

A TIMELY DELIVERANCE

MR. CHURCHILL'S

:: FIVE YEARS ::

THE PRIME MINISTER'S
BROADCAST TO THE
NATION ON SUNDAY,
MAY 13, 1945



The dawn of 1941 revealed us still in jeopardy. . . . The sense of envelopment, which might any moment turn to strangulation, lay heavy upon us. We had only the North-western Approach through which to bring in the means of life and to send out the forces of war. . . .

. . . This was, indeed, a deadly moment in our life, and, if it had not been for the loyalty and friendship of Northern Ireland, we should have been forced to come to close quarters with Mr. de Valera or perish forever from the earth.

*With the Compliments
of
Major Baird.*

“FORWARD UNFLINCHING”

In his broadcast to the nation to mark his five years as Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill reviewed the achievements and ordeals that led to victory in Europe, paying a noteworthy tribute to the friendship and loyalty of Northern Ireland in the crisis of the Battle of the Atlantic.

Dealing with the great tasks ahead, he showed the need for further efforts of mind and body and further sacrifices. We must make sure, he said, that the causes for which we fought find recognition at the peace table in facts, and that the world organisation being created at San Francisco does not become an idle name.

Finally, he spoke of the great war against the Japanese and called on the nation to go “forward, unflinching, unswerving, indomitable till the whole task is done and the whole world is safe and clean.”



ARCHITECT OF VICTORY

How Things "Worked Out Pretty Well"

Mr. Churchill said:—

It was five years ago on Thursday last that his Majesty the King commissioned me to form a National Government of all parties to carry on our affairs. Five years is a long time in human life, especially when there is no remission for good conduct. However, aided by loyal and capable colleagues and sustained by the entire British nation at home and all our fighting men abroad, and with the unswerving co-operation of the Dominions far across the oceans and of our Empire in every quarter of the globe, it became clear last week that things had worked out pretty well and that the British Commonwealth and Empire stands more united and more effectively powerful than at any time in its long romantic history. Certainly we are in a far better state to cope with the problems and perils of the future than we were five years ago.

For a while our prime enemy, our mighty enemy, Germany, overran almost all Europe. France, who bore such a frightful strain in the last great war, was beaten to the ground and took some time to recover. The Low Countries, fighting to the best of their strength, were subjugated. Norway was overrun. Mussolini's Italy stabbed us in the back when we were, as he thought, at our last gasp. But for ourselves, our lot, I mean the British Commonwealth and Empire, we were absolutely alone.

Battle of Britain

In July, August and September, 1940, 40 or 50 squadrons of British fighter aircraft broke the teeth of the German air fleet at odds of seven or eight to one in the Battle of Britain. Never before in the history of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few. The name of Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding will ever be linked with this splendid event. But conjoined with the Royal Air Force lay the Royal Navy, ever ready to tear to pieces the barges, gathered from the canals of Holland and Belgium, in which an invading army could alone have been transported. I was never one to believe that the invasion of Britain would be an easy task. With the autumn storms, the immediate danger of invasion in 1940 had passed.

Then began the blitz, when Hitler said he would rub out our cities. This was borne without a word of complaint or the slightest signs of flinching, while a very large number of people—honour to them all—proved that London could take it and so could the other ravaged centres.

But the dawn of 1941 revealed us still in jeopardy. The hostile aircraft could fly across the approaches to our island, where 46,000,000 people had to import half their daily bread and all the materials they need for peace or war, from Brest to Norway in a single flight or back again, observing all the movements of our shipping in and out of the Clyde and Mersey and directing upon our convoys the large and increasing numbers of U-boats with which the enemy bespattered the Atlantic—the survivors or successors of which are now being collected in British harbours.

The sense of envelopment, which might at any moment turn to strangulation, lay heavy upon us. We had only the north-western

approach between Ulster and Scotland through which to bring in the means of life and to send out the forces of war. Owing to the action of Mr. de Valera, so much at variance with the temper and instinct of thousands of southern Irishmen, who hastened to the battle-front to prove their ancient valour, the approaches which the southern Irish ports and airfields could so easily have guarded were closed by the hostile aircraft and U-boats.

A Deadly Moment

This was indeed a deadly moment in our life, and if it had not been for the loyalty and friendship of Northern Ireland we should have been forced to come to close quarters with Mr. de Valera or perish forever from the earth. However, with a restraint and poise to which I say, history will find few parallels, we never laid a violent hand upon them, which at times would have been quite easy and quite natural, and left the de Valera Government to frolic with the German and later with the Japanese representatives to their heart's content.

When I think of these days I think also of other episodes and personalities. I do not forget Lieutenant-Commander Esmonde, V.C., D.S.O.; Lance-Corporal Keneally, V.C.; Captain Fegen, V.C., and other Irish heroes that I could easily recite, and all bitterness by Britain for the Irish race dies in my heart. I can only pray that in years which I shall not see, the shame will be forgotten and the glories will endure, and that the peoples of the British Isles and of the British Commonwealth of Nations will walk together in mutual comprehension and forgiveness.

My friends, we will not forget the devotion of our merchant seamen, the vast, inventive, adaptive, all-embracing and, in the end, all-controlling power of the Royal Navy, with its ever more potent new ally, the air, which have kept the life-line open. We were able to breathe; we were able to live; we were able to strike. Dire deeds we had to do. The destruction or capture of the French fleet which had it ever passed into German hands would, together with the Italian fleet, have perhaps enabled the German Navy to face us on the high seas. The dispatch to Wavell all round the Cape at our darkest hour, of tanks—practically all we had in the island—enabled us as far back as November, 1940, to defend Egypt against invasion and hurl back with the loss of a quarter of a million captives the Italian armies at whose tail Mussolini had planned a ride into Cairo or Alexandria.

Great anxiety was felt by President Roosevelt, and indeed by thinking men throughout the United States, about what would happen to us in the early part of 1941. This great President felt to the depth of his being that the destruction of Britain would not only be a fearful event in itself, but that it would expose to mortal danger the vast and as yet largely unarmed potentialities and future destiny of the United States.

Invasion Threat

He feared greatly that we should be invaded in that spring of 1941, and no doubt he had behind him military advice as good as any in the world, and he sent his recent Presidential opponent, Mr. Wendell Willkie, to me with a letter in which he had written in his own hand the famous lines of Longfellow, which I quoted in the House of Commons the other day:—

Sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!

We were in a fairly tough condition by the early months of 1941 and felt very much better about ourselves than in the months immediately after the collapse of France. Our Dunkirk army and field force troops in Britain, almost a million strong, were nearly all equipped or re-equipped. We had ferried over the Atlantic a million rifles and a thousand cannon from the United States, with all their ammunition, since the previous June.

In our munition works, which were becoming very powerful, men and women had worked at their machines till they dropped senseless with fatigue. Nearly one million of men, growing to two millions at the peak, working all day had been formed into the Home Guard, armed at least with rifles and armed also with the spirit "Conquer or Die."

Later in 1941, when we were still all alone, we sacrificed, to some extent unwillingly, our conquests of the winter in Cyrenaica and Libya in order to stand by Greece, and Greece will never forget how much we gave, albeit unavailingly, of the little we had. We did this for honour. We repressed the German-instigated rising in Iraq. We defended Palestine. With the assistance of General de Gaulle's indomitable Free French we cleared Syria and the Lebanon of Vichyites and of German intrigue. And then in June, 1941, another tremendous world event occurred.

You have no doubt noticed in your reading of British history that we have sometimes had to hold out all alone, or to be the mainspring of coalitions, against a Continental tyrant or dictator for quite a long time—against the Spanish Armada, against the might of Louis XIV, when we led Europe for nearly 25 years under William III and Marlborough, and 130 years ago, when Pitt, Wellington, and Nelson broke Napoleon, not without the assistance of the heroic Russians of 1812. In all these world wars our island kept the lead of Europe or else held out alone.

Hitler's Mistake

And if you hold out alone long enough there always comes a time when the tyrant makes some ghastly mistake which alters the whole balance of the struggle. On June 22, 1941, Hitler, master as he thought himself of all Europe, nay indeed soon to be, he thought, master of the world, treacherously, without warning, without the slightest provocation, hurled himself on Russia and came face to face with Marshal Stalin and the numberless millions of the Russian people. And then at the end of the year Japan struck her felon blow at the United States at Pearl Harbour, and at the same time attacked us in Malaya and at Singapore. Thereupon Hitler and Mussolini declared war on the republic of the United States.

Years have passed since then. Indeed every year seems to me almost a decade. But never since the United States entered the war have I had the slightest doubt but that we should be saved and that we had only to do our duty in order to win. We have played our part in all this process by which the evildoers have been overthrown. I hope I do not

speaking vain or boastful words. But from Alamein in October, 1942, through the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa, of Sicily and of Italy, with the capture of Rome, we marched many miles and never knew defeat.

And then last year, after two years' patient preparation and marvelous devices of amphibious warfare—in my view our scientists are not surpassed by any nation, specially when their thought is applied to naval matters—last year on June 6 we seized a carefully selected little toe of German-occupied France and poured millions in from this island and from across the Atlantic until the Seine, the Somme, and the Rhine all fell behind the advancing Anglo-American spearheads. France was liberated. She produced a fine Army of gallant men to aid her own liberation. Germany lay open.

And now from the other side, from the East, the mighty military achievements of the Russian people, always holding many more German troops on their front than we could do, rolled forward to meet us in the heart and centre of Germany. At the same time, in Italy, Field-Marshal Alexander's Army of so many nations, the largest part of which was British or British Empire, struck their final blow and compelled more than 1,000,000 enemy troops to surrender. This 15th Army Group, as we call it, are now deep in Austria joining their right hand with the Russians and their left with the United States armies under General Eisenhower's command.

It happened that in three days we received the news of the unlamented departures of Mussolini and Hitler, and in three days also surrenders were made to Field-Marshal Alexander and Field-Marshal Montgomery of over 2,500,000 soldiers of this terrible warlike German Army.

I shall make it clear at this moment that we have never failed to recognise the immense superiority of the power used by the United States in the rescue of France and the defeat of Germany.

For our part we have had in action about one third as many men as the Americans, but we have taken our full share of the fighting, as the scale of our losses shows. Our Navy has borne incomparably the heavier burden in the Atlantic Ocean, in the narrow seas and Arctic convoys to Russia, while the United States Navy has used its massive strength mainly against Japan. It is right and natural that we should extol the virtues and glorious services of our own most famous commanders, Alexander and Montgomery, neither of whom was ever defeated since they began together at Alamein, both of whom had conducted in Africa, in Italy, in Normandy and in Germany battles of the first magnitude and of decisive consequences. At the same time we know how great is our debt to the combining and unifying of the command and high strategic direction of General Eisenhower.

Chiefs of the Staff

Here is the moment when I must pay my personal tribute to the British Chiefs of the Staff with whom I have worked in the closest intimacy throughout these hard years. There have been very few changes in this powerful and capable body of men who, sinking all Service differences and judging the problems of the war as a whole, have worked together in the closest harmony with each other. In Field-Marshal Brooke, Admiral Pound, Admiral Andrew Cunningham,

and Marshal of the R.A.F. Portal a power was formed who deserved the highest honour in the direction of the whole British war strategy and its agreement with that of our allies.

It may well be said that never have the forces of two nations fought side by side and intermingled into line of battle with so much unity, comradeship, and brotherhood as in the great Anglo-American army. Some people say, "Well, what would you expect, if both nations speak the same language and have the same outlook upon life with all its hope and glory." Others may say, "It would be an ill day for all the world and for the pair of them if they did not go on working together and marching together and sailing together and flying together wherever something has to be done for the sake of freedom and fair play all over the world."

There was one final danger from which the collapse of Germany has saved us. In London and the south-eastern counties we have suffered for a year from various forms of flying bombs and rockets and our Air Force and our Ack-Ack Batteries have done wonders against them. In particular the Air Force, turned on in good time on what then seemed very slight and doubtful evidence, vastly hampered and vastly delayed all German preparations.

Blasting the Viper

But it was only when our Armies cleaned up the coast and overran all the points of discharge, and when the Americans captured vast stores of rockets of all kinds near Leipzig, and when the preparations being made on the coasts of France and Holland could be examined in detail, that we knew how grave was the peril, not only from rockets and flying bombs but from multiple long-range artillery.

Only just in time did the allied armies blast the viper in his nest. Otherwise the autumn of 1944, to say nothing of 1945, might well have seen London as shattered as Berlin. For the same period the Germans had prepared a new U-boat fleet and novel tactics which, though we should have eventually destroyed them, might well have carried anti-U-boat warfare back to the high peak days of 1942. Therefore we must rejoice and give thanks not only for our preservation when we were all alone but for our timely deliverance from new suffering, new perils not easily to be measured.

I wish I could tell you to-night that all our toils and troubles were over. Then indeed I could end my five years' service happily, and if you thought you had had enough of me and that I ought to be put out to grass, I assure you I would take it with the best of grace. But, on the contrary, I must warn you as I did when I began this five years' task—and no one knew then that it would last so long—that there is still a lot to do and that you must be prepared for further efforts of mind and body and further sacrifices to great causes if you are not to fall back into the rut of inertia, the confusion of aim, and the craven fear of being great. You must not weaken in any way in your alert and vigilant frame of mind, and though holiday rejoicing is necessary to the human spirit, yet it must add to the strength and resilience with which every man and woman turns again to the work they have to do, and also to the outlook and watch they have to keep on public affairs.

On the continent of Europe we have yet to make sure that the simple and honourable purposes for which we entered the war are not brushed

aside or overlooked in the months following our success, and that the words freedom, democracy, and liberation are not distorted from their true meaning as we have understood them. There would be little use in punishing the Hitlerites for their crimes if law and justice did not rule, and if totalitarian or police governments were to take the place of the German invaders.

“ We Must Make Sure ”

We seek nothing for ourselves. But we must make sure that those causes which we fought for find recognition at the peace table in facts as well as words, and above all we must labour that the world organisation which the United Nations are creating at San Francisco, does not become an idle name; does not become a shield for the strong and a mockery for the weak. It is the victors who must search their hearts in their glowing hours and be worthy by their nobility of the immense forces that they wield.

We must never forget that beyond all lurks Japan, harassed and failing but still a people of a hundred millions, for whose warriors death has few terrors. I cannot tell you to-night how much time or what exertions will be required to compel them to make amends for their odious treachery and cruelty. We have received—like China so long undaunted—we have received horrible injuries from them ourselves, and we are bound by the ties of honour and fraternal loyalty to the United States to fight this great war at the other end of the world at their side without flagging or failing.

We must remember that Australia, New Zealand, and Canada were and are all directly menaced by this evil Power. They came to our aid in our dark times, and we must not leave unfinished any task which concerns their safety and their future. I told you hard things at the beginning of these last five years; you did not shrink, and I should be unworthy of your confidence and generosity if I did not still cry, “ Forward, unflinching, unswerving, indomitable, till the whole task is done and the whole world is safe and clean.”

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