



Winston Churchill (wartime speeches on CD)

Winston Churchill was born in 1874 into a wealthy and famous family. His father was Lord Randolph Churchill and he was the grandson of the 7th Duke of Marlborough. Winston Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire. He was schooled at Harrow where it is said that he only put his name on the exam entrance paper to get in. Churchill went to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and gained a commission in the Fourth Hussars. He saw some military action and took part in the Battle of Omdurman in 1898.

During the Boer War, he was a war correspondent. Winston Churchill was captured, held a prisoner, escaped and took part in the relief of Ladysmith.

After this, Winston Churchill went into politics. He had a chequered career up to World War Two and was seen as something of a maverick. In 1900, he was elected Conservative MP for Oldham but in 1904, he left the Conservative Party and joined the Liberal Party, which, he believed, better represented his economic views on free trade. From 1906 to 1908, he was a Liberal MP for northwest Manchester and from 1908 to 1922, he was MP for Dundee.

Between 1908 and 1910, Winston Churchill held a cabinet post when Herbert Asquith, leader of the Liberal Party, appointed him President of the Board of Trade. Winston Churchill's major achievement in this post was to establish labour exchanges. In 1910, he was promoted to Home Secretary. As Home Secretary, Winston Churchill used troops to maintain law and order during a miners strike in South Wales. He also used a detachment of Scots Guards to assist police during a house siege in Sidney Street in East London in January 1911. Whilst such actions may have marked him down as a man who would do his utmost to maintain law and order, there were those who criticised his use of the military for issues that the police usually dealt with.

From October 1911 to May 1915, Winston Churchill was made First Lord of the Admiralty. In this post, he did a great deal to ensure that the navy was in a state to fight a war. Winston Churchill put a strong emphasis on modernisation and he was an early supporter of using planes in combat.

However, Churchill was to pay the price for the bloody failure of the Dardanelles campaign in 1915 – it was Winston Churchill who proposed the expedition to the War Council and, as a result, he was held responsible for its failure. He was dismissed from his post at the Admiralty and he was made Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Having been Home Secretary and First Lord at the Admiralty, this was seen by many, including Winston Churchill, to be a demotion and he left the post after just six months. Churchill rejoined the army.

Here he commanded a battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers on the Western Front until May 1916. However, Winston Churchill quickly returned to government. In 1917 he was appointed Minister for Munitions – a post he held until 1918.

In 1919, Winston Churchill was appointed Minister for War and Air – a post he held until 1920.

In 1921, he was appointed Colonial Secretary – a post he held until he lost his seat for Dundee in the 1922 election.

After his electoral defeat in 1922, Winston Churchill left the Liberal Party and became the MP for Epping in 1924 standing as a 'constitutional anti-socialist'. Stanley Baldwin, leader of the Conservative Party, appointed him as Chancellor of the Exchequer (a post he held from 1924 to 1929) and Winston Churchill officially rejoined the Conservative Party in 1925.

Churchill remained outside of government from 1929 to 1939. He had spoken out against the government's policy towards India and as Hitler became more and more aggressive in Europe, Winston Churchill became more and more concerned about the stance taken by the then leader of the government, Neville Chamberlain. From 1938 to the outbreak of war in September 1939, Churchill urged the government to be more pro-active against Hitler, including for an early call for conscription.

On September 3rd, 1939, Winston Churchill was back in the government when Chamberlain appointed him First Lord of the Admiralty. The seeming failure of the government, including the military failure in Norway in 1940, meant that criticism of Chamberlain became more and more robust. On May 10th, 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister and during the war, he was the most dominant figure in British politics – a role that received huge praise once the war was over.

To many people in Britain, Churchill's stand against Nazism and all it stood for, summarised why the war was being fought. His speeches have become part of legend – be it 'fighting on the beaches' or his salute to the men from Fighter Command who took on the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain:

"Never in the field of human conflict, was so much owed to so few."

Churchill also remained in London during the Blitz and regularly visited areas bombed out by the Luftwaffe. To the people of London, he was one of them and a man who could have removed himself from the dangers of German bombers, but refused to - staying in bombed out London along with those who suffered.

Churchill also took a role in military issues. It was he who was the political force behind the creation of commando units that would be sent in to disrupt the German military. He was also scathing about military defeats, calling the defeat at Tobruk a "disgrace".

During the war, Winston Churchill also held a number of meetings with other wartime leaders. He met F D Roosevelt, the American president, on nine occasions between 1941 and 1945; he had five meetings with the Russian leader Stalin between 1942 and 1945.

