

Winston Churchill became the authority during the most pivotal period in Britain's history. Germany was rising under Hitler's rule, alarming Europe as a whole. The Nazis were employing the battlefield as the greater fighting force. Their expansion was just as great as their strength. Occupation of Norway, Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg followed the occupation of Czechoslovakia and Poland. If a government happened to oppose the Führer, they immediately faced the horrid aerial bombardment.

Still, the Brits were relieved, as Germany was located far from them. Despite their new planes, Germans still wouldn't be able to carry their thousand-pound bombs to Britain. There was only one way for Germany to be able to bomb Britain and that was to occupy France. But France had a strong army and navy, there was no way they would fail.

Soon after Churchill became the prime minister, the impossible became possible: Germany pillaged France. And chaos began which ended up making Churchill one of the most important people in the twentieth century.

Chapter 1 - Churchill's intent was clear from the start: getting support from Americans.

By May 1940, everything was clear. The Nazis had occupied France, Britain's ally. One way or the other, the war was approaching for British people.

Churchill gained authority after Parliament voted an opposition for Neville Chamberlain, who attempted to satisfy Hitler's inclination to expand. The UK was experiencing hard times. Any person would have guessed that Britain had no luck when it came to the gigantic Nazi war machine. Yet, unlike Chamberlain and others, Churchill felt no fear and assured that Britain could overthrow the Nazis.

What Churchill needed to, was to assure his country and the US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that the UK had a chance. Churchill was aware that it was impossible to win the war without American help.

As for the Americans, they weren't in the mood to send their young to the battle for a second time. The government was also skeptical about working with Churchill. "It seems that he is not reliable when he is drunk," said the secretary of the interior.

It was not a lie that Churchill was eccentric. For example, he preferred working during his bath, which was every other day. If he heard the ringing of the phone during bath time, he would get out of the bathroom naked to get his phone from the private secretary. He would walk ploddingly throughout his official residence in eloquently flowered gowns and would point a smoked cigar towards the air to emphasize something.

He was adored by the British and he was cautious not to lose their trust. His first address to the House of Commons showed his typical oratory patterns: a calm assessment of facts and a justification for plausible optimism. "I have nothing to offer, but blood, toil, tears, and sweat," he said.

Despite the hopeless circumstances, his government was full of energy since the beginning. Everyone, including the lowest positions to the highest minister, was heading towards the same path—to hinder Germany from occupying England and ending the war with success. Distinguished civil servants were seen rushing through the halls to the appointments.

The fresh resolution Churchill offered to his office was just in time. Things were getting much worse.

Chapter 2 - A brave and vital rescue provided enough motivation to Britain for the war ahead.

The scene of the Nazis occupying French and battling them on their homeland was already depressing. The French army was strong. And the Maginot Line was regarded to be a great barrier that was believed to be impassable.

Yet, the unimaginable happened. The Germans passed the Maginot Line. The Nazi army plundered France, and Allied troops began to retreat from the havoc. The French president called Churchill. "They have defeated us," he said. After a shocked silence, "Well, you can't say it happened too soon?" Churchill replied.

While the Nazis were becoming comfortable in the lands of France, it was easy to foresee that the invasion of Britain would follow. The more urgent problem was the future of the British troops that were still in France.

The British Expeditionary Force returned to the coast of Dunkirk. The time for brawling had passed. Extremely worn out, the troops were demoralized. They went to the beach every day, staring across the Channel to see their home, wondering if they would ever be able to go there again. Nazi forces were following them.

However, on May 24, 1940, the British hit a jackpot. Hitler's crew underwent critical losses in the first occupation attempt, and he ordered his tanks to stop. One Nazi general found this a deadly mistake.

The British troops, completely drained, were thankful for Hitler's error.

Churchill commanded that the British troops be rescued from Dunkirk on May 26. He was expecting around 50,000 people to survive. They could only rescue 7,700 people on the first day, which was even more depressing than their expectations. Still, soon enough, private boats and yachts used by civilians started to be seen across the Channel. Overall, 887 vessels came and only one in four boats belonged to the British navy. More than 300,000 soldiers were saved.

This little achievement helped Churchill prove that Britain was not going to pursue a ceasefire with Hitler. "If this long island story of ours is to end, at last, let it end only when each of us lies choking in his own blood upon the ground," he said.

The following day, the Luftwaffe –the Nazi air force—started a new invasion. Hitler had England in his mind.

Chapter 3 - With England preparing for occupation, their fate was dependent on aerial combat.

People were quite sure that Germany had the capability to bomb England until they surrendered in May 1940. The vicious, strong-willed, and motivated deputy of Hitler, Hermann Göring, had made Luftwaffe all by himself. He had constructed the strongest air force in the world.

For a start, the number of fighter planes was four times higher than those of England's. In addition, the planes and bombs were much more effective. The Stuka plane seemed as if it were a gigantic, horrifying bug. It was able to bear 4,000-pound explosives which were also known as Satan bombs. The bombs were so strong that they could destroy a city block.

The radio beam technology of Germany made it possible for them to bomb their enemies, even when it was hard to see. But Britain didn't have such technology that is on par with Germany, so its cities were unsafe during night-time and during bad weather conditions.

London was thought to be the main goal of the invasion, as it was the political, economic, and cultural capital of Britain. Churchill told the ministers to get out of the cabinet and gaze around the city after a certain meeting. "I believe conditions will change in two or three weeks," he stated.

Churchill was aware that the extent to which Britain could produce planes would determine their defensive power. He positioned a Ministry of Aircraft Production on the first day in office. A good friend of his, Lord Beaverbrook was selected as the minister. Churchill didn't expect expertise in aircraft from him.

Beaverbrook didn't disappoint his old friend. He spent his days working and the result was an amazing success. Soon, British plants were creating aircraft at a speed that nobody could have predicted, not even German intelligence.

Nevertheless, the German people didn't stop the immense bombing and went towards the countryside. They hadn't gone into London yet. Still, the reports suggested that an invasion was impending. The people in the capital were waiting for the scary moment to come.

But, despite everything, the Royal Air Force fighters were retaining their own position. Dogfights started to be a public spectacle. Even radios broadcasted the fights and described the events as if they were sports matches.

Hitler decided to wait until he showcased the full power of the Luftwaffe in England. The reason he waited was that he was still expecting a peace deal to prevent the damage cost of an invasion. After all, it was quite clear that Britain wouldn't be the winner of this war.

But Churchill was looking at the situation from a different perspective.

Chapter 4 - While aerial battles continued, Churchill sought Roosevelt to get help from the navy until he reached his goal.

After France put up a white flag, Churchill sent a critical message to Roosevelt. The countries under threat were not limited to France or Britain, Churchill wrote. It was possible that the Nazis could rule all of Europe. He requested destroyer ships from Roosevelt and underlined the severity of the issue.

Churchill needed to be very careful about what he wrote to Roosevelt. He needed to convey the seriousness of the situation and to avoid making it seem like Britain's fate was a lost cause.

Initially, Roosevelt was hesitant towards his British counterpart. He still didn't know Churchill completely, and he didn't trust him. Roosevelt aided Churchill's first request and wished him luck. Then he requested the British group of ships to be passed on to the US in case they lost the war.

Overhead, the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force kept battling each other, and Churchill sent Roosevelt telegrams each day. Although RAF planes were manufactured at a great speed, the Luftwaffe was still better in quality. Still, what really helped the Germans was that their pilots were much more capable. Most of them had their experience when they flew for Franco's Nationalist party, which was during the Spanish Civil War.

However, the RAF aces handled the situation better than the Luftwaffe. The Brits were at their homeland; besides, they used radar technology. The most important thing was that their lives were at stake. If they lost a fight, it would mean that the invasion was coming closer.

Luftwaffe's immense loss against the RAF made Hitler frustrated. He commanded a full assault by sea, called Operation Sea Lion. It was to take place in August 1940. Hitler ordered that the RAF had to be demoralized and weakened by the time the operation began.

During this time, Churchill kept requesting help from Roosevelt. And he finally got an answer to his pleas. Roosevelt commanded his cabinet to search for a method to help the Brits with old destroyers while also obeying the neutrality laws. The Navy Secretary suggested a method: America would support Churchill with destroyers if Churchill gave permission for Americans to enter naval bases in the Atlantic.

All Roosevelt had to do was to get the plan, Lend-Lease, through Congress. Senator Clause Pepper, who was known to support Roosevelt completely, warned him that the plan would fail.

Chapter 5 - An incidental attack to London marked the beginning of the following phase for the aerial war.

The commander of Luftwaffe, Herman Göring received the misinformation. Intelligence lead Beppo Schmid had assured Göring that the RAF had received fatal blows. The report was different from what German pilots had told him. Still, the reports made Hitler confident enough to assign a big strike against the RAF. The name for the operation was Adlertag—Eagle Day.

The operation didn't grant success to the Nazis. The first day, they experienced such bad weather that Göring needed to cancel the operation just a moment after it started. The planes that managed to succeed saw that RAF defense was aggressive, which was completely different from their expectations. The RAF had found out about the fragile German planes, the Stuka, and they used this information for their advantage. The RAF bombed twice as many planes as it lost.

Churchill was elated about the news but he also felt surprised. Why did the Germans take part in a massive attack that accomplished so little? Why didn't they seek London, Britain's capital, to surge?

A few days passed and Churchill understood that the aim of the attack was the RAF itself. If they eliminated the RAF, it would be easier for them to plan a full-scale attack without being worried about the bomb attacks.

People in the UK were alarmed. They audited the attacks as they were lazing in the grass during gorgeous summer weather, whereas bullets were raining in the countryside. Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels saw this situation and used it for their advantage, spreading rumors to kindle a sense of fear. British people were aware that something enormous was going to happen soon; moonlight depressed them as it made people more visible to the German invaders.

Though Adlertag failed, Germans continued their plans with the Operation Sea Lion with a small tweak: it was postponed by a month, to September 1940.

Yet, on August 24, an accident changed the schedule of the war. Some German bombers got lost and found themselves over London. They released the bombs there and attacked the city.

Things could have gone a lot worse. There weren't many casualties, and Churchill finally found what he had wanted: an excuse to attack Germany. The first RAF fighters were ordered to fly to Berlin the next night.

Chapter 6 - Living in London became horrifying due to the German bombs.

As a payback to the British offense on Berlin, Hitler commanded the first intentional invasion to London. The chance to get back to Britain for embarrassing the Luftwaffe made Göring ecstatic. He planned "the Destruction of London". Goebbels envisioned that this plan would be the biggest havoc in human history.

However, there were some not delighted about the clash between Britain and Germany in the Nazi group. For example, the former first deputy of Hitler, Rudolf Hess regarded the Brits as racial allies. Thus, he started to find a way to establish peace between Britain via a backchannel.

Aside from him, other Nazis were overjoyed. Göring, along with his officers, planned a picnic on a French cliff with the scenery of the Channel. Göring was elated to see the first planes overhead. The atmosphere was soon full of fighter jets. The destination was London.

The bombing came in three waves. The first wave involved almost a thousand aircraft. The aircraft carried high-explosive standard bombs, incendiary oil bombs, and bombs with time-delayed fuses to avoid intrusion by firefighters.

The first sirens were heard minutes before 5:00 p.m. and they were heard throughout the night. There were four hundred corpses and 1,600 injured. Churchill planned a public investigation of the wreckage the following day. People had planted papers with Union Jacks to the ground. Seeing this, Churchill couldn't help but cry, and people sympathized with him. "We can put up with it!" a person yelled. "Give it 'em back."

The planes kept coming that night and the following night. It was clear for every person that the worst part of the beginning phase was that people were too anxious to sleep. Bombs and sirens made it impossible for people to rest even a little bit. Churchill experienced the raids first-hand from the roof of 10 Downing St. while smoking a cigar as he always did.

Even the king and queen were in danger. A certain bomber appeared to be aiming for Buckingham Palace. The queen was glad. These bombings helped her to be able to face the hardest-hit people in London without feeling ashamed.

Despite all the hardships, the RAF kept hitting back. A particular battle took place on September 24, only a month after the first bombing in London. The RAF took down 183 German fighters. Their loss was under 40. The day became known as the Battle of Britain Day.

The Luftwaffe had stung Britain. But it was obvious to Hitler that the plan wasn't strong enough to annihilate it. Göring and Hitler were adamant about not giving up. They doubled down.

Chapter 7 - The fear of impending invasion was fading; yet, the bombing had never been so bad before.

The cooler the days became, the lesser was the chance of Germans invading Britain. Churchill wrote about Hitler: "The gent has taken off his clothes and put on his bathing suit, but the water is getting colder and there is an autumn nip in the air."

Not so surprisingly, Hitler put off Operation Sea Lion because the RAF was posing a critical threat. He desired to plan a battle that he could win and turned east. It was his dream to conquer Russian Bolshevism. He believed it would be easier than the cross-Channel invasion of Britain. He ignored the doubts about a two-front war. The new plan was called Operation Barbarossa.

Göring's aerial onslaught continued. He bombed the Midlands town of Coventry in November. The Luftwaffe used 500 tons of high explosives and 20,000 incendiary devices. More than 500 people died, and more than 2,200 buildings were in ruins.

While Coventry was trying to recover, Britain experienced a horrible financial crisis. Churchill had to request help from Roosevelt once again. He stated that America would suffer after England. Britain was in need of food and military material. He insisted that this would help their common goal in the long run.

In Coventry, London, along with many other places, people who were left homeless due to the German bombs were trying to stay alive in wretched shelters. Churchill's spouse, Clementine, visited some of the shelters and found out that the living conditions were dreadful. People were struggling with lice, there was no space among people, and the restrooms were beyond below the standards. What is worse, they didn't have any place to make tea.

The invaders were in awe of Churchill's strength, even after the bombing. Goebbels argued that Churchill's insistence on continuing the war was a war crime. Hitler kept working on Operation Barbarossa fervently. The operation had to start before Russia was able to build a defense.

While Coventry was on fire, Rudolf Hess became nervous as there was no reply about a peace negotiation in his backchannel. He chose to act on his own, he was able to fly a plane just like any pilot. He decided to fly to Scotland and convey the message on his own.

Chapter 8 - Roosevelt eventually started to respond to Churchill's proposal—but it was almost too late.

During the wartime, Churchill kept courting the Americans. Roosevelt got Churchill's latest message when he was on a holiday in the Caribbean. He thought about the idea for a few days and decided to accept Churchill's request.

He made an address to Americans during Christmas; it was one of his well-known Fireside Chats—Roosevelt showed that he was devoted to the British. It was the first time he addressed Germans as Nazis. He stated that if the Brits were defeated, Americans would be the next object of the Germans.

The following day, the Luftwaffe started bombing London's financial district with all their might, possibly to undermine the effect of Roosevelt's address. The resulting havoc became known as the Second Great Fire of London, while the first one was in 1666. Before 1940, the number of Brits killed by the Nazi raids was more than 13,000.

Humbled by the havoc, Churchill was also philosophical. The time of the German attack was great to gain sympathy from Americans. He also received the good news. Roosevelt had sent his personal friend Harry Hopkins to London. Hopkins was to report the circumstances there.

Hopkins was looking weak because of his struggle with stomach cancer, but he was likable, empathetic, and really clever. He quickly became a good friend to Churchill.

Churchill kept an eye on Hopkins to make a good impression on him. Churchill walked alongside the tired Hopkins around volunteer centers. Hopkins was trying to blend in with the crowds, but Churchill kept calling him to be near his side. He also used Hopkins to make British people understand that they had gained sympathy from the Americans. He convinced Hopkins that his request was not for the US to join the war while also acknowledging that it was a desire of his.

Hopkins felt touched by the courage of the Brits, and by Churchill himself. Churchill asked Hopkins about when he would tell Roosevelt about the situation. Hopkins quoted the Bible: "Whither thou goest I will go." Churchill cried. Eventually, Hopkins reported to Roosevelt that the Brits needed Americans' help as soon as possible, as they were miserable.

Meanwhile, Hitler was growing tired of the continued resistance from Britain. Wishing to clear the obstacles before taking part in Operation Barbarossa, he commanded Göring to end the RAF completely. They aimed to incapacitate English forces and to make it known that an invasion was to come. He believed that this would make Churchill surrender.

Chapter 9 - After Americans joined the battle, the bad news continued coming across the Channel.

Hopkins requested Churchill to come to the Prime Ministerial country house. The date was March 11, 1941, when he told Churchill that Roosevelt's plan, called the Lend-Lease Plan, had passed in the US Congress. The plan allowed Britain to use American destroyers and supported the Brits immensely.

Churchill was elated after hearing the news. He wore his most-liked outfit, which a blue one-piece romper he designed. He played military marches on the gramophone. Raising a rifle, he executed rifle drills and bayonet maneuvers. His appearance was similar to a fiery, baby blue Easter egg taking part in a battle. People seeing him were curious as to what would Hitler think about this demonstration.

Churchill's triumph wouldn't last, though. Air raids come one after another. He called a new US emissary, William Averell Harriman, to witness one of the raids. While they were

watching, he quotes the British poet Tennyson: "Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew."

The war overhead would continue. Churchill was aware of that. He was also aware that the war meant a political hazard. There was a limit to how much Londoners could take.

Unpleasant news was coming fast. British troops in North Africa and the Middle East was being battered by the Nazi General Erwin, also known as "The Desert Fox". The circumstances in the Balkans are also pretty depressing with Bulgaria joining the Axis. Churchill was depressed. He started to feel dependent on Harriman and American support.

During April, hundreds of bombs were dropped to London. In the middle of the crisis, the Parliament requested a debate on the war situation. Going too far, Churchill requested a referendum on his government. Despite his overreacting at the beginning, he eventually made another moving address to the public and passed the vote.

But the worse news was yet to come, in the form of German Stukas. Hitler's men persuaded him to command an attack on London with all their might.

The Nazi troops came on May 10, minutes before 11:00 p.m. Their aim was clear and firm: destroying London and annihilating Churchill. More than 500 bombers flew over the skies of London for the following six hours. Thousands of bombs were dropped. Westminster Hall and the British Museum were on fire. One of the bombs cut through the tower housing Big Ben. All around London was covered in flames.

The worst part was the raid. More than 1,400 people died in a single night, setting a record, and over 12,000 people were left without a home.

Chapter 10 - The most problematic moment of the Blitz occurred at the same time with one of its strangest events.

While numerous aircraft flew over the channel, the third-ranking Nazi official, Rudolf Hess was insisting that he would be able to arrange a peace negotiation with the UK. He attempted to fly to Scotland four times. He studied maps, looked at his horoscope reading, packed his collection of medical paraphernalia, and got onto a plane. His deputy letters were to be sent to his wife and Hitler.

After five hours, Hess was almost out of fuel. He was lost. He got out of his plane and found himself in a farm field. Afterward, he started to wait until he was taken into police custody. The farmer offered him tea, but he only asked for a glass of water.

Major Donald, an officer in Glasgow, went to see the prisoner. Hess told him that he was carrying a critical message for the Duke of Hamilton. He believed that the Scottish lord would be amicable enough to accept a peace agreement.

Donald was in shock. There he was, in a Scottish prison in the countryside, and across him was the third-ranking Nazi official who wanted to convey a private message. It took Donald long to convince his superior officers to send the message, but he eventually succeeded. Hess was able to meet the duke the following morning.

Obviously, Britain wasn't keen on the offer. Churchill imprisoned Hess in the Tower of London, the infamous dungeon that was built in the 1000s.

After Hitler learned about what Hess had done from the letter, it triggered one of his famous Wutausbrüche or also known as, a tantrum. As a result of his actions, Hess's assistants and his astrologer were sent to a concentration camp.

The event attracted public attention from both sides of the Atlantic, even Roosevelt was interested. He reasoned that being fascinated by the series of events was healthy for the war effort. Churchill let the newspapers keep trying to solve the episode. Questions were asked and puns were made. One newspaper published an article with the headline "Your Hess is as good as mine."

At one particular club in London, there were so many people talking about "Hess" that the final sound started to sound weird— "like a basketful of snakes," said an outsider American.

Chapter 11 - Operation Barbarossa was a decisive moment in the war that eliminated the threat of an invasion.

The bombing had a big impact on London, but the city was determined to put up with it. During the period from September 7, 1940, to May 11, 1941, around 29,000 people died in London and more than 28,000 were critically injured. The number of killings all around the UK was more than 44,000, and among these people 5,000 were children.

Yet, after May 11 there were no bombers to be seen. The raids began to disappear. In May alone, German raids resulted in more than 5,600 people getting killed. By December, the number was as low as 37. Churchill and the Brits had proved to Hitler that they were not going to stop fighting.

In June 1941, Operation Barbarossa was continued as planned. A second front had been opened, defying the suggestion Hitler had touched upon in his Mein Kampf.

Hitler believed that Operation Barbarossa would take three weeks to be completed. However, the Soviet army was shockingly strong. In the 1945 Nuremberg trials of Nazi officials, it was revealed that the sole reason why Germany couldn't seize Britain was the disturbance caused by Barbarossa.

Churchill's spirit was low once again before Christmas. He was at the Prime Ministerial country house listening to the BBC. When he heard from the radio that Japan had raided America's principal Pacific naval base at Pearl Harbor, his low spirit changed immediately. He quickly got out of the room while saying "We shall declare war on Japan!" And the following day, he declared a war on Japan after Roosevelt.

After the declaration, Churchill was no longer in low spirits—not at all. The war no longer meant desperation. If the US joined the war, the Allies would win. The only question was when they would win. Churchill's doctor told him that he appeared to be enjoying himself. Controlling a country during the conflict as the prime minister was something that he couldn't even dream about.

Churchill appeared to be joyful when he visited the White House in late December. During his visit, Roosevelt entered his room only to see Churchill fully naked, drinking, and smoking a cigar. "As you can see, Mr. President, I have nothing to hide," Churchill said. He put a towel over his shoulder and strutted in the room while being nude for the following hour. During this time he was talking to Roosevelt and refilling his glass when it was necessary.

The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz by Erik Larson Book Review

During the initial period of Churchill's authority, his influence helped his people to face a critical situation with courage. Using his charm and flattery on Roosevelt, he guaranteed American help, which later became essential to be victorious during wartime.

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