

Was Churchill a manufactured hero 1930-1945



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Churchill's role as Prime Minister was to represent the country, inform the country and ultimately do as the majority demanded. His speeches of inspiration encouraged the nation into doing its moral duty. During his short time as First Lord of the Admiralty he ordered the boarding of a German merchant ship known to be carrying British sailors after the ship had been allowed to go by British forces without inspection. However it was the common soldier who fought the Germans on the beaches, on the landing grounds, in the field and streets. Yet only the men in positions of power are recognised as heroes. The men who fought are the true heroes and not the man who on a number of occasions ordered them to their deaths.

Churchill to the public was a hero who led the nation to a just victory over the Nazis. However not everyone in his administration or the army believed this. Below are collections of quotes from a variety of sources telling of their dislike of Churchill.

'Silly old man - he plunged into a long harangue about World Organisation, knowing nothing whatsoever of what he was talking about and making a complete nonsense of the whole thing.'¹

This source by Cadogan would confirm the belief that Churchill was merely a mouthpiece, in love with the sound of his own voice no matter what the topic. However the source was written after being confined to simply working with the same men for years. This could be a release of frustration at how things were at the time or Churchill's arrogance at believing he knows what is best about everything.

'Very few will criticize Churchill openly... if one hints that perhaps Churchill isn't all he's supposed to be, a great leader many people respond immediately and will begin to tell all kinds of things they dislike about him.'²

During and after the war there was a great sense of patriotism created by the media to whip up support for the war and Churchill's speeches were a main focus of this and enabled him to grow in stature and in the confidences of the British public. However some people still had some personal resentment towards him. This source by Walter Graebner represents mainly the political class who took a keen interest in government and so would have more information and understanding on political issues.

In April 1932 Hitler ran for the German presidency and won 13 million votes. The rise to power of Hitler caused great concern for Churchill. So on the 13 May 1932 the Disarmament Conference was supposed to bring the nations of the world together through the decreasing of arms. This did not happen the conference had actually Anthony Scannell Centre Number: 12532 Candidate Number: 5148 Word Count: 2987

managed to make each nation increase their production of armaments. Hitler saw this the right time to demand equality of status with the French.

Churchill's view on German rearmament was:

'They (Germans) are looking for weapons and when they have the weapons, believe me they will ask for the return of lost territory and lost colonies.'³

At the time Hitler was coming to power Churchill held no position of power. He did however believe the policies pursued by the government were right at

the time. These policies were of Britain detaching herself from European Politics. This destabilised Europe leaving a power vacuum that led to Hitler's regime growing in power on the international stage. If Churchill is the hero he is made out to be how could he support the withdrawal of a power that kept Europe stable.

Churchill could see that democracy in Germany was failing, as any government could not survive without Nazi support. Churchill's solution to this was to make the French stronger by rejecting French disarmament and German rearmament. However, if Britain continued to press for disarmament it would tie Britain up in a European affair that it would prefer to avoid. Appeasement on the other hand would release Britain from all her European duties.

With Britain forcing herself out of European affairs this left France vulnerable to old enemies. While France was prepared to act to prevent any German military action Britain was not prepared to enter another major war. The hero leaving the people of Europe to protect themselves from a tyrant.

Churchill was prepared to allow Germany to break the Treaty of Versailles even though it was preventing Germany from becoming a military power once again. But as long as Britain could disengage from Europe it didn't matter. Would a hero unleash a nation that was seeking revenge on her and her allies? Of course a hero would do no such thing. So France would be left on its own to deal with European affairs. What a brave soul he was leaving France to deal with the Germany on her own. If Britain wanted to be isolated

they would first have to vanquish the grievances put on Germany in 1918. Urging appeasement would be safer than demanding disarmament.

At the same time Hitler had established himself as the political leader with the title of Fuhrer of the Third Reich. With the British still adopting a policy of disarmament. Churchill's view was that if any war did break out in Europe Britain not being involved in foreign countries affairs, and so would remain neutral. The Germans were still demanding rearmament and so, the British government would have to either conciliate Hitler or confront him. Here Churchill wanted confrontation, but not for the British to put the pressure on, but to leave it to the French. Allowing Britain to remain outside of European affairs.

When Britain joined the League of Nations its purpose was to stand up against aggressors and make sure justice was done. Churchill however wanted to walk away from this just organisation to pursue his own desires of self-greatness. Thus leaving allies who had helped Britain in the past and allies that Britain had sworn to protect.

This is not righteous, brave or noble but the work of coward, and man of no honour and defiantly not the way of a hero.

A major step towards the start of all out war was the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. The Treaty of Versailles forbade this action. The Treaties of Locarno in 1925 promised British and Italian support in the event of German violation of the demilitarised zone without League of Nations permission.

When Hitler did remilitarise the Rhineland it was seen as the last chance to stop Hitler from starting an all out war in Europe. A counter attack from

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France would have forced Hitler to withdraw his troops. Churchill's diagnosis was disappointingly imprecise, he did not immediately or decisively protest to the government to have the Germans removed from the Rhineland. He thought the handling of the situation by the government was acceptable and applauded the evasive policy of futile talking and negotiation. Thus paving the way to all out war where he grew to the status of hero.

The facts above indicate that France would not act without the support of Britain. The British policy of isolation had let Hitler take major steps towards forging his super state that would eventually challenge Britain and France as the powerhouses of Europe and the World. In March 1936 Churchill spoke out against the cold and scientific persecution of Jews. The end of 1945 had seen millions of men, women and children killed in the final solution. Churchill had spoken out against Jewish persecution but he let more Jews fall under Nazi control. Showing that he is all words and no action. While a hero would try to protect all by noble deeds and not just words.

In 1939 when Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty he wanted to secure the seas around Norway as many allied ships had been sunk here. When the Altmark a German merchant ship known to be carrying captured British sailors was spotted two destroyers were sent to intercept the vessel. En route two Norwegian gunboats that had claimed to inspect the vessel approached the destroyers. At that the destroyers withdrew.

Churchill knowing the Norwegians were trying to remain neutral may have lied about the contents of the Altmark. So he dispatched two destroyers to

board the vessel. Once intercepted the Altmark was boarded and in the hull were 299 British sailors.

This showed that Churchill had a strong will as was prepared to alienate the Norwegian government to save British sailors. His decisive decision of boarding the Altmark showed he was prepared to make important decisions quickly. This attribute allowed him to bring about success and so heightened his status to hero.

In 1939 the Nazi-Soviet pact gave Hitler the green light for the conquest of Europe with only Britain and France standing against him. Churchill saw that Germany could cause a problem for the British Empire. So after his long search for British isolation Churchill started to believe an Anglo-French alliance should be basis of wider anti-German grouping and justified through the League of Nations principles.

Churchill eventually realised the only way to deal with Hitler was to confront him. However, this was too late to prevent Hitler from building up his forces for the greatest war to date. The phrase 'better late than never' comes to mind if it had taken any longer Hitler may just have won the war.

On the 26th May 1940 the operation to evacuate troops from Dunkirk began. It was thought only 45,000 troops would be evacuated. By the 30th the first estimation before the operation had started had been exceeded with a 120,000 evacuated including only 6,000 French troops. Churchill demanded that every effort should be made to evacuate more French troops so as to keep good relations with the French. 31st May and 1st June some 13,200 troops were evacuated to England. On the 4th 26,175 Frenchmen landed in

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England with 21, 000 being bought on British Ships. On the 4th the Dunkirk operation ceased. More than 338, 000 British and Allied troops had landed in England.

The Dunkirk evacuation was seen and presented as a major success. As 338, 000 were evacuated and not the predicted 45, 000 the First Lord of the Admiralty (Churchill) would be praised for this.

The way he demanded the British Navy to withdraw French troops and leave behind some British forces brought the two nations closer together in this time of crisis. This can be seen by the amazement of the French government when told that thousands of their troops had been evacuated to Dover.

These are the actions of a hero as he put himself out on a limb to save thousands of French troops. To ensure the evacuation of the main body of the allied forces thousands of French and British troops had to be abandoned. This led to an uneasy feeling in the highest offices of government that perhaps they had been let down.

Two and a half years into the war Japan's entry opened up a new front that threatened the Pacific colonies. Churchill however believed the formidable fort of Singapore stood ready to meet any Japanese threat. He believed the fort would be able to hold out for two months until reinforcements arrived. Churchill did not know that the only permanent fortifications were facing seawards and that much of the garrison had already been sent north to engage the Japanese. This lack of information in the end was catastrophic. The battle was over in five days and the brave and noble Prime Minister in his decorated office complained that the troops should have fought to the

death instead of surrendering. He had sent 18th Army division to reinforcement the fort. They arrived after the fort had been breached and in the end had to surrender or face being massacred as Churchill had ordered. A quote by General Nye sums this episode up well.

'British troops, when well-trained and confident, are really masters of the Japanese'⁴

The training and morale of troops is down to officers in the highest command appointed by Churchill himself. This was Churchill's failure, but he however was not as noble as we are led to believe in today's society. He simply passed blame on to others when he made the disastrous decision of sending 20,000 troops to become slave labour for the Japanese.

Another failure of Churchill's was the battle of Tobruk where a superior numerical force surrendered once again. At Tobruk 33,000 men surrendered to one half their number. Churchill had been pushing Wavell the main commander in the region to relieve Tobruk. On 15 June reinforcement arrived to defeat the German army led by Rommel. However this small force was not prepared or large enough to ever defeat

Rommel's forces. Once again Churchill had wasted forces by not waiting for the appropriate numbers to be gathered. By the 17 June Tobruk had fallen to Rommel. If Churchill had not sent 18th Army Division to the loss cause of Singapore then he might have been able to protect this vital harbour.

Churchill has proven time and again that he is no military mind. Both Singapore and Tobruk saw the capture of thousands upon thousands of troops due to his blunders. With his only excuse being that the troops did not

fight to the death as he had ordered. Would a hero ever make such a demand from a man? I think not.

'Any question of abandoning... was unthinkable... forces... should resist to the end. There should be no withdrawal and no surrender'⁵

How could a hero order troops to an evitable death, between Singapore and Tobruk over 50,000 men could have been massacred if the commanders of the bases did not surrender. Churchill may believe it is better to die than surrender as many of his speeches were inclined that way, but there would be no gain to have thousands killed so just so he could keep up his public image of no surrender. He lives a life of luxury compared to the troops and is in no real danger at the time of being on the front line having to fight to the death. Ordering men to their death is not brave or noble but plain stupid.

Churchill's main contribution to the war effort was the image that was fed to the press of a strong leader. This was also reinforced by the speeches he made. The connection he established with the people ensured that many failures could be shrugged off, as he would tell the people time and again that they faced many hardships ahead but there was a light at the end of the tunnel. As Churchill was portrayed as a true Englishman doing the just thing probably encouraged many of the men to fight. Below are sections from speeches spoken by Churchill to reassure and encourage the British public.

'We shall fight them on the beaches, we shall fight them on the landing grounds, we shall fight them in the fields and the streets, we shall fight them in the hills, we shall never surrender...'⁶

After defeat at Dunkirk many believed there would be a Treaty between Britain and Germany. Churchill however abruptly changed this view with this powerful speech. This speech was like a second declaration of war and a request or even demand of the people to protect the nation at any cost. This defiant speech had been extremely well written and set a standard until the end of the war. This speech was by a man on a mission to ensure justice was done. He should be given some credit as when in a tight corner he refused to surrender to a superior force and this stubbornness eventually paid off. By being arrogant he created a false sense of strength in a stretched armed forces.

'Nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat'⁷

Churchill needed to get the message across that the road ahead was long and hazardous. This speech told the people that many would die, the fight would be hard and numerous hardships would fall on the people but they would be doing the right thing, ridding the continent of an aggressive nation. The speech showed both grit and determination and with Churchill's customary cigar the symbol of this.

'Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few'⁸

The speech praised the RAF for their achievement at winning the Battle of Britain. Thus it was the first major victory of the war. It would have been well published and would certify that everyone's efforts were of vital importance. This was not Churchill achieving anything himself but a publicity stunt to show himself as the great leader.

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In the end Churchill did the job his position required. Every person who did their job in World War two are heroes. However Churchill's status of hero is well known due to his position. He would be the one heard on the radio and seen in the newspaper. His speeches won over not just the British public but also the American and the Russia government. Thus enabling the Allies to win the war. During the war Churchill did make military blunders but in every war set backs are evitable. However his order to fight to the death showed however he was a hypocrite as he sent men to their death he remained in his plush accommodation. If the public had known his status of hero would have been seriously damaged.

So Churchill did have military and political success that led to him becoming a hero. Nevertheless not all details of his efforts were released and so he was and is a manufactured hero.