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## The Last Lion; Winston Spencer Churchill: Alone, 1932-1940

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The tapestry is extraordinarily rich with insights into life among the leaders of Britain during the great threat to that nation. Not all of it is pretty. Many Americans who served in the blood and gore of the foxholes, in the all-too vulnerable ships, and in the freezing and frightening aircraft of the time will wonder at the privilege enjoyed by the British leaders. Indeed, an American is left to wonder whether one of the reactions to the Colville diary in Britain may not have been immense resentment by those who served in less exalted positions within the British war effort. But the British society was class-based society then, even more than it is now. The book shows that.

Military historians will be particularly fascinated by the discussion of decisions to appoint various key leaders and to remove others. The devastating effect of unpreparedness in Britain at the beginning of the war, the machinations to involve the United States, and the long wait until the United States mobilized are all graphically displayed.

Colville's contemporaneous writings about the relationship between Churchill and de Gaulle portended events that continue to plague the North Atlantic Alliance. Churchill's attitudes toward Stalin over time, again recorded contemporaneously, were chillingly prophetic.

One could go on about structure, process, function, and personality. In the process, the reviewer would fail to capture the color and wit Colville adds to these important topics. Beyond that, an exceptional set of biographical notes, a list of abbreviations and an excellent index beckon the serious scholar.

It is better, though, to let Colville speak for himself. This volume of diaries is one of the best sources in recent times on the subject of power in crisis.

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Manchester, William. *The Last Lion; Winston Spencer Churchill: Alone, 1932-1940*. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1988. 800pp. \$24.95

This is a book for every military officer who faces the prospect of challenging accepted wisdom. Reading this well-written volume, which William Manchester narrates with the story-telling ability of a novelist, is a pleasurable experience. His affection for Churchill is obvious, and there is sufficient documentation to support his enthusiasm. All of us are familiar with the major events.

Most of us know the characters, both good and bad, as well as some of the issues, but this volume presents them in great depth. The author portrays Churchill as a man isolated by circumstance, but with the emotional stability, self-confidence, and political will to see the future, to warn of its consequences, and to repeat those warnings over and over again to his hostile audience of fellow subjects.

The book's lesson illustrates how evidence of what was to come was readily ascertainable to anyone who

would see or listen critically. Manchester describes the policy of appeasement, the avowed policy of the British government whose efforts in that regard bordered on the obsequious. He presents Churchill's ability to see the fallacies in that policy. They were evident to him at the time; to the others—only in retrospect. Churchill's power to listen, keep his own counsel, and make up his own mind is impressive.

Hitler was intent upon *lebensraum*. Churchill knew it and because he had learned all he could about the man, knew he had to be stopped. Patton is reported to have said about Rommel, "I read his book." Churchill said the same about Hitler. The mystifying fact is that few others appear to have done so. Chamberlain thought Hitler could be satisfied or diverted.

In spite of, or more likely because of, his prescience, Churchill suffered the loneliness and the social ostracism of a prophet in the wilderness. He was considered an unreliable maverick in light of the great problems of the day; irrelevant, practically senile; and out-of-touch. He was often told so. But the author's admiration for his subject clouds the reader's ability to understand the fact and the reasons for Churchill's enforced isolation.

There are other lessons here, too, which are known widely but bear repeating. Churchill's implacable opposition to Hitler was caused, in part, by his realization of what Hitler was doing to the Jews. And although a weak case could, on

occasion, be made for other aspects of the Nazi government, Churchill knew that the indefensible could not be defended.

Manchester's description of a typical Churchillian day at Chartwell is full of charm. From the magnificent, relaxed nudity of the morning, to the pervasive sociality of the crowded lunches and dinners, Churchill dominates an impressive house. The cataloging of the subject's smoking and drinking habits and his bizarre work schedule—dictating his books from 11 at night until 3 in the morning—is fascinating. It calls into question all recent health and "early to bed" advice.

Further information and insight into Churchill and the prelude to World War II can be obtained from Martin Gilbert's recently completed multivolume biography, and Anthony Read and David Fisher's new *Deadly Embrace*, a description of Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet pact.

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Saward, Dudley. *Bomber Harris: The Story of Marshall of the Royal Air Force*. New York: Doubleday, 1985. 368pp. \$19.95

Coffey, Thomas M. *Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay*. New York: Crown, 1986. 480pp. \$18.95