savrola*, Churchill, *Savrola*, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 11 January 1899, CAC, CHAR 28/26/2. See also David Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister: A Life of Sir Charles Dilke* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 225n.

<sup>41</sup> Storr, “The Man”, p. 225.

<sup>42</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>43</sup> J. B. Atkins, *Incidents and Reflections* (London: Christophers, 1947), p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> *Hansard*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 1965, Vol. 262, 1070.

<sup>45</sup> Jerrold M. Post and Robert S. Robins, *When Illness Strikes the Leader: The Dilemma of the Captive King* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Gilbert, *In Search of Churchill* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 216.

outlasting his years. “There is a thrill and charm of its own in the glittering jingle of a cavalry squadron manoeuvring at the trot”, Churchill wrote, before lamenting, many years later, the changes that had come upon war: “War, which used to be cruel and magnificent, has now become cruel and squalid... War ceased to be a gentleman’s game.”<sup>47</sup> Even during the Second World War, at the apogee of his political and military career, Churchill still lamented to Field-Marshal Alexander about the changing character of war, and how he had never been the triumphant battlefield commander: “I do envy you, you’ve done what I’ve always wanted to do—to command great victorious armies in battle. I thought I got very near to it once, in the First World War, when I commanded those forces at Antwerp. I thought it was going to be my great opportunity.”<sup>48</sup> The genesis of that dream and temperament began as a young boy, when Churchill enjoyed what was probably at least the normal mount of military daydreaming for a child his age. But even so, not every boy who grows up playing “cowboys and Indians”, or reconstructing famous battles, or idolizing military heroes turns out to be a man of war himself. Given his military future, and his future character, Winston’s childhood preoccupations temptingly discounted as normal military fantasies perhaps lend themselves to more serious inspection.

Geoffrey Best has suggested that it was the “underlying factors of militarism”, conspicuous in public schools and in “pre-1914 European thought”, which, “far more than ‘incidents’ and assassinations, telegrams and ultimate, were responsible for the causation of’ the First World War.<sup>49</sup> In a war in which almost half of the men joined as volunteers—750,000 by the end of September 1914 alone<sup>50</sup>—social historians have turned their attention to factors which help to explain such an impassioned response. “Schoolbooks and speech-day orations, rifle corps and cadet groups, newspaper leaders and popular novels, Navy League pamphlets and military drill instructions books, import-export tables and the sales figures of arms to Romania have all become source materials for the serious investigator.”<sup>51</sup> Postcards and

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<sup>47</sup> MEL, pp. 78-79.

<sup>48</sup> Churchill, 3, p. 111n.

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Best, “Militarism and the Victorian Public School”, in Brian Simon and Ian Bradley (eds.), *The Victorian Public School* (London: Gill and Macmillan, Ltd., 1975), p. 130.

<sup>50</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Zara S. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 2. For more on this theme see John Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); W. J. Reader, *At Duty’s Call* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Anne Summers, “Militarism in Britain before the Great War”, *History Workshop*, No. 2 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 104-123; Simon and Bradley (eds.), *The Victorian Public School*; Patrick A. Dunae, “Boys’ Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914”, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 105-121. More recently, historians like Bernard Porter have questioned the effect of these ephemera on the masses, arguing instead for a mostly indifferent working class that sometimes—but rarely—swayed by imperialistic propaganda. See Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

cigarette cards, leaflets, music and music halls, photography, games, puzzles, packaging, and other bits of ephemera were vehicles for imperialism often rich with militaristic themes; among them were toy soldiers, which “were even more significant recruiters for the forces.”<sup>52</sup>

Prior to 1893, when the British toy manufacturer, William Britain, perfected the making of hollow soldiers and thus facilitated their mass, cost-effective production in Britain,<sup>53</sup> most toy soldiers were solid lead and made in Germany and France. In one of his first known letters to his mother, written when he was but seven years old, Winston expressed gratitude for the gift of toy soldiers<sup>54</sup> that would become a staple of his childhood entertainment.<sup>55</sup> In another letter he grew a bit envious over Jack who “had such a beautiful box of soldiers sent him from Lady de Clifford.”<sup>56</sup> He would grow his collection for many years to come, and it would eventually number around 1,500. When sent to Versailles to improve his French, Winston wrote back to Jack: “I have seen here such beautiful soldiers...I think I will buy a box of cannon.”<sup>57</sup>

Winston found a great deal of consolation in maneuvering his toy soldiers, and was enchanted from the very beginning with the romantic world of soldiering. Remembering back to when he was at his first school, St. George’s at Ascot, Churchill later recalled how he “counted the days and the hours to the end of every term, when I should return home from this hateful servitude and range my soldiers in line of battle on the nursery floor.”<sup>58</sup> Clare Sheridan, his cousin nine years his younger, later recalled that, “Altogether it was a most impressive show, and played with an interest that was no ordinary child’s game.”<sup>59</sup>

Toys are, in form and function, multi-dimensional, and while they are simple playthings they also are an “important part of the child’s experientially perceived reality, operating in several related ways over and above their more manifest recreational purpose.”<sup>60</sup> By 1914, the journal *Games and Toys* was able to claim that in the previous two decades it was well recognized that the toy dealer came “next to parents...as a factor in the education of

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<sup>52</sup> John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 1-38, 28.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth D. Brown, “Modelling for War? Toy Soldiers in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain”, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter, 1990), p. 239.

<sup>54</sup> Russell, *Winston Churchill*, p. 18; D’Este, *Warlord*, p. 14; Brown, “Modelling for War?”, p. 238.

<sup>55</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 4 January 1882, CAC, CHAR 28/13/1-1A. The author of the first volume of the official Churchill biography, Randolph Churchill, incorrectly identifies this letter as the first known letter to his mother. However, an earlier letter, dated 1881, exists in the Churchill Archives: see WSC to LRC, letter dated [1881], CAC, CHAR 28/13/2. Punctuation is [sic].

<sup>56</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-73.

<sup>58</sup> *MEL*, p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> Sheridan, *Nuda Veritas*, p. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Donald W. Ball, “Toward a Sociology of Toys: Inanimate Objects, Socialization, and the Demography of the Doll World”, *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Autumn, 1967), p. 447.

children.”<sup>61</sup> Toy soldiers were equally educative, and an early nineteenth-century study featured an illustration of toy jousting knights accompanied by text which noted that “persons of rank were taught in their childhood to relish such exercises as were of a martial nature, and the very toys that were put into their hands as playthings were calculated to bias the mind in their favour.”<sup>62</sup>

It was these soldiers which “must sometimes have provided an appropriate background or stimulus for membership of the public school’s cadet corps”,<sup>63</sup> a variant of which he would join at Harrow, and generated an interest in Winston to become a soldier himself. One day his father “paid a formal visit of inspection.” For some time Lord Randolph judged the arranged troops from every angle. When done, he asked Winston if he would like to enter the army. “I thought it would be splendid to command an Army”, Churchill recalled, “so I said ‘Yes’ at once: and immediately I was taken at my word.”<sup>64</sup>

In the Late-Victorian era toy soldiers were not just for boys. A former Secretary of State for War, early in the twentieth century, placed “an extraordinary order...for a large set of soldiers.”<sup>65</sup> William Britain’s son, Alfred, noted that by 1896 his firm was receiving orders from “gentlemen” who valued them for their “perfect modeling and correct colouring.”<sup>66</sup> Literary figures like Robert Louis Stevenson,<sup>67</sup> the Brontë sisters,<sup>68</sup> and especially H. G. Wells, who would later write a book on scaled warfare,<sup>69</sup> were fascinated with the pastime well into their adult years. Politicians, too, enjoyed toy soldiers. Sidney Buxton, President of the Board of Trade, was once found “sprawled full length on the floor and with unerring accuracy of aim picking off the flower of [H. G.] Wells’s Imperial Guard, which he thought he had concealed and protected in a thick pine forest.”<sup>70</sup> Charles Trevelyan played with toy soldiers, wrote his brother, “well after we were all grown men.”<sup>71</sup>

The interest in toy soldiers amongst civilians paralleled a similar interest and professionalization of miniature warfare in the armed services. Early in nineteenth-century Prussia, *kriegspiel*, a “sort of military chess” involving a “board marked off into squares, on which pieces representing troops were moved according to a series of conventional rules”,

<sup>61</sup> As quoted in Brown, “Modelling for War?”, p. 243.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Brown, “Modelling for War?”, p. 243; Ball, “Toward a Sociology of Toys”, p. 447.

<sup>64</sup> *MEL*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>65</sup> H. E. D. Harris, *Model Soldiers* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), p. 34.

<sup>66</sup> As quoted in Brown, “Modelling for War”, p. 241.

<sup>67</sup> Lloyd Osbourne, “Stevenson at Play”, *Scribner’s Magazine*, Vol. 24, No. 75 (December, 1898), pp. 709-19.

<sup>68</sup> Lesley Gordon, *Peepshow into Paradise: A History of Children’s Toys* (London: George G. Harrap, 1953), p. 138.

<sup>69</sup> H. G. Wells, *Little Wars, A Game for Boys* (London: Frank Palmer, 1913).

<sup>70</sup> C. F. G. Masterman, “H. G. Wells”, *Review of Reviews*, Vol. 65, No. 390 (June, 1922), p. 593.

<sup>71</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *An Autobiography and Other Essays* (London: Longmans, 1949), p. 4.

gained a strong foothold in the military when General Von Müffling exclaimed, after witnessing a performance, “It’s not a *game* at all, it’s a training for war. I shall recommend it most emphatically to the whole army.”<sup>72</sup> Prince Arthur of Connaught proposed in a 1872 lecture at the Garrison Instructor’s classroom, Dover, that *kriegspiel* “might be of the greatest use to all who were desirous of earnestly studying their profession”, especially given the good use made of it by the Prussians in the recent war.<sup>73</sup> That same year, the War Office recommended “that Officers should avail themselves to the utmost of this useful means of instruction.”<sup>74</sup> By 1904 many officers had accepted the recommendation. In the 1904 Royal Commission on the Militia and the Volunteers, Field Marshal Earl Roberts testified that *kriegspiel* was of “immense value” and “Volunteers, I know, do practice it”; during the same Commission General Ian Hamilton thought *kriegspiel* essential in helping a man acquire tactical knowledge, and Colonel C. T. Wallis spoke of the “extraordinary...interest that is taken in these war games by Volunteer officers.”<sup>75</sup>

Young Winston was swept up in the growing number<sup>76</sup> of civilians and soldiers who found recreational and practical value in toy soldiers, miniature warfare, and war games. When Winston was 14 his brother, an obvious childhood companion, wrote to Mrs Everest asking her to “bring me that war game because I don’t know how to play the other one.”<sup>77</sup> By his adolescent years Winston had moved pretend soldiering from the nursery to the outdoors, and though he did not cease to build his collection of miniatures the young generalissimo staged mock battles with his brother and many cousins as soldiers. And, like De Gaulle, another devotee of toy soldiers (playing “with unusual seriousness and intensity”) who would later distinguish himself in war, Churchill was always determined to command his country’s forces.<sup>78</sup> Clare Sheridan remembered one summer, at Banstead Manor, when “Winston and Jack his brother built a log house with the help of the gardener’s children, and dug a ditch around it which they contrived to fill with water, and made a drawbridge that really could pull up and down. Here again war proceeded. The fort was stormed. I was hurriedly removed from the scene of action as soon as mud and stones began to fly with effect.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Spencer Wilkinson, *Essays on the War-Game* (Manchester: Manchester Tactical Society, 1887), pp. 8, 11.

<sup>73</sup> “The Game of War”, *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, Mar. 14, 1872, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> *Rules for the Conduct of the War-Game* (London: H. M. S. O, 1872), p. iii.

<sup>75</sup> “Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on the Militia and volunteers”, Vol. 1, British Parliamentary Papers, Cd. 2062, (London: H. M. S. O., 1904), pp. 34, 52, 354.

<sup>76</sup> Brown, “Modelling for War”, pp. 237-248.

<sup>77</sup> CAC, CHAR 28/29/41-42.

<sup>78</sup> Aidan Crawley, *De Gaulle: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 17; D’Este, *Warlord*, p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> Sheridan, *Nuda Veritas*, p. 14; *MEL*, pp. 43-44.

If “the toy soldier, long after he has been put away with other childish things lives on unchallenged by reason,”<sup>80</sup> as one sociologist suggests, it is important to note again that in some ways Winston never grew out of his inner world of make-believe. H. G. Wells wrote of playing war games with the adult Churchill and other politicians, “whose imaginations were manifestly built” on the “early war fantasies” engendered by “amusing model warfare” with “toy soldiers and guns”, and who “remained puerile in their political outlook because of its persistence.”<sup>81</sup> Certainly in this way too, as this chapter has so far contended, Churchill always kept at least one foot firmly planted in the fancies his younger years, and always resisted the complete abandonment of his early conceptions of warfare which found their shape as an adult, as they did in boyhood, in toy soldiers and war games, amongst other things. James Lees-Milne, a friend of Churchill’s son, told of one visit to Chartwell when he and the elderly Sir Winston “remained at that round table till after midnight. The table cloth had long ago been removed. Mr Churchill spent a blissful two hours demonstrating with decanters and wine glasses how the Battle of Jutland was fought. It was a thrilling experience. He was fascinating. He got all worked up like a schoolboy, making barking noises in imitation of gunfire and blowing cigar smoke across the battle scene in imitation of gun smoke.”<sup>82</sup> Reflecting soon before his patient’s death, Churchill’s doctor wrote that the story of the Churchill as war leader “begins for me with a small boy playing with his tin soldiers on the floor of his nursery at the Little Lodge in Dublin.”<sup>83</sup> Churchill himself believed the same, and later admitted that it was “the toy soldiers that turned the current of my life.”<sup>84</sup>

The parental absence that began at Churchill’s birth continued almost unabated throughout his school years. He was so lonely that he could have been an orphan.<sup>85</sup> While at his first school neither of his parents bothered to visit him,<sup>86</sup> despite his persistent pleas to “come soon” and “I am wondering when you are coming to see me?”<sup>87</sup> At his second school, his father failed to call on him even when Lord Randolph was very nearby on another appointment—a snub that happened more than once,<sup>88</sup> despite Winston’s protestations.<sup>89</sup> And,

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<sup>80</sup> E. Parsons, “The Toy Soldier”, *Educational Review* (June, 1915), p. 92, as quoted in Brown, “Modelling for War”, p. 246.

<sup>81</sup> H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, Vol. 1 (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934) p. 102.

<sup>82</sup> *Churchill*, 5, p. 265.

<sup>83</sup> Moran, *The Struggle for Survival*, p. 327.

<sup>84</sup> *MEL*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>85</sup> J. C. Humes, *Churchill: Speaker of the Century* (New York: Scarborough, 1982), p. 14; Marthe Bibesco, *Sir Winston Churchill, Master of Courage* (London: R. Hale, 1957), p. 32; Lucille Iremonger, *The Fiery Chariot: A Study of British Prime Ministers and the Search for Love* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970), p. 23; Robert Louis Taylor, *Winston Churchill: An Informal Study of Greatness* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1952), p. 93.

<sup>86</sup> Manchester, *The Last Lion*, p. 125.

<sup>87</sup> Celia Sandys, *From Winston With Love and Kisses* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), pp. 48-49, 51.

<sup>88</sup> Manchester, *The Last Lion*, p. 125.

at his third school, each parent visited only once—separately—and did not arrange for the traditional “leaving breakfast” when he left Harrow. Instead he departed alone, in a cab.<sup>90</sup>

During his eleven years away from home and at boarding school, there developed a self-reliance and pugnacity that came to hallmark his intellectual development as a soldier. It is not unlike the ambition previously discussed, except that it was a determination coupled with self-confidence in his success. In 1899, a fellow war correspondent, J. B. Atkins, came across Churchill for the first time: “I had not before encountered this sort of ambition, unabashed, frankly egotistical, communicating its excitement, and extorting sympathy.” Atkins later remembered: “He stood alone and confident, and his natural power to be himself yielded to no man...His tenacity forbids the belief that he is capable of ever being disheartened; the more he scents frustration the more has to fight for...If he had only one arm and half a lung he would continue to fight.”<sup>91</sup> “If I am not good enough—others are welcome to take my place”, Churchill wrote his mother from India in 1898. “I should never care to bolster up a sham reputation and hold my position by disguising my personality. Of course—as you have known for some time—I believe in myself.”<sup>92</sup> That same year he wrote of the Mahdi—though he could have been thinking of his own experience—that “Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong; and a boy deprived of his father’s care often develops, if he escapes the perils of youth, an independence and vigour of thought which may restore in after life the heavy loss of early days.”<sup>93</sup> Again he wrote to Lady Randolph: “I have faith in my star—that is that I am intended to do something in this world.”<sup>94</sup> Before 1900 he was to express to three people on three different continents his fervid belief that he would one day be Prime Minister of Britain.<sup>95</sup>

Such self-assuredness was also evident in his life as a soldier. He operated “with neck out-thrust”, as Browning characterized Napoleon,<sup>96</sup> a posture evident in his military temperament—both as a soldier fighting war and as a politician directing war. In less than four years following his commission as a cavalry subaltern in the Fourth Hussars, Winston would see military action in as many theatres of war, “not an ungenerous allowance for a field-officer of more service than Winston Spencer Churchill counts years of his life”,<sup>97</sup> and itself a testament to his determination. “He was a soldier of fortune”, his son later wrote. “He had to

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<sup>89</sup> *Churchill, CV, 1, i, pp. 113, 127.*

<sup>90</sup> Chaplin, *Winston Churchill and Harrow*, pp. 83–84.

<sup>91</sup> Atkins, *Incidents and Reflections*, pp. 122, 131.

<sup>92</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 26 January 1898, CAC, CHAR 28/24/26–29.

<sup>93</sup> *Churchill, 1, p. 241.*

<sup>94</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 5 September 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/53/52.

<sup>95</sup> *Churchill, 1, pp. 352–54.* Churchill was not alone in foretelling his destiny, and some others supposed it of him. *Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 1153.*

<sup>96</sup> Robert Browning, *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 383.

<sup>97</sup> G. W. Steevens, “The Youngest Man in Europe”, in Charles Eade (ed.), *Churchill By His Contemporaries* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), pp. 63, 65.

make his way, he had to make his name.”<sup>98</sup> The war correspondent, G. W. Steevens, noted in 1898 that Winston’s “self-confidence bobs up irresistibly, though seniority and common sense and facts themselves conspire to force it down.”<sup>99</sup> It was this dogged tenaciousness that Charles Masterman recognized:

In nearly every case an idea enters his head from the outside. It then rolls round the hollow of his brain, collecting strength like a snowball. Then, after whiling winds of rhetoric, he becomes convinced that it is right: and denounces every one who criticizes it...And he can convince himself of almost every truth if it is once allowed thus to start on its wild career through his rhetorical machinery.<sup>100</sup>

“Winston has always seen things in blinkers”, his wife observed in 1945.<sup>101</sup> Historian Ronald Lewin argued that Winston’s self-determination, self-confidence, and self-reliance, characteristics impacted by his many years alone at boarding school, led to a mentality in which he “was certain that he was right, *ruat coelom*, nothing could shake or distract him: an inflexibility which marred his war leadership as it did of Hitler.”<sup>102</sup> The inflexibility demonstrated by Churchill in his persistent efforts to force the Dardanelles is well known, as is his preoccupation with Norway in the Second World War. In November 1941, Churchill fixed himself upon the idea of capturing Pantelleria, a tiny island northwest of Malta, and held steady in this conviction long after the enthusiasm of the Chiefs of Staff waned. He could “defend a sound or an unsound idea with equal persuasiveness.”<sup>103</sup> His faith in himself is almost interminable in his military intellectual composition, and no doubt found its roots in his school years, when he had little other choice.

Winston’s happy days in the nursery came to an end when, aged eight, he was enrolled as a boarder at St. George’s near Ascot, on 3 November 1882. His school days were some of the unhappiest of his life.<sup>104</sup> He was “miserable at the idea of being left alone among all these strangers in this great, fierce, formidable place”, after having “been so happy...with all of [his] wonderful toys: a real steam engine, a magic lantern, and a collection of soldiers already nearly a thousand strong.”<sup>105</sup> Touting itself as a preparatory school for elite establishments like Harrow and Eton, St. George’s was a fashionable and expensive school—fifty-two pounds for

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<sup>98</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 397.

<sup>99</sup> Steevens, “The Youngest Man in Europe”, p. 65.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Rhodes James, “Churchill the Parliamentarian, Orator, and Statesman”, in Robert Blake and William Roger Louis (eds.), *Churchill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 508.

<sup>101</sup> Barton Biggs, *Wealth, War, and Wisdom* (Hoboken: John Wiley, 2008), p. 63.

<sup>102</sup> Ronald Lewin, *Churchill as Warlord*, (London: Batsford, Ltd., 1973), p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> Ted Morgan, *Churchill: The Rise to Failure, 1874-1915* (London: Triad/Panther, 1984), p. 313.

<sup>104</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 45.

<sup>105</sup> *MEL*, p. 24.

the first month<sup>106</sup>—run by Rev. H. W. Sneyd-Keynnersley, the sadistic headmaster who was known mostly by the students for his relentless floggings, oftentimes leaving the victim bleeding and scarred. Yet despite the certainty of severe punishment, Winston remained one of the most hardheaded mischief-makers in the school, where his sojourn had been “one long feud with authority”; he gained a reputation for rule-breaking and pugnacity that would follow him into his days of soldiering.<sup>107</sup>

Churchill’s feud with authority and his corresponding resistance to anything he did not like or found boring was the central reason for any early academic failure. An examination of his reports from St. George’s shows that where his average mark was quite low, it was brought down by subjects in which he scored low in part because he cared nothing about them. However, when intrigued and excited by subjects—namely history and geography—he performed above average and, in some cases, even exceptionally well. In these subjects his school reports described his performance as “very good”, “very fair”, “very erratic—sometimes exceedingly good”, and “very good”.<sup>108</sup>

Though the exact causes which led Winston’s parents to take him away from St. George’s are unknown, it is thought that both his poor health and the discovery of the welts on his backside were instrumental to Lady Randolph enrolling him in a new school in September 1884. Winston’s horrific experience at St. George’s left lasting scars. Many years later, when asked about his experience, he said: “If my mother hadn’t listened to Mrs Everest and taken me away I would have broken down completely. Can you imagine a child being *broken down*?...I can never forget that school. It was horrible.”<sup>109</sup>

Though Churchill’s views on military discipline and the treatment of prisoners of war (stemming, at least in part, from his own experience as a captive) will be more fully discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine, note here the compassion instilled in him at an early age. Present again is a trait rooted, wrote Anthony Storr, in his early environment, “a generalized capacity to identify himself with the underdog.”<sup>110</sup> It was an empathy extended especially to the underprivileged,<sup>111</sup> and in the military context, the defeated enemy and prisoners of war. In Egypt Winston was repulsed by reports of the killing of the Dervish wounded, and wrote to his mother “that ‘the victory at Omdurman’ was disgraced by the inhuman slaughter of the

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>107</sup> Baring, *The Puppet Show of Memory*, p. 71.

<sup>108</sup> CAC, CHAR 28/44/2-8.

<sup>109</sup> Anita Leslie, *The Life of Lady Randolph Churchill* (London: Hutchinson & Co.: London, 1969), p. 82.

<sup>110</sup> Storr, “The Man”, p. 233.

<sup>111</sup> His consideration of Mrs. Everest whilst she was living, and efforts to mitigate the plight of old age pensioners after her death, is a prime example. See *Churchill*, 1, pp. 207-08, 244, 245, 246; *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 578-79, 424-25; Carter, *Winston Churchill*, p. 13; *MEL*, pp. 86-87.

wounded and that Kitchener is responsible for this.”<sup>112</sup> After the battle, Churchill contrasted the actions of Sir Bindon Blood, who had permitted, after forcing the Tanga Pass, the Mohammedan soldiers to visit the Tomb of the Akhund of Swat, with those of Kitchener, who ordered the Mahdi’s tomb razed and his body dug up. “He may be a general”, Winston declared of Kitchener, “but never a gentleman.”<sup>113</sup>

Writing after his experience on the North-West Frontier, Churchill expressed the necessity of compassion for a defeated enemy: “‘Never despise your enemy’ is an old lesson, but it has to be learnt afresh, year by year, by every nation that is warlike and brave.”<sup>114</sup> As an old man he told his physician of how a British tank crew, having been forced to surrender on the western front in the Second World War, had been saluted by the German soldiers. “That is how I like war to be conducted”, he said.<sup>115</sup> As Home Secretary, Churchill was a strong advocate for prison reform and sought to help the prisoners in every way. Among his proposals was a plan to allow “time to pay”, reform for young offenders, amending the rules for solitary confinement, and the establishment of a “central after-care association” for released convicts.<sup>116</sup>

With the Misses Thomson at 29 & 30 Brunswick Road, Hove, his new school, Winston’s academic performance improved dramatically. Only the reports from his first three terms survive, but in these he went from the bottom of the class in many subjects to the top third of the class—or better—in almost every subject. Remarks from his tutors included such praises as “showed decided improvement”, “very satisfactory progress made”, “very marked progress”, and, “If he continues to improve in steadiness and application, as during this term, he will do very well indeed.” In his second and third terms he scored very near the top of his class in English and French, and in the latter term was first in his classics class.<sup>117</sup> Overall he seemed to enjoy his studies.<sup>118</sup> Any improvement in academics at Brighton did not, however, seem to affect Winston’s conduct.<sup>119</sup>

Throughout his early years, Churchill found that the “greatest pleasure I had in those days was reading.”<sup>120</sup> “My teachers saw me at once backward and precocious,” Churchill later

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<sup>112</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 1004.

<sup>113</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The River War*, Vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1899), pp. 212-14 [hereafter TRW]; WSC to LRC, letter dated 26 August 1898, CAC, CHAR 28/25/38. It should be noted that Winston reserved this pronouncement for private correspondence with his mother and also with Ian Hamilton, see Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 979.

<sup>114</sup> WSC, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force: An Episode of Frontier War* (London: Longmans, 1899), p. 208 [hereafter MFF].

<sup>115</sup> Moran, *The Struggle for Survival*, p. 416.

<sup>116</sup> Churchill, 2, pp. 388-91.

<sup>117</sup> CAC, CHAR 28/44/9-11.

<sup>118</sup> “We are learning Paradise Lost for Elocution, it is very nice. I am getting on very well indeed in my work.” CAC, CHAR 28/13/97; CAC, CHAR 28/14/20.

<sup>119</sup> Germains, *The Tragedy of Winston Churchill*, p. 13.

<sup>120</sup> MEL, p. 26.

wrote, “reading books beyond my years and yet at the bottom of the Form.”<sup>121</sup> Winston sought newspapers’ take on a wide array of contemporary cultural and military issues, studying the accounts of the Haymarket riot in Chicago, the erecting of the Statue of Liberty, and the Belgian conquest of the Congo.<sup>122</sup> And as through all of his life, from an early age he fed on political articles, an appetite undoubtedly made keener by his father’s presence in them. “Thank you very much indeed for your news-paper”, Winston wrote to Lady Randolph, a sentiment often repeated:<sup>123</sup> “The Extra Supplement to the *Graphic* is very good indeed, it is of Papa in the library with all the Photographs and the ink-stand.”<sup>124</sup>

The indifference of Lord Randolph did not destroy the loyalty of his son.<sup>125</sup> Winston later wrote that “the greatest and most powerful influence in my early life was of course my father. Although I had talked with him so seldom and never for a moment on equal terms, I conceived an intense admiration and affection for him...I read industriously almost every word he had ever spoken and learnt by heart large portions of his speeches. I took my politics almost unquestioningly from him.”<sup>126</sup> “In fact”, Winston said, Lord Randolph “seemed to own the key to everything or almost everything worth having.”<sup>127</sup>

Winston’s insistence on his father’s awesome influence, though sincere, cannot be taken as the settled, definite source of his own political opinions. The story was more complicated. Lord Randolph’s political attitudes, especially with regards to Empire, were sometimes unconventional and not always without contradiction; Winston’s adherence to them, though never lacking in respect, was hardly steadfast. Winston’s first memory was, in fact, one of Empire, as he witnessed his grandfather, the Duke, unveil a statue of the imperial hero Lord Gough in Dublin’s Phoenix Park. He also remembered the unrest that had, in his very early years, already embroiled Ireland in conflict and violence. “My nurse, Mrs. Everest, was nervous about the Fenians”, Churchill recalled. “I gathered these were wicked people and there was no end to what they would do if they had their way.”<sup>128</sup> On the question of Irish Home Rule, it was “Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right” that was Lord Randolph’s famous *bon mot* of the 1880s.<sup>129</sup> Churchill certainly appreciated the phrase, and for many years supported his father’s position. But once a minister his opinion soon “ripened”, and he became

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Manchester, *The Last Lion*, p. 128. In May 1885 he grew interested in the contest over the nature of Victor Hugo’s state funeral and burial and asked his mother: “Will you send me the paper with Victor Hugo’s funeral in it?” CAC, CHAR 28/13/64-65.

<sup>123</sup> CAC, CHAR 28/13/51.

<sup>124</sup> CAC, CHAR 28/13/66.

<sup>125</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill*, p. 27.

<sup>126</sup> WSC, *Thoughts and Adventures* (London: Macmillan, 1943), pp. 41-42 [hereafter *TAA*].

<sup>127</sup> *MEL*, p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>129</sup> WSC, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 65.

“convinced that a national settlement of the Irish difficulty...is indispensable to any harmonious conception of Liberalism.”<sup>130</sup>

In 1898 Winston would serve in Egypt, a place capturing much of Lord Randolph’s political attention in the 1880s. In 1882 Britain intervened in Egypt to quell a nationalist revolt that threatened her significant economic interests and investments. After the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir, Lord Randolph grew convinced, rather unconventionally, that the Khedive purposely incited the revolt so as to usher in the British, stating in June 1883 that “the author of the massacres at Alexandria was the Khedive of Egypt, our puppet and ally.”<sup>131</sup> But this was not a rejection of imperialism per se, but only of a British propping-up of Cairo. “Let them take Egypt altogether if they liked,” Lord Randolph said, “but let the country be under persons responsible to the English Government who would rid the country of its burdens and raise the fellaheen from their present low state.”<sup>132</sup> Lord Randolph would go on to lambaste the Government for its failure to rescue General Charles Gordon, and earned widespread recognition for his outspoken criticisms in speeches in which he advocated “a policy of activity for the national welfare, combined with a zeal for Imperial security.”<sup>133</sup> For his part, Winston would later serve under Kitchener in the retaking of Khartoum and, as some would call it, the avenging of Gordon’s death.<sup>134</sup>

Before Winston served as cavalry subaltern in India and the on the North-West Frontier, Lord Randolph was appointed (by Lord Salisbury) to the Cabinet post of Secretary of State for India. Contradictions hallmarked at least part of his seven months in that post, most notably the apparent admiration in which he regarded the Indians whilst in their country, versus the scorn and insult he heaped upon them once back in Britain. Liberal ideas turned more radical, and Lord Randolph, who was a “polite and intelligent listener” during the Indian National Congress of 1885, returned to Britain mocking the “ignorance and credulity” of the Indians whilst promulgating Upper Burmese annexation and general military expansionism.<sup>135</sup>

It was South Africa that was to be the setting of Churchill’s final pre-Parliament military service, and it was to South Africa that *The Times* announced Lord Randolph would visit in May 1891.<sup>136</sup> For a considerable sum Lord Randolph had contracted with the *Daily Graphic* to print accounts of his experiences, and his letters and imperial pronouncements

<sup>130</sup> Churchill, 2, pp. 440-510, 450.

<sup>131</sup> Hansard, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 8 June 1883, Vol. 280, 49.

<sup>132</sup> “Lord R. Churchill at Chatham”, *The Times* (London, England), 7 June 1883, p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, Vol. 1, p. 290.

<sup>134</sup> Woods, *Young Winston’s Wars*, pp. 175-76.

<sup>135</sup> R. F. Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 204;

Richard Toye, *Churchill’s Empire* (London: Macmillan, 2010), pp. 10-11.

<sup>136</sup> Brian Roberts, *Churchills in Africa* (London: Hamilton, 1970), p. 4.

stayed true to his—sometimes startling<sup>137</sup>—unconventionality. Certain Portuguese territory in Mozambique should be occupied by the British, he said, before going on—astonishingly—to support Gladstone’s policy of the restoration of the Boer republic of the Transvaal during the peace settlement after the British defeat at the Battle of Majuba Hill. While many Conservatives regarded this relinquishment as a black mark against imperialism, Lord Randolph instead said that it had provided a solution to “a wretched and discreditable muddle, not without harm and damage, but probably in the best possible manner, and that the lessons have been taught... which, if learned, may be of the utmost value in framing future policy.”<sup>138</sup> But despite this endorsement of the Boer-favouring peace settlement, Lord Randolph was still incredibly insulting, writing that the Boer farmers’ “simple ignorance is unfathomable, and this in stolid composure he shares with his wife, his sons, his daughters, being proud that his children should grow up as ignorant, as uncultivated, as hopelessly unprogressive as himself.”<sup>139</sup>

Winston followed his father’s South African journey with much attentiveness (“I think your letters [to the *Daily Graphic*] are very interesting” and “charming”<sup>140</sup>), and whilst at Harrow he received an uncharacteristically warm-hearted letter from Lord Randolph, then in Johannesburg. “I have been having a most agreeable travel in this very remarkable country. I expect that when you are my age you will see S Africa to be the most populous and wealthy of our colonies.”<sup>141</sup> Winston kept abreast of the press coverage of his father, which he wrote to him as being “particularly offensive”,<sup>142</sup> as well as “exceedingly spiteful & vicious.”<sup>143</sup> Winston also asked Lord Randolph for some South African stamps and an antelope head, and hinted at his growing taste for adventure in far off and exotic places by lamenting to his father that “I do wish I were ‘out’ with you”<sup>144</sup>, and “I wish you had taken me. What fun I should have had.”<sup>145</sup> “I hear the horrid Boers are incensed with you”, wrote Winston. “It would have been much wiser, if you had waited till you came back, before you ‘slanged the beggars.’”<sup>146</sup>

Despite Winston’s pronouncement of his father as the source of almost all of his political opinions, the exact influence of Lord Randolph’s imperial thinking upon his son is, as

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<sup>137</sup> “With Mr. Rhodes through Mashonaland”, *Review of Reviews*, Vol. 5, No. 26 (Feb., 1892), p. 190.

<sup>138</sup> Randolph S. Churchill, *Men, Mines and Animals in South Africa* (London: Sampson Low, 1892), p. 25.

<sup>139</sup> Churchill, *Men, Mines and Animals*, p. 94.

<sup>140</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 22 July 1891, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 260; WSC to RC, letter dated 8 July 1891, *Ibid.*, pp. 253–54.

<sup>141</sup> RC to WSC, Letter dated 27 June 1891, *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>142</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 8 July 1891, *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>143</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 22 July 1891, *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>144</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 8 July 1891, *Ibid.*, p. 254; WSC to RC, letter dated 22 July 1891, *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>145</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 27 September [1891], *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

Richard Toye observed, difficult to judge.<sup>147</sup> Their personal relationship was not close, and they were never—to Winston’s great regret—political or intellectual compatriots. If “ever I began to show the slightest idea of comradeship,” Churchill later wrote, “he was immediately offended... When I became most closely acquainted with his thought and theme, he was already dead.”<sup>148</sup> But his father’s death spurred in Winston an even greater desire for acquaintance with Lord Randolph’s life. “I conceived an intense admiration and affection for him, and, after his early death, for his memory”, Winston later wrote.<sup>149</sup> Whist in India, Winston “soaked himself in the speeches of his father”,<sup>150</sup> memorizing large portions of them and interacting with the issues as best he could via marginalia in the records of various Parliamentary debates. The two-volume biography he published in 1906 demonstrates the ardor with which Churchill studied his father—a biography, admittedly, which sometimes took pains to downplay the irregularities and eccentricities that Lord Randolph, especially in his final years, fell victim to.<sup>151</sup> Wilfred Scawen Blunt pointed out that in the biography there was “nothing at all about his father’s more Indian liberal views.”<sup>152</sup> But though some things were conveniently deemphasized, it is notable that the opposite was not always true, and that the biography did not, with regards to the subject of interest here, cast Lord Randolph as a barefaced imperialist; it even admitted that “Lord Randolph Churchill was never what is nowadays called an Imperialist and always looked at home rather than abroad.”<sup>153</sup> In the same way that Winston noticed the limits of his father’s imperialism, so too was Lord Randolph’s impression of imperialism on Winston also limited. Probably less important were his father’s specific political policies and programmes, but rather the strong rhetorical undercurrent in general support of the British Empire, which would have helped keep afloat and carry forward the other imperialistic influences of Winston’s youth.

Even from a young age Winston encountered and interacted with imperialistic intimations—some of them overt. He was born in Blenheim Palace, “a monument to his great ancestor’s famous victory over Britain’s hereditary foe and chief colonial rival.”<sup>154</sup> He spent his early years in an upper-class, Victorian, highly political home with a father whose star shone so brightly that that no son could have wholly escaped its light—no matter how distant the

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<sup>147</sup> Toye, *Churchill’s Empire*, p. 14.

<sup>148</sup> *MEL*, p. 60; *TAA*, p. 42.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>150</sup> Paul Addison, “The Political Beliefs of Winston Churchill”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 30 (1980), p. 31.

<sup>151</sup> Peter Clarke, *Mr Churchill’s Profession* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 21–22.

<sup>152</sup> Wilfred Scawen Blunt, “Lord Randolph: A Personal Recollection”, *Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. 59 (March, 1906), p. 406.

<sup>153</sup> WSC, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, Vol. 2, p. 117.

<sup>154</sup> Piers Brendon, “A Churchill and Empire”, unpublished lecture, sent to author on 10 March 2013. This author is grateful to Dr. Brendon for kindly providing the text of his lecture.

source might have been. And nor would Winston have wanted to. Again, it should be noted that the effect of these influences is in question, for how does one measure the impact the small rivulet that, when eventually joined with many others, goes on to form the cataract? One can only point to probable contributing factors and, as it were, tell the story backwards and identify early clues that, knowing something of the finale, might help explain the first act. This chapter, then, does not propose to establish indubitable linkages of cause to effect with respect to Churchill's youthful influences and his later imperialism; instead, as with every question herein, it examines some of the shaping forces that might help the reader add scaffolding to Winston's early military intellectual development.

Winston's exposure to imperialism began early and did not always take the form of formal indoctrination.<sup>155</sup> His parents, as noted, often kept at arm's length, surrendering intimacy with their son to Mrs. Everest. When Churchill was four he visited Ventnor, the coastal town on the Isle of Wight, to stay with Mrs. Everest's sister and her husband, John Balaam, who had fought against the Zulus. As Churchill later remembered:

There were pictures in the papers of these Zulus. They were black and naked, with spears called "assegais" which they threw very cleverly. They killed a great many of our soldiers, but judging from the pictures, not nearly so many as our soldiers killed of them. I was very angry with the Zulus, and glad to hear they were being killed; and so was my friend, the old prison warder. After a while it seemed that they were all killed, because this particular war came to an end and there were no more pictures of Zulus in the papers and nobody worried any more about them.<sup>156</sup>

As a lover of reading, young Winston undoubtedly absorbed things that helped to form and shape his military ethos, especially as much of the popular boys' literature of his youth was so pervasively influenced by sentiments of imperialism and empire.<sup>157</sup> "Boys' books and periodicals were without exception dedicated to the imperial idea", and though there existed many variances of expression of imperialism and empire in various publications (and at various times) during this era, given the unsurprising leanings of a Victorian upper-class English boy born at Blenheim Palace, Churchill was enamored by the grand adventure stories of his day.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, p. 15.

<sup>156</sup> *MEL*, p. 20.

<sup>157</sup> Patrick A. Dunae, "Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914", *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980), p. 105.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106. See Dunae's entire article for an insightful study of the changing expression of imperialism in boys' literature from 1870 to 1914.

“When I was nine and a half my father gave me *Treasure Island*”, Winston later wrote, “and I remember the delight with which I devoured it.”<sup>159</sup> He particularly relished the novels of G. A. Henty, the “great Imperialist”, who espoused themes of “Jingoism...the Jubilees...[and] when the English were conscious for a brief period of a manifest destiny.”<sup>160</sup> Beginning in 1876, Henty published eighty novels that told of adventures in the far reaches of the British Empire; it is estimated that by 1898, when Churchill was fighting in the Sudan, annual Henty sales reached 250,000.<sup>161</sup> Henty was “one of those whose influence makes for the greatness of England, an England which will fight, if duty really calls, at one of those crises in a nation’s life which show which is the true worth and which the base.”<sup>162</sup> As Henty himself once admitted, “Officers have repeatedly told me that many have offered themselves for service simply after reading these little stories of mine.”<sup>163</sup> It is easy to see how reading Henty most likely dovetailed and bolstered Winston’s enthusiasm for things patriotic and martial.

Whilst at Brighton, Winston requested that his mother send him two recent novels published by H. Rider Haggard, the Victorian adventure writer, who wrote hugely popular tales of Englishmen and Englishwomen set in Africa and other foreign and exotic surroundings: “Will you send me a book to read I have got nothing at all to read now. I should like ‘She’ or ‘Jess’ very much indeed.”<sup>164</sup> After reading *King Solomon’s Mines* at least twelve times, Churchill set Haggard up as something of a literary idol, and in January 1888 he used his Aunt Leonie’s friendship with the author to request a visit.<sup>165</sup> Afterwards, Haggard sent him copy of his newest sequel, for which Churchill thanked him: “Thank you so much for sending me *Allan Quatermain*; it was so good of you. I like *A. Q.* better than *King Solomon’s Mines*; it is more amusing. I hope you will write a good many more books.”<sup>166</sup>

Alongside novels by the likes of Henty and Haggard, Winston would have most likely been exposed to works of nonfiction retelling the exploits of British soldiers on the imperial frontier. Sir Edward Creasey’s *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World: From Marathon to Waterloo* would be, in the years following its 1851 appearance, published in thirty-one editions,

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<sup>159</sup> MEL, p. 27.

<sup>160</sup> Guy Arnold, *Held Fast for England* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980), p. 63. The title of Churchill’s 1930 autobiography, *My Early Life: A Roving Commission*, might have come from *A Roving Commission (or Through the Black Insurrection of Hayti)*, a book published by Henty in 1900.

<sup>161</sup> Janet Phillips and Peter Phillips, *Victorians at Home and Away* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 166.

<sup>162</sup> George Manville Fenn, *George Alfred Henty, the Story of an Active Life* (London: Blackie and Son, 1907), p. 339.

<sup>163</sup> Robert L. Dartt, *G. A. Henty, A Bibliography* (Cedar Grove, N. J.: Dar-Web, 1971), pp. 75-76.

<sup>164</sup> CAC, CHAR 28/14/20.

<sup>165</sup> “What do you mean?” Winston, during the meeting, pushed on a disputed point. Haggard, no doubt experiencing the full reality of his name, “confessed he did not know himself.” Shane Leslie, *The End of a Chapter* (London: Constable and Co., 1916), p. 117.

<sup>166</sup> Cowles, *Winston Churchill*, p. 31.

allowing the British to “revel in accounts of slaughter.”<sup>167</sup> In 1891, *Strand Magazine* began running a new series entitled “Story of the VC: Told by those who have won it.” These proved to be as successful as another new series entitled “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.”<sup>168</sup> Winston also owned *Routledge’s Every Boy’s Annual* for 1884, a periodical usually filled with stories filled with marital exploits, steeped in the themes of Victorian imperialism, and decorated with vivid imagery of uniformed British soldiers strutting proudly or combatting a wide array of foes.<sup>169</sup> Many compilations such as these were pregnant with the romantic nationalism, exportation of civilization, and the gentlemanly warfare of which Winston Churchill grew so keen during his early formative years.

Winston said at the very beginning of his autobiography that he “was a child of the Victorian era, when the structure of our country seemed firmly set, when its position in trade and on the seas was unrivalled, and when the realization of the greatness of our Empire and of our duty to preserve it was ever growing stronger.” He continued: “In those days the dominant forces in Great Britain were very sure of themselves and of their doctrines. They thought they would teach the world the art of government, and the science of economics. They were sure they were supreme at sea and consequently safe at home. They rest therefore sedately under the convictions of power and security.”<sup>170</sup> This was a drastic oversimplification; an epoch whose start and end dates were open to debate was certainly filled with hundreds of contradictions.<sup>171</sup> Optimism was met by pessimism, piety by skepticism, and the intellectual life of the period was wrought with incongruities.<sup>172</sup> “On the one hand, there were the rocks of pragmatism, rationality and earnestness upon which those currents constantly broke only to regather again.”<sup>173</sup> And yet, despite these tensions, there was still “the Victorians’ faith in their progress,” what one historian called “perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the age.”<sup>174</sup>

But even so, as a “child of the Victorian era”, Churchill’s military ethos was impacted by it. The newspaperman Cecil King described Churchill as “a man of the 19<sup>th</sup>, if not the 18<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>167</sup> Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 210-11.

<sup>168</sup> Phillips, *Victorians at Home and Away*, p. 166; Jablonsky, *Churchill*, p. 15.

<sup>169</sup> Edmund Routledge (ed.), *Every Boy’s Annual* (George Routledge and Sons, 1884).

<sup>170</sup> *MEL*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>171</sup> Simon J. Potter, “Empire, Cultures and Identities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain”, *History Compass*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2007), pp. 51-71.

<sup>172</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 219; Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*; “There is no such thing as a Victorian society or a Victorian culture.” Eugene C. Black, *Victorian Culture and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. ix. See Jablonsky, *Churchill*, pp. 6-43.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>174</sup> David Grey and Eva Leckström Grey (trans.), Herbert Tingsten, *Victoria and the Victorians* (London: George Allen, 1972), p. 22.

century; he knows little and cares less for the political currents of the day. To him war is a vast pageant with himself in a scarlet uniform on a white horse, baton in hand, leading the British forces forward through the smoke of battle.”<sup>175</sup> In an era in which the British Empire was hailed by Lord Curzon as “the greatest instrument for good the world has ever seen”,<sup>176</sup> Churchill, in 1890, aroused by the influenza epidemic that was spreading throughout Europe, won a prize for a poem published in *The Harrovian*, the school newspaper. Though most of the twelve stanzas told of the disease’s effect on continental cities, the final lines were devoted to a cause that would forever animate Churchill, and which would help undergird some if not much of his military thought: the paramountcy of the British Empire:<sup>177</sup>

God shield our Empire from the might  
Of famine, plague or blight  
And all the power of Hell,  
And keep it eve in the hands  
Of those fought ‘gainst other lands,  
Who fought and conquered well.<sup>178</sup>

But though it is true that “the Victorian world of empire was the foundation of Winston Churchill’s belief and upbringing”,<sup>179</sup> it remains equally true that in some military spheres his understanding and interaction with that imperialism was somewhat an evolving enigma. On the one hand, he believed in the overarching imperial project of Britain; it matched his romanticism well. As a young boy the prospect of the Jubilee captivated Winston, and he begged Lady Randolph to let him attend the celebrations: “I can thinking of nothing else but Jubilee”, he wrote to her.<sup>180</sup> Churchill was ten years of age when Major-General Charles “Chinese” Gordon, the famous martyr for British imperialism, was killed in the Sudan. He shared the Queen’s indignation as a young boy, and continued to hold Gordon in high respect in *The River War*, prompting the *Daily Mail* to remark in its review of the book that “Nothing can exceed Mr Churchill’s admiration of the hero.”<sup>181</sup> After retaking of Khartoum, Churchill thought that it would be a good thing to “tell some stonemason to bring his hammer and chisel and cut on the pedestal of Gordon’s statue in Trafalgar Square the significant, the

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<sup>175</sup> William Armstrong (ed.), *With Malice Toward None: A War Diary by Cecil H. King* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), p. 300.

<sup>176</sup> J. H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain, 1900-1939* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 196.

<sup>177</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 979; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), p. 376; Best, *Churchill and War*, pp. 97, 250, 258.

<sup>178</sup> Harrow School Archive, *The Harrovian*, 1940, Vol. 54, Issue 11, p. 39; Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>179</sup> D’Este, *Warlord*, p. 56.

<sup>180</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 135.

<sup>181</sup> Churchill, 1, p. 457; Jablonsky, *Churchill*, p. 15.

sinister, yet the somehow satisfactory word, ‘Avenged.’”<sup>182</sup> That same month, after condemning the “treatment of the wounded” at Omdurman as “disgraceful”, Churchill still declared to Ian Hamilton that “My faith in our race & blood was much strengthened.”<sup>183</sup> The heroic deeds of the British dead would, the young journalist wrote, be memorialized not only by monuments of stone, but by the “destruction of a state of society which had long become an anachronism—an insult as well as a danger to civilization; the liberation of a great waterway; perhaps the foundation of an India; certainly the settlement of a long account.”<sup>184</sup> In the 1930s Churchill wrote this encomium of Joseph Chamberlain: “But it was when as an Imperialist he revived in the Tory party the inspiration of Disraeli and made the world-spread peoples of the British Empire realize that they were one, and that their nature lay in acting upon his knowledge, that the life-work of Chamberlain entered its widest and loftiest sphere.”<sup>185</sup> Charles Wilson would later record one response of President Roosevelt to Churchill when he visited Washington during the winter of 1941–42: “He was a great Tory... Why, he talked about the British Empire as if he was living in the reign of Queen Victoria!”<sup>186</sup>

On the other hand, though, it was against this backdrop of a general belief in the project of Empire that Churchill expressed some reservations when he saw the consequences of imperialism played out on the frontier. Whether he was there for the glory of Britain or the glory of Churchill, while on the battlefield Winston had to face the reality that either glory came at a cost. In his reporting his sentiments were ambivalent; he shifted from the Victorian pragmatic necessity of death for the cause of Empire to the very real horrors of the late-nineteenth century battlefield. What began on the North-West Frontier as the “healthy, open-air life, the vivid incidents, the excitement, not only of realisation, but of anticipation, the generous and cheery friendships, the chances of distinction which are open to all...[and] memories...which few men do not hold precious”,<sup>187</sup> had succumbed to reality a year later when he reported that “bullets were shearing through flesh, smashing and splintering bone; blood spouted from terrible wounds; valiant men were struggling on through a hell of whistling metal, exploding shells, and spurting dust—suffering, despairing, dying.”<sup>188</sup> The Battle of Spion Kop had particular effect on Churchill, and he reported of his riding with Captain Brooke to ascertain the true nature of the situation: “Streams of wounded met us and

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<sup>182</sup> WSC to *The Morning Post* (London, England) [hereafter *MP*], dispatch dated 9 September 1898, published 6 October 1898.

<sup>183</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 979.

<sup>184</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 9 September 1898, published 6 October 1898.

<sup>185</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *Great Contemporaries* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1937), p. 75.

<sup>186</sup> As quoted in D’Este, *Warlord*, p. 639.

<sup>187</sup> *MFF*, p. 252.

<sup>188</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 119.

obstructed the path. Men were staggering along alone, or supported by comrades, or crawling on hands and knees, or carried on stretchers. Corpses lay here and there. Many of the wounds were of a horrible nature. The splinters and fragments of the shell had torn and mutilated in the most ghastly manner. I passed about two hundred while I was climbing up.”<sup>189</sup> The cost hit Churchill personally, too, and after losing a friend, Lieutenant Grenfell, in battle, he wrote that “the realization came home with awful force, that war, disguise it as you may, is but dirty, shoddy business, which only a fool would play at.” But that very evening he admitted to having again “recognised that there are some things that have to be done, no matter what the cost may be.”<sup>190</sup> “In a word”, Churchill wrote, “let no one despair of Empire because a few thousand soldiers are killed, wounded, or captured.”<sup>191</sup>

And yet, in another instance of his inconclusiveness, Churchill, in another dispatch, offered this severe and sneering comment on the nature and future of British imperialism:

Perhaps the time will come when the supply will be exhausted and there will be no more royal freaks to conquer. In that gloomy period there will be no more of these nice little expeditions—“the image of European war without its guilt and only twenty-five percent of its danger”; no more medals for the soldiers, no more peerages for the generals, no more copy for the journalists.<sup>192</sup>

There seemed, in other words, to be a distinction—if not sometimes a contradiction—between Churchill the Victorian imperialist and Churchill the soldier. He was wedded in the abstract to the idea of expanding Empire, governed by a monarch for whom “a loyal sentiment promotes the solidarity of the Empire”,<sup>193</sup> and in which those “who have dared violate the Pax Britannica” were punished.<sup>194</sup> Yet, on the battlefield nothing was abstract, and the once glorious philosophical inclinations were painted in vivid colour—often in hues of reds and browns, the ground stained with the blood of friend and comrade. Romance met reality: “Ah, horrible war,” Churchill wrote, “amazing medley of the glorious and the squalid, the pitiful and the sublime, if modern men of light and leading saw your face closer, simple folk would see it hardly ever.”<sup>195</sup>

Even as a young boy Churchill caught glimpses of squalidness of war. In 1888 and 1889, when Churchill would again holiday at Ventnor, John Balaam would tell the boy stories of prison mutinies and of the Zulu War of 1879, in which he had served. On another visit he

<sup>189</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 25 January 1900, published 17 February 1900.

<sup>190</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 6 September 1898, published 29 September 1898.

<sup>191</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 25 January 1900, published 17 February 1900.

<sup>192</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 12 September 1898, published 8 October 1898.

<sup>193</sup> *MFF*, p. 220.

<sup>194</sup> WSC to John Strange Churchill, letter dated 31 August 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/51.

<sup>195</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 22 January 1900, published 17 February 1900.

witnessed the training ship *Eurydice*, both before, in full sail, and after—with “three black masts...pointed out to me, sticking up out of the water in a stark way”—she capsized. The stories of the divers recovering hundreds of soldiers eaten upon by the marine life “made a scar on [his] mind.”<sup>196</sup> During some of his life Churchill loathed sea-travel.<sup>197</sup> Aged only ten, Winston wrote Lord Randolph a letter in which he asked about Lieutenant-Colonel Burnaby, Royal Horse Guards, who was killed along the Nile in battle of Abu Klea during the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1885.<sup>198</sup> During the Sudan campaign, Churchill would see service along the Nile thirteen years later. Of these and other experiences, Churchill later recalled that “from very early youth I had brooded about soldiers and war”,<sup>199</sup> and they likely formed his first experiences with casualties and the costs of war. Beginning here was Churchill’s first attempts to reconcile the glory of war with the horror of war, a laboured, painful, and unsure evolution made all the more difficult by his active participation in both realms. He maintained dual advocacies. During these years, his growing feet were slowly but firmly planted: one in the romantic notions of glory, war, and Empire; the other squarely in the battlefield, where for Churchill, on more than one occasion, “Death stood before me, grim sullen Death without his lighthearted companion, Chance.”<sup>200</sup> His journalism was, for the most part, a resounding paean to the virtues of Empire. There was nothing sweet or honorable about the Dervish dead, he reflected after Omdurman. “Nothing of the dignity of unconquerable manhood...Yet these were as brave men as ever walked the earth.”<sup>201</sup>

On 17 April 1888 Lord Randolph broke over a century and a half of Churchillian tradition and enrolled his son not at Eton, but at Harrow. It was a decision made mostly out of consideration for Winston’s health, which was thought to be better served at “Harrow-on-the-Hill”. Receiving its Royal Charter in 1572 from Queen Elizabeth, by the late-nineteenth century Harrow stood alongside Eton and Winchester as one of Britain’s premier public schools. It was one of the places that the sons of the British upper class were sent to be educated, and the list of Old Boys who graduated from there included, by the time of Winston’s enrolment, five prime ministers, as well as masters of history, poetry, literature, and the arts. By 1888 six Harrovians had won the Victoria Cross; in the years to come thirteen more would be awarded the decoration.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> MEL, pp. 20–21.

<sup>197</sup> WSC, *The Boer War* (New York: Dorset Press, 1991), p. 1 [hereafter *TBW*].

<sup>198</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, pp. 102–03; CAC, CHAR 28/99/37.

<sup>199</sup> MEL, p. 90.

<sup>200</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 20 November 1899, published 1 January 1900.

<sup>201</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 10 September 1898, published 6 October 1898.

<sup>202</sup> “Old Harrovian Victorian Cross Holders”,

<<http://www.harrowassociation.com/netcommunity/document.doc?id=189>>, accessed 10 December 2014.

Winston was never to win a Victoria Cross,<sup>203</sup> although it was suggested that he be recommended for one after the armoured train incident.<sup>204</sup> And although there are no recorded references of the impact of the Harrovian VCs upon young Churchill, what is certain is that throughout his life Winston yearned for the “conspicuous bravery” for which the Cross was given. In an age when school boys were ashamed of their nannies, Churchill had the bravery to kiss Mrs. Everest in full view of the other boys when she came to visit him at Harrow. The display prompted Jack Seely, who witnessed the event and who was to go on to later win a Distinguished Service Order and serve as one of Churchill’s cabinet colleagues, to describe the kiss as “one of the bravest acts I have ever seen.”<sup>205</sup> Brigadier-General Jeffreys, referring to Winston’s service on the North-West Frontier, “praised the courage and resolution of Lieutenant W. L. S. Churchill, 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars.”<sup>206</sup> Upon hearing this, Churchill wrote to Lady Randolph: “I am more ambitious for a reputation for personal courage than [for] anything else in the world...As to deserving such an honour—I feel that I took every chance and displayed myself with ostentation wherever there was danger.”<sup>207</sup>

Accepted into Harrow mostly on his father’s coattails rather than his own demonstrated intellect (during the entrance exam he claimed he was able only to write his name at the top of the Latin paper), Churchill was placed in the bottom Form of the school, the Third Remove of the Fourth Form. For fourteen terms over the next forty-five months, like the two schools before this one, Winston struggled to rise above a low or mediocre academic standing. Despite this, his assignment to the lower Forms was not wholly without benefit. It was there that he benefitted from the tuition of Mr. R. Somervell, and later Mr. L. M. Moriarty when he entered the Army Class. Both helped build the foundations for a mastery of the English language for which he was to become so conspicuous both then and in his later years.<sup>208</sup> Mr. C. H. P. Mayo also proved himself Churchill’s ally, and taught him enough mathematics in six months of the Army Class to help him pass the entrance examination into Sandhurst.

Although he remained near the bottom of the Forms throughout his time at Harrow, he was not without intellectual capacity. Like at Brighton, and even Ascot, when he encountered subjects that genuinely interested him he tended to rise (sometimes far) above average. Beginning to be put on show at Harrow as well was his tremendous gift for

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<sup>203</sup> Nor was he to win a Distinguished Service Order (DSO).

<sup>204</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 466.

<sup>205</sup> Cowles, *Winston Churchill*, p. 36; Manchester, *The Last Lion*, p. 157.

<sup>206</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 362.

<sup>207</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 2 December 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/84.

<sup>208</sup> “I got into my bones the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence—which is a noble thing.” *MEL*, pp. 30–31.

memorization—indicative of a capacious and retentive mind that would be on display all his life. At thirteen, he was enrolled at Harrow for only two months before he began learning lines of Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* for a school competition.<sup>209</sup> He went on to recite 1,200 lines without fault. No doubt the martial theme in these lines resonated with Churchill as he envisioned himself defending the bridge to Rome against the Tuscan invaders:

Then out spake brave Horatius,  
The Captain of the Gate:  
"To every man upon this earth  
Death cometh soon or late.  
And how can man die better  
Than facing fearful odds,  
For the ashes of his fathers,  
And the temples of his Gods."<sup>210</sup>

He was also known to quote entire Shakespearean scenes from memory<sup>211</sup> (a skill he retained his entire life, along with the passages), even to the point of correcting his masters if they made a mistake. Once, after sitting through a lecture on Waterloo, he dared to deliver a critique of it, citing sources that, once checked, were proven accurate.<sup>212</sup> One master later recollected, "I formed the highest opinion of his abilities and never ceased to wonder why he did not rise higher in the School. But he hated the Classics, and in his time that kept him down... On one field-day he came to me and asked me to let him act as my *aide-de-camp*, and his alertness and zeal for action were amazing." And another wrote: "He was not an easy boy to deal with. Of course he had always a brilliant brain, but he would only work when he chose to and for the matters he approved of."<sup>213</sup>

As with his previous school years, his feud with certain studies was accompanied by a general feud with authority. Harrow's headmaster, the Reverend J. E. C. Welldon, was no Sneyd-Kynnerley, but given Churchill's frequent impertinence—and the contemporary standard of corporal punishment—the young miscreant often found himself at the painful end of the switch. Nugent Nicks, who was to become Bishop of London, and who, during Churchill's early days, was both Head of House and Head of School, oftentimes administered this punishment to the obstinate offender. On the first occasion, after receiving his drubbing,

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<sup>209</sup> "I am learning 1000 lines of Macaulay for a prize I know 600 at present. Anyone who likes to take the trouble to learn them can get one, as there is no limit to the prizes." WSC to RC, CAC, CHAR 28/15/18-19.

<sup>210</sup> Lord Macaulay, "Lays of Ancient Rome" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 13. Frank H. Shaw, another soldier (and eventual military novelist), testified of a similar experience with Macaulay. Frank H. Shaw, *Seas of Memory* (London: Oldbourne, 1958), pp. 10, 15-16.

<sup>211</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 118.

<sup>212</sup> Manchester, *The Last Lion*, p. 160.

<sup>213</sup> Siddons, "Spencer Churchill, W. L.", p. 17.

Churchill told Hicks, “I shall be a greater man than you,” to which Hicks replied, “you can take two more for that.” In July 1888, after just three months at Harrow the assistant master at Harrow wrote a long letter to Lady Randolph describing Winston’s “forgetfulness, carelessness, unpunctuality, and irregularity in every way.” The serious reprimand ended, though, with some recognition: “He is a remarkable boy in many ways, and it would be a thousand pities if such good qualities were made useless by habitual negligence. I ought not to close without telling you that I am very much pleased with some history work he has done for me.”<sup>214</sup>

If the adult—and cavalry officer—Winston Churchill was opinionated and stubborn, which he was, then the genesis of those qualities are to be found during his school years, and especially at Harrow. Throughout his life, Churchill developed and engaged in each of his qualities, whether desirable or not, with a wholehearted zeal supported by a seemingly endless energy and enthusiasm mustered for the cause. He had yet to discern the difference between foolhardiness and prudence, between fearlessness and recklessness. It was difficult for him to be wrong, and one questions whether his pride simply refused to give in or whether he really did consider himself mostly always right. He was at Harrow what he would be called later on: a bulldog—short, obdurate, and oftentimes rude. Billiards, a game at which Winston was tolerable, sometimes ended with the smashing of a window that found its way in his line of fire, so fierce and aggressive was his strike.

At Harrow, then, there began to emerge the soon-to-be-hardened characteristics that would go on to define Churchill for years to come. He resisted guidance, especially when unsolicited and pressed upon him by someone whose station alone was meant to guarantee its acceptance and veracity. A few years hence, when writing countless front-line dispatches for the *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post*, he was no stranger to seeking advice, especially on subjects about which he knew little. It was advice, too, that he often found instructive and took to heart. But he did it on his own terms; he had to initiate. He would rather make his own rules than abide by the rule-making of others. He was almost always a nonconformist—strict and bullheaded. As a Harrow Old Boy contemporary of Winston’s later put it, “He consistently broke almost every rule made by masters or boys, was quite incorrigible, and had an unlimited vocabulary of ‘back-chat’, which he produced with dauntless courage on every occasion of remonstrance.”<sup>215</sup> It was this trait, his “glowering ferocity in the face of opposition,

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<sup>214</sup> CAC, CHAR 28/43/16-17.

<sup>215</sup> Sir Gerald Woods Wollaston, “Churchill at Harrow”, in Eade, *Churchill By His Contemporaries*, p. 19.

almost animal in its instinctive hostility,” as another historian has described, that “was a constant throughout Churchill’s life.”<sup>216</sup>

Just a few days after his arrival at Harrow, *The Harrovian* carried a letter complaining about the state of the Harrow School Rifle Volunteer Corps,<sup>217</sup> which the author claimed was woefully unpopulated.<sup>218</sup> Winston quickly answered the call for more members—an action taken so soon after his arrival as to demonstrate an interest in military life perhaps beyond that of simply boyhood fantasies. On 12 May 1888 he took part in a battle with Haileybury School at Rickmansworth as a part of his first Field Day. *The Harrovian* reported: “The action began about three o’clock. The manoeuvres were simple. The Haileybury Corps, regardless of life, advanced gallantly over a large open space, and would, without doubt, have been annihilated, if it had not been for an unfortunate mistake made by the right flank of Harrow, who mistook a flag supposed to represent a company of 100 for a detachment of four men. They were obliged to retire in ignominious haste.”<sup>219</sup> Winston found the battle thrilling: “As I had not got a uniform, I only carried cartridges. I carried 100 rounds to give away in the thick of the fight; consequently my business enabled me to get a good view of the field. It was most exciting you could see through the smoke the enemy getting nearer and nearer.”<sup>220</sup> His entrance into the Rifle Corps marks the first time Winston donned a uniform or received military training. The toy soldiers were coming to life.

During drills—and indeed, in many aspects of life at Harrow—the boys learned and sang songs, songs that Churchill remembered well into his later years and in which he took great delight. “I enjoyed the Harrow Songs”, he wrote. “They have an incomparable book of school songs. At intervals we used to gather in the Speech Room or even in our own Houses, and sing these splendid and famous choruses. I believe these songs are the greatest treasure that Harrow possesses.”<sup>221</sup> Sentiments like those expressed in the famous old Harrow song, “Left! Right!”, written E. W. Howson in 1897, would have animated boys like Churchill as they filled their minds with visions of imperial and martial glory.

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<sup>216</sup> See also Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen account of his encounter with Churchill at Harrow. Lewin, *Churchill as Warlord*, p. 3.

<sup>217</sup> The Rifle Corps (a predecessor of the Officer Training Corps, established in 1908) was founded in 1859 as the 18<sup>th</sup> Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps, and would remain associated with the Middlesex Regiment for many years to come. Douglas S. Russell, “Lt. Churchill: 4<sup>th</sup> Queen’s Own Hussars”, delivered at the International Churchill Society, Boston, 28 October 1895; Wollaston, “Churchill at Harrow”, p. 20; Christopher Tyerman, *A History of Harrow School: 1324 – 1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 401–02; Richard Meinertzhagen, *Diary of a Black Sheep* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), pp. 197–98.

<sup>218</sup> Harrow School Archive, *The Harrovian*, 1888, Vol. 1, Issue 2, pp. 16–17.

<sup>219</sup> Harrow School Archive, *The Harrovian*, 1888, Vol. 1, Issue 5, p. 64.

<sup>220</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated [14] May 1888, CAC, CHAR 28/17/4.

<sup>221</sup> *MEL*, p. 55.

And when he tried for Sandhurst, he was sure as fate to pass,  
 For wasn't he a member of the Harrow Army Class?  
 And now he's in a Regiment a-fighting for the Crown,  
 And soon he'll be a KCB, and Major-General Brown.  
 So listen all, both great and small, and may there be some more  
 To rally round the bugle-sound, and join the Rifle Corps!<sup>222</sup>

Harrow was full of other patriotic songs too, which, by his own admission, had a powerful influence on Winston's life. Many were of a patriotic theme. "Forty Years On", written by John Farmer in 1872, is traditionally regarded as the school song, and called Harrovians to persistence against the odds.<sup>223</sup> Another, "We Are Here", called them to duty.<sup>224</sup>

In addition to regular drill, the Rifle Corps included an annual inspection in May and periodic competitions and demonstrations (called "Assault at Arms", to which he frequently invited his parents<sup>225</sup>) in horsemanship, fencing, and gymnastics. Athletically, it was in swimming, shooting, and fencing that Churchill did better than average. It is interesting to note that Churchill did not seem to take any interest in team sports (like rugby or football); instead, he gravitated toward those games in which success depended solely upon the individual. It is a characteristic correlating with his individualistic stubbornness without wholly defining his personality. For, on the one hand, Churchill demonstrated during his early years a resistance to unwanted partnership—from masters and peers alike. But on the other hand he was completely dependent upon his parents for every form of life support. He always lived well beyond his means and constantly asked them for money. He used the connections of his parents and the status of his family to open doors otherwise sealed shut. He was never shy about imploring his mother, especially after Lord Randolph's death, to exercise all manner of her personal leverage in service of his personal, cultural, or occupational advancement. He enjoyed the perception of being his own man but in reality his good fortune, in part, belonged to the hard work of others.

Two months after joining the Corps he wrote to his mother: "You will be glad to hear that I have passed in my Recruit Drill, Manual Drill, and in Shooting—I made 22 out of a possible 25."<sup>226</sup> Included with this letter was an illustration of a cannon and soldiers. Though he clearly enjoyed marksmanship, he was not gifted enough to join the Harrow squad which represented the school in competition with other public schools. The same could not be said of fencing. From October 1889, when he first expressed an interest in learning to fence

<sup>222</sup> Edward E. Bowen, *Harrow Songs and Other Verses* (London: Longmans, 1886), p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> John Farmer (ed.), *Harrow School Songs* (Harrow: J. C. Wilbee, Bookseller to Harrow School, 188-?), p. 33.

<sup>224</sup> Harrow School Archive, *The Harrovian*, 1888, Vol. 1, Issue 5, pp. 60-61.

<sup>225</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated [?] November 1889; *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 195.

<sup>226</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated [?] July 1888, CAC, CHAR 28/17/17.

believing it “would be useful...in the Army”, Winston spent many hours in the coming months in the gymnasium,<sup>227</sup> going on to win, in April 1892, the Public Schools Fencing Competition at Aldershot. It was only the second time that a Harrovian had ever won this competition—and likewise, only the second time that Churchill had ever won anything on his own. *The Harrovian* congratulated Churchill in “his success over all his opponents in the fencing line, many of whom must have been taller and more formidable than himself.” Churchill refused to fight in the orthodox way, and his win “was chiefly due to his quick and dashing attack which quite took his opponents by surprise.”<sup>228</sup>

It was the Rifle Corps’s field days (usually once or twice per term) that rallied most of its members’ enthusiasm. This was the case for Churchill, and he took place in five such mock battles between 1888 and 1892. The mock battles were held at places like Rickmansworth, Sandhurst, or Aldershot (where Churchill would be stationed as a commissioned officer), and consisted of setting up encampments and practising maneuvers in competition with other public schools. Large events, sometimes consisting of thousands of boys and thousands more regulars besides, they typically lasted until all the blank ammunition was expended or until it was time to return to their respective schools for tea or a band performance.

Despite it not being a very serious affair,<sup>229</sup> Churchill enjoyed the Rifle Corps and loved the field days which he often encouraged his parents to attend. “The Rifle Corps had a grand Sham fight yesterday which Mamma saw”, Winston told Lord Randolph. “Harrow versus Haileybury & Cambridge. Harrow won—we defended the town successfully for 2 hours.”<sup>230</sup> “It was great fun,” Churchill reported to his father. “The noise was tremendous. There were 4 Batteries of Guns on the Field & a Maxim, & several Nordenfeldts. We were defeated because we were inferior in numbers & not from any want of courage. I have bought a Book on Drill as I intend going in for the corporal Examination next term. I went down to the Range on Tuesday & fired away 20 rounds.”<sup>231</sup> In fact, there is no record of Churchill ever rising to the rank of Corporal.

Lord Randolph left no record of what influenced his decision to direct Churchill toward the army. No doubt he took notice of his son’s enjoyment of the Rifle Corps, while at the same time assuming, through the disappointing torrent of sub-par course marks, that he had not the intellectual gifting for university. We have, then, only Churchill at his word: that,

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<sup>227</sup> Winston’s first letter to *The Harrovian*, written under the nom de plum “Junius Junior”, complained that the “Gymnasium has gone completely down the hill” because “so few boys do anything.” Harrow School Archive, *The Harrovian*, 1891, Vol. 4, Issue 10, pp. 129-30.

<sup>228</sup> Churchill, 1, p. 179.

<sup>229</sup> J. W. S. Tomlin, “Harrow in Churchill’s Time”, in Chaplin, *Winston Churchill and Harrow*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>230</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 28 October 1888, CAC, CHAR 28/17/22-23.

<sup>231</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated [27?] March 1889, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 180-81.

as already recounted, in summer 1889 Lord Randolph visited Churchill and proceed to inspect his collection of toy soldiers, and afterwards asked his son whether he wished to join the army, a proposition Winston instantly accepted. Churchill recounted the story twice, first in *My Early Life* and later in an essay entitled “Private Article”, published in 1946.<sup>232</sup> In the first recounting Churchill ends by writing the matter was settled: “Henceforward all my education was directed to passing into Sandhurst, and afterwards to the technical details of the profession of arms.”<sup>233</sup>

This directing of education began to take place that very next term with Churchill joining the Army Class at Harrow, a relatively new phenomenon instituted to discourage students from leaving Harrow prematurely to study with a “crammer” before taking the army entrance examination. “You told me last term [summer 1889]”, Welldon wrote to Lord Randolph, “that you wished [Winston] to go into the Army Class but he did not know whether he is destined for Woolwich or for Sandhurst.”<sup>234</sup> Woolwich, sometimes called “The Shop”, was the military academy for cadets aiming for the Royal Engineers or the Royal Artillery. Sandhurst was primarily for cadets seeking commissions in the cavalry and infantry. One month later Reverend Welldon decided that Winston was not strong enough in mathematics to be considered for Woolwich, “but that he ought to aim at passing into Sandhurst.”<sup>235</sup>

Army Class boys still belonged to their regular Forms, but spent considerable time studying in those areas which were known to be especially prized by the Civil Service Commissioners. Because of this, the lessons focused less on strict military topics and more on those subjects likely to be crucial for successful entrants into Sandhurst or Woolwich—among them history, Latin and French, geometrical drawing, chemistry, and mathematics. This was in addition to work required by the regular lessons. On top of this the Army Class typically demanded extra time for lessons and practice in evenings and during summer holidays. As Churchill wrote to his mother of his joining in September 1889; “I have joined the ‘Army class’. It is rather a ‘bore’ as it spoils half your Holiday: however we do French & Geometrical drawing which are the two things most necessary for the army.”<sup>236</sup> And to his father: “Harrow is a charming place but Harrow & the Army Class don’t agree.”<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> First entitled “Private Article”, the essay was published as “The Dream”. Winston S. Churchill, “The Dream”, in Michael Wolff (ed.), *The Collected Essays of Sir Winston Churchill: Centenary Limited Edition, Vol. IV, Churchill at Large* (Library of Imperial History, 1976), pp. 504-511.

<sup>233</sup> *MEL*, p. 33.

<sup>234</sup> Rev. J.E.C. Welldon to RC, letter dated 6 August 1889, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 189.

<sup>235</sup> Rev. J.E.C. Welldon to RC, letter dated 23 September 1889, CAC, CHAR 28/103/33.

<sup>236</sup> WSC to LRC, letter postmarked 28 September 1889, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 190; *Churchill*, 1, pp. 126-27.

<sup>237</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated [1?] June 1890, CAC, CHAR, 28/17/48-50.

Despite it being a “bore”, Churchill managed well enough and in January 1890 wrote to his mother that he had gotten his Remove—though he remained in the Fourth Form.<sup>238</sup> However, his overall academic performance still remained low, and he never got out of the Lower School. In his ninth term he placed fifteenth out of sixteen in the “Special Sandhurst Class” in which he had been placed, and one term later was nineteenth out of twenty-one. And though L. M. Moriarty wrote on one Army Class report that Winston “has considerable power of application and is very intelligent”,<sup>239</sup> his performance on the all-important exams was such that, in the summer of 1890, Rev. Welldon declined to let him sit the preliminary examination for Sandhurst, the first of two tests required of hopeful entrants. After more studying Churchill was eventually allowed to sit the exam in November 1890. And he was lucky he did: that exam happened to be the last exam where Latin was an optional subject; thereafter, new regulations made it obligatory.<sup>240</sup> Though he would have thought himself to have done well had he passed in three subjects,<sup>241</sup> he in fact passed in all five. He performed better than seventeen of his classmates, many of them older and all of them from higher Forms.<sup>242</sup>

It was “a taste for history which I acquired in [Mr. Moriarty’s] Army Class”<sup>243</sup> that animated much of Churchill’s mind during his remaining time at Harrow. In his second term he had a prize for his work in history.<sup>244</sup> In November 1888 he wrote to his mother of how he sat enraptured when the American Colonel Gouraud, who fought at Gettysburg, visited Harrow to lecture on and demonstrate a new invention called the phonograph. He used the machine to record “John Brown’s Body”, a feat which he claimed “astonished all sober-minded People.”<sup>245</sup> He seemed to be awed by the presence of a soldier that had fought in such a famous battle. Thematically, three of the five lectures Churchill remembered in his autobiography were either historical or martial. One was on the battle of Waterloo, while another was on the battle of Sedan. A third, by Mr. Parkin, addressed the Imperial Federation.<sup>246</sup> Together, these all “made a great impression” on young Churchill.<sup>247</sup>

In his early years, too, Churchill combined growing skill with the English spoken and written word—influenced, as he said, by Mr. Moriarty—with his growing love of history and

<sup>238</sup> WSC to LRC, letter postmarked 16 January 1890, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 195.

<sup>239</sup> Sandys, *From Winston With Love and Kisses*, p. 137.

<sup>240</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 133.

<sup>241</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated [?] November 1890, *Churchill*, CV, 1, I, p. 216.

<sup>242</sup> Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, p. 31; *Churchill*, 1, pp. 135–36. Note the discrepancy in total number of Harrow students taking the exam.

<sup>243</sup> Siddons, “Spencer Churchill, W. L.”, p. 16.

<sup>244</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 118.

<sup>245</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 7 November 1888, CAC, CHAR 28/15/29.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>247</sup> *MEL*, p. 55.

fascination of battlefields and warfare. Beyond notes on the reigns of Queen Anne, George I, and George II, as well as early-eighteenth century political climates, what remains of his Harrow history notebook are largely detailed accounts of the War of Spanish Succession, with special emphasis, not surprisingly, on the campaigns of the First Duke of Marlborough. Maps, too, accompany the narrative and analysis, and intricate sketches of the 1704 Blenheim Campaign, the 1708 Battle of Oudemarde and Siege of Lille illustrate Winston's improving skill of geometrical and freehand drawing, both of which were praised by his Army Class masters.<sup>248</sup>

These sketches not only adorned his history notebook, but often served as marginalia for his many letters written to his parents, Jack, and other acquaintances whilst he was at Harrow. They were almost always of a martial theme. His report to his mother of his first Field Day in May 1888 included a large map detailing the "plan of action": the positions of the various schools and the various manoeuvres and objectives all set in the basic topographical context. The reverse of a letter postmarked July 1888 featured a landscape with a detachment of infantry, some standing and some firing, as well as an artillery piece.<sup>249</sup> "I furnish a small plan of the fight at its climax for as far as I could see. I enjoyed myself very much", he wrote to Lady Randolph after another Field Day in March 1889. The plan accompanying this letter featured the layout of the valleys and hills complementing the Aldershot mock battlefield, as well as the railway station and the various routes of Harrow's advance and retreat.<sup>250</sup> Other sketches of soldiers, too, embellished more letters.<sup>251</sup>

In July 1891, Winston was granted an exeat from Harrow to visit London for what was to be one of the most memorable weekends of his boyhood. Once again, his recounting of the weekend was full of praise for the military grandeur displayed during a special exhibition at the Crystal Palace to honor the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Winston took pains to describe what he witnessed to his younger brother, and did what he could, too, to supplement his words with drawings. The Battle of the Nile was refought in the sky: "The ships actually moved & the cannonading was terrific. Finally *L'Orient* blew up." "I must describe the Emperor's uniform", he wrote to Jack. "A helmet of bright Brass surmounted by a white eagle nearly 6 inches high. A polished steel cuirass & a perfectly white uniform with high boots."<sup>252</sup>

<sup>248</sup> CAC, CHAR 1/11; Sandys, *From Winston With Love and Kisses*, p. 137.

<sup>249</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated [?] July 1888, CAC, CHAR 28/17/17.

<sup>250</sup> WSC to LRC, letter postmarked 28 March 1889, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 181.

<sup>251</sup> WSC to LRC, letter postmarked 17 July 1890, CAC, CHAR 28/18/41-44; WSC to LRC, letter dated 21 September 1890, CAC, CHAR 28/16/14.

<sup>252</sup> WSC to Jack Churchill, letter dated 11 July 1891, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 255-56.

Among the sketches included were the Kaiser and his kaiserin, the Kaiser's profile, including his brass helmet, and a separate drawing of the Kaiser's knee-high boots.<sup>253</sup>

It is tempting to discount these stories of young Winston as purely anecdotal and commonplace in Victorian boys of his age. And to some extent such a discounting might be warranted. Sketches in margins, headers, and footers have little bearing on the waging of war. If Winston had not gone on to serve as a soldier, or to lead soldiers, or to lead a navy, or eventually to lead an entire nation in the waging of war, then one would be right to place little emphasis on a boy's excitement during Field Days, his fascination with toy soldiers, or the fact that of all the things he could have been sketching he chose the men and instruments of war. But it is precisely that he did go on to do those things that these experiences matter. No discussion of Churchill's military intellectual formation can easily escape his childhood conceptions of, romanticization of, and experiences with even the most quixotic notions of war. For on some important level Churchill himself never could escape them. The romantic fascination of the young Winston who played with his toy soldiers or stared spellbound whilst at the Crystal Palace was not wholly unlike the Churchill of twenty-five years later, aboard the First Lord's Admiralty yacht, *Enchantress*:

W. in glorious form though slightly over-concentrated on instruments of destruction. Blasting and shattering are now his *idées fixes*. As we leaned side by side against the taffrail, gliding past the lovely, smiling coast-line of the Adriatic, bathed in sun, and I remarked 'How perfect!' he startled me by his reply: 'Yes—range perfect—visibility perfect—If we had got some six inch guns on board how easily we could bombard...' etc. etc.—and details followed showing how effectively we could lay waste the landscape and blow the nestling towns sky-high. He was enthralled by the technology of naval warfare and his sense of its results in human terms was for the time being in abeyance.<sup>254</sup>

Less anecdotal than the stories of sketches and enthusiasm is an essay Churchill wrote at Harrow in 1889. Though written for his English master, it was in fact Churchill's first military history essay—and sufficiently remarkable for a fourteen year old that his teacher, Robert Somervell, without the foresight of the young boy's destiny, thought it worthy of preservation.<sup>255</sup> Entitled "The Engagement at 'La Marais', July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1914", it was an imaginary account between Russian and British forces, written in the first person in the form of diary entries made by the hero of the story, Colonel Seymore, an aide-de-camp to the British commanding officer. Its 1,600 words tell the story of a British force that, whilst trying to relieve a garrison besieged at Kharkov in the Ukraine, comes under Russian attack.

<sup>253</sup> For the sketches see Sandys, *From Winston With Love and Kisses*, p. 159; *Churchill*, 1, pp. 150-51.

<sup>254</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill*, p. 262. Transcription of a diary entry; all inconsistencies are [sic].

<sup>255</sup> WSC asked that it not be displayed until after the Second World War. CAC, CHAR 20/53C/291.

Colonel Seymore speaks Churchill's words and no doubt Churchill fashioned himself as the great man. One must be careful to judge the author and his essay as they were in 1889, and not as they would come to be in later years. Notwithstanding, the essay argues for both Churchill's understanding of the tension and adventure needed in a story of this type, as well as his desire to understand very rudimentary military tactics, the language of command, and battle formations—the latter illustrated on the half-dozen hand-drawn maps which accompanied the essay, each of surprising detail. Least unpredictable, and the aspect of the essay which leaves the strongest impression upon the reader, is the romanticism which permeated Winston's conceptualizations of warfare: "Bang! a puff of smoke has darted from one of their batteries & the report floats down to us on the wind; the Battle has begun...from both sides of the Cannonade was opened. From where I stood I could see the enemy's shells bursting in the masses of our cavalry killing and wounding dozens of them at a time."<sup>256</sup> He continued with the mounted arm: "The British Cavalry...bursting through struck the infantry behind...the Odessa and Dnieper regiments...formed 'in line' disdaining 'double column' and aided by a Battery of Artillery poured in so awful a volley the remnants of the cavalry were glad to turn and ride back...with Heroic Bravery they...galop [sic] on to our lines..."<sup>257</sup> Winston had obviously gone a long way in finding his "voice"—a voice which, though only fourteen, would go on to characterize his dispatches from the front lines. "The left was relieved by the moving lines & columns of red surmounted by the glimmering bayonet", Churchill wrote in 1889; nine years later he would write a very similar description of his first sight of the Dervishes on 2 September 1898: "From the ridge they looked dark blurs and streaks, relieved and diversified with an odd-looking shimmer of light from the spear-points."<sup>258</sup>

Beyond his studies, most of his holidays were spent in Britain, with the country house in Banstead being a favourite destination and one which left Winston and his brother "happy & delighted & in towering spirits."<sup>259</sup> Here Winston still orchestrated war games—though by now Winston "had graduated from drilling his toy soldiers in Connaught Square to drilling his brother, his cousins, and his other 'volunteers' in the field outside the Den,"<sup>260</sup> and it was at the end of the drilling that he marched his troops across the drawbridge into the Den, raised the drawbridge and defended the citadel against all comers with the aid of his powerful catapult."<sup>261</sup>

Having finally passed his Sandhurst preliminary exam in December, 1890 ended on a

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<sup>256</sup> Winston S. Churchill, "The Engagement of 'La Marais', July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1914", Harrow School Archives.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 109.

<sup>259</sup> Mrs. Everest to LRC, letter dated 1 January 1891, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 218.

<sup>260</sup> A homemade fort.

<sup>261</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 139.

particularly high note for young Winston. It was his greatest academic achievement to date. And yet, the celebrations were quickly replaced by an even higher hurdle, and one which would prove much more difficult: the final entrance examination for Sandhurst. Over the following months correspondence between Rev. Welldon and Winston's parents urged them to stay unrelenting in their call for hard work and intellectual rigor from their son, and to secure for him private tutors during the various holidays as a means of "increasing his prospect of success."<sup>262</sup>

In order to improve his language skills, in December 1891 Churchill spent one of these holidays on the Continent with Mr. Minssen, a Harrow French teacher, in Versailles. He described, in faltering French, going on an afternoon walk and seeing "soldiers, nothing but soldiers—De Seine de l'artillerie, des cuirassiers et de chasseurs a pieds. There are 6,000 hommes dans al garrison, and on Sat week there is to be a great review. 10,000 men march past. C'est une nation bien militaire."<sup>263</sup> He also sent a letter to Jack which included a sketch of some Russian toy soldiers, promising that when he returned they would "have much fun & great games with the army."<sup>264</sup> He met many French officers, and on one occasion, whilst discussing a certain battle with which none of the professional soldiers knew the specifics, "young Churchill said, 'I can describe it,' and he proceeded to give a detailed account of the course of the battle with plans."<sup>265</sup>

Despite the fact that Winston, both according to himself and his masters, worked harder academically (than probably ever before) as he prepared for the Sandhurst "further" entrance examination, it was not enough. He took the exam in July 1892 and in August he found out his results. The minimum marks for entrance into cavalry and infantry was 6,457 and 6,654 respectively. Winston scored only 5,100 marks, and placed 390<sup>th</sup> out of 693 candidates. He did best in history, 18<sup>th</sup> out of the 415 candidates who took the subject.<sup>266</sup> Lord Randolph, predictably, was not enthused, and confided to his mother, Frances, Duchess of Marlborough, that if Winston "fails again I shall think about putting him in business. I could get him something very good."<sup>267</sup>

In September 1892 Winston returned to Harrow and worked hard toward his next attempt at the examination, which came in November. And, for one of the first times, Reverend Welldon wholeheartedly praised his pupil's renewed efforts: "His work this term has been excellent...I shall consider that in the last twelve months he has learnt a lesson of life-

<sup>262</sup> Rev. J. E. C. Welldon to LRC, letter of 13 July 1891, CAC, CHAR 28/53/2.

<sup>263</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 22 December 1891, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 297.

<sup>264</sup> WSC to Jack Churchill, letter dated [?] January 1891, CAC, CHAR 28/16/61.

<sup>265</sup> Siddons, "Spencer Churchill, W.L.", p. 17.

<sup>266</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 180.

<sup>267</sup> RC to Duchess of Marlborough, letter dated [?] September 1892, *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 338.

long value. The two disadvantages under which he lies are that he was not well grounded, when he came here...and that he partially wasted the beginning of his public schooldays. Still, when this is said, I am of the opinion that he is now well up to the level of passing into Sandhurst.”<sup>268</sup>

But it was not to be. In mid-January 1893 Winston found out that he had failed again, this time coming 203<sup>rd</sup> out of 664 candidates. His marks totaled 6,106—1,006 more than his previous attempt.<sup>269</sup> True to the confidence he had expressed before the exam, Churchill did better in Chemistry, as well as in mathematics, geometrical drawing, and English history. He fared worse, though, in French, Latin, and English Composition. But the standards were changing too, and had he even done just as well in these last three subjects as he had in the first exam, he still would have missed a cadetship by five marks.<sup>270</sup>

Lord Randolph, determined to find a solution, removed his son from Harrow and sent him to Captain James, a celebrated “crammer” in London.<sup>271</sup> And though Winston had received high praise during his last term at Harrow, Captain James was to encounter the “classic” Churchill that had defined all of his school years: “He is distinctly inclined to be inattentive and to think too much of his abilities...he has been rather too much inclined up to the present to teach his instructors instead of endeavoring to learn from them...he suggested to me that his knowledge of history was such that he did not want any more teaching in it!”<sup>272</sup> This tendency, of teacher-student or expert-novice role reversal, became a life-long hallmark of Churchill’s relationship to his surroundings; this was especially the case in his war-fighting roles, when necessarily the writer-soldier-politician was in close proximity—sometimes to learn from, sometimes to lead—with veteran career soldiers. The question of who was master and who was pupil was not, in other words, confined to Churchill’s school years—though the irresistibility of fighting that tension was certainly rooted there.

By mid-June, and after hard application by Winston, Captain James felt more assured: “Without saying that [Winston] is a certainty I think he ought to pass this time.”<sup>273</sup> In June 1893 Churchill took the exam for the third time, and achieved what he later called “a modified success.”<sup>274</sup> He barely scraped by. With 6,309 out of 12,000 possible marks, he came 95<sup>th</sup> out of 389.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Rev. J.E.C. Welldon to RC, letter dated 28 November 1892, *Churchill*, 1, p. 184.

<sup>269</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 186.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 35, 359.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

<sup>274</sup> *MEL*, p. 49.

<sup>275</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 193.

	Mathematics	Latin	French	English History
WSC	1,236	362	1,233	1,278
Maximum	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
	Chemistry	English Composition	Drawing: Freehand	Drawing: Geometrical
WSC	825	312	338	725
Maximum	2,000	500	500	1,000

Churchill improved his marks in all eight subjects, and his English History mark was by far the highest of all successful candidates, further emphasizing that rather than being categorically stupid, when a subject interested him he could perform quite well indeed. His overall marks, though, were not high enough to gain an infantry cadetship—he was eighteen marks too few and four places too low for that—but it was enough for a cavalry cadetship. Winston was to join the army after all.

Though in Victorian Britain the prestige of the cavalry was second only to the infantry, for Winston it was no bother at all that he had barely missed the most august arm. As he would later write, “I was delighted at having passed the examination and even more at the prospect of soldiering on horse-back. I had already formed a definite opinion upon the relative advantages of riding and walking. What fun it would be having a horse! Also the uniforms of the cavalry were far more magnificent than those of the Foot. It was therefore in an expansive spirit that I wrote to my father.”<sup>276</sup>

Lord Randolph was not so delighted. He replied to his son with a severe letter making clear his disappointment, and clearer yet the wide gulf between Winston and his father’s approval: “The first extremely discreditable feature of your performance was missing the infantry, for in that failure is demonstrated beyond refutation your slovenly, happy-go-lucky harum scarum style of work for which you have always been distinguished at your different schools.” Lord Randolph persisted: “There is also another satisfaction for you that by accomplishing the prodigious effort of getting into the Cavalry, you imposed on me an extra charge of some £200 a year. Not that I shall allow you to remain in the Cavalry. As soon as possible I shall arrange your exchange into an infantry regiment of the line.”<sup>277</sup> Churchill responded with hopefulness: “I am looking forward to going there very much more especially as it gives me an altogether fresh start on a course which is certainly ‘paved with good resolutions.’”<sup>278</sup> To his mother he wrote of a deeper anticipation, a more heartfelt fresh

<sup>276</sup> *MEL*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>277</sup> RC to WSC, letter dated 9 August 1893, CAC, CHAR 1/2/66-68.

<sup>278</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 399.

chance: “I am going to buckle to at Sandhurst & to try and regain Papa’s opinion of me.”<sup>279</sup> He was eighteen years of age.

Churchill was as glad to leave Harrow as he was to leave behind all of his twelve school years. Together they formed “the only barren and unhappy period” of his life, “during the whole of which I had enjoyed few gleams of success, in which I had hardly ever been asked to learn anything which seemed of the slightest use or interest, or allowed to play any game which was amusing.” He reflected further: “I would far rather have been apprenticed as a bricklayer’s mate, or run errands as a messenger boy, or helped my father to dress the front windows of a grocer’s shop. It would have been real; it would have been natural; it would have taught me more; and I should have done it much better...I am all for the Public Schools but I do not want to go there again.”<sup>280</sup>

In some ways his schoolmasters succeeded in encouraging a maturity of intellect and temperament; in many ways they failed altogether. They fostered in him a love of the English language; they instilled at least a sporadic industry of work; they nurtured a proficient memory that awoke when introduced to the right things. And this was the innominate task of his masters: to graft onto Winston’s never-ending youthfulness a framework for grown-up responsibility; to add assiduous application to adolescent aspiration; to equip the boy to act in a man’s world; to start dressing the youngster in gentleman’s clothing.

To any extent they succeeded in doing so (and it was greater than Churchill later gave them credit for), they did not succeed in making Winston grow up. He was firmly rooted in his youth, and the enthusiasms, romance, and visions of glory found there constituted his temperament’s bedrock. Six years after leaving Harrow, the *Daily Mail* correspondent G. W. Steevens would call Winston Spencer Churchill “the youngest man in Europe.” “His self-confidence bobs up irresistibly, though seniority and common sense and facts themselves conspire to force it down.”<sup>281</sup> Fifteen years later much the same was still said of him: “Life is a succession of splendid sensations, of thrilling experiences...All that matters is this magic world of which he has become the momentary possessor, and which he must devour before the curtain is rung down on the drama and the dream.”<sup>282</sup>

It was during his schooldays that Winston’s burgeoning self-confidence began to take aim at two main objects: politics and the army. He was a product of his family and even as a schoolboy he associated with principal political figures of his time. He had discussions with the Harcourts, Balfours, Asquiths, and Hicks Beaches. In 1892 he went to see Sir Felix Semon, a

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<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>280</sup> *MEL*, p. 52.

<sup>281</sup> G. W. Steevens, “The Youngest Man in Europe”, pp. 63, 65.

<sup>282</sup> A. G. Gardiner, *Pillars of Society* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1913), p. 57.

noted laryngologist, for advice on reducing the speech impediment from which he would suffer all his life. When Winston left, Semon recalled having told his wife: “I have just seen the most extraordinary young man I have ever met...After informing me that he had just left Harrow, he added: ‘I intend to go to Sandhurst, and afterwards to join a regiment of Hussars in India. Of course it is not my intention to become a mere professional soldier. I only wish to gain some experience. Some day I shall be a statesman, as my father was before me.’”<sup>283</sup>

Becoming a mere professional soldier perhaps not, but the soldier’s life was the object of many of young Winston’s dreams and efforts. Blenheim was there from the beginning. It was Winston’s birthplace, and as such at times he considered soldiering his birthright. This is not to say at all that Lord Randolph’s choice for his son, or Winston’s passing the necessary examinations, were foregone conclusions. Had he failed to achieve Sandhurst, Lord Randolph would have most likely, as he said, set his son up in business. History was not written before it happened. But when it did happen, Winston regarded himself as the perfect vehicle. Murland Evans later wrote of an 1891 encounter he had with Winston whilst at Harrow where, in a basement room of the Headmaster’s House, the future soldier pronounced: “I see into the future. This country will be subjected somehow, to a tremendous invasion, by what means I do not know, but...I tell you I shall be in command of the defences of London and I shall save London and England from disaster...dreams of the future are blurred but the main objective is clear.”<sup>284</sup>

As it relates to his military intellect, in a military sense Winston left Harrow relatively uneducated. On the whole he bucked almost every traditional, educational rhythm, and by 1892 was “deficient in cricket, Latin Verse, and other accepted tests of Victorian success...His father told his mother that the boy had not the brains to fit him for Oxford.”<sup>285</sup> What he thought he knew of army life was less a product of the Rifle Corps or the Army Class, and much more a consequence of his own daydreaming, fort-building, and love of adventure stories.

Though Churchill entered Sandhurst without much, if any, real practical knowledge on the waging of war, he did so with a temperament that would inform and animate every war that he waged. It was a temperament marked by strong tendencies: stubbornness, self-aggrandizement, courage, a tendency to confuse—and buck against—the teacher-pupil relationship, a firm self-reliance hijacked by the necessity of depending upon others, and above all a love of romantic story with himself cast by Destiny as the protagonist.

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<sup>283</sup> Gilbert, *In Search of Churchill*, p. 216.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>285</sup> Shane Leslie, *Long Shadows* (London: John Murray, 1966), p. 22.

## :: III ::

## SANDHURST: GENTLEMAN CADET AND GROWING PRESUPPOSITIONS

Winston Churchill was just leaving Britain for a month-long walking tour of Switzerland with his brother and an Eton tutor<sup>1</sup> when he learned of his acceptance into Sandhurst. “I was *so* pleased to get your wire today and to know that you had ‘got in’!!!”, Duchess Lily wrote to Winston on 3 August 1893.<sup>2</sup> And though he had originally missed it by 18 marks, Winston returned to London on 29 August to find a letter from the Military Secretary at the War Office informing him that due to a low rate of matriculation he was to be offered an infantry cadetship after all.<sup>3</sup>

Lord Randolph had strongly desired, primarily because it was less expensive,<sup>4</sup> for Winston to join an infantry regiment upon graduation from the Royal Military College (R. M. C.). Furthermore, he had arranged for his son to join the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles, known also from 1881 as “The King’s Royal Rifle Corps”, which had as its Colonel-in-Chief a cousin of Queen Victoria, the Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army from 1856 to 1895. It was, in fact, “one of the most exclusive family regiments in the world.”<sup>5</sup> “I am very glad that Winston has got an infantry cadetship”, Lord Randolph wrote to his mother. “It will save me £200 a year. I shall see the Duke of Cambridge when I get back & remind him about the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles.”<sup>6</sup>

Churchill arrived at Sandhurst on 1 September 1893 and in doing so began what he called the “intermediate period” of his life. Nearly 12 years of school were finished. He was finally able to leave behind what he saw as the uncompromising and wearisome fetters of St. George’s, Brighton, and Harrow. Gone, he later wrote, was the “unending spell of worries that did not then seem petty, and of toil uncheered by fruition; a time of discomfort, restriction, and purposeless monotony.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, “at Sandhurst I had a new start.”<sup>8</sup>

In some ways Sandhurst was, then, less an extension of his school days and more an extension of the mood of Blenheim Palace. The Royal Military College was a continuation of

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. J. D. G. Little came highly recommended by George Brodrick, a contemporary of Lord Randolph at Merton College, Oxford. *Churchill*, 1, pp. 194, 201.

<sup>2</sup> Duchess Lily to WSC, letter dated 3 August 1893, CAC, CHAR 1/9/39.

<sup>3</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 402.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill later wrote: “‘In the infantry,’ my father had remarked, ‘one has to keep a man; in the cavalry a man and a horse as well.’ This was not only true, but even an under-statement. Little did he foresee not only one horse, but two official chargers and one or two hunters besides—to say nothing of the indispensable string of polo ponies!” *MEL*, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Byron Farwell, *Mr Kipling’s Army* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> RC to Frances, Duchess of Marlborough, letter dated 3 September 1893, *Churchill*, CV, I, i, p. 404.

<sup>7</sup> *MEL*, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

the Woodstock estate that had and would, as discussed in the previous chapter, serve as a significant root in the development of Churchill's military world view. Both were sublime monuments built in service to, or in recognition of, the often brutal realities of war. Both carried the gaze upwards and outwards. As a long-time Sandhurst lecturer would write: "Sandhurst's dreamy parkland, acres of mown lawns, colonnaded vistas, and soft creamy facades are the unlikeliest setting I know or can imagine in which to train young men for war. Classical languages, perhaps, or philosophy, or the fine arts—any of those would be appropriate to that sylvan spot; tactics, strategy, drill, musketry, bloodshed seem to have no place at all amid Sandhurst's bowers and arbours."<sup>9</sup> And from Churchill himself, scarcely a year after leaving Sandhurst: "There are few people who could walk from the village of Camberley through the woods to the Royal Military College without being struck by the beauty of the neighbourhood," he wrote, before continuing: "For a mile and a half the road winds through a forest of larch, birch, and pine, with here and there glimpses of the lake seen picturesquely through the trees, until the visitor finds himself at the edge of a large clearing... The estate in which the College stands is every extensive, and is from end to end densely wooded. Two beautiful lakes afford facilities for swimming and boating... In fact, it would be hard to find a spot in any country better suited by nature and adapted by art to the requirements of a military college."<sup>10</sup>

Sandhurst, like Blenheim, was a testament to the memories of war, and the setting and history would serve only to reinforce certain presuppositions in young Churchill about the character of war. Originally consisting of 450 acres purchased by the army from then Prime Minister William Pitt, by the time of Churchill it had grown by another 400 acres. The "Old College", or the dormitory and classroom building and where Churchill would live, on the second floor, during his eighteen months at Sandhurst, is a two-story building whose wings meet underneath a grand portico decorated and supported, in classical themes, by eight fluted columns. The Grand Entrance is capped with the reclining stone figures of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, and Mars, the Roman god of war. North of the Old College sits another neoclassical, colonnaded building, the Gymnasium, in which Churchill would have trained and competed under the watchful gaze of equipment, trophies, busts of military heroes that covered its inside walls.

The Royal Memorial Chapel, a rectangular building of red brick sitting west of the Old College, was concentrated as Christ Church by the Bishop of Oxford in 1879. Its inside

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<sup>9</sup> John Keegan, *Fields of Battle: The Wars of North America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), pp. 146-47.

<sup>10</sup> A Cornet of Horse, "The Royal Military College, Sandhurst", *Pall Mall Magazine*, Vol. 10 (September - December, 1896), p. 593.

walls were a memorial to the British military dead, covered as they were in plaques, memorials, tablets, brass plates, and flags honoring soldiers who had fallen in the many and varied campaigns of the nineteenth century—most of them very far from home.<sup>11</sup> Stable blocks, a riding school, sporting courts and pitches, and large outdoor training areas for practice with explosives and the building of fortifications and entrenchments helped to round out the Sandhurst grounds. Gentleman Cadets rehearsed bridge building on the two lakes in front of the Old College. Firing ranges facilitated instruction in both rifle and revolver proficiency. The expansive acreage permitted training in compass-reading and map-making, reconnaissance, cavalry and infantry maneuvers, and mock battles.<sup>12</sup>

Though it did not have the long history of Harrow or Blenheim, Sandhurst would have nonetheless reinforced Churchill's belief that the army, like politics, stood as a spokesman for—or buttress to—the force of British civilization or indeed of the Anglo-Saxon race. They were complementary, and to serve in one was to stand in service of the other. And so beyond the practical necessities like tactics and strategy, fortifications and riding, the Royal Military College by its very history and tradition shaped Churchill's presuppositions of the army as a source for good, able in a very romantic sense to fling out its civilizational arm to the far-flung corners of the earth. And though in September 1893 Churchill was almost entirely uneducated with respect to the actual practice of war, he was not uninformed with respect to certain conclusions regarding the character of military life, and nor was he a tabula rasa when it came to certain personal attitudes and temperaments that would suffuse both his training for war and his fighting of war.

Winston Churchill entered Sandhurst on 1 September 1893, along with 129 others. Academically he ranked nineteenth. He was nearly nineteen years old, of slender build, and stood five feet six and one-half inches tall.<sup>13</sup> He had, it must be remembered, only left Harrow less than a year before, and many of the habits and tendencies of personality acquired there and in his previous school years were still very strong and very present. His military intellect was in development, and in that regard Churchill's time at Sandhurst served less as an abrupt about-face and more as a time of pruning, direction and re-direction, and amalgamation.

Even so, it seems that Sandhurst brought the end of some of the troubles, educational and otherwise, that had plagued young Churchill up until this time. Sandhurst was much better suited to his ambition, and he was able to toss off the yokes of academia that had, largely

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<sup>11</sup> *The Chapel of the Royal Military College Sandhurst* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1924), pp. 1–24; Major A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst: A Chronicle of the Royal Military College from its Foundation to the Present Day* (London: Heinemann, 1900), pp. 77–86.

<sup>12</sup> *Syllabus of the Course of Instruction at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, 1895* (London: H. M. S. O., 1895), pp. 3–11; *MEL*, pp. 57–60, 62–63; Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, pp. 41–53.

<sup>13</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 212.

because of their assumed impracticality, weighed him down and kept him, at least at Harrow, from ever advancing too far competitively against his contemporaries. In his own words, Churchill was “no longer handicapped by past neglect of Latin, French or Mathematics. We now had to learn fresh things and we all started equal.”<sup>14</sup> Finally Churchill was able to direct his energies toward ends which he regarded as useful—both in service of a vocation of which he was fond, and in service of his own personal advancement.

In fact, it is shocking how fast his attitude changed when he was allowed to align his energies with his interests. “I am very contented and like the place very much’, wrote Churchill scarcely 72 hours after arriving at Sandhurst, spirits no doubt buoyed by fresh start. “Altogether, I like the life. I am interested in the drill and in the military education I shall receive; and now that the army *is* to be my trade I feel as keen as I did before I went in for any of the Examinations. At any rate I am sure that I shall be mentally, morally, and physically better for my course here.”<sup>15</sup>

The eighteen months from matriculation to commissioning at the Royal Military College were divided into three terms,<sup>16</sup> and respectively cadets progressed academically along three classes: junior, intermediate, and senior. Two classes, or intakes, matriculated to Sandhurst every year, and upon graduation one’s ranking was determined in his relation to the other cadets in his intake. The entire curricula was formed of only five disciplines: fortification, tactics, topography, military law, and military administration. Of these, Churchill was especially interested in tactics and fortification.<sup>17</sup>

Study in these subjects took up about five hours a day, with one to two hours of that time spent out of the lecture hall and engaged in practical field work. Churchill found the practical work in field fortification the “most exciting.”<sup>18</sup> Field fortification largely dealt with military engineering, and by 1900 the subject bore that name. “We dug trenches, constructed breastworks, revetted parapets with sandbags...we cut railway lines with slabs of guncotton, and learned how to blow up masonry bridges, or make substitutes out of pontoons or timber.”<sup>19</sup> In addition, military engineering included exercises in artillery and field guns, rifles and machine guns, geometrical drawing, defensive shelters, pits, coverings, and other

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<sup>14</sup> *MEL*, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> *Churchill, CV*, 1, i, pp. 206-07.

<sup>16</sup> This new system of three terms spread along eighteen months was introduced in September 1892. In 1900 it would revert back to one year divided into two terms.

<sup>17</sup> *MEL*, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

entrenchments, bridge building, the felling of trees,<sup>20</sup> clearing ground, camp and bivouac making, cooking arrangements, water supply and purification, latrines and field sanitation.<sup>21</sup>

The lectures and exercises in tactics covered areas like the effects of topography on units, outposts, reconnaissance, logistics, marches, advanced and rear guards, night operations, the probable effects of smokeless power, and the principles of employment, attack, and defence of infantry and cavalry. The study of tactics used as its textbooks both the *Infantry Drill Manual* and Captain C. M. Gruyther's *Tactics for Beginners*,<sup>22</sup> the latter a short volume by an instructor in tactics at the R. M. C. with chapters ranging across the entire scope of tactical considerations, including the organization and function of the three arms in both offence and defence in day and night on battlefields of varying terrains.<sup>23</sup>

Instruction in military topography was mostly given by lectures in classrooms and addressed some of the following subjects: different types of scales, copying, reducing, and enlarging maps, measurement of distances and angles, compass types and uses, triangulation, drawing and sketching, and the interaction of topography with reconnaissance.

As could be expected, military law and military administration were closely related. Both were classroom subjects, and both used as textbooks *The Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Army* and the *Manual of Military Law*. Military administration added to these sources *Notes on Administration*, by Major C. G. Morrison, whilst military law added to its sources *Notes on Military Law*,<sup>24</sup> by the same author. The course titles were largely self-descriptive. Military law covered such subjects as the organization of British and colonial forces, recruiting, mobilization, pay and allowances, responsibilities and duties of officers, clothing, equipment, and quarters, transport and supply in peace, movements by land and sea, and correspondence and the framing of reports. Correspondingly, military law covered such subjects as acts, orders, warrants, regulations, and rules, crimes and punishments, courts martial, and other mechanisms for establishing and maintaining law and order within the military.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Yesterday we went out and felled trees, which was very amusing." Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 418.

<sup>21</sup> See also Major H. D. Hutchinson, *Field Fortification* (Chatham: Gale and Polden, 1891), and C. F. Fuller, *Notes on Col. Philip's Text Book of Field Fortification* (Portsmouth: W. H. Carpenter and Co., 1890).

<sup>22</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, p. 289.

<sup>23</sup> This was a text that, as pertained to Churchill's eventual commissioning, argued that "the force of cavalry" was principally demonstrated at "the moment of collision with the enemy", and that "proper place" of the cavalryman was "always on his horse." This tactical prescription will be further discussed in the following chapter. Captain C. M. DeGruyther, *Tactics for Beginners*, London: Gale and Polden, 1899), p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Captain C. G. Morrison, *Notes on Military Law, Organisation, and Interior Economy* (London: H. M. S. O., 1895).

<sup>25</sup> The content of the curricula is deduced from the "Appendix B: Syllabus of the Course of Instruction at The Royal Military College, Sandhurst", as provided for the year 1900 in Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, pp. 284-91.

No foreign languages or other traditional academic subjects were taught during Churchill's terms at the R. M. C.; military history would not formally enter the curricula until 1897.<sup>26</sup> Churchill, then, sought to supplement the official curricula with his study. His love of reading had followed him from his earlier school years, and at Sandhurst that love joined his omnipresent ambition and desire for mastery over subjects he found practical and vocationally expedient. As he later recalled, "My father instructed his bookseller Mr. Bain to send me any books I might require for my studies. So I ordered Hamley's *Operations of War*, Prince Kraft's *Letters on Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery*,<sup>27</sup> Maine's<sup>28</sup> *Infantry Fire Tactics*, together with a number of histories dealing with the American Civil, Franco-German and Russo-Turkish wars, which were then our latest and best specimens of wars. I soon had a small military library which invested the regular instruction with some sort of background."<sup>29</sup> Churchill spent a good deal of time reading these texts,<sup>30</sup> and in some cases made typewritten notes,<sup>31</sup> which he hoped would help benefit him in the final examinations.<sup>32</sup>

Captain Charles Blair Mayne was an officer in the Royal Engineers and instructor at Canada's Royal Military College in Kingston. His *Infantry Fire Tactics* was a long discussion on the use of infantry firepower in war. Its chapters covered the constructions and uses of various rifles, and were a practical manual on topics like individual versus collective fire, trajectories, rapidity of fire, indirect and night fire, supply, ammunition, entrenching, and musketry. Written by an engineer, it at times delved into advanced trigonometry to explain more complex theories, and its appendices were a collection of charts and graphs demonstrating the effectiveness of various fire tactics. Mayne emphasized increased training and practice in peace, and concluded, for one, that "fire at short ranges should be the general rule in order to obtain decisive results, and that long-range fire should only be made use of under conditions favourable to its efficacious employment: while, at all ranges, the most stringent control over fire should be maintained."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, "superiority of fire is to be obtained more by a rational and good tactical use of the rifle than by any actual superiority of armament."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sir John Smyth, *Sandhurst* (London: Wedenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Discussed further in Chapters 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> The author assumes that Churchill was referring here to Captain Charles Blair Mayne who published at least two editions of his *Infantry Fire Tactics* (Chatham: Gale and Polden, 1885 and 1888).

<sup>29</sup> *MEL*, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> "I am reading a very good book I got from Bain on Artillery which will take some time." WSC to RC, letter dated 3 May 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/20.

<sup>31</sup> "I am reading up a very good work I got from Bain on tactics & making typewritten notes, which passes the time away." *Churchill, CV*, 1, i, p. 484.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498.

<sup>33</sup> Captain C. B. Mayne, *Infantry Fire Tactics* (Chatham: Gale and Polden, 1888), p. vi.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. v.

The son of a British Vice-Admiral, then-Colonel Edward Bruce Hamley was an artillery officer during the Crimean campaign and onetime Commandant of the Staff College at Camberley. His *The Operations of War: Explained and Illustrated* first appeared in 1866 and remained in print for at least forty years, becoming a standard textbook of military instruction. For part of the nineteenth century it also served as the sole textbook in entrance examination for the Staff College. Its pages contained a method in which “certain operations will be selected, detailed, explained, and what lessons they afford deduced, till in this way a theory shall be formed on facts and experience which the student may confidently use for general application.”<sup>35</sup> Using as various past wars and conflicts—like the campaign of 1796 in Germany, the campaigns of Salamanca and Jena, Waterloo, the 1864 campaign in Georgia—as case studies, its chapters discussed, in systematic fashion, from broader to finer considerations, questions such as the modern conditions of war, offensive versus defensive wars, communications, interposing an army between the parts of an enemy’s extended front, topography, configuration of bases and frontiers, formations and combinations of the different arms, the orders of battle, and other tactical concerns.<sup>36</sup> Throughout Hamley argued for strategy as a “flexible science”<sup>37</sup> and a new general “who has been taught by study and thought, not merely what has been done in war...but how to meet new circumstances with new combinations”; he “has mastered the problems of strategy, and can *read* the theatre of war.”<sup>38</sup>

Halfway through his second term Churchill had “nearly finished Hamley”, and it is no wonder that he considered it “a very solid but interesting work.”<sup>39</sup> He would have been swept up almost by the first sentence—to which his life, in some respects, was a testament: “No kind of history so fascinates mankind as the history of wars.”<sup>40</sup> The last sentence, too, would have equally charmed the young romantic, transfixed as he was, even at this early age, with casting himself in the role of the great soldier and savior: “If, of the many Englishmen who possess the qualities necessary for great soldiers, some few should find that this book has in any degree smoothed the path that leads to honour and achievement, the years passed in student its subjects, and the many months devoted to its composition, will have been sufficiently fruitful of result.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Bruce Hamley, *The Operations of War Explained and Illustrated* (London: William Blackwood, 1872), p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xi–xxiv.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 462, 464.

<sup>39</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 3 May 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/20.

<sup>40</sup> Hamley, *Operations of War*, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

Be that as it may, the fact that Churchill undoubtedly found inspiration and a friend in the opening and closing of *Operations of War* causes one to question the degree to which the gentleman cadet was able, then or in the future, to grasp all that came between. One can admire the bookends while ignoring the words they support. Only a few pages after his opening sentence, Hamley went on to take issue with those students who continued to read the history “as they read a romance. They read Napier when they are men as they used to read Plutarch when they are boys. They choose a side, drift with the course of the narrative, and accept the opinions of the historian.”<sup>42</sup> But this, argued Hamley, is “no longer sufficient”, and it is expected that students should “be something more than mere chroniclers.”<sup>43</sup> This is, in sum, one of the central questions of this paper. To put it a different way, one principal consideration is the degree to which Churchill’s military intellectual development included questions found in the whole of Hamley, or whether the intricacies of strategy and tactics were lost in the romantic flourish of the opening and closing sentences.

Churchill’s education was further supplemented, in his own words, through the occasional invitation to dine at the Staff College at Camberley, “where all the cleverest officers in the Army were being trained for High Command. Here was the study of divisions, army corps, and even whole armies; of bases, of supplies, and lines of communication and railway strategy. This was thrilling.”<sup>44</sup> Churchill reveled in the splendor of it all, much as he earlier on in his childhood—whether constructing forts at Blenheim, arranging his toy soldiers, reading Henty or Haggard, or watching in awe the gleaming Kaiser at the Crystal Palace in 1891. Then as it did at Sandhurst, parts of war remained very much in the realm of theatre. Still speaking of the stimulation of Camberley (but one can rightly assume a wider application), Churchill continued: “It did seem such a pity that it all had to be make-believe, and that the age of wars between civilized nations had come to an end for ever. If it had only been 100 years earlier what splendid times we should have had! Fancy being nineteen in 1793 with more than twenty years of war against Napoleon in front of one! However all that was finished...and now that the world was growing so sensible and pacific—and so democratic too—the great days were over.”<sup>45</sup> War was to be played out on the stage, with the greatest soldiers as the greatest protagonists. Soldiering even provided the appropriate accoutrements,

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *MEL*, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

and Churchill's life-long love of uniform<sup>46</sup> was apparent even from his earliest days at Sandhurst.<sup>47</sup>

To the standard Sandhurst curriculum and Churchill's own efforts in self-education was added different extracurricular military exercises such as gymnastics, drill, and riding school. Gymnastics, or the physical training of cadets, consumed an hour of most of Churchill's evenings and other than to note the fatigue that it caused<sup>48</sup> he did not comment on it frequently. Despite his being a fencing champion at Harrow, there is no mention of Churchill's participation in any of the athletic or sporting competitions in the official Sandhurst records.<sup>49</sup>

Riding was a different matter altogether. Though the formal riding school did not start until his second term, from very early on in his first term he relayed various stories of his outings<sup>50</sup> and asked for permission from home to take out the horses more often. "I want your leave to ride, also, as there are excellent horses in the village", he petitioned Lord Randolph ten days after arriving. "Please send me the two signatures as I want to ride very much."<sup>51</sup> From very early on Sandhurst helped to give outlet to and to cultivate Churchill's growing love of horses and horsemanship. It was an interest both personal and professional, and in the case of the latter, Churchill's growing mastery over horses certainly aided him during his future service as a cavalry officer on various frontiers. It was a mastery that would shape Churchill's consideration of cavalry tactics as the limits and usefulness of mounted warfare was impacted by his own personal experience. However, the full discussion and impact of his time spent riding at Sandhurst is best saved for that point when this thesis turns to Churchill's second and third terms, when he was formally engaged in riding school.

Drill involved exercises both in marching (formations, cadences, etc.) and in the handling weapons. Churchill seemed to have mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, the skills themselves were not his forte—so much so, as he later wrote, that he was relegated to remedial training: "I did not much like the drill and indeed featured for several months in the 'Awkward Squad,' formed from those who required special smartening up."<sup>52</sup> When, in mid-October, he had completed the afternoon drill sessions mandatory for the first five weeks of a

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<sup>46</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him*, pp. 60, 128; Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 416, 419, 434.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>49</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, pp. 97-273. Churchill did fence, though, as on 26 November 1893 he asked Lord Randolph for an early allowance as "I have to pay my Fencing Bill." *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 427, 415.

<sup>50</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/13-15.

<sup>51</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 412.

<sup>52</sup> *MEL*, p. 57.

cadet's first term, he was relieved: "At length we have finished our preliminary Drill and so shall have no more afternoon parades. Such a relief—it was awfully unpleasant to have to hurry on to parade immediately after luncheon."<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the spectacle of drill—smartly-dressed soldiers processing in formation under the glint of bayonet—fitted in very well with the air of romance and pageantry which Churchill so often impressed upon military life, and in which the prejudices of his own intellect basked. "Today we had an adjutants' parade of almost the whole battalion & did the new physical drill to music. A very pretty sight", Churchill wrote to his mother, before imploring: "You really must come down some day and see it. We appear to have got on very well & the commandant said that E. Company marched past the best."<sup>54</sup> Though E Company won the drill championship for two out of Churchill's three terms at Sandhurst, his name is not listed in the roll call of honored participants.<sup>55</sup>

Training in rifle and revolver handling and marksmanship was also part of military drill, and on more than one occasion Churchill wrote home of the practice "nearly every day" with his revolver, Lee-Metford rifle and bayonet.<sup>56</sup> It was firing practice that would have been administered by the NCOs according to the regulations set forth in the army's *Drill Book*. In November of his first term Churchill shot in the Company matches for both rifle and revolver, but again there is no listing of his name as among the sharpest shooters in the *Annals* of the R. M. C.<sup>57</sup> After his death his daughter, Lady Mary Soames, would attest that Churchill remained a good shot until late in life, a fact of which he was quite proud.<sup>58</sup>

Sandhurst, though allowing some time for leisure, kept strict discipline—"far stricter than Harrow", said Churchill. "No excuse is ever taken—not even with a plea of 'didn't know' after the first few hours; and of course no such thing as unpunctuality or untidiness is tolerated."<sup>59</sup> Yet the uncompromising regimen did not seem to chafe against him as it had consistently done during his previous years. Free from a system which did not understand nor could find any use for, the young cadet was willing to compromise his own wishes and predispositions. "There is something very exhilarating in the military manner in which everything works", Churchill wrote his father; "I think that I shall like my life here during the next 18 months very much."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 419.

<sup>54</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 28 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/18-19.

<sup>55</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, p. 258.

<sup>56</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 415.

<sup>57</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, pp. 214-46.

<sup>58</sup> As quoted in Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, p. 52.

<sup>59</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 409. See also *Ibid.*, p. 418.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

Churchill's first term in the "junior class" at Sandhurst involved a full daily schedule which left him with "very little time."<sup>61</sup> As he described to Lord Randolph only a few days after arriving, "Reveille is at 6.30. 1<sup>st</sup> study at 7. Breakfast at 8—parade at 9.10. Study from 10.20 to 1.50. 2 o'clock luncheon—3 o'clock afternoon parade (3/4 hour); 5 o'clock to 6 Gymnastics. 8 o'clock Mess. So you see there is hardly any time for writing or idling."<sup>62</sup> The afternoon parade was not a requirement after the "Preliminary Drill" period of the first five weeks of term and so ended in mid-October.<sup>63</sup> Saturdays were free after morning parade and all of Sunday's were free from official obligation. Many cadets chose to spend their weekends off Sandhurst grounds, and typically in London, though Lord Randolph "demurred to 'unrestricted leave'"<sup>64</sup> during Churchill's first term, and instead preferred that his son "read books on Saturday & Sunday."<sup>65</sup> Winston was unenthused and persistently asked for permission for unrestricted leave,<sup>66</sup> and complained, when it did not come, that "I suppose I shall go on being treated as 'that boy' till I am 50 years old",<sup>67</sup> and it was "such a bore being different from everyone else."<sup>68</sup>

Churchill's highest hurdle during his first term was not academic but corporal. He continued to be, as he was in boyhood, a somewhat frail man of often fragile health. The steady diet of training, exercise, and drill were difficult for Churchill. Only after a few days at Sandhurst he told his father that "the physical exertion of one day is so severe that at the end of the day I feel regularly fatigued."<sup>69</sup> A few days later he wrote to his grandmother of "drill which is awfully fatiguing"<sup>70</sup>, and a week after that, in a letter to Lady Randolph, he lamented: "I am cursed with so feeble a body, that I can hardly support the fatigues of the day."<sup>71</sup> On 13 October his health was such a bother that he sought medical advice. "Well, I have no news to tell you except that we had to run ¾ mile with Rifles & accoutrements the other day & I had to be helped off parade by a couple of sergeants at the end of it & have been bad ever since", he told Lady Randolph. "I have been to see the doctor & he says there is nothing wrong except that my heart does not seem very strong. So he has given me a tonic & lighter work for a few days."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 419.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.

<sup>65</sup> RC to WSC, letter dated 21 February 1894, CAC, CHAR 1/2/74.

<sup>66</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 412, 414.

<sup>67</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/13-15.

<sup>68</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 421.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.

<sup>71</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/13-15.

<sup>72</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 13 October 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/20-21.

Along with his disposition towards feebleness Churchill struggled, as he always had, with procrastination. And even though he was consistently late he worked hard to paint a brighter picture for his parents, stating many times<sup>73</sup> that although “public opinion of the College is tremendously against unpunctuality”,<sup>74</sup> he had been “neither late nor lazy.”<sup>75</sup> The note that accompanied his first term’s marks, though, told the true story: “Conduct: Good, but unpunctual”.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout Churchill’s junior term he would often write Lord and Lady Randolph of the news of Sandhurst, what he called “R. M. C. intelligence”.<sup>77</sup> In his correspondence one is struck by how different was his experience at Sandhurst than that of Harrow or his other schools. He enjoyed the life<sup>78</sup> and he enjoyed his studies.<sup>79</sup> Once removed from an environment which he considered largely impractical, energies once bent on rebelling were redirected and concentrated toward achieving aims and ends which he found useful and sensible. “The work is very interesting and extremely practical”, Churchill wrote his farther, before proceeding to give examples of just the types of work he meant: “Shot and shell of all kinds—bridges, guns, field and siege, mapping, keeping regimental savings bank accounts—inspecting meat etc. form the ‘study’ work. Then there are all the parades and drills.”<sup>80</sup> And again, a few weeks later, he reiterated the same: “The work is very interesting: today we learnt to make all kinds of nuts and to lash beams together. We have also been out making or learning to make sketch maps. On Monday we have to go and fire with a new 12 pounder gun, which has just been issued to the Artillery.”<sup>81</sup> Other than some minor complaints about the food<sup>82</sup> and the disrepair of his room,<sup>83</sup> Churchill seemed largely content resting upon the twin pillars of practicality and interest. They would become hallmarks of his military leadership: few ideas, no matter how sound, could earn his attention unless they first earned his

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<sup>73</sup> He emphasized this no less than five times during his first term. WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/13-15; *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 415; WSC to LRC, letter dated 28 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/18-19; WSC to LRC, letter dated 13 October 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/20-21; *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 421.

<sup>74</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 412.

<sup>75</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/13-15.

<sup>76</sup> *Royal Military College Sandhurst, The Register of Gentlemen Cadets, Vol. 4, 1890, Feb. to 1897, Jan.*, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Archives (Sandhurst Collection), WO 151; see also Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, p. 55.

<sup>77</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 21 October 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/22-23.

<sup>78</sup> “Everything is going on very well here”; “I like it very much indeed”; “Otherwise everything is most satisfactory & I feel very well.” *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 427, 412, 429.

<sup>79</sup> “I like Sandhurst better than ever and the work gets more interesting every day.” *Ibid.*, p. 418.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>82</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 28 September 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/18-19.

<sup>83</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 21 October 1893, CAC, CHAR 28/19/22-23.

interest; similarly, once interested in a particular strategy or tactic, hard was the task to convince or dissuade him otherwise.

“In three weeks the examinations begin, and so I am working rather hard”, Churchill wrote to Lord Randolph in mid-November. “Things are going on very smoothly here and I hope great things from the exam.”<sup>84</sup> During the first two weeks of December Churchill completed those exams, marking the end of his junior term at Sandhurst. He predicted he had done well,<sup>85</sup> and once marked he scored as follows:

1. Fortification	215
2. Tactics	278
3. Military Topography	199
4. Military Law	276
5. Military Administration	230
	1,198
	Conduct: Good, but unpunctual. <sup>86</sup>

The top score for each subject was 300, and to pass one had “to get 100 in each subject and 750 on the whole 5 subjects”, Churchill explained in a letter to Lord Randolph.<sup>87</sup> Overall Churchill came out eighth.<sup>88</sup> For an obdurate student who had up until that point fallen far short of full academic industriousness, and for whom it took three attempts to pass even the Sandhurst entrance examination, Churchill’s first term marks were certainly an improvement. Furthermore, they reemphasized his capacity to grasp military principles—at least as presented in their basic form in the first term curriculum of a Sandhurst gentleman cadet.

That his Sandhurst entrance examination marks had fallen short of those required for the infantry and had thereby consigned him to the cavalry was a secret relief to Churchill, who had always preferred the dash and glamour of the mounted arm. The last-minute place that opened up in the infantry, then, proved disappointing, and so it was in the winter of 1893–94, during his two-month vacation between terms, that he renewed his enthusiasm and lobbying for a commission as a cavalry officer.

His enthusiasm was somewhat personified and encouraged by his growing acquaintance with then-Colonel John Palmer Brabazon, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars cavalry regiment. At the time of Churchill’s cadetship, the regiment was garrisoned at Aldershot and, given its proximity to Sandhurst, Churchill was offered the chance to visit both the regiment and its colonel. The acquaintance was eased by the old relationship Colonel Brabazon shared

<sup>84</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 426. Elsewhere Churchill admitted to studying hard: *Ibid.*, pp. 428, 429.

<sup>85</sup> WSC to LRC, CAC, CHAR 28/12/51/52.

<sup>86</sup> *Royal Military College Sandhurst, The Register of Gentlemen Cadets, Vol. 4, 1890, Feb. to 1897, Jan.*, WO 151.

<sup>87</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 430.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 433.

with the Churchills. Prior to Winston finally being offered a place in the infantry, Lord Randolph had thought to use this connection to secure him a place in Brabazon's regiment for two or three years before transferring him to the infantry.<sup>89</sup>

His reasons behind his preference for the cavalry were, on the main, three-pronged, though one suspects that the importance he placed upon two outweighed the third. The first reason, and the most obvious, was attitudinal: the idea of the cavalry played directly into the romanticism omnipresent in Churchill's notions of military life and warfare. As a characteristic explored well elsewhere, it only remains the object here to realize how deep and how present was the inclination even in adolescence, and how it was a central characteristic of his early military intellectual development. When the newly-commissioned Lieutenant Churchill thought about war, he thought about it at least in romantic terms; the same could be said of him as a newly-appointed Prime Minister.

If Churchill's first reason was attitudinal, his second was strategic: as a man of ambition, Churchill realized that promotion came easier on horseback than on foot, and as early as the beginning of his second term he was anxious over the prospect of graduating early to begin that advancement.<sup>90</sup> Correspondingly, and not unrelated to his first reason, Churchill believed he would have an easier time distinguishing himself in the cavalry. If the stories of old spoke of gallantry on horseback, then maybe with a bit of luck he too could feature in such stories, and in so doing help catapult his name into the limelight. The cavalry could prove more useful than infantry in "Churchill" becoming a household name.

His third reason was sober practicality. Throughout Churchill's school years both his physique and his health proved notoriously frail, and the physical demands of Sandhurst added strain to both.<sup>91</sup> Churchill did not look forward to long foot marches heavy-laden with a full pack. The infantry would, then, at least physically, emphasize those areas in which Churchill struggled whilst ignoring that area in which he excelled. "I hate the Infantry", he told Lady Randolph during his second term, "in which physical weaknesses will render me nearly useless on service & the only thing I am showing an aptitude for athletically—riding—will be no good to me."<sup>92</sup>

Convinced of what he considered to be three sound reasons, during the holiday before his second term Churchill began what would become a long argument over his seeking a cavalry commission. He began with a letter to his mother, in whom he guessed—rightly—he might find an ally. He listed six arguments in favour of the cavalry: quicker promotions,

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>92</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 1 May 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/18.

quicker commissions, quicker dispatch to India, better provisioning for officers, cheaper equine husbandry, and finally, what he called “sentimental advantages”.<sup>93</sup>

If judging by the sheer number of times he used it in the effort to persuade his parents, Churchill’s talent for riding was his strongest argument for a place in the mounted arm. During the winter months before he returned for his second term at Sandhurst, Churchill had his father arrange riding lessons<sup>94</sup> with Captain Charles Henry Burt, riding master of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Life Guards.<sup>95</sup> Churchill’s hope to “steal a march on the other cadets”<sup>96</sup> seemed to work, and throughout his intermediate term he excelled on horseback. “He has been riding and was put at the head of the class”, Lady Randolph wrote of her eldest son. “He is delighted with his progress and the pull he has over the others.”<sup>97</sup>

Returning to Sandhurst (as he was anxious to do<sup>98</sup>) for his second term in mid-February, Churchill found the academic programme much the same as the first term. There was the addition of some extra work, and lights out in the evening was moved to one half-hour earlier. Though these changes were unpopular, in his correspondence Churchill complained infrequently.<sup>99</sup> He also made little mention of the physical strains of the added activities, suggesting that his first term efforts had helped condition his body.

The largest change in his second term was the addition of the formal Riding School, which was added to the academic and training programme. Major Hodgkins was the Sandhurst Riding Master during Churchill’s time, and the instruction was based upon the *Cavalry Drill* manual.<sup>100</sup> Hodgkins belonged to a class of instructors for which Sandhurst had always been “particularly fortunate”, the likes among whom were remembered as a “Mephistopheles-form standing in the corner of the school, long whip in one hand and horse-pistol in the other, waiting for a victim.” When one came along there followed “a frantic cut from the whip on the horse’s flanks and the discharge of the pistol under his belly, and instantly the whole school was in an uproar, with horses bolting in all directions and pale-face cadets clutching at the pommel.”<sup>101</sup> Riding School was perhaps the most formative component of Churchill’s Sandhurst education. Once commissioned, in an article meant to describe the life of a

<sup>93</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 December 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/55; *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 433–34.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437. During the holiday Churchill was also able to ride with Lord Valentia, Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the Oxfordshire Imperial Yeomanry, a regiment in which Churchill would eventually serve.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444.

<sup>98</sup> It seems that he was bored in London, as he wrote from Grosvenor Square: “I feel very well and I am looking forward to going back to the R. M. C. as there is not much to do in town.” *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 440, 467.

<sup>100</sup> Mockler-Ferryman, *Annals of Sandhurst*, p. 292.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

gentleman cadet at Sandhurst, Churchill went to great lengths to describe the riding instruction as, in his own words, it “plays so important a part in the curriculum of a soldier, and fills so prominent a place in the Sandhurst curriculum.”<sup>102</sup> Several decades later his love of horses and riding, which he called “the greatest of my pleasures at Sandhurst”, persisted. To “sit and manage a horse...is one of the most important things in the world”, he contended, before continuing with advice: “And here I say to parents... ‘Don’t give your son money. As far as you can afford it, give him horses.’...No hour of life is lost that is spent in the saddle.”<sup>103</sup>

The next chapter discusses more fully Churchill’s service in, interaction with, and critique of the mounted arm, but here it is important to note that it should never be forgotten that when it came to active military service Churchill was first a cavalryman. In the course of his life he would serve in four different cavalry regiments.<sup>104</sup> Looking ahead it is interesting to consider, then, the role that Churchill as a cavalryman played in his military intellectual development. Was his development impacted in ways that it would not have been had he not abandoned his father’s plan of the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles? Did he come to consider strategic and tactical questions as one who has the vantage of a high perch, whilst ignoring detail gleaned only when one’s feet are on the ground or—as would come to pass in two decades’ time—in the trenches? In short, did Churchill regard war differently because of his training and station as a cavalry officer?

When it came to the Sandhurst curricula and exercises, Churchill commented on little else besides riding in his frequent letters home.<sup>105</sup> This was partly because of the sheer pleasure he derived from the subject; partly, too, because he had a point to make. He recounted his successes for his parents. Where some fell off when practising without stirrups, Churchill stayed on;<sup>106</sup> when untamed horses proved too difficult for others, Winston retained control.<sup>107</sup> Through repetition he pressed a point and subtly suggested his suitability for the arm that best fitted his natural talents.

From his correspondence it seems that, besides the riding, Churchill’s military training during his second term at Sandhurst was filled with little more than the daily routine of study and exercise. He made specific references to sketching (“very hot and uncomfortable

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<sup>102</sup> A Cornet of Horse, “The Royal Military College, Sandhurst”, p. 595.

<sup>103</sup> *MEL*, p. 59.

<sup>104</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars, 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers, South African Light Horse, and the Oxfordshire Hussars.

<sup>105</sup> In fact, during his second term Churchill commented in his success in riding in at least ten letters home, eight of which were addressed to the most unsympathetic opponent, Lord Randolph. By contrast, other subjects and exercises—gymnastics, musketry, and signaling—were only casually mentioned. See *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 440, 445, 449, 451, 464, 477, 498; WSC to LRC, letters dated 19 February 1894 and 16 March 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20 and CAC, CHAR 28/20/11; WSC to Lord RC, letter dated 9 March 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/9.

<sup>106</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, I, p. 467.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

work”<sup>108</sup>), gymnastics (“very tiring and a great bore”<sup>109</sup>), and musketry (“very interesting”<sup>110</sup>); he also asked his father’s permission to take up instruction in his old pastime of fencing.<sup>111</sup> No longer in his junior term, Churchill was afforded more freedom and had to try hard to resist spending his weekends in nearby London. In this he had Lord Randolph’s support, which came more in the form of a command. “If you devote on Sunday at least 3 hours of real study”, Lord Randolph wrote his son in April 1894, “You will have that advantage of extra knowledge over those cadets who take their leave for Saturday & Sunday.” Lord Randolph was concerned for his son’s military mind (he provided, as mentioned, any additional textbooks that Winston might request), and stated clearly that “when you go into the army I wish you to make your one aim the ambition of rising in that profession by showing to your officers superior military knowledge skill & instinct.”<sup>112</sup> Churchill began to follow his father’s advice<sup>113</sup> and spent some weekend hours reading the military textbooks.<sup>114</sup> He further applied himself in his second term and volunteered to take a signaling class which he found “most useful” and in which the instruction was “very good.”<sup>115</sup>

During this term, too, Churchill’s gaze travelled beyond the Sandhurst grounds and he engaged in a programme of expanding his social and professional contacts. He met many of these persons of influence alongside his father, in whose eyes, in Churchill’s own words, he “acquired a new status” as a gentleman cadet. “I was entitled on leave to go about with him”, Churchill later wrote.<sup>116</sup> The figures, understandably, were largely political, and together he was introduced to “most of the leaders and a selection of the rising men of the Conservative Party.”<sup>117</sup> It is interesting to note here how at Sandhurst there began what could be called a lifelong amalgamation. One could certainly argue that in his later posts as a government minister responsible for facets of the British military, that politics and war were, for Churchill, inexorably intertwined. The posts demanded it. But even when the posts did not demand it, even when his sole responsibility was that of a gentleman cadet, or a cavalry subaltern, Churchill could not resist the urge to mix politics and war. From a young age they were overlapping spheres of influence. One was tied to the other in ways not only expedient. The important point for Churchill is that the man of politics and the man of war were both well

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 477.

<sup>111</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 20 April 1894, *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 465–66.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 448.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 467–68.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>116</sup> *MEL*, p. 59.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60. He also met, through Lord Randolph, several prominent figures in the world of racehorses.

suiting for the stage. Both were intrinsically capable of playing a leading role; both had in them the seeds of the protagonist. And so here again Churchill came to regard war as a form of theatre, and one wonders whether this constant mixing of politics and war did not cause one art to suffer for the sake of the other. The inherent inner and intellectual restlessness apparent even during his days at Sandhurst seems to have thwarted his complete concentration and focus on his military schooling. Put simply, had Churchill devoted himself solely to studying and practising war, would his military intellectual development have taken on a keener edge?

Alongside the political contacts Churchill also met leading military figures like Lord Roberts, who won a Victoria Cross in the Indian Mutiny of 1858, and whom Lord Randolph had been instrumental in seeing appointed as Commander-in-Chief, India, and under whom Churchill would eventually serve on the subcontinent.<sup>118</sup> It was in this term, too, that Churchill increasingly fell under the strong spell of Col. Brabazon and the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars. In March 1894 Brabazon, whom Churchill described as “magnificently dressed”,<sup>119</sup> visited Sandhurst and invited the cadet to visit Aldershot, which Churchill did over the weekend of 28–29 April 1894, making the visit with Julian Byng, then a Captain in the 10<sup>th</sup> Hussars.<sup>120</sup> It was his first regimental mess,<sup>121</sup> and he described it later as

a great treat...It was like a State banquet. In an all-pervading air of glitter, affluence, ceremony and veiled discipline, an excellent and length dinner was served to the strains of the regimental string band. I received the gayest of welcomes, and having it would seem conducted myself with discretion and modesty, I was invited again on several occasions.<sup>122</sup>

The visit certainly had its effect. A few days after Churchill wrote to his mother of the “great fun” he had at Aldershot. “How I wish I were going into the 4<sup>th</sup> instead of those old Rifles. It would not cost a penny more<sup>123</sup> & the regiment goes to India in 3 years which is just right for me. I hate the Infantry”, he bemoaned, before once again appealing to a sense of urgency: “Furthermore of all regiments in the army the Rifles is slowest for promotion.”<sup>124</sup> A month later found Churchill again at Aldershot, this time for a Grand Review attended by Queen Victoria. It was by all accounts a “brilliant military spectacle”<sup>125</sup> and one which only encouraged Churchill’s enamouring: “The Review was splendid. I never did see so many troops in the field at once. I got a very good place & saw everything capitally. Colonel

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<sup>118</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 450.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 455.

<sup>120</sup> Churchill would once act as his galloper during the Boer War. *Ibid.*, p. 475, note 1.

<sup>121</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 3 May 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/20.

<sup>122</sup> *MEL*, p. 75.

<sup>123</sup> In fact a commission in a cavalry regiment cost at least £200 more per annum.

<sup>124</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 1 May 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/18.

<sup>125</sup> “The Queen at Aldershot”, *The Times* (London, England), 18 May 1894, p. 7.

Brabazon looked the smartest officer there and the Fourth were very good.”<sup>126</sup> Less than two weeks later he was at Aldershot again, this time for the Queen’s Birthday Review, which Churchill called “very splendid”, and after which Brabazon “took me home & gave me lunch with the mess.”<sup>127</sup> His desire for the mounted arm was certainly gaining momentum as he still gathered the courage make his case to Lord Randolph.

During his second term Churchill was for the second time in his life a distant witness to death by drowning, reminiscent of the capsized *Eurydice* off the coast of Ventor. In May 1894 a cadet drowned on one of the Sandhurst lakes, using one of the boats Churchill had been using “not an hour before.” He wondered over his own luck and the ill-fortune of his classmate, thankful, in a letter to Lady Randolph, for the swimming skills acquired at Harrow: “About 6 weeks ago I got turned over there but through I had very heavy boots on & the water was cold I got out easily thanks to ‘Ducker.’ Very sad.”<sup>128</sup> It was the second recorded time that Churchill witnessed, in what seemed to be a very personal way, the sometimes harsh realities and mortal consequences of military life.<sup>129</sup>

In spite of this, Churchill’s second term progressed without much turbulence and, as with during his first term, he often wrote of how things were “going on very well indeed here”, of how “there is no trouble of any sort”, and how he liked “Sandhurst more than ever.”<sup>130</sup> After a term of some distraction but some study as well Churchill, in July 1894, neared his intermediate term exams. To his father he wrote of how he hoped “to benefit by the extra work I have done in Hamley, Mayne, and Prince Kraft”,<sup>131</sup> and on their eve he wrote to his mother of his confidence: “I am doing a lot of work as the Examinations begin to-morrow. I feel I know my subject very thoroughly and am not nervous as to not getting through. I hope however to pass high as I shall take the opportunity of writing a long letter to pap on the subject of Cavalry. I have been piling up material for some time and have a most formidable lot of arguments.”<sup>132</sup> When he received his marks he scored as follows:<sup>133</sup>

	<u>First Term</u>	<u>Second Term</u>
1. Fortification	215	254
2. Tactics	278	266

<sup>126</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 484.

<sup>127</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 25 May 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/26.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> The Sandhurst drowning incident also could not have avoided intensifying his aversion to sea travel, as referred to in the previous chapter.

<sup>130</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 449; WSC to LRC, letter dated 10 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/28.

<sup>131</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, p. 498.

<sup>132</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 10 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/28.

<sup>133</sup> For the sake of comparison they are listed alongside his first term marks.

3. Military Topography	199	207
4. Military Law	276	218
5. Military Administration	230	195
	1,198	1,140
	Conduct:	Conduct:
	Good, but unpunctual.	Unpunctual <sup>134</sup>

Overall, out of a total possible score of 1,500, Churchill scored 58 points lower than his first term, and though the unpunctuality persisted his conduct no longer listed “Good”. Churchill, though, in a letter to his mother did not seem too bothered: “Last time I got 1198 so you see I have lost about 60 marks. This I attribute to the fact that the papers did not suit me quite as well as last time—being rather apart from the notes from which I worked.”<sup>135</sup> Churchill seemed satisfied just in his passing, and any desire he possessed to excel seemed to stem more from his want of impressing Lord Randolph in hopes of abandoning an infantry commissioning.

Lord Randolph’s health was rapidly deteriorating and in a desperate attempt of “effecting a cure, or at least arresting the progress of the disease” he and Lady Randolph left on 27 June for a tour around the world.<sup>136</sup> Churchill began his six-week summer recess on 14 July 1894. His time in Britain he spent, in his parents’ absence, with his grandmother at Grosvenor Square, which he once again found more boring than Sandhurst,<sup>137</sup> though he did manage to occupy himself by accepting a number of invitations from “good society” received “on the strength of [Lord and Lady Randolph’s] popularity”,<sup>138</sup> and by continuing his military riding lessons at Hyde Park Barracks.<sup>139</sup> On 1 August he and Jack set off on another tour of the Continent, again with Mr. Little.<sup>140</sup> It was not without military influence: in Brussels he examined the “American Warship *Chicago* lying in the river...as closely as the authorities would let” them.<sup>141</sup> He also explored the battlefield of Waterloo,<sup>142</sup> illustrating that even while away from the formal military setting of Sandhurst his mind was still at least somewhat preoccupied with things related to war.

<sup>134</sup> *Royal Military College Sandhurst, The Register of Gentlemen Cadets, Vol. 4, 1890, Feb. to 1897, Jan.*, WO 151; see also Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, pp. 55, 63.

<sup>135</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 26 August 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/19/35-36.

<sup>136</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 235. Churchill was abruptly bidden from Sandhurst to bid his father goodbye and, in his own words, “I never saw him again, except as a swiftly-fading shadow.” *MEL*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>137</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/19/28-29.

<sup>138</sup> Frances, Duchess of Marlborough to LRC, letter dated 19 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/42/23; WSC to LRC, letter dated 22 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/19/30-32.

<sup>139</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, pp. 507, 508, 509.

<sup>140</sup> Frances, Duchess of Marlborough to LRC, letter dated 7 August 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/42/25-26.

<sup>141</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 3 August 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/19/33-34.

<sup>142</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 31 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/30.

During his summer recess Churchill finally mustered the courage to write Lord Randolph of his desire to join the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars. Whilst no copy of his letter to his father exists, Churchill did recount its contents to his mother, then currently in North America. “I have written Papa a long letter on the subject of the Cavalry”, he wrote Lady Randolph. “I do so hope he will not be angry—or take it as ‘freespoken’ or stupid. I only wrote what I thought he ought to know—namely how keen I was to go into the Cavalry and how I could not look forward with great eagerness to going with even the best Infantry regiment in the world.”<sup>143</sup> If Churchill was expecting sympathy he was wrong. Lord Randolph’s reply, penned in California, was unambiguous and incontrovertible: “I do not enter into your lengthy letter of the 22d in which you enlarge on your preference for the Cavalry over the 60<sup>th</sup> Rifles. I could never sanction such a change.”<sup>144</sup> It is unknown if Lord Randolph’s emphasis on his own mortality was written in the knowledge of his impending death. By all accounts it was prescient; it was his final word on the subject, and indeed his final letter to Churchill.

Churchill had, by 4 September 1894, returned to Sandhurst for his third term. This final, or “senior”, term brought a further increase in work and study hours.<sup>145</sup> The general structure and academic subjects, though, remained largely the same as in the intermediate term. The riding continued, of course, and with his eye on the Riding Prize offered at the end of the term, Churchill redoubled his efforts aimed at horsemanship. After such a resounding rebuff from Lord Randolph the month previous, Churchill considered winning the competition his last chance at switching to the mounted arm. “The riding has begun also and I am working so hard at it”, Churchill wrote to his mother in his upon returning to Sandhurst. “I should like nothing netter than to win the riding prize. My only chance of persuading Papa to let me go in the Cavalry is, I feel, to do something of that sort. If I take ‘Honours’ very high on the list, in passing out or win the Riding Prize I shall broach the subject again but till then the future is very gloomy.”<sup>146</sup> Churchill complemented his formal riding lessons with hunting, a sport in which he had dabbled in the past, but which during his final term garnered a newfound keenness. As he wrote to Lady Randolph: “I do love this kind of riding. You know how little I have hunted. I don’t think anything would stop me if I had a good horse...I do not think that there is anything in this world I would rather do than hunt—I mean so far as pleasure is concerned.”<sup>147</sup> It was these sorts of experiments that helped engender for Churchill and his fellow cadets the hope of some future conflict in which to make a name for oneself.

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<sup>143</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 22 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/19/30-32.

<sup>144</sup> RC to WSC, letter dated 21 August 1894, CAC, CHAR 1/2/87.

<sup>145</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 4 September 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/34.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 19 September 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/39.

“There were Zulus and Afghans, also the Dervishes of the Soudan. Some of these might, if they were well-disposed, ‘put up a show’ some day”, Churchill later wrote of his youthful yearnings. “We wondered about all this. Of course we should all get our commissions so much earlier and march about the plains of India and win medals and distinction and perhaps rise to very high command like Clive when quite young!”<sup>148</sup>

In September 1894, in the midst of the First Sino-Japanese War, Japanese forces converged on the walled city of Pyongyang in which the Chinese Beiyang Army established a defensive position. Churchill took great interest in the Japanese victory that included the defeat of a Chinese naval force near the mouth of the Yalu River. “The news of the great battles of the war has just reached us. You must write and give me some news”, he begged his mother, and commented on how interesting it must have been for her to be “near the seat of war”, before continuing: “I take the greatest interest in the operations both, of the fleets & armies. Anything so brilliant as the night attack of Ping Yang is hard to find in modern war. The reports as they have arrived here seem to show that the Japanese concentration was so accurately timed & their assault so skillfully delivered that the celestials had ‘no show’ at all.”<sup>149</sup> His request for more information shows genuine interest that suggests an enthusiasm for the art of war perhaps beyond that of an indolent or preoccupied gentleman cadet. So does Churchill’s stay at Harrow in October 1894 to visit his brother but also to attend Lord Roberts’s lectures.<sup>150</sup>

It is also important not to forget the simple fact that, for Churchill, Sandhurst was fun.<sup>151</sup> It was the continuation of the “gleam in his eye” with which he often approached military life and war. A friend reported that on the eve of the First World War, far from being “filled with sadness”, Churchill rose to the occasion with “glowing zest.”<sup>152</sup> The sentiments associated at a young age with toy soldiers carried on through Sandhurst and beyond. Whilst still a cadet he wrote home of the “amusements” which he found “attractive.”<sup>153</sup> After graduating he spoke of Sandhurst as a “pleasing emancipation, profitable to experience, agreeable to recall.” It was a time, he said, “of merriment and sport, a time of high hopes and good friends, of many pleasures and insignificant worries—a period of gratified ambitions and

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<sup>148</sup> MEL, pp. 58-59.

<sup>149</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 19 September 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/39.

<sup>150</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 21 October 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/42.

<sup>151</sup> For more, see Manchester, *The Last Lion*, pp. 191-92.

<sup>152</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him*, p. 313.

<sup>153</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 8 November 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/47.

attained ideals.”<sup>154</sup> Later in life he would still regale his friends with stories of his pranks as a gentleman cadet.<sup>155</sup>

The Riding Examination took place on 7 December 1894. It was “considered a great honour” in which the cadets took “great interest.” Two days later he proudly reported news of the day to his father: “I was wild with excitement and rode I think better than I have ever done before but failed to win the prize by 1 mark being 2<sup>nd</sup> with 199 out of 200 marks...I am awfully pleased with the result...I hope you will be very pleased.”<sup>156</sup> There is little question that it proved to be Churchill’s most memorable day at Sandhurst. His father was unfortunately too ill to take notice, and his mother too preoccupied with Lord Randolph to offer much in the way of congratulations. Still, the accomplishment had a bolstering affect on Churchill and was the final verdict on the right arm of the military for the young gentleman cadet.

In the days that followed came the final exams, for which the competition was “very keen” and Churchill was “working hard.” He confessed to needing to revisit tactics, but he trusted that all would “be satisfactory and that I shall find I have passed successfully out of Sandhurst.”<sup>157</sup> His hopefulness proved justified (“the examinations were after all easy”<sup>158</sup>) and he scored admirable marks:<sup>159</sup>

	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>WSC</u>
1. Fortification	600	532
2. Tactics	300	263
3. Military Topography	600	471
4. Military Law	300	227
5. Military Administration	300	232
6. Drill	200	95
7. Gymnastics	200	85
8. Riding	200	190 <sup>160</sup>
9. Musketry	150	105
10. Marks Awarded by Professors	600	446
Total:	3,450	2,646

Conduct: Good.<sup>161</sup>

Churchill later wrote that he “passed out with honours eight in my class of a hundred and fifty”, adding—remembering his earlier academic struggles—that was demonstration that

<sup>154</sup> A Cornet of Horse, “The Royal Military College, Sandhurst”, p. 598.

<sup>155</sup> Moran, *The Struggle for Survival*, p. 392.

<sup>156</sup> WSC to RC, letter dated 9 December 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/50/51.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 December 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/55.

<sup>159</sup> Subjects 6–10 were only scored in the senior term.

<sup>160</sup> Why this score differs from the score of 199 that WSC reported to RC is unknown.

<sup>161</sup> *Royal Military College Sandhurst, The Register of Gentlemen Cadets, Vol. 4, 1890, Feb. to 1897, Jan.*, WO 151; see also Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, p. 68.

“I could learn quickly enough the things that mattered.”<sup>162</sup> In fact, Churchill was wrong in his standing and the official records at Sandhurst confirm that his autobiography, which recorded Churchill’s final class standing as 20<sup>th</sup> out of a class of 130,<sup>163</sup> was correct.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, Churchill’s repeated desire to pass out “with honours” and then his later claim that he did so leaves the reader wondering. For, whilst Churchill was there, Sandhurst made no allowance for graduating “with honours”; the only recognition as such that it bestowed was the Sword of Honour, awarded to the cadet “considered to have had the best influence amongst the cadets generally...the most deserving cadet, although not necessarily passing out high.”<sup>165</sup> When Churchill graduated the Sword of Honour went to Howarth Greenley. Greenley had the highest marks of all the cavalry cadets and by that standard Churchill’s marks were second-highest.<sup>166</sup> They were his most distinguished academic achievement to date, the last exams he would ever take.

Churchill left Sandhurst on 17 December 1894, and though he finished “very successfully...leaving many friends and numerous acquaintances”, the air of accomplishment was dampened by news of his father’s worsening prognosis which forced he and Lady Randolph to cut their world tour short, returning to London on 24 December. “For a month, at his mother’s house, he lingered pitifully,” wrote Churchill in his father’s autobiography, “until very early in the morning of January 24 the numbing fingers of paralysis laid that weary brain to rest.”<sup>167</sup>

Lord Randolph had forbidden his son to switch arms during his lifetime, but upon his death Churchill, free from that forbiddance, wasted no time. Within a week of his father’s funeral he started making the necessary arrangements for a commissioning in the cavalry. He persuaded Lady Randolph to telegraph Colonel Brabazon asking the best course of action, to which the regimental commander replied that she should take her case directly to the Duke of Cambridge.<sup>168</sup> This she did and secured the Duke’s commitment to write to the Military Secretary to enquire as to whether Churchill’s candidature could “be transferred from the 60<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> MEL, p. 73.

<sup>163</sup> Churchill, 1, p. 242.

<sup>164</sup> Royal Military College Sandhurst, *The Register of Gentlemen Cadets, Vol. 4, 1890, Feb. to 1897, Jan.*, WO 151.

<sup>165</sup> Alan Shepperd, *Sandhurst: The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and its Predecessors* (London: Country Life, 1980), p. 99.

<sup>166</sup> Royal Military College Sandhurst, *The Register of Gentlemen Cadets, Vol. 4, 1890, Feb. to 1897, Jan.*, WO 151.

<sup>167</sup> WSC, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, Vol. 2, p. 484. Seventy years later, to the day, WSC would die.

<sup>168</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, i, pp. 553-54.

Rifles to a Cavalry Regiment & specially to the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars.”<sup>169</sup> Twelve days later Churchill reported to Aldershot and the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars, and on 20 February he received his commission, signed by H. Campbell-Bannerman, Secretary of State for War:<sup>170</sup>

*War Office, Pall Mall,  
19<sup>th</sup> February, 1895.*

*4<sup>th</sup> Hussars, Gentleman Cadet Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, from the Royal Military College, to be Second Lieutenant, in succession To Lieutenant C. H. B. Gaine, seconded.  
Dated 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1895.*<sup>171</sup>

There is no doubt that Sandhurst was among the most maturational times in Churchill’s life. In the space of the just over 15 months he spent there he, in many ways, transitioned from boyhood to manhood. And, despite this, there were some things he did not leave behind, and the fact that he still retained them even at the age of 20 and at the cusp of entering into full adult and professional life means, quite correctly, that they were to be habits and dispositions that would, with very few exceptions, remain with him throughout the rest of his fighting years.

He came to Sandhurst obdurate, and though his stubbornness was seasoned into respectability there still continued a rather strong streak that one never had to dig very deep to uncover.<sup>172</sup> He still wanted to get his way, and any appearance of less outright obstinacy is because it just so happened that his way was, on the whole, more in line with the way required of him. He came to Sandhurst restless, and whilst there his grandmother wrote of him as being “volatile and impulsive.”<sup>173</sup> He came to Sandhurst a romantic, and if anything that sentiment only intensified as it was concentrated. The rigmarole of the daily and sometimes unpleasant routine did not, for Churchill, rob the romanticism of its luster; it did not disenchant the enchanted. Instead the romanticism grew flesh, and it became more real: the horses he had once read about were now his to ride; the uniforms that had once caught his attention were now being fitted to his small frame.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 554. According to WSC, by September 1894 the Duke of Cambridge had already forgotten the commitment he had made to RC. WSC to LRC, letter dated 4 September 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/20/34.

<sup>170</sup> Eleven years later WSC was to receive from Bannerman his first Ministerial appointment as Under-secretary for the Colonies. *Churchill*, 1, pp. 243-44.

<sup>171</sup> *The London Gazette* (London, England), 19 February 1895, p. 1001.

<sup>172</sup> The Duchess of Marlborough noted to LRC that WSC was “mercurial” and “requires a firm hand” and “checking sometimes.” Francis, Duchess of Marlborough to LRC, letter dated 19 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/42/23; Francis, Duchess of Marlborough to LRC, letter dated 27 July 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/42/24.

<sup>173</sup> Francis, Duchess of Marlborough to LRC, letter dated 19 September 1894, CAC, CHAR 28/42/29-30.

He came to Sandhurst ambitious and left even more so. He fancied the prospect of graduating early and yet it constantly eluded him. If some of his fellow gentleman cadets had entered the Royal Military College out of obligations to class or society, of a gentleman's duty to serve, Churchill entered for different reasons. To be sure, his father wanted him to enter and had Churchill resisted he would no doubt have met, as was demonstrated on other occasions, a bull-headedness sufficient to match his own. But the point is that he did not want to resist. By all indicators he wanted to enter the army, and by all indicators where that desire might have included an obligation to class or society, it was more than that. Churchill relished the idea of military life, and especially those points where he assumed at this young age that such a life would intersect with heroism and adventure and status and the cause of country. Furthermore, and just as important, he entered out of an obligation to the career path, and not a path ending in a single-dimensional apogee. By the end of Sandhurst, and certainly in the months that followed, it became all too clear that Churchill was aiming for politics. If anything the death of Lord Randolph crystalized this and vindicated his resolve. In this respect the military was to be a stepping-stone.

If those were some constants that continued with Churchill despite Sandhurst, the time spent there did affect some changes as well, changes that were in a position to have a more direct bearing on Churchill's military intellectual development. Churchill's first real experience with military education, however rudimentary, began at Sandhurst, and faced with this new curricula Churchill's regard for education changed. No longer forced to learn that which he neither cared for nor found practical, he mollified—and in some cases, reversed—the lackadaisical and unremarkable academic performances that had overshadowed much of his learning up to that point. He was not incapable; when he wanted to learn he could learn. At Sandhurst he wanted to learn and even had a fair amount of aptitude for the basic military principles that formed the crux of what the British Army deemed important in the early education and development of its future military leaders. And when he found the Sandhurst regimen to be lacking he acquired respected texts on military strategy and tactics, making typewritten notes in an effort to better grasp and retain the material.

As his final examinations and other experiences demonstrated, Churchill possessed some practical military skills as well. He was good at fencing, a talent not wholly isolated from that required of cavalymen on the battlefield, notwithstanding the difference in weapons, context, and tactics. He voluntarily took a signaling class; he was an adept swimmer; one could hardly characterize him as uncourageous; he possessed skills of observation. Most obvious, he was, even at a young age, a gifted horseman, a skill crucial to his chosen arm, and one that in future years contributed to both his distinction and his survival.

It is clear that the relationships, experiences, and education of Churchill whilst at Sandhurst animated his mind to think more—and more deeply—about war. It is also clear that having matured and found his academic stride, he was better prepared to think about war upon his leaving the College than upon his arrival. His time at Sandhurst both fueled and focused, and in doing so helped construct the essential categories of his military intellectual development. Whilst still retaining their boyish romanticism, he traded Henty and Haggard for Hamley, Mayne, and Kraft. Sandhurst began his military education and intellectual development; in the following years it continued, with Churchill as a practising soldier. Those years, and that continuation, form the subject of the chapters that follow.

## :: IV ::

## MOUNTED WINSTON: A CRITICAL VIEW OF MOBILE WAR

Churchill began his soldiering as a cavalryman. And, in heralding throughout his life the glamour and traditions so commonly defended by orthodox, Late-Victorian cavalrymen, he always remained one. But little is known about how his experiences on horseback affected his early intellectual development. Almost no research has been directed towards Churchill's engagement with the principal cavalry doctrines of his day, and how he fitted into and interacted with the various debates over the changing utility and application of the mounted arm.

While serving as a trooper on the Indian subcontinent, in Egypt, and in what is now South Africa, Churchill demonstrated rather robust elucidations on cavalry, which led him to definite conclusions regarding the mounted arm, and more generally affected his attitude towards war. In other words, he was not too preoccupied with self-aggrandizement to lend any serious consideration to the art of war, and nor, when it came to fighting, was he more spellbound by romance than by tactics.

Nevertheless, it is important not to underestimate the romance. It is true that many if not most Victorian boys of the upper classes would have tried their hand at war games, and dreamt of battlefield heroics. In this, young Winston was no different. The stories of his 1,500 toy soldiers, fort-making, and battle drills with his friends and cousins (with him, of course, always playing generalissimo) are well known, and have been discussed.

The early romance found shape in the prospect of saddle warfare. From at least the very beginning of Sandhurst, Churchill was set on the cavalry. And while there is no harm in recognizing Churchill's penchant for engaging the battlefield sentimentally, there is plenty of harm in portraying him as a one-dimensional romantic. He was never less than a romantic, but he was always more. He was never uprooted from the past, but this does not mean that the present did not contribute significantly to his thinking. It is important to paint the picture of the whole man. Churchill fell in love with cavalry, to be sure, but his decision was also a rational one.

Churchill thought through ways in which to use his time of service to his advantage. Regardless of any associated sentiments of romance or glory, Churchill was always determined to make the army work for him; it is surprising, sometimes, how squarely he approached military decisions, not only in seeking to manipulate his own future, but in evaluating the various facets of military doctrine. He later remembered settling on the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars after dining with Colonel Brabazon; in reality, at the time, in addition to being captivated by what

he saw, he almost certainly chose the cavalry over infantry in part because of family connections. Colonel Brabazon was a family friend, and offered him a place. Churchill also regarded the placement as a fast track to recognition and eventually to the Commons. Another reason for choosing the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars might have been their frequent deployment. While in India, Churchill affirmed what he had long considered true, that the only way a soldier “can hope to rise above the others, is by risking his life in frequent campaigns.”<sup>1</sup> With that in mind, the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars’ 33 years of deployment since 1822 could not have been unattractive to the young Churchill trying to rationalize his way into the limelight.<sup>2</sup>

Churchill continually called on his mother and anyone else with whom he was even remotely associated who he thought might lend a favour.<sup>3</sup> In all of this, he was very cleverly engaging in a campaign of self-advertisement. His mind was fully present in his decision to join the cavalry, but also afterwards, as he interacted with the state of the mounted arm on the battlefield.

In 1902, Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. R. Henderson suggested that the “manner [in which] the cavalry of the twentieth century will differ from the hussars and cuirassiers of the nineteenth century is undoubtedly, from a military point of view, one of the most interesting and momentous questions of the day.” At the same time he argued that cavalry was the arm that had undergone the least change.<sup>4</sup> From the days of Frederick the Great to the hapless charge of Lord Cardigan’s brigade in 1854, few questioned the effectiveness of the raw power—particularly the psychological impact—of the *arme blanche*, cold steel atop brute horses bearing down on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup>

But European land warfare had changed immensely during the nineteenth century. And by the 1850s,<sup>6</sup> some of these changes brought varying opinions about how the cavalry might—and in some cases, must—adapt to improvements and differences in factors like firepower, terrain, training and leadership. The most ardent advocates for reform sought to revolutionize the cavalry, abandoning (for the most part) the *arme blanche* and shock tactics in favour of increased dismounted action employing the carbine and rifle. For some, like Colonel George Denison and Sir Henry Havelock, it was the technological improvements in firepower

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<sup>1</sup> *MFF*, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> The Marquess of Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry 1816 to 1913, Vols. 1-4* (London: Leo Cooper, 1982), pp. 300–01 (Vol. 1); 460–61 (Vol. 2); 430–31 (Vol. 3); 512–13 (Vol. 4).

<sup>3</sup> *Churchill, CV*, 1, i, pp. 676–77.

<sup>4</sup> G. F. R. Henderson, *The Science of War* (London: Longmans, 1905), p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Bond, “Doctrine and Training in the British Cavalry 1870–1914”, in Michael Howard (ed.), *The Theory and Practice of War* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> This date is, admittedly, somewhat arbitrary.

that most necessitated a re-evaluation of the traditional cavalry's effectiveness.<sup>7</sup> The late-nineteenth century saw the adoption of and improvements in small-calibre ammunition, breech-loading guns, smokeless powder, magazine rifles, quick-firing artillery, and machine guns—not to mention the development and utilization in the U.S. Civil War of cheap, multiple-shot handguns. Captain Ian Hamilton, a strong friend of Churchill, wrote in 1885 that from the time of Gustavus Adolphus “to the time of the Crimea, fire and shock may be said to have balanced one another in importance...and now fire alone is the force which seizes the key to a position and by which a province is lost and won.”<sup>8</sup>

Other factors encouraged the reformers. In the last forty years of the nineteenth century, Britain engaged in at least forty colonial wars and punitive expeditions, all of them on terrain at times very unlike that of the European continent which had for so long exerted considerable influence on battlefield tactics and strategies.<sup>9</sup> The forests of West Africa and the mountains of Afghanistan were largely unsuited to shock tactics; similarly, the *nullahs* of India and the *khors* of the Sudan were formidable obstacles to charging cavalymen trained to ride knee-to-knee. When the 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers joined Sir Frederick Roberts in Afghanistan in 1879, they were ordered to keep their swords attached to their saddles while instead using the carbine as their principal weapon.<sup>10</sup>

Though the presence of the carbine was not necessarily unusual, what is important was the reluctance to switch principal arms, and the determination in some quarters to maintain the devotion to the *arme blanche*. It was reported that one Lancer regiment unloaded its first issue of carbines on a pile of manure,<sup>11</sup> and Field-Marshal Sir W. Robertson recorded that among the mounted arm “musketry was universally hated and deemed to be a degradation and a bore.”<sup>12</sup>

This reluctance toward reform was founded on a combination of practical and sentimental concerns. But underpinning most of the practical concerns (like the infeasibility of

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<sup>7</sup> Sir Henry Havelock, *Three Main Military Questions of the Day* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867), pp. 40-65; George Denison, *Modern Cavalry* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1868), pp. 7, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Captain Ian Hamilton, *The Fighting of the Future* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1885), pp. 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> See, among many sources, Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), Appendix 2; Brian Bond (ed.), *Victorian Military Campaigns* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), pp. 310-11; I. F. W. Beckett, *Victoria's Wars* (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1987), pp. 43-66; Captain H. L. Nevill, *Campaigns on the North West Frontier* (London: J. Murray, 1912), p. 404.

<sup>10</sup> Anglesey, *British Cavalry*, Vol. 3, pp. 228, 234-35, 401.

<sup>11</sup> Colonel H. C. B. Rogers, *The Mounted Troops of the British Army* (London: Seeley Service, 1959), p. 214.

<sup>12</sup> Field-Marshal Sir W. Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (London: Constable, 1921), p. 15.

training,<sup>13</sup> the lack of land for training,<sup>14</sup> and threats to cavalry morale and unit cohesion<sup>15</sup>), and perhaps more important than them, was that for the most extreme traditionalists adherence to the cavalry ethos had assumed something of cult-like proportions. The tradition was deep-rooted: the cavalry had long been the standard-bearer of British glory on the battlefield, and though in 1889 it only made up 8.2% of the Regular Army, its size was certainly disproportionate to its mystique.<sup>16</sup> Officer vetting—assisted by the cavalryman’s need for a higher private income—ensured a generally aristocratic tone pervaded the entire corps. To suggest reform was not only to recommend adjustments to weaponry or tactics, it was to chip away at an entire philosophy of life.<sup>17</sup>

The “cavalry spirit”<sup>18</sup> was in peril, and so then, some thought, the entire mounted arm. In 1907, Major-General Douglas Haig published *Cavalry Studies*, and though certainly recognizing the growing relevance of firepower, he remained a staunch advocate of the *arme blanche*, contending that “now as formerly, all great successes can only be gained by a force of cavalry which is trained to harden its heart and charge home.”<sup>19</sup>

This is the context into which Winston Churchill stepped as a brand new second lieutenant, reporting for duty at Aldershot on 14 February 1895, where he was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars. And, as his temperament suggests, he very quickly fell into the traditional rendering of cavalry as the gentlemen-umpires of the battlefield. “The Dragoon, the Lancer and above all”, Churchill believed and wrote many years later, “the Hussar, still claimed their time-honoured place upon the battlefield.” The cavalry was “a small number of well-trained professionals championing their country’s cause with ancient weapons and a beautiful intricacy of archaic manoeuvre, sustained at every element by the applause of their nation.”<sup>20</sup>

But while the typical subaltern might have been more interested in horseflesh and hunting than doctrinal investigations,<sup>21</sup> Churchill remembered being “deeply interested” in his

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<sup>13</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel F.N. Maude, *Cavalry: Its Past and Future* (London: William Clowes, 1903), p. viii; Colonel W. Verner, *The Military Life of H. R. H. George, Duke of Cambridge* (London: J. Murray, 1905), pp. 435–36.

<sup>14</sup> Bond, “Doctrine and Training”, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Maude, *Cavalry: Its Past and Future*, pp. vii–iii; *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, Vol. 2 (London: H. M. S. O., 1903), Q17218–41, pp. 305–06 [hereafter referred to as *Elgin Commission*]. See also Bond, “Doctrine and Training”, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> Anglesey, *British Cavalry*, Vol. 3, pp. 228, 234–35, 401; Lieutenant-Colonel E. T. H. Hutton, *Five Lectures on Mounted Infantry* (London, 1891), pp. 14–16.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Badsey, “The Boer War (1899–1902) and British Cavalry Doctrine: A Re-evaluation”, *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 71 (January, 2007), p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> C. W. Battine, “The Use of the Horse Soldier in the Twentieth Century”, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, Vol. 52 (1908), p. 323.

<sup>19</sup> Major-General Douglas Haig, *Cavalry Studies* (London: Hugh Rees, 1907), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> MEL, pp. 78–79.

<sup>21</sup> Field-Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, “British Cavalry 1853–1903”, *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 1 (1906), pp. 147, 149; see also Anglesey, *British Cavalry*, Vol. 3, pp. 131–46.

work, “especially Tactics and Formation.” As noted in the previous chapter, with access to his father’s bookseller, he invested in a small military library, and ordered Sir Edward Hamley’s *Operations of War* and Prince Kraft’s *Letters on Cavalry*, together with a number of histories of the American Civil, Franco–German and Russo–Turkish Wars, which Churchill called “our latest and best specimens of wars.”<sup>22</sup> In each of these volumes it would have been impossible for Churchill not to encounter the contemporary cavalry debate. Each of the conflicts were used by proponents of both reform and orthodoxy as case-studies and evidence for their particular viewpoint. This is especially so of Hamley and Kraft, who directly engaged with the debate—it is, in part, the main object of their writings.

When the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars were ordered to India in September 1896, Churchill sailed with them as a *vieux jeu* cavalryman. He dedicated a whole chapter to this period in his memoir, aptly titled, “Education at Bangalore”. “The desire for learning came upon me”, Churchill recalled. “I read for four or five hours every day history and philosophy...I approached it with an empty, hungry mind, and with fairly strong jaws; and what I got I bit.”<sup>23</sup> These were far from the conventional habits of Churchill’s fellow officers, a fact that he himself recognized in a letter to his mother, where he confessed that that “as a soldier—my intelligent interests are supposed to stop short at Polo—racing & [the] Orderly Officer.”<sup>24</sup> But his “intelligent interests” stopped nowhere near polo, and an appetite to understand things led him for “the first time to envy those young cubs at the university who had fine scholars to tell them what was what; professors who had devoted their lives to mastering and focusing ideas in every branch of learning; who were eager to distribute the treasures they had gathered before they were overtaken by the night.”<sup>25</sup>

Churchill put his newfound (yet certainly still burgeoning) self-education to good work. He left Bangalore for the North-West Frontier in August 1897 and in doing so inadvertently positioned himself as a commentator on British cavalry doctrine. Principally a writer of narrative, he rarely refrained from interjecting his opinion into the storyline. Among Churchill’s writing from the front, what one finds then—predominantly in his fifteen dispatches printed in the *Daily Telegraph*, and also in *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, which was largely a variation on those dispatches—are the well-researched (given his station) and riveting tales of colonial warfare, replete with description, explanation, and appraisal.

Industrious enough would have been telling the story. Yet Churchill also wrestled with tactical and doctrinal concerns that were well beyond the expectation and pay-grade of a

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<sup>22</sup> *MEL*, p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126–27.

<sup>24</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 704.

<sup>25</sup> *MEL*, p. 127.

simple second lieutenant. Churchill at this time was but twenty-one, and his only formal military education was had at Sandhurst, where he was taught merely the rudimentary principles of soldiering. Yet from the very onset of his arrival on the North-West Frontier, and his first real experience with action, he was busy commenting. It should be remembered that Churchill was only on the North-West Frontier for less than three months. Given his time and experience what he accomplished is quite remarkable. And although these early accounts are decidedly from the perspective of a single soldier, they laid a strong foundation for a widening scope of understanding, appraisal, and critique that would correspond in the coming years of service with widening experience and maturity. As concerns cavalry, this appraisal whilst on the North-West Frontier can be grouped into five related areas: defence, offence, reconnaissance, equipment, and training.

By the late-1890s, only the most reactionary colonels and their regiments were completely “wedded to shock tactics” in opposition to some combination of dismounted action coupled with the use of the carbine.<sup>26</sup> The terrain of the North-West Frontier called for both the horse and the rifle. Lord Roberts and his colleagues had served in India, and remembered the conditions as unsuitable for massed cavalry attacks—such as when the 200 troopers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers, untrained for dismounted action, struggled to fight both on and off horseback, losing 40 carbines in the process.<sup>27</sup> In this colonial setting, cross training in mounted and dismounted action became the rallying cry of many of the reformers. “Cavalry that cannot fight on foot is not up to the requirements of the present day”, noted Douglas Haig in 1892.<sup>28</sup> Henderson too, calling into mind his studies of the American Civil War, remembered that North American cavalry “used fire and *l’arme blanche* in the closest and most effective combination, both against cavalry and infantry.”<sup>29</sup> But this model of a “hybrid” trooper, one trained to fight both from the saddle and on foot, was not without its critics. Sir Evelyn Wood argued against the hybrid model, contending that a trooper trained for both would be a trooper not very good at either, while the Canadian militia colonel George Denison endorsed as late as 1913 two mutually supporting mounted arms, one retaining the traditional charging role of orthodox cavalymen, while the other concentrating on dismounted proficiency.<sup>30</sup> On this and other questions regarding the changing role of the

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<sup>26</sup> E. M. Spiers, “The British Cavalry, 1902-1914”, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 57 (1977), p. 79.

<sup>27</sup> Anglesey, *British Cavalry*, Vol. 3, pp. 229-239. Spiers asserted that Lord Roberts “constantly recollected the scene as he pressed his case for Cavalry reform.” *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> As quoted in Gervase Phillips, “Scapegoat Arm: Twentieth-Century Cavalry in Anglophone Historiography”, *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 71 (2007), p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> Henderson, *Science of War*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> George Denison, *A History of Cavalry from the Earliest Times with Lessons for the Future*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan, 1913), pp. 420-26.

mounted arm, there were almost as many opinions as opinion-holders; notwithstanding, by 1914 every senior British Army officer was expected to maintain a position on cavalry doctrinal issues, and all did.<sup>31</sup>

Mobility, too, played a crucial role, not only in reconnaissance, but also in moving the defenders to the flank, whereupon a fusion of mounted and dismounted tactics would keep the enemy in check. Lord Roberts quoted and agreed with Henderson, who maintained that “the Cavalry, confronted by new and revolutionary conditions...[ought to] have sought new means of giving full effect to the mobility which makes it so formidable.”<sup>32</sup> And Prince Kraft, too, whom Churchill made note of studying, praised the effectiveness of this kind of defensive action, and stated his belief that “the chance for cavalry in a defensive battle to be yet more favourable [than offensive action]”, citing the “many instances where cavalry have...defended villages”, all of which depended upon “every cavalry soldier learning how to make use of the ground when dismounted and acting on the defensive.”<sup>33</sup> In some quarters of the British Army these tactics became quite “fashionable”.<sup>34</sup>

Churchill witnessed these tactics, and reported: “The task which is usually confided to [the mounted arm] in these mountain actions is to protect one of the flanks. The ground hardly ever admits of charging in any formation, and it is necessary for the men to use their carbines...The methods they employed are worth noticing”, he recommended. “Little groups of six or seven men were dismounted, and these with their carbines replied to the enemy’s fire. Other little groups of mounted men, remained concealed in *nullahs* or hollows, or behind obstacles. Whenever the enemy tried to rush one of the dismounted parties, and to do so advanced from the bad ground, the mounted patrols galloped forward and chased them back to cover.”<sup>35</sup> He went on to call this whole business of bait and catch a “beautiful display of cavalry tactics in this kind of warfare, and, considering the enormous numbers of the enemy, who were thus kept from participating in the main action, it demonstrated the power and value of the mounted arm with convincing force...For five hours two weak squadrons of the Guides Cavalry were sufficient to hold them in check.”<sup>36</sup> Here Churchill was quite comfortable in acknowledging the inefficacy, in some situations, of both shock tactics and the *arme blanche*. And whereas the romance is not wholly absent, it is a demonstration of Churchill the rational: willing to set aside his sentimental leanings in favour of utility. The contemporary

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Erskine Childers, *War and the Arme Blanche* (London: E. Arnold, 1910), p. ix.

<sup>33</sup> Major N. L. Walford (trans.), Kraft Karl Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, *Letters on Cavalry* (London: Edward Stanford, 1889), pp. 82, 124, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Badsey, “The Boer War”, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> *MFF*, p. 226.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

cavalry debate seemed to impact his description, which engaged directly with the role of the mounted arm in defensive tactics on the colonial frontier.

But alongside the call for mounted and dismounted troops armed primarily with the carbine when assuming a defensive posture, Churchill understood that doctrines needed to work, and that even on the North-West Frontier, certain situations called for the exact opposite techniques. During the relief of Shabkadr, he described the 151 lances of 13<sup>th</sup> Bengal Lancers (accompanied by 586 infantry rifles and four guns) confronting about 6,000 enemy Mohmands. With casualties high and prospects bleak, Brigadier-General Elles arrived on the field and immediately ordered the Lancers to “move well to the right flank, to charge across the front and check the enemy’s advance.” Churchill recalled that the “‘cease fire’ sounded as on a field day. Then there was a pause. The movements of the cavalry were concealed from most of the troops, but suddenly all noticed the slackening of the enemy’s fire. Then the tribesmen were seen to be in retreat and disorder. The power of the cavalry had been strikingly displayed.” And lest the reader attribute the victory to the perfect combination of terrain and tactics, Churchill continued: “The two squadrons, ably led, had executed a fine charge over what theorists would call impossible ground for a distance of one and a half miles along the bed of a great *nullah*, and among rocks and stones that reduced the pace to a trot. The enemy were driven from the field. Sixty were actually speared by the Lancers, and the rest retreated in gloom and disorder to their hills across the frontier.”<sup>37</sup> The full employment of cavalry shock tactics backed up by the *arme blanche* might have been headed for eventual obsolescence, but it had not happened yet. During the defence of Chakdara, Churchill was quick to praise the 11<sup>th</sup> Bengal Lancers as “perhaps better mounted than any native cavalry regiment in India”, and used the example of their skill in manoeuvring masterfully despite inhospitable terrain as evidence that “there are few obstacles that can stop brave men and good horses.”<sup>38</sup> Later on in India, Churchill praised the cavalry as being “as formidable in offensive tactics, as they are useful in collecting intelligence.”<sup>39</sup> And finally, in what is perhaps his most definitive statement against those schools of thought which cast cavalry as completely unsuited to some frontier regiments, Churchill declared the mounted arm “daring, intelligent, and capable...[proof] of the value of their training, and...fit to lead men under any conditions, and in any country.”<sup>40</sup>

Considering Churchill’s positions on both defensive and offensive cavalry tactics, one would be hard-pressed to draw any conclusion other than Churchill’s openness to reform was

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

dependent upon scenario. Throughout his accounts of the Malakand Field Force, Churchill wanted things to work. Whether in discussion of pensions or transport or bullets or leather versus web belts, he was insistent upon functionality.<sup>41</sup> It is a tendency that continued throughout his twentieth-century war leadership. And though his last statement on the universality of the cavalry approximates a similar assertion by Lord Roberts, who contended that given the right training, “it is impossible to over-estimate the value of Cavalry”,<sup>42</sup> the crucial element in each is the right training. Churchill and Lord Roberts both found utility for the mounted arm on every battlefield, given the right tactics and training.<sup>43</sup> Despite his reputation as a staunch reformer, the latter admitted as late as 1903 that cavalry ought to be trained, in addition to “fighting as infantry”, to “occasionally use shock tactics.”<sup>44</sup>

Churchill, alongside contemporary reformers and non-reformers alike, still also found plenty of use for the mounted arm in reconnaissance. Some thinkers, like Kraft, thought that the diminution of the cavalry’s role in battle made it necessary to shift their importance from the offensive to reconnaissance. Furthermore, Kraft put considerable emphasis on the cavalry’s duty to “push on for considerable distances...into the enemy’s country...and to spread out their antennae as far as possible, making reconnaissances, covering the front and screening the army.”<sup>45</sup> Here the mobility of the well-trained horse and rider proved invaluable, regardless of terrain (again a point made by Lord Roberts).<sup>46</sup> Churchill read Kraft, and whereas he reserved the right to support the use of cavalry in other roles, on several occasions during this campaign he made reference to the cavalry making “daily reconnaissance in all directions”; sometimes the “object in view was topographical, sometimes military, and at others diplomatic.”<sup>47</sup> And yet, in the wilds of the frontier, “even under the auguries of peace the foraging parties were usually fired upon, and this furnished several opportunities for the display of the value for the cavalry.”<sup>48</sup> To demonstrate, he told, among others, the story of Major Beatson, who, with the 11<sup>th</sup> Bengal Lancers, “made daily expeditions towards the various valleys and passes, about which information was needed.” And, with a nod to the debate over suitable ground for the charge, Churchill acknowledged that “though horsemen need good ground to fight on the

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<sup>41</sup> For each discussion see *Ibid.*, pp. 264, 283, 287–88, 290, respectively.

<sup>42</sup> Childers, *Arme Blanche*, p. xiii.

<sup>43</sup> By the time of Childers’ *Arme Blanche* volume in 1910, it is true that Lord Roberts and most reformers would find less and less place for cavalrymen in the face of entrenched infantry armed with machine guns absent of any significant cover. But, in 1903, Lord Roberts was willing to grant that every scenario most likely had a place for either large or small bodies, if not both. Lord Roberts, “Cavalry Armament”, pp. 576–ff.

<sup>44</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q13250, p. 66.

<sup>45</sup> Kraft, *Letters on Cavalry*, pp. 89, 122.

<sup>46</sup> Childers, *Arme Blanche*, p. xiii., pp. ix, x, xiii.

<sup>47</sup> *MFF*, p. 146.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

advantage, they can easily move over any country, however broken, and where they are boldly used, can collect as much information as necessary.”<sup>49</sup>

In each role, whether defence, offence, or reconnaissance, there was still substantial debate over which weapons the cavalry should carry, and which should be principal. Churchill acknowledged that the debate over the sword or lance had long been argued, but for his purposes decided to consider the views of those whose experience with both had been the most recent. Ian Hamilton, whom Churchill met earlier during a sea voyage, and who was to become a fast friend, remarked, in testimony after the Boer War, that “compared to a modern rifle, the sword or lance can only be regarded as a medieval toy.”<sup>50</sup> Hamilton echoed Lord Roberts who, in that same enquiry, said that while “it is very desirable that cavalry should be experts with swords and trained for shock tactics, my belief is that in future wars shock tactics will be few and far between”; that “cavalry must be prepared to fight on foot much more than they have ever done before”, a view which led him to hope “to do away with the lance for service.”<sup>51</sup> Both Hamilton and Lord Roberts disagreed with Douglas Haig, who testified that, “To take away from cavalry its power of assuming the active offensive by mounted action, by depriving it of the *arme blanche*, is to withhold from it a very considerable advantage without any compensating gain.”<sup>52</sup> But neither of the two reformers would go as far as Erskine Childers who, seven years later, would insist that “steel weapons ought either to be discarded or denied all influence on tactics.”<sup>53</sup>

While here Churchill’s commentary might have been coloured by military theorists (and probably was, given his close association with some), he made no direct reference to them, and depended upon his own observations, judgment, and the opinion of those with whom he served. “Though I have had no opportunity of witnessing the use of the lance,” Churchill wrote, “I have heard the opinions of many officers both of the Guides and the 11<sup>th</sup> Bengal Lancers. All admit or assert, that the lance in this warfare is the better weapon. It kills with more certainty and convenience, and there is less danger of a horseman being cut down.”<sup>54</sup> As for the length, Churchill again deferred to general opinion, and especially that of Major Beatson, which he related “seems to be in favour of a shorter spear. This, with a

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255-56.

<sup>50</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q13941, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Q13247, p. 66. Though outside the scope of this thesis, there are records of Churchill corresponding with Hamilton over the carbine versus the *arme blanche* in that famous charge, and given their frequent correspondence beforehand on martial matters, it is not outrageous to assume cavalry doctrine was discussed prior to the Sudan. See General Sir Ian Hamilton, *Listening for the Drums* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), pp. 246-47.

<sup>52</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q19299, p. 403

<sup>53</sup> Childers, *Arme Blanche*, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *MFF*, p. 293.

counter poise at the butt, gives as good a reach and is much more useful for close quarters.” Churchill carefully advocated the fixing of a stop eighteen inches below the point, to prevent the lance from penetrating too far, and the impaled enemy from “wriggling up and striking the lancer.”<sup>55</sup> And though his experiences in the Sudan would afford more opportunity for directly engaging the debate between steel and rifle, he did take the occasion of colonial warfare in India to survey the system of the Guides, which he found of interest: “In this warfare it is very often necessary for the cavalryman to dismount and use his carbine. The lance then gets in the way and has to be tied to the saddle. This takes time, and there is usually not much time to spare in cavalry skirmishing. The Guides compromise matters by giving one man in every four a lance. This man, when the others dismount, stays in the saddle and holds their horses.”<sup>56</sup> This mention of the difficulty of the lance is close to what Lord Roberts later said, namely that the “lance is a positive impediment to dismounted action, as it adds greatly to the difficulty of led horses being moved forward when the men advance. In other words, it ties the men to the horses.”<sup>57</sup>

In the end, with regards to equipment, Churchill seemed satisfied with the equipment he found himself with during the action he saw whilst attached to Sir Bindon Blood’s force. It should be noted, however, that a previous shoulder injury caused Churchill to carry a revolver rather than a sword, and thus he could have been spared having to wield a blade in sometimes less than suitable conditions. Nevertheless, what is revealing is that Churchill took time to engage, through his writing, a discussion that did not directly lend to telling his own story. It is another occasion in which he busied himself with a tangent more affecting military doctrine than narrative.

In the decades before the South African War, training of either mounted infantry or regular cavalry in the use of the carbine as a principal weapon made at best slow progress, and at worse none at all.<sup>58</sup> During the doctrinal flux there was neither a consistent message coming from the top commanders, nor was there efficient implementation even if a mandate was present. In the late 1880s, Prince Kraft acknowledged that “the cavalry generally has much greater difficulties in training and leading than have the other arms”, a fact which he attributed to, in part, “the improvement in firearms” which “has so much increased the difficulties with which the cavalry struggle’, and which require more energy and spirit if these are to be overcome and the duties of the cavalry of the future are to be discharged.”<sup>59</sup> The *Cavalry Drill*,

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 293-94.

<sup>57</sup> Childers, *Arme Blanche*, p. v.

<sup>58</sup> Bond, “Doctrine and Training”, p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> Kraft, *Letters on Cavalry*, pp. 7-8.

1898 devoted only five pages out of 450 to “Dismounted Action”.<sup>60</sup> In 1910, Childers scoffed that “shock action, consigned to complete oblivion in South Africa and to equally complete oblivion in Manchuria, still holds the first place in the training of the Cavalry soldier.”<sup>61</sup> On the other side, Hamilton argued in 1903, with respect to cavalry and mounted infantry, that “the role of the two arms must be kept distinct; the cavalry must not be permitted, while increasing its efficiency with the carbine, to become mounted rifles, nor must the mounted infantry be allowed to emulate the cavalry and depart from its distinctive role of mobile infantry.”<sup>62</sup> Churchill avoided commenting directly on home front training practices, but suggested that the best place for training was in the field, and with those indigenous units who have adapted to the demands of their surroundings and enemy. Subalterns, he argued, should be allowed to volunteer for emergency employment with indigenous cavalry, “in order to give cavalry officers as many opportunities of seeing active service as possible”, and because the indigenous regiments were always in want of officers.<sup>63</sup> He went further, and contrasted the value of in-the-field British cavalry training with that of their indigenous equivalents: “To the young man, who wants to enjoy himself, to spend a few years agreeably in a military companionship, to have an occupation—the British cavalry will be suited. But to the youth, who means to make himself a professional soldier, an expert in war, a specialist in practical tactics, who desires a hard life of adventure and a true comradeship in arms, I would recommend the choice of some regiment on the frontier, like those fine ones I have seen, the Guides and the 11<sup>th</sup> Bengal Lancers.”<sup>64</sup> Churchill’s once again reverted to functionality, and was willing—and even suggested—that British cavalrymen trained mostly in mounted tactics would benefit from non-orthodox experiences of dismounted action on the North-West Frontier.

In the third week of October, Churchill was ordered back to Bangalore. His period attached to Sir Bindon Blood’s force, he wrote to his mother, “has been the most glorious and delightful that my life has yet contained. But the possibility was always in view that it might be abruptly terminated. I saw a great many people killed and wounded and heard many bullets strike all round or whistle by—so many that if I had counted them you would not perhaps believe me. But nothing came nearer me than a foot...My luck throughout was extraordinarily good.”<sup>65</sup> During the campaign, Churchill proved himself quite cool under fire.

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<sup>60</sup> Spiers, “The British Cavalry”, p. 73.

<sup>61</sup> Childers, *Arme Blanche*, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q13941, pp. 110-11.

<sup>63</sup> *MFF*, p. 262.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>65</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 805.

He not only earned himself the campaign medal, but was cited in the dispatches for “courage and resolution”, having “made himself useful at a critical moment.”<sup>66</sup>

Churchill was proud to have been remembered by Blood in the dispatches, writing to his brother that he “never imagined such a thing possible” and that he “hoped it is true” that his “good grey pony caught the speaker’s eye.” And to his mother he wrote: “I do not suppose any honour or dignity which it may be my fortune in life to deserve or receive will give me equal pleasure”, before continuing: “I feel that I took every chance and displayed myself with ostentation wherever there was danger.” And to them both, Churchill admitted that “there is no ambition I cherish so keenly as to gain a reputation of personal courage.”<sup>67</sup>

Churchill eventually intended to stand for Parliament at the General Election (so that, as he wrote to his grandmother, “my sojourn abroad will not be indefinitely prolonged”<sup>68</sup>), but before he did so that ambition for a reputation of personal courage led him to want to be sent to one more scene of military action. “I must now go to Egypt and you should endeavour to stimulate the Prince into writing to Kitchener on the subject”, he told his mother. “My life [in India] is not big enough to hold me. I want to be up and doing and cannot bear inaction or routine. Polo has lost half its charm and no longer satisfies me. I become more in need of serious occupation every day.”<sup>69</sup> In mid-January he implored her again: “Oh how I wish I could work you up over Egypt! I know you could do it with all your influence—an all the people you know. It is a pushing age and we must shove with the best.”<sup>70</sup>

But before Egypt—about which he soon confessed that there was “no hurry”, as he only wanted “to be sure of going next March or so before the autumn campaign”<sup>71</sup>—Churchill set his heart on the Tirah Expeditionary Force, which was being formed in the mountains, beyond the Khyber Pass. After all of his mother’s attempts to persuade either Lord Roberts (now serving in Ireland) or Lord Wolseley (commander in chief of the British Army since 1885) to intercede on her son’s behalf had failed, Churchill elected instead the very risky move of using the allowed three travel days to return to Bangalore after a polo match to instead travel to Peshawar where he hoped to secure a position on the staff of General Sir William Lockhart, commander in chief of the Tirah Expeditionary Force. The gamble, like so many of Churchill’s youth, paid off, and after presenting himself unannounced to Lockhart’s adjutant, Captain Aylmer Haldane, he spent half an hour extolling his own virtues. A “none too cordial but evidently interested” Haldane conferred with Lockhart, and reported back to

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 836, note 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 834–35.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 811.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 813.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 856.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 813.

Churchill that “Sir William has decided to appoint you an extra orderly officer on his personal staff. You will take up your duties at once. We are communicating with the Government of India and your regiment.”<sup>72</sup>

In the spring of 1898 the Tirah Expeditionary Force was disbanded. Churchill never saw action. During his brief time with the Force, however, Haldane would later say that he formed “an opinion of the young cavalry officer who was widely regarded in the Army as super-precocious, indeed by some as insufferably bumptious, and realize that neither of these epithets was applicable to him.” Haldane regarded the Churchill of that time as neither contentious nor haughty. “He struck me at almost first sight as cut out of a vastly different pattern from any officer of his years I had so far met”, Haldane wrote, before summarizing: “I had a feeling that such a prodigy would go far.”<sup>73</sup>

The prospect of adventure in Tirah dashed, Churchill set his sights on Egypt, and the British Expeditionary Force there under the command of Major General Sir Horatio Herbert Kitchener. But back in London, where he returned to secure an attachment to the Sirdar’s Force, Churchill faced a problem. Churchill’s reputation from both his adventures on the Frontier and his new book detailing his time spent there preceded him, and many of the army’s old guard were put off by such a opinionated and seemingly grandstanding mere subaltern. Kitchener in particular, who already had a distaste for war correspondents,<sup>74</sup> was amused neither by Churchill’s reputation nor incessant solicitations. Only when a lieutenant of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers died was Churchill suddenly accepted to fill his post. The news, however, came along with the curt notice that Churchill would be required to travel at his own expense and in the event of his “being killed or wounded in the impending operations, or for any other reason, no charge of any kind will fall on British Army funds.”<sup>75</sup> And despite Lady Jeune’s assurance that he not go to Egypt as a correspondent,<sup>76</sup> Churchill had in fact already made arrangements with the *Morning Post*, who agreed to publish his dispatches in the form of letters written by a soldier to a friend at home, never intended for publication, and thus preserving his anonymity—and his escape from Kitchener’s wrath.<sup>77</sup>

Churchill arrived in Cairo on 29 July 1898, just in time to leave with his squadron up the Nile the following day. “It is a vry strange transformation scene that the last 8 days have worked,” Churchill wrote to Lady Randolph. “When I think of the London streets—dinners, halls, etc and then look at the Khaki soldiers—the great lumbering barges full of horses—the

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<sup>72</sup> MEL, p. 173.

<sup>73</sup> General Sir Aylmer Haldane, *A Soldier’s Saga* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1948), p. 119.

<sup>74</sup> Philip Magnus, *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London: John Murray, 1958), pp. 118-19.

<sup>75</sup> MEL, p. 182.

<sup>76</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 949.

<sup>77</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 964.

muddy river and behind and beyond the palm trees and the sails of the Dahabiahs. And the change in my own mind is even more complete...The anticipations of Parliament—of speeches—of political life generally have faded before more vivid possibilities and prospects and my thoughts are more concerned with swords—lances—pistols—& soft-nosed bullets—than with Bills—Acts & by-elections.”<sup>78</sup>

To his disappointment, the uncertainty of Churchill’s status and arrival date meant that the command of the troop he was expecting had instead been given to another, Lieutenant Robert Grenfell, who wrote to his family: “Fancy how lucky I am...Here I have got the troop that would have been Winston’s.”<sup>79</sup>

Churchill was immediately put to work assisting with the necessary and complex arrangements to move a military unit and all supporting pieces over 1,400 miles. In his first dispatch to the *Morning Post*, he wrote that though moving infantry “is a laborious affair”, “with cavalry the difficulties are more than doubled.” “The entraining of troops is ever a long and wearying affair. The soldiers, arrayed in what they call ‘Christmas Tree Order,’ and dangling with water bottles, haversacks, canteen straps, cloaks, swords, and carbines from every part of their bodies, clank awkwardly into the carriages. Then the baggage has to be loaded, kitbags must be stowed, and provision made for food and filtered water...Saddlery, forage, and above all horses have to be packed into the trucks. When I tell you that the horses are stallion Arabs you will easily realise what a kicking and a squealing the stowage of this last item caused.”<sup>80</sup>

To build Churchill’s account of the Sudan campaign, one must rely principally upon the fifteen dispatches published in the *Morning Post*, and their subsequent expansion in the form of the two-volume *The River War*, published in 1899. As will be discussed in the following chapter, these letters underwent extensive editing, both by Churchill and then by the editors of the *Morning Post*, prior to their publication—editing that is in some ways illustrative of the Churchill’s motivation for writing the letters, and helps to justify the focus of the content and the language used to engage with that content.

The punitive army of the Sirdar, consisting of some 17,600 Egyptian and Sudanese and 8,200 British troops, was, by 24 August, only sixty miles from the fortress of Omdurman. “Within the next ten days there will be a general action—perhaps a very severe one”, he wrote to his mother. “I may be killed. I do not think so. But if I am you must avail yourself of the consolations of philosophy and reflect on the utter insignificance of all human beings...But I

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 957.

<sup>79</sup> *MEL*, p. 183.

<sup>80</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 8 August 1898, published 31 August 1898, as quoted in Frederick Woods (ed.), *Young Winston’s Wars* (London: Sphere Books, 1972), p. 114.

can assure you I do not flinch...Nothing—not even the certain knowledge of approaching destruction would make me turn back now—even if I could with honour. But I shall come back afterwards the wiser and the stronger for my gamble. And then we will think of other and wider spheres of action. I have plenty of faith—in what I do not know—that I shall not be hurt.” “After all”, Churchill concluded, “there will be nothing hotter than the 16<sup>th</sup> of September of last year, and I am sure that of the next world we may say, if any then better.”<sup>81</sup>

On 26 August, as Kitchener’s forces drew even closer to an impending clash with the Khalifa’s army, Churchill attempted a last-ditch effort to transfer from the Lancers to the Egyptian Cavalry, as “tho’ more dangerous it is a much better business as far as chances of distinction go.” Though the Egyptian commanding officer had asked for him, the Colonel “of the 21<sup>st</sup> replied that he would stick to his British officers.” Not knowing what was in store within the week, Churchill lamented the decision as “a pity as I should have stood a much better chance of getting something out of the business with the Egyptians.”<sup>82</sup> That very day Churchill learned that Kitchener had questioned Churchill’s motives for being in the Sudan. Churchill told his mother that the Sirdar “had known I was not going to stay in army—was only making a convenience of it; that the had disapproved of my coming in place of others whose professions were at stake & that E. Wood had acted wrongly & had annoyed him by sending me.” This caused Churchill to conclude that Kitchener “may be a general—but never a gentleman.”<sup>83</sup>

Gentleman or not, on 1 September 1898, after three years of meticulous preparation, Kitchener drew his army to the doorstep of Khartoum. By midday it seemed the Dervish force might clash with them by nightfall. Churchill, whose squadron had been sent to reconnoitre the advance to Omdurman, was one of the first to catch a glimpse of the Dervishes. It was an “awe-inspiring” and “formidable sight” which he expected never to see again.<sup>84</sup> “I climbed the black hill of Surgham,” he later described spectacularly, “and looked around. From the summit the scene was extraordinary. The great army of Dervishes was dwarfed by the size of the landscape to mere dark smudges on the brown of the plain. Looking east, another army was now visible—the British and Egyptian army” he wrote, before continuing: “Neither force could see the other, though but five miles divided them. I looked alternately at each array. That of the enemy was, without doubt, both longer and deeper. Yet there seemed a superior strength in the solid battalions, whose lines were so straight that they might have been drawn

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<sup>81</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 969.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 971.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 87.

with a ruler.”<sup>85</sup> And although he personally reported back the Sirdar that at their current rate of advance the two armies would clash in only an hour, the Dervish army soon halted, and the impending engagement was put off for a day, and the nervous British and Egyptian troops encamped for the night, their backs to the river.

“The bugles all over the camp by the river began to sound at half-past four” on the morning of 2 September 1898. “The cavalry trumpets and the drums and fifes of the British division joined the chorus, and everyone awoke amid a confusion of merry or defiant notes. The infantry”, remembered Churchill, “who had slept armed and accoutred in their ranks, had but to stand up... Then it grew gradually lighter, and the cavalry mounted their horses, the infantry stood to their arms, and the gunners went to their batteries; while the sun, rising over the Nile, revealed the wide plain, the dark rocky hills, and the waiting army. It was as if all the preliminaries were settled, the ground cleared, and nothing remained but the final act and ‘the rigour of the game’.”<sup>86</sup>

At sunrise the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers were again sent out to reconnoitre, and Churchill returned to Surgham Hill.<sup>87</sup> “Never shall I see such a sight again”, he wrote two weeks later to General Hamilton. “At the very least there were 40,000 men—five miles long in lines with great humps and squares at intervals—and I can assure you that when I heard them all shouting their war songs from my coign of vantage on the ridge of [Surgham] Hill I and my little patrol felt very lonely. And though I never doubted the issue—I was in great awe.”<sup>88</sup> At 5.45am Churchill wrote a message for Kitchener, noting the current position of the Dervish army. At 6.20 he wrote another, noting this time that the Khalifa “had decided to throw back the oncoming army”<sup>89</sup> and that “Most of the [Dervish] Cavalry are with this”<sup>90</sup> advancing force. Churchill continued to observe from the hill, and later told Hamilton that, “Their cavalry patrols which consisted of five or six horsemen each made no attempt to drive me back and I waited until one great brigade of perhaps 2000 men got to within 400 yards. I didn’t realize they could shoot and thought they were all spearmen.” For fifteen minutes the Dervish cavalry paid no mind to Churchill and his seven Lancers, instead treating them with “complete disdain.” But then, “Foolishly I dismounted”, Churchill remembered, “and opened magazine into the brown of them. Thereat they sent out 20 Riflemen and began to make very close practice. Finally I had to gallop and as we did I did not hear less than 30 bullets. Luckily—(you

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>87</sup> Not knowing that an Egyptian cavalry regiment had occupied the hill before him, Churchill later reported to Hamilton that he thought he “was the first to see the enemy.” *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 977.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 976-97.

<sup>89</sup> *MEL*, p. 94.

<sup>90</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 972.

know how capricious Fortune is)—we never had a man touched. If we had it would have meant others.”<sup>91</sup> Churchill sent his patrol to safety behind the hill and then went back up himself, where he came under heavy fire until his fellow troopers brought him back to his squadron. “I attributed the fact that we had no casualties—to ‘my experience’ etc.”, Churchill wrote on 16 September. “It was really do to the Almighty’s amiability. For candidly the fire was for the time being as hot as anything I have seen—barring only those 10 minutes with the 35<sup>th</sup> Sikhs—a year ago today.”<sup>92</sup>

The 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers were then sent behind the protective *zeriba*, where they “listened for an hour to 20,000 rifles, near 60 guns and 20 maxims without seeing much.” They watered and fed their horses protected by the good cover down by the bank of the Nile. After what G. W. Stevens pronounced not so much “a battle but an execution”,<sup>93</sup> at about 8.40 the cavalry were “bustled out of the *zeriba* to the left flank” and instructed to see what resistance, if any, lay between Kitchener and Omdurman, towards which he was preparing to march, so as to occupy the city before any remaining enemy soldiers. Churchill and his fellow cavalrymen “halted on the old ridge” beyond which thousands of Dervishes could be seen—in fact, the Khalifa’s reserve army. The troopers “messed about with carbines for a quarter of an hour” before mounting and “riding slowly toward these crowds.” Churchill recalled being “confident that we should spear them till we could not sit on our horses.” Expecting little resistance, things turned dangerous when “between us and the distant fugitives was a single line of 150 men.” Expecting them to be spearmen, the cavalrymen intended to simply outflank the seemingly small force when suddenly the Dervishes, from about 250 yards away, announced themselves as riflemen by beginning to pour heavy fire into the Lancers. Churchill realized there were only two courses open: either “left wheel into line and gallop off—coming back for the wounded”, which he called “a bad business”, or to “Right wheel into line and charge.”<sup>94</sup> What followed was the now immortalized charge of Omdurman, perhaps the last and most famous charge of the British cavalry.<sup>95</sup> Churchill described it in the grandest of prose:

The trumpets sounded “right-wheel into line,” and on the instant the regiment began to gallop in excellent order towards the riflemen...In a deep fold in the ground—completely concealed by its peculiar formation—a long, dense, white mass of men became visible. In length they were nearly equal to our front. They were about twelve deep...

At full gallop and in the closest order the squadron struck the Dervish mass....

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 977.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Alan Moorehead, *The White Nile* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960), p. 336.

<sup>94</sup> *Churchill, CV*, 1, ii, pp. 977-78.

<sup>95</sup> D’Este, *Warlord*, p. 107.

It is very rarely that stubborn and unshaken infantry meet equally stubborn and unshaken cavalry. Usually, either the infantry run away and are cut down in flight, or they keep their heads and destroy nearly all the horsemen by their musketry. In this case the two living walls crashed together with a mighty collision. The Dervishes stood their ground manfully...

The regiment broke completely through the line everywhere, leaving sixty Dervishes dead and many wounded in their track...In one hindered and twenty seconds five officers, sixty-six men, and one hundred and nineteen horses out of less than three hundred had been killed or wounded.<sup>96</sup>

In relaying the story of the charge, Churchill also commented on some of the cavalry debates of the day, as outlined in presenting his descriptions of mounted warfare on the North-West Frontier. For after the cavalymen regrouped on the far side of the enemy lines they had just smashed through, the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers “dismounted and opened a heavy fire with their magazine carbines. Under the pressure of this fire”, Churchill recalled, “the enemy changed front to meet the new attack.” The Dervishes began to advance, but soon stopped, due to, as Churchill credited it, accurate fire and “the moral effect of the charge” that had been “very great” so that “these brave enemy were no longer unshaken.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, Churchill credited a combination of both mounted and dismounted action as proving effective.

The descriptions above were taken from Churchill’s dispatches to *The Morning Post*. But in his private correspondence with Ian Hamilton, Churchill extended his commentary on the cavalry action of the charge of Omdurman even further. The first point was one of preparation, which Churchill believed the troopers lacked: “I never saw better men than the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers. I don’t mean to say I admired their discipline or their general training—both I thought inferior. But they were the 6 year British soldier type—and every man was an intelligent human being that knew his own mind...as soon as we got through I reformed my troop getting about 15 together and I told them they would have to go back and perhaps back again after that. Whereupon my centre guide said in a loud voice—‘All right sir—we’re ready—as many times as you like.’”<sup>98</sup>

The second, and more crucial, had to do again with the principal cavalry debate of the day. As Churchill told Hamilton, “I was very anxious for the regiment to charge back—because it would have been a very fine performance and men and officers could easily have done it while they were warm. *But the dismounted fire was more useful*, though I would have

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<sup>96</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 6 September 1898, published 29 September 1898, as quoted in Woods, *Young Winston's Wars*, pp. 158-60.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>98</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 979.

liked the charge—‘*pour la gloire*’—and to buck up British cavalry.”<sup>99</sup> That Churchill could have relegated, so soon in the immediate aftermath of the grandiose charge of Omdurman, something as legendary as the *arme blanche* to second place behind the tactics of dismounted fire is not unimportant; in fact, when taken in conjunction with Churchill’s seemingly intrinsic penchant for the romance of war, his critique of orthodox cavalry doctrine is quite telling.

But this was not the only time that Churchill recognized the eventual obsolescence of the *arme blanche*. In *The River War* he described the place where the “Baggara cavalry had made their last splendid charge to certain death. The white-clad bodies of the men were intermingled with the brown and bay horses, so that this part of the field looked less white-speckled than the rest. They had ridden straight at the solid line of bayonets and in the teeth of the storm of projectiles. Every man had galloped at full speed, and when he fell he shot many lengths in front of his horse, rolling over and over—destroyed, not conquered, by machinery.”<sup>100</sup>

On the point of the lance versus the sword, Churchill relayed that he left “the Indian frontier an enthusiastic admirer of the lance,” but that “Egypt shook [his] convictions.” “It must be remembered”, he continued, that the men of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers “were really Hussars, armed only lately with lances.” They had not been trained with the weapon, and whereas they knew their lance drill, “they hankered for the sword.” Churchill learned that the points of the lance were dulled in the sandy conditions of the arid march, and after the charge, several of the troops “loudly complained that their points would not pierce the enemy, but only push them over”, and that the “crowded nature of the scrimmage prevented the lances being used with effect.” In close quarters, the enemy “caught hold of the weapon and twisted it out of the horseman’s hand”, leading Churchill to conclude that in such conditions “the sword was the better defence”, but as it is only “very rarely in modern warfare that men come to such close fighting...in the actual shock of an ordinary charge against cavalry or in a pursuit the lance is the better arm.”<sup>101</sup>

However, when compared to weapons of fire, Churchill preferred the pistol, which he deemed “far more effective than either lance or sword” and, together with the revolver, “incomparably more terrible than any *arme blanche*.” “The officers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Hussars”, he knew, “who were continuously campaigning in Egypt and the Soudan from 1882 to 1885, discovered that the man who carried a revolver might come safely through a charge where good swordsmen were cut down.” From one of these officers Churchill claimed to have learned many “useful details of Arab fighting”, chief among them that the officer “should

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* First italics mine.

<sup>100</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 222.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 346-47.

charge with the revolver, not a sword.” Upon arrival at Wad Hamed, Churchill compared these findings with the preferences of several officers of the Egyptian cavalry, whom he found to be in agreement. “Nearly all were in favour of the pistol”, for they said that the Dervishes “were not eager to attack a horseman so armed.” Churchill of course, armed with these findings and his own weapon of choice, charged with his pistol at Omdurman, along with the only one other officer to do so. “Like myself”, Churchill was keen to point out, “he was unharmed. If we had charged back again, there would have been many more revolvers drawn.”<sup>102</sup>

Regarding this debate Churchill went further. “A man with a pistol is far more formidable”, he contended, and argued that though “a sword cut may be comparatively harmless”, or guarded, “who can parry a bullet?” The Dervishes had tried to grab the reins, but Churchill claimed that had more cavalymen been armed as he had, less horses would have been stopped, for “no man living would dare to attempt such an enterprise, if he knew that he would be fired at with a pistol at, let us say, six inches’ range.”<sup>103</sup>

This, for Churchill, went on to beg the question as to why whole regiments should not be armed with the revolver, rather than confining the superior weapon to officers alone. There were two possible answers. First, Churchill recognized—but largely discounted—the claim that troopers flurried in the midst of battle would inadvertently shoot each other. “Very likely”, admitted Churchill, before he continued: “But even the rawest recruit in the moment of extreme agitation has a distinct preference for shooting his enemies rather than his friends; and as for random shots, they may hit either side indiscriminately.”<sup>104</sup>

Second, the larger obstacle in Churchill’s estimation was what has already been discussed: a profound allegiance to the traditions of the orthodox cavalry, and resistance to any departure from them. “It will be argued”, recognized Churchill, “that cold steel is the characteristic of the cavalryman.” But he discounted the contention as “purely sentimental.” “It is probably that the Yeomen of England finally abandoned the long-bow for the musket with grave misgivings”, but Churchill would not give up on the great advantages and the “far more terrible...meeting of cavalry squadrons” from whom the “deadly pistol” had “taken the place of the comparatively harmless, ornamental sword.” He continued: “Were a squadron armed with revolvers to charge a squadron armed with swords, the former might lose ten men from their own fire; the other would be practically destroyed.” Churchill then quoted instances during the American Civil War, found in Henderson’s *A History of Cavalry*, where

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 347–48.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 348–49.

“the Confederates, armed with revolvers, almost annihilated the Northerners, who used swords.”<sup>105</sup>

Finally, Churchill acknowledged the full scope of the debate over how to best arm cavalrymen:

The change [from *arme blanche* to firearm] would be so sweeping that I hesitate to advocate it...It is a matter which cavalry officers should think over without prejudices of any kind. There are many who have already begun to do so. It will be brought before them with increasing urgency, for, as the years go by, firearms are continually improving, and the sword stands still forever. The day may come when the civilised warrior will finally abandon the weapons of the savage and adopt the machines of science. It will appear no less ridiculous to carry a long knife to the battlefield wherewith to carve and transfix the enemy, than it would now seem for a Grenadier to be armed, like David, with a sling and five smooth stones.”<sup>106</sup>

Neither did Churchill flinch from engaging the debate over recent improvements in firearms. The invention of the magazine pistol attracted his particular attention, and he thought that it should for other interested parties as well. His catalogue of the advantages of the new Mauser pistol—higher capacity, further range, self-loading, self-cocking, self-ejecting, higher rate of fire, doubled muzzle velocity, faster re-load, more suitable to varying climates and conditions—convinced Churchill that once its singular disadvantage of a small bore had been resolved, the weapon would cause the revolver to “follow the arquebus into the museums of ancient arms.” In fact, “who shall say that the magazine pistol with its carbine fitting will not oust the trooper’s sword as well as the officer’s revolver?” Churchill asked.<sup>107</sup> In his analysis, Churchill again referenced the studies of Colonel Denison.

As with his post-Malakand studies, Churchill did not limit his military considerations while in the Sudan to simply those having to do with weapons and mounted versus dismounted warfare. As always, cavalry played a role in scouting out terrain and enemy troop positions. Churchill afforded an entire chapter in *The River War* to the detailed description of only two cavalry reconnaissance missions. It is testament to the significant energy Churchill spent familiarizing himself with operations he himself took no part in, all in the aim of describing this important aspect of not only the Sudan campaign, but again of a main object of the mounted arm in general. Whereas “the nice and delicate operation of withdrawing a small force from the jaws of an active and powerful enemy is one with which military officer on the Indian Frontier have become familiar”, Churchill wrote, “the campaigns on the Nile afford few instances of minor tactics.” Even so, that the one instance in question “of a rearguard

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 351-52.

action in Sir H. Kitchener's campaigns...should have been so ably conducted" is "all the more creditable" and "indisputable evidence of the wonderful work of British officers."<sup>108</sup>

Mobility was not only the cavalry's key asset in reconnaissance, but also in harassing the enemy. To this purpose, which he noted as an "important question" to the "general disposition of the mounted forces", Churchill offered the actions of the Egyptian cavalry and Camel Corps on the day of the battle as a sufficient case study. "There can be little doubt", he wrote, "that the presence of [these forces] on the Kerreri Ridge, by misleading the left of the Dervish army and attracting it northwards, contributed materially to the result of the battle." Given the enhanced mobility of the cavalry, the pursuing Dervishes, before they attacked MacDonald's brigade, had been on the move since daybreak, had expended much of their ammunition, and had perhaps lost some confidence in the leaders who had led them against so intangible a foe." Afterwards the prisoners, "many of whom were intelligent men of much experience in war, expressed the opinion that the cause of their defeat was due to this useless fight with the cavalry at Kerreri." Churchill believed that "the fact that the Dervishes regarded the cavalry as so powerful a factor in their ruin has certain significance."<sup>109</sup>

Given their indisputable usefulness, when armed and employed correctly, Churchill desired only that there had been more cavalry regiments present. Some argued that the victory was not capitalized upon in full—the Khalifa escaped, as did many of the defeated enemy who would then take up refuge in other cities—and in doing so placed the blame for this upon the cavalry. Churchill acknowledged that the responsibility of both aims was with the cavalry, but refused to blame the troopers themselves, or the cavalry leaders. Culpability was "upon the Sirdar, and upon him alone", Churchill accused. In the first place, the numbers of the mounted forces were too few. Churchill knew from his studies that "the proportion which cavalry in an army should bear to the strength of the other arms has always been a fairly constant quantity"; it was one that "Napoleon rated as high as one to four", and more recently, Colonel Henderson thought should equal at least one to six, lest the army suffers. But, Churchill recorded, "the proportion of cavalry to the other arms in the Anglo-Egyptian force fell far below the recognised standard."<sup>110</sup>

Secondly, Churchill argued that few as the overall cavalry numbers were, "a better result might have been achieved had they been more advisedly disposed." A lack of coordination between the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers and Colonel Broadwood's brigade "prevented the whole cavalry force advancing together as soon as the enemy were in full retreat." As such, "the results were unsatisfactory." The retreating Arabs escaped from the field, as did the

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 407, 411.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

Khalifa, and “the name of Omdurman must be added to that long list of battles in which the victorious army failed to take advantage of their triumph.” And to those who argued against the increased expense of an extra cavalry brigade, Churchill retorted that while he applauded ‘the cheapness of Kitchener’s campaigns’, there “is no worse extravagance in war than an economy of soldiers.”<sup>111</sup>

In addition, Churchill spent pages discussing the intricate detail of forming, on the field, four cavalry squadrons of four troops each from an existing three cavalry squadrons of four troops each, as what happened to the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers when they arrived at Wad Hamed. Churchill was critical of such a practice, and in his critique acknowledged some familiarity with contemporary doctrines of war: “It will not be denied by any who have studied modern military principles, that this was a revolution of everything that has been preached and accepted for years.” Men should know their place in the ranks, Churchill contended, and that the “celebrated squadron system was made to walk the plank”, just to satisfy the Sirdar’s unanticipated request for four squadrons, could have, had “the campaign been one of months instead of days”, been a change that would have been found neither “wise nor profitable.” From this example Churchill concluded that, “If the peace system of three field squadrons and a depot squadron—one of the legacies of Sir George Luck—is unsuited to war...the sooner the ridiculous peace system is done away with the better.” Furthermore, Churchill argued, if “the peace system is a good one and suited to war, then all officers should be strictly forbidden to depart from it under any circumstances,” so as to prevent the “principles of troop and squadron leading which have been admitted for so long...[from being] utterly abandoned.”<sup>112</sup>

Churchill gathered up his individual commentaries regarding the role of cavalry in the Nile campaign into some summary reflections. “The part played by the cavalry throughout the war was important”, Churchill decided. His reasons were the “smooth, flat country” that enabled the mounted arm “to be handled in considerable bodies”, not only in reconnaissance, but also the regular engagements. “But the concluding campaign”, Churchill wrote, “saw the fullest employment of cavalry for many years.” That the “force arrived at Kerreri earlier than the Khalifa expected...would seem large due to the efficient screening by which the cavalry offered in advance.” The fact that in the battle of Omdurman “the mounted forces sustained half the losses of the whole army...shows how much they were used.” But despite their utility, Churchill argued, as he had before, that “it is indisputable that the proportion of cavalry to the

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342–43.

other arms was too small; that the horses were worked to death; and that much of the effect of the victory was lost through the numerical weakness of the mounted arm.”<sup>113</sup>

With Churchill’s role in Kitchener’s forces complete, he wasted no time returning to London, arriving in early October. While there he gave three political speeches and reconnected with influential members of the press and the government before departing for India, in November 1898, to take part Inter-Regimental Cup Polo tournament in February 1899. His regiment, the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars, claimed victory and won the Cup. His four-year commitment to the British Army having been fulfilled that spring, Churchill resigned his commission shortly after the tournament and returned to London at the end of April.

The summer months passed quickly. In July he stood, unsuccessfully, as the Conservative candidate in the by-election of Oldham. Work continued on *The River War*, and that autumn Lord Salisbury, who had been instrumental in helping Churchill take part in the Sudan campaign, agreed to let him dedicate the work to him. When Churchill asked, in early August, there is no indication that he intended to fight again; yet, merely a month later, with tensions mounting in South Africa, Churchill wrote to a Birmingham politician that he expected “there will be war in the Transvaal in November and if so I shall go as a special correspondent.”<sup>114</sup> Within a week Churchill received offer from the *Daily Mail* asking him to be their correspondent in South Africa; this he used as leverage and secured instead an extremely lucrative deal with the *Morning Post*: £1,000 for four months in the Transvaal, all expenses paid. The war came sooner than expected. The first shots were fired on 12 October. Two days later, Churchill sailed from Southampton in the *Dunottar Castle*. It was to be his third war in barely more than two years.

Churchill landed in Cape Town on 31 October 1899. He arrived as a war correspondent—and, for the first time since his commission, he was in the field without any attachment to a regiment. This was his single station until January 1900 when, after his escape as a prisoner of the Boers the previous month, Sir Redvers Buller, commander of the British efforts in South Africa, was happy to confer upon the now famous Churchill a commission in the South African Light Horse Regiment. He was the only soldier-correspondent who served in South Africa, and did so despite a recent decree by the War Office forbidding such a formal alignment of roles.

Unlike his dispatches from the North-West Frontier and the Sudan, Churchill never subsequently gathered and “fattened up” his South African articles into an edited book, but rather left them largely as compilations of his original articles. As such, the reader is mostly left

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 343–44.

<sup>114</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1046.

only with Churchill's observations and opinions at the time—either as he stood on the field, or at most a few days afterward. And though perhaps lacking some of the researched context and commentary present in his previous books, they are nonetheless replete with compelling narrative and on-the-spot critique. At the time, Mortimer Menpes, an artist who met Churchill during the war, said that the young journalist “speaks in an almost flippant manner, giving his views in an apparently careless way, but with the greatest assurance.” Furthermore, Menpes went on, “Mr. Churchill...struck me as a man who, in certain circles, might be termed unpopular, and accused of an arrogance which, to any but a jaundiced vision, would appear for what it undoubtedly is, frankness and perfect manliness.”<sup>115</sup>

During the fifteen days Churchill was a prisoner of war in South Africa, he authored six dispatches, but it was not until after his escape that his military commentary began to flow more freely. He was relentless, and at times, ferocious. The pluck he demonstrated on the battlefield was not absent from his pen, and again and again he told of futile efforts of a British Army hamstrung by underestimation and misapprehension—of both the enemy and his terrain. The story of how the British cavalry largely failed to adapt to the dismounted tactics of the Boers is well known, and need not be repeated here. What is important is that Churchill recognized the problem, long before the Elgin Committee looked for, and exposed, tactical and strategic shortcomings.

Though the overall picture Churchill painted was one of British unpreparedness, he did witness instances in which the traditional *arme blanche* charge worked. The most notable was during the action of Diamond Hill in June 1900 where, in country “well suited for cavalry action”, the 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers, numbering only 150 men, charged a larger group of Boer infantrymen. The “effect was instantaneous...the Boers fled before them...Had the horses been fresh and strong a very severe punishment would have been administered to the enemy...[even so,] the moral effect on those who escaped must certainly have been considerable.” Later that day, Churchill recorded another instance of traditional tactics. This time, a regiment of Household Cavalry were dismounting with their carbines when they were actually told to remount, and charge wielding steel. “Whereupon, delighted at this unlooked-for, unhoped-for opportunity, the Life Guardsmen scrambled back into their saddles, thrust their hated carbines into the buckets, and drawing their long swords, galloped straight at the enemy.” “The Boers”, reckoned Churchill, “might very easily have inflicted severe loss on them. But so formidable was the aspect of these tall horsemen...that they did not abide, and

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<sup>115</sup> Mortimer Menpes, *War Impressions: Being a Record in Colour* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901), pp. 124-27.

running to their mounts fled in cowardly haste, so that, though eighteen horses were shot, the Household Cavalry sustained no loss in men.”<sup>116</sup>

But this sort of effective charge was not the norm. The terrain was mostly “better suited to Boers than to British troops.” Even ground, like the country east of Bloemfontein, that at first appeared “smooth and open” offering “no obstacle to the free movement of cavalry”, in fact concealed the “treacherous and unimagined donga or the awkward wire fence.” Many times Churchill described the “most broken and difficult country, all rock, high grass, and dense thickets, which made it imperative to move in single file.”<sup>117</sup>

For Churchill, the terrain, plus the Boers’ tendency to prefer dismounted action, armed with accurate rifles, gave the enemy trooper an advantage over that of the British strooper. Several times Churchill recorded the ineffectiveness of British cavalry who refused to adapt to the conditions and foe they faced.<sup>118</sup> And, conversely, he was quick to praise episodes in which dismounted action was effectively employed. On 21 January he recorded an “instructive” incident in which a squadron of the South African Light Horse dismounted and “held an advanced *kopje* all day long under heavy fire, and never lost a man.” He remarked of action near Hussar Hill that, “it was very pretty to see these irregular soldiers stop their horses and dismount with their carbines at once without any hesitation.”<sup>119</sup>

The bulk of Churchill’s explicit commentary on the cavalry action of the Boer War was reserved for a lecture delivered in April of the following year, in which Sir Redvers Buller was present—and, in fact, chairman. Titled “Some Impressions of the War in South Africa”, Churchill used the occasion to employ evidence from the ongoing struggle in South Africa to deliver a sort of death knell to the sacrosanctity of the *arme blanche*.

Throughout the lecture, as one might expect, Churchill defended the individual cavalryman while attacking the system and her leaders. The trooper, argued Churchill, fought every day, never spared himself, and rode out “simply to draw fire and come back again—minus one or two.” “Day after day” they had been asked to perform “the most trying duties” in a dark, “broken country held by crafty and terrible guerrillas.” They were sniped at, endured bivouacking away from the main contingent, and have endured nothing “nothing but abuse and criticism from England.” Churchill then asked: “Is it any wonder they are disappointed with the result?”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *TBW*, pp. 392-95.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286, 263, 174.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 330, 332.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 167.

<sup>120</sup> WSC, “Some Impressions of the War in South Africa”, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol. 45 (1901), p. 842.

Instead, Churchill pointed the finger of blame at the training, which was given over to “drill in preparation for shock tactics...[and] shock tactics alone were what [the cavalryman] was told he was to believe in.” The carbine was intended only for “bye-days.” Of less use still were their swords, which, “although they might look very bright and fierce in time of peace, were no use whatsoever in time of war.” “If the cavalry”, Churchill declared, “had put into practice the lessons they had learned in peace in South Africa, it would have been ruin and destruction every time.”<sup>121</sup>

“But the cavalry officers were very intelligent men, and the cavalry soldier is very quick to learn”, and this, attested Churchill, accounted for any limited success which greeted the British mounted arm. They learned to march not in formation, as they had been taught, but in a “loose swarm”; they abandoned their “useless swords” and “drew forth the neglected carbine”, began to learn, in the open field, greater speed and accuracy of fire; they discarded the “mysterious rubbish with which their horses were encumbered” and “looked enviously at the long rifles of their irregular comrades”; “to the very last they were hampered by their training and equipment; but to the very last they were steadfast and always improving.”<sup>122</sup>

When surveying his writings vis-à-vis his adventures in the Indian subcontinent, Egypt, and the Sudan, the reader is struck by more than one oddity. The first is that he cared to enter into the finer points of the military debates in the first place. He was certainly under no obligation to do so. His volumes might actually have sold better had he left out the nuances of theory, for which he often apologized as simply getting in the way of the layman’s normal interests. His attention to detail in cavalry, among other things, clearly demonstrates that far from merely gallivanting absentmindedly in exotic places, Churchill was engaged. His purpose in writing and observing extended beyond simple storytelling; he had a keenly critical mind which he put to better use than elementary daydreaming. His pen was not ill-suited for analysis.

The second telling point is that Churchill was willing to set aside strong ties to the historically glorious role of cavalry for a more well-balanced and fair-minded investigation. From the very beginning he was caught up in the splendour and legacy of the British military and especially mounted warfare. A. G. Gardiner famously wrote of Churchill that “He is unconsciously playing a part—an heroic part. And he is himself his most astonished spectator. He sees himself moving through battle, his brow clothed with thunder, his legions looking to him for victory, and not looking in vain. He thinks of Napoleon; he thinks of his great ancestor... It is not make-believe, it is not insincerity: it is that in that fervid and picturesque

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 842–45.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 843–44.

imagination there will always be great deeds afoot with himself cast by destiny in the Agamemnon rôle.”<sup>123</sup> It is this fact that one must be careful not to underestimate, lest it misrepresent Churchill and deemphasize what is an aberration away from conventional opinion—namely, that he seems to guard against letting the romance of the cavalry get in the way of his assessment of it. Yet was it an aberration? Perhaps Churchill was as lopsided as some suggest, with romance eclipsing realism, but perhaps also he knew the difference. From reading his commentaries on cavalry, one could only conclude that whereas the adventurous schoolboy certainly shines brightly in other passages, his fair perspicacity on the mounted arm suggests an ability to keep romance and realism separate. All this, of course, could make a great deal of difference as to how Churchill is viewed going into the First World War, and hints towards a military leader for whom, obviously, “the past was alive and Whig history was true”, but also who, despite his mistakes, was not the permanent victim of naïveté as is sometimes suggested by peers and historians alike.<sup>124</sup>

There are two sets of conclusions to be drawn from Churchill and the cavalry. The first are the “close-up” up issues pertaining to Churchill’s direct conclusions and prescriptions relating to the mounted arm. Taking into account each of the facets addressed, what started out as fairly traditional training on the home front quickly expanded during his experiences. In other words, in accordance with his contemporary Drill Books and the programme of instruction at Sandhurst, Churchill received a typical regimen for a light cavalry officer. It was not highly reformist. His subsequent service was quite different, and in those places he was exposed to untraditional tactics. These he adapted to quite readily and easily, if not eagerly. He observed what he saw, and remained confident enough, even after only a short time in the field, to suggest that there was still a place for cavalry in the Late-Victorian Army, and moreover, that there was a place for irregular and *arme blanche* tactics alike, given suitable terrain. He was, overall, highly practical. In defensive tactics he was prepared to keep cavalymen on their horses until they arrived at the point of action, and then have them dismount for greater efficiency. In offence he was willing to give carbine action the upper hand over the sword and lance, while still maintaining the possibility of success with shock tactics, provided training, morale, and circumstances accommodated. In all these matters he met the contemporary cavalry debate head on, crafting his commentary to fit within the spectrums spanning both tactics and doctrine.

The second set of conclusions answer the question of what having been a cavalry officer meant for Churchill in terms of his attitude toward war. First, it helped to perpetuate a

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<sup>123</sup> As quoted in *Churchill*, 3, p. 132.

<sup>124</sup> Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), pp. 439, 178.

romantic view of war. Churchill's own inclinations in this direction, born far before his arrival at Sandhurst or his gazettement with the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars, and perhaps finding root in his ancestors of centuries prior, found perfect embodiment in the mounted arm. From this point of view, Churchill and the cavalry were made for one another; from horseback, Churchill realized his own notions of the glory of the battlefield. Perched there, his sight stretched further than if he had been on the ground, and Churchill often used this vantage to look backwards, to an era before democracy "was admitted to, or rather forced itself upon the battlefield", when war was still "a gentleman's game."<sup>125</sup> Cavalry certainly did not hurt the romance.

Churchill's devotion to understanding and functionality that characterized his discussions of various cavalry roles and tactics stretched also to cover the larger field of general war. He developed in the few years before the turn of the century a liking for comprehension, usually extending far beyond his immediate, designated surroundings. This stayed true his whole life, whether it was learning how to lay a brick wall, or how best to build a tank, or how best to defend Antwerp. And, he liked things that worked. He was not afraid to scrap and try again.

Furthermore, Churchill was thinking from early on about how to make cavalry adaptable for different theatres. On the one hand he stated clearly that the well-trained cavalryman was fit to lead in any country under any conditions, but on the other he was conscious that in order to do so the arm would have to remain open to reform and adaptability. There are echoes of this in later years, as Churchill sought to maintain similarly flexible arms of the British military, well suited for combat across varying theatres.

If other accounts be any useful guide, it is safe to say that Churchill probably forgot little of what he encountered in those early adventures, and that years later, when considering the use of the cavalry in the next great conflict, his mind's eye no doubt wondered back to the thrill of Malakand, Omdurman, and South Africa. In 1930, when reflecting upon his time in this latter campaign, he admonished his reader: "Let us learn from our lessons. Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on that strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The Statesman who yields to war fever must realise that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events."<sup>126</sup> In this light, the study of the early military thought of Churchill is not a barren enquiry; in fact, there is much to be learned about this young warrior who would grow up to assume stations of significant military import in the future days of his nation.

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<sup>125</sup> *MEL*, p. 79.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

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## THE TACTICS OF WAR

The late Victorian British Army was stressed at home and abroad as it sought to recruit, train, equip, and sustain its forces in the many and varied colonial wars in distant theatres, each presenting differing tactical challenges. Topography presented constant obstacles and placed heavy burdens on the task of moving men and equipment across, as in the case of Wolseley's 1870 Red River expedition, hundreds of miles of wilderness, oftentimes making makeshift use of waterways, as would also be done to transport men and materials to the Sudan almost 30 years later. South Africa impeded movement with its *veldts*, Canada with its whitewater rapids, the Sudan with its *khors*, the Gold Coast with its tropical jungles, and the North-West Frontier with its mountains, steep ravines, and sheer rock faces, a treacherous landscape through which intertwined the semblance of rocky trails hardly wide enough for a mule, much less heavy and cumbersome artillery.

Varying geography was often accompanied by varying climates. Both demanded (sometimes elusive) careful logistical planning, without which the way was paved for potential havoc on men, animals, and equipment unaccustomed to the harsh realities of sometimes unpredictable weather. In 1880 Lord Roberts marched 10,000 men across 313 miles from Kabul to Kandahar through intense dust storms and extreme climate changes.<sup>1</sup> While the presence of too many rivers presented their own challenges to army engineers, the opposite was equally true; Sir Robert Napier's expedition, faced with traversing the arid mountainous terrain of Abyssinia, was forced to carry sufficient water on its trek to Magdala. It took the expedition three months to travel 400 miles. As Colonel (later Major-General Sir) Charles Callwell, in his most valuable *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, observed, "It is perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of small wars...that they are in the main campaigns against nature."<sup>2</sup>

The British Army was further forced into adaptation and improvisation by the varying foes encountered on its expeditions. The Talpurs, Sikhs, Afridis, Dervishes, Zulus, and Boers, to name just a few of the enemies encountered by the British in the nineteenth century, each varying greatly in their approach to warfare. The Zulus, lightly armed and sustained by their environment, were highly mobile on the *veld*, but lacked advanced weaponry and the commitment to defensive action. With respect to organization the Egyptian Army was not too unlike their European equivalents, having been trained and armed by them; by contrast the Ashanti could set ambushes and manage some flanking

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Robson, "Roberts, Frederick Sleigh, First Earl Roberts (1832–1914)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, Jan 2011, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35768>>, accessed 23 May 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: H.M.S.O., 1906), p. 44. This author, as countless others, is indebted to Callwell for doing so well what had scarcely been done hitherto. This thesis relies heavily on his *magnum opus*.

manoeuvres, but could not withstand frontal assaults. Equally dissimilar, the Mahdists were committed to advancing, as they did under the command of Osman Azrak in September 1898, across the open plain in the face of far superior weaponry and almost certain slaughter, while the Xhosa tribes were elusive and rarely presented a unified target to an advancing foe. In short, “British forces had to adapt to a variety of challenges posed by different foes, employing different weapons and tactics.”<sup>3</sup>

Winston Churchill, in his pre-First World War years as a practising soldier, was thrust into four of these varied conflicts. From 1895–1900, the cavalry officer came face to face with differing terrains, climates, and foes. Later he would write, “Twenty to Twenty-five! These are the years.”<sup>4</sup> He was not wrong. By the time he sailed from Cape Town on the *Dunottar Castle* on 7 July 1900, bound for Britain and home, Churchill had observed in Cuba,<sup>5</sup> and fought with Blood on the North-West Frontier, and with Kitchener in the Sudan and in South Africa. His name had appeared in dispatches, and he had been awarded an order and four medals. In four years he witnessed an incredible amount of action for a newly-commissioned officer, and as such was in a position to form opinions on the tactics of the late Victorian army. Churchill’s military intellectual development was impacted at least in part by his experiences, readings, and relationships; the final years of the nineteenth century proved to be fertile soil—abundant and unabating—for all three. Interminable too was his writing, and given his station as a soldier-journalist one is given the opportunity to determine the scope of that intellectual development.

Churchill was neither the only nor the most famous Victorian war correspondent.<sup>6</sup> William Howard Russell (1820–1907) of *The Times*, who made his venture into fame first by reporting in the Crimea, was probably the most famous, and despite the sin of “giving his predecessors scant recognition...he influenced the future course of war news more than...any other correspondent.”<sup>7</sup> Russell ushered in the golden age of war correspondence, or that period from the Crimean War to the Boer War, and it was from him that the pattern for British war correspondents was set.<sup>8</sup> “When a war correspondent was faced with the necessity of describing a battle, the image of William Howard Russell rose before him. Russell’s favourite words, phrases, and descriptive tricks appear with endless

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<sup>3</sup> For this quotation and helpful references in the preceding paragraphs, Edward Spiers, “The Late Victorian Army, 1868–1914”, in David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> *MEL*, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Admittedly not a British conflict, but still nonetheless important in understanding the more informal aspects of Churchill’s military education.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent introduction to Late-Victorian war correspondents, and their role and effect in and on the army and society alike, see Roger T. Stearn, “War Correspondents and Colonial War, c. 1870–1900”, in John MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 139–61.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph J. Matthews, *Reporting the Wars* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Stearn, “War Correspondents and Colonial War”, pp. 140–41.

monotony in the dispatches of his successors.”<sup>9</sup> And there were many successors, led by Archibald Forbes of the *Daily News* and Bennet Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph*. Forbes was called by Russell “that incomparable Archibald” and became “the most decorated journalist who ever lived”;<sup>10</sup> Burleigh, who reported twenty-four wars, received praise from Lord Burnham as “the greatest of the *Daily Telegraph* war correspondents and possibly the greatest of all war correspondents”,<sup>11</sup> left the army and became a journalist in London, but was then sent back to the field as a war correspondent, where his talents shone brightly. Other professional war reporters included Charles Williams, H. A. Gwynne, E. F. Knight, Francis Scudamore, and G. A. Henty. George Warrington (G. W.) Steevens, more contemporary and thus more important in relation to Churchill, was “probably the best-known and most eulogized, and possibly the most influential, British journalist”; he wrote descriptions of the 1898 Sudan campaign and the Second Boer War for the *Daily Mail* memorable enough to be used by military historians ever since.<sup>12</sup> One of those descriptions is an account of meeting young Churchill in 1898 in the Sudan, where he was then a fellow journalist.<sup>13</sup> Later Churchill included Steevens in his own memoirs, and remembered him as “the most brilliant man in journalism I have ever met.”<sup>14</sup>

Nor was Churchill the only war correspondent with military training and experience. Forbes had enlisted in the Royal Dragoons, where he rose to the rank of acting quartermaster-sergeant. A. W. A. Pollock was formerly an army colonel. Burleigh also had army experience before beginning in journalism, and Henty had previously volunteered for the Army Hospital Commissariat and thereupon sent to the Crimea. And though some serving officers doubled as war correspondents, even as civilians in the field war correspondents sometimes assumed a quasi-officer status and in battle they sometimes assumed an officer role.<sup>15</sup> Late in the nineteenth century Michael MacDonagh reported that one war correspondent took “rank as an officer for the purpose of drawing food for himself and a servant.”<sup>16</sup> And while officially war correspondents were non-combatants,<sup>17</sup> many—like Churchill—armed themselves and engaged the enemy, and were sometimes “in every aspect a combatant.”<sup>18</sup> Most were armed with revolvers, and some with other weapons. Burleigh had a repeating carbine; Prior had a shotgun; Bennett Stanford his “four-barrelled Lancaster pistol” and Scudamore carried a Bland, a

<sup>9</sup> Matthews, *Reporting the Wars*, pp. 276-77.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Moy Thomas, *Fifty Years of Fleet Street* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Burnham, *Peterborough Court: The Story of the Daily Telegraph* (London: Cassell, 1955), p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Roger T. Stearn, “G. W. Steevens and the Message of Empire”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 17 (1989), p. 210.

<sup>13</sup> G. W. Steevens, “The Youngest Man in Europe”, in Charles Eade (ed.), *Churchill, By His Contemporaries* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), pp. 61-66.

<sup>14</sup> *MEL*, p. 227.

<sup>15</sup> Stearn, “War Correspondents and Colonial War”, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> Michael MacDonagh, “Can We Rely on Our War News?”, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 69 (1898), p. 613.

<sup>17</sup> As the Secretary of War, Colonel Stanley, stated in the House of Commons on 29 July 1879, “...any officer who permitted a newspaper correspondent to take an active part against the enemy would act in a manner which I would characterize as unjustifiable.” *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 1879, Vol. 248, 1534.

<sup>18</sup> MacDonagh, “Can We Rely on Our War News?”, p. 625.

double-barreled pistol which “blew a hole in the poor chap the size of a soup tureen.”<sup>19</sup> During the Nile campaign Charles Williams was “twice requested to take command of some of the men by the senior officers on the spot.”<sup>20</sup> Burleigh, who had previously served as an officer in the Confederate States Army, famously helped rally the men at Tamai, shouting to the British troops, “Give it to them, men! Hurrah!”—immortalizing him, in Bullard’s words, as “the special who would have been awarded the V. C. for his exploits in the Soudan, had it been possible for a ‘camp follower’ to win that coveted distinction.”<sup>21</sup>

Some being former soldiers, and all being interested in the art of war, many war correspondents sought out an education on the profession of war. Archibald Forbes, when not on active service in the cavalry, spent hours in the “regimental library over the pages of Napier, or in tougher wrestle with the war problems of Jomini”;<sup>22</sup> henceforward he built up a “complete war-library, extending from Clausewitz’s *On War* to Von Scherff’s *Tactics of Infantry*, and embracing all the most recent works on the art military [*sic*].”<sup>23</sup> Believing “himself a military expert”,<sup>24</sup> Forbes wrote “frequent articles on campaign and war subjects”,<sup>25</sup> and held “that a war-correspondent should always understand war practically and theoretically; should always be abreast of the latest systems and freshest ideas on his own peculiar subject... [and] must study to see with understanding, and to write so as to earn the respect of soldiers.”<sup>26</sup> Bennet Burleigh was found by Bullard to be “rather prone to assertiveness upon military matters, as if his judgment was authoritative”; upon his death he was praised by Field-Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood for his ability, military judgment, and knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Equally important, war training, war experience, and a presence on campaigns meant that war correspondents not only reported but offered evaluation and critique. Their position did not preclude them from turning a sometimes-critical eye to the operation of war, often to the disgruntlement of the officers and ministers responsible for operations being reported upon. From the beginning, William Howard Russell exposed some of the faults of the military and its authorities, which resulted in tremendous suffering, an exposure which led in part to the crashing down of the Aberdeen Ministry and the coming to the Crimea of Florence Nightingale.<sup>28</sup> Russell helped to establish the role of the

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<sup>19</sup> Stearn, “War Correspondents and Colonial War”, p. 152; Bennet Burleigh, *Khartoum Campaign, 1898, or the Re-conquest of the Soudan* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1899), p. 204; Frank Scudamore, *A Sheaf of Memories* (London: T. F. Unwin, Ltd., 1925), p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> MacDonagh, “Can We Rely on Our War News?”, p. 625.

<sup>21</sup> F. Lauriston Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents* (London: Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1914), p. 193.

<sup>22</sup> Archibald Forbes, *Souvenirs of Some Continents* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1885), p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> E. H. Yates (ed.), *Celebrities at Home* (London: Office of ‘the World’, 1879), pp. 42–43.

<sup>24</sup> Stearn, “War Correspondents and Colonial War”, p. 145.

<sup>25</sup> Charles M. Andrews, “*The Life of Napoleon III* by Archibald Forbes”, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Jan., 1899), p. 360. These subjects included the United States Army, the strategy of Abraham Lincoln, and Napoleon III.

<sup>26</sup> Yates, *Celebrities at Home*, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents*, p. 230.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39–41.

military critic within the role of the military correspondent, and those professionals who came after him, though almost always subject to some level of censorship, turned their commentative eye to transport, supply, education, equipment, tactics, strategy, generalship and the like. Archibald Forbes, in 1878 and 1884–85 respectively, raised awareness and questioned illness among the British garrison in Cyprus and the quality of the British weapons in the Sudan, both of which not only caused concern at home but sparked Parliamentary questions and debate.<sup>29</sup> In 1898 he reported on the “valueless character of the Lee–Metford rifle bullet”,<sup>30</sup> and told of “under superior orders...large details from each regiment...engaged daily in firing off the tips of...one million rounds.”<sup>31</sup> G. W. Steevens in 1898 criticized the lack of adequate boots, which he called a “scandal” of the War Office: “It is always the same story—knavery and slackness clogging and strangling the best efforts of the British soldier.”<sup>32</sup> In that same volume he devoted the entirety of Chapter 23 to “Analysis and Criticism”.<sup>33</sup> The war in South Africa was hugely reported upon (*The Times* alone, at one point, had 24 correspondents in the field, and altogether there were almost 300 in total),<sup>34</sup> and with increased scrutiny came increased opportunity for critique. War correspondents criticized, among other things, “British faults of unpreparedness, incompetent generalship and tactics, inadequate intelligence and maps, [and] insufficient mounted troops and mobility.”<sup>35</sup> Burleigh questioned the wisdom of the British authorities for conspicuous officer adornment—because of which the enemy, “told off to shoot leaders, found no difficulty in distinguishing officers from privates.”<sup>36</sup> Steevens repeated a common theme when he reported on the British “inferiority in guns”, calling them “as useless as catapults” against the Boers’ “newer, better pieces, mounted on higher ground.”<sup>37</sup>

It is important to recognize the professional and literary context of Churchill’s war reporting, and in that light this chapter has so far sought to acknowledge two obvious and accurate claims. First, Churchill was not at all unique in using his position as soldier–journalist to comment on the operation of war. Others used their station to the same end, and some probably to a greater extent and to a greater effect than he did. Second, in most cases Churchill offered little new commentary, but only rephrased and repeated the general attitudes and reports of journalists sent to cover campaigns. In the

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<sup>29</sup> *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 12 March 1885, Vol. 295, 879; John Wilkinson–Latham, *British Military Swords* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), pp. 43–46; John Wilkinson–Latham, *British Cut and Thrust Weapons* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), pp. 22–23, 75.

<sup>30</sup> The Lee–Metford rifle bullet was accused of having insufficient stopping power. See Edward M. Spiers, “The Use of the Dum Dum Bullet in Colonial Warfare”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1975), pp. 3–4.

<sup>31</sup> Bennet Burleigh, *Sirdar and Khalifa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898), p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> G. W. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartoum* (London: Greenhill Books, 1990), pp. 69–71.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 284–96.

<sup>34</sup> Trevor Royle, *War Report* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1987), pp. 69–70; R. J. Wilkinson–Latham, *From Our Special Correspondent* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p. 249.

<sup>35</sup> Stearn, “War Correspondents and Colonial War”, p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> Bennet Burleigh, *The Natal Campaign* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1900), p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> G. W. Steevens, *From Capetown to Ladysmith* (London: William Blackwood, 1900), pp. 92, 100.

British campaigns in which Churchill was reporting, the party line amongst correspondents was strong, especially with regard to evaluation, commentary, and critique. The temptation to toe that party line was, it seems, equally strong. It is difficult to find a journalist critiquing a tactical consideration in a way fresh and different from that of his peers. The same is true of Churchill. Certain themes—like the inferiority of British to Boer weapons—recur to the point of seeming ubiquity.

The reality of Churchill's principal audience being the paying public had important consequences. One was that his accounts had to have purchase power with the largest possible audience, and in doing so his correspondence not only had to be exceptionally dramatic and vivid, but of sufficient scope to encompass the largest possible sweep of the theatre of war, thus holding the attention of a public with varying interests. His journalism at times needed to adopt a wide scope, and to report on events and action that Churchill might not have been in a position to directly or personally observe. His book on the Soudan expedition spent many pages discussing the Battle of Atbara, which took place many months before Churchill even arrived in Egypt. By the same token, he did not stop telling the story of the Boer War whilst detained as a prisoner of war in Pretoria; instead, he relied on information gathered secondhand.

Information collected by other sources had its inherent limitations, principal among them being anything included in that information had first to pass muster of the one who witnessed it, and was therefore subject to another's judgment of what was, or what was not, important. Given the impossibility of both Churchill and the firsthand witness to have shared exactly the same perspective and argument, important aspects of any information given to Churchill could have been, at the very least, deemphasized, and at the very worst, left out of the account altogether. There was then the additional dilemma of determining the veracity of the information passed to him, and in each instance Churchill, in trying to tell the story of—and draw conclusions from—events not witnessed by him, was in many ways at the mercy of eyes and ears not his own.

Each of these particulars, and especially the fact that any of Churchill's commentary on military theory, from the theatre of battle, was almost always couched in journalism meant for a public and paying audience, has a particular bearing on any deduction of his early military thinking from those correspondences. The context of Churchill's war journalism should not be forgotten when trying to evaluate its usefulness in establishing his military intellectual capital. Included in that context, too, is the editing of the dispatches by Churchill and the publications' editors, prior to printing. A discussion of one collection of these dispatches helps to illustrate the importance of this context, and particularly how the dispatches might have been altered to better suit their audience, or indeed some of the motivations that helped to govern their original style.

Fourteen of the fifteen dispatches that Churchill wrote whilst in the Sudan still exist in their original, pre-publication form, scrawled in pen and pencil on paper of varying sizes and conditions.

Upon completion, Churchill sent each dispatch to his mother, who then gave them either to J. N. Dunn, the editor of the *Morning Post*, or to Oliver Borthwick, the son of Lord Glenesk, its owner. The dispatches are now kept among the Glenesk-Bathurst Papers in the Special Collections of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.<sup>38</sup> The letters have been used as source material for some published work,<sup>39</sup> though it is interesting to note that the original letters do not appear in the listings of sources used in the publication of the two books which come closest to the subject of this thesis.<sup>40</sup>

In his covering letter which accompanied the first two dispatches,<sup>41</sup> Churchill wrote of how he fashioned his style after the eighteenth-century essayist Joseph Addison, who, among other things, contributed to *The Spectator* a series of letters authored by the “Spectator”—“an observant and well-travelled individual whose detached viewpoint and shrewd reflections on life [informed] the journalistic discourse throughout the paper’s run.”<sup>42</sup> In doing so, Churchill made the half-hearted—though hardly serious, and hardly permanent, since his aim of self-advertisement meant he always intended his authorship eventually to be known publicly—attempt to conceal his dispatches under the guise of private letters written to a friend under the *nom de plume* “A Subaltern of the Horse”—a pen name which, as it happened, the *Morning Post* never permitted to be printed in the final published versions. Borthwick and Dunn had removed other Addisonian characteristics as well, namely those passages bent mainly on feeding Churchill’s conceitedness and so farcical to have threatened the believability of the letters or the integrity of the paper. Upon learning of the *Morning Post*’s edits, Churchill was less than pleased, and wrote to his mother of how what he had meant as a “pious fraud”,<sup>43</sup> intended to “amuse many people”,<sup>44</sup> had instead lost its “elegance”, “illusion”, and “peculiar idea”, and had become a “mere *banal* penny a line journalism.”<sup>45</sup> In other ways the *Morning Post* exercised further editorial privilege; for example, it devised sub-headings, changed titles (in the eighth letter, Churchill’s title “The Battle of Khartoum” was substituted for “The Battle of Omdurman”, among other examples), and rewrote the introduction to the series.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> WSC’s dispatches to *MP*, Glenesk-Bathurst Correspondence and Papers, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, MS/DEP/1990/1/1826-1840.

<sup>39</sup> Keith Wilson, “Young Winston’s Addisonian Conceit: A Note on ‘The War on the Nile’ Letters”, in Edward Spiers (ed.), *Sudan: The Reconquest Reappraised* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 223-28.

<sup>40</sup> The two books are Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, and D’Este, *Warlord*.

<sup>41</sup> WSC to Oliver Borthwick, letter dated 10 August 1898, Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, MS/DEP/1990/1/1824.

<sup>42</sup> Pat Rogers, “Addison, Joseph (1672-1719)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn., May 2015, available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/156> [accessed 16 January 2016].

<sup>43</sup> WSC to Captain Aylmer Haldane, letter dated 11 August 1898, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 964.

<sup>44</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 10 August 1898, *ibid.*, p. 961.

<sup>45</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 17 September 1898, *ibid.*, pp. 980-81.

<sup>46</sup> For more on these particular classes of edits, including those that took aim at the inherent “Addisonian conceit”, and the dispatches’ general reception at the *MP*, including WSC’s coming to terms, as it were, with their published form, see Wilson, “Young Winston’s Addisonian Conceit”, pp. 223-28.

Beyond the *Morning Post's* edits, the original letters also illustrate the attention and care Churchill gave to his own words, altering words, phrases, and sentences until he found the exact language that suited his intended design and message. Of the 139 manuscript pages of text and maps that survive, only six bear no trace of discernable editing, and most of those are simple illustrations showing battle movements. Evident is Churchill's concern to correctly identify people and places, even telegraphing his mother to correct certain names in his dispatch describing the action of 2 September 1898.<sup>47</sup> Even so, most of the edits were those of an attentive proofreader who wished to make minor changes to words or syntax—such as the substitution of “upholstery” for “padding” when describing an unadorned train carriage, or the substitution of “shimmer” for “dance” in the sentence, “Over all the heat began, as the sun rose, to glitter and to dance.”<sup>48</sup> On other occasions, Churchill added words or phrases that heightened the descriptiveness or drama. At the same time his editing periodically removed language which he perhaps thought the better of using; for example, when describing a British force at a depot along the Nile, he changed the description of their gaze up the river from “anxiously” to “watchfully”;<sup>49</sup> in the fourth letter he struck out a phrase in which he described indigenous women as having “ugly” faces, and edited the description of their children from having eyes “empty of intelligent result” to eyes “without intelligent result.”<sup>50</sup> Similarly, in his sixth letter Churchill crossed out the word “filthy” before “savages”.<sup>51</sup>

As telling as the numerous edits is perhaps how much prose went unedited by Churchill, especially considering his use of indelible ink. As stated, the vast majority of edits were, at least in regards to the general thrust and tone of the story, largely ornamental, having more to do with style than substance. From the letters it would seem that Churchill had, for the most part, almost entirely made up his mind before he put pen to paper; there are not, in other words, visible in the original dispatches any major shifts in attitudes or opinions, or for that matter any significant evolution of either, between drafting and posting. The editing he did undertake, then, substantiates the degree to which his dispatches were principally crafted and meant as pieces of popular journalism, and one would be hard-pressed to argue that any substantive explanation of or grappling with military theory within their pages was anything but an aim of secondary importance to Churchill. It is another way that Churchill and his writings resembled that of his popular, contemporary war correspondents. All the same, given that much of this thesis is an exploration into Churchill's early military thinking as evidenced in his war correspondence and in the subsequent books constructed upon their foundation, the care and attention that went into writing his dispatches should not go unnoticed, and to add flesh to what

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<sup>47</sup> LRC to editor, *MP*, letter dated 28 September 1898, Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, MS/DEP/1990/1/1820.

<sup>48</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 15 August 1898, *ibid.*, MS/DEP/1990/1/1828.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 20 August 1898, *ibid.*, MS/DEP/1990/1/1929.

<sup>51</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 25 August 1898, *ibid.*, MS/DEP/1990/1/1831.

would otherwise be the rather dry bones of academic analysis, reproduced in Appendix 1 is a facsimile of Churchill's account of the Battle of Omdurman, so that the reader may see for himself the writing and construction of his letters from the field.

If Churchill as war correspondent was more the rule than the exception, what legitimizes any effort to uncover his early military thinking whilst thusly occupied is not so much that he was a war correspondent who thought militarily, but rather that he was a future war leader who was thinking militarily at a young age. Given his future station he was unique among his fellow late Victorian war correspondents. Among them, he alone would later assume such a high degree of responsibility for the waging of war; he alone would be in a position to use (or ignore) his early experiences with war; he alone would be able to shape battlefields with the benefit of hindsight of lessons learned (or not learned) on the battlefield; he alone would be afforded the chance to lead in light (or not in light) of the observations and critiques he once made of leaders. Because of this, though perhaps not altogether different from the opinions of his peers, how Churchill came to regard the operation of war as a soldier and as a war correspondent is a key component in understanding his early military intellectual development. He might not always have known the answers, but whether Churchill came to know what questions to ask, specifically with regards to tactics, would be an important consideration in evaluating his early military intellectual capital. Alongside this is the question of the degree to which Churchill's ruminations on war were consistent with the ruminations of other more recognized military thinkers; it is because of this that, in the pages that follow, several parallels are drawn between Churchill's thinking and the thinking of others, specifically Charles Callwell. Churchill left Harrow and then Sandhurst with maturing characteristics—many of them mental, psychological, and attitudinal—that would have some bearing on his early military mind; these he brought with him to the frontier, where they were combined with the practice of war-making.

As noted, by the time he left Sandhurst Churchill had developed a small military library, and professed to reading some or significant parts of it. And though the initiative demonstrated in building such a library speaks of his abiding interest in military affairs for itself, it remains unclear the degree to which that library, or his reading of recognized military theorists, actually influenced his military development. As in his school years, the early Churchill was reluctant to dabble in what he would have considered the dusty abstract; on the contrary, he was much more interested in history and experience. Returning to Britain after the South African War, he gave a speech to an audience of military professionals on, among other things, artillery tactics; astoundingly, in the speech he admitted to not knowing what was in the artillery drill books.<sup>52</sup> As concerns the evolution of his military thinking, works of history occasionally coloured by demonstrations of tactics and strategy were more impactful than works of tactics and strategy occasionally coloured by historical example. Biography trumped

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<sup>52</sup> WSC, "Some Impressions of the War in South Africa", p. 839.

strict theory. The same can be said of his personal experiences, which contributed to his military thinking because of the principles he drew from them, not because they acted as evidence for some pre-existing, meticulously thought out, carefully constructed theories of tactics and strategy. Churchill placed a high degree of importance on practical knowledge and on-the-job training; he needed to see with his own eyes, rather than through the eyes of others.

This emphasis on the art of war learned biographically through the written word, or autobiographically through first-hand experience, stayed with Churchill through his early years as a soldier. “They were of the greatest value in training the soldiers”, Churchill wrote of cavalry engagements on the North-West Frontier. “The Guides Cavalry know all there is to know of frontier war, but there are many other regiments who could be made infinitely more powerful fighting organisations, if they were afforded the opportunity for such experience.”<sup>53</sup> He stressed “of what value a little active service is to the soldier”, and confessed that “from a military point of view, the perpetual frontier wars in one corner or other of the Empire are of the greatest value.”<sup>54</sup> As discussed in a previous chapter, service in some regiment on the frontier, Churchill recommended, would be of great practical worth to the youth “who means to make himself a professional soldier, an expert in war, [and] a specialist in practical tactics.”<sup>55</sup>

Whilst in India Churchill placed high value on reviewing the tactics demonstrated during field days, again emphasizing the importance of learning via experience. As one of his subordinates, Sergeant Hallaway, remembered, “After a field day Mr Churchill would arrive at stables with rolls of foolscap and lots of lead pencils of all colours, and tackle me on the movements we had done at the exercise...if I was not paying much attention to Mr Churchill’s drawings of the manoeuvres he would roll the paper up and say, ‘All right, you are bad-tempered today!’”<sup>56</sup> And although Sergeant Hallaway “had not the time for tactics”, Churchill’s avidity for the subject, or at least for the practising of it in the field, did not go unnoticed by his superiors. In Bangalore he reported to his mother that Colonel Ramsay had written a letter of recommendation supporting Churchill’s application for service in the Sudan in which Churchill was praised for being “a good rider” and a “very smart cavalry officer” who knew his “work in the field thoroughly.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore his superiors had seen fit to make Churchill regimental adjutant whilst the official one, Lieutenant Barnes, was on leave. From Kundana Camp in January 1897 he wrote to Lady Randolph: “I have had for the first time in my military experience—responsibility & have discharged it, not altogether without success. The regiment has had to adapt itself to the new conditions of a strange country, has had to find out many things which it would have been

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<sup>53</sup> *MFF*, p. 258.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 267.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>56</sup> David Scott Daniell, *4<sup>th</sup> Hussar, The Story of a British Cavalry Regiment* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, Ltd., 1959), pp. 228–29.

<sup>57</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 12 February 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/16.

easy for others to explain.”<sup>58</sup> Two weeks later, during a five-day field exercise which included reconnaissance, chart and compass practice,<sup>59</sup> Churchill was again given more responsibility: “I am doing ‘Brigade Major’ a most important duty and one which in England could never have been obtained under 14 or 15 years service”, he reported to his mother, before reminding her that he was “still doing adjutant so that soldering prospects are very prosperous.” “I am”, he summed up, “becoming my dear Mamma a very ‘correct soldier.’ Full of zeal etc. Even in homoeopathic doses—Responsibility is an exhilarating drink.”<sup>60</sup>

Thus, Churchill valued experience and in the field he placed a premium on the experience active service on the frontier could offer the soldier and officer. His own experiences were varied, and from a tactical perspective he was afforded the opportunity to witness, notice, and comment on the stark contrasts in environment and enemy that demanded equally starkly contrasting tactics. This is demonstrated by two colonial engagements in 1897 and 1898 in which Churchill partook, and which differed widely from one another. In the latter year the British, in seeking to reestablish control in the Sudan, gathered an Anglo-Egyptian army of around 25,000 men to face the approximately 40,000 men of the Mahdist army. In the final days of that conflict, Churchill not only participated in a *bona fide* cavalry charge, but also witnessed the destruction of the enemy who, despite their bravery, were cut down in the open by volleys of British infantry and artillery fire that left some 20,000 Mahdist casualties. In turn, the British suffered less than 500 total casualties.<sup>61</sup> Juxtaposed with his Sudan experience was the 1897 conflict, in which Churchill served as a cavalry subaltern in one of the many punitive expeditions against the Pashtun tribes on the North-West Frontier of India. Here the terrain allowed for no traditional cavalry charges like that at Omdurman, and the “tribesmen”, while not lacking the courage or the fanaticism of the Mahdists, used the mountainous terrain to their advantage, skirmishing and employing breech-loading rifles with effect, while all the while remaining behind cover. In Egypt Kitchener made use of close-order formations and volley fire; by contrast, the same tactics on the North-West Frontier would have proved both impractical and perilous. And though in both conflicts the British were victorious, the methods and tactics used to achieve victory stood, at times, in contrast to one another.

In 1889, Colonel Hale, while referring to colonial campaigns, argued, “An officer who has seen service must sweep from his mind all recollections of that service, for between Afghan, Egyptian and Zulu warfare and that of Europe, there is no similarity whatever. To the latter the former is merely

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<sup>58</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 28 January 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/14.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Historical Account of the 4<sup>th</sup>, THE QUEEN’S OWN Historical Papers 1801-1929, 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars’, p. 163. Unpublished archive document, Home Headquarters, The Queen’s Royal Hussars, London; Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, p. 154.

<sup>60</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 12 February 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/16.

<sup>61</sup> This number includes killed and wounded. Cyril Falls, “The Reconquest of the Soudan, 1896-1898”, in Bond, *Victorian Military Campaigns*, pp. 299-301.

the play of children.”<sup>62</sup> Such a remark suggests that among British officers there existed the belief that colonial campaigns were ‘rogue’ from professional soldiering; that is, that they represented a significant enough departure from the tactics and strategies needed in continental warfare that these “small wars” rendered themselves effectively useless in mainstream military theorizing, even perhaps posing as martial charlatans.<sup>63</sup> However, for Major-General Sir Garnet Wolseley, colonial warfare represented not inferiority or futility but rather “an art in itself”, requiring the commander to apply only the spirit of the “rules of war”, and allowing his genius to “fill in the details required by the nature of the country and by the tactics, mode of fighting, and arms of the enemy.”<sup>64</sup> Churchill leaned toward the Wolseley opinion, and though his mind and energies were not solely occupied with his soldering profession, the influences of the frontier nevertheless contributed to the development of his own thinking about war as “an art in itself.” Accordingly, it is the continued aim of this chapter to consider the development of Churchill’s tactical thought, and what follows is a discussion of the “raw tactics” of the various fighting arms and their ancillaries. As the cavalry arm is covered elsewhere, this chapter will not address it except when necessary to support a more relevant contention.

Churchill was trained by and entered into an army that was reluctant to assimilate into formal training its experiences of frontier warfare. The British Army, understandably, had to prepare and train for more than one colonial campaign, and more than just colonial campaigns (however high their frequency), and as such no single tactical doctrine would have served as a satisfactory solution for every conflict in which it found itself engaged. This point was no better illustrated than by Callwell, who attempted to synthesize the lessons of colonial wars in which the “conditions...are so diversified, the enemy’s mode of fighting is often so peculiar, and the theatres of operations present such singular features, that irregular warfare must generally be carried out on a method totally different from the stereotyped system.”<sup>65</sup> Be that as it may, and perhaps at least in part due to the complexity of the project of colonial tactical distillation, in the developing tactical doctrine of the Late-Victorian era the emphasis was placed on continental warfare, with special attention given to the conduct of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71; the British Army was subsequently seen as a European, rather than as an imperial, force, and the importance of colonial warfare was dismissed.<sup>66</sup> Until as late as 1892, the tactical manuals used by the British and Indian armies were to rely almost solely on continental thought, with little regard to the more pressing needs of the colonial environments.<sup>67</sup> Trained in continental methods, British soldiers and officers sent to the North-West Frontier often had to adapt

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<sup>62</sup> As quoted in Timothy Robert Moreman, “‘Passing it On’: The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849-1947”, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, King’s College, University of London, 1995, p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> As quoted in T. R. Moreman, “The British and Indian Armies and North-West Frontier Warfare, 1849-1914”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 20 (1992), p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> Major-General Sir G. Wolseley, “The Negro as Soldier”, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 50 (December, 1888), p. 703.

<sup>65</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars: their Principles and Practice*, p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Moreman, “The British and Indian Armies and North-West Frontier Warfare, 1849-1914”, p. 37.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

whilst in the field, learning the pragmatic necessities of survival from the tested experience of veterans. The Pathan “tribesmen” were well acquainted with the mountainous environment, and used it, along with superior mobility and marksmanship, to harass the punitive forces in what at times amounted to guerilla warfare. As Churchill observed in 1898, “Great and expensive forces, equipped with all the developments of scientific war, are harried and worried without rest or mercy by an impalpable cloud of active and well armed skirmishers. To enter the mountains to attack an Afridi is to jump into the water to catch a fish.”<sup>68</sup> Tactically, Churchill recognized the same problem as Colonel John Adye who, writing 30 years earlier, noted that, “Offensive mountain warfare, in a hostile unknown region, is the prosecution of a difficult art under the most trying circumstances. All the ordinary obstructions to successful campaigning then present themselves in aggravated form.” Adye expounded: “Whether in climbing steep ridges, or in forcing rocky defiles, the advantages of ground and the knowledge of locality are entirely in favour of the enemy...The well-fed soldiers of the plains...find that the advantages of the regular formations and severe drill are of little avail under conditions antagonistic to normal routine.”<sup>69</sup>

If colonial warfare, then, can at least in one way be traced and characterized by tactical realizations and adaptations, it becomes helpful in establishing the way young Churchill thought of the craft of war to explore the ways in which he did or did not identify and interact with those realizations and adaptations. Using experience, training, and study as his guides, Churchill endorsed certain tactical recommendations underpinned by his observations. Herein, though, it is important to realize that Churchill’s observations were based upon, not surprisingly, what he observed, and just as it would be imprudent, given the inherent diversity of frontier environments, to prescribe one solution for every context, so too would it be unfair to impress upon Churchill the duty of making all but general recommendations for conditions with which he had no personal familiarity.

If, as Callwell argued, small wars were principally a war against nature, then in colonial warfare nature inherently favoured the indigenous people. “Tribesmen” enjoyed knowledge of local terrain and were not burdened with significant climate acclimation that so often fed disease and fatigue in the invading force. For the most part, communication, reconnaissance, intelligence, and subsistence came more easily to the local. Churchill recognized the innate advantage possessed by the indigenous warrior, writing on the North-West Frontier of the “great disadvantages...to which regular troops are exposed in fighting an enterprising enemy...who knows the country and who knows the ranges.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> WSC, “The Ethics of Frontier Policy”, *United Service Magazine*, Vol. 17 (1898), p. 506.

<sup>69</sup> John Miller Adye, *Sitana: A Mountain Campaign on the Borders of Afghanistan* (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> *MFF*, p. 294.

While observing the Houtneck Pass and mountain of Thoba in South Africa in May 1900, he wrote back to Britain of a terrain and “battlefield better suited to Boers than to British troops.”<sup>71</sup>

In colonial operations regular troops were generally forced to maintain lines of communication, sometimes stretching for hundreds of miles behind the front lines to allow for supply and replenishment and, among other things, to facilitate transport and the evacuation of the sick and wounded, and to enforce a path of retreat or withdrawal should disaster be met. And although he counseled the occasional abandonment of such lines in favour of expediency, rapidity, and decisive victory, generally Callwell recognized them to “hamper the commander’s liberty of action at every turn”, and to be a burdensome and “terrible drain in men.”<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, though “a necessary consequence of elaborate and systematic organization, of modern armament”, when utilized properly they would, by the end of Victoria’s long reign, help to give the strategic advantage to the regular army.<sup>73</sup>

Churchill experienced and commented upon this varied spectrum of supply and communications. He understood the importance of supply, especially in an unfamiliar and hostile environment where provisions were not readily attainable via conquest or foraging. “Transport—the life and soul of an army—”, he said of the Mamund Valley, “is an even more vital factor here, than in less undeveloped countries. The mobility of a brigade depends entirely upon its pack animals.”<sup>74</sup> He wrote of the supply difficulties of the Tirah campaign, in which “weary mules, ponies, and donkeys [toiled] on winding and uneven mountain track...bringing supplies in dribbles...ever threatened by the enterprising enemy.”<sup>75</sup> Such were the difficulties in bringing supplies to the front, but so too was the operation of evacuating casualties back to a rear base also trammelled by the harsh realities of unfavourable environmental factors. The business of retiring and evacuation explained, in Churchill’s estimation, “many of our losses in the frontier war.”<sup>76</sup> He wrote of “troops, brave and well-armed, but encumbered with wounded, [and] exhausted by climbing and overpowered by a superior force”, who had been ordered to retreat, only to find that it was “an operation too difficult for a weak force to accomplish.” The withdrawing party would be “punished severely, and the small covering parties, who remain to check the enemy, will very often be cut to pieces, or shot down”, meaning that in some instances on the North-West Frontier entire battalions were employed as a covering force, when much smaller units could have fulfilled the assignment in more ideal conditions.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 8 May 1900, published 25 June 1900.

<sup>72</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, pp. 85–86.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>74</sup> *MFF*, p. 235.

<sup>75</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 326.

<sup>76</sup> *MFF*, p. 190.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Of evacuations of the dead or wounded in particular, Churchill detected a tactical weakness before prescribing a solution. The difficulty with removing casualties was that “no sooner has a point been left—a knoll, a patch of corn, some rocks, or any other incident of ground—than it is seized by the enemy.” Furthermore, he continued, it took four men to carry away a body, so that for every man hit five rifles were lost; the vulnerability of an evacuating party meant that soon the entire rear-guard was overburdened with wounded. His prescription, influenced by the valuable instruction of the Guides, was to employ men from each company to mask retirements. Once the company had withdrawn and set up a new position a distance away, they would, in turn, provide covering fire while the men left behind rushed back to join them. The process was then to be repeated, so that the entire company retired incrementally. “Besides this,” Churchill advised, “the fire of one company in retiring should always be arranged to cover another, and at no moment in withdrawal should the firing ever cease.” On one occasion he witnessed these new tactics in practice, and in lauding their success also made a special point of recognizing the complexities of well-executed tactics: “The way in which Major Campbell, the commanding officer, availed himself of the advantages of retiring down two spurs and bringing a cross fire to bear to cover the alternate retirements, resembled some intricate chess problem, rather than a military evolution.”<sup>78</sup>

Churchill’s prescription for retirement, especially when transporting casualties, was remarkably similar to Callwell’s. First, Callwell recognized that the nasty scenario which may unfold should a man be wounded and then a cluster of men, each unable to fire and together presenting a larger target to the enemy, be compelled to aid in his removal. Callwell acknowledged this as a particular tactical problem in hill warfare, which of course most accurately described Churchill’s North-West Frontier environment. Second, Callwell, like Churchill, advised that in contrast to the typical prescription for regular warfare, the rear guard in irregular warfare was “almost always entitled to count on support from the main body” or from other withdrawing units. The whole force “should never be on the move at once”, but rather one picquet should “cover the retirement of another.” Third, as further testimony to Churchill’s observation and comprehension, Callwell identified the same ideal retirement in hill warfare: “If it can be arranged for picquets to retire down parallel spurs, they will be able to afford each other very effective support.”<sup>79</sup> This was the exact tactic practised by Major Campbell and praised by Churchill, suggesting an embodied tactical knowledge supported by an informal education guided by experience.

If lines of supply and communication favoured the indigenous people, so too did intelligence. Because small wars, by their very nature, often broke out “unexpectedly and in unexpected places”,<sup>80</sup> the regular forces were often in want of information about the theatre in which the war was to be

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286–87.

<sup>79</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, pp. 219, 221, 331.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

waged, and the opponent (his strength, position, weaponry, and otherwise) against whom the war was to be fought. Churchill understandably witnessed the frustrations that both deficiencies in intelligence necessarily and frequently caused.

While on the North-West Frontier, Churchill, in his discussion of the practicality of civil officers attached to field forces, distinguished between two different types of intelligence. On the one hand there was the intelligence necessary when an enemy was ready to negotiate or was suing for peace or stability, and might have included information like “knowledge of local conditions, of the power and influence of the khans, or other rulers of the people, [or] of the general history or traditions of the country.” On the other hand, there was the intelligence necessary for actual craft of war; this included particulars like “the numbers and intentions of the enemies” and other “military information...a general requires.” The second category, Churchill believed, should be left squarely in the responsibility of military, and not civil, officers. It was this “collection of information” that remained “one of the most important of military duties.” “Scanty information”, Churchill wrote, could keep a “whole force in their boots about three nights each week” or, as in more than one conflict with the Mamunds, be “the main cause...of severe loss.”<sup>81</sup>

Both Callwell and Churchill alike made special note of the disadvantages imposed upon an invading force which lacked sufficient knowledge of the environment and topography of the campaign.<sup>82</sup> It was yet another advantage enjoyed by the enemy: he could operate “in a theatre of war with which he is familiar...He knows the tracks over the hills, the paths through the jungle, the passages over the rivers, the points where he can be sure of replenishing his few requirements.”<sup>83</sup> While on the North-West Frontier Churchill occasionally accompanied Captain Stanton and watched as he made “one of those useful view-sketches”, and advised, “the opportunity of making fresh maps and of adding to and correcting the detail of existing maps...must not be neglected.”<sup>84</sup> Further discussion of reconnoitering and the tactics of mounted intelligence gathering will be left to the chapter given over to cavalry tactics.

Though supported by the other arms, as well as by the Royal Navy and other ancillaries, the infantry was the principal arm of colonial warfare.<sup>85</sup> By the time of Churchill’s service the infantry had gained a reputation for courage,<sup>86</sup> and its numerous successes—along with some failures<sup>87</sup>—on the

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<sup>81</sup> *MFF*, pp. 275-77.

<sup>82</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, pp. 43-56.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> *MFF*, pp. 159, 157.

<sup>85</sup> For tracing the impact of Victorian warfare upon the development of infantry and artillery tactics, and some of the related examples cited in the paragraphs that follow, this author is indebted to Spencer Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), pp. 71-113.

<sup>86</sup> Bond, *Victorian Military Campaigns*, p. 22.

many hostile frontiers of the British Empire had tested its resourcefulness and adaptation.<sup>88</sup> At the onset of the First World War it became, in Edward Spiers's estimation, an arm which had reached a standard "never before achieved in the British Army and unequalled among the contemporary armies in Europe."<sup>89</sup> Its evolution to such a caliber, though, would be far from gentle. Within the context of colonial campaigns, Callwell identified several tactical lessons with which the British infantry had to accommodate itself to.

Writing in 1904, an anonymous soldier illustrated a central tactical problem that the British infantry had to come to terms with in an era of rapidly developing weaponry:

War is not what it was when armies manoeuvred in sight of each other, and when 600 yards was the limit of artillery fire. I smile when I think of the face of a man who is bungling an attempt to bite off the end of a cartridge, with one eye cocked all the time on the gentleman advancing at the double to avenge the death of "poor Bill." That was old-time fighting, and some sport about it too. Now Bill is killed at 2400 yards, and Bill's pal hasn't an idea where the shot was fired. That is modern warfare...<sup>90</sup>

Increasingly, the zones of advance facing an infantry were often fire-swept by weapons capable of firing bullets and shells accurately, from great distances, and with sufficient stopping power or kill radii to make close-order formations particularly hazardous. Churchill partook in three colonial environments which each presented a different lesson with regards to tactical infantry formations. On the North-West Frontier, where the "tribesmen" were more primitively armed, the potential danger of close-knit infantry was sometimes evidenced and harkened toward the ensuing end of more orthodox infantry tactics. In this mountainous terrain Callwell cautioned against "compact bodies of men" which often could "come under steady fire of these hill-men who often make very good shooting as long as they are not hurried";<sup>91</sup> in the same way, Churchill recognized that in that environment "close order formation makes [infantry] a good mark"<sup>92</sup>—especially for snipers, who were "so common a feature...[that] no picture of the war on the Indian frontier would be complete without some account" of them.<sup>93</sup>

In the Sudan, Churchill reflected and observed from a very different perspective, and witnessed the effects of modern weaponry upon scores of tightly clustered enemy soldiers. In military

<sup>87</sup> For example, Maiwand or Majuba Hill, or the Maori Wars, in which "time and again a vast amount of effort and many lives were fruitlessly expended in storming the Maori strongholds by infantry assaults in close order." Bond, *Victorian Military Campaigns*, p. 23.

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Howard Bailes, "Technology and Imperialism: A Case Study of the Victorian Army in Africa", *Victorian Studies*, 24 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 83-104.

<sup>89</sup> Edward Spiers, "Reforming the Infantry of the Line 1900-1914", *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 59 (1981), p. 94.

<sup>90</sup> Not by a Staff Officer, "Some Remarks on Recent Changes", *United Service Magazine*, Vol. 30 (October, 1904), p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, pp. 303-304.

<sup>92</sup> *MFF*, p. 286.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

theory, he was a spectator to a clash of tactical eras, the perfect demonstration of the devastation that could result when, under the right conditions (as they were at Omdurman), technological advancement was brought to bear upon the anachronistic. The Khalifa's plan of attack, in Churchill's words, was "based on an extraordinary miscalculation of the power of modern weapons", and precipitated "that mechanical scattering of death which the polite nations of the earth have brought to such monstrous perfection."<sup>94</sup> At the same time, though, and as testament to just how flexible tactics needed to be to adapt to changing enemy and terrain, the same close-order formations of the Dervishes which helped usher in their destruction by Kitchener were used by Kitchener himself, in that same conflict, at the Battle of Atbara, where "the front was formed in line and the rear in company columns."<sup>95</sup>

In South Africa, given that the Boers were well armed with modern weaponry, including field guns, the strengths of technology and the effects of close-order formations were more demonstrable than in Churchill's first colonial campaign; consequently, he argued that on the *veldt* "a hundred bold men with magazine rifles on a ridge can delay a whole army."<sup>96</sup> He offered the contrast of evolving tactics, while at the same time showing some knowledge of codified military theory: "In the textbooks compiled from the results of past experience the military student reads that armies divide to march and concentrate to fight", he wrote in 1900. However, he continued, "'Nous avons changé tout cela.' Here we concentrate to march and disperse to fight." General Hildyard called this the "Formation for taking advantage of ant-heaps", which Churchill thought was "a valuable addition to the infantry drill."<sup>97</sup> He witnessed General Hamilton's use of extended-order formations during the action at Johannesburg in late-May 1900,<sup>98</sup> during which, according to the "most modern principles...the first line of skirmishers were extended no less than thirty paces"—a "novel attack" which, a few days later, Churchill was able to report in full to Lord Roberts.<sup>99</sup>

After the infamous Black Week, in one of his first memoranda entitled "Notes for Guidance", the newly-appointed Lord Roberts issued tactical instructions that in general realized the overall value of extended-order formations.<sup>100</sup> Besides limiting clusters which were more easily seen and targeted, the abandonment of close-order formations allowed troops to advance in groups of sufficiently small size to allow them to take advantage of any cover the terrain might afford. At the Battle of Diamond Hill (June 1900), infantry advanced at an extension of thirty yards per man, and in other actions as well

<sup>94</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 118-19.

<sup>95</sup> Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, p. 85.

<sup>96</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 6 March 1900, published 11 April 1900.

<sup>97</sup> *TBW*, p. 108.

<sup>98</sup> General Hamilton also famously used extended formations at the Battle of Elandsplaagte (21 October 1899). Leo Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol. 2 (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1902), p. 184.

<sup>99</sup> *TBW*, pp. 334, 349.

<sup>100</sup> "Notes for Guidance in South African Warfare", 26 January 1900, Lord Roberts Papers, TNA, WO 105/40.

ten to twenty yards extension was not uncommon.<sup>101</sup> Even so, due to lack of prior training and the inherent belief in such traditions as the “dash”, the British soldiers were not always quick to adapt to the new guidelines or the need for cover. Whilst observing the war in South Africa, Colonel Slocum of the U. S. Army wrote, “The disregard of the British officer and soldier of all corps of ordinary precautions for his own safety is astonishing.”<sup>102</sup> Lord Roberts’s tactical guidance that “every advantage should be taken of cover” was not always fully appreciated or comfortably implemented. “At first officers and men were very stupid about taking cover”, said Major-General Sir Henry Colville. “I have seen men halted on a rise in full view of the enemy when a few paces forward or backward would have placed them in shelter, the reason being that to have taken this step would have broken the dressing of the line.”<sup>103</sup>

Evolving infantry weaponry and the nature of the terrain needed improved fire tactics and marksmanship. By the 1890s, “collective fire by volleys remained the general method of developing an attack”;<sup>104</sup> *Musketry Regulations* specified that volley firing allowed for “complete control of direction and concentration of fire...correction of elevation and direction”, regulated the expenditure of ammunition, and acted as “an aid to discipline.”<sup>105</sup> This supported *Infantry Drill*, which stated that in the attack volley fire should be used for “as long as possible.”<sup>106</sup>

The hill warfare of some of the colonial campaigns could easily upset both formation and organized volley fire, as the enemy presented too little a target, whilst the infantry, arranged in volley-fire formation, presented too large a one. Churchill caught a glimpse of what was to come whilst observing the Cuban conflict, which he admitted was not a war but a rebellion—where, he wrote, “numerous undulations, nullahs, and large tracts of forest afford every kind of facility for an active enemy to surprise the troops, whilst the nature of the track nearly always necessitates single file, thus causing the column to straggle over a couple of miles of ground in the worst possible formation for resisting any attack that may be made.”<sup>107</sup> The next month, still in Cuba, Churchill reported “sharp fire” which was “opened on the column from the edge of the wood”; but, “as nothing could be seen, the troops did not reply.”<sup>108</sup> And yet, even so, volley fire still sometimes proved advantageous, and

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<sup>101</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q13247, p. 66; *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, Q16772, p. 273.

<sup>102</sup> Captain Jonkheer J. H. Ram, “Observations on the War in South [sic.]”, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol. 48, No. 311 (1904), p. 50.

<sup>103</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q16974, p. 286.

<sup>104</sup> Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 251.

<sup>105</sup> *Regulations for Musketry Instruction for the Martini-Henry Rifle and Carbine* (London: H. M. S. O., 1892), p. 107; *Regulations for Musketry Instruction, 1892, Lee-Metford Rifle* (London: H. M. S. O., 1892), p. 70.

<sup>106</sup> Captain H. R. Gall (ed.), *Tactical Questions and Answers on the Infantry Drill Book, 1898* (London: Kegan Paul, et al., 1892), p. 77.

<sup>107</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 23 November 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1.

<sup>108</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 2 December 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1.

Churchill wrote of both accounts where the regulars employed it to check an enemy advance, and where the rebels fired in volleys upon the Spanish camp, to great effect.<sup>109</sup>

Callwell wrote in 1906 that whether on the offensive or defensive, when the enemy is ensconced on the hillside, seen only for a moment, “it will almost be better to employ a few picked marksmen firing independently, than to let all the men fire freely.”<sup>110</sup> Churchill, now on the North-West Frontier, advanced a similar viewpoint, not unlike General Egerton’s commentaries on Indian frontier hill warfare, and wrote that “against the quickly moving figures of the enemy it proved almost useless to fire volleys.” He continued: “The tribesmen would dart from rock to rock, exposing themselves only for an instant, and before the attention of a section could be directed to them and the rifles aimed, the chance and the target would have vanished altogether. Better results were obtained by picking out good shots and giving them permission to fire when they saw their opportunity, without waiting for the word of command.”<sup>111</sup>

With Kitchener on the Nile, as has been alluded to, Churchill witnessed almost the complete opposite of hill warfare, and with regards to fire tactics was privy to a scenario in which the combined power of both volley and independent firing wreaked havoc on the enemy. Again, South Africa, as with each of the colonial campaigns, reinforced the necessity of varying tactics to meet varying environments.

Whilst in the Sudan, Churchill was also in a position to observe and comment upon the tactics of infantry offensives, and did so historically, drawing parallels and contrasts with historical tactics. When reflecting upon Omdurman, Churchill often heard it remarked that the Dervish tactics of that battle were similar to those of 1884 and 1885. To the contrary, Churchill explained, the only resemblance was that each action involved rushes of men. Modern infantry tactics, Churchill wrote, centred on moving the assaulting column within charging distance of the enemy’s position, moving towards it as the enemy was kept preoccupied by covering fire, laid down by the column’s supporting infantry and artillery. On many occasions in 1885, and especially at Abu Klea and Abu Kru, Churchill maintained that the Dervish infantry understood the basics of these offensive tactics, and implemented them. By contrast, he noted that the indigenes at Omdurman did not keep their riflemen and spearmen separate, and nor did they methodically lay down covering fire whilst the spearmen advanced to within rushing distance. Instead, all Dervish parties rushed at once, and only after sustaining severe losses did the riflemen then lay down and fire independently at the British lines—except to no effect, and to no use. “In 1885 the tactics of the Arabs were very instructive”, argued Churchill; “in 1898 they were imbecile and hopeless.” Churchill identified a lack of seasoned leadership as the reason for this tactical vacuity, for the veteran leaders had all been killed. This episode serves to illustrate

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, p. 392.

<sup>111</sup> *MFF*, p. 285.

Churchill's engagement not only with contemporary tactics, but those of the past as well, and it is not hard to suppose that instances of this sort reinforced his own estimation of the value of history.

Further, there is a lesson to be learnt about the value of a great architect of warfare, as he remembered the final taunt of one veteran captain about to be executed: "After my death you will try to find men like me to take my place, and you will not find them."<sup>112</sup>

The general experience in South Africa could not have been more different from that at Omdurman. Gone were the easy targets of thousands of indigenes charging across a flat, open plain. Instead, the Boers made the best use of camouflage and on average wielded a marksmanship sufficiently impressive to inflict damage from hundreds of yards away. Even after firing, smokeless powder kept their positions hidden. Better armed than the foes of previous conflicts in that century, even the average burgher with a magazine rifle could prove lethal, especially at close range. "A hundred bold men with magazine rifles on a ridge can delay a whole army", Churchill wrote.<sup>113</sup> Neville Lyttleton, who fought along the Nile and in South Africa, later wrote of the dissimilarities: "Few people have seen two battles in succession in such startling contrast as Omdurman and Colenso. In the first, 50,000 fanatics streamed across the open regardless of cover to certain death, while at Colenso I never saw a Boer all day till the battle was over, and it was our men who were the victims."<sup>114</sup>

British soldiers during this period were, for the most part, still most trained in and heavily reliant upon volley fire. Seventy-seven rounds per year were issued to regular troops for sectional volley practice at fixed targets up to eight hundred yards; and though a seemingly small allotment, this was still almost twice as much as that issued for individual fire training at similar distances.<sup>115</sup> Though independent fire often produced better results on the firing range, in the Victorian period volley fire was still considered to be the core of fire tactics, and it was taught that "if fired under similar conditions a succession of volleys is more effective than an equal number of shots fired individually."<sup>116</sup> As with the Mahdists, volley fire proved especially effective against enemies who attacked together and in close formation; in some situations, it even proved of use against the Boers as suppressing cover at longer ranges. At the Battle of Elandslaagte (October 1899), volley fire at about 800 yards kept the Boers

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<sup>112</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 334–35.

<sup>113</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 9 March 1900, published 12 April 1900.

<sup>114</sup> General Sir Neville Lyttleton, *Eighty Years: Soldiering, Politics, Games* (London: Hodder and Soughton, 1927), p. 212. Similarly, Captain Slocum commented of the same battle that "A very striking feature of the action... was the total invisibility of the enemy; not a single Boer was to be seen from beginning to end." Ram, "Observations on the War in South [*sic.*]", p. 48.

<sup>115</sup> Captain H. R. Mead, "Notes on Musketry Training of Troops", *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol. 43 (1899), pp. 251–52.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Major Sir R. Colleton, "The Training of a Battalion in the Attack", *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, Vol. 43 (1899), pp. 128–47; Major J. H. Swanton, "Collective Practices", *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1900), pp. 922–27; Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 251; *Regulations for Musketry Instruction for the Martini-Henry Rifle and Carbine* (London: H. M. S. O., 1892), p. 107.

pinned behind their cover as the Devons advanced.<sup>117</sup> In April of the following year, Churchill found the method of keeping the enemy's heads pinned down with large volumes of "unaimed—not undirected—rifle fire...worthy of closest attention." He continued: "I have only once before noticed its employment, and that was when Sir Bindon Blood attacked and took the Tanga Pass. Then, as now, it was most effective."<sup>118</sup>

At closer distances though, the effectiveness of the accurate individual fire employed by the Boers far outclassed the traditional volley fire of the British infantry, whose "deficiencies...in rapid fire at short ranges and, to a lesser extent, in long-range fire at distances beyond the pre-war expectations...had been exposed."<sup>119</sup> No longer organized in close-order formations, it became difficult for officers to communicate with the speed and accuracy necessary to effectuate coordinated fire. The enemy too were now dispersed and often hidden, offering limited or no available target. "Where [the Boers] beat us so completely", Major-General Brabazon later remembered, "was when we got onto kopjes at close quarters, say, a few hundred yards, a man could not put his finger up over a rock or ridge without being hit."<sup>120</sup> Infantry fire control and tactics were further complicated in South Africa by the British tendency (reinforced by their training) to hold fire until the enemy was reasonably close, all the while suffering casualties from Boer bullets fired from much further ranges. Additionally, the level of marksmanship varied considerably within the British infantry, and was further hampered by unusual South African atmospheric conditions which sometimes thwarted accurate range-finding.<sup>121</sup>

Alongside the development of smokeless powder, another important refinement was the machine gun, the first genuinely automatic version of which was invented in 1893 by Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim, and deployed—mostly because of its reduced weight and newfound mobility—in many small wars thereafter. Churchill first witnessed its terrible potential in engagements along the Nile, in conditions ideal for maximum effectiveness. "The results of the Maxim guns used in line with the infantry were thoroughly satisfactory", Churchill observed near the conclusion of *The River War*. He went on to note that whilst the deployment of machine guns in batteries was the recommendation of *Infantry Drill*, it was not until the later campaigns along the Nile that this prescription was followed—unfortunate, as "the massing together of four or eight of these formidable engines multiplies their effect."<sup>122</sup> Reflecting from terrain ideal for their deployment, it is no surprise then that Churchill encouraged future cavalry regiments to "find a valuable ally in the galloping Maxim gun", and secure

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<sup>117</sup> M. Jacson, *The Record of a Regiment of the Line: Being a Regimental History of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Devonshire Regiment During the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1908), p. 21.

<sup>118</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 6 March 1900, published 11 April 1900.

<sup>119</sup> Spiers, "Reforming the Infantry of the Line", p. 85.

<sup>120</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 1, Q6859, p. 294, as cited in Jones, *From Boer War to World War*, p. 89.

<sup>121</sup> Jones, *From Boer War to World War*, p. 90.

<sup>122</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 356-57.

for themselves at least two guns each.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, he still cautioned tacticians lest they overestimate the power of the Maxim: “At Omdurman, as in every other battle,” Churchill wrote, “the killing was done not by the artillery, nor by the cavalry, nor by the Maxim guns, but by the continued fire of great numbers of infantry.”<sup>124</sup> In South Africa, Churchill’s observations and pronouncements on machine guns were less rigorous. Probably his most impactful interaction with the machine gun was at Spion Kop, where the British infantry were not on the giving, but rather the receiving end of its ferocious power, where, alongside the artillery, the incessant bullets “scourged the flanks of the hill and the sheltering infantry.”<sup>125</sup>

Churchill’s commentary extended not only to infantry armaments, but also to the bullets they fired. Given the attention surrounding its use, the so-called Dum Dum bullet drew the particular notice of Churchill. Up until 1895, The British Army had, in accordance with the St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868, refrained from issuing bullets which would “uselessly aggravate the sufferings of disabled men, or render their death inevitable.”<sup>126</sup> In 1871 the War Office adopted, after the success of the needle-gun at Sadowa in 1866, the Martini-Henry as the service rifle. This was replaced in 1888 by the Lee-Metford rifle, which incorporated a rifled barrel and less recoil, but which also, especially during the Chitral campaign, fired a .303 Mark II bullet which often inflicted only minimal wounds; one commentator recorded that an enemy soldier, having been shot six times, still managed to walk nine miles to receive care, and thereafter “made a rapid recovery.”<sup>127</sup> Experiments were then undertaken to produce ammunition with greater stopping power, and at a factory in Dum Dum the .303 bullet was modified so that the front of the bullet was exposed to reveal the softer lead core which would expand and mushroom upon impact with its target, not unlike the ammunition used in big game hunting. After its use in the Tirah Expeditionary Force, a debate ensued in Britain as to whether the Dum Dum bullet, which as it did not contain an explosive did not violate the strict abjuration of the St. Petersburg Declaration, did in fact violate the spirit of that agreement, which prohibited ammunition which inflicted wounds not dissimilar to those of expanding bullets like the Dum Dum, and later the Mark III and Mark IV bullets.

Churchill waded headfirst into this debate. Like his contemporaries, he noted the inadequacy of the Mark II bullets, and stated simply that “these bullets do not kill an enemy.” He traced the development of the Dum Dum bullet. “Its stopping power is all that could be desired”, Churchill

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>125</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 25 January 1900, published 17 February 1900.

<sup>126</sup> *Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of Explosive Projectiles Under 400 Grammes Weight* (11 December 1868), in Dietrich Schindler and Jiri Toman (eds.), *The Laws of Armed Conflicts* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2004), p. 92. For this section the work of Edward Spiers has again proved most helpful. See Spiers, “The Use of the Dum Dum Bullet in Colonial Warfare”, pp. 3-14.

<sup>127</sup> Captain G. J. and Captain F. E. Younghusband, *The Relief of Chitral* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 68.

wrote, before describing the effects and sensations of the bullet upon the human body. “The result is a wonderful and from the technical point of view a beautiful machine”, he pronounced, but then acknowledged that what the bullet had gained in potency, it had lost in accuracy and functionality, as it tended to jam the magazine of a rifle. At Atbara troops were equipped with converted and unconverted bullets, the result being “that a single action at the longer ranges might fire converted bullets, which were unlikely to hit, and at the critical moment, when magazine action was necessary, they might fire unconverted bullets, which were unlikely to kill.” The new Mark IV bullet, developed at Woolwich and meant to supersede previous expanding ammunition by combining accuracy with stopping power, “answered its purpose”, reported Churchill, and offered results that were “from the shooter’s point of view sufficiently good, and from any other sufficiently ghastly.”<sup>128</sup>

It was this ghastliness that made way for debates over whether the new expansive bullets violated the spirit of the agreements at Geneva or St. Petersburg. Churchill thought not, arguing that both conventions forbade only the use of explosive, and not expansive, bullets, and dictated that shells below a certain size should not be employed. Neither the Dum Dum nor the Mark IV violated these clauses. Furthermore, contended Churchill, bullets were “primarily intended to kill,” and that expansive bullets did “their duty most effectually, without causing any more pain to those struck by them, than the ordinary lead variety.”<sup>129</sup> Along the Nile he continued to defend their use, appealing to “the paramount and sacred law of self-preservation” which justified “the employment of a man-stopping bullet.” “The living, fighting enemy is fair game,” wrote Churchill, “and may be killed by any means except those excluded by a recognized contract with him...and except by means which savour of treachery.”<sup>130</sup>

Beyond marksmanship and fire tactics, another area affected by evolving infantry weaponry and tactics was the use of entrenchments. Eventually slated to make their most infamous debut in the First World War, during the colonial wars of the Victorian period the British had relatively little experience in taking enemy trenches, or even of constructing trenches of their own. By the late 1890s, the British infantry was largely schooled in just two kinds of shelter trenches: the “hour” and the “half-hour” trench, so named for the amount of time it was intended to construct; both were “arranged for infantry fire kneeling”, and had “breastworks 1.5 foot high, [with trenches] 1.5 foot deep.”<sup>131</sup> Peacetime training in constructing trenches had been “handicapped by the orders forbidding to break ground, and no practical spade work [was] carried out during manoeuvres”, which overall had “a very

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<sup>128</sup> *MFF*, p. 288; *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 338.

<sup>129</sup> *MFF*, p. 288.

<sup>130</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 338.

<sup>131</sup> James Grierson, *Scarlet into Khaki: The British Army on the Eve of the Boer War* (London: Greenhill, 1988), pp. 166-67.

bad effect” on the British Army.<sup>132</sup> “We had no practice whatever in entrenching”, wrote Colonel Sir Howard Vincent said in 1900; “our entrenching tools are of the most flimsy and wretched character it is possible to conceive. I think at some manoeuvres they have a piece of tape to represent a trench, or something of that sort. That is the ridiculous farce which is played, and all because we cannot compensate some farmer or must not disturb some squire’s game, or something of that kind.”<sup>133</sup>

Both on the North-West Frontier and in the Sudan Churchill experienced the use of entrenchments, employed by both the British and the indigenous soldiers. Churchill wrote of the usefulness of trenches in sheltering British infantry from fire from the surrounding mountains, where the enemy often possessed the advantage of altitude. In these cases, he wrote, the “majority of bullets” would clear the entrenchments and “whizzed across without doing any harm to the prostrate figures.”<sup>134</sup> On the North-West Frontier, Churchill recognized the value of trenches in interrupting an enemy assault. As night firing often ended in assaults and sword rushes—for, as he maintained, “the ultimate appeal is to the bayonet”—Churchill wrote that it was “advisable to have the ditch of the entrenchment towards the enemy.” On more than one occasion he witnessed the sense of this prescription, and wrote of the “numerous bodies lying outside the shelter trench”, which belonged to enemy who “rushed right up to the trenches and fell dead and dying, under the very bayonets of the troops.”<sup>135</sup> Though he was not in South Africa at the time, the Battle of Atbara offered Churchill the opportunity to reflect upon British troops advancing upon enemy entrenchments which often formed, sometimes with a *zeriba*, a defensive network. “The plan of the attack for the army was simple”, wrote Churchill, describing the battle. “The long, deployed line was to advance steadily against the entrenchments, subduing by its continual fire that of the enemy. They were then to tear the *zeriba* to pieces.” The plan was successful, and though Churchill did admit the loss during “the assault of the entrenchments was severe”, he characteristically did not allow that to temper his fidelity to what he called “the majesty of war—a mighty avalanche of men, stern, unflinching, utterly irresistible.”<sup>136</sup> At the end of his account of the campaign along the Nile, Churchill engaged with the debate over whether the *zeriba* or shelter trench was more useful. Except for its obvious moral advantage in instilling confidence in the men behind it, especially at night, Churchill sided with proponents of the shelter trench. “I have seen shelter trenches used on the Indian Frontier with great effect”, Churchill wrote. “If the ditch be made toward the enemy, the defender, standing on the higher ground, has a powerful advantage should the assault end in hand-to-hand fighting; and in the searching rifle fire

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<sup>132</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q20215, p. 444.

<sup>133</sup> Colonel Sir Howard Vincent, “Lessons of the War: Personal Observations and Impressions of the Forces and Military Establishments Now in South Africa”, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol. 44 (June, 1900), p. 657.

<sup>134</sup> *MFF*, p. 227.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 230, 228.

<sup>136</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 247, 430-31.

which invariably preceded the Pathan charge, there are few men and no wise ones who would rather be behind a hedge than behind a bank.”<sup>137</sup>

South Africa exposed the British deficiencies in both offensive and defensive entrenchment training. The obvious difference was that in facing the Boers, the British infantry faced an enemy often employing the latest in weaponry and ammunition, and not trammelled by the sometimes primitive tactics of previous colonial foes. Often built with the aid of indigenous labour, Boer trenches were sophisticated, protective, and well camouflaged. Boers at the Battle of Paardeberg were able to sustain several days of artillery bombardment with relatively few casualties, due to the engineering of their entrenchments.<sup>138</sup> “They had constructed their trenches in an extraordinarily skillful manner”, wrote Lord Roberts. “Deep narrow trenches, with each side well hollowed out, in which they got complete shelter from shellfire, and if their food could have lasted, they might have defied this large force for some time to come.”<sup>139</sup>

Churchill observed the usefulness of these trenches on many occasions, and they made an obvious impression upon him: whilst in South Africa he commented upon them no less than 121 times in his published correspondence.<sup>140</sup> At Potgieter’s he wrote of “the dark lines of shelter trenches.”<sup>141</sup> At Vaal Krantz he described the Brakfontein position, “which the Boers had fortified by four tiers of trenches, with bombproof casemates, barbed wire entanglements, and a line of redoubts, so that it was obviously too strong to be carried frontally.”<sup>142</sup> At Inniskilling Hill he wrote of the shells which fell upon the entrenched Boers, “overhead, in their faces, in the trench itself, behind them, before them, around them... Yet they held their ground and stayed in greater peril than was ever mortal man before.”<sup>143</sup> And though a prisoner of war in Pretoria at the time of its fighting, Churchill knew of the Battle of Magersfontein, where famously the Boers had entrenched not on the side or summit of the *kopje*, but at the base, where they were largely unexpected, and where they were afforded not only the element of surprise, but also the advantage of firing along a flat trajectory. The British preceded their assault with a two-hour bombardment of the ridge of *kopje*, during which only three Boers were wounded.<sup>144</sup> As a result, the subsequent assault was a disaster, and the British found themselves in close-

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<sup>137</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 337.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), p. 340.

<sup>139</sup> André Wessels (ed.), *Lord Roberts and War in South Africa, 1899-1902* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000), p. 59.

<sup>140</sup> This count includes *From London to Ladysmith Via Pretoria* and *Ian Hamilton’s March*, both by WSC.

<sup>141</sup> *TBW*, p. 119.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>144</sup> Colonel George R. Duxbury, *The Battle of Magersfontein, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1899* (Johannesburg: S. A. Museum of Military History, 1974), p. 22.

order formation a short distance from the hidden Boer trenches, and only discovered their whereabouts after coming under their devastating fire.<sup>145</sup>

Of course it was at Spion Kop that Churchill most thoroughly observed and reported on the awesome devastation wrought upon soldiers, devoid of cover, and upon whom the gunners' sights had been fixed. Churchill described the second line of the Boer defences as one of "great strength" as it "consisted of a line of low rock and earth redoubts and shelter trenches, apparently provided with overhead cover, and cleverly arranged to command all approaches with fire—often with cross-fire, sometimes with converging fire." And though several field batteries and howitzers "bombarded the whole Boer position ceaselessly...they failed utterly to clear the trenches, or reach and overpower the Dutch artillery."<sup>146</sup> When the British took the summit, Churchill noted how the "surface of the hill was extremely unsuited to defence", as "the rocks which covered the summit made digging an impossibility."<sup>147</sup> Thus exposed, when General Woodgate (and then Major Thorneycroft) and his men fell under the unceasing fire of the Boer guns, "a thick and continual stream of wounded flowed rearwards", and "the dead and injured, smashed and broken by the shells, littered the summit till it was a bloody, reeking shambles."<sup>148</sup> In his report to Sir Charles Warren, Churchill reported that "unless good and efficient cover could be made during the night...the infantry could not, perhaps would not, endure another day."<sup>149</sup> Testifying in 1903, Major-General J. Talbot Coke contended that "much of our loss at Spion Kop might have been avoided had our men then possessed any knowledge of the principles on which entrenchments should be made, which they afterwards practically learned from the Boers."<sup>150</sup>

These vivid images of early trench warfare remained with Churchill and would become important when he, as one of the architects of the First World War, would bring to his post his earlier experiences at a time when, in 1914, at least 46,291 men of the British Expeditionary Force had less than two years' experience, and "only 4,192 men with fifteen or more years of continuous service."<sup>151</sup> Then, as in South Africa and before, Churchill's involvement with concealment and trenches would be not from afar, but tangibly close as he grappled with the realities modernized weaponry brought to bear upon battlefield tactics. Put another way, one would be hard-pressed to think that, upon receiving reports of the bleak situation on the ground at Gallipoli, Churchill's mind did not harken back to the scenes he witnessed at Vaal Krantz or, even more poignantly, Spion Kop. In the same way, the trenches of the Late-Victorian period helped form the foundation for the trench stalemate of the

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<sup>145</sup> Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, *History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, Vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1906), pp. 318-19.

<sup>146</sup> *TBW*, pp. 134-35.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

<sup>150</sup> *Elgin Commission*, Vol. 2, Q20215, p. 444.

<sup>151</sup> David Ascoli, *The Mons Star* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), p. 8.

Western Front, which Churchill would try so hard to frustrate either strategically, or technically, with his push for the development of the tank and the mechanized steamroller.<sup>152</sup> For on more than one occasion in South Africa, Churchill watched perceptively as the Boers fortified their positions, and “observed the long lines of trenches which grew and spread along the face of the opposite hills”, some “evidently deep enough to shelter horse and man.”<sup>153</sup>

Many of the tactical lessons impressed upon the British infantry during the colonial campaigns in which Churchill fought, and those in which he did not but which were waged in the latter part of the nineteenth century, had similar counterparts for the long arm. The same lessons learned by the infantry, including dispersion, longer-range offensives, and concealment and camouflage, were also impressed upon the Royal Artillery. To these tactical considerations can also be added the related question of support and cooperation between the infantry and the artillery, and the relationship between these two arms, and also with the cavalry. Just as Churchill’s commentary extended to infantry tactics, so too did it include the artillery, in particular to the matter of inter-arm cooperation, an important debate of the day.

In the years between the Franco-Prussian War and the end of the century, technological innovations, theoretical arguments by military commentators, and limited field experience, among other factors, came to bear upon and influence artillery tactics. Even so, the learning curve was steep and slow, particularly as after the Crimean War, it was not until the Boer War that the British faced an enemy comparably armed. Most of the many colonial campaigns were in destinations too remote, terrain too unsuited, or against foes too primitive to warrant much, if any, artillery action.<sup>154</sup> It took decades for the artillery to be regarded as an arm in its own right, and even then it was not considered to be fully independent. Until the acquisition of Oakhampton in 1877, there was no sufficient training facility, and no true tactical manual until 1892. Further complicating the ebb and flow of tactical development was the introduction of new equipment. Guns switched from breech-loading to muzzle-loading and then back to breech-loading again. Smokeless powder offered the same advantages it did to the infantry; new carriages improved mobility; telescoping sights allowed for more accurate targeting at longer distances which new shells were capable of reaching; clinometers helped make possible indirect firing.<sup>155</sup>

As thinking and technology both evolved to allow for the possibility of accurate indirect firing, the Germans, with the introduction of the mobile 150mm howitzer in 1886, worked diligently to

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<sup>152</sup> Murray Seuter, *The Evolution of the Tank* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 19137), pp. 20, 27-29, 38, 45-49, 51-68, and others; Lewis Broad, *Winston Churchill*, Vol. 1 (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1963), pp. 243-46.

<sup>153</sup> *TBW*, pp. 122, 108.

<sup>154</sup> One exception would be in Egypt in 1882. In other campaigns, the terrain necessitated the formation of portable artillery batteries, such as those which helped constitute the Punjab Frontier Force. Moreman, “The British and Indian Armies and North-West Frontier Warfare”, pp. 40-41.

<sup>155</sup> Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, pp. 252-53.

develop a weapon ideal for high-angled firing. At the same time the British, paradoxically, were adopting the lessons of another Prussian, Prince Kraft zu Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, as detailed in his *Letters on Artillery*, translated in 1887. Kraft harkened back to the Franco-Prussian War and argued for a bold, highly-mobile arm that, after engaging in an artillery duel with the enemy's guns at ranges between 2,200 and 2,700 yards, would then, as the auxiliary arm, advance at rapid pace with the infantry, eschewing indirect fire, concealment, or entrenchment for direct engagement with the enemy, and in doing so "must not shun the very closest range."<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, Kraft emphasized precision and accuracy, and introduced the concept of fire control, all in ways that could be tested, measured, and refined in competitive trials at Oakhampton.<sup>157</sup> Though Churchill did not quote directly from *Letters on Artillery*, it is known that he read it, and so when commenting on the artillery arm it is not unlikely that the Prussian military writer's critiques were close at hand.<sup>158</sup>

The first two obvious points, as they relate to Churchill and artillery, are that Churchill was not an artillery man, and so his commentary on the arm came from his reading, experiences, and relationships, and that, given the minimal use of artillery on the North-West Frontier, and the lack of an artillery-wielding enemy in the Sudan, much of what he said about artillery stemmed rather from his time in South Africa. An important third point is that what Churchill did comment upon in the first two theatres was developed within the constructs of continental thinking on artillery—not surprising given that in the last decade of the nineteenth century the Royal Artillery had to refer back many decades, either to the Crimean or to the Franco-Prussian War, in order to consider historical examples which might form some basis for contemporary artillery tactics. Artillery officers had to have long memories, and often those memories were no longer fit for purpose in the context of changing weaponry, environments, and enemies. Even so, as with infantry, some of what Churchill wrote, even in colonial contexts, was prescient and not unlike what professional theorists observed and prescribed.

Given the difficulties imposed by mountain transport, and the ability of the "tribesmen" to find easy cover amongst the crags, of the conflicts in which Churchill fought, artillery played the smallest role on the North-West Frontier. "The targets presented to the artillery", Churchill wrote, "were extremely bad...against sharpshooters on broken ground, guns can do little."<sup>159</sup> When it was used, however, Churchill echoed "long admitted" continental prescriptions and advised that guns,

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<sup>156</sup> Kraft, *Letters on Artillery*, pp. 385, 387-88. Not surprisingly, some arguments opposing concealed indirect fire in the artillery closely mirrored those that opposed abandoning the *arme blanche* in the cavalry: that to do so was to deprive the arm of its esprit de corps. As Colonel John Headlam feared, "If you train Field Artillery to consider firing from behind cover as 'practically the rule,' I believe you will destroy the whole spirit of the arm." Captain J. Headlam comments on Captain N. D. Pilcher, "Artillery from an Infantry Officer's Point of View", *Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institution*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (June, 1896), p. 274.

<sup>157</sup> Kraft, *Letters on Artillery*, pp. 268-87.

<sup>158</sup> Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, pp. 253-54; *MEL*, p. 57.

<sup>159</sup> *MFF*, p. 291.

when possible, be used in a line and firing all at once.<sup>160</sup> At Landakai, he witnessed Sir Bindon Blood arrange twelve of his eighteen guns in one line—the first, Churchill argued, to do so in mountain warfare in India. “The fire of this artillery drove the enemy, who were in great strength and an excellent position, from the ground...the infantry attack was accomplished, with hardly any loss.”<sup>161</sup> On another occasion Churchill watched the 10<sup>th</sup> Field Battery and the No. 7 Mountain Battery “come into action at once” and prepare a heavily defended ridge for infantry assault. As a defensive weapon the artillery also presented uses for Churchill, and he commented on their significant value assisting “the extrication of the infantry” by preventing the enemy occupation by of significant routes of retreat.<sup>162</sup> In all scenarios not only did the shells inflict physical damage, but also a significant moral effect on the “tribesmen”, “who had never before witnessed the explosion of a twelve-pound projectile”, and which were often induced to flee.<sup>163</sup> Callwell acknowledged this principle as well: “The moral effect of artillery is very great against irregular enemies.”<sup>164</sup> Even given the logistical complications of deploying long guns in extreme terrain, Churchill saw “no reason why the artillery should be stinted”, though as with most tactical questions, one wonders whether he would have advised the same had he been assigned to an expedition other than that of Sir Bindon Blood.

The principles of artillery preparation and mass engagement were reinforced by Churchill’s experience in the Sudan. Here was presented at least the terrain which more closely matched that likely to be encountered on the continent. The Battle of Atbara afforded Churchill the opportunity to be very critical of the inadequacy of the artillery preparation, the “shortness of which”, argued Churchill, “cannot...be explained.” “Civilised troops should take full advantage of their weapons,” he continued, and severely questioned why, after a bombardment of only ninety minutes, and which resulted in almost one quarter of the enemy as casualties, all the while posing no significant risk to the gunners, the preparatory assault did continue for three hours. Such a bombardment was “the course which would be suggested by all tactical experience and by all modern books on war”, Churchill wrote, showing familiarity with—and appealing to—contemporary theory.<sup>165</sup>

The artillery reticence exemplified at Atbara was not to be repeated at Omdurman, where Churchill was privy to the devastating effects of accurate gunnery against dense masses of unconcealed, unprotected, and primitively-armed human flesh. In this regard, the action of 2 September 1898

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<sup>160</sup> It is worth noting that Callwell, after admitting “the principle of concentration of fire is still...an axiom of modern tactics”, went on to teach that in small wars the “massing of guns will seldom be applicable”, though this was mostly because the number of guns needed would not always be available, and that long-range artillery preparation in this type of warfare should be the exception and not the rule. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, p. 433.

<sup>161</sup> *MFF*, pp. 290-91.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>164</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, p. 429.

<sup>165</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 1, p. 459.

afforded Churchill the opportunity to continue to develop his thinking on basic artillery tactical principles. Despite the occasional uses in rearguard action that he had witnessed on the North-West Frontier, Churchill acknowledged that “artillery is essentially an offensive weapon.” He still maintained that guns were most useful when firing together, but he softened on the strictness of their targeting, and pointed out that when the indigenes attacked along the entire front, it was dispersed, and not concentrated, fire which proved the most effective. The moral effect, too, was contingent upon the enemy’s psychology, and Churchill remained amazed over the unimpressionability of the Dervishes, who “went on until they saw that they were too few to carry their attack to a conclusion or till they were shot down.” But even this, as might be expected, was no constant, and Churchill wrote of the searching power of artillery, a capacity which he argued had been “overlooked by even the most sanguine admirers.” At least of the sort constructed by the Mahdists, British artillery was useful in clearing earthworks, and with an unknown eye cast to the future Churchill quoted an officer who had said to him, “I cannot believe in the possibility of shelter-trenches being held under artillery fire.” Similarly, whilst observing the action on Spion Kop, Churchill saw that “one thing was quite clear—unless good and efficient cover could be made during the night...the infantry could not, perhaps would not, endure another day. The human machine will not stand certain strains for long.”<sup>166</sup> Neither did the different types of shells escape Churchill’s attention, and he devoted many paragraphs not only to their description, but also to critiques of their usage.<sup>167</sup> Finally, Churchill recognized the linkage between the evolution in weaponry and the evolution in tactics, both historically and in the present. “The modern improvements in gunnery have been tremendous”, wrote Churchill. “It is no exaggeration to say that the artillery which fired at Omdurman was far superior to that used at Sedan, as the artillery at Sedan was superior to the cannons [used at] the Battle of Blenheim.” Even so, the evolution was not yet complete: “But the power of artillery is not overwhelming. The rifle has more than kept pace with the gun in its development.”<sup>168</sup>

These modern improvements were demonstrated no more fully than in South Africa. Not only were the Boers much better equipped than previous colonial foes, and especially those which Churchill had fought, but they refused to follow largely continental prescriptions when using that equipment. Outmoded were the general Franco-Prussian artillery tactics of largely short-range fire, as was open, exposed deployment and the initial artillery duel. “Their artillery is inferior in numbers, but nothing else, to ours”, wrote Churchill.<sup>169</sup> Knowing they were outnumbered by both men and matériel, the Boers were practised instead in accurate long-range fire, concealed deployment, and varied positioning from which to harass British troops. By contrast, the 1896 *Field Artillery Drill*, where

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<sup>166</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 355–56; *TBW*, p. 139.

<sup>167</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 353–54.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 354–55.

<sup>169</sup> *TBW*, p. 32.

it listed several priorities in choosing position, ended with “lastly—cover”.<sup>170</sup> It was this concealment and long-range accuracy of the Boers that most attracted Churchill’s attention, and which provoked his critique, especially when proficiency in those tactics was found lacking within the British long arm.

Immediately after being taken prisoner outside Chieveley, Churchill had the chance to view the Boer guns which had assailed his armored train, itself equipped with only a “poor little gun.”<sup>171</sup> They were “two strangely long barrels sitting very low on carriages of four wheels”, Churchill reported, which “looked offensively modern, and I wondered why our Army had not got field artillery with fixed ammunition and 8,000 yards’ range.”<sup>172</sup> These modern weapons, under the careful handling of the Boer troops, could be terrifyingly accurate. In the action surrounding Bastion Hill, Churchill witnessed the Boer gunners throw a shell within a yard of two troops galloping in the distance, “a tiny target.” “All this at seven thousand yards!” he exclaimed, and exhorted: “English artillery experts, please note and if possible copy.”<sup>173</sup> In the same month, whilst moving toward a wood with his cavalry squadron, Churchill expressed thankfulness that “our formation was a dispersed one, for no sooner had we moved into open ground” than a shell burst one hundred yards behind the group, which broke off in a gallop. “Think of this, Inspector-General of the Artillery”, Churchill exhorted, “the Boer gunners fired ten or eleven shells, every one of which fell among or within our ranks... The range was not less than seven thousand yards... Thanks to our dispersed formation only two horses had been killed, and it was possible to admire without having to deplore the skill of the artillerists who could make such a beautiful practice at such a range.”<sup>174</sup> Outside Heilbron, Churchill recorded another occasion in which the British artillery “disgraced themselves”, which prompted him to recognize “how a weapon, which is so terrible in the hands of the enemy, may become feeble and ineffective when used on our side by our own gunners.”<sup>175</sup> Near the end of his time in South Africa, Churchill was reconnoitering with Brabazon when a Boer shell burst within two yards of the General’s horse. “Wonderful,” Churchill reported Brabazon saying, “why cant our forsaken artillery shoot like that?”<sup>176</sup>

Upon his return to Britain, Churchill spoke more about how improvements in range and accuracy had ushered in changes in artillery tactics. He understood that the artillery arm, and indeed the entire British Army, had gotten many things from the Franco-Prussian war “which have not proved of entire service in other wars in which we have been engaged.” One of these, Churchill wrote, was the old dictum of the artillery that “one gun is no gun.” Not “precisely true”, he wrote, for “how often have the Boers produced considerable effect with one or two guns!” Looking forward, he

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<sup>170</sup> *Field Artillery Drill 1896* (London: H. M. S. O., 1896), pp. 12.

<sup>171</sup> *TBW*, p. 38.

<sup>172</sup> *TBW*, p. 46.

<sup>173</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 25 January 1900, published 27 February 1900.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 22 May 1900, published 2 July 1900.

<sup>176</sup> *TBW*, p. 258.

suggested the idea of employing “artillery snipers”, or single, long-range guns to be used, under specially trained officers, either independently, or “with advance cavalry, even with patrols, to harry and disturb the enemy in his camp or on his march, and in every way to use a gun where it would not be expected that a gun under any circumstances would be brought.” He argued for this even in full recognition that the idea was “against all the German ideas of artillery.”<sup>177</sup>

Namely because of inferior numbers, Churchill acknowledged with other commentators that though the physical damage exacted by Boer shells was minimal, their artillery did dampen morale and upset logistics.<sup>178</sup> “At present the Boers often cause us a great deal of trouble with single guns,” wrote Churchill, “which, though they do scarcely any material harm, disturb everyone, so that camps are shifted and marching columns ordered to make long detours, whereas we ought to shrug our shoulders...pay the small necessary toll, and go our way uninterrupted.”<sup>179</sup> At the same time, though, Churchill devoted some thought to forecasting the effects of “the wholesale aspect of artillery fire.”<sup>180</sup> As was predominantly the case, Churchill’s tactical commentary was founded largely on personal experience, and as such it was no accident that this forecast resulted in part from his personally coming under fire. On 24 February 1900, Churchill was riding with Captain Brooke when a shrapnel shell burst immediately above his head. Being in the centre of the cone of dispersion, Churchill himself was unharmed, but those around him were not. “My respect for modern artillery was mightily increased by this example of its power”, Churchill recorded. But that and the few successive shells had been fired from a few guns. “Fancy if there had been a battery”, Churchill wondered. “Yet in a European war there would have been not one, but three or four batteries.” Episodes like that began to impress upon Churchill a fundamental shift in modern war: “I do not see how troops can be handled in masses under such conditions...Future warfare must depend upon the individual.”<sup>181</sup> As testament to the impact of this realization, Churchill chose to re-emphasize this point in his next dispatch, written the very next day: “But it is almost an open question whether it is better to have many guns to shoot at very little, or few guns to shoot at a great deal; hundreds of shells tearing up the ground or a dozen plunging into masses of men.” He continued: “Personally, I am convinced that future warfare will be to the few, by which I mean that to escape annihilation soldiers will have to fight in widely dispersed formations, when they will have to think for themselves, and when each must be to a great extent his own general.” With respect to the artillery, he concluded, “it appears that the advantages of defensive

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<sup>177</sup> WSC, “Some Impressions of the War in South Africa”, p. 839.

<sup>178</sup> Jones, *From Boer War to World War*, p. 115.

<sup>179</sup> *TBW*, pp. 258-59.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>181</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 5 March 1900, published 10 April 1900.

action, range, concealment, and individual initiative may easily counterbalance numbers and discipline.”<sup>182</sup> It is little wonder, then, that the Western Front would prove so frustrating.

At least one final consideration with regard to artillery tactics was the cooperation between the long arm and the infantry and the cavalry. Up until and even during much of the Boer War, the arm was seen principally as an auxiliary of the infantry, with its chief role, after winning an initial dual against other guns, to provide a preliminary bombardment of the enemy position prior to the final infantry assault.<sup>183</sup> A typical dictum of this era was, “The greater the difficulties of the infantry the closer should be the support of the artillery,” which in principle usually meant pushing the guns up to within close-range of the infantry, a tactic which proved calamitous at Colenso.<sup>184</sup>

From the very beginning, on the North-West Frontier, Churchill argued for developing cooperation between the artillery and the infantry and cavalry, though artillery-infantry cooperation received the bulk of his attention. He was, though, even as a proud cavalry officer serving in an arm which was concerned, as they generally all were, with preserving the *esprit de corps* of their arm, able to admit that, “Everyone is prone to overestimate the power of his arm.”<sup>185</sup> “There are some things in which it is not well to give way to them”, Churchill said of disgruntled artillery officers as he argued for the placing of infantry between guns that form the defensive line around a camp.<sup>186</sup> At Landakai, as previously discussed, Churchill witnessed an excellent example the continental artillery tactics of cooperation when the guns prepared the way for the infantry, and made possible “a success...at the cost of a dozen lives which would have been cheap at a hundred.”<sup>187</sup> Likewise, Churchill’s two major discussions of inter-arm cooperation in the Sudan—Atbara and Omdurman—were already discussed. It is worth noting, though, the degree to which he critiqued the insufficient cooperation at Atbara, as evidenced by the poor artillery preparation. “The spectacle of the assaulting columns advancing on the entrenchments after an insufficient artillery preparation...however magnificent that may be, suggest the hog-hunter who dismounted from his horse, flung away his spear, then dealt the boar a tremendous kick in the throat, and eventually made an end of him with his hands.”<sup>188</sup> Later, given the success of the fixed placement of the guns at Omdurman, and his position as a cavalryman, it is not unexpected that Churchill took issue with a battery of Egyptian Horse Artillery attached to a brigade of cavalry, which he doubted was little more than an encumbrance, given its underwhelming fire power, its tendency to be trammled by the sandy terrain, and its source of anxiety to the brigadier.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 6 March 1900, published 11 April 1900.

<sup>183</sup> Kraft, *Letters on Artillery*, p. 386; *Field Artillery Drill 1896*, pp. 27-29; Major-General Sir John Headlam, *The History of the Royal Artillery*, Vol. 2 (Woolwich: Royal Artillery Institution, 1937), p. 42.

<sup>184</sup> Jones, *From Boer War to World War*, p. 146.

<sup>185</sup> *MFF*, p. 285.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>188</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 1, p. 459.

<sup>189</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 344-45.

“It is astonishing how we have underrated these people”, Churchill wrote to Sir Evelyn Wood, less than two weeks after disembarking at Cape Town. “The contribution of mounted infantry and heavy guns is extremely effective...A long and bloody war is before us—and the end is by no means as certain as most people imagine.”<sup>190</sup> Writing that same day to the *Morning Post*, he acknowledged the same cooperation, notwithstanding a measure of hyperbole: “The combination, made for the first time in the history of war, of heavy artillery and swarms of mounted infantry is formidable and effective.”<sup>191</sup> All the same, another chief obstacle to that cooperation, as identified by Churchill, was the tendency for guns to be seen as a source of anxiety rather than strength. This was accentuated by the inherent immobility of British artillery equipment, and its unsuitability in various colonial environments. “Had we been only cavalry and mounted men we could have fallen back after the position became untenable”, Churchill wrote, “but we were encumbered with four field-guns.”<sup>192</sup> To help alleviate this, Churchill advised that artillery equipment be considered as any other matériel of war: subject to loss. He recommended this even in light of their potential tactical value, limited numbers, and the difficulties posed in their transport. “Indeed, so long as the loss of guns is considered a natural disaster instead of only an ordinary incident of war, cavalry officers will regard them rather as sources of anxiety than as powerful weapons.”<sup>193</sup> What he also failed to mention was that in an era of rivalry between the arms, the cavalry no doubt had other reasons to be wary of their attachment to long guns.

A few months after returning to Britain, Churchill revisited the failure of artillery-infantry cooperation, which he then identified as “the main point which I noticed in...observing what went on in South Africa.” This failure stemmed from the tactical prescription of the preparatory bombardment. In Churchill’s estimation, this prescription often led to artillery either stopping the bombardment too early, for fear of hitting their own infantry, and thus exposing them to enemy fire, or to keep on firing as the infantry advanced, catching their own troops in the thick of not only enemy fire, but what was supposed to be friendly supporting artillery fire, the infantry prevented from rushing “in because they see their own shrapnel bursting on the enemy’s trenches 200 or 250 yards in front of them.” What was needed was better communication and cooperation between infantry and artillery commanders, so that both were aware of their supporting role, and so that both had decided, prior to the offensive, when one arm would continue or stop to let the other supporting arm carry on with the attack. It was not until the Battle of Pieters Hill, estimated Churchill, that he witnessed effective infantry-artillery support and cooperation. There, when the infantry got close to the Boer trenches, rather than the British artillery ceasing their fire they merely re-sighted their shells to land behind the Boer trenches, so that

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<sup>190</sup> WSC to Sir Evelyn Wood, letter dated 10 November 1899, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1059.

<sup>191</sup> *TBW*, p. 32.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

the retreating enemy “would be overtaken by the shells...and those who stood in the trenches still felt the projectiles whistling and screaming towards them.” This, Churchill did not doubt, “was of great assistance to the infantry attack.”<sup>194</sup>

Churchill’s dispatches as a soldier-journalist were not always limited to the big tactical debates orbiting the principal arms of the British Army. Many more subjects, all too narrow to be included in a project of this sort, but which would provide rich topics for future study, caught his observation, and became the subject of commentary and critique.<sup>195</sup> A fuller discussion of arms,<sup>196</sup> defensive action,<sup>197</sup> offensive action,<sup>198</sup> and rearguard tactics,<sup>199</sup> intelligence,<sup>200</sup> reconnaissance,<sup>201</sup> supply,<sup>202</sup> terrain,<sup>203</sup> training,<sup>204</sup> transport,<sup>205</sup> and trench warfare<sup>206</sup> are all found in his letters, articles, and books. Along with them, Churchill examined camp conditions<sup>207</sup> and the conditions of soldering in general,<sup>208</sup> discipline,<sup>209</sup> fatigue,<sup>210</sup> funerals,<sup>211</sup> maps,<sup>212</sup> medics,<sup>213</sup> mercenaries,<sup>214</sup> movement,<sup>215</sup> night marches,<sup>216</sup> rations,<sup>217</sup> sniping,<sup>218</sup> and uniforms,<sup>219</sup> all not only in the hope of more fully developing the idea of war for his largely laymen readers, but also of engaging in the theoretical debates which would have occupied his professional military contemporaries.

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<sup>194</sup> WSC, “Some Impressions of the War in South Africa”, pp. 839-40.

<sup>195</sup> In the listing that follows, the examples footnoted are merely representative and not exhaustive.

<sup>196</sup> *MFF*, pp. 184, 270, 275-77, 285, 287-88, 290, 293-95, 354-55, 356; *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 142, 366-67, 427, 459; *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 4-5, 89, 100, 104, 106, 109, 164, 192-94, 195-96, 338, 339-41, 346-47, 351, 352-54, 356-57; *TBW*, pp. 110, 188, 189-90, 196.

<sup>197</sup> *TBW*, pp. 9-10, 10-11, 19-21, 31, 127-28, 134-35, 137-39, 207.

<sup>198</sup> *MFF*, pp. 255-57, 295-96; *TBW*, pp. 9-10, 127-28, 132, 133-35, 137-38, 207, 212.

<sup>199</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 13 April 1898, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 910-12; *MFF*, pp. 190, 222, 286-87; *TBW*, pp. 96-98, 153-54, 266.

<sup>200</sup> *MFF*, pp. 275-77.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 159; *TBW*, p. 256.

<sup>202</sup> *MFF*, pp. 154-55, 235; *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 276, 301, 302-05, 308-09, 366-67; *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 326-33.

<sup>203</sup> WSC to Bourke Cockran, letter dated 5 November 1896, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 699-700; *MFF*, pp. 294-95; *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 326-32; *TBW*, pp. 174-75, 208, 228-29, 263, 168, 186, 310, 318, 323, 330, 332, 351, 352, 352-53, 392-96.

<sup>204</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 6 April 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 748-51; *MFF*, pp. 258, 261, 266-67, 296-99; *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 411-12; *TBW*, pp. 32.

<sup>205</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 18 September 1896, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 679-80; *MFF*, pp. 235, 283; *TRW*, Vol. 1, p. 276, 301; *TBW*, p. 310.

<sup>206</sup> *MFF*, pp. 295-96; *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 335-38, 352-56; *TBW*, pp. 134-35, 137-39, 199.

<sup>207</sup> *MFF*, pp. 160, 284-85, 295-96; *TBW*, p. 155.

<sup>208</sup> *MFF*, pp. 152-53.

<sup>209</sup> *TBW*, p. 19.

<sup>210</sup> *MFF*, pp. 102, 290, 294-95.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206; Churchill, *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 440-41; *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 221, 225-26.

<sup>212</sup> *MFF*, pp. 157, 159; *TBW*, p. 256.

<sup>213</sup> *MFF*, p. 70; *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 439-40.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 411-12.

<sup>215</sup> *MFF*, pp. 294-95; *TBW*, pp. 108.

<sup>216</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 1, p. 417.

<sup>217</sup> *MFF*, p. 290; *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 302-05; *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 7; *TBW*, p. 240.

<sup>218</sup> *MFF*, pp. 72, 268, 270, 284-85.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

The tactical lessons Churchill learned during his time as a soldier and war correspondent made a lasting impression, and he referred back to them in the years that followed. In 1906 he was invited to observe the annual manoeuvres of the German Army in Silesia as a guest of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Housed, along with other dignitaries, in a hotel in Breslau, he and they were transported every day by special train to the site of the manoeuvres. He spent most days on horseback and nights attending various tattoos and formal dinners. The sheer scale of the manoeuvres—“50,000 horse, foot, and artillery”—left him impressed, especially in relation to the equivalent British exercises. “The Infantry, regiment by regiment, in line of battalion quarter columns, reminded one more of great Atlantic rollers than human formations”, he wrote. “Clouds of cavalry, avalanches of field guns...completed the array. For five hours the immense defilade continued. Yet this was only a twentieth of the armed strength of the regular German Army before mobilization.”<sup>220</sup>

Even confronted with the impressive and threateningly overwhelming display, Churchill noticed, drawing on his previous experience, “many questionable features.” Chief among them was the dense formations in which the troops, and particularly the infantry, tended to move. “I had carried away from the South African *veldt* a very lively sense of what modern rifle bullets could do”, Churchill wrote. Equipped with that sense, in Silesia Churchill watched in astonishment as thousands of German troops in condensed columns maneuvered close to entrenchments lined with opposing infantry unleashing a ferocious fusillade of blank ammunition, and as two opposing masses of infantry, upon being given the order to charge, actually marched through one another in flawless drill with bayonets fixed. “Whatever else this might amount to,” Churchill wrote, “it did not form contact with reality at any point.” Churchill also thought back to Omdurman, where he had learned the effects of mass, coordinated rifle fire on soldiers arrayed in “formations much less dense”, and where afterwards he had said to himself, “This is the end of these sorts of spectacles. There will never be such fools in the world again.”<sup>221</sup> After the manoeuvres he wrote to Lord Elgin, Secretary of State for the Colonies, of “the manoeuvres wh [*sic*] were indeed impressive.” Churchill continued: “There is a massive simplicity and force about the German military arrangements which grows upon the observer”, but he did not “think they have appreciated the terrible power of the weapons the hold and modern fire conditions.” Even so, “numbers, quality, discipline and organisation are four good roads to victory.”<sup>222</sup> Upon his return to Britain, Churchill summed up his conclusion to his Aunt Leonie: “I can only thank God there is a sea between England and that army!”<sup>223</sup>

During the summer recess of 1907 Churchill traveled to the continent to attend the French manoeuvres, which he was able to compare to the German maneuvers he observed the previous year.

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<sup>220</sup> *TAA*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>222</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 2, i, p. 582.

<sup>223</sup> Leslie, *End of a Chapter*, p. 119.

He subsequently compiled a report of his observations which he sent to his friend Ian Hamilton, then serving as General Officer Commanding Southern Command, who found the report so perceptive that he forwarded it on to the War Office.<sup>224</sup> Churchill also wrote an account to Lord Elgin, recommending that, based upon what he observed in France, he advise Haldane organize the new South African batteries on a four-gun basis, so long as they were quick firing. “If the first artillery nation in the world is prepared to fight European artillery with four-gun batteries, such a system should surely be good enough for our S. African needs”, he wrote.<sup>225</sup>

In 1909 Churchill, now a member of the Cabinet, received another invitation to attend the German army manoeuvres. This time they were near Würzburg in Bavaria, and Churchill once again went as a guest of the Emperor, though on this occasion he did not receive the same welcome, and in many ways he found the Kaiser, who “avoided all military and serious matters”, much more reticent. The tactics of the German Army stood in equally stark contrast. “A remarkable stride had been made in modernizing their Infantry formations and adapting them to actual war conditions”, Churchill later wrote; “the absurdities of the Silesian manoeuvres were not repeated.” The size of the battlefield had greatly increased in size, and each arm had undergone a transformation. The infantry had abandoned their dense masses, and advanced instead as skirmishers. Machine guns were more prominent and better placed. The artillery was no longer arranged in long rows, as if on parade, but was instead positioned wherever the ground afforded the greatest tactical advantage. The cavalry, too, had been re-envisioned and was assigned to the flanks where, in accordance to more modern tactics, it was less a central unit for charging, and more a reconnaissance asset which could also be employed to take quick advantage of weaknesses in the opposing lines.<sup>226</sup>

Churchill’s outlook had also changed since the 1906 manoeuvres, and had adopted an air of dread and pessimism. “This army is a terrible machine”, he wrote to his wife from Würzburg. “It marches 35 miles in a day. It is in number as the sands of the sea—& with all the modern conveniences.” He hoped for a “wiser and a gentler world” which his children might one day see, but in September 1909 he envisaged, as will be further discussed in the next chapter, the awful consequences of mass modernity: the modern battlefield populated with modern mass armies equipped with modern weaponry mass produced. “Much as war attracts me & fascinates my mind with its tremendous situations”, he confided, “I feel more deeply every year—& can measure the feeling here in the midst of arms—what vile & wicked folly & barbarism it all is.”<sup>227</sup> It would be 1915 before Churchill would see the German Army again.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Churchill, 2, p. 221.

<sup>225</sup> Churchill, CV, 2, ii, p. 685.

<sup>226</sup> TAA, pp. 67-69; Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, pp. 336-36.

<sup>227</sup> Churchill, CV, 2, ii, p. 911-12.

<sup>228</sup> Russell, *Winston Churchill: Soldier*, pp. 335-36.

In each of the theatres in which Churchill was employed as a soldier or war correspondent or both, he went to significant lengths to engage with the tactical debates of his day, and offered explication not altogether different than contemporary professional military theorists. While doing so, he relied less upon (but did not wholly ignore) professional military texts, and more upon personal experience and relationships with those who offered technical expertise and experience. “The principle of entrusting commands to officers of local experience has certainly been closely followed of late years”, Churchill wrote in 1899. “Generals”, he said, “are becoming specialists not only in the art of war, but in the particular style of the countries in which their experience has been gained.” Comparison between these styles, Churchill argued, was especially helpful, as it “bridges the gap between these different styles of war; displays the difficulties, the dangers, and the opportunities of each: and enables the achievements of one commander to be appreciated relatively to those of others.” Even so, he remained conscious of the potential pitfalls of experience, at least when elevated to sacrosanctity. Including his short stint in Cuba, Churchill encountered war in four regions which each presented drastically different enemies and environments. The temptation, Churchill recognized, not only for the individual soldier but also for the army at large, was not to approach each scenario afresh, and instead to apply tactics which could be well suited to one environment but unsound in another. “The British army is employed on every amazing variety of warfare which the peculiarities of savage peoples, the extremes of climate, and the diversity of natural features may present”, Churchill wrote, and concluded: “Experience in one kind is often an actual impediment to the successful conduct of another.”<sup>229</sup>

Not only, then, did Churchill identify tactical concerns within each scenario in which he fought, but he considered the wider question of how one might relate to another. He engaged, to use Callwell’s terminology, not only with individual small wars, but also with the nature of small wars as a general mode of warfare. He also acknowledged another Callwellian axiom: that small wars are, at their foundation, wars against nature. “No contrast could be more remarkable than that presented by the expeditions to Tirah and Khartoum”, Churchill explained. “Tirah is a cold country of mountains. The Soudan is a hot, flat desert.” The enemy in each, he went on, though espousing essentially the same religion and courage, “are in most other respects as different as their lands. The Afridis are excellent shots, avoid close quarters and regular entanglements, and harass and harry continually, particularly after nightfall.” By contrast, the “Dervishes disdain to take aim, collect in great armies eager for pitched battles, despise, small affairs, and detest the darkness.” The significant point, Churchill understood, was that these differences in the nature of either the environment or enemy, or both, had certain tactical

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<sup>229</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 322–23.

consequences for the British Army, consequences which were identifiable, instructive, and in some cases, predictable.<sup>230</sup>

A summarizing and foundational conclusion Churchill, as a young soldier, drew from his observations on the tactics of war, and which he made in a speech in 1901 before the *Royal United Services Institution*, was that nations “must think out their own style of warfare for themselves.” Each nation must evaluate her own offensive and defensive needs, real and potential, and craft a fighting force best suited to meet those needs; brought home, Britain should develop her own “unique and peculiar resources to meet” her own “unique and peculiar dangers.” “Where would the Boers have been if they had drilled their burghers into battalions and regiments of lancers and hussars?” Churchill asked. “It does not follow that because these things are adopted by some countries and some people, that therefore they are the only way to win in war.” Churchill argued that the nations should not necessarily be swayed by a consensus of other nations or fighting forces, for “the certain road to ruin is to play exactly the same game as your enemy”, and often there is significant tactical advantage in a army’s “unexpected and original variations from the traditional systems of its most probable antagonists.” And lest there be any mistaking his principal point, especially in an era when Britain was engaged in a fundamental re-evaluation of its military armament,<sup>231</sup> Churchill advised, “without hesitation...[to] abandon once and for all our servile imitation of European methods; let us decline to play the Continental game of soldiers.” It might be that France and Germany adopt conscription; it did not follow necessarily that Britain should then adopt it too. Due, in large part, to his experiences in frontier warfare, Churchill maintained that, “Instead of trying to manufacture a miniature German Army in England, we shall build up...a British Army for the British Empire.”<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323-34. In some places Churchill spent a great many words contrasting various enemies and environments, and drawing from that certain tactical conclusions and prescriptions. See *Ibid.*, pp. 322-79.

<sup>231</sup> See, for example, Brian Bond, “The Effect of the Cardwell Reforms in Army Organization, 1874-1904”, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol. 105 (1960), pp. 515-24; Jones, *From Boer War to World War*; Edward Spiers, “Rearming the Edwardian Artillery”, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 57 (Autumn, 1979), pp. 167-76; Spiers, “Reforming the Infantry of the Line”; Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, pp. 76-129; Major-General C. E. Webber, “Army Reform Based on Some 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lessons in Warfare”, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol. 45 (1901), pp. 378-420.

<sup>232</sup> WSC, “Some Impressions of the War in South Africa”, pp. 846-47.

## :: VI ::

## THE STRATEGY AND POLICY OF WAR

The previous chapter focused on Churchill's interaction with various subjects concerning military tactics and demonstrated his familiarity with and apprenticeship to them. In doing so, it made a case for a mind that, rather than avoiding tactical matters, sought at times to engage them, couching knowledgeable commentary on the nuts and bolts of war within journalistic narrative meant, in large part, for the British public. At times Churchill made prescriptions not unlike those of recognized military tacticians like Colonel Callwell, and, in sum, he perhaps deserves more credit as a military thinker than he is usually given.

This chapter will take one step back from the previous chapter and, in looking at the slightly larger picture, discuss Churchill's early military intellectual collateral on matters of war as they relate to strategy and British imperial and foreign policy. It will first briefly examine the ways in which Churchill thought about wartime strategic dynamics, before proceeding to study his understanding of how military strategy might fit into an overall grand strategy, encompassing not only military objectives and contributions, but other policies as well—namely those political and economic. Like what has come before it, the overall objective of this chapter is to understand more fully Churchill's early thoughts on war and things relating to war, and it does so mostly in the context of his relationships and experiences. As was predominantly the case with tactics, Churchill's mastery of strategy came more from his hands-on experience than from any systemized or even purposefully dedicated study of recognized strategic thinkers like Clausewitz or Jomini. In the same way, then, Churchill's was not a formal strategic education, but rather an informal apprenticeship.

In 1990 David Jablonsky published a short monograph in which he briefly traced the evolution of Churchill's strategic thought from his early years through the two world wars.<sup>1</sup> Jablonsky argued that Churchill's thinking evolved and his mind matured militarily in a time when the character of war was itself evolving, and this changing character necessarily impacted the way Churchill thought about strategy. Wars, and even more importantly, national strategic objectives, were, by the late Victorian period, much less likely to be decided by single decisive battles. Even a century earlier Clausewitz had recognized that the commander increasingly needed to do more than coordinate individual tactical parts toward individual tactical victories. He must now look "at each engagement as part of a series...always on the high road to his

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<sup>1</sup> Jablonsky, *Churchill: The Making of a Grand Strategist*. This author is indebted to Jablonsky's short but valuable work, some of which helps form the foundation for the section that follows.

goal.”<sup>2</sup> As the nineteenth century progressed it was a high road that grew more complicated given the rise in populations, sophisticated alliances, and technological innovations. The First World War only furthered the complexities; no longer would a campaign—or war—hinge on a single tactical victory. The classical understanding of strategy was no longer the final objective; rather, it was repositioned as the linking “operational” level between the tactical level and the level of national strategic objectives. As the U. S. Department of Defense defined in 1994, the “operational level of war” is “the level of war at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives...Activities at this level link tactics and strategy...These activities imply a broader dimension of time or space than do tactics...they provide the means by which tactical successes are exploited to achieve strategic objectives.”<sup>3</sup> The operational level would come to exist in a vertical continuum between the tactical and the strategic; the tactical level would affect the operational level, which would in turn affect the strategic level. And though Churchill obviously did not think exactly in terms of this more modern continuum, it helps to provide a framework for studying how Churchill understood tactics to relate to strategy (both in the classical sense and on the operational level, as it would come to be known), and how that understanding evolved through—and was impacted by—the various conflicts in which he was both agent and spectator.<sup>4</sup>

During his younger years of formal education, Churchill, this thesis has explored, was very much caught up with what he considered the more orthodox and classical view and method of war. Decisive action commanded by a successful captain: those were the stories and the protagonists he preferred. As the second chapter established, those stories provided the vocabulary for both his imagination and enthusiasm. He participated in the great mock battles at Harrow and was riveted by the stories of Henty and Haggard, replete as they were with the heroic feats doing their part to spread and establish the dominance of the British Empire. While at Bangalore he devoured Macaulay, and “embarked on that splendid romance...and voyaged with full sail in a strong wind” as he “revelled” in stories of “Chatham, Frederick the Great, and Clive.”<sup>5</sup> The curricula at Sandhurst furthered his elementary military beginnings at Harrow, and Churchill performed well in tactics, fortifications, and riding, while still

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Howard and Peter Paret (eds. and trans.), *Carl von Clausewitz, On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> U. S. Department of Defense, *Joint Pub 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: 23 March 1994), p. 316.

<sup>4</sup> Jablonsky, *Churchill: The Making of a Grand Strategist*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>5</sup> *MEL*, p. 126.

maintaining an absorption in what he called the “age of wars between civilized nations”, where pivotal engagements lent to game-changing or game-ending consequences.<sup>6</sup>

Somewhat contrary to Jablonsky’s contention that Churchill’s first two military engagements would have done little to affect his early notions of war and strategy,<sup>7</sup> it should not be forgotten that the subaltern was, upon arriving in India, unacquainted with the peculiar art of irregular warfare. Insofar that small wars were different from his early ideas of war—informed in part by his personal reading, the context of his youth, and his early education at especially Sandhurst but also before—they were instructive by their very contradistinctions. The sporadic skirmishes on the North-West Frontier, though tactically enlightening and illustrative as examples of irregular warfare, might have been strategically underwhelming, and the principles drawn from them oriented more toward frontier policy than to redefining his notion of military strategy.<sup>8</sup> However, it should not be assumed that the frontier wars were not educational for Churchill. In 1897, Churchill confided to his grandmother that, “the experience I enjoyed while on the frontier is the most valuable of my life. Regarded from an educational point of view alone—it is well worth having.”<sup>9</sup> “The skill of the general, the quality of the troops, the eternal principles of the art of war,” he wrote in his account of the conflict, “will be as clearly displayed as on historic fields. Only the scale of the statistics is reduced.”<sup>10</sup> During his garrison on the subcontinent Churchill came to grasp some of the fundamental differences accentuated by irregular warfare. As he wrote in 1898, “The peculiar difficulty with attends mountain warfare is that there are no general actions on a great scale, no brilliant successes, no important surrenders, no chance of *coups de théâtre*.”<sup>11</sup> In contrast, his second campaign with Lord Kitchener in the Sudan was the furthest thing from mountain warfare, and climaxed with a battle sufficiently decisive to align with Churchill’s early notions of the important culminating point, replete in this case with a cavalry charge.<sup>12</sup>

South Africa was different. Here the enemy was not archaic “tribesmen” but Boers in possession of a modern array of weapons and organized in such a way as to take full advantage of familiarity with the home terrain and environment. Long-range artillery employing smokeless powder was hidden in higher elevations and, invisible to lookouts and out of reach of the British mounted arm, would fire shells at huge distances, wreaking havoc amongst

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<sup>6</sup> MEL, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Jablonsky, *Churchill: The Making of a Grand Strategist*, pp. 5-10.

<sup>8</sup> Churchill’s thinking on frontier policy will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> WSC to the Duchess of Marlborough, letter dated 25 October 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 810.

<sup>10</sup> MFF, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 30 March 1898, published 3 May 1898.

<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that the campaign in the Sudan did not affect Churchill’s thinking of war, and the reader is reminded of how this thesis discusses Churchill’s view-altering encounters with elements like waste and carnage.

British forces. Battlefields were enormous and ill-defined having discarded the more orthodox, European assault positions. Entrenchments, barbed wire, and sandbags further eroded the ability and necessity to advance, and with them part of the classic military understandings that had so far animated Churchill and which would succumb to further assault and crumble under the realities of the First World War.

Churchill was not oblivious of these changes, and whilst in South Africa he witnessed engagements that impressed upon him the changing character of war. “Colenso, Spion Kop, Vaal Krantz, and the third day at Pieters were not inspiring memories,” he wrote.<sup>13</sup> At the Battle of Pieters he observed British soldiers continuously cut down by “the hideous whispering Death” from “the terrible fire of the Mauser rifle”, an “extraordinary rattling roll of...musketry in great volume” that brought about “a frantic scene of blood and fury.”<sup>14</sup> The engagement on Spion Kop proved even more unforgettable. There, on “a flat [hill]top about as large as Trafalgar Square...2,000 British infantry were packed”, without much cover, and made to suffer the horrific effects of an artillery bombardment whilst they attempted to hold their position.<sup>15</sup> Churchill recalled that “the scenes on Spion Kop were among the strongest and most terrible I have ever witnessed.”<sup>16</sup> In similar engagements, as discussed, Churchill’s “respect for modern artillery was mightily increased” by the witnessing the effects of just one well-placed, accurate gun. “Fancy if there had been a battery”, he mused; “Yet in an European War”, he discerned, “there would have been not one, but three or four batteries. I do not see how troops can be handled in masses in such conditions...”<sup>17</sup> It was a discernment that would stay with him. In 1906, when watching the German army manoeuvres at Breslau, his mind wandered back to South Africa. As considered in the previous chapter, Churchill professed to have “carried away from the South African veldt a very lively and modern sense of what rifle bullets could do”, and that whatever the manoeuvres he was watching amounted to, they “did not form contact with reality at any point.”<sup>18</sup> In 1909 Churchill, no less attuned to the destructive capacity of modern weapons, took note of how the German Army had adapted to changing war conditions.<sup>19</sup>

Churchill’s experiences as a soldier, were, then, instrumental in helping him to understand and come to terms with the realities of an expanded continuum of war, one in which the single battle was rarely decisive and where arts like soldiering, warfare, and strategy

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<sup>13</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 5 March 1900, published 10 April 1900.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> MEL, p. 324.

<sup>16</sup> Churchill, CV, 1, ii, p. 1147.

<sup>17</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 5 March 1900, published 10 April 1900.

<sup>18</sup> TAA, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> Churchill, CV, 2, i, p. 582; TAA, p. 67.

were adapting to shifts in factors like population, technology, and alliances. By late-1899, Churchill was identifying and remarking upon what was, in effect, an expanded Boer continuum: “It is impossible not to admire the Boer strategy. From the beginning they have aimed at two main objects: to exclude the war from their own territories, and to confine it to rocky and broken regions suited to their tactics.”<sup>20</sup> Churchill also recognized that it was no longer strategically (or even, using language of the continuum, operationally) sufficient to capture and establish as a military hub a large and defensible city. In the case of South Africa, there existed large expanses of spaces which allowed the enemy, benefiting from home-ground advantages, entrenchments, and modern technology, to move about and wage war effectively even without occupying otherwise principal cities. This was the case with Ladysmith, which the British Army, in service to what Churchill considered an outmoded understanding of strategy, had struggled to capture and keep. “Whoever selected Ladysmith as a strategic centre must sleep uneasily at nights”, he wrote. In preparation for war with the Boers, he remembered several ranking officers persisting under the impression “that Ladysmith was a tremendous strategic position, which dominated the lines of approach both into the Transvaal and the Orange Free State”; in fact, Churchill argued, it “does nothing of the sort...Tactically Ladysmith may be strongly defensible, politically it has become invested with much importance, but for strategic purposes it is absolutely worthless...Not only do the surrounding hills keep the garrison in,” Churchill continued, “but they also form a formidable barrier to the advance of a relieving force...Sir Redvers Buller...is compelled to attack the enemy on their own terms and their own ground.”<sup>21</sup>

Here it might be expected to move from the vertical continuum of war to an analysis of Churchill and technology, as it is a factor which could affect the tactical-operational-strategic linkage—or, in contemporary parlance, it is a force multiplier. To some extent other force multipliers, like intelligence and deception, were addressed in the previous chapter; however, a discussion of Churchill and technology will be suspended until the next chapter, as it is impossible to separate Churchill’s thinking on technology and war from his conceptualization of war itself. And while technology does have some bearing on the subjects of this chapter, namely strategy and policy, it is more fittingly considered within the context of Churchill’s wider ideas on war as a phenomenon.

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<sup>20</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 24 December 1899, published 27 January 1900. Elsewhere, Churchill expanded upon the admirable strategy. WSC to MP, dispatch dated 1 November 1899, as quoted in *TBW*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 24 December 1899, published 27 January 1900. Again, this author is indebted to the above-referenced work by David Jablonsky for his brief but helpful work on Churchill and the changing character of war. Jablonsky, *Churchill: The Making of a Grand Strategist*.

The military component makes up but one dimension of what the U. S. Department of Defense (D. O. D.) has called “national strategy”, or “the art and science of developing and using the political, economic, and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives.”<sup>22</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart called the employment of these instruments of national power “grand strategy”, which he said is “to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, toward the attainment of the political object of the war.”<sup>23</sup> These resources, referring back to the D. O. D.’s definition, include at least political, economic, and psychological instruments, as well as the military.<sup>24</sup> Together they provide at least four helpful areas through which to understand Churchill’s interaction with grand strategy.

The first obvious—but still worthwhile—point to be made concerns the nature of Churchill’s pre-First World War wartime experiences. All were colonial wars. None were fought on the British island; none were even fought near the British island. All were distant. In none of the conflicts was the very survival of Britain in play, at least not in the same serious sense that future wars would mean. Instead, in each instance Churchill was attached to what could be called a punitive expeditionary force, and in each instance the enemy were more or less indigenous people. The nature of these conflicts had particular influence on the various elements of grand strategy.

From the very beginning, Churchill’s first interaction with warfare—in Cuba in late-1895—was made more intricate by the opposing forces wielding various instruments of power against one another. The revolt in Cuba was “an exceeding complex problem”, he wrote in 1896, as “military, financial and international considerations complicate the struggle and obscure the issue.”<sup>25</sup> Militarily, Churchill found fault with both the Cuban and the Spanish tactics and strategies. The rebels he considered to be “the most boastful and braggart section of a mongrel race”, who resolved to “‘outmanoeuvre and hold in check’ the Government forces in much the same way that a comparatively small number of rogues and rowdies in London manage to provide an occupation for thirteen thousand Metropolitan policeman.” Churchill recognized their object as two-fold: to demonstrate their power to the world, and to so plunge their country into such economic ruin that some other power would be tempted to intervene.<sup>26</sup> However justifiable these objects were in the face of the “intolerable...system of government and taxation”, Churchill found them to be a “dreadful and desperate remedy. The

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<sup>22</sup> U. S. Department of Defense, *Joint Pub 1-02*, p. 293.

<sup>23</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991), p. 322.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 17-189.

<sup>25</sup> WSC, “The Revolt in Cuba”, *Saturday Review*, Vo. 81 (Feb., 1896), p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 22 November 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1.

system, despite the “sympathy of the entire Cuban population”, would remain fruitless so long as they remained unable to muster the organization and cohesion necessary to wage one “single, really hard-fought battle” which, “whether they won or lost, would convince foreign Powers of their sincerity and in all probability procure their recognition from the United States.” In a similar way, Churchill found the Spanish unable to coordinate their own disparate tactical efforts into a unified strategic front, and in their own way succumbing to the same heterogeneous tactics as the Cubans. His principal proscription for the Spanish, then, was to concentrate the thousands of men, theretofore scattered about in defence of villages and plantations, into columns whose movements were dictated by “one concerted scheme.” Alongside the repurposed columns, Churchill advised that the Spanish General Weyler should “employ to the fullest extent the cavalry reinforcements”, and “infuse a greater spirit of energetic perseverance into the tactics of his subordinates.” These serve as further examples of Churchill thinking in the spirit of a continuum of war, and aiming to focus individual tactical elements into what amounted to an operational level pointed toward a larger strategic objective.<sup>27</sup>

The economic policies of both sides, but especially of the rebels, had particular impact on the psychology of the indigenes. It was, at least in part, the corrupt economic policies of the Spanish government that led to a “demand for independence” that was “national and unanimous.”<sup>28</sup> For their part, the insurgents were engaged in the widespread prevention of any harvesting, under threats to burn the plantations of any planter who refused to comply. This “no amount of military protection or patrolling” could guard against and had, Churchill understood, triple effect: the displacement of thousands of labourers from employment, bankrupting the island so that it could no longer be used as security for loans to continue waging war, and robbing the Spanish cause of potential supporters by demonstrating their weakness in protecting the essential fields.<sup>29</sup> “In fact, it is a war, not a rebellion”,<sup>30</sup> Churchill concluded, “and whatever may be the results, the suffering and misery of the entire community is certain.”<sup>31</sup>

While Churchill was sympathetic to the rebellion, he did not share the same sentiment for the rebels, and here his imperialistic biases shown through clearly. He found them unruly and resistant to military discipline, and tactically obtuse, resorting only to the methods of “incendiaries and brigands—burning canefields, shooting from behind ledges, firing into

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<sup>27</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 14 December 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1; WSC, “The Revolt in Cuba”, p. 165.

<sup>28</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 23 November 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1.

<sup>29</sup> WSC, “The Revolt in Cuba”, p. 165.

<sup>30</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 23 November 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1.

<sup>31</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 22 November 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1.

sleeping camps, destroying property, wrecking trains, and throwing dynamite.” All legitimate in war, Churchill contended, but “not acts on which States are founded.” He took issue with their patriotism, and argued that in the face of such corruption, taxation and oppression, which he believed helped to justify rebellion, every able-bodied man should have taken up both arms and the objective. To the contrast, however, he observed that “towns and villages are full and overflowing with patriots, who, though they weary the visitor with tales of their valour, would not hazard a brass farthing—far less life or limb—to promote the cause they profess to hold so high.” Such policies, Churchill concluded, are hardly ones “which should obtain recognition from any great civilized nation, still less from a great colonial power.” Such waywardness was in want of civilizing influences, and if the Spanish could maintain the advantage on the various military, economic, political, social, and international fronts that made up the war effort, Churchill supposed that there could still be “good government where now is anarchy, prosperity in the place of ruin, peace instead of war.” In other words, Churchill supposed that future years might “see the island as it would be now, had England never lost it.”<sup>32</sup>

Each being a small war, and thus similar in some respects to the Cuban rebellion, Churchill’s involvement in his next three conflicts—the North-West Frontier, the Sudan, and South Africa—led him, in part, to expound upon themes he began whilst observing in the Spanish colony. In each conflict, and with increasing complexity, Britain was confronted with the realities of multi-dimensional warfare—that is, waging war with the multiple instruments of national power that make up what would later be termed grand strategy.

Churchill grew increasingly aware of the addition and intervention of strictly non-military instruments into military objectives; and yet, at least as a newly-commissioned officer, he seemed to possess mixed opinions on their involvement, and did not always approve. “Of course nowadays every budding war is spoiled and nipped by some wily diplomatist”,<sup>33</sup> Churchill wrote to his mother from India in 1895, and, in his memoir many years later, Churchill carried on this theme and expended no effort to be complimentary toward the political officers who accompanied the Malakand Field Force, accusing them of being “marplots” and “shilly-shallying”, or interrupting an impending conflict right before the point of engagement, choosing instead “to participate in an interminable interchange of confidences upon unmentionable matters between [the political officers and the] sulky and murderous

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<sup>32</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 14 December 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1; WSC, “The Revolt in Cuba”, p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 30 September 1895, CAC, CHAR 28/21/69.

tribesmen.”<sup>34</sup> They left soldiers disappointed by settling disputes “which would formerly have been left to armed force.”<sup>35</sup>

Churchill did regard political officers as useful when faced with their first principal duty, negotiation. “The difficult language and peculiar characters of the “tribesmen” are the study of a lifetime”, Churchill wrote from the North-West Frontier, and the political officers were “indispensable” in their “knowledge of local conditions” and as men “who understand the whole question, and all the details of the quarrel, between the natives and the Government”—men, in Churchill’s estimation, who could not “be found in the army.”<sup>36</sup> And yet he considered their second assigned duty, intelligence gathering, to be best left to soldiers. “Civil officers should not be expected to understand what kind of military information, a general requires”, Churchill wrote; “civil officers should discharge diplomatic duties, and military officers the conduct of war.” On the final point relating to political officers, Churchill expressed no doubts: “The political officers must be under the control of the General directing the operations...In a Field Force one man only can command—and all in it must be under his authority.”<sup>37</sup>

Taking a step back from the civil officers in the field, the most profound way in which the political instrument affected the waging of war was British foreign policy. This was inescapably woven with British imperialism, and both attracted Churchill’s consideration. As was demonstrated in previous chapters, Churchill joined the frontier war in India with more than a few preconceived notions of British imperialism, not surprising for the grandson of a duke, “Mid Victorian, steeped in the politics of his father’s period, and unable ever to get the modern point of view”,<sup>38</sup> and one self-proclaimed to be a “child of the Victorian era.”<sup>39</sup> Given that, as Richard Toye has argued, “no homogenous view of Empire existed in late-Victorian Britain”,<sup>40</sup> Churchill’s own commentary on his military experiences is helpful in establishing just how he believed the interests of the British Empire should be pursued.

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<sup>34</sup> *MEL*, p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> *MFF*, pp. 154, 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275-76. Here Churchill went on to say that “The military profession is alone sufficient to engross the attention of the most able and accomplished man.” This is a striking statement when considered in the context of Churchill’s own profession, and begs the question of whether Churchill himself felt guilty to ignoring his own maxim as he, perhaps, attempted to exercise authority over too many professions at once. In some respects, and to the exasperation of his colleagues, he was a life-long meddler, prone more often than not to muscle his way into projects or areas that not always fell under his jurisdiction or responsibly.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.

<sup>38</sup> John Barnes and David Nichols (eds.), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929-1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p. 49 (entry for 4 August 1929).

<sup>39</sup> *MEL*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Toye, *Churchill’s Empire* (London: Macmillan, 2010), p. 34.

On his way to the frontier from Bangalore, Churchill traveled 2,027 miles by rail. He stopped overnight at Rawalpindi, and whilst there he joined a sing-a-long in the sergeants' mess where, three decades after, he remembered these lines from what he thought was the best song:

Great White Mother, far across the sea,  
Ruler of the Empire may she ever be.  
Long may she reign, glorious and free,  
In the Great White Motherland.<sup>41</sup>

He was on his way to join a punitive expedition meant to punish the tribes that had staged an uprising in the Swat Valley of the North-West Frontier, and to reclaim and secure that Frontier as a safeguard against threats to India, the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. This reclamation most often took shape in the so-called Forward Policy, or the policy of extending—and in some cases, re-extending—British control to the Durand Line (established in 1893 as the new border between India and Afghanistan) to protect India from foreign encroachment from both Afghanistan and imperialist czarist Russia in what was commonly referred to as “The Great Game”.

In his dispatches from the front lines, Churchill attributed the uprising to “wild and merciless [religious] fanaticism”,<sup>42</sup> rooted in Moahommedanism<sup>43</sup>—which, because it swept over tribes immune to common sense, and energized them into action which threatened the Empire, had to be quashed.<sup>44</sup> Unsurprisingly, he shared a negative opinion of the “tribesmen”. Untamed, as it were, Churchill believed the Pathans to be impelled by their baser instincts towards “treachery and violence”, manifesting itself in “the strong aboriginal propensity to kill.” Bent on plundering, their associations were of force; every man was a soldier, and their hostility toward control led to the arresting of any civilizational progress, so that all respect for law and authority was abandoned. Virtue was traded for vice, and their code of honor was “incomprehensible to a logical mind.” They were dirty, degraded, dangerous, and devoid of the family virtues “which idealists usually ascribe to primitive peoples.” Nevertheless, their lives and settings were “not without moments when the lover of the picturesque might sympathize with their hopes and fears”, and even at their most sordid the “tribesmen” were not irredeemable, and Churchill witnessed occasions when those who had joined the British

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<sup>41</sup> *MEL*, p. 139.

<sup>42</sup> *MFF*, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter Three.

<sup>44</sup> Winston S. Churchill, 6 September 1897 dispatch to *The Daily Telegraph*, as quoted in Woods, *Young Winston's Wars*, p. 43.

forces actually proved quite useful, advancing up steep hillsides in pursuit of the indigenous “tribesmen”, suggesting “nothing so much as a well-trained pack of hounds.”<sup>45</sup>

As Churchill experienced it in practice, a significant portion of the Forward Policy effort was punitive. After a particularly bad British defeat in the Mamund Valley, Sir Bindon Blood ordered it laid to “waste with fire and sword in vengeance”, the “necessary chastisement”; as Churchill later remembered: “we receded systematically, village by village, and we destroyed the house, filled up the wells, blew down the towers, cut down the great shady trees, burned the crops and broke the reservoirs in punitive devastation.”<sup>46</sup> Though privately he was disturbed at the type of warfare taking place,<sup>47</sup> publicly he supported the action: “Of course, it is cruel and barbarous, as is everything else in war, but it is only the philosophic mind, that will hold it legitimate to take a man’s life, and illegitimate to destroy his property”; moreover, he condemned any attempt to sugarcoat the awful punishment: “In official parlance the burning of villages is usually expressed euphemistically...I do not believe in all this circumlocution...the people of our islands only require to have the matter put fairly before them to arrive at sound, practical conclusions.”<sup>48</sup>

A short study of Churchill’s estimation of the Forward Policy in 1897–98 is illustrative of both the young subaltern’s evolution of thought toward a policy of war, but also of the tension present in what was becoming an amalgamation of the soldier–politician. In both cases, as with other subjects, of note are the understandable differences between public and private opinions, especially for someone keen on making a name for himself, and the complications of understanding not the thought, but the evolution of thought, in someone who was very much traversing through his formative years.<sup>49</sup>

While still partaking in the expedition and fighting, Churchill expressed in a 21 September 1897 dispatch to the *Daily Telegraph* two themes which would prove recurrent during his consideration of the Forward Policy. The first was that it was not hard to find arguments against the Forward Policy; the second was, despite that, it was hard to argue for any viable alternative. Here Churchill was making a prudential argument: the Forward Policy

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<sup>45</sup> *MFF*, pp. 4–11, 243–44.

<sup>46</sup> WSC to *DT*, dispatch dated 18 September 1897, as quoted in Woods, *Young Winston’s Wars*, p. 58; *MEL*, p. 162.

<sup>47</sup> WSC to the Duchess of Marlborough, letter dated 25 October 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 810–11.

<sup>48</sup> *MFF*, p. 241. Churchill added a note to these pages which contrasted the village-burning on the Indian Frontier with that in Cuba, in which his general point was that the destruction in Cuba was meant to incite the lukewarm sympathizers into action; “by placing the alternative of ‘fight or starve’ before the inhabitants, [it has] the effect of driving them to take up arms against the Spaniards, whom they all hate, and join the rebels in the field.” *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Richard Toye has done excellent work in this area, and this author is grateful for recent work, which has proved very helpful in coming to understand the young Churchill’s thinking on empire and subjects relating to it. For the paragraphs that follow in particular, see Toye, *Churchill’s Empire*, pp. 41–46.

might not be the perfect solution, but it was the best possible solution from an array of alternatives. Thus, despite the difficulties with which it was saddled, Churchill said that the “forward movement is now beyond recall”, and because retreat was impossible, “the more rapid the advance the sooner will the troubles of a transition stage be over.” The advance, he argued, should establish the Gilgit–Chitral–Jellalabad–Kandahar line.<sup>50</sup> Lady Randolph, to whom Churchill sent the dispatch to be forwarded to the *Daily Telegraph*, hesitated out of fear that it was a mistake, and that given his position in the army he should not be expressing such views at that time lest it attract unwanted trouble from his superiors.<sup>51</sup> To the contrary, responded Churchill, the dispatch expressed “what is essentially the military view”, and while making “no attack on any military officer”, in the main it agreed with the central points made by Sir George White, Commander-in-Chief in India, in his farewell speech.<sup>52</sup> On this point Churchill was correct. “Civilization and barbarism cannot exist conterminously and at the same time as independent neighbours”, White said, before continuing: “Civilization must advance and savagery recede...So long as we had on our border 200,000 of the most turbulent and finest fighting material in the world, unrestrained by civilized government and fired by fanaticism, we should never have peace to be relied upon.”<sup>53</sup> In his final published dispatch, Churchill repeated arguments from his first: though economically poor (any trade from settled frontier would never even approximate the military expense to pacify it), and morally unfortunate (“our spheres of influence clash with their sphere of existence”), “it is impossible to go back...We must therefore go on.”<sup>54</sup>

Churchill’s private communications reveal a less settled mind. Writing to his mother in October 1897, Churchill said that the Forward Policy was the cause of the frontier war, and that those who adopted the policy “must bear the responsibility of what has happened, but perhaps it was impossible to do anything else.” Whatever the cause, he continued, “Now we are started we can’t go back and must go on. And the sooner the better. Financially it is ruinous. Morally it is wicked. Militarily it is an open question, and politically it is a blunder. But we can’t pull up now.”<sup>55</sup> Two weeks later, he sent his mother an amulet which he called “a tangible result of the ‘Forward Policy’”, and described it as insignificant but for it was found in a village which claimed 70 British lives—“a bitter comment on the wild and wasteful course

<sup>50</sup> WSC to DT, dispatch dated 21 September, as quoted in *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 790.

<sup>51</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 4 November 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 831–32.

<sup>52</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 2 November 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 813–14.

<sup>53</sup> “Sir George White On Indian Frontier Policy”, *The Times* (London), 4 October 1897, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> WSC to DT, dispatch dated 16 October 1897, as quoted in Woods, *Young Winston’s Wars*, p. 108.

<sup>55</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 21 October 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/64.

upon which we are now embarked and upon which we must now continue for some years.”<sup>56</sup> That same day he wrote to another of the Forward Policy as “an awful business.”<sup>57</sup>

When it came, early the next year, to publishing *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, Churchill maintained the same posture toward the Forward Policy, albeit with slightly tamed aversions. The thrust of the summary chapter, “The Riddle of the Frontier”, argued not against expansion or annexation, only the methods of achieving it. Churchill questioned not the ends, but the means. He stated the complex situation in which British forces found themselves in 1898 was not wholly unforeseen by the original policy planners, and that in some senses the present situation had been “deliberately created.” Despite that, and despite the fact that Britain had no hope of recouping the financial investment it had made on the North-West Frontier, and that there were no “lack of arguments against the ‘Forward Policy’”, Churchill, when given the chance, neither publicly or privately exerted much effort in destroying or even discrediting its scaffolding.<sup>58</sup>

Instead it was the implementation of the Forward Policy that came under his scrutiny and critique. Churchill understood that in practice the Forward Policy led not to the British securing—through training “tribesmen”, building roads and railways, and establishing forts—principal lines of approach to Afghanistan, but rather to try, in effect, to tame a large region of plains, hills, and mountains that now make up present-day Pakistan. The chief object of retention was Chitral,<sup>59</sup> but Churchill argued that the city was hardly a prize at all: not nearly enough troops could be garrisoned there to defend it against a Russian takeover. And though a Russian violation would give rise to an international conflict, that would happen regardless of any British troops which might be garrisoned there. The easier course, to Churchill’s mind, would have been to make it clear in St. Petersburg the borders of the British sphere of influence, as well as the probable consequences for violating those borders. “The safest frontier line is a political one”, he contended.<sup>60</sup> This would have kept Russia equally at bay, and would have done so without the need to maintain a frontier outpost like Chitral via supply and communication routes through the hazardous topography of Swat and Dir, which demanded constant attention and defence.

Even so, Churchill argued that Britain had no choice but continue with the policy. “We have crossed the Rubicon”, he said, “the forward movement is now beyond recall.” And, he argued, that movement should be slow and steady. “The ‘Full steam ahead’ method

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<sup>56</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 2 November 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 814.

<sup>57</sup> WSC to Lord William Beresford, letter dated 2 November 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/69.

<sup>58</sup> *MFF*, pp. 309–10.

<sup>59</sup> “The most marked incident in the ‘Forward Policy’ has been the retention of Chitral.” *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 21 October 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/64.

would be undoubtedly the most desirable”, he considered, but Britain had “neither the troops nor the money to carry it out.” Only “a system of gradual advance” was left—and, with a nod toward utilizing other instruments of national power, he encouraged using “political intrigue among the tribes” and “subsidies”: in two words, politics and economics. Finally, his main criticism of both the rulers of Britain and India was that they had been too timid in laying out their commitment to the Forward Policy; as such it became a “strong policy weakly carried out” when instead they should “frankly lay their case before the country, and trust to the good sense and courage of an ancient democracy.”<sup>61</sup>

As further support to his fundamental defence of the Forward Policy, shortly after his book Churchill published “The Ethics of Frontier Policy” in the *United Service Magazine*. Here he reiterated that forward movement was the only possible option, and again took issue more with the methods than the ends. Rather than simply try to secure lines of approach to the frontier, the authorities busied themselves with further interference which could only end in annexation. The Forward Policy thus became a harrowing, and quite often fruitless, operation. The “tribesmen” could be beaten back if they were to advance across the plains which help to make up the natural frontier of India. “All this”, Churchill argued, “changed when the soldiers enter the hills”, and “the study of the past shows that it has always been so.” He continued: “Other conquerors besides the British have sent great armies on this fruitless errand, and...it has always been found that their losses far exceed their gains. A line is drawn between the people of the plain and the men of the hills...Each are supreme in their proper element. Neither can attack the other except at the greatest disadvantage.” The unfavourable policy led to “the acquisition of unnecessary territories [which] has involved the construction of undesirable forts”, the guarantee of which demanded military relief expeditions.<sup>62</sup>

In April 1898 Churchill sent a copy of the essay to his friend, Ian Hamilton. In his accompanying letter, Churchill stated tellingly that in the essay he chose “a circuitous insidious but none the less effective method of defending the Forward Policy.” In doing so, Churchill confirmed that, contrary to what many modern historians have asserted,<sup>63</sup> he was never truly opposed to the policy, and that any allusions otherwise were his attempts at peacemaking and good favour. As such, it is no wonder that Lord Salisbury, upon reading Churchill’s book asked to see him and proceeded to offer praise “not only for its matter but for its style.” It is

<sup>61</sup> *MFF*, p. 310-13.

<sup>62</sup> WSC, “The Ethics of Frontier Policy”, pp. 504-06.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Warren Dockter, “Winston Churchill and the Islamic World: Early Encounters”, *Historian*, Vol. 101 (Spring, 2009), pp. 19-21; Roland Quinault, “Winston Churchill and Gibbon”, in R. McKitterick and R. Quinault (eds.), *Edward Gibbon and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 317-32; Ted Morgan, *Churchill: Young Man in a Hurry, 1874-1915* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 94. This author is indebted to Richard Toye for identifying some contrary opinions. See Toye, *Churchill’s Empire*, p. 42, notes 34-39.

hard to imagine this happening were the book to have taken great issue with the Government's Forward Policy.

Relating to the idea of grand strategy, Churchill drew two principal conclusions from his observations on the North-West Frontier, both illustrative of the consequential interplay between the political and military instruments of national power. Again focusing on the practice of the Forward Policy, "It has been unwise", Churchill began, "to adopt a policy which involves other complications with the Border tribes than are necessary for maintaining lines of advance into Afghanistan." His second conclusion flowed from the first: "It is unwise to develop a policy which gives the power of choosing opportunity and occasion to an enemy."<sup>64</sup> Churchill questioned the reasonableness of engaging the "tribesmen" on their own turf and terms. Viewed simply from military terms, and if neither time nor changing policies at home were problems, Churchill advised that the military commanders should force the "tribesmen" to assume the offensive by occupying their valleys and positioning the men and officers, at night, in deep trenches to limit the British losses to enemy fire. "At length the tribesmen," Churchill predicted, "infuriated...and perhaps rendered desperate by the approach of famine and winter, would make a tremendous attempt to storm the camp. With a strong entrenchment, a wire trip to break a rush, and modern rifles, they would be driven off with great slaughter, and once severely punished would probably beg for arms. If not, the process would be continued until they did so."<sup>65</sup> Churchill's prescription for future action, then, involved a fusion of the political and military instruments: "We should endeavor to secure the lines of advance into Afghanistan; to gradually expose the Frontier tribes, by the development of trade and a system of subsidies, to the softening, enervating influences of civilization; to restrict their supply of firearms; to build our forts few and strong; and to postpone all great military expeditions into the mountains until the Indian Budget shows a superfluous surplus."<sup>66</sup> Said simpler, and with no doubt of the instruments of modern warfare and strategy, Churchill concluded his book on the North-West Frontier by arguing that, "The frontier policy must be looked at from many standpoints, moral, political, military, and economic."<sup>67</sup>

In later campaigns Churchill recognized the interplay not only of the political and economic, but of the psychological, with the military instruments. No longer was the military alone the decisive factor in wartime engagements—and indeed, there remains a question of whether it ever had been. During the Tirah Campaign he published in the *Times* a letter

<sup>64</sup> WSC, "The Ethics of Frontier Policy", pp. 508-09.

<sup>65</sup> *MF*, pp. 295-96.

<sup>66</sup> WSC, "The Ethics of Frontier Policy", pp. 508-09. For more on Churchill's prescriptions, see *MF*, pp. 311-15.

<sup>67</sup> WSC to *DT*, dispatch dated 16 October 1897, as quoted in Woods, *Young Winston's Wars*, p. 107.

critical of the home press and populace for “a series of attacks of extraordinary vigour and virulence” which sought to undermine the soldiers, officers, and administrators in the theatres of war.<sup>68</sup> In 1898, in the Sudan, Churchill identified other crucial instruments which helped to form the overall concentration and direction of the national power: “The diplomatist said: ‘It is to forestall the French.’ The politician said: ‘It is to score over the Radicals.’ The ridiculous person said: ‘It is to restore the Khedive rule in the Soudan.’ But the man in the street—and there are many men in many streets—said: ‘It is to avenge General Gordon.’”<sup>69</sup>

The importance of public opinion and national psychology in war efforts was further illustrated to Churchill in South Africa. “A democratic Government cannot go to war unless the country is behind it”, he wrote from Capetown in November 1899.<sup>70</sup> The national upsurge of patriotism after the disastrous “Black Week” in December 1899 shifted to criticism and outrage after compounding losses at Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz on 24 January and 5–7 February 1900.<sup>71</sup> These sentiments were juxtaposed with national jubilation only a few weeks later when Bloemfontein was captured and the siege Mafeking lifted; later in the autumn of that same year, the Conservative government exploited the swelling tide of popular satisfaction and swelled their ranks through the khaki election. The Boer War helped Churchill solidify the opinion that future wars would not be fought in the same way as past wars, and that in the conflicts to come no nation could lean as heavily upon the merely military continuum as it had perhaps had done in the past. “A European war”, Churchill told the Commons on 13 May 1901, “cannot be anything but a cruel, heart-rending struggle, which, if we are ever to enjoy the bitter fruits of victory, must demand, perhaps for several years, the whole manhood of the nation, the entire suspension of peaceful industries, and the concentration to one end of every vital energy in the community.”<sup>72</sup>

During Churchill’s years as a soldier, and in the years that followed, war was becoming more demanding, more tyrannical. With nations and nationalism trending upward, under the umbrella of war more and more of the nation and the national was gathered. The trajectory of war was pointed toward totality. Despite that, and even given their new comrades of industry and technology, in the late Victorian era it was still men who remained a decisive factor, and despite ever-encompassing mobilization, soldiers still had to be put on the field. This was no

<sup>68</sup> WSC to *The Times* (London), letter dated 30 March 1898, as quoted in *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 903.

<sup>69</sup> WSC, “The Fashoda Incident”, *North American Review*, Vol. 167, No. 505 (Dec., 1898), p. 738. In *TRW*, too, Churchill recognized the growing importance of public opinion underpinning military efforts. *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 170, 252.

<sup>70</sup> WSC to *MP*, dispatch dated 1 November 1899, *TBW*, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 309; Stephen M. Miller, “In Support of the ‘Imperial Mission’? Volunteering for the South Africa War, 1899–1902”, *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (July, 2005), pp. 694–96.

<sup>72</sup> *Hansard*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 13 May 1901, Vol. 93, 1572.

new realization to Churchill, and though his opinion was not always steady, enlistment and conscription were not subjects he sought to avoid.

Given the importance, as seen in the previous chapter, that he placed on many years of practical field experience, it should come as little surprise that Churchill was critical of the short service system implemented as part of the Cardwell Reforms. In the decades prior to Churchill's own service the minimum enlistment period had been gradually reduced, from 21 years in 1847 (where it had been since the Napoleonic Wars), to 10 and then 12 years' long service split between service in the Regulars and service in the Reserves. Reserve soldiers trained for only a short period each year and could, in theory, be recalled only in times of national exigency. In practice, though, the Reserves were used for more than just a reserve for the Regular Army, or to "bring battalions up to war establishment and to provide replacements *after* the war had begun"; instead, it served as a training ground to a Regular Army which frequently depended upon it to fill its own ranks. To meet its quota of 20,000 men for the Egyptian Campaign of 1882, 10,800 Reservists—many young and undertrained—had to be called out. By 1892 it was "generally admitted that not a single home battalion was fit for active service without the substitution of at least 200 Reservists."<sup>73</sup>

Churchill was not unnoticing of or ambivalent toward this debate. Whilst on the North-West Frontier he touted the "many disadvantages" of the short service system. "Troops under it", he stated, "suffer from youth, want of training, and lack of regimental associations." The boys, "not old enough for the work", are sent not to "temperate climates" or "civilised countries", but to the distant frontier where they are "expected to compete on equal terms with Sikhs and Gurkhas of thirty, fully developed and in the prime of life. It is an unfair test." Any failure would come not from lack of spirit, but "because our soldiers are young, not yet grown strong."

The young subaltern recognized that the short service system which had offered Britain only a bag of mixed results worked better on the Continent for one principal reason: superior numbers. The European nations, with their enormous supplies of men, were able to use their army apparatuses to train up soldiers en masse before passing them on to the Reserves, where they would be kept until needed. "European nations deal with soldiers only in masses", Churchill wrote. "Great armies of men, not necessarily of a high standard of courage or training, but armed with deadly weapons, are directed against one another, under varying strategical conditions. Before they can rebound, thousands are slaughtered and a great battle has been won or lost. The average courage of the two nations may perhaps have been

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<sup>73</sup> Brian Bond, "The Effect of the Cardwell Reforms in Army Organization, 1874-1904", *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol. 105, No. 620 (1960), pp. 515, 517, 520.

decided. The essence of the continental system is its gigantic scale.” On the contrary, the British Army, without a huge supply of men, and required to operate not on the enormous continental extent but rather in smaller wars (“our soldiers are not required to operate in great masses, but often fight hand in hand”), had, by adopting the short service system, been saddled with “poor quality, but not the great quantity.” The system, argued Churchill, “increased our numbers a little, and decreased our standard a good deal.”<sup>74</sup>

Though conscription was “inseparable”, in Churchill’s estimation, to the success of the short service system in certain continental nations, he nevertheless stood opposed to compulsory service in Britain. “Many words will have to be spoken, many votes voted, and perhaps many blows struck”, he said whilst serving in India, “before the British people would submit to such abridgment of their liberties, or such a drag upon their commerce.” Such sacrifices would be called upon only “when the English Channel runs dry.”<sup>75</sup> His opposition to conscription carried into his early years in Parliament, where he spoke passionately against it—most notably in his attacks on Brodrick’s Army Scheme. In an early-1902 speech Churchill hoped that “his right honourable friend had finally and thoroughly abandoned the fatal and foolish theory of conscription”, and he noted that though Brodrick had, “in a very eloquent passage in his speech, said that conscript soldiers did not fight at Alma, Waterloo, or Delhi”, Churchill thought that he “might have said with equal force that it was not conscript soldiers who had fought the long weary war in South Africa so steadily and unflinchingly.” Churchill would have liked to “see the conscript soldiers who would do what the British soldiers had done in South Africa.”<sup>76</sup>

Churchill’s opposition to conscription eventually gave way to the realities of the First World War, and to his conviction that the conflict would not be decided until huge numbers of men had been consigned to the war. Even so, during the first years of the war Churchill wavered over the best way to secure those men. He started very early on as a compulsionist,<sup>77</sup> abandoned the idea in favour of voluntarism when enlistment numbers surged, and then by late-1915 started to align himself once again with conscription. Finally, having served in the field once more as an officer (this time as a Lieutenant-Colonel), Churchill returned from the Western Front trenches as a staunch supporter of conscription. His attitude shifted with his surroundings, reinforcing his perennial practicality. There were few subjects on which he

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<sup>74</sup> *MFF*, pp. 296–97.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>76</sup> *Churchill*, 2, p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> On 26 August 1914, immediately following the British retreat from Namur, Churchill argued for compulsory service in a Cabinet meeting—much to the annoyance of other senior members of government, who were in no mood to hear such a drastic proposal from a monger like Churchill. *Churchill*, 3, p. 57.

could not persuade himself to change to his mind if the situation warranted. Context and experience were important, as was expediency. That expediency was in service of both his personal<sup>78</sup> and professional welfare, but also of the larger causes to which he so often attached his energy and welfare. The expediencies were subject to reversals and shifts; the causes, most often, were not.

Churchill's changing stance on conscription during the First World War should not necessarily be used as evidence of any significant erosion of his childhood obstinacy that so often characterized him.<sup>79</sup> Even late in his life he still described himself as "an obstinate pig",<sup>80</sup> echoing Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker's confession to Charles Darwin in 1866.<sup>81</sup> A developing trait of Churchill, which began in his childhood, was that he was always more apt to change his mind if he could be convinced to do it himself. He was the one best suited for relaxing his own stubbornness; outside pressure or interference tended only to secure the keep and arm the defences around his own already-settled opinion. As in his early school years, once decided upon an opinion, however premature, the later-Churchill remained convinced of his rightness until he found enough reason to alter. He was not convinced about conscription; he, through the catalyst of experience, convinced himself.

As concerns the development of his military thought, Churchill's early opposition to conscription was founded upon less tactical and more metaphysical considerations. He did not, for example, write against compulsory service necessarily out of regard to its theoretical implications upon tactical or strategic advantages, but more from a biographical perspective: the effects of conscription upon the man, the British soldier, and his community and nation; the effects of forced service upon, as it were, the "biography" of the British Empire. Until he was forced—through experience—to come to terms with the inevitability of needing many, many more men in order to confront the threat posed to that Empire, Churchill was unable to reconcile what he saw as the awfulness of conscription with its military advantages. In order eventually to reconcile this one story—the spirit of the British citizenry—had to be trumped by another story—the very survival of Britain. His reason for acting and decision had to be couched in biography.

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<sup>78</sup> For example, by December 1915, and going into 1916, Asquith led an increasingly-marginalized faction of government which stood wary of full national conscription. Churchill foresaw this position as eventually unwinnable, and so in becoming an outspoken advocate of national service he allied himself with the opposition—namely Lloyd George—whom he hoped would split with Asquith and form a government of his own in which Churchill would be invited to serve in a Cabinet-level position. *Churchill*, 3, p. 622.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>80</sup> WSC to Eisenhower, 8 August 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Western Europe and Canada*, Vol. 6, Part 1 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office), p. 1052.

<sup>81</sup> Frederick Bukhardt and Sydney Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, Vol. 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 285.

Returning to grand strategy, it should not be forgotten that it utilizes the instruments of national power to secure national objectives not only in war, but also in peace.

“Furthermore, while the horizon of strategy is bounded by the war,” Liddell Hart wrote, “grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace. It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace.”<sup>82</sup> Certain policies, then, whether military, political, economic, or psychological, are employed in such a way as to accomplish war or peace or both, all under the auspices of grand strategy.

Churchill understood this, and it was something he learned early on. Writing in 1930, he asserted he had “always urged fighting wars and other contentions with might and main till overwhelming victory, and then offering the hand of friendship to the vanquished.” He continued: “Never indeed was it more apt than in South Africa. Wherever we departed from it, we suffered; wherever we followed it, we triumphed...I always get into trouble because so few people take this line.”<sup>83</sup> When later he was asked to devise an inscription for a French monument, he wrote, “In war, Resolution. In defeat, Defiance. In victor, Magnanimity. In peace, Goodwill.” Churchill’s made plain his reasoning: “Those who can win a war well can rarely make a good peace, and those who could make a good peace would never have won the war. It would perhaps be pressing the argument too far to suggest that I could do both.”<sup>84</sup>

While the war in South Africa was still being fought, Churchill looked ahead to the post-war settlement and appealed for that magnanimity:

A cry, growing into a clamouring, which I can perfectly understand, has arisen that stern retribution should be meted out to these guilty and miserable people...It is the spirit of revenge. It is wrong, first of all because it is morally wicked; and secondly because it is practically foolish. Revenge may be sweet, but it is also the most expensive...

While we continue to prosecute the war with tireless energy and remorselessly beat down all who resist—to the last man if necessary—we must also make it easy for the enemy to accept defeat. We must tempt as well as compel...

Beware of driving men to desperation. Even a cornered rat is dangerous. We desire a speedy peace and the last thing in the world we want is that this war should enter upon a guerilla phase.

“Do not act or speak”, Churchill continued, “so that it may be said ‘...They were brave in battle; but they were spiteful in victory.’”<sup>85</sup> These words, published in the *Natal Witness* in

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<sup>82</sup> Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, p. 322.

<sup>83</sup> *MEL*, p. 346.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>85</sup> WSC to *Natal Witness*, dispatch published 29 March 1900, as quoted in *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 1162-64.

March 1900, evoked a strong and disapproving reaction from the newspaper and South African whites. Responding to one critic, Churchill reinforced his published attitude: “Perhaps this is not the time to write of mercy and forgiveness. But you know perfectly well the spirit that I protested against. It disgusts me.”<sup>86</sup>

In characteristically Victorian fashion, Churchill also desired that the “hand of friendship” be extended to prisoners of war, and he was disgusted when either this could not be, or was not, practised. It was not a position from which he wavered, and one remembers the aversion to cruelty demonstrated from his very early schooldays when he had been bullied and when he developed, not uncharacteristically, a pity for the underdog.<sup>87</sup> “I wonder if people in England have any idea of the warfare that is being carried on here”, Churchill wrote, while attached to the Malakand Field Force, to his grandmother. “It is so different from all one has been led to expect—that I do not doubt there are many people who do not realize for instance that no quarter is every asked or given. The troops never spare a single man who falls into their hands—whether he be wounded or not...I wish I could come to the conclusion that all this barbarity—all these losses—all this expenditure—had resulted in a permanent settlement being obtained.”<sup>88</sup> On 16 September 1897 he was involved in a raid in the Mahmud Valley in which the British forces were driven back, sustaining heavy casualties. Though his report to the British press had somewhat masked the severity of the losses, he confided to his mother that the retirement had been an “awful rout in which the wounded were left to be cut up horribly by these wild beasts.”<sup>89</sup> But even faced with “tribesmen” who “torture the wounded and mutilate the dead”, he still counseled: “‘Never despise your enemy’ is an old lesson, but it has to be learnt afresh, year after year, by every nation that is warlike and brave.”<sup>90</sup>

An abiding respect for the enemy is an omnipresent theme in any study of Churchill’s military thinking. On the North-West Frontier he admitted the injustice of denying the “people of the Mohmand Valley the reputation for courage, tactical skill, and marksmanship which they have so well deserved...they are a brave and warlike race.”<sup>91</sup> After the Battle of Omdurman, widespread reports of the maltreatment of the Dervish wounded had made some British newspapers; despite its unpopularity Churchill weighed in, careful to make clear that the only way in which Kitchener bore responsibility was in his failing to republish an earlier

<sup>86</sup> WSC to Rae Collins, letter dated 13 April 1900, as quoted in *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1169.

<sup>87</sup> “Bravo Zola!” Churchill wrote in 1898, after following the Dreyfus Affair from the Sudan and learning that Colonel Henry’s confession of the forgery. “I am delighted to witness the complete debacle of that monstrous conspiracy.” WSC to LRC, letter dated 4 September 1898, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 974.

<sup>88</sup> WSC to the Duchess of Marlborough, letter dated 25 October 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 810.

<sup>89</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 19 September 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/57.

<sup>90</sup> *MFF*, p. 208.

<sup>91</sup> WSC to *DT*, dispatched dated 8 October 1897, as quoted in Woods, *Young Winston’s Wars*, p. 93.

order, given after the attack of the Mahmud's zeriba, that the injured should be spared. "The sentiment that the British soldier is incapable of brutality, is one which never fails to win the meed of popular applause", Churchill wrote, "but there are in fact a considerable proportion of cruel men in every army." It was this proportion, spurred on in Churchill's estimation by the "unmeasured terms in which the Dervishes had been described", and by the overwhelming sentiment of "avenging Gordon", that "had led them to believe that it was quite correct to regard their enemy as vermin—unfit to live. The result was that there were many wounded Dervishes killed",<sup>92</sup> though he was careful to blame the brutality on non-white troops.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, Churchill did go to some lengths to qualify his condemnation: to his mind death was justified for any enemy who still posed some danger, or whose injuries were inescapably fatal. But for those who lay down their arms, quarter should be extended; and given that after Omdurman it was not always so, and in the face of such a recent massacre, Churchill wrote that "the mind turns with disgust from the spectacle of unequal slaughter." For him, it was enough even to dim the brightness of victory, and he cautioned that "the individual soldier will carry from the field only a very transient satisfaction, and the 'glory of Omdurman' will seem to any who may five years hence read this book a very absurd expression."<sup>94</sup>

It is worth pointing out that the majority of the criticisms regarding the treatment of the wounded and the destruction of the Mahdi's tomb were removed in the new, condensed 1902 edition of *The River War*. Part of this is surprising as the first edition did not receive the scathing reviews that Churchill predicted. Prior to publication, Churchill submitted the passages on Kitchener to Lord Salisbury, to whom the volumes were dedicated, for comment, but received no instruction to alter them, implying that they did not stray beyond the pale of acceptable comment.<sup>95</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* and the *World*, among others, did suggest that Churchill's critiques were a blot on the book, or an indication that he assumed he could have waged the campaign better than Kitchener;<sup>96</sup> the *National Review* published the most blistering review, claiming that the book was "misleading as history and inaccurate in detail", and fell into the trap of "biased and fragmentary workmanship" which regarded the British troops with

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<sup>92</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 195-96. Churchill reiterated this sentiment at the end of the book: "...when an army in the field becomes imbued with the idea that the enemy are vermin who cumber the earth, instances of barbarity may very easily be the outcome." *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197. Later Churchill admitted to having witnessed British troops "spearing the wounded and leaning with their whole weight on their lances." Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events, 1888-1914, Part Two* (London: Martin Secker, 1932), p. 400, entry for 21 October 1912.

<sup>94</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 197.

<sup>95</sup> WSC to Lord Salisbury, letter dated 14 August 1899, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1042; Lord Salisbury to WSC, letter dated 17 August 1899, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1042.

<sup>96</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, pp. 57-58.

an air of partiality.<sup>97</sup> Many other commentators, though, did not remark on the first edition's denouncements, and at least one reviewer praised him for them. Churchill's exact reasons, then for excising the passages remains unknown. The decision could, in part, be ascribed to his own ambivalence: as has been pointed out, Churchill was not always able to satisfy both conscience and political expediency.<sup>98</sup> It would not be surprising, then, for an author with political aspirations to use the excuse of producing a truncated volume to leave out those passages which might jeopardize voters or the established political authorities.<sup>99</sup>

Part of Churchill's concern for the treatment of the wounded and prisoners of war arose from his own disposition, best demonstrated when he himself was captured and held a captive of the Boers. From the State Model Schools in Pretoria, where he arrived on 18 November 1899, he continued to write: "The position of a prisoner of war is painful and humiliating. A man tries his best to kill another, and finding that he cannot succeed asks his enemy for mercy...All military pride, all independence of spirit must be put aside", Churchill recommended. "Certain things—sufficient food and water and protection during good behaviour—the victor must supply or be a savage, but beyond these all else is favour. Favours must be accepted from those with whom we have a long and bitter quarrel, from those who feel fiercely that we seek to do them cruel injustice. The dog who has been whipped must be thankful for the bone that is flung to him."<sup>100</sup>

Even without any "legitimate grounds of complaint" against his treatment,<sup>101</sup> or the treatment of other British officers while prisoners of war, Churchill declared his days at Pretoria, "the most monotonous and among the most miserable of my life."<sup>102</sup> He later confided to J. B. Atkins of his feelings, and the absolute horror of imprisonment, of losing his freedom "like cattle", of—as was a constant theme throughout his childhood—having his life controlled by others.<sup>103</sup> A close friend later remembered often hearing Churchill "say that he hated every moment of his captivity more bitterly than he had ever hated any other period in his whole life, including even his wretched private school days."<sup>104</sup> His despair drove him to escape, which he did less than four weeks after his arrival. Three decades later his disgust over imprisonment was still palpable; when recounting his captivity in his autobiography, Churchill

<sup>97</sup> F. I. Maxse, "Inaccurate History", *National Review*, Vol. 35 (April, 1900), pp. 262, 272.

<sup>98</sup> Jablonsky, "Churchill's Initial Experience with the British Conduct of Small Wars", pp. 13-17.

<sup>99</sup> Best, *Churchill and War*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>100</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 24 November 1899, published 1 January 1900.

<sup>101</sup> In a note left for his captors after his escape, Churchill conceded: "I consider your treatment of prisoners is correct and humane, and that I see no grounds for complaint." WSC to MP, dispatch dated 3 December 1899, *TBW*, p. 78.

<sup>102</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 3 December 1899, *TBW*, p. 69.

<sup>103</sup> J. B. Atkins, *The Relief of Ladysmith*, p. 193.

<sup>104</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him*, p. 58.

entitled the relevant chapter “In Durance Vile”, and recounted how the experience had left a marked influence on his life even many years later: “Looking back on those days, I have always felt the keenest pity for prisoners and captives”, he wrote. “Therefore in later years, when I was Home Secretary and had all the prisons of England in my charge, I did my utmost consistent with public policy to introduce some sort of variety and indulgence into the life of their inmates.” He went on, and said that even though he loathed the idea of inflicting capital punishment, in those instances he was at least comforted, when faced with the prospect of imposing prolonged jail time, “that a death sentence was far more merciful than a life sentence.”<sup>105</sup>

Churchill’s time as a young subaltern on the front lines fitted into a context of a changing character for war. As such, he was placed in theatres and confronted with strategies and policies which challenged many preexisting notions which he might have carried with him from his very early years and his time at Sandhurst. His years on the frontier impressed shifts in attitudes and understandings all the more because of two factors: the varied environments of Cuba, the North-West Frontier, Sudan, and South Africa, and the real fact that each of these environments was the staging ground for a British Army that was itself attempting to come to grips with the demands of new enemies and frontiers which called into question existing orthodoxies. Finally, this nexus of change was oriented not only toward victory in the present conflict, but toward securing the advantage in future conflicts. This was true not only for the army, but also for Churchill as he reconciled war in the past, with war at the present, and also war in the future.

In that sense, as it relates to the strategy and policy of war, Churchill’s education was one immense exercise, guided by experience, in compare and contrast. In Cuba he first experienced warfare and was first fired upon, and while there he witnessed an indigenous population employing disruption and violence to affect relief, on ill-defined battlefields which easily blended mountains, fields, and towns, where the material prize of the colony’s agriculture meant that the destruction of economy would be utilized as an instrument of war-making. It was largely a guerilla conflict, and would have challenged from the outset many of Churchill’s ideas about warfare, even if this conflict was centred on an island far from—in both principle and practice—the historic battlefields of western Europe. The action on the North-West Frontier maintained aspects of that guerilla action, but traded the Cuban indigenes for warlike tribes dispersed, as they had been for thousands of years, amongst mountainous terrain almost impenetrable to a force more prepared for environments suitable for large-scale movements of men and machines. Kitchener’s expedition in the Sudan saw a general

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<sup>105</sup> *MF*, pp. 273-74.

continuation of the type of enemy facing the British (in Churchill's estimation, primitive and fanatical), but exchanged the peaks of the Mamund Valley for the sandy plains and *khors* of the Sudan, where mastering movement and transport and communications meant mastering rivers and rail lines. And finally South Africa, the culminating point for young Churchill's military service, presented a change of scenery once again: the banks and desert extending away from Nile had given away to the veldt punctuated with high hills, standing alone or side by side, and altogether intersected with rivers and streams presenting constant obstacles to movement and transport, and which rendered the surrounding terrain much less suited to infantry and artillery than to cavalry.

Each of these military events added to Churchill's intellectual capital; what he saw and learned from each theatre served as an ever-growing touchstone by which to evaluate and comment upon wars that followed. What is hard to deny is that Churchill thought seriously about these subjects—even more so than with tactics, as policy and strategy incorporated the instruments of grand strategy—namely politics, economics, and national psychology—that were to engross his attention and energy in the years that followed. His beginning understanding of these elements, and their relationship to war, helped form the underlying foundations upon which he would stage his later efforts as a twentieth-century civil leader of war.

As those future roles, taken up later in life, would prove, the policies and strategies of modern war are complex and labyrinthine. It is perhaps further testament to his understanding that their intricacies were not hidden to Churchill, even at an early age. Barely six weeks into his first major experience of war, Churchill wrote these prescient words:

When I consider the vast accumulations of diverse and often conflicting facts which can be assembled under each of these heads [moral, political, military, and economic], and reflect on the extraordinary volume of technical and specialised knowledge necessary for the proper appreciation, I feel that to take a comprehensive grasp of the whole question is beyond the mind and memory of man...[It is like] a picture of such great size that to see the whole it is necessary to stand so far away that the forms and colours are alike indistinguishable."<sup>106</sup>

As a young officer and correspondent, Churchill, then, was coming to terms with the complexities of a warfare whose character was changing even as he wrote. There were few constants—save, perhaps, but one, a universal of war which Churchill, at the age of twenty, stated plainly: “How it will end is impossible to say.”<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> WSC to DT, dispatch dated 16 October 1897, as quoted in Woods, *Young Winston's Wars*, p. 107.

<sup>107</sup> WSC to DG, dispatch dated 22 November 1895, CAC, BRDW I, Press 1.

## :: VII ::

## THE CONCEPT OF WAR

This thesis's earlier chapters attempted, in part, to demonstrate the imperial and Victorian influences upon young Churchill, and to establish, even as an adolescent, how those might have affected his thinking on war as a personal and human activity. In its examination of Churchill's concept of war, this chapter will build further upon those early foundations. It seeks to understand better how Churchill thought about war at the widest, and highest, levels; to elevate the eye of examination above the individual components; to approach war from such an altitude that the entire landscape is visible, and the individual distinctions blur into the wide panorama. Earlier chapters busied themselves with the nuts and bolts of war; this chapter focuses itself on war as a phenomenon, and Churchill's interactions with it as such.

The early implications of the truth of Churchill's own statement, that he was a child of the Victorian era, have been the subject of previous chapters. Along with these was the impact of things like Blenheim Palace, the romance of imperialism, history as a stage upon which Churchill must be an actor, the necessity of action, a belief in the inexorable march of progress, and a framework of optimism. One would be hard-pressed to over emphasize the importance of this early infrastructure, especially when considered in light of the very real fact that Churchill did not abandon many early childhood preconceptions. As with the vine and trellis, Churchill, as he matured, "grew up" with those ideas, rising in height, but still very much wedded to them. One object of this chapter, then, is to demonstrate how the frontier wars helped to reinforce his perennial ideas of war.

Looking back on Churchill, one friend observed that, "He was at once tough and tender, a romantic and a realist."<sup>1</sup> The tension recognized in this statement is crucial for understanding Churchill's conception of war. On the one hand, he brought to the battlefield a clear conception of what war should be; on the other hand, the realities of war differed very much from his conceptions, and at once he was challenged to maintain his early beliefs while not turning a blind eye to the inescapable actualities of violent conflict. Churchill was not, of course, alone in carrying the untested ideals of war headfirst into the cold steel of bullets and bayonets; and yet, the tension observed by his friend is an omnipresent theme in understanding the evolution of his early conceptions of war. Not only, then, did the frontier wars and the conflicts that followed reinforce some of his conceptions of war, but they offered a challenge to those conceptions as well. Some of Churchill's early conceptions about the character of war were forced to adapt to the realities of his experiences as an officer on the colonial frontiers.

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him*, p. 24.

Finally, as ever it should be remembered that this thesis is essentially biographical in both subject and construction. Its subject is a young man, not an abstract collection of theories and ideas. Because of this, it is not an over-glorification to say that the core of what follows (and what precedes) is very much alive, as it was alive, as it were, in a man; the concepts outlined are, in that way, organic, and are strictly opposed neither to change or contradiction. Because of this, the picture is nothing if not complex. In his correspondences “are many sentiments unexpected from a young soldier who had felt the exhilaration of battle and victory.”<sup>2</sup> In what follows, these sentiments shall be arranged and addressed firstly by Churchill’s conceptions of what invigorates the need for war, and secondly by Churchill’s conceptions of the nature and character of war itself, including such components and byproducts as heroism and barbarism.

It is not necessary here to repeat the Victorian and imperial influences upon young Churchill that are covered in Chapter Two. Rather, what follows seeks to incorporate ideas of race and national character, as they are evidenced in Churchill’s thinking, and the impact they might have on the character of war—civilizational and otherwise.

In December 1954 Churchill welcomed Mr. Blundell, a visitor from East Africa, to 10 Downing Street.<sup>3</sup> There commenced a conversation in which Churchill began by recounting his first visit to Kenya in 1907, and continued with a discussion in which he passionately conveyed, among other things, his views on race. The crux of these views was relatively timeless; it was “old-fashioned” and included a belief that black people were not “as capable or as efficient as white people”, but also the conviction that purported subordinate races should be treated humanely, and should also not, where possible, be denied the chance of elevating their status, provided they achieved a cultural benchmark. “If I meet a black man and he’s a civilized educated fellow”, Churchill said, “I have no feelings about him at all.”<sup>4</sup> And, as previously discussed, militarily Churchill found worthy and admirable characteristics in many of the non-white races he encountered. In 1921, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, Churchill proclaimed that “there should be no barrier of race, colour or creed which should prevent any man from reaching any station if he is fitted for it”; however, he quickly cautioned that “such a principle has to be very carefully and gradually applied because intense

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, *In Search of Churchill* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> This episode is recounted by Richard Toye in *Churchill’s Empire*, pp. ix-xviii.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Blundell, *A Love Affair with the Sun: A Memoir of Seventy Years in Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1994), pp. 108-10; Michael Blundell, *So Rough a Wind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 183-85. In addition to Blundell’s account, perennially helpful has been Toye’s *Churchill’s Empire* as an invaluable guide to the structure and comment of this section as well as others.

local feelings are excited, and there is no doubt that extraordinary social stresses arise when populations are intimately mingled.”<sup>5</sup>

After Harrow, Churchill proceeded to Sandhurst where there were certainly tangible manifestations of an imperial influence.<sup>6</sup> There Churchill and his fellow cadets longed for wars between white peoples and between civilized nations, both of which they were convinced had come to an end. “The British Army had never fired on white troops since the Crimea,” Churchill lamented, before he expressed some hope: “Luckily, however, there were still savages and barbarous peoples...Some of these might, if they were well-disposed, ‘put up a show’ some day.”<sup>7</sup> He was not above using racial slurs,<sup>8</sup> but in general he maintained the principle that he was prepared to treat others as equal so long as they were civilized—this included a Pushtu officer friend who happened to be good at billiards, about whom he relayed to his mother that “he is a nice fellow” whom “everyone likes.”<sup>9</sup> Also during this time he was a frequenter of the music hall, where songs like “It’s the English-Speaking Race Against the World” were not atypical,<sup>10</sup> and whose continuation was deemed by him important enough for him famously to defend the Empire Theatre against closure by the women of the London County Council.<sup>11</sup>

In preparation for India, Churchill’s first official posting, he later recorded having read George Aberigh-Mackay’s *Twenty-One Days in India*, a collection of papers originally written for *Vanity Fair*.<sup>12</sup> The book is a collection of satirical chapters, each describing various Indian “types” ranging from “The Villager”, who “has no ambition...is without the pale of intelligence...[and] dreams his low life”, to “The Bengali Baboo”, soulless, incapable of laughter, afflicted with an “aberration for speech” and overall “a subject for tears.”<sup>13</sup> Once on the subcontinent, Churchill certainly was not immune to the widespread racial attitudes he encountered; in some ways, they mirrored his early reading of Henty, Kipling, and Haggard. “When you learn to think of a race as inferior beings it is difficult to get rid of that way of

<sup>5</sup> “Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions, and India, Held in June, July, and August, 1921”, Cmd. 1474 (London: H. M. S. O., 1921), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> For example, refer to the plaques which adorned the walls in the Royal Memorial Chapel, as discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>7</sup> *MEL*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, i, p. 257.

<sup>9</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 19 October 1895, CAC, CHAR 28/21/73.

<sup>10</sup> Two lines of this song popular song read: “When we go to meet the foe, / It’s the English-speaking race against the world.” Penny Summerfield, “Patriotism and Empire: Music-Hall Entertainment, 1870–1914”, in MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 29–30.

<sup>11</sup> *Churchill*, 1, pp. 232–35.

<sup>12</sup> *MEL*, p. 94; Toye, *Churchill’s Empire*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>13</sup> George Aberigh-Mackay, *Twenty-One Days in India, or the Tour of Sir Ali Baba*, K. C. B. (London: W. H. Allen, 1882), pp. 127–35, 49–55.

thinking”, he later confided. “When I was a subaltern the Indian did not seem to me equal to the white man.”<sup>14</sup> Later in the 1940s it was observed that, “Winston thinks only of the colour of their skin; it is when he talks of India or China that you remember he is a Victorian.”<sup>15</sup> To his mother he advised from Bangalore that, “Nor ought we to wish for anything that could impede the expulsion from Europe of the filthy Oriental”,<sup>16</sup> and wrote thankfully when he was granted reprieve, by way of a formal dinner, from “an abominable country”, “few nice people”, and “nearly 3 months of...barbarism”, without which he might relapse into a purely animal state of existence.”<sup>17</sup>

William Winwood Reade’s *Martyrdom of Man* was equally, if not more, important in the shaping of Churchill’s worldview. First read in Bangalore in early 1897 as what he described as one of his first textbooks in his project of self-education, Churchill twice wrote back to his mother of his “fascination” with it, admitting that it had lured him away from the eighth volume of Gibbon.<sup>18</sup> “This was Colonel Brabazon’s great book...he read it many times over”, Churchill wrote, before noting that his commanding officer regarded it “as sort of a Bible.”<sup>19</sup> Reade was also admired by H. G. Wells, another author respected by Churchill.<sup>20</sup> Though Reade is often attributed for instilling a distrust in religion, if not outright atheism, in Churchill, what is more important here is how he influenced Churchill’s ideas of empire and the progression of human civilization as they related to war.

Reade’s work is meant to pay particular focus on Africa, but before doing so he admitted of having to set the stage by giving a sort of universal history of the world, and he ended the first half of the book, a condensed consideration of thousands of years of history, by concluding that it was war that had been the “chief agent of civilisation” before the fall of the Roman Empire.<sup>21</sup> It is no wonder that Reade had corresponded with Darwin, for in his work there are more than a few hints of Social Darwinism, where what was true on the individual biological level could, and should, be extended to whole races and nations. Religion was enveloped in this as well; as a whole the more barbaric would be stamped out by the more civilized, progress was propelled by inescapable suffering. This necessary trauma, encouraged by agents such as war and civilization, is what Reade meant by “the martyrdom of man”.

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<sup>14</sup> Moran, *The Struggle for Survival*, p. 370.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 6 April 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/31.

<sup>17</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 12 November 1896, CAC, CHAR 28/22/34.

<sup>18</sup> MEL, p. 129; WSC to LRC, letter dated 14 January 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/10; WSC to LRC, letter dated 31 March 1897, CAC, CHAR 28/23/29.

<sup>19</sup> MEL, p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> David Smith, *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal: A Biography* (London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 14–15.

<sup>21</sup> Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (London: Watts & Co., 1934), p. 129.

Reade argued that the rights of man for the uncivilized populations, to which it was the obligation of the civilized to engender, would never be obtained “except by means of European conquest.” He continued: “The conquest of Asia by European Powers is therefore in reality emancipation... Thus war will, for long years yet to come, be required to prepare the way for freedom and progress in the East.”<sup>22</sup> It is not hard to see where Reade might have reinforced for Churchill a belief in the parallel trajectories of empire and war and progress. “It seems that Churchill’s cheerful vision of war as the engine of social improvement—which he maintained into the 1940s—was heavily influenced by Reade”, wrote Toye.<sup>23</sup> In 1899, when addressing the Midland Conservative Club, he lamented the Hague peace conference, and complained that, “It was only one more instance of the reaction against the spirit of competition.” “Destroy the rivalry of men and nations,” he told his audience, “and all that made for the betterment and progress of the world would be destroyed.” He went on to argue that the “clear blue ocean of national passion” was to be valued over the “stagnant pool of international agreement.”<sup>24</sup> In this light, Britain’s work was unfinished. Near the end of his speech before the Bath Primrose League, Churchill scorned those who suggested that the British Empire had reached the height of its glory, and would now begin its decline, as had “Babylon, Carthage, and Rome” done in the past. “Do not believe those croakers”, said Churchill, but rather show “that the vigour and vitality of our race is unimpaired”, and that Britain would continue her “mission of bearing peace, civilisation and good government to the uttermost ends of the earth.”<sup>25</sup>

On the very day that Churchill made this speech, 26 July 1897, there was a revolt of the Pathan “tribesmen” in the Swat Valley on the North-West Frontier. Two days later the news had reached Britain, and the editors of the *Times* published commentary which would have not been unlike the thoughts of young Churchill. “It is absolutely necessary to show the tribesmen without delay”, read the editorial, “that we can bring an overwhelming force to act against them even in the fastnesses of their own mountains, and to teach them that treachery and insurrection will be sharply and swiftly punished.” It was, the editorial continued, a lesson which Britain had been obliged to teach primitive peoples in many parts of the world, and in doing so, to act as agents in their transformation towards “loyal soldiers, peaceful husbandmen,

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<sup>22</sup> Reade, *Martyrdom of Man*, p. 405.

<sup>23</sup> Toye, *Churchill’s Empire*, pp. 29–30.

<sup>24</sup> “Midland Conservative Club: Mr Churchill’s Presidential Address”, *Birmingham Daily Post* (Birmingham, England), 2 June 1899, as quoted in Richard Toye, “Winston Churchill—Conservative or Liberal Imperialist?”, in Jeremy Black (ed.), *The Tory World: Deep History and the Tory Theme in British Foreign Policy, 1679–2014* (London: Ashgate, 2015), p. 231.

<sup>25</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 774; Martin Gilbert, *Churchill’s Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 8.

and industrious traders.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Churchill wrote that one evening soon after his arrival in India, he and his comrades “certainly felt as we dropped off to sleep the keenest realization of the great work which England was doing in India and of her high mission to rule these primitive but agreeable races for their welfare and our own.”<sup>27</sup> Conquest and punishment were both missionary undertakings.

As the previous chapter discussed, Churchill, who had joined Sir Bindon Blood’s punitive expedition to quell the Pathan uprising, maintained a predictably negative outlook towards the “tribesmen”. Fueled, as he argued, by Islamic fanaticism, the “vermin” were bent on the primitive instincts of treachery and killing.<sup>28</sup> In the same way that, though, the experience of war had a reflective impact upon Churchill with regards to his attitude toward indigenes or policies like the Forward Policy, so too did it for the agency of war in the mission of civilization. And though confined to his private correspondence (like most things, in his early writings, which would have caused a stir or perhaps landed him in disfavour with those who might later lend a helping hand in personal advancement), there occasionally crept in an air of caution and ambivalence. In May 1898 Churchill wrote to his mother of how his reluctance to engage in a full-blown conflict with Russia over the North-West Frontier would “be unpopular in a jingo age.” He found the Indian race naturally subservient,<sup>29</sup> but still pointed to the dangers of excess, and especially excess of sentiment. “Militarism degenerates in brutality”, he wrote, before continuing: “Loyalty promotes tyranny and sycophancy. Humanitarianism becomes maudlin and ridiculous. Patriotism shades into cant. Imperialism sinks to Jingoism.”<sup>30</sup>

In the Sudan, Churchill once again demonstrated an ambivalence regarding the indigenous Sudanese, which he regarded as a “lower type” than in India.<sup>31</sup> The month prior to Omdurman, he wrote to his mother of his “keen aboriginal desire to kill several of these odious dervishes & drive the rest of the pestiferous breed to Orcus and I anticipate enjoying the exercise vy much. I should like to begin tomorrow.”<sup>32</sup> This he was given the chance to do, and to witness, on a far larger scale than he would have imagined. At the same time, though, he warned against excess besmirching, likening the tendency to a boa constrictor who besmears “the body of his victim with a foul slime before he devours it”; in the same way, he argued, many people in Britain were prone to “cajole themselves into the belief that their

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<sup>26</sup> “The Sudden Rising of the Pathans of the Swat”, *The Times* (London, England), 28 July 1897, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *MEL*, p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> *MFF*, pp. 4-11, 243-44.

<sup>29</sup> *MEL*, p. 117.

<sup>30</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 938.

<sup>31</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2., p. 400.

<sup>32</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 10 August 1898, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 963.

enemy are utterly and helplessly vile.” This practice, wrote Churchill, “may be very comforting to philanthropic persons at home; but when an army in the field becomes imbued with the idea that the enemy are vermin who cumber the earth, instances of barbarity may very easily be the outcome.”<sup>33</sup>

The motivation of revenge at times qualified as an aspect of the “foul slime”, but here too Churchill wavered ambivalently. Immediately following Omdurman, Churchill wrote delightedly of the satisfaction the British public could now enjoy, as they could now “tell the stonemason to bring his hammer and chisel and cut on the pedestal of Gordon’s statue in Trafalgar Square the significant, the sinister, yet the not unsatisfactory word, ‘Avenged.’”<sup>34</sup> Barely more than a week later, though, Churchill wrote to the same readers of the *Morning Post* that the entire Sudan “quarrel was embittered by the element of revenge. It is not an incentive to which General Gordon would often have appealed.”<sup>35</sup> And similarly, in his later history of the campaign, Churchill warned that where “revenge may be good inspiration for soldiers in action”, it was not “a dignified emotion for a great people to display.”<sup>36</sup> It is further proof of Churchill’s humanity: one would anticipate, in the excited aftermath of victory, such a charismatic character to feed his reading audience what they would want to hear; it is proof of his youth that such sentiments (and others) were not immediately tempered, and in the interim their existed an ambivalence not wholly unexpected.

After the conflict, Churchill granted the same possibility that he would later grant to Mr. Blundell some five decades later, as detailed above—namely, that given the right conditions, supposed lower races could evolve both morally and culturally to a plain of higher civilization. This Churchill regarded as a possibility for the future of Sudan. After the “waste of war” was repaired—or, to rephrase in the parlance of Reade, the “the martyrdom of man”—and the population once again increased, Churchill believed that economics, or “the more numerous wants of civilisation”, would encourage the indigenes to once again begin working. With this labour, and the increase in wealth and improvement in the welfare that comes with it, so long as the evolution was not interrupted, Churchill believed the indigenes’ “type and intelligence will advance; their ideals will become less degraded; their morality more pure; their scale of life—its hopes and happiness—larger.”<sup>37</sup> Only eight days after Omdurman, when the plains were still scattered with thousands of the rotting dead—“bodies...swollen to almost

<sup>33</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 394.

<sup>34</sup> Woods, *Young Winston’s Wars*, pp. 175-76.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>36</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 393.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 398-99. On this point, Churchill confessed that should any reader enquire as to why the indigenes “should labour so that they may improve; why they should not remain contented, if degraded”, that he did not have an answer; but, were this to happen, Churchill believed that there would have then been “made out a very good case for universal suicide.” *Ibid.*

gigantic proportions”—Churchill found occasion for hope and envisioned, along with Reade, of a time when war, having been the dreadful escort, would be rendered anachronistic and noncore. “The terrible machinery of scientific war had done its work”, Churchill wrote, and the scattering of the Dervish host “only anticipates that of the victors...when a mighty system of irrigation has changed the desolate plain of Omdurman to a fertile garden, and the mud hovels of the town have given place to the houses, the schools and the theatres of a great metropolis, that the husbandman, turning up a skull amid the luxuriant crop, will sapiently remark: ‘There was foretime a battle here.’” This, thought Churchill, was how “the event will be remembered.”<sup>38</sup>

However, indigenous races could not achieve full civilizational potential without guides; the martyrdom needed help. Here Churchill advised sending gifted British administrators, when the natural course of evolution and civilization had reached the correct point, to “devote themselves to the natives” by settling disputes, developing industries, and establishing a system law and order. And though it was true, Churchill confessed, that “a proportion of officers in British regiments firmly adhere to what is known as ‘the damned nigger’ theory”, he believed this would quickly dissipate once they realized that a portion of their own honor was bound up in the “behavior or condition of the natives under their control.” They then would be civilizational missionaries, their motives “high and holy” as they tended to “the people thus desperately defeated—to repair their injuries, to lift their hopes, to point the better way.”<sup>39</sup> This was not an argument for racial equality, but rather that the evolution of nature and the humanitarian efforts of man might be able, in some cases, to raise the level of education, culture, and civilization among predisposed indigenous races.

There is relatively little commentary in Churchill’s South African correspondence on the role of race in the Boer War. One particular occasion, then, where it was indeed the central point, bears further consideration. After the armored train incident, a captured Churchill conversed with H. G. Spaarwater, one of the guards transporting the prisoners to Pretoria. During the journey, among other things discussed was the way black people were treated in the Boer Republics, in contrast to the British territories.

In the conversation, the Boer guard and his companion ridiculed the idea of black Africans being treated in any way equal to the whites to such a degree that Churchill admitted that the true and original root of Dutch aversion to British rule “was not Slagter’s Nek, nor Broomplaat, nor the Jameson raid, but “the abiding fear and hatred of a government that seeks to place the native on a level with the white man.” Spaarwater accused the British of being less

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<sup>38</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 10 September 1898, published 6 October 1898; Woods, *Young Winston’s Wars*, p. 182.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 400-02.

free than the Boers, and when Churchill asked what that meant, he was answered: “Well, is it right that a dirty Kaffir should walk on the pavement—without a pass, too? That’s what they do in your British Colonies.” The guard continued: “Brother! Equal! Ugh! Free! Not a bit. We know how to treat Kaffirs.”<sup>40</sup>

Reading Churchill’s account of the conversation, it would be easy to come to the conclusion that Churchill, with regards to race, was “more informed and relatively enlightened.”<sup>41</sup> When his South African dispatches were collected and published in book form in 1900, some reviewers highlighted the attention Churchill paid to “the native question.” For example, the *Spectator* encouraged readers to look at the book itself, so “very good and sound is Mr. Winston Churchill’s further moralising on this point.”<sup>42</sup> Violet Bonham Carter, writing later, regarded Churchill’s description of the incident as proof that “even in those days the racial issue was the main bone of contention between the Boers and [the British].”<sup>43</sup>

However, as Toye again argued, if one is actually clear about what Churchill said to his captors, the most convincing conclusion drawn is that his position was not all that radically enlightened.<sup>44</sup> He did care about the welfare of the South African blacks, and a few months later, he argued that the British forces had “reaped a rich reward in this dark season for having consistently pursued a kindly and humane policy toward the Bantu races; and the Boers have paid a heavy penalty for their cruelty and harshness.”<sup>45</sup> Three weeks later, he published an article in the *Natal Witness* in which he encouraged the colonists to “not act or speak so that it may be said... ‘It is true, the Natal colonists have fought well but they were drunk with racial animosity,’”<sup>46</sup> and in response to an angry reader he did not “want to associate [himself] with any—natural if you like—ebullition of racial animosity.”<sup>47</sup> But, as his commentary both on the North-West Frontier and in the Sudan suggest, combined with his earlier comment, made in South Africa, of the “indolent Kaffir”, Churchill was far from an advocate of full racial equality.<sup>48</sup> In the conversation with Spaarwater, Churchill claimed that only “in the Boer’s mind” was British government “associated... with violent social revolution.” In fact, Churchill’s position did not differ in huge measure from that of the British government. On the eve of the war, Joseph Chamberlain condemned before the Commons the treatment of the

<sup>40</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 30 November 1899, *TBW*, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Roland Quinault, “Churchill and Black Africa”, *History Today*, Vol. 55 (June, 2005), p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> “Mr. Winston Churchill’s Letters on the War”, *Spectator*, Vol. 84, No. 3752 (26 May 1900), p. 743.

<sup>43</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him*, p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> Toye, *Churchill’s Empire*, pp. 68–70.

<sup>45</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 10 March 1900, *TBW*, p. 219.

<sup>46</sup> WSC to *Natal Witness*, dispatch published 29 March 1900, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 1163–64.

<sup>47</sup> WSC to Rae Collins, letter dated 13 April 1900, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1169.

<sup>48</sup> WSC to MP, dispatch dated 6 November 1899, *TBW*, p. 19.

indigenes as “disgraceful”, “brutal”, and “unworthy of a civilized Power.”<sup>49</sup> And yet, Article 8 of the June 1902 treaty that brought the conflict to a close left the question of the enfranchisement of the indigenous people up to the Boers to decide under the self-government promised under British rule.<sup>50</sup> Though both Churchill and the British Government denounced the treatment of the non-white Africans, clearly the war was not fought in the name of establishing equality. As Churchill would say a few years later in his first ministerial speech, “We have got in some cases to put up with those things.”<sup>51</sup>

Though he might have objected to the Boers’ racial convictions, Churchill still reserved respect for his enemy. Whilst imprisoned, he called them the “most humane people where white men were concerned”, and “the most good-hearted enemy” he had ever fought against on the four continents where he had seen active service.<sup>52</sup> Captain Haldane wrote how the Boers in Pretoria, with whom Churchill had engaged in conversation and argument, “somewhat shook his faith, and certainly gained his sympathy.”<sup>53</sup> He wrote that the British military punch must be “stunning; afterwards we may be generous”,<sup>54</sup> harkening back again to the contention that the imperial victors should assume the role of custodians toward their primitive, vanquished enemy. Writing to Bourke Cockran from the States Schools Prison, Churchill sympathized with the Boers’ “love of freedom and pride of race”, but conferred higher regard to the British policy which involved a “bigger principle”, and which animated it not to “shrink from any sacrifice however great, however prolonged, to remove the causes of unrest from South Africa.”<sup>55</sup> After the fighting concluded, Churchill made a case for magnanimity toward the conquered, as addressed in the previous chapter. “For the sake of our manhood” Britain must fight, Churchill argued, but once concluded the Dutch and British races must live “side by side under the supremacy of Britain.”<sup>56</sup>

And yet, upon his return to Britain, Churchill further demonstrated his ambivalence. One is left with the impression of a young soul in conflict—again the ever-present romance versus reality, a tension so often present in Churchill as it related to war and its associates. On the one hand, he was carried forth on strong currents of Victorian imperialism, at least as defined as the duty, in some cases, of Britain to cultivate, militarily if necessary, civilization in

<sup>49</sup> *Hansard*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 19 October 1899, Vol. 77, 271.

<sup>50</sup> “Peace Treaty of Vereeniging”, 3 June 1902, <<http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/peace-treaty-vereeniging-transcript>>, accessed 30 November 2014.

<sup>51</sup> *Hansard*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 22 February 1906, Vol. 152, 571.

<sup>52</sup> *MEL*, p. 272.

<sup>53</sup> Aylmer Haldane, *How We Escaped from Pretoria* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1901), p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> WSC, “Our Account with the Boers”, CAC, CHAR 1/19/19-20; Toye, *Churchill’s Empire*, p. 71.

<sup>55</sup> WSC to Bourke Cockran, letter dated 30 November 1899, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, pp. 1082-83.

<sup>56</sup> *MEL*, p. 316; WSC to *Natal Witness*, dispatch published 29 March 1900, as quoted in *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1164.

those populations it considered primitive and barbarian. On the other hand those currents were anything but tranquil, and as they cascaded downstream they often were transformed into rapids as they came into brutal and unavoidable contact with the inescapable solidity of frontier warfare. The picture is anything but simple, but should not be regarded as unusual given that the subject is a maturing man evolving via various readings, relationships, and experiences. It is made all the more complex given Churchill's station in life: as a rapidly recognizable public figure, he had to juggle the knotty intricacies of public versus private life and learn political prudence. As the Boer War progressed, especially into phases more appropriately termed "guerilla", Churchill was shocked by the "shocking evils" that came with it—concentration camps, farm burnings, and disease that claimed the lives of thousands of women and children.<sup>57</sup> In his maiden speech in the Commons, though, he stated that "compared with other wars, especially those in which a civil population took part, this war in South Africa has been on the whole carried on with unusual humanity and generosity." He went on to famously proclaim that, "If I were a Boer fighting in the field—and if I were a Boer I hope I should be fighting in the field—I would not allow myself to be taken in by any message of sympathy, not even if it were signed by a hundred hon. Members."<sup>58</sup> But less than a month later, Churchill wrote to Alfred Milner of "this miserable war, unfortunate and ill-omened in its beginning, inglorious in its course, cruel and hideous in its conclusion." The latest atrocities he "hated...with their barbarous features—questionable even according to the bloody precedents of 1870, certainly most horrible." At the same time, though, Churchill was still "absolutely determined" to subjugate the Dutch, even if he could not bear "the idea of their being economically and socially ruined too."<sup>59</sup>

The often and inherent ambivalence in Churchill extended also to his perceptions of science and technology, and particularly to their influence on the character of war.<sup>60</sup> In this area he was, as in others, not un-Victorian. His birth in 1874 placed him in an era pregnant with technological innovation, optimism for the future, and a particular faith in science and technology as the guardians of that optimism.<sup>61</sup> There was a linkage between technology and civilizational progress in which Churchill, in many cases, held and expressed a strong

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<sup>57</sup> *MEL*, p. 369.

<sup>58</sup> *Hansard*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 18 February 1901, Vol. 89, 407–ff.

<sup>59</sup> WSC to Alfred Milner, letter dated 17 March 1901, as quoted in Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front*, pp. 17–18; Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, pp. 82–83.

<sup>60</sup> Once again, the meticulous research of David Jablonsky has proved invaluable in providing an intellectual skeleton for what follows on Churchill and technology, and in identifying several fundamental questions without which this chapter would be significantly poorer. For a fuller discussion of Churchill and technology, stretching far beyond the scope of this thesis, see David Jablonsky, "Churchill and Technology", in John H. Maurer (ed.), *Churchill and Strategic Dilemmas before the World Wars: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 121–158.

<sup>61</sup> Janet and Peter Phillips, *Victorians at Home and Away* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 181.

confidence. Even his high regard and defence of tradition sometimes gave way to his promotion of scientific progress. Writing just after the Sudan War of 1898, Churchill took issue with the height of the Aswan Dam, which had been limited in response to archeologists who were concerned that higher reservoir levels would flood the Temple of Philae. “Profitless chippers of stone, rummagers in the dust heaps of the past”, Churchill branded the protesters, before concluding: “The State must struggle and the people starve, in order that professors may exult and tourists find some place on which to scratch their names.”<sup>62</sup> Later, when looking back upon his youth, he recalled the “balmy days of Queen Victoria”, wherein “science had opened the limitless treasure-house of nature. Door after door had been unlocked. One dim mysterious gallery after another had been lighted up, explored, made free for all: and every gallery entered gave access to at least two more. Every morning when the world woke up, some new machinery had started running. Every night while the world had supper, it was running still. It ran on while all men slept.”<sup>63</sup> Not surprisingly, Churchill borrowed Gibbon’s pronouncement on an earlier era and labeled the Victorian era to be “the British Antonine Age.”<sup>64</sup>

In his youth, it will be remembered, Churchill’s schooling included only the standard doses of science, and forgoing further education in the discipline it cannot be strictly argued that Churchill was ever a scientist proper. Even so, it did not at all preclude him from an interest in the subject, and in this way he was more correctly identified as a “popular scientist.”<sup>65</sup> Lord Randolph’s residence, in Connaught Place, was the first in London to be fitted with electric lighting. At Harrow, Churchill enjoyed and remembered lectures on natural history, and in Bangalore he started a butterfly collection.<sup>66</sup> Preparing for his Sandhurst entrance examination, he chose Chemistry as one of his voluntary subjects, which he called one of the two “Kings” he held in his hand (the other being English).<sup>67</sup> Moreover, and more importantly, his lack of formal scientific training did not disqualify him from some of the proclivities of the professional scientist. “His attitude has always been the antithesis of that of the mid-twentieth-century scientist, the specialist who finds out more and more about less and less”, wrote Professor A. M. Low many years later. Even without formal training or qualifications, Churchill “never ceased to be a scientist in the more vital sense of observing, experimenting, and deducing”, Low continued, before he pointed out that when possible

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<sup>62</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 18-19.

<sup>63</sup> *WSC*, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, Vol. 1, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>64</sup> *WSC*, *Great Contemporaries* (London: Odhams Press, 1948), p. 69.

<sup>65</sup> A. M. Lowe, “Churchill and Science”, in Charles Eade (ed.), *Churchill, By His Contemporaries* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p. 442.

<sup>66</sup> *MEL*, pp. 42, 55-56.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Churchill used his positions of authority to give the professional scientist “the encouragement and the means to carry on his work for the benefit of the nation.”<sup>68</sup>

However, as this thesis has argued, in the years immediately following Harrow, Churchill was very much concentrated on the science of war. During those years, and in the decades that followed, he would, in varying ways and capacities, act as the soldier-scientist. He played a significant role in the revolutions of military science, and witnessed, and in some cases oversaw, among other things, the revolution in cavalry from the horse and lance and sabre to the armoured vehicle and machine gun. On the battlefield, he witnessed the evolution from smoke and little fire power to the addition of a new dimension of warfare, where a single bomb dropped from the sky could kill in one explosion more soldiers than were previously killed by all the explosives in a single battle, or even a war.<sup>69</sup> Violet Bonham Carter would later write that, as First Lord of the Admiralty, “He was enthralled by the technology of naval warfare, and his sense of its results in human terms was for the time being in abeyance.”<sup>70</sup> In 1921 Churchill would meet Frederick Lindemann, professor of experimental philosophy at Oxford. Despite their differences in habits and characteristics, Churchill took a fond liking to “The Prof”, and particularly to his ability to answer questions in “lucid, homely terms”, so much so that, from 1925 till the outbreak of the Second World War, he was “by far the most regular visitor [to Chartwell] outside the family.”<sup>71</sup> Lindemann was Churchill’s constant tutor in his pursuits to understand the intersections and implications of technology and warfare, so that “of all the politicians and statesmen involved in the Second World War”, the prime minister “had by far the widest and soundest briefings on matters of science.”<sup>72</sup> When he introduced Churchill in a public lecture, Lindemann spoke highly of his friend’s scientific mind: “I have always looked upon Mr. W.S.C. as a scientist who has missed his vocation”, who possessed “above all the underlying conviction that the world is not just a jumble of events but there must be some higher unity, that facts fit together... Where the ordinary brain is content to add each new experience to the scrap-heap, he insists on fitting it into the structure of the cantilever jutting out from the abyss of ignorance.”<sup>73</sup>

Even in his early years, technology played a part in Churchill’s war experiences and helped shape his attitudes on the character of war. Each of these experiences, as they progressed, illustrated a different effect of technology on war, and gave rise to new

<sup>68</sup> Low, “Churchill and Science”, pp. 442-44.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444. See also R. V. Jones, “Churchill and Science”, in Robert Blake and William Roger Louis (eds.), *Churchill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 427-41.

<sup>70</sup> Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him*, p. 262.

<sup>71</sup> Mary Soames, *Clementine Churchill* (London: Cassell, 1979), pp. 228-30.

<sup>72</sup> Jones, “Churchill and Science”, pp. 431-32.

<sup>73</sup> R. V. Jones, “Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill. 1874-1965”, *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, Vol. 12 (Nov. 1966), p. 69.

developments in Churchill's thinking about the phenomenon of war. It could also be argued that the actions on the North-West Frontier, in the Sudan, and in South Africa, in turn, placed an added burden on the relationship between the Victorian Churchill's positive notion of science and its impact on the character of war. Technology might have been one hand-maiden of civilisation, but on the battlefield she often paved the way for heightened destruction. Churchill had a natural affinity for science and technology as partners to advanced civilisation, partners which, at the same time, threatened to undermine the "civilisation" of the battlefield. Therein lay Churchill's ambivalence.

Both on the North-West Frontier and in the Sudan, Churchill was an avid supporter of new technology and its usefulness in confronting an enemy armed, for the most part, very primitively—so much so that in one instance the Pathans "actually threw stones."<sup>74</sup> Facing what Churchill called the "tidal wave of fanaticism", Churchill argued for such technological and tactical innovations as firearms for cavalry officers, more advanced rifles for infantry, and the fixing of a pennant to the lance so as to keep any impaled enemy from wriggling down toward the soldier who had just made the thrust.<sup>75</sup> As this thesis has also explored, Churchill defended the Dum-Dum bullet, despite criticisms that it violated international laws condemning exploding bullets; instead, he argued that it was "a wonderful and from the technical point of view a beautiful machine."<sup>76</sup> "Bullets are primarily intended to kill",<sup>77</sup> Churchill offered as justification, echoing his sentiments of warfare in the Sudan, where "any means"<sup>78</sup> were warranted when facing "unflinching, utterly irresistible",<sup>79</sup> Dervish warriors. Such technological pragmatism was, for Churchill, justified by the "paramount and sacred law of self-preservation."<sup>80</sup> In Bangalore, while writing his account of the Sudan campaign, Churchill witnessed four months of plague claim "no fewer than 6,500 persons", and his pragmatism extended so far as to imagine disease harnessed by the technology as a weapon of war: "The machinery of modern war is still defective. Some day science may call the mighty *bacillus* into the disputes of nations."<sup>81</sup>

And yet, Churchill was unable to laud British technological superiority without, at the same time, staring squarely at its destructive capabilities. Surveying the post-battle desert sands of Omdurman, he was taken aback by the sheer scale of the slaughter rendered by the British weaponry. Tending to the wounded, he confessed that a "nameless man with a revolver and a

<sup>74</sup> WSC to LRC. Letter dated 19 September 1897, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 792.

<sup>75</sup> *MFF*, p. 293.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 339.

<sup>79</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 1, p. 430.

<sup>80</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 338.

<sup>81</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 1, p. 142, note 15; Jablonsky, "Churchill and Technology", pp. 122-23.

big bag of cartridges would have seemed merciful” when confronted with “sights and smells...so terrible...that the brain failed to realize the suffering and agony they proclaimed.”<sup>82</sup> In private correspondence to his grandmother, he even confessed the “shattering effects” of the Dum-Dum bullet, which were “simply appalling.”<sup>83</sup> Writing to the public as a war journalist, Churchill concluded that Omdurman was “mainly the mechanized scattering of death by well-armed men on the defensive upon badly armed men in the open”, and that Kitchener’s campaign on the whole as “a tale which from beginning to end has been a record of slaughter.”<sup>84</sup> “There was nothing *dulce et decorum* about the Dervish dead” who fell before “the terrible machinery of scientific war”, Churchill wrote; “all was filthy corruption.”<sup>85</sup> Technology with all of its advantages, did not enhance the romance of war, but in fact harshly battled against it. In the aftermath of the Sudan expedition the disillusionment was fierce for Churchill, who remained “anxious and worried during the night” as he “speculated on the shoddiness of war. You cannot gild it. The raw comes through.”<sup>86</sup> In a summarizing passage in *The River War*, Churchill again lamented the abstract consequences of modern, scientific warfare:

The mind turns with disgust from the spectacle of unequal slaughter. The name of the battle, blazoned on the colours preserved for future generations the memory of a successful expedition. Regiments may exult in the part they played. Military experts may draw instruction from the surprising demonstration of the power of modern weapons. But the individual soldier will carry from the field only a very transient satisfaction, and the “glory of Omdurman” will seem to any who may, five years hence, read this book a very absurd expression.<sup>87</sup>

It was an ambivalence that could not remain unresolved. On 19 October 1899 the editor of a pacifist magazine, *Concord*, wrote to the *Westminster Gazette* and denounced the massacre at Omdurman, and cited “Lieutenant Churchill’s account of how the enemy was ‘destroyed, not conquered by machinery’, and of the terrible scenes on the battlefield afterwards.” In his response, Churchill argued that “the ethics of human destruction...must necessarily be somewhat obscure”, and proceeded to take issue with the contention that the extent of slaughter was caused by any unnecessary bloodthirstiness of the British and Egyptian forces. “Had ‘The Editor of *Concord*’ been present in the *zeriba* on the morning of September 2,” wrote Churchill, “and had he seen 40,000 savages advancing with hostile intent, he would

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<sup>82</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 223-24; Frederick Woods (ed.), *Artillery of Words* (London: Leo Cooper: 1992), p. 146.

<sup>83</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 810.

<sup>84</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, pp. 375, 322; Frederick Woods, *Artillery of Words*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>85</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 221; Woods, *Young Winston’s Wars*, p. 145; Woods, *Artillery of Words*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>86</sup> WSC to LRC, letter dated 4 September 1898, *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 974.

<sup>87</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 197.

not have protested against the soldiers opening fire...Once fire was opened...there was a hail of bullets...and, in the interests of the Peace Preservation Society, it was necessary that the hail of bullets should also continue.” Churchill concluded: “[I]t is unfair as well as irrational to attribute cruelty and bloodthirstiness to soldiers who, placed in a position where they have to defend their lives, use the weapons with which they are armed with skill, judgment, and effect.”<sup>88</sup>

Churchill rationalized the use of the new technology and mechanized slaughter, despite its detrimental effects on the romance of war, in part by placing it in the context of the larger civilizational aims of the Empire. In earlier times, it was not possible for the civilized to develop weaponry very much more advanced than the uncivilized; the civilized had little or no inherent technological advantage. But now, in his time, Churchill regarded technology on the battlefield as the “strong and implacable arm of civilisation...to chastise his merciless enemies.”<sup>89</sup> In centuries past, the British might have met their enemies on the banks of the Nile as technological equals, and were it not for the “strong arms” of technological superiority, they could have been swept from region and, together with the “militant and proselytizing faith” of Islam, even from the continent.<sup>90</sup>

If, to his mind, Churchill’s first two wars were demonstrations of the technological and civilized subduing the primitive and uncivilized, the Boer War was something different altogether. As previous chapters explored, the Boers were far from primitive, and on many occasions they operated technology and weaponry either equal to or better than that of their British enemy. Machine guns tore into British ranks, while well-positioned and expertly-manned artillery placed shells with terrifying accuracy and effect, often from hidden vantages undiscovered by cavalry reconnaissance. Entrenchments, barbed wire, and other obstructions further bolstered Boer resistance. The Black Week triad of devastating defeats “were not inspiring memories” and left an indelible mark on Churchill, as did the aftermath of Spion Kop, which for him offered “scenes...among the strangest and most terrible I have ever witnessed.”<sup>91</sup> A few months later, Churchill almost rejoiced in the return to “normality” provided on 14 June 1900 when, at Diamond Hill, the British employed a traditional cavalry charge, “a fine, gallant manoeuvre, executed with a spring and an elasticity wonderful and admirable.”<sup>92</sup> “Battles now a-days are fought mainly with firearms”, Churchill wrote when confronted with the unstoppable tide of technology on the battlefield, “but no troops,

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<sup>88</sup> *Churchill*, 1, p. 423-24; Jablonsky, “Churchill and Science”, p. 124.

<sup>89</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 38. See also Kirk Emmert, *Winston S. Churchill on Empire* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1989), p. 30.

<sup>90</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 2, p. 250.

<sup>91</sup> *TBW*, p. 416; *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 1147.

<sup>92</sup> *TBW*, p. 394.

however brave, however well directed, can enjoy the full advantage of their successes if they exclude the possibilities of cold steel and are not prepared to maintain what they have won, if necessary with their fists.” Furthermore, technology possessed the power to rob an army of its moral strength, a characteristic which Churchill insisted resided more strongly in those who welcomed “the closest personal encounter”, rather than those who merely killed their “foes at a distance.” “Rifles can inflict the loss,” Churchill maintained, “but victory depends...on the bayonets.”<sup>93</sup>

This thesis has argued that Churchill’s life spanned several decades which ushered in significant changes in the character of war. Not least among these was the relationship between technology and war. Very early warfare involved opponents similarly armed. Many of the Victorian small wars involved combatants unequally armed, with at least the technological advantage going the people considered, at least by Churchill, to be more civilized. In Churchill’s experience, by the time of the war in South Africa, and certainly beyond, science and technology had advanced at such a pace, and had been dispersed at such a breadth, that even those peoples less advanced could mount, through sophisticated weaponry, a not insubstantial offence or defence. It was by no means an insignificant change, and for Churchill it threatened the very concept and character of war.

Scientific progress in war threatened Churchill’s concept of war in at least three ways. First, as already alluded to, it distorted the relationship between war and civilisation, and endangered the linkage between the victorious and the civilized. In previous eras, Churchill thought the cataclysm of war would naturally bring, in the opposing parties, the highest virtues to the front. War served in part like a churn, whereby the agitation and conflict would necessarily encourage those possessed of the more noble, civilized character to rise to the top. Without the advantages of inherent technological superiority, ancient warfare depended in part on the intangible virtues to decide the victor. War was a training ground, a forge, for the civilized and for civilisation. These ideas about war very naturally fitted in with Churchill’s early conceptions of war, and neither did they did not contradict the edifices of past wars by which he was very often surrounded as a child, both at Blenheim, and in his reading, and beyond, as was explored particularly in the early chapters of this thesis. These concepts of war lent to Churchill’s perception of war as a crucible for heroism, expressed either in the individual or in a particular people. In 1924 Churchill wrote an article which clarified the direction of his thinking. In it, he placed war squarely within the rubric of social Darwinism, and stated that in previous times “superior martial virtues—physical strength, courage, skill,

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110; Jablonsky, “Churchill and Science”, p. 124.

discipline—were required to secure such a supremacy.” As such, “in the hard evolution of mankind the best and fittest stocks came to the fore.”<sup>94</sup>

Technology endangered that natural catharsis. No longer did the basic equality of opposing technologies ensure the necessity of greater virtue to secure victory in war. “There is no reason why a base, degenerate, immoral race should not make an enemy far above them in quality, the prostrate subject of their caprice or tyranny”, wrote Churchill, “simply because they happened to be possessed at a given moment of some new death-dealing or terror-working process and were ruthless in its employment.”<sup>95</sup> Given the possibilities of new technology, Churchill believed that the continuance of free society was no longer secured “by their natural qualities, but by their dodges”, as their “superior virtue and valour may fall an easy prey to the latest diabolical trick.”<sup>96</sup>

Given the story of his youth, at least part of this thesis has argued that Churchill’s education, relationships, and readings, together with his social and familial contexts, helped engender in him a notion of war that was romantic and perhaps suited more for the stage than the battlefield. It was on stage that, in the best tales, the righteous protagonist clearly shined; it was atop the tall column at Blenheim that stood Churchill’s ancestor, the victorious Duke; it was astride his camel that T. E. Lawrence led Arab rebels to fight against Ottoman rule. Churchill’s interest gravitated towards those stories where in some wrenching struggle civilisation won out. He would try his hand at those stories, most notably with his *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, but also, it could be argued, with his earlier war journalism and his histories of the two world wars. Technology changed his concept of war, and in doing so threatened to change the plot, beginning first with what he witnessed at Omdurman, and continuing more strongly in his experiences in South Africa, where a wayward colony was able to substantially hold its own, using the advantages of technology, against the much larger—and, for Churchill, more civilized—British forces.

Secondly, technology extended the scale of warfare. Parallel with the discussion in the previous chapter, the trajectory of war’s changing character made it possible, and even likely, for it to occupy not just armies and war councils, but entire populations and economies. Though fought beyond the shores of Britain, Churchill’s war experiences made evident to him the expanding scope of war, conflicts which would soon demand, he predicted in 1901, “the whole manhood of the nation.”<sup>97</sup> Aided by technology war became, Churchill argued, “a collective enterprise...Many improvements in the apparatus of slaughter were devised...The

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<sup>94</sup> WSC, “Shall We All Commit Suicide?”, *Nash's Pall Mall*, Vol. 73, No. 377 (September 1924), p. 80.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Hansard*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 13 May 1901, Vol. 93, 1572.

organization of mankind into great States and Empires and the rise of nations to full collective consciousness enabled enterprises of slaughter to be planned and executed upon a scale and with a perseverance never before imagined.” He continued: “Science unfolded her treasures and her secrets to the separate demands of men...[and] made it possible to divert for considerable periods the energies of whole peoples to the task of Devastation.”<sup>98</sup>

The scale of warfare had extended faster than the capacity for restraint. New technologies had made possible devastation both greater and more permanent than had ever before been dreamt of; what was not possible was now possible; technology outpaced civilisation, and especially the civilized virtues; checks were no match for the capabilities. At the end of the First World War, Churchill bemoaned the state of things, the relationship between technology and war and civilisation: “When all was over, Torture and Cannibalism were the only two expedients that the civilized, scientific, Christian states had been able to deny themselves; and these were of doubtful utility.”<sup>99</sup> Understandably, Churchill realized this reality more easily after the cataclysm of the Great War, but even in his early years, and on the heels of the Boer War, his conception of technology and the scale of war had already begun to shift. “Now, when mighty populations are impelled against each other, each individual severally embittered and inflamed”, he forecasted at the turn of the century about the character of future war, “when the resources of science and civilization sweep away everything that might mitigate their fury, a European war can only end in the ruin of the vanquished and the scarcely less fatal dislocation and exhaustion of the conquerors.”<sup>100</sup>

Due in part to the technology and the scale of future wars, components Churchill foresaw only increasing in both scope and effect, he was able to argue in as early as 1901 that “The wars of peoples will be more terrible than those of kings.”<sup>101</sup> Churchill’s concept of war had changed. “Death stands at attention, obedient, expectant, ready to serve, ready to shear away the people en masse”, Churchill wrote, before he went on: “ready, if called on, to pulverize, without hope of repair, what is left of civilization.”<sup>102</sup> Of Omdurman, Churchill wrote of a war “full of fascinating thrills. It was not like the Great War. Nobody expected to be killed...to the great mass of those who took part in the little wars of Britain in those vanished light-hearted days, this was only a sporting element in a splendid game.” In his

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<sup>98</sup> TAA, pp. 207-08.

<sup>99</sup> WSC, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, Vol. 1, pp. 2-3.

<sup>100</sup> *Hansard*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 13 May 1901, Vol. 93, 1572; Jablonsky, “Churchill and Technology”, pp. 126-27.

<sup>101</sup> *Hansard*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 13 May 1901, Vol. 93, 1572. Churchill’s pronouncement was similar to that of Marshal Foch: “The wars of kings were at an end; the wars of the peoples were beginning.” Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1977), p. 31.

<sup>102</sup> WSC, “Mankind is Confronted by One Supreme Task”, *News of the World* (14 November 1937), CAC, CHAR 8/568.

words, war would cease to be splendid, cease to be a sporting game. Soon soldiers were fated for wars “there the hazards were reversed, where death was the general expectation and severe wounds were counted as lucky escapes, where whole brigades were shorn away under the steel flail of artillery and machine-guns, where the survivors of one tornado knew they would certainly be consumed in the next or the next after that.”<sup>103</sup> The very character of war had been transformed from what it once was; for Churchill it was less noble, and more base. “The reader will observe how low the art of war had sunk”, Churchill would later write. “It represents little but the massing of gigantic agencies for the slaughter of men by machinery. It is reduced to a business like the stockyards of Chicago.”<sup>104</sup> Death invoked by war, recognized Churchill, awaited “only the word of command...from a frail, bewildered being, long his victim, now—for one occasion only—his master.”<sup>105</sup>

Churchill’s concession that war had ceased to be “a splendid element in a sporting game”<sup>106</sup> is but another way that the changes in the art of war wrought havoc upon Churchill’s early conceptions of war. War as a sporting game was a subject attended to in Chapter Two, and here it is helpful to be reminded of Churchill’s early preoccupations with toy soldiers and war games. Did the various (and oftentimes homemade) versions of *kriegspiel* that Churchill played as a young boy effect on the future soldier? Did games and toy soldiers help shape or reinforce a particular view of war? At least one study has shown that “men who fought frequently in childhood are more favourable to war than those who did not”, and that “people are favourable to war in proportion to the amount of military education and military service they have had.”<sup>107</sup> There are many examples, too, of soldiers who had, because of childhood preoccupations, school contests, or other like similar cultural influences, come to regard war as a game or sport. J. F. C. Fuller wrote that as a young subaltern he had been “brought up to believe that war was a sport, and that the height of soldiering was to be a sportsman”, and that “by fighting in a sporting way” he “endowed...war with a chivalrous atmosphere... We never doubted that sportsmanship was *the* essence of soldier-ship.”<sup>108</sup> Charles Carrington, a subaltern writing from the western front in 1916, said that “fighting dream battles with visionary foes...had been a favourite game since I had played at ‘fighting the Boers’ in the nursery...I was no more afraid than if it were a game...This was as good fun as playing soldiers in the

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<sup>103</sup> MEL, p. 195.

<sup>104</sup> TAA, p. 129.

<sup>105</sup> WSC, “Mankind is Confronted by One Supreme Task”.

<sup>106</sup> MEL, p. 195.

<sup>107</sup> Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965), p. 277, note 15.

<sup>108</sup> J. F. C. Fuller, *The Last of the Gentlemen’s Wars* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), pp. 6–7.

garden at home.”<sup>109</sup> General Lord Horne wrote that during the First World War the soul of the British nation “abhorred...anything unsportsmanlike.”<sup>110</sup>

Churchill’s interest in war games and toy soldiers never waned. In September 1913, as First Lord of the Admiralty, he sent a letter undertaking to send the “War Game papers”, which he thought would “form the subject of a useful tactical exercise.”<sup>111</sup> One month later he asked the Naval Secretary, Admiralty, to telegraph to the Naval War College asking “for the full Blue situation down to to-night of the Naval War Game which is being played there.”<sup>112</sup> In October 1934, a gentleman wrote to Churchill from Paris and thanked him for supplying the address of the shop which sold “the lead soldiers.”<sup>113</sup>

Churchill also regarded war, at least in part, as a great—if not cruel—game in which he was determined to excel. “I shall do my best to play a good game”, Churchill wrote to Lady Randolph whilst on the train to the North-West Frontier.<sup>114</sup> One month later, and still largely un-confronted with the harsher realities of war, he wrote to her again: “I mean to play this game out and if I lose it is obvious that I never should have won any other. The unpleasant contingency is of course a wound which would leave permanent effects and would while leaving me life—deprive me of all that makes life worth living. But all games have forfeits. Fortunately the odds are good.”<sup>115</sup> But the game would soon turn grim. Before leaving Omdurman, Churchill visited the new British cemetery where his other comrades who had fallen in battle were buried. “Such is the melancholy end of brave men who fall in war”, Churchill told his readers.<sup>116</sup> He then wept over the graveyard, with its “protecting crosses which the living raised as a last tribute to those who had paid the bill for all the fun and glory of the game.”<sup>117</sup> For Churchill, Lord Moran recorded, war was “a game for gentlemen, which had to be played according to the rules...In [Churchill’s] hands it was still a game for people of quality.”<sup>118</sup> In 1916, before setting off for the front lines, and having experienced first-hand the degradation of the South African War, then Lieutenant-Colonel Churchill still felt strong enough about the concept to deliver a homily in which he maintained that, “War is a game that is played with a smile.”<sup>119</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Charles Edmonds, *A Subaltern’s War* (London: Peter Davies, 1929), p. 204, pp. 63, 70-71, 73.

<sup>110</sup> Major H. Hesketh-Prichard, *Sniping in France* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1920), p. i.

<sup>111</sup> CAC, CHAR 13/22B/228-229.

<sup>112</sup> CAC, CHAR 13/6B/387.

<sup>113</sup> CAC, CHAR 1/256/41.

<sup>114</sup> *Churchill*, CV, 1, ii, p. 781.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 785.

<sup>116</sup> *TRW*, Vol. 1, pp. 440-41.

<sup>117</sup> Manchester, *The Last Lion*, p. 280; D’Este, *Warlord*, p. 114.

<sup>118</sup> Moran, *Churchill*, p. 173.

<sup>119</sup> Soames, *Clementine Churchill*, p. 162.

Thirdly, the introduction of advancing technology and the expanding scope and destruction had, as part of war's changing character, a depersonalizing effect. The artists and masters of past wars, so highly regarded by Churchill in his youth (and beyond), had been dethroned by his "frail, bewildered being." Churchill's pine—"Fancy being nineteen in 1793 with more than twenty years of war against Napoleon in front of one!"—considered in Chapter Three is well remembered here, as is his lament over that bygone era.<sup>120</sup> "No longer will Hannibal and Caesar, Turenne and Marlborough, Frederick and Napoleon, sit their horses on the battlefield and by their words and gestures direct and dominate between dawn and dusk the course of a supreme event", he wrote.<sup>121</sup> Supersession was unstoppable. Writing later, Churchill mourned the disappearance of the "lion-hearted warrior", replaced by "Generals...found on the day of battle at their desks in their offices fifty or sixty miles from the front", like the "manager of a stock-market", dealing not with shares but with the "lives of scores of thousands of men...fighting a battle in command of armies ten times as large and as a hundred times as powerful as any that Napoleon led." This man, removed from the front lines, depersonalized from the glory of war just as his men themselves are depersonalized, like animals in the stockyard—this man, said Churchill, "is not the hero."<sup>122</sup> It was a change in the character of war that began, for Churchill, during his early years as a soldier, when he experienced it firsthand. And it was a change that was to grow only more profound in the years that followed, and one which he found deeply disturbing, and which he rued and fought against. "Winston waxed very eloquent on the subject of the old world & the new, taking up arms in defence of the former", Frances Stevenson noted in her 17 January 1920 diary entry.<sup>123</sup> In his history of the First World War, Churchill looked back to the start of the South African War as the beginning, in some respects, of this new character of war. "The scale on which events have shaped themselves, has dwarfed the episodes of the Victorian Era", he wrote. "Its small wars between nations, its earnest disputes about superficial issues, the high, keen intellectualism of its personages, the sober frugal, narrow limitations of their action, belong to a vanished period." He continued: "The smooth river with its eddies and ripples along which we then sailed, seems inconceivably remote from the cataract down which we have been hurled and the rapids in whose turbulence we are now struggling."<sup>124</sup> And yet, even given his acknowledgement of the South African War as the beginning of a deterioration in the character of war, as a testament to how far things would, in Churchill's estimation, deteriorate

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<sup>120</sup> *MEL*, p. 58.

<sup>121</sup> *TAA*, p. 222.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222-23.

<sup>123</sup> A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 196.

<sup>124</sup> *WSC, The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, Vol. 1, pp. 14-15.

from his Victorian preferences, he was able in 1940 to refer to the Boer War as “the last enjoyable war.”<sup>125</sup>

Ambivalence is a constant theme in any discussion of early Churchill’s conceptions of war. None of his understandings of race, national character, science, technology, or civilization remained immune to some aspect of indecision which was found, not unusually, in the judgments of a young soldier striving to come to terms with such a phenomenon as war and his role in it. This was especially the case when not only was Churchill undergoing a process of change and maturation, but so was the character of war. Both processes were only beginning. Like two eddies moving downstream, constantly churning and changing and bashing into one another, so too would Churchill and war be constant companions—varying in capacities, but always in reactive tension. “It was great fun galloping about”, Churchill confessed to Lord Moran, many years later, of his time in South Africa; “That was before war degenerated.”<sup>126</sup> In many ways, young Churchill was still equivocating; in some ways, especially in light of his life-long youthful tendencies,<sup>127</sup> it was a trait out of which he would be want to grow. With regards to war, reality often stood as the enemy of romance; his conceptions were often head-butted by the conflict, the combat, and the clash. His early years were but the start of his deep disturbance at “the collapse of settled values and ancient institutions.” In an election speech in 1922, he spoke of “what a disappointment the Twentieth Century has been”, and continued to expatiate sorrowfully:

How terrible & how melancholy  
 is a long series of disastrous events  
 wh have darkened its first 20 years.  
 We have seen in ev country a dissolution,  
 a weakening of those bonds,  
 a challenge to those principles  
 a decay of faith  
 an abridgement of hope  
 on wh structure & ultimate existence  
 of civilized society depends.  
 We have seen in ev part of the globe  
 one gt country after another  
 wh had erected an orderly, a peaceful  
 a prosperous structure of civilized society,  
 relapsing in hideous succession  
 into bankruptcy, barbarism or anarchy...  
 And only intense, concerted & prolonged efforts  
 among all nations

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<sup>125</sup> Colville also noted that Churchill’s “thirst for talking military strategy is unquenchable.” *Churchill*, 6, p. 800.

<sup>126</sup> Moran, *Churchill*, p. 236.

<sup>127</sup> See Chapter One.

can avert further & perhaps even greater calamities.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Churchill*, 4, pp. 914-15.

:: VIII ::

CONCLUSION

It should not be forgotten that much of Churchill's writing was intended for a reading public; it was an irrepressible talent but it was also his employment, and in some of the most important ways what he wrote had to be purchased by—and find purchase among—a paying audience. Customer satisfaction was not his least important motivation for writing. And because it was his craft, had he not become a soldier he no doubt would have applied his talents in other ways and on other subjects, just as the war poets would most probably have not ceased being poets had they never experienced war. Churchill was manipulating his experiences of war for his purpose; however—and this must be stressed—this admittance does not at all undercut the validity and importance of his writing in establishing a better understanding of his early military thought. Both realities can be simultaneously true; neither should be forgotten.

Churchill's early years were oriented, by intention, by necessity, and in some ways by chance, toward war. From an early age he intended, as did his father, to enter the army. Once commissioned, he very purposefully shaped, via his own efforts and the efforts of others on his behalf, a trajectory that would place him more often than not at the centre, rather than the periphery, of military action. In many ways he needed this placement, whether to satiate his own desires or to provide the vivid fodder which could demand the highest price from the printers. There was also the element of chance, beginning with his unexpected birth at Blenheim where the vestiges of war and generalship that surrounded him at his entrance into the world left their indelible mark.

Yet to reduce an understanding of Churchill's early years to intention, necessity, and chance is to dehumanize the subject. Men, and certainly young men, do not think merely in terms of these categories, and at the risk of venturing into the unhelpfully abstract this thesis has sought to reinvigorate Churchill the man with the psychology that, albeit ever-evolving in relation to his experiences and relationships, was naturally inclined toward a love of war. In doing so, it sought to demonstrate not only a love of war, but a love of understanding war, and a love of understanding war in ways that were thoughtful, penetrative, and though not always right at least interactive with the arguments and contexts of professional war theorists, tacticians, and strategists.

It was during Churchill's early years that the foundations for his military intellectual development were set, foundations for both his interests and his conceptions. In many biographical treatments it might be unwise to place too much emphasis on the early years, and

though the caution is well acknowledged here it is in the many ways Churchill never outgrew them that those early experiences and presuppositions warrant so much scrutiny. Churchill's pre-Sandhurst years featured several prominent hallmarks of his character that would later gain serious foothold. Stubbornness, unwillingness to be taught, personal courage and, most notably, the romanticism through which he saw most things historical and martial—these characteristics helped form and inform the foundation of his later military intellectual development, and the mental posture with which he approached even the more technical aspects of war as a practising soldier, politician, minister, and military leader.

It was at Sandhurst that Churchill coupled his imagination and his juvenile, uninformed thoughts about war with the real training and practice of war. With regards to his early military intellectual development, his years at Sandhurst were the most formative of Churchill's pre-commission years, and the most maturational with respect to the transition from his thinking about war to his practice of war. Sandhurst was the laboratory where—however neophytic—theory met practice, the forge of mere interest into vocation. The Royal Military College set the stage for Churchill as soldier, and was the setting for his growing presuppositions about war, heavily informed as they were by his own thinking and the programme of Victorian cavalry training.

The obdurateness, restlessness, romance, and ambition Churchill brought with him to Sandhurst were, in many ways, further entrenched during his years there. They underwent slight evolution, to be sure, but on the whole they were rendered more pronounced, if not deceptively softened by his learning to employ them to his greatest tactical advantage. These traits, combined with the implications of his birth into aristocratic Victorian society and his innate inquisitiveness into anything new which captured his interest, served to imbue the psychological crux that informed Churchill's early military thought. That thought was on a trajectory of preparation for active service and for the larger consideration of war. By the time of his commissioning, he was reading Hamley, Mayne, and Kraft. He was volunteering for courses not obliged by the normal curricula regimen. He was fitting into his boyhood notions of the romance of the battlefield the real occupation of service on horseback; life as a cavalryman and his early ideas of war were converging, not diverging, and their marriage, not yet strained by the realities of frontier warfare, found a strong advocate in the architecture, traditions, and routines of the Royal Military College.

Churchill began his soldiering as a cavalryman, and he left Sandhurst keen on his work and anxious to put it to use in the field. As a perennial man of action he was eager not only to begin fulfilling a role in reality which theretofore had only been imagined, but also to use his recent commission as a gateway to action, as a catapult to the possible fame which could result

from distinction on the battlefield. He was a young man out to prove himself, and to use what skills and connections he might have to accelerate his own renown and reputation. This was the general context of motivation for Churchill's service on the North-West Frontier, in the Sudan, and in South Africa.

But there was more to the story. Even whilst accepting his hurry towards self-aggrandizement, and his admitted goal to reach the Commons sooner rather than later, Churchill maintained a deep and authentic interest in war. With the occasional exception of politics, no other subject commanded so much of his attention in his early years. The British Army formed the vast majority of his tangible surroundings in the final years of the nineteenth century. His war journalism during those years was mostly a product of financial necessity, but the content of his communications, both public and private, was not solely driven by popular appeal. The substance was informed not only by what would sell, but also by his interest, and here his boyhood penchant to investigate and understand those subjects which captured his interest clearly shown. Here Churchill illustrated that he thought deeply about certain aspects of war; he invested himself in studying military subjects beyond the pale of the cavalryman; he grappled with both the technical and fundamental aspects of the art of war in ways that demonstrated a comprehension of the important questions, both as he saw them and as they existed in the context of contemporary military debates, and which resulted in a more considerable military intellectual capital than might have, quite easily, otherwise been.

As a cavalryman Churchill interacted, in the first instance, with Late-Victorian cavalry doctrine and debate. He paid particular attention to the strategies and tactics surrounding the use of cavalry, both in the Victorian setting of frontier and small wars, and in leading up to the First World War. As a cavalryman Churchill spent much of his time thinking and writing about the mounted arm; he not only recognized common conceptions of his day, but demonstrated critical military thinking by offering insight about mobility on the battlefield and the problems created by new weapons technology. In the same way, albeit to a lesser extent given his principal arm, Churchill engaged with tactical debates surrounding the infantry and the artillery. Whilst in the field he sought out opportunities to witness those arms in action, and bolstered his understanding by soliciting wisdom and guidance from those more acquainted with their history and usage. Within each of the arms he considered such tactical questions as offence, defence, and rearguard action, ammunition, reconnaissance, equipment, terrain and environment. To the army as a whole he offered analysis on education and training, discipline, intelligence, signaling, supply, and transport. In many ways, his questions, elucidations, and commentary did not wholly differ from that of recognized military theorists like Charles Callwell.

In his letters, war journalism, and subsequent published histories, Churchill addressed other areas, each of an expanding scope of influence and conceptualization. His military intellectual development widened to encompass matters of war as they related to British imperial and foreign policy. He discussed issues like frontier wars, forward policy, punitive warfare, and the role of alliances, regular versus irregular warfare, conscription, and economics. As he spent longer in or with the armed forces, he considered and developed his understanding of military strategy as it fitted into overall grand strategy, where the military force was but one component, serving alongside the economic, psychological, and the political, all oriented and acting in concert toward a specified grand strategic goal. His varied experiences in the various small wars in which he fought offered the ideal contexts to stimulate his thinking on the policy of war. Each experience differed enough to establish contrast and the need for flexibility, whilst maintaining sufficient similarities to assist Churchill in his search for abiding principles.

Finally, this thesis explored the evolution of Churchill's conception of war and the nature of war, as well as the positions of war as a human activity and a genuine phenomenon, including the role of race and national character in war. It did so without omitting his reflections on civilization, glory, barbarity, and heroism—all constant themes in his life and especially during his early years, if not from the very beginning. In the same way that the small wars, both individually and as a progression, offered an ideal entrée for his understanding of the tactics and policy of war, so too did they plunge Churchill into dissimilar war experiences that demonstrated for him the changing character of war at the highest levels. As ever, it was Churchill's presuppositions, relationships, and experiences that formed the scaffolding for his evolving early military thinking. Confronted by the Pathans, the Dervishes, and finally the Boers, Churchill reached and reinforced certain conclusions regarding the role of Britain as an agent of civilization in the world, and the role of the military as a husbanding or punitive tool in that agency—in other words, the stewardship of the sword.

The advent of advanced military technology caused the greatest upset to this relationship between war and civilisation, a presuppositional relationship which had informed Churchill's military thought had from the beginning. From his early reading, to the plaques adorning the walls in the chapel at Sandhurst, to the punitive war waged against the rebellious tribes on the North-West Frontier, war represented a catharsis wherein those possessed of the noblest virtues would necessarily come to the fore and defeat the less noble, the less civilized. Technology arrested that process, and allowed for the possibility of an inferior people, via the unnatural advantage of advanced technology, to defeat a more civilized people. This was, in itself, destabilizing to Churchill's understanding of war, but technology threatened two further destabilizations. First, technology naturally aligned itself with the expanding scale of warfare,

and offered to the democratized collective the instruments of slaughter suited to whole peoples engaged in war. Second, technology depersonalized warfare: Churchill's ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough, no longer sat astride his horse and directed the Allied forces to victory; now the great generals, lamented Churchill, positioned themselves increasingly further from the front lines, and from their distant vantage directed far-reaching advanced weaponry to rain destruction upon opposing forces which may or may not even see the foe they faced, nor lay eyes upon the enemy who was to be their end.

The changing character of war in the late-nineteenth century, as encapsulated in the colonial campaigns in which Churchill fought, directly impacted his understanding of war, and in many ways was the impetus behind the evolution of his own early military intellectual thought. Each of the presuppositions he brought with him to the battlefield were challenged by his experiences there; some escaped mostly intact, if not slightly shaken; others were forced to adapt to an art of war that was undergoing significant upheaval as it transitioned into the twentieth century. Inherent in this process, then, was a natural ambivalence in Churchill. As a young man he was torn between maintaining his youthful idealism while not disregarding the reality of a changing war that on many fronts confronted his early conceptions. His ambivalence was all the more pronounced and long-lasting given his perennial tendency to hold on to certain convictions of what war should and should not be, however rooted in adolescent romance those convictions might have been. As this thesis has contended, at the simplest level Churchill was a boy who never fully grew up.

Later in life, Churchill's frequent push for new technologies and strategies, sometimes before they could be developed or carried out successfully, seemed to suggest that he was a man modern beyond his times. Militarily, he frequently looked for something new, whether technologically through new inventions, or strategically through new fronts, such as at the siege of Antwerp or at Gallipoli. And yet, to focus on the ways that Churchill was forward-looking is to ignore the very large degree that he was backward-looking. This thesis has asserted that Churchill was always an equal, if not sometimes unequal, amalgamation: the past and present were always there, and at times the veneration of the past won out. His later attempts at the new were part of a larger effort to restore the old. Churchill was at least, if not more, pre-modern than he was modern.

By the time he left South Africa, the 25-year-old Churchill had written and collected sufficient material to publish five histories of war, as well as numerous articles and innumerable pages of private correspondence, many filled with commentary on the art of war. In one sense, these years were but one large exercise in autodidacticism. The education he received, much at his own initiative, while serving with soldiers or reporting alongside soldiers, went far

beyond any formal military education he received at Sandhurst. His demonstrated military thought, especially as it had matured, by the time of the Boer War, to the level commenting at the level of strategy and high command, would be inexplicable were it not for his efforts to educate himself. And given but the little evidence that he ever actively immersed himself in contemporary tactical or strategic works recognized as authoritative in his day, it is not unreasonable to conclude, as this thesis has argued, that Churchill's natural affinity for war, alongside his devotion to experience, observation, and comprehension, helped to influence and guide this cavalry subaltern to a fuller understanding of war than would have normally befitted a soldier of his age, station, and experience.

By the Battle of Omdurman Churchill's opinion of war had started to change, as the character of war itself began to shift toward a state that would become all too recognizable to him in the twentieth century. In that way, and more so on the conceptual level, Churchill was in many ways prepared for the realities of the wars to come, in which he was to play an increasingly instrumental hand. He foresaw the degradation of war away from the traditions and ideals that he believed best defined it in its highest form. Powerless to stop the decay, he still tried, and would occasionally harken back to his early years as evidence of what war could be, of what war should be, and of the hapless road it was destined to traverse. His Victorian worldview and belief that he could still play the Agamemnon role meant, on the other hand, that he was in more than one instance ill-suited to the democratization which had infiltrated war planning at the highest levels, wherein he still sought to strong-arm his decisions. Nevertheless, it is worth asking whether he would have had the effect—both good and ill—he did were he not incessantly pushing himself to the fore whilst looking longingly over his shoulder at what had once been. It is worth asking whether he would have had the effect—both good and ill—he did were it not for his early military intellectual development. It is worth asking whether the twentieth century would have happened without the nineteenth. To each of these questions Churchill, at least, expressed little doubt, and following his appointment as Prime Minister on 10 May 1940, he went to bed with “a profound sense of relief. At last I had authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my life had been but a preparation for this hour and this trial.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> WSC, *The Second World War*, Vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1949), p. 601.

## :: APPENDIX 1 ::

A facsimile of  
 "The Battle of Khartoum"  
 September 6, 1898

Signed: A Subaltern of the Horse (Winston S. Churchill)<sup>1</sup>

1990/1/1833

The Battle of Khartoum  
 Khartoum  
 Sept: 6<sup>th</sup> 1898

I was very much surprised my dear \_\_\_\_\_ to hear by telegraph this morning that you have been publishing my letters to you in a ~~some~~ London newspaper, I believe "The Morning Post". I do not think you should have done this as you know my detestation of all forms of journalism and my hatred of publicity. It is fortunate that I have not committed myself to any criticisms or adverse comments or my position here might have been seriously compromised. The military authorities in this country share my dislike of newspaper enterprise and prefer to tell their own story in their own way without contradiction or dispute. Yet as the chronicles of success makes few enemies and a victory is my theme, I shall not let this correspondence in which I have zealously persevered, come to an abrupt perhaps even an entirely conclusion. Indeed my modesty compels me to <sup>think</sup> ~~say~~ that you may be more severely punished by its continuance than by its cessation. And besides I ~~must~~ <sup>would</sup> like impatiently to describe the end of a long quarrel and ~~the~~ the Battle of Khartoum.

All the bugles all over the camp by <sup>the</sup> river began to sound at half past four. The cavalry trumpets and the drums & the fifes of the British division joined the ~~chorus~~ chorus and every one awoke amid a confusion of ~~war~~ or defiant notes. The moon was full and by its light and that of lanterns we dressed ourselves - many with special care. Those ~~who~~ <sup>practical</sup> were callous, who had seen much war or who were ~~through~~ <sup>practical</sup> set themselves <sup>to</sup> ~~eat~~ <sup>to</sup> eat a substantial meal of such delicacies <sup>as</sup> ~~as~~ <sup>as possible</sup> as rations biscuits and "bully" beef. Then it grew gradually

<sup>1</sup> WSC to MP, letter dated 6 September 1898, Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, MS/DEP/1990/1/1833.

lighter and the cavalry mounted their horses, the infantry stood to their arms and the gunners went to their <sup>the</sup> batteries. While the sun rising over the Nile ~~desplayed~~ <sup>waited</sup> the wide plain <sup>the</sup> and dark rocky hills <sup>and the</sup> ~~the arena the ground cleared~~ <sup>the enemy</sup>. It was as if <sup>all</sup> the preliminaries were settled and nothing remained but the final act and the ~~rigour~~ <sup>rigour</sup> of the game.

X  
As soon as it was light enough to move several squadrons of British & Egyptian cavalry were pushed swiftly forward ~~in search of~~ to gain contact with the enemy and to learn his intentions. It was my fortune to be sent with an advanced patrol of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers and though I know that it is of the battle that you wish to hear and not of my personal experiences, I must describe events from my own standpoint. <sup>at half past five</sup> The British and Egyptian army was drawn up in line with ~~flanks~~ <sup>flanks</sup> ~~secured~~ <sup>secured</sup> with its back to the river. Its flanks were secured by the gunboats which were moored in the stream. Before it was the rolling, sandy ~~open~~ plain. To the left right were the rocky hills ~~top~~ of the Khorri position, near which the ~~dear~~ nine squadrons of Egyptian cavalry were massed. On the left the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers were trotting towards Helio-graph Hill with their advanced patrols already cantering up its lower slopes.

My patrol was I think the first to reach the top of the ridge and to look into the plain beyond. I had expected that the Dervish army would have retired to their original position and could not believe that they would advance to the attack ~~in broad~~ daylight across open ground. Indeed it seemed more probable that their hearts might have failed them in the night and that they had melted away into the deserts of Kordofan. But these anticipations were

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immediately dispelled by the <sup>open night scene</sup> ~~light~~ <sup>1990/1/1833</sup> which ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> visible from the crest of the ridge. It was a quarter to six. The light was dim but growing stronger every minute. There, in the plain lay the enemy, their <sup>numbers</sup> ~~numbers~~ unaltered their confidence & intentions apparently unshaken. Their ~~line~~ <sup>front</sup> was nearly five miles long and composed of great masses of men joined together by ~~thinner~~ <sup>thinner</sup> lines. They looked from where I stood, dark blurs <sup>behind and to the flanks</sup> ~~with~~ <sup>also large masses</sup> streaks relieved and diversified with odd looking gleams of light from the spear points. After after making the necessary reports, I continued to watch the strange & impressive ~~scene~~ <sup>feats</sup>. As it became broad day, that is to say at about ten minutes to six I suddenly realised that <sup>all</sup> the ~~whole~~ masses were in motion and advancing swiftly. Their <sup>Scouts</sup> ~~Scouts~~ galloped about among ~~and~~ <sup>before</sup> their ranks. Scouts and patrols began to ~~scatter~~ <sup>scatter</sup> themselves all over the front. ~~The whole great attack~~ ~~developed~~. Then they began to cheer. They were still a mile away from the hill <sup>and</sup> ~~were~~ <sup>folded</sup> ~~concealed~~ by the ground. ~~Now~~ <sup>but</sup> the noise of the shouting was heard, albeit faintly, by the troops down <sup>by the river</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>to</sup> us watching on the hill however ~~it~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~came~~ <sup>of tremendous</sup> ~~up~~ <sup>roar</sup> in waves of intense sound like the tumult of the rising wind ~~as before~~ <sup>as a storm</sup>.

The advance continued. The Dervish left began to stretch out ~~across~~ <sup>across</sup> the ~~Kerreri~~ <sup>Jordan</sup> plain <sup>as I thought</sup>, to turn our right flank. Their ~~center~~ <sup>center</sup>, ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> over which the black flag of the Khalifa floated high & remarkable, moved directly towards the hill. Their right which



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As the whole Dervish army continued to advance this division which had till now been echeloned in rear of their right flank up into the general line and began to climb the <sup>southern</sup> slopes of Kelioglu Hill. They too saluted us with musketry but as the hill was within <sup>good</sup> artillery range of the gorge, I knew that they would have something else to occupy their attention when their banners appeared over the shoulder ~~of the~~ crest of the ridge, and we remained spectators sheltering among the rocks about 300 yards to their right flank.

At this time ~~indeed~~ <sup>expressed</sup> ~~yet~~ another body of the enemy who had been drawn up behind the "White flagmen" <sup>was</sup> moving slowly ~~into~~ towards the Nile ~~was~~ echeloned still further behind their right and not far from the ~~houses~~ <sup>suburbs</sup> of Onidurman. These men had <sup>apparently</sup> been posted to prevent the Dervish army being cut off from the city and it was there that the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers charged and drove back about two hours later. My attention was distracted from their movements by the loud explosion of artillery. The Dervish centre had come into range and the batteries opened on them. ~~The~~ Above the heads of the ~~morning~~ <sup>morning</sup> shells began to burst dotting the air with smoke balls and the ground with ~~the~~ bodies. But they were nearly two miles away and the distance rendered me unsympathetic. I looked back to the "White flagmen". They were very nearly over the crest. In ~~minutes~~ <sup>to the batteries</sup> ~~minutes~~ they would become visible. Did they realize what ~~around~~ would come to meet them? They were in a

dense mass <sup>scarcely</sup> ~~but~~ two thousand yards from the  
 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Battery and the gunboats. The ranges  
 here known. It was a matter of machinery. The  
 more distant cannonade passed unnoticed as the mind  
~~attention~~ was concentrated on the impending  
 horror. I could see it coming. It was a matter  
 of seconds and then swift destruction would  
<sup>rush</sup> come upon these brave men.

They ~~then~~ ~~they~~ topped the crest and drew  
 out into full view of the whole army. Their  
 white flags made them ~~truly~~ conspicuously above  
 all. As they saw the camp of their enemies  
 they discharged their rifles with a great  
 roar of musketry and quickened their pace -  
 and I was alarmed to see a solitary British  
 officer, lieutenant Conolly of the Greys attached  
 to the 21<sup>st</sup>, galloping across their front  
 at only a hundred yards distance. He  
 had been sent out to take a final look behind  
 the hill. Fortunately he returned in safety and  
 with the necessary information. For a moment  
 the white flags advanced in regular order and  
 the whole division crossed the crest and were  
 exposed.

Forth with the gunboats, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Battery,  
 and other guns from the ~~side~~ opened on them,  
 I was but three hundred yards away and with  
 excellent glasses could almost see their faces of

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the dervishes who met this ~~terrible~~ fearful fire, about twenty shells struck them in the first minute, some burst high in the air; ~~some~~ others exactly in their faces. Others again plunged into the mud ~~and~~ and exploding dashes clouds of red dust, splinters and bullets amid their ranks. The white flags ~~fell~~ <sup>tumbled over</sup> in all directions, yet they rose again immediately as other men pressed forward to die for Allah's sacred cause and in the defence of the successor of the true prophet of the only God. It was a terrible sight, for as yet they had not hurt us at all and it seemed an unfair advantage to strike thus cruelly when they could not reply.

From the purely military point of view I was not impressed with the effect of the shells. I had looked to see fifty men drop to each projectile. You read of these things in the ~~the~~ text books on war and you hear them stated every time you talk to an artillery officer. What soldier has not heard of the results of target practice? Right Eighty percent of hits etc. etc.! I watched most carefully and from a close & excellent position. About five men on the average fell to each shell. Still there were many shells. Under their influence the mass of the "White flagmen" dissolved into thin files of spearmen and skirmishers and came on in altered formation and diminished numbers but with unaltered enthusiasm.

The 1st Co  
arrived  
at 10:30

And now the whole attack being thoroughly exposed it became the duty of the cavalry to clear the front as quickly as possible and leave the further conduct of the battle to the art infantry and the Maximoguns. We therefore retired into the gully and taking advantage of the river bank watered and fed our horses, while all the time the fusillade grew louder and more intense and we wondered what progress the attack was making.

Of this I saw nothing but it appears that the <sup>debris of the</sup> white flagmen joined the centre and that these continued their advance against the gully gradually spreading out and abandoning their dense formations and gradually slowing down. At about 800 yards <sup>range of the British</sup> ~~from the gully~~ <sup>division</sup> the advance ~~came to a~~ ceased and they could make no further headway. ~~Their~~ Unable to advance they were unwilling to retire and their ~~refuge~~ <sup>refuge</sup> getting into taking advantage of the folds of the ground opened and maintained an unequal combat. By 8.30 it was evident that the attack had been ~~defeated~~ repulsed. The loss in the gully did not exceed sixty killed and wounded. That of the enemy was not less than 2000. Colonel F. Rhodes <sup>the Times correspondent</sup> was unfortunately among the wounded being shot through the shoulder as he sat on his horse near the Maxim guns.

The second phase of the action, or as an excitable correspondent called it 'The second battle' now began. Disregarding ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~presence~~ <sup>presence</sup> of the Devish left on Kark and among the Kerreni hills, the Sirdar gave the order for the army to march on towards Oudurman. The 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers moved out of the girth and trotted over the ridge near Helograhk Hill. The whole of the British Division made a left wheel and faced south their left on the river ~~and~~ <sup>at</sup> right angles to the enemy's base centre and their former front. The Egyptian and Soudanese Divisions were echeloned on the right by brigades. Thus the army presented its flank to the Devish centre and its right rear to the Devish left. ~~Great~~ Probably Sir Herbert Kitchener was anxious above all things to gain a moral advantage and realised that if he could enter Oudurman all the <sup>resistance</sup> of the enemy would collapse. ~~Entrance~~ <sup>however</sup> ~~proved~~ <sup>proved</sup> the movement to be premature. The Devish left who had started out in the morning confident of victory and who had ~~thus~~ vainly toiled after the elusive cavalry scoured corps among the Kerreni hills now returned <sup>an</sup> ~~exasperated~~ but undefeated and ten thousand. In passing into the centre the encouragement of a reinforcement they fell upon General Macdonald's Soudanese brigade which was the rear-most of the echelon. That officer, who by personal prowess and military conduct had ~~passed~~ <sup>risen</sup> from the rank of Private to that of general, met the attack

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with a skill & determination which excited the admiration of ~~the whole army~~ <sup>all</sup> General Lewis with the Egyptian Brigade also swung round and thus the army assumed a ~~V~~ <sup>W</sup> shaped formation <sup>apex pointing west & away from the Nile,</sup> four brigades looking South to Indouman & two brigades looking North West towards the Derrish ~~attack~~.

This was the critical moment of the engagement. The Sirdar, ~~however~~ <sup>was</sup> not the least disconcerted by the discovery of his mistake, ~~he~~ immediately proceeded to rectify it. The movement of ~~bringing~~ <sup>bringing</sup> up the right shoulder of the army ceased. ~~stopped~~. Pivoting on the two Brigades which were now hotly engaged, the British Division and the ~~two~~ <sup>the</sup> whole south front of the ~~V~~ <sup>W</sup> swung round until it became a straight line facing nearly west. Advancing in that direction the army steadily drove the Derrishes before them, away from the river and, as the left began to come up more and more, threatened to cut their line of retreat.

Of this and all this I had but fleeting glances for an event was taking place on the Southern slopes of Akkisiyaffa Hill, which absorbed my whole attention and may perhaps <sup>the account</sup> ~~interest~~ <sup>interest</sup> you. I will describe it at ~~great~~ <sup>perhaps even at more</sup> length in detail because I write as an eye witness <sup>and</sup> you may read with interest. Everyone describes an action from his own point of view. Indeed it is thence that we look at most things.

human or divine. Why should I be <sup>or make</sup> an exception?

At about a quarter past eight the 20<sup>th</sup> Lancers moved out of the zariba and occupied a position on the ridge of Helio-graph hill whence a view of the ground right up to the walls of Ondroman was obtainable. Here ~~the~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~received~~ <sup>written</sup> dismounting a few troops to fire at the Serish skinners on the higher slopes. At 8.40 orders reached us to advance, ~~harass~~ <sup>harass</sup> the enemy's right and enclose ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> cut him from Ondroman. In pursuance of these orders Colonel Martin advanced his regiment in line of squadron columns slowly across ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~ground~~ <sup>down</sup> the southern slopes of the ridge & hill and ~~then~~ and continued across the plain in a South westerly direction. In the distance a large number of the enemy could be seen retreating into Ondroman. The whole plain was crossed by a continual stream of fugitives. In the fore ground about 200 Serishes were ~~low~~ <sup>low</sup> crouching in what appeared to be a small <sup>Khot</sup> <sup>or</sup> ~~increase~~ in the ~~ground~~ plain. The duty of the cavalry to brush these away and proceed at once to the more numerous bodies in rear was plain, with a view of outflanking them the squadrons wheeled to the left in a column of troops and breaking into a trot ~~they~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~thought~~ <sup>thought</sup> ~~them~~ <sup>them</sup> across the their front. ~~of~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~thought~~ <sup>thought</sup> ~~them~~ <sup>them</sup> ~~for~~ <sup>for</sup> ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> were within 200 yards and they had fired no shot. Suddenly, as the regiment began to trot, they opened a heavy, severe & dangerous

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fire. Only <sup>??</sup> one course was <sup>now</sup> possible. The trumpet  
 sounded "Right wheel into line" and on the instant  
 the regiment began to gallop in excellent ~~disorder~~  
 order towards the riflemen. The distance was  
 short but before it was half covered it  
 was evident that the riflemen were but  
 a triple compared to what lay behind. In a  
 deep fold of the ground - completely concealed  
 by its peculiar formation - a long, <sup>dense</sup> white  
 mass of men ~~was~~ <sup>became</sup> visible. In length  
 they <sup>were</sup> nearly equal to our front. ~~The average depth~~  
~~was~~ ~~less~~ ~~than~~ ~~ours~~. They were about twelve deep.  
 It was undoubtedly a complete surprise to us. What  
 followed <sup>probably</sup> astonished them as much. I do not  
 myself believe that they ever expected the  
 cavalry to come on. ~~With all respect to the~~  
~~gallant officer of the Egyptian cavalry these~~  
~~men have not ever~~ ~~sharpened~~ ~~formed~~ ~~lines~~  
~~of~~ ~~ambush~~ ~~and~~ ~~ambush~~ ~~ambush~~ ~~described~~  
~~infantry~~. ~~There~~ ~~was~~ ~~no~~ ~~acknowledged~~  
 the unexpected sight only by an increase of  
 pace. A desire to have the necessary momentum  
 to drive through so solid a line annihilated  
~~every~~ ~~good~~ ~~man~~. But the whole affair  
 was a matter of seconds.

At full gallop and in the closest  
 order the squadrons struck the Derwish  
 mass. ~~The broken ground of~~ ~~the~~ ~~khors~~  
~~was~~ The riflemen who ~~formed~~ ~~bravely~~ to the  
 last were brushed head ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~other~~ ~~heads~~  
 into the khors: and with them the Lancers

jumped actually on to the spears of the enemy whose heads were scarcely level with the horses knees. Infantry meet <sup>it is</sup> very rarely that stubborn and unshaken cavalry. Usually either the infantry run away and are cut down in flight or they keep their heads and destroy nearly all the horsemen by their musketry. In this case the two living walls crashed together with a mighty collision. The Dervishes stood their ground manfully. They tried to hamstring the horses. They fired their rifles, pressing their muzzles into the very bodies of their opponents. They cut bridle reins and stirrup leathers. They would not ~~hedge~~ hedge till they were knocked over. They stabbed and hacked with savage pertinacity. In fact they tried every device of cool determined men practised in war and familiar with cavalry. Many horses reared or laming or stumbled in the press and the man that fell was pounced upon by a dozen ~~not~~ merciless ~~enemies~~ foes.

The regiment broke completely through the line everywhere, leaving sixty Dervishes dead and many wounded in their track. A hundred and fifty yards away they halted, rallied and in less than five minutes were reformed and ready for a second charge. The men were anxious out their way back through their enemies. But some realization of the cost of that wild ride began to come to all of us. Riderless horses galloped across the plain. Men, clinging on to their saddles, lurched helplessly about ~~covered~~ <sup>streaming</sup> covered with blood from perhaps a dozen wounds. Horses streaming from tremendous gashes limped and staggered with their riders. In 120 seconds 5 officers 66 men and 114 horses out of less than 3000 had been killed or wounded.

The Dervish line, broken and shattered by the charge began to reform at once. They closed up, shot themselves together and prepared with constancy and courage for another shock. The 21<sup>st</sup> now again drawn up in line of squadron columns wheeled, and galloping round the Dervish flank, dismounted and opened a heavy fire with their ~~see~~ magazine carbines. Under the pressure of their fire the enemy changed front to meet the new attack so that both sides were formed at right angles to their own original lines.

When the Dervish change of front was completed, they began to advance against the dismounted men. But the fire was accurate

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 and there can be little doubt that the moral effect of the charge had been very great and that these brave enemy were no longer unshaken. Be this as it may the fact remains that they retreated swiftly through in good order towards the ridge of Helio-graph Hill where the Khalifa's black flag still floated waved and the 26<sup>th</sup> Lancers remained in possession of the ground — and of their dead.

I have told you the story of the charge, ~~but~~ <sup>and</sup> you will perhaps ~~wish~~ <sup>care</sup> to hear a few incidents. Colonel Martin, ~~being~~ with the direction of his regiment, drew neither sword nor ~~the~~ revolver and rode through the press unarmed and uninjured. Major Cole Wyndham had his horse shot under him by a Danish who pressed his muzzle into the very hide. From out of the middle of that savage crowd the officer fought his way on foot and escaped in safety. Lieutenant Wormald of the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars thrust at a man with his sword and that weapon by a well known London maker bent double and remains thus — a monumental instance of mercantile basality. ~~Even~~

I saw myself Sergeant ~~Major~~ <sup>Freeman</sup> ~~Facey~~ trying to collect his troop after the charge. His face was cut to pieces and as he called on his men to rally the whole of his nose, cheeks and lips flapped amid red bubbles. 'Surely some place may be found in any roll of honour for such a man.'

~~There were many wonderful escapes. Lieutenant Molyneux's horse fell in the middle of the crowd and his sword was wrenched out of his hand. Rising, he drew his revolver. Two men rushed at him. One he shot. The other slashed him across the right arm inflicting a deep and severe wound. The revolver dropped to the ground and the wounded officer had no choice but to run for his life. Behind came his antagonist, swift and ~~skated~~ <sup>spurtant</sup>. But a lancer, an unknown man of valour turned, and coming to the rescue killed the pursuer and Molyneux escaped breathless covered with blood but, thank God, alive.~~

Lieutenant Nasham of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers had an even more ~~unsuccessful~~ <sup>extraordinary</sup> escape. Amid a crowd of men clashing and stabbing he remained in his saddle throughout. His left hand was nearly severed from his body by a single stroke. He managed to twist the reins round his right wrist. The near bridle rein and the off stirrup leather were both cut. The wounded officer reeled. ~~in his~~ <sup>in his</sup> saddle his enemies closed around him. He received another deep cut in his right leg and a slighter one in his left right arm. Yet his horse pressing forward carried him through the Derrishes to fall faintly among the rallying squadrons.

I have written thus of others. You would ask me of my own experiences. You know my luck in these things. As on another occasion on the Indian Frontier I came safe through - one of the very few officers whose saddle, clothes or horse were untouched and without any incident that is worth while putting down here.

One ~~obscure~~ <sup>obscure</sup> impression only will I record. I remember us sound. The whole event seemed to pass in absolute silence. The yells of the enemy, the shouts of the soldiers, the firing of many ~~and~~ <sup>shots</sup>, the clashing of sword and spear ~~were~~ <sup>were</sup> unnoticed by the senses, unregistered by the brain. Others say the same. Perhaps it is possible for ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> whole of a man's ~~intelligence~~ <sup>faculties</sup> to be concentrated in eye, bridle hand, trigger finger and ~~reins~~ <sup>reins</sup> with drawn from all other parts of the body.

It was not until after the squadrons had reformed that I heard of the death of Lieutenant Grenfell of the 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers. This young officer, who to great personal charm and high courage added talents and industry, which gave promise of a successful even a famous military career, and who had ~~just before the~~ <sup>just before the</sup> earlier in the day reconnoitred the enemy riding close up to their ranks under a hot fire in a manner that excited general admiration - had been cut down & killed. And

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no chance <sup>with</sup> ~~leaving~~ at this shocking news, the exhilaration of the gallop, the excitement of the moment, the joy and triumph of successful combat faded from the mind and the realisation came home with awful force that war, in disguise it as you may, is but a dirty, shoddy business which only a fool would play at. Now was it until the night when I saw Charles Newfeld released from thirteen years of ~~degradation~~ suffering and degradation that I again recognised that there are some things that have to be done no matter what the cost may be. ~~I would~~ <sup>can</sup> ~~with~~ <sup>some</sup> ~~tribulation~~ <sup>tribulation</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~know~~ <sup>know</sup> ~~if~~ <sup>if</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> ~~any~~ <sup>any</sup> ~~value~~ <sup>value</sup> with this reflection and with the knowledge that he felt probably little pain, certainly no fear, Robert Greenfell's friends among whom I am sorrowfully proud to count myself, may indeed must <sup>be</sup> ~~not~~ content.

The lancers remained in possession of the dearly bought ground. There was not much to ~~look~~ show that there had been a desperate fight. A quarter of a mile away nothing would have been noticed. Close to, the scene looked like a place where <sup>recently</sup> rubbish is thrown, or where a fair has been held. White objects, like dirty bits of newspaper lay scattered here and there - the bodies of the enemy. Brown objects almost the colour of the ground earth, like bundles of dead grass or heaps of manure were also dotted about - the bodies of soldiers. And here among these were goat-skin water bottles, broken weapons, torn and dragged flags - cartridge cases. In the ~~middle~~ foreground lay a group of dead horses & several dead or dying donkeys. It was all litter.

We gathered reverently the poor remains of what had but a quarter of an hour before been



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