

Winston Churchill and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
by
Prof. Barry A. Goodfield, Ph.D., DABFM

On June 6, 1944 the Allied forces under the command of Dwight D. Eisenhower invaded the French shores of Normandy. On June 6, 2017, a film was released entitled *Churchill*. It was a multilayered story of a relationship and a life lived well and wrapped in adventure, conflict, self-doubt and a classic example of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, for more than a century, has been a great teacher for many of us. Valor, integrity, honor, tenacity, defiance and the resolute decision to *Never give in!*

As I calculate I was 3 years old just tall enough to put my nose on my families bookshelf. I saw a man wearing a funny hat holding a strange kind of gun. I regularly stared with fascination at the man in the pinstripe suit holding such a strange weapon. It was my first encounter with Winston Churchill and a Thompson submachine gun.

That was oh so many years ago and he still remains my primary teacher of views and values that I cherish to this day. As a psychologist my primary focus these days is providing treatment for veterans who suffer PTSD using what we call The Goodfield Method™.

I was at a half empty local theater when the movie came out that day. With one eye I was looking at the depiction of a childhood hero, a man who fascinated me for all these years, and with the another eye looking at him as a tireless warrior who constantly battled traumas and hardships throughout his life.

Over the years I became quite familiar with many of the exploits and traumatic events of his long history. For example, his life began in a ladies' cloakroom, where his American born mother Jenny Jerome, had been partying at the annual St. Andrew's Ball at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire. She apparently fainted and was carried into a little room just off Blenheim's great hall. Once it had belonged to the first duke's chaplain; that night it was the ladies' cloakroom. A country doctor delivered a healthy Winston on evening of November 30, 1874.

One story says he was born two months premature and the other that he was a full term baby. William Manchester's *The Last Lion* also suggested Winston's "premature" birth was a fiction promulgated to obscure a pre-wedding pregnancy, a ruse that supposedly fooled no one. Winston enjoyed the stories. He would reply: "Although present on the occasion, I have no clear recollection of the events leading up to it." Of course, it is possible that



his parents have been slandered. Periods of gestation do vary. He may have been premature. It would have been just like him. He never could wait his turn.

His father, Lord Randolph Churchill, the grandson of the 7th Duke of Marlborough never really accepted or had much to do with Winston Churchill. Winston had no real contact with his father whom he idolized, it was a one-way street. Randolph Churchill once was heard to say to young Winston “You’ll never amount to anything, you will always be a failure!”

Traumatic events characterize much of Winston’s youth. His mother came from a wealthy family from Brooklyn, New York and was quite the socialite. More “plus belle du bal” than affectionate and concerned mother. Long periods of time went by without any contact except for desperate letters pleading for contact written by young Winston from prestigious private schools where he languished in private schools (public schools as they were referred to in England). A velvet gilded cage was still a cage.

Throughout Churchill’s life he had a speech impediment it was diagnosed as a *lateral lisp*. This was clearly something that was traumatic for him as a young boy. He was bullied and judged by other boys. This too was on the list of Perceived Traumatic Events (PTE’s) he had to overcome. He felt and in fact was socially rejected virtually his whole childhood.

After the death of his father Randolph from syphilis and alcoholism his mother had multiple assignations and a few marriages, mostly with men of social prominence. It was even rumored that, Gen. Kitchener and the Prince of Wales were occasional suitors, or the occasional fetching men of younger age. Although Winston adored her it did not go over well with him.

His mother “discovered” her adventurous son, as the press heralded his thrill-seeking exploits in South Africa, Cuba, Egypt and the Sudan and a far. The young soldier, journalist grabbed headlines that laid the base for his long tumultuous political career.

Many who knew him said of his military career that he was “metal hungry” and was always looking for situations where he could find self-glory, recognition and praise from others. Many of those situations however, were fraught with danger and excitement. He was in the last cavalry charge that took place in the second Boer War at the Battle of Omdurman, September 2, 1898.

For Churchill PTSD had many faces. Its derivation came from unexpressed and overwhelming traumas that lived in his body like a mine field ready to explode, spiraling him into confusion, desperation, and despair. He called them his black dog. It was in fact, what we called today, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. When it struck he would sometimes disappear for days staring into space, plunged into dark into dark despair and depression.

Words were his true weapon, as much as his trusted 380 Webley Scott, words written or spoken for him decoded despair, giving inspiration and solace, not just to himself but, later to a hope starved world, held in the grip of Hitler's tyranny. His wit and wisdom shaped and inspired many.



Churchill at his desk in 1940

It was however, his popular written histories, for which Churchill received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953 for his mastery of historical and biographical description.

Under that short, stocky, redheaded giant was a man struggling not just with the overwhelming events of the history he shaped but, with intrapsychic occurrences he struggled to understand. Churchill's famous black dog's real name was Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He was a real combat veteran who loved action more than life itself.

As such he constantly sought out opportunities to challenge, to prevail and take a crisis and turned it into creativity and ultimately victory. His drive to prove himself found him in harms way much of his life. His military accomplishments speak for themselves and they also speak to his struggle to be seen as worthy by neglecting parents, and cruel headmasters who impose their will on this lonely lad.

His military accomplishments and actions are of note:

MILITARY UNITS WITH WHICH CHURCHILL SERVED

1. 4th Queen's Own Hussars (cavalry regiment): England and India, 1895-99.
2. 31st Punjab Regiment, Bengal Infantry, Indian Army, part of the 1st brigade, Malakand Field Force: NW Frontier of India, September 1897.
3. 35th Sikh Regiment, Bengal Infantry, Indian Army, part of the 2nd brigade, Malakand Field Force: NW Frontier of India, September 1897.
4. 21st Lancers (cavalry regiment): Egypt and the Sudan, August-October 1898. The regiment became the 21st (Empress of India's) Lancers after the Battle of Omdurman, 2 September 1898.

5. South African Light Horse (Imperial Yeomanry cavalry regiment): commissioned January 1900, served as officer and correspondent until July 1900.
6. Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars (Yeomanry cavalry regiment): January 1902. A reserve unit, the QOOH became part of the Territorial Force in 1908 (re-titled Territorial Army in 1920). In 1923 the regiment was superseded by 100th (Worcestershire & Oxfordshire Yeomanry) Royal Field Artillery Brigade, which contained two batteries formed from QOOH volunteers.

Note: Churchill was posted to the Western Front, first to the 2nd battalion, Grenadier Guards (infantry regiment) for one month's training (December 1915-January 1916); then to command the 6th battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers (infantry), part of the Ninth (Scottish) Division, 5 January to 16 May 1916. Despite these postings his commission remained in the QOOH. *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*

Perhaps the largest Perceived Traumatic Event (PTE), was discussed in a book written in 2005 by William C. Ives entitled, [The Dardanelles and Gallipoli](#).

Ives sets the stage and discuss the factors surrounding a decision which haunted Churchill for more than half a century. He was the ultimate risk taker unfortunately, his wishes, desires and tactical approaches were not followed and subsequently resulted in the loss of thousands of lives.

The battle hinged around the narrow channel between European and Asiatic Turkey. It became the scene of Winston Churchill's greatest tragedy. Ives says, "He had never seen these straits. Had he done so, would he have pursued the plan to force the Dardanelles by ships alone? The Dardanelles hovered as a black cloud in Winston Churchill's sky for the last half century of his life. The failed attempt to sail a fleet through the Dardanelles Straits, across the Sea of Marmora to cow the Turks into surrendering, and thus relieve Russia in World War I, cast a long shadow."

Ives goes on to say, "The Dardanelles Campaign opened on 3 November 1914, when the Royal Navy shelled two Turkish forts guarding the Aegean entrance to the Straits: Kumkale on the Asian side, Seddulbahir on the tip of the peninsula. Of course, prior to this, there had been naval activity in the Aegean in the vicinity of the Dardanelles, and much conferencing, strategizing and memorandum exchanging in Whitehall. Churchill's requisitioning in July 1914 of two new battleships destined for the Turks by British shipyards and already paid for, understandably upset the Turkish Government and provided the Germans with a further opportunity to prod Turkey into entering the war on the side of the Central Powers, which she did at the end of October."

What did Churchill do when the failure and blame landed on his desk as First Sea Lord, First Lord of the Admiralty? Not just a military disaster, it was the profound judgment from his peers, the British press and the public in general, that shocked, depressed, and brought out the infamous PTSD "black dog" — his clinical depression began to invade his life and debilitate once more, as it did his childhood.

He struggled with the demons that told him he was responsible for the deaths of thousands of men. Always the man of action he found himself once again impotent, powerless to correct the situation. He was not there, he simply oversaw the debacle from the Admiralty in London.

He was stuck behind a big desk when he needed to be with the fighting men in Gallipoli. This once again reinforced the notion that action was the answer to anxiety. He needed action now to vindicate himself from the bonds that held him in England, judged as a fool alas, maybe even a coward. He needed to find himself unconsciously blameless from the erroneous characterizations made about his leadership skills.

He damned the desk and donned a uniform, that of a Lieutenant Colonel commanding a Scottish battalion located near Ploegsteert Wood, Spring 1916. Now the commanding officer of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, he was able to risk his life in daily combat and prove himself to himself and his men showing his valor that those in England did not see.



Future wartime Prime-Minister
Winston Churchill, as officer
commanding 6th (Service)
Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers, 1916

Many evenings by himself, or with a few men, crawling in the muck and mud in the black of night up to “the wire” where he was close enough to hear the enemy speaking German. Whether it was suicidal behavior, one might speculate this was the unconscious goal or whether it was just him trying to prove himself to himself. He would report later as daring deeds restored new balance in the system.

When he first joined the regiment the seasoned Scottish combat veterans had little truck for the disgraced former First Sea Lord. He was determined to prove himself as worthy of their respect. In a short time he did. The action and the danger diminished the power of the PTSD.

His self-concept was that of a courageous fighting man who was willing to sacrifice but not willing to suffer. He therefore, arrived to take his command with what’s his superiors officers later called, “*More than ample kit.*”

He wrote to Clementine on January 27, 1916, with demands for his mess that added to the burden of a busy mother of three. He discussed his current food requirements to be shipped from Selfridge’s in one of their famous baskets to fighting men at the front.

“I want you to send me three large slabs of corn beef, Stilton cheese, hams, dried fruit, steak and kidney pies and peach brandy. It seems to be popular here.” He was

ready for war. His initial kit included cases of fine wine, Scotch, cognac, port, and of course, an ample supply of Pol Roget the champagne he drank his entire life.

What probably drew the most surprise was the full-size bathtub that accompanied his arrival. It was war, nevertheless, he still insisted on bathing daily in a 98° warm bath regardless of what he had done during that day. This fact in itself makes me wonder if his PTSD went back as far as difficulty during his birth process in a palatial cloakroom.

Like many who suffer PTSD's haunting combat experiences that triggered deeper and earlier childhood traumas Churchill was no exception. Was it his desire to prove something to his father who judged him harshly as a child? It seems a safe speculation.

He followed Randolph Churchill career path serving as High Commissioner in India, retracing some of his accomplishments and failures. His struggle with Gandhi over India's independence reflected the staunch position held by his father.

Randolph Churchill was Chancellor of the Exchequer as was Winston in later years. Throughout his life we can trace the path of a man trying to prove himself to a father who existed as a vague memory that judged him as inadequate.

His actions bespoke a deeper call, "See me, hear me, love me, and simply tell me that I am okay." This clearly was a driving force in Churchill's life and reflected the terrible trauma he suffered from a father who simply neglected him.

Churchill's primary happy memory with his father was one afternoon when his father came in his room. He saw Winston playing with his hundreds of lead soldiers which were organized in a way that re-created a famous English battle. He received great praise from his father at that moment and it was something he never forgot.

He was equally traumatized by his relationship with his mother who simply farmed him out to a nanny. Lady Randolph hired Mrs. Elizabeth Everest as a nanny to care for Winston. Winston fondly called Mrs. Everest "Woomany." She ultimately raised him and gave him the love, support and reinforcement he always needed. That was great but it did not replace his mother and father.

Winston Churchill's early childhood traumas with rejection, judgment and profound loneliness help to create the core that enabled him to stand up to the judgments of others.

The film *Churchill* focuses primarily on the three days prior to D-Day June 6, 1944, and the frustration he experienced by once again being denied the possibility to become apart of the Normandy invasion.

This unconsciously triggered the sense of powerlessness, frustration, the déjà vu of the Dardanelles and Gallipoli. This time he wanted to be a part of it, after all he was Prime Minister! The role that his wife Clementine played in helping him through this was quite compelling.

In spite of all the uproar in his life, including the black dog, Winston Churchill was named the Greatest Briton of all Time in a 2002 poll. Till today Churchill remains

among the most influential people in British history, consistently ranking well in opinion polls of Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom. His highly complex legacy continues to stimulate intense debate amongst writers and historians. In 1963, he was the first of only eight people to be made an honorary citizen of the United States.

The producers, and all those who had the courage to create the movie *Churchill*, directed by Jonathan Teplitzky, and written by Alex von Tunzelmann, including the stars, Brian Cox as a very believable Churchill, and Miranda Richardson as a very feisty Clementine, they deserve a special thanks in a time when courage, boldness and commonality of purpose are so essential meeting today's challenges.



As I left the theater I smiled when I heard a few people applauding to an empty screen. Churchill was gone but apparently not the message for some.

What can we learn from this remarkable man who suffered extraordinary struggles in his life? What is clear is that PTSD, as we know it and defining today, is not the end of the road. Without doubt it is a major bump on life's road. It need not be a dead-end. Churchill's life stands as a living testimony to this fact. To address the challenge of change is never easy or simple. Crisis can be turned to creativity. Despair can resurface as insight and turn to productive action.

As I said in the beginning of this article, as a psychologist I provide treatment for people who suffer from PTSD using what we call The Goodfield Method™. It is simply a path with opportunity and insight. Ask for help and once again have the courage to exercise to explore the power and the pain of the past.

"Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense." Winston S. Churchill 1941

References:

Winston S. Churchill, *Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches* 2004
Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
William C. Ives entitled, *The Dardanelles and Gallipoli* 2005
William Manchester's *The Last Lion* 1980

©June 6, 2017 Goodfield Institute LLC