

Today we are going to carry on with the story of WINSTON CHURCHILL, which I began telling you on Wednesday. When we left it off, WORLD WAR II had broken out between Britain and France on the one hand, and Germany on the other, in September 1939. PRIME MINISTER NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN had invited Churchill back into government, into his old post as FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY, in charge of the Royal Navy. The story continues –

At first nothing much happened between Britain and France and Germany. ADOLF HITLER was too busy invading Poland to bother about his enemies on the Western front. But in 1940, everything changed. First of all, in April 1940, the British Army clashed with the German Army in NORWAY - both sides were trying to get hold of valuable metals and minerals that could be found in Norway and would be useful in fighting the war. The British Army was beaten really badly, and Neville Chamberlain was blamed. He decided to resign as Prime Minister. But who would succeed him? The candidates were Churchill, on the one hand, and LORD HALIFAX, on the other. If Lord Halifax became Prime Minister, he would have tried to make peace with the Germans. Churchill would fight, fight, fight, to the very end. Fortunately for us, Chamberlain recommended to KING GEORGE VI (Queen Elizabeth II's father) that he make Churchill the Prime Minister. And so it was that on 10 MAY 1940, that Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. He was 65 years old - the age at which most people are expected to retire. Instead, he had to lead Britain in a fight for its very survival. And a lot of people were very nervous about whether Churchill could do it. He had not been a success in any other government position, and he had some terrible failures on his record. But when the time came, he proved that he had what it took to lead Britain to victory. In his very first speech on becoming Prime Minister he said, 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. You ask: what is our aim? It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.'



On the same day Churchill became Prime Minister, the Germany Army invaded France, cutting into France via Belgium and Holland in the north and via Luxembourg in the south. In WORLD WAR I, the British and French armies were able to stop the advance of the German army, with the result that both sets of armies dug into trenches and found it very difficult to make any progress for four years. Not this time - the German army, equipped with PANZER TANKS, was too quick and strong. Within just a few days, the British Army was pinned down in the northern French port of DUNKIRK, desperately looking for a way home across the Channel. This was provided by a huge number of little ships that sailed from England to pick up soldiers from Dunkirk. The British Army would not set foot on French soil for another four years. The French Army was also overwhelmed and the French government surrendered on 16 June 1940 - just over a month after the German Army invaded. Almost the

whole of Western Europe now belonged to Hitler: he had conquered France, and Italy and Spain were already allies of the Germans. The only bit that was left was Britain. But Churchill refused to surrender. He had the British Navy blow up the French Navy to stop it falling into German hands, and he resolved to fight on, to fight to the end: 'We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER.' Churchill knew how to give good speeches!

When the French surrendered, Churchill told Parliament: 'The BATTLE OF BRITAIN is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the future of Christian civilisation. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be freed and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say 'THIS WAS THEIR FINEST HOUR'.'

Before Germany could think about invading Britain, following the example of WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR almost nine hundred years ago, Germany had to defeat the British Air Force, to get control of the skies over Britain. That way, they could sail their ships over the English Channel without fear that they might be bombed by British planes. So from 10 July 1940, the German Air Force - the LUFTWAFFE ('Luft' means air in German; 'waffe' means weapon or force) - launched a huge assault on Britain. By day, German bombers would drop bombs on British airfields, trying to destroy the British planes. Those planes - mostly SPITFIRES - would try to get in the air as soon as the bombers approached, where they would have to do battle with German MESSERSCHMIDTS.



By night, the German bombers would drop bombs on British cities, especially London, trying to make the British population so sick and tired of war that they would demand Churchill seek peace with the Germans. But, with Churchill urging them on, the British fought on. At the height of the Battle of Britain, Churchill declared that 'The gratitude of every home in our land goes out to the British airmen who are turning the tide of world war. Never in the field of human conflict HAS SO MUCH BEEN OWED BY SO MANY TO SO FEW.' But by September 1941, the few were very few indeed. The British had virtually nothing left to fight with - very few planes and pilots were left. But then - a miracle! The Germans, not knowing how exhausted the British were, gave up - they stopped the daytime raids, and abandoned plans to invade Britain. Instead, Hitler turned his attentions to RUSSIA, and started planning to invade Russia in 1941.

Britain's victory in the Battle of Britain, and Hitler's stupidity in both deciding to invade Russia, and in declaring war on the United States when JAPAN bombed the American fleet at PEARL HARBOUR in 1941 meant that the British - together with the Americans and the Russians - would eventually win WORLD WAR II, in 1945. On 6 June 1944, a huge fleet of ships and men took the reverse journey that WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR had taken almost nine hundred years ago, and landed on Normandy, to begin the process of freeing Europe from German rule. Churchill had wanted to be on one of the first boats landing in Normandy, but the risk was far too great and he was told to stay home, and continue inspiring the nation to victory. That came on 8 MAY 1945: crowds assembled in London to celebrate, with Churchill joining the Royal Family (who had stayed in London throughout the German bombing of London) on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to greet the cheering crowds: <https://youtu.be/fwxL0pk2A6s?t=158>

But like ABRAHAM LINCOLN, Churchill was not allowed to enjoy his victory for very long. Just a couple of months later, Churchill was out of power again - he was defeated in the 26 July 1945 General Election, which saw a Labour government elected to power. As we saw on Wednesday, he would become Prime Minister again, but 1940 was his finest hour, and perhaps Britain's as well, when it stood alone in the world against a barbaric and evil enemy, of whom we will have to say more at some point. And this is the voice that inspired Britain to hold firm against that enemy when everything seemed lost and bleak: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5q19HiNHSg>