

# SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL: PORTRAIT IN MINIATURES

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

James H. Hillestad pens a profile of the British prime minister illustrated with personality figures and complementary collectibles

**S**ir Winston Churchill's life has been the subject of countless books, articles and films. Churchillian societies flourish worldwide, paying homage to his abilities and accomplishments.

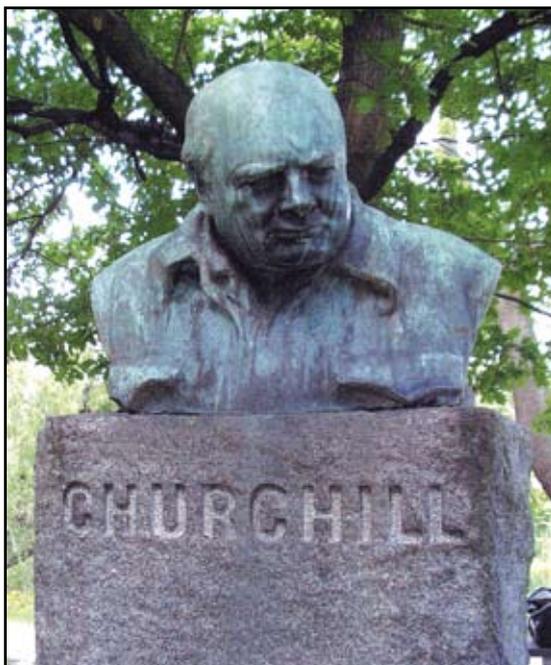
Born in 1874 at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England, he was a direct descendant of the first Duke of Marlborough.

Churchill's mother, the former Jennie Jerome, was the daughter of an American millionaire. His father, Lord Randolph Churchill, was a prominent Tory politician.

## MILITARY MAN & POLITICIAN

Winston Churchill was graduated from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. The second lieutenant joined the 4th Hussars in 1895.

He served with the Malakand Field Force on



Portrait bust of the British prime minister sculpted by Oscar Nemon. This statue stands in Churchill Park, Copenhagen, Denmark.



Porcelain bust of Churchill by Kevin Francis Ceramics in Staffordshire, England.

British India's North-West Frontier in 1897. The following year he took part in the fabled charge of the 21st Lancers during the Battle of Omdurman, Sudan.

Churchill served as a war correspondent during the

Second Anglo-Boer War. He was captured after Boers ambushed and derailed a British armored train in 1899.

Churchill made a daring escape from imprisonment in Pretoria. Aided by an English



W. Britain set portraying Sir Winston and Lady Churchill riding in the Prime Minister's Coach at the 1953 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.



AeroArt St. Petersburg Collection set of the "Big Three" of the WWII Allies at the 1943 Teheran Conference. The figures depict Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (from left).



Toy soldiers that once belonged to the British prime minister are on display at the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms in London. The 48-mm figures are believed to have been made in Germany. (Photo Courtesy of Chartwell)

# CHURCHILL & TOY SOLDIERS

**IT IS WIDELY KNOWN that Sir Winston Churchill was fond of toy soldiers.**

At his ancestral home at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England, is a magnificent display of 780 figures made by the French firm Lucotte. The popular belief has been that this was Churchill's toy soldier collection.

Not so. The figures were owned by artist Paul Maze, a friend of Churchill's in London. Maze had been given them by his father, who started the collection in the early 1890s.

When visiting Maze, Churchill would delight in rearranging the figures to his satisfaction.

In 1935, Maze and Churchill were going to spend Christmas at Blenheim Palace. Churchill suggested that Maze bring with him the entire army. Not only did Maze do so, he made a gift of the collection to the present 11th Duke of Marlborough,

John George Vanderbilt Spencer-Churchill, who was 9 years old at the time.

What do we know of Churchill's personal boyhood collection?

In his official biography of Churchill, Martin Gilbert noted at age 7 (in 1881) Churchill had

ultimately 1,500. My brother Jack commanded the hostile army."

On display now at the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms in London is a collection of toy soldiers (44 cavalry and 53 foot figures). They were once Churchill's and are now owned by Chartwell, the prime minister's country house in Kent that is now under the administration of the National Trust.

**“ Whether these figures were from his childhood is open to conjecture. But what is certain is that Churchill was a passionate collector of toy soldiers. ”**

a collection of soldiers nearly "1,000 strong which he would range in line of battle on the nursery floor."

The following year, Churchill mentions playing with his collection "making engagements," and states in a letter of thanks to his mother how much he likes his "soldiers, flags, and castle" (Churchill Archives Centre).

In his book, "My Early Life," Churchill wrote, "I had

These 48-mm figures are most likely German-made, though the maker has not been identified.

Henry Kurtz, author of "The Art of the Toy Soldier," wrote, "In the early 1880s there was not one commercial maker of lead soldiers in the whole of the British Isles. The toy soldiers that formed young Winston's miniature army were almost certainly imported from Germany."

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--James H. Hillestad

mine manager, he managed to trek nearly 300 miles to Portuguese Lourenço Marques (Maputo) in what is now Mozambique. Churchill returned to England a hero.

Churchill's subsequent political rise was swift: elected to Parliament in 1900; home secretary in 1910; and first lord of the Admiralty in 1911. He became prime minister in 1940, shepherding the British people to victory against the Axis juggernaut during World War II.

Churchill was defeated in the general election of 1945. But he rebounded in 1951 and remained in office as prime minister until 1955. He died in 1965.

## PROLIFIC WRITER & ARTIST

Dry biographical facts do not describe the scope of the man. Churchill was a journalist, soldier, politician, great orator, talented painter and stylish writer.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953 "for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values."

"In the Footsteps of Churchill" author Richard Holmes wrote, "He was neither wholly good nor wholly bad, as completely right about as often as he was hopelessly wrong,



WWII souvenir matchbox with portraits of the Allied "Big Three."



Little Lead Soldiers figures of Churchill, Queen Elizabeth and King George VI inspecting damage from German bombs during the WWII London Blitz.



Figure of Prime Minister Winston Churchill by King & Country Ltd.



Churchill commemorative plate.

## SOURCES

- National Trust, Chartwell
- Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms
- Churchill Archives Centre
- Blenheim Palace Archives
- Finest Hour Editor Richard M. Langworth
- Edward W. Fitzgerald, a founding member of the Churchill Centre



Churchill the war correspondent by the Quartermaster Corps.

Churchill with a tommy gun "Propaganda Pose" by The Armoury of St. James's.

Cigar-puffing Churchill by Alymer.

First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill by Fusilier Miniatures.

“ I like pigs: cats look down on human beings, dogs look up to them, but pigs just treat us as their equals. --Winston Churchill ”

and the occasional frail raft of quiet humility was swamped by his raging ego.”

It might surprise some readers that while Churchill loved military uniforms, he was the antithesis of a militarist. In 1959, he coined the phrase “to jaw-jaw is better than to war-war.”

## CHURCHILL TRIVIA QUESTION

**Q:** What do Winston Churchill, Helen Keller, Joan of Arc, Babe Ruth and Bill Gates have in common?  
**A:** They are all left-handed.

## ENJOYED CIGARS & BRANDY

Churchill was notorious for his enjoyment of cigars and alcohol.

In 1942, he was scheduled to fly in an unpressurized American Liberator bomber to

meet Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and discuss war plans. When told he would have to wear a special oxygen mask, Churchill asked that it be adapted so that he could enjoy a cigar en route -- and it was!

Referring to his accustomed glass of brandy, he observed,



Churchill charging at Omdurman by Trophy Miniatures of Wales Ltd.



Red Box figure of Churchill painting at Chartwell.

"I neither want it nor need it, but I should think it pretty hazardous to interfere with the ineradicable habit of a lifetime."

### GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR

Boundless, often mischievous, humor was Churchill's trademark.

Examples include his exchange of telegrams with playwright George Bernard Shaw as follows:

Shaw: "Two tickets reserved for you, first night 'Pygmalion.' Bring a friend. If you have one."

Churchill: "Cannot make first night. Will come to second. If you have one."

Another exchange with the argumentative Lady Nancy Astor, the first woman to serve as a



WWI newspaper van by Lledo.

member of Parliament in the House of Commons, follows:

Astor: "If I were your wife, I would put poison in your coffee."

Churchill: "Nancy, if I were your husband, I would drink it."

In the early 1930s, Churchill attended an American football game. Asked what he thought of it, he replied:

"Actually it is somewhat like rugby. But why do you have all these committee meetings?"

### GREAT MAN IN MINIATURE

Given Churchill's dynamic role in history, it is no wonder that he has been a popular subject for makers of painted metal military miniatures.

He has been depicted in the Sudan, South Africa, World Wars I and II, and at Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation in 1953. He has even been portrayed at leisure painting the landscape at Chartwell, his country house in Kent.

As for the latter pastime, Churchill wrote, "Painting is a

### ABOUT THE WRITER

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum in Cresco, Pa., USA. For more information about the museum and shop, visit his Website at [www.the-toy-soldier.com](http://www.the-toy-soldier.com).

friend who makes no undue demands. Happy are the painters, for they shall not be lonely. Light and colour, peace and hope, will keep them in good company to the end." ■



Special U.S. postal issue from 1991 celebrating Lend-Lease, the program under which the United States supplied Great Britain with war materiel in return for military bases.



Churchill figure made by Martin Ritchie.

### FURTHER READING

For further reading, writer James H. Hillestad recommends "The Wicked Wit of Winston Churchill" by Dominique Enright, "Churchill: A Life" by Martin Gilbert" and "In the Footsteps of Churchill" by Richard Holmes.

Churchill on the armored train during the Boer War by Trophy Miniatures of Wales Ltd.

