Churchill's Adventures

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Randolph Churchill | Theresa May | Stephen Hawking
Churchill on Foot at Witbank | On Safari in Kenya
On the Pitch in England | A Christmas in Athens

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The Rail-Splitter and the Bulldog


Review by Robert A. McLain

Lewis Lehrman has produced a wonderfully rendered comparison of two very different statesmen. Indeed, while the author’s recent Churchill, Roosevelt & Company related the statecraft of two closely intertwined war leaders, the juxtaposition of Lincoln and Churchill would seem a stretch, until now. Lehrman quickly points out the radically different backgrounds and personality traits of the president and the prime minister, yet he also suggests compelling historical parallels. Both leaders guided their countries to victory through essentially existential crises unprecedented in scope, the American Civil War and the Second World War. Lehrman also notes that the modest and unassuming Lincoln served as Commander-in-Chief of an army that exceeded two million men, one of the largest in history to that point, while Churchill refused to yield even as the British Empire and Commonwealth, vast but inept, and poorly equipped, faced Hitler’s might with no outside aid following the fall of France.

One of the most valuable aspects of this work is how cogently it reveals the similarity of traits that made Lincoln and Churchill such outstanding wartime leaders. Both men possessed an aptitude for military affairs and harbored a deep understanding of history. Most critically, Lehrman documents Lincoln’s and Churchill’s shared sense of moral clarity with regard to the respective evils of American slavery and Nazism. This awareness created a determination in both leaders to see the fighting through to the end, even when defeat seemed imminent and those around them lost heart and clamored for peace, or some sort of shameful accommodation.

The two chief executives also shared great foresight. Lincoln began denouncing any Southern attempts at secession in the mid-1850s. As early as 1933, Churchill started condemning the Nazi tendency towards “ferocity and war spirit,” as well as Germany’s “piti- less treatment of minorities” such as the country’s Jewish population.

Churchill was also quick to dismiss officers whom he saw as ineffective, particularly in the early campaigns in the Middle East and North Africa. Lehrman suggests it was General Sir Alan Brooke, who replaced Sir John Dill as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1941, who best understood how to manage the relationship with the prime minister. Brooke’s intellect and stubbornness easily matched Churchill’s, with no small amount of mutual exasperation and respect.

Equally vital for effective war leadership was the ability of Lincoln and Churchill to see problems as a combination of political and military factors. Lincoln was shrewd enough to release the Confederate diplomats James Mason and John Slidell after the crew of the USS San Jacinto seized them from the British mail packet RMS Trent en route for Europe—“one war at a time,” as Lincoln put it. Churchill had the opposite problem: how to cultivate President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the hope that the immense war-making potential of the United States could be brought to bear against Germany.

In making his comparisons, Lehrman astutely shows just how large the Anglo-American relationship loomed in both conflicts. One cannot but reflect that the lives of Lincoln and Churchill might have briefly overlapped if the former had survived just a few more years. And Churchill, ever alert to his American bloodline and his own historical moment, could not help drawing a direct comparison in a 1939 speech: “All the heroism of the South could not redeem their cause from the stain of slavery, just as all the courage and skill which the Germans show in war will not free them from the reproach of
Nazism, with its intolerance and its brutality.” This compelling mono-
graph makes one wonder how the respective leaders escaped more
direct comparison for so long.  

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Leadership Lessons

Lawrence M. Kryske, Churchill
without Blood, Sweat, or Tears,
Homeport Publishing,
ISBN 978–0692940174

Review by David Freeman

One of the most frequently
received requests by the In-
ternational Churchill Soci-
ety is for material about Churchill’s
qualities as a leader. Lawrence M.
Kryske is a retired US Navy com-
mander and longtime Churchillian.
No one is better qualified to write
on the subject.

Churchill without Blood, Sweat,
or Tears distills what Kryske has
learned from more than fifty years
of studying Churchill and a na-
val career that began with action
during the Vietnam War and cul-
mated as the first commanding offi-
cer of US Naval Station, Pascagoula,
which was the Navy’s newest, most
technologically advanced, and most
environmentally clean base in the
world.

Kryske begins by identifying
Churchill’s formula for success:
vision + courage + determination
= success. The main sections of the
book break down each of the three
ingredients by identifying qualities
that advance, cultivate, and deepen
them.

Each section is supported with
concrete examples from Churchill’s
career and copious quotations that
illustrate the essence of his lead-
ership philosophy. When it comes
to explaining courage, for instance
(which Kryske rightly judges “the
most difficult step”), the author
cites this incontrovertible wisdom:
“We shall not be judged by the crit-
icisms of our opponents but by the
consequences of our acts.”

Underlying Churchill’s lead-
ership was the clarity of purpose
that he championed his entire life
against all threats: “The central
principle of civilization is the sub-
ordination of the ruling authority
to the settled customs of the people
and their will as expressed through
the Constitution.”

Even with noble vision and
great courage, however, determina-
tion is still essential in order to
persevere towards victory. Here
Kryske identifies another one of
Churchill’s greatest qualities: tenac-
ity. Never did he express this better
than in his famous injunction,
“Never give in! Never give in! Nev-
er, never, never, never—in nothing
great or small, large or petty—nev-
er give in except to convictions of
honor and good sense.”

This brief, brisk, and powerful
handbook is informed by a life-
time of study and experience and
is highly recommended both for
those only just beginning their
career path and those looking for
an excellent jolt in their continuing
leadership development.

David Freeman is the editor of Finest
Hour.