

EDITED BY EMMA SOAMES



*Mary  
Churchill's  
War*

THE WARTIME DIARIES OF  
CHURCHILL'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER

In 1939 seventeen-year-old Mary found herself in an extraordinary position at an extraordinary time: it was the outbreak of the Second World War and her father, Winston Churchill, had been appointed First Lord of the Admiralty; within months he would be Prime Minister.

The young Mary Churchill was uniquely placed to observe this remarkable historical moment, and her diaries -- most of which have never been published -- provide a front-row view of the great events of war, as well as exchanges and intimate moments with her father. But they also capture what it was like to be a young woman during wartime. An impulsive and spirited writer, full of coming-of-age self-consciousness and *joie de vivre*, Mary's diaries are untrammelled by hindsight or self-censorship or nostalgia.

From aid raid sirens at 10 Downing Street to seeing action with the ATS, from cocktail parties with presidents and royals to accompanying her father on key diplomatic trips, Mary's wartime diaries are full of colour, rich in historical insight, and a charming and intimate portrait of life alongside Winston Churchill.

**1940**

## **Plunged into Adulthood**

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*I have learnt more about human suffering  
& anxiety than ever before*

Image to follow



When you think of Winston Churchill, you tend to think of 1940. This year will change everything for him and his family; their darkest but also finest hour. Yet for Mary it begins relatively inauspiciously. It certainly starts cold, with frequent frosts and heavy snowfalls that ultimately culminate in one of the most severe ice storms to ever hit the United Kingdom. And while there is no thaw in international relations, the full reality and horror of war is yet to register.

As the year opens Mary is shooting with her new sister-in-law's family in Dorset. Thereafter she shops in London, skates at Chartwell, visits the theatre and listens to the wireless. But duty is already starting to call, and she accompanies her father on an official visit to the navy at Portsmouth. At this point, such occasions are still glamorous and novel, and the reader cannot help but be swept along by her youthful excitement at being piped aboard a battleship.

The entries for 23 and 29 February provide an unintentionally powerful juxtaposition between reality and romance, describing two events in London that each, in their own way, mark the beginning of a coming of age. Mary attends the royal inspection of the victorious crews of the Royal Naval cruisers HMS *Ajax* and HMS *Exeter*, just returned from South American waters where they have fought successfully in the battle of the River Plate against the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee*. While she cannot hide her excitement at the occasion, she is clearly uneasy about coming face to face with those widowed and orphaned by the action. Nevertheless, she does not let this dampen her enthusiasm for her 'debut' a few days later. This is a formal occasion at which daughters of the aristocracy are presented to high society. Given the constraints

of wartime, there is no ceremony at Buckingham Palace but there is a dinner dance, known as Queen Charlotte's Ball, at the Grosvenor House Hotel.

Everything changes again in May when her father becomes prime minister. A crucial debate in the House of Commons is triggered by defeat in the Norwegian campaign, where the British have failed to forestall a German invasion. It quickly widens into a confidence debate about Neville Chamberlain's leadership. On 9 May, Mary is in the gallery of the House of Commons to watch her father wind up for the government, a most difficult speech in which he has to walk a tightrope between defending Chamberlain justifying his own role and maintaining his credibility as a likely prime minister in waiting.

The following morning she dances the night away in London, blissfully unaware that momentous events are unfolding. Hitler has unleashed his blitzkrieg invasion of the Low Countries and Chamberlain has agreed to resign. Jock Colville, already in Downing Street as one of Chamberlain's private secretaries, records in his diary, how he: 'Dined with Mrs Henley and went on afterwards to dance at the Savoy. Sat between Mrs H and Mary Churchill (Winston's youngest progeny) . . . I thought the Churchill girl rather supercilious: she has Sarah's emphatic way of talking, and is better looking, but she seemed to me to have a much less sympathetic personality.' Colville was also rather critical of her father at this time, writing of his assumption of office that it was: 'a terrible risk, it involves the danger of rash and spectacular exploits, and I cannot help fearing that this country may be manoeuvred into the most dangerous position it has ever been in.' He was soon to revise both opinions, serving as one of Churchill's private secretaries and becoming a key confidant of the family and friend to Mary.

With Churchill now prime minister, Mary is truly at the heart of events and expected to play a role. In July, she performs her first solo engagement, the launching of the naval destroyer HMS *Gurkha* at Birkenhead. She does not record a trip to the theatre to see her sister Sarah in Ivor Novello's play *Murder in Mayfair*, of which Colville writes that: 'The Churchills en famille were delightful and very amusing. They made a certain amount of fun of the Chamberlains and Mary described how Mrs Chamberlain had taken her for the wife of one of the officers on the *Exeter* . . . I devoured cherries, gossiped with Diana, and aroused Mary's indignation to a high pitch by telling her that when Chamberlain was PM I had refused to wake him up to see the papers which Winston sent over sporadically from the Admiralty at 2.00 am. "You dared to do that to Papa!" she said.'

As the year progresses, the Battle of Britain, in which the Luftwaffe tries to break the air superiority of the Royal Air Force, gives way to the large-scale bombing of the Blitz. At her parents' insistence, Mary spends much of the summer in the comparative safety of her cousin Judy Montagu's home in the Norfolk countryside at Breccles. Here she is exposed to a more typical and lively teenage social life than she had hitherto experienced at Chartwell.

From September, and her eighteenth birthday, Mary is living in the prime minister's country residence, Chequers, a sixteenth-century manor house in Buckinghamshire, and undertaking work for the Women's Voluntary Services. Her diaries show her following the military campaigns on which her father's premiership now depends. She is part of his inner circle and feels the reverses and successes very keenly. The failed attempt by a British and Free French expedition to take control of the strategic port of Dakar in Senegal, from forces

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loyal to the Vichy French regime, is damaging to both Churchill and de Gaulle. Yet the year ends on a high note with a small taste of victory against the Italians in North Africa and the family united in celebration.



## Monday 1 January

New Year's Day at Minterne.<sup>1</sup> Went out with the guns – in the morning we shot rabbits – and saw plenty of roebuck, they are so pretty and elegant. After lunch we went out to shoot the snipe bog – v cold, ice, wind. About 5 flew out – killed one. Then we beat an adjacent wood – woodcock, pigeons. A glorious afternoon – I do so love the vast immensities of open country.

Played about in the evening. Had continual struggle for 'the last word' at dinner and afterwards with Duke and Duchess of Norfolk – both of whom I think are the greatest fun. Lovely time playing records – then, prompted by her – the Earl Marshall [the Duke of Norfolk] allowed himself to do his 'strong man act' & hurl me about the room – he must be pretty strong. V gay mouvementée evening!!

## Thursday 4 January

Work – very little to do. Driving lesson in pm – then went on the 'bargain hunt' to Marshalls stocking sale. Had to walk miles because I took wrong bus! Outside St George's a pavement artist had extraordinarily good caricatures of public personalities – among them a v good one of Papa – so I gave him 6d, which I thought a bit stingy afterwards, & I told him who I was – the man looked absolutely flabbergasted – & raised his hat on recovering! When I have a torch & plenty of time I like London in the blackout – it's rather thrilling & different.

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1 Minterne House, Dorset, Pamela Churchill, née Digby's family home

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## Saturday 13 January

I began life at 2am by the Admiralty wanting Papa & ringing my number by mistake!! We left Waterloo by the 7.45 & had breakfast on the train. Mr Seal,<sup>2</sup> the Naval Sec Admiral Syfret, Mummie, Papa, myself – a secretary and Inspector Thomson<sup>3</sup> completed the party. We were met at Portsmouth by the C-in-C – Sir William James of Bubbles fame!<sup>4</sup> We went straight to Mount Vernon – torpedo school – then looked at some mines – queer things!! Then Mummie & myself went to the officers' mess & had coffee – while something terrifically hush-hush was shown to the others. Then we all went in a battleship – Papa just looked at a couple of cruisers & I was simply longing to go in one – & Adm Syfret was perfectly sweet & divining my wish took me onto one whose captain he knew. All the others went off to look at something else & oh – proud moment of my life – I was PIPED OVER THE SIDE – both going on & coming off – I nearly fainted when I realised what was happening. I suppose it's because I have a big sense of the spectacular and romantic – because the uniforms – the gold – the saluting – the trumpeting – & the piping.

## Monday 12 February

I develop German Measles. We are definitely NOT amused.

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2 Eric Seal 1898–1972, Principal Private Secretary to Churchill, 1938–41

3 Detective Inspector Walter Thompson 1890–1978, Churchill's police guard

4 Admiral Sir William James 1881–1973, who had been the model as a child for the painting *Bubbles* by his grandfather, John Everett Millais

### Friday 23 February

THE INSPECTION OF THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE AJAX & EXETER BY THE KING.<sup>5</sup> Quite early crowds began collecting along the streets & especially on the Horse Guards parade. Tremendous bustlings & hustlings not only on the parade, where commanders & marines rushed about, but also indoors – where secretaries & myself flew about in a great state. A tragic group of widows & orphans collected underneath the windows of Admiralty House, where chairs were arranged for them. They looked cold & miserable, and Mummie had the wonderful idea of providing coffee & biscuits for them – so Lyons after some persuasion arranged it, & I flew across to the shop to guide the nippies over [waitresses in Lyons teashops]. I was so hot by this time, as I was all in my best & tidied up!! Mummie & I went down & I helped give them the coffee. It was terrible their grief & courage, & I crept away. I felt too much moved & I felt I had no right to intrude on their sorrows. People began arriving – personal friends upstairs & official friends down . . . Mummie, self, Mrs Fitzroy, Lady Pound & Mrs Chamberlain (who was late) all were in Papa's room, where little platforms had been put in the windows. Lady Harewood, Lady Woodhouse & Mrs Bell, Adm Syfret & Mr Seal came in to be presented to the Queen, I was v much excited & stood behind Mummie.

### Thursday 29 February

MY DEBUT. I couldn't believe when I woke up this morning that today was the day I have been longing for for such ages. I began dressing at about 5.30 & managed to be 10 mins late!

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5 The crews from the Battle of the River Plate

Well I must say it was lovely to wear such a really beautiful white taffeta hooped dress (slightly off the shoulders!) I wore tiny camellias in my hair – my pearl necklace – my aquamarine & pearl drop earrings, long white gloves – & a sweet little diamond naval crown which Vic sent me as a present – the angel! Mummie looked stunningly beautiful in a lovely pale pink gown with sequins embroidered on it.

### The Party

I can only say that the evening was a dream of glamour & happiness. Everyone was so sweet to me – But the evening was made for me by Papa, in spite of all work & everything, coming in & sitting with us for a little while.

### **Wednesday 8 May**

The debate on the Norwegian campaign continued throughout today. Attacks, queries, suspicions & suggestions came from all sides of the House. In the evening at 10 after Mr A.V. Alexander (Labour)<sup>6</sup> had sat down after a minute questioning of the Norwegian campaign (the unrest in the House was aggravated by Papa arriving rather late for Mr A's questions – however this point was entirely submerged by later events). Papa rose to wind up the debate. It was the first time in 11 years that he had wound up for the govt. The House was in a most uncertain, unpleasant & sensitive & restless mood. There were frequent interruptions – also quite a lot of cheering. Papa's handling of the actual matter and of the House was nothing short of SUPERB. I listened

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6 Albert Victor Alexander 1885–1965, later 1st Lord Alexander of Hillsborough, succeeded Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty, 1940–45

breathless with pride, apprehension & desire. A storm of interruptions arose making Papa sit down & the speech ended amid cat-calls from both sides of the House. There was a spirit of criticism & ferocity to be felt most strongly. Bitter opposition to Chamberlain & many members of the Cabinet even within the ranks of the Tory party.

### Thursday 9 May

The papers full of the debate yesterday evening. Rumours in nearly all of them that Papa might form a govt: & a general feeling that a coalition govt on the broadest base should be formed.

In the efforts to beat off a cold I think I took an overdose of quinine & cinnamon, anyway I felt mighty sick from about 4.30 until 8.13 when all my troubles ended by my being VERY VERY sick – all dressed up in my best too – however all was well & I went to a lovely dinner party given by Cousin Sylvia<sup>7</sup> for Judy and myself. Mark<sup>8</sup> was there & made himself v agreeable to me. We went to the Savoy & then (despite a few conscience pricks which I firmly banished) on to the 400 [Club]. Danced almost exclusively with Mark. V nice! Home & bed 4am – tut-tut! Jock Colville, secretary to PM told me that on leaving the House of Commons last night one French journalist was said to remark to the other: '*Dieu! Que les femmes députés sont laides*'<sup>9</sup>!! V charming I think!

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7 Sylvia Henley, Clementine Churchill's cousin

8 Major Mark Howard, of Castle Howard, in Yorkshire, who was to be killed fighting with the Coldstream Guards in Normandy in 1944

9 God! These women MPs are ugly!

### Friday 10 May

While Mark & I were dancing gaily & so unheedingly this morning – in the cold grey dawn Germany swooped on 2 more innocent countries – Holland & Belgium. The bestiality of the attack is inconceivable.

Went to college. A cloud of uncertainty & doubt hung over us all day. What would happen to the govt? What is the news from abroad? French towns – open towns – were raided. The rumours of Chamberlain's resignation increased . . .

Just before the 9 o'clock news Mr Chamberlain spoke to us & told us that he had resigned & that Papa was forming a new govt. It was the speech of a patriot.

### Saturday 11 May

At Chartwell. The Cabinet is announced.

### Sunday 12 May

At Chartwell. Church – we prayed for Papa.

**'I SPEAK TO YOU FOR THE FIRST TIME AS PRIME MINISTER IN A SOLEMN HOUR FOR THE LIFE OF OUR COUNTRY, OF OUR EMPIRE, OF OUR ALLIES, AND, ABOVE ALL, OF THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM. A TREMENDOUS BATTLE IS RAGING IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS. THE GERMANS, BY A REMARKABLE COMBINATION OF AIR BOMBING AND HEAVILY ARMoured TANKS, HAVE BROKEN THROUGH THE FRENCH DEFENCES NORTH OF THE MAGINOT LINE.'**

### **Sunday 19 May**

Rode in the morning. Heavenly hot weather. Home in the evening & a very hysterical journey up in the train. We succeeded in entirely monopolising a carriage & we had a lovely supper in the train. We made a disgraceful amount of noise & giggled ceaselessly – what fun! On arriving home we all of us got stuck in that antediluvian lift & only just got up in time for Papa's speech. Papa's speech was absolutely magnificent. He will lead us to victory if anyone can.

### **Wednesday 22 May**

College. Uncle Jack for lunch. Papa had left early by aeroplane for Paris. It was terrible flying weather & I was so anxious. The news is unbelievably bad – one can only hang on by praying it will come all right.

### **Friday 24 May**

I was so silly in the French lecture & made insulting remarks about French politicians chiefly Bonnet & was severely snubbed. Quite rightly too – I must try to curb my tongue.

### **Friday 31 May**

The evacuation of Dunkirk continues – the epic of the 'little ships' that rescued the British army from either a shameful surrender or a bloody destruction. Stories of such incredible gallantry & courage.

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### **Tuesday 4 June**

Virginia had me to lunch at Ritz. Papa's speech in HoC truly magnificent – to my mind one of the greatest I have ever heard him make. 335,000 men evacuated.

**'WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE BEACHES,  
WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE LANDING  
GROUNDS, WE SHALL FIGHT IN  
THE FIELDS AND IN THE STREETS,  
WE SHALL FIGHT IN THE HILLS;  
WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER.'**

### **Thursday 13 June**

Papa went to France. I do hate it when he goes. We all have a ghastly premonition that the French are going to give in. O God France can't do it! She must go on she must go on.

### **Friday 14 June**

Paris is declared an open town. Paris is taken. That dream city is sullied by the contaminating presence of the German army.

Out with Ally, Jean & Charles. Not a very gay party.

### **Saturday 15 June**

We are staying at the Carlton while the move into Downing Street is going. The Chamberlains have left the place very dirty. Mummie has left Admiralty H[ou]se like a new pin.



### Sunday 16 June

Mummie, Sarah, Nana and I went to Southwark Cathedral, where there was really a most beautiful choral communion. The sermon was the best I think I have ever heard preached. The text was 'Why do ye fear? How is it that ye have no faith?' It was so comforting and filled me with courage and faith. I was so glad Sarah was there, because I think she has suffered so much from mental fear these last few months about what she should do if Vic decided to go to America. She is so gallant and so idealistic & I think she has worried terribly.

### Monday 17 June

We are in – just – to No. 10.

Mummie had terrible row with David Margesson [the Chief Whip] whom Papa brought to lunch. I was most ashamed & horrified. Mummie & I had to go & have lunch at Carlton. Good food wrecked by gloom. Today came the announcement that following Reynaud's resignation and Pétain's assumption of leadership that France asks for peace terms.

Oh *chère* France – I can never love you one jot the less – but why have you failed in this. We have been expecting this – & yet now it has come – we all feel shocked – bereaved of a great & brilliant ally. Now we are alone. May God be with us grant that we shall not fail.

### Tuesday 18 June

We are more or less installed in Downing Street. Mummie has given me a lovely bedroom, sitting room & most spacious clothes closet (this latter most Hollywood).

Papa spoke in the House.<sup>10</sup> He was quite wonderful. I can't ever express my admiration and love for him, because they are unexpressable.

Had great fun being photographed by Antony Beauchamp<sup>11</sup> – a friend of Jean's. I felt and looked a mass of affectation but HOW I enjoyed it.

### Saturday 22 June

Lounged very late in bed, having read *The Constant Nymph* till nearly 2 o'clock. Then walked round garden & house most of morning with General Alexander. I think he is so charming & the morning passed very agreeably. General Ismay to lunch. Duncan & Diana, Brendan, Major Morton & Roger Lyttelton *arrived* after tea (both generals had departed). Papa however was woken out of his rest by very urgent & distressing news & rushed immediately back to London with Max Bwho had just arrived.

Bed & read. News bloody awful.

### Sunday 23 June

A wrathful & gloomy breakfast downstairs. Church. French peace terms announced in evening. They are SHAMEFUL & cruel. Papa returned for lunch. Randolph & Pam, Stuffie Dowding<sup>12</sup> & charming v good-looking young S African airman who in the raids of last week in one night [word missing] himself 2 German planes, he's got the DFC.

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10 'Their Finest Hour'

11 Antony Beauchamp 1918–1957, society photographer, became second husband of Sarah Churchill in 1949

12 Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, 1882–1970, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Fighter Command

## Tuesday 25 June

At about 1.10am the sirens went in London. I was awakened by Mummie putting the lights on & saying 'Quickly get up – there is a raid warning.' Well I didn't really feel frightened – just rather breathless & excited. We all bundled down into the shelter – except of course Papa & some of the staff who stayed & worked. In the shelter were Sir John Anderson<sup>13</sup>, Mr Greenwood & Mr Attlee. I did not feel very much in the mood for scintillating conversation & my dressing gown would keep bursting open – most tiresome. We all had tea – & finally got so sleepy that we all went to bed at about 3.15. 'All Clear' sounded at 4. I didn't hear it.

## Wednesday 3 July

Great anxiety about future of French fleet. Chief of Air Staff, Sir Cyril Newall came to lunch & promised to send me a miniature of the scimitar which the Gurkhas use for next Monday!! . . . During dinner news kept on coming in of the action against the French fleet at Oran. It is so terrible that we should be forced to fire on our own erstwhile allies. Papa is shocked & deeply grieved that such action has been necessary.

## Thursday 4 July

This morning at the lecture M. Thierry told me – with grief written mostly plainly on his face – that he was entirely for

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13 Sir John Anderson 1882–1958, later 1st Lord Waverley, Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, plus Arthur Greenwood 1880–1954, Minister without Portfolio

the course the Gov. had taken over the fleet – & that it was the only thing that could be done. I am sure thousands of Frenchmen all over the world must feel the same.

This afternoon Mummie & Pam & I went to the House. It was a very sad day for Papa – he who has always loved & admired the French so much & worked so much for the entente cordiale. His statement was sombre – sorrowful, but resolved & encouraging. He explained the situation & the Government's action to a gloomy, crowded attentive house. When, after nearly an hour he sat down – the House began to cheer – the cheering grew & grew – until the House was on its feet.

### Friday 5 July

Lunched with the Vansittarts<sup>14</sup> & Colly, who I find v agreeable. Found a simply hootsy-tootsy hat at Selfridges – 3 gns reduced to 30/- !! BARGAIN. Mummie says I may have it – Whoops! I am feeling a bit frightened about the weekend.

### Saturday 6 July

[Launch of HMS *Gurkha*] Poured with rain all morning. Went to a music lesson & then left for Liverpool. I felt a little lonely starting out all by myself, but it all seemed rather like a very exciting adventure – going all alone to be with people I have never met & then – the moment, the first really big official occasion of my life. The train was rather crowded & v stuffy. However we arrived eventually & Mr Johnson, the Managing Director of Cammell Laird,

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14 Sir Robert Vansittart 1881–1957, Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the Foreign Secretary, and his wife Sarita.

was there to meet me. He is very delightful. We then drove to his house across the river at Birkenhead, & we went through the Mersey Tunnel which is perfectly amazing & most exciting. Their house is not pretty – but very comfortable. ‘*Très cossue*’. Mrs Johnson is charming. After dinner Robbie their son (tall & good-looking & 28) arrived. I went to bed sleepy & happy.

### Sunday 7 July

Slept late & after breakfast Mr J, Robbie & I went down to Cammell Laird's shipyards. We spent the whole morning walking round, & it was really thrilling & interesting. What a wonderful & romantic career a shipbuilder's is! How wonderful to feel that so much of one's country's life & greatness depends on the skill & craftsmanship of one's firm.

We saw many ships, both of war & merchantmen, & among them the *Thetis*, being reconditioned & renamed the *Thunderbolt*. It was very sad & it sent a chill through as I watched her lying there so quietly in the basin. And I thought of the grey seas running high in Liverpool Bay, & the tugs & destroyers standing round & 99 men sweating & gasping their life away in 40 foot of water.

I was shown my *Gurkha*. She looked such a beauty, such strong graceful lines. I'm sure no destroyer has ever looked quite so beautiful before!!

### Monday 8 July

#### THE LAUNCH OF HMS *Gurkha*

I felt excited but quite calm this morning until about 11 when a fit of nerves overcame me. I couldn't have felt more nervous if it had been my wedding day!! At about 11.45 I went & got

dressed & felt better. I wore my tailored blue & white spotted dress with a white taffeta petticoat, white shoes, white gloves, white bag & my blue & white pill box hat. My gold & blue earrings & the little Gurkha badge given to me by Sir Cyril Newall.

We arrived at the shipyard at 12.45, & for  $\frac{3}{4}$  hr people kept on arriving. The room was hot & I must say I felt pretty awful – but it was just emotion & excitement. The Controller [of the Navy] arrived & a very, very old Gurkha general with drooping white moustaches.

### **Tuesday 9 July**

Long, hot dirty journey home. Mummie & Papa knocked endways by my diamonds!<sup>15</sup>

### **Monday 22 July**

It is in the papers today about poor Commander Bickford. It is practically certain that he & his crew & their *Salmon* are lost. God rest their souls in peace. I feel so sorry for his poor newly-wed wife. Poor girl. I must say he was one of the best-looking men I have ever seen – & such vitality & charm. I find it difficult to realise that he no longer exists – & that somewhere his dead body is being dashed & mouldered by the cold sea waves. It must be terrible knowing that you will never, never see or hear someone one loves dearly again.

I don't think I have at all comprehended the unhappiness this war is causing & is going to cause – it just shows how

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15 Mary was given a Victorian diamond necklace by the Cammell Laird shipbuilders

self-centred I am & unintelligent too & yet I do firmly believe that however great the suffering we must go through with it.

### Thursday 25 July

General de Gaulle came to lunch with Madame de Gaulle. Also Ivor<sup>16</sup>. The general is a stern, direct giant. We all thought him very fine. He told us that Pétain combined: (1) Great age (2) Ambition (3) (I think) Anti-British feeling. *La France n'existe maintenant que dans les âmes des ses fils fidèles, et dans les coeurs de ceux qui dans un pays étranger, luttent toujours contre la tyrannie.*<sup>17</sup>

### Sunday 28 July, Chartwell

Lunched with Horatia at Lady Oppenheimer's – such a nice house & a heavenly garden . . . Went to bed early & wrote v long letter to Mark [Howard]. At 9.50 two fairly loud explosions took place, Nana & I both thought they were the AA guns & descended hastily to find a sky lit with searchlight beams & the constant drone of aeroplanes.

11.15 Violent explosion lasting about 2 or 3 seconds. House trembled. Thought I heard enemy plane overhead – felt frightened but excited & robust.

### Monday 29 July

Learnt this morning that bombs fell at Edenbridge! No one hurt – my my my my.

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16 Lord Ivor Spencer-Churchill or Ivor Guest (2nd Lord Wimborne).

17 France now only exists in the souls of her faithful sons and in the hearts of those in a foreign land who still fight against tyranny

## Tuesday 30 July

Interview with Lady Reading.<sup>18</sup> She was absolutely charming to me – and talked to me in a most motherly fashion. She said I had to uphold so much ‘precedent’ – that I was the big girl of the future – that I should do a really good & useful job. I am to work for 3 months in the registry at the WVS . . .<sup>19</sup> Left for Breccles. Good journey down, the last ½ hr of which was lightened by conversation with a charming soldier & airman. So glad to get to Breccles. Judy most welcoming.

## Thursday 1 August

Searched out an evacuated hairdresser in the morning & in the afternoon we had our heads all toozled up in preparation for the evening.

Party given by officers of Watton aerodrome. Great fun & very crowded. Judy obstinately assured us all that it was sure to be evening dress & so we arrived all teed up to find about 1 other person in a long dress! Practically everyone was very tight<sup>20</sup> but so charming that it didn’t matter at all.

## Friday 2 August

Morning after the night before.

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18 Stella, Lady Reading 1894–1971, chairman and founder of the Women’s Royal Voluntary Service (WVS)

19 Women’s Voluntary Service

20 A bit drunk



### **Monday 5 August**

. . . Watton came and gave us the most superb aerial beating up that anyone could possibly conceive. A flight of Blenheims appeared & one after another swooped down to within 25 or 30 feet of the ground. We all nearly passed out with excitement. It lasted about 10 or 15 minutes! Only fly in the ointment was the escape of the horses! Rung up Robin – he had a wild & charming idea that he will be able to come tomorrow – it didn't materialise.

### **Tuesday 6 August**

Horses retrieved from Wretham Hall by Judy & Kathryn. Rosemary & I & Cousin Venetia & evacuees helped to stook corn. 'Each stook stoked is a kick-in-the-pants for Hitler,' I said to myself encouragingly. Lovely picnic at the Mere. Donald & Ben Newlands came – we were joined later by Cecil Beaton,<sup>21</sup> who took photographs of us at tea in most unaesthetic attitudes, such as when we were cramming our mouths with drop scones (made there, yum yum!) & golden syrup.

### **Saturday 10 August, Chequers**

Gossiped to Jock & wrote quantities of letters . . . Lunch – Mummie & Papa, Jock & me. I like Jock – he is very pleasant – but I think he is very 'wet'. Mummie & Jock & I all climbed Coombe Hill in afternoon. Pug Ismay returned for tea & General de Gaulle also came for a while . . . Long talk with Mummie till midnight.

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21 Cecil Beaton 1904–80, photographer, during the war worked for the Ministry of Information

## Sunday 11 August

AIR BATTLES. The conclave of generals dispersed soon after breakfast . . . An intensive air battle raged all day. The Huns are now coming in hundreds. May God be with us now.

Walked to Beacon Hill with Jock – discussed marriage – much the same views with regard to this knotty problem – on politics however we differ violently!<sup>22</sup>

## Monday 12 August, London

Shopped & did jobs all morning. Mr Whitelaw Reid and Sir Sergison Brooke came to lunch. The former is Mrs Ogden Reid's son. She is the owner of the *New York Herald Tribune* – which in Papa's words has been running 'the most majestic campaign in the history of journalism' by directing American public opinion towards active participation in the war against Nazism. General Sergison Brooke is in charge of all the London area Home Guard – numbering about 50,000.

After lunch the General took us onto the parade where there is an army pigeon loft with about 50 carrier pigeons which are being carefully trained, in case all communications should be severed. The man in charge is a corporal – and is a lion in the racing pigeon world! He won the *News of the World* contest in 1938!

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22 Jock Colville's diary records that: 'After lunch I was soundly beaten by Mrs C[hurchill] at croquet and then walked to the top of Beacon Hill with Mary. We sat on the top in the sunshine and prattled gaily, looking at the magnificent view of the plain below. Even though she takes herself a little seriously – as she confesses – she is a charming girl and very pleasant to look upon.'

### Wednesday 14 August

Mummie paid a visit to the French at the White City. I went too, also little Ivor [Churchill] and Mrs Crawshay. It was terrible to see how lost they all look. Here we saw all the worst qualities of the French. Here we saw men who have lost their country – their faith – their '*amour propre*'. Miserable, disaffected! It made a most profound impression upon me. I felt I wanted to fling my arms round them and tell them how much we sympathise – how much we love them. I was quite overcome with the misery of it all.

Mlle de Gaulle came to lunch & spent afternoon with us. She is sweet, sixteen & beautifully mannered & hard work. I took her to see *Les 9 Célibataires* which made me laugh no end . . . Felt crushed and miserable in evening, also rather exhausted. Papa told us that a Blenheim squadron had been very badly knocked about.

### Thursday 15 August

. . . It appears that 11 out of 12 from Watton didn't return. Hugh Painter, Ben Newlands, Donald Wellings are all safe. It is horrid to think that most of the boys at that lovely party aren't there any longer. Poor mothers & sisters & girl friends, I feel so much for you.

. . . On the midnight news we heard that over 88 Nazi raiders have met their doom. Thank God for the RAF.

### Friday 16 August

Shopped in morning. Caught by sirens in Harrods at about 12.30. I wish Hitler could have seen the complete calm of the great crowd assembled on the ground floor. All Clear at

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1.20 . . . Shopped again in pm. Went to Sarah's to pick up earrings – sirens again. Vic & I had tea & he drove me home. All Clear went about ½ hr later. I must say life is quite exciting. Yesterday's figures are now 169 with our own losses 34. The knights of King Arthur's Table assume a prosaic air in comparison with our pilots.

### **Saturday 17 August**

Travelled to Minterne. Journey from Waterloo to Sherborne scheduled to take 3 hours, in fact took 5 hours. Owing to line being blown up between Andover & Basingstoke, the train was diverted & it went to Salisbury & Sherborne via SOUTHAMPTON!! We had a raid warning & had to pull blinds down – but it was a false alarm. Saw wreckage of 2 planes. Also got entangled in political discussion with acidulated old woman – who cast aspersions on the French – the old bitch! Also said we must remember the Germans are children of God. Also she was nauseatingly smug about the British. Ugh. Only Pam & Lady Digby at Minterne, which is very peaceful.

### **Sunday 18 August**

A rather fascinating Brigadier Lumley & his wife came to lunch, also an old Blimp called General Ramsay, who nearly made Pam & myself sick by saying that 'the country had begun to go downhill ever since the working classes & the trades unions got power'. He however did tell a very amusing story about Papa. It was on a ship going to the South African war (I think) & a friend of Papa's was rather unpopular with the rest of the officers of the regiment; & so one night to pass the time the officers determined to try this fellow by Court

## MARY CHURCHILL'S WAR

Martial for 'being a cad & not being able to conceal it'. He was found guilty, & sentenced to have half his moustache shaved off. Papa had sat through his friend's trial in silence, but at the end remarked that the accused 'had one great advantage – he was tried by his peers'. Very Churchillian.

### **'NEVER IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN CONFLICT WAS SO MUCH OWED BY SO MANY TO SO FEW'.**

#### **Tuesday 20 August**

. . . Mummie told me raid round Westerham had been quite bad & very alarming. Poor Mrs Beville was killed instantaneously by a bomb. Altogether about 131 bombs dropped near Westerham. One in belt at Chartwell. Felt very depressed. Hate the war.

#### **Tuesday 27 August, Breccles**

. . . After supper Papa rang Mummie & said that in Ramsgate 700 houses had been blown up by shelling & bombardment. Down here – despite air activity & especially during this lovely day one had almost forgotten the war.

#### **Wednesday 28 August**

. . . Mummie & Cousin Venetia left for London. We – that is – 'les girls' – spent most of the morning 'pansying up' for the luncheon at Watton officers' mess. The Wing Commander was perfectly charming & a lovely lunch had been arranged for us. After lunch – tennis – then tea – then highlight of the

whole afternoon – we were shown over a Blenheim. It was thrilling – it made me feel very useless; there can never be a true measure of my love for England, because I am a woman – I feel passionately that I would like to pilot a plane – or risk everything for something that I believe in so entirely & love so very deeply. I may not be heroic for my country – I must lick down envelopes & work in an office & live a comfortable, happy life.

### **Friday 6 September**

. . . Lovely day again. Papers full of Papa's speech – which seemed cheerful & confident. It is a long time, poor darling, since he has had anything as cheerful as the Anglo-American Pact to tell the House about.

### **Saturday 7 September**

[Later note]: Beginning of Blitz (London bombed nightly until Nov 2). Invasion thought to be imminent.

Worked in the kitchen. Lunched at the Mere & bathed with some of the evacuees. It was so lovely – joie de vivre overcame vanity & I bathed minus a cap after Judy ducked me.

### **Tuesday 10 September**

Kitchen work all morning. Then general pansying up for nothing in particular till lunch. A rainy, gloomy afternoon – News from London very bad – Judy and I unanimously decide that Hitler is bloody.

### Saturday 14 September

The last day that I shall be 'sweet seventeen'! What a wonderful year it has been! I think it will always stand out in my memory. It has been very happy for me too – despite the misery & unhappiness in the world. I hope that does not mean that I am unfeeling – I really don't think I am, but somehow I just haven't been able to help being happy. On the other hand, I have felt things more acutely & impersonally – I think I have felt fear & anxiety & sorrow in small doses for the first time in my life. I do so love being young & I don't very much want to be 18. Although I often behave in a completely idiotic & 'haywire' fashion – yet I feel I have grown up quite a lot in the last year.

### Sunday 15 September

[Later note]: My 18th birthday. Climax of Battle of Britain.

Nana & I walked to Holy Communion. I prayed especially for courage & endurance, I feel I shall need both.

Mummie & Papa both gave me cheques for £10! What a lovely present. Sarah came down, bringing with her a lovely leather writing portfolio from her & Vic – chocolates & silk stockings from Phyllis . . . how sweet everyone is in these terrible times to remember me being 18! I do appreciate it terribly . . . Mummie had ordered a lovely cake for me despite raids! How sweet she is. It was so lovely having Nana with me for my birthday – it seemed almost like old times. I went to bed eighteen & very happy.

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### **Saturday 21 September**

All this week I have been working with WVS to help refugees. This is the twentieth century – Look on London – look at the crowds of homeless, destitute & weary people in Aylesbury alone. I have seen more suffering & poverty this week than ever before.

I cannot find words to describe my feelings about it. I only know I am moved to a greater & wider realisation of the suffering war brings. I only know that I have learnt more about human suffering & anxiety than ever before. O God be with the homeless & anxious. I have seen so many worried & sad & lost expressions – & a great deal of courage & optimism & good sense.

### **Monday 23 September**

Today the papers are full of the torpedoing of the liner carrying children to Canada.<sup>23</sup> 89 children killed. May God rest their souls, and help us to wipe the curse of Hitler & the vilest burden mankind has ever born from the world.

### **Thursday 26 September**

A land mine having landed in Walton Grange garden – the WVS are refugees. Only 19 hurt. The withdrawal from Dakar is made known.<sup>24</sup> I don't see how in the course of

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23 SS *City of Benares*, torpedoed by a German submarine with heavy loss of life, including 77 evacuated children

24 Unsuccessful Allied attack on the port of Dakar (then part of French West Africa), which attempted to replace the Vichy French administration with the Free French under de Gaulle



having to make endless decisions one can avoid some mistakes. But was it a mistake – or was it a muddle *sur le champ* – between Gen de Gaulle & our people? O God – somehow this minor reversal has cast a shadow over everything. I do hope the government will pull through – All my feelings are so mixed. Of course I want Papa to pull it off but not only for personal reasons – but also if he went WHO is to come??

### Friday 27 September

. . . 133 Nazis shot down. All today seemed overcast with the gloom of the Dakar affair. It certainly does seem that there was misjudgement somewhere. Oh I am so anxious for Papa. He loves the French so much, & I know longs for them to do something grand & spectacular – but I fear he will take rather a bump over this. The papers exhibit varying degrees of rage & disapproval. The *Mirror* – hysterical & fierce queries & judgements. ‘The Gallipoli Touch?’ Oh – how unkind. The *Mail & Express*: More moderate – but demanding explanation. The *Sketch* – ‘whose responsibility?’. *Telegraph* – calm – considered – awaiting full statement.

### Saturday 28 September

. . . Dakar ‘horoosh’ seems to have quieted down today.

### Tuesday 1 October

Am invited to dinner with officers for tomorrow. Yippee.

Hospital in the morning. Mrs Dixon helped me. Felt very young, inefficient & miserable. Saw quite clearly that library

is full time job<sup>25</sup> – quandary & dismay, because I grieve to relinquish useful work in Aylesbury . . . Am to remain with WVS but work whole time at library . . . wish passionately I could do both. Oh please why aren't there 10 days in the week & 2 of me? Feel faintly pathetic – I want to help so much – & yet I really think I have done best thing. Oh dear how bloody life is.

### Thursday 3 October

Cabinet changes. CHAMBERLAIN resigns. He is very ill – I am sorry for that but I am glad he has gone at last.<sup>26</sup> I am an inveterate – unforgiving – unforgetting contre-Munichoise<sup>27</sup>. Even more delighted that that bloody old fool Lord Caldecote (known to some irreverents as Caligula's Horse) has been booted out.

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25 Red Cross library for patients at Stoke Mandeville hospital

26 Neville Chamberlain has remained a member of Churchill's war cabinet and is still leader of the Conservative Party. He is suffering from the bowel cancer that will kill him a little more than a month later. His resignation from the government allows Churchill to carry through a reconstruction that strengthens his position. Lord Caldecote is sacked as Lord Chancellor, but it was his previous appointment by Chamberlain in 1936 as Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence (a job coveted at that time by Churchill), and for which he was felt by many to be so patently unsuitable, that Churchill's circle often described as the most remarkable appointment since the Roman Emperor Caligula had made his horse a consul.

27 i.e. against the Munich Pact of 1938

## Tuesday 8 October

. . . Very agreeable dinner party in the officers' mess brought to an abrupt close by the swishing, crescendoing clatter of a bomb uncomfortably near. Everyone ducked ineffectually – & waited – it seemed an age – before a comparatively small bump – found us rather breathless but intact & morale on all sides good. They were all sweet to me – and I was feeling terribly excited & rather breathless – but thank God – not all white & trembly as I so often have imagined & feared I would be. We all went to the slits [trenches] – very muddy & spoilt my suède shoes. No more excitements SO FAR – but I was escorted home soon after. Damn those Bloody Huns for breaking up an enjoyable party.

## Wednesday 9 October

First thing that greeted my eyes this morning was LARGE crater about 100 yds from the Mess tent where I dined last night! I am not feeling so ignored by the war.

## Thursday 10 October

4.40 am WINSTON CHURCHILL junior arrived! Hooray. Pam weak but happy. Baby not at all weak & only partially happy!

## Monday 21 October

. . . Tonight Papa spoke to France.<sup>28</sup> So frankly – so encouragingly – so nobly & tenderly. I hope his voice reached many of

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28 Broadcast 'Dieu protège la France'

them, and that its power & richness will have brought them new hope & faith.

*'Aux armes citoyens! Formez vos bataillons, Marchons, marchons, Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons.'*<sup>29</sup> Dear France – so great & glorious, be worthy of your noblest sons & of that high cause you twice bled for – Liberty.

### **Thursday 31 October**

Papa said the other day – ‘It is a very remarkable thing that the young should be so much braver than the old – for they have so much more to lose – but it is so.’

### **Wednesday 6 November**

President Roosevelt elected for third term. Glory Hallelujah!!  
A delicious poke in the snoot for Hitler.

### **Monday 11 November**

. . . There was no armistice service this year – no 2 minutes silence. But poppies were sold everywhere & I think everyone was thinking of the millions whose great struggle came to an end 22 years ago.

### **Sunday 24 November**

Papa said: ‘Of all wars, this is the most unnecessary. In 1933 or 1934 a dispatch would have stopped the German rearmament. In 1935 an ultimatum – in 1936 general mobilisation of France & England.’ After the war – Papa said he had

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29 Line from La Marseillaise, the French national anthem.

considered very seriously the formation of training colleges for those who embarked on a political career – for he considers that the quality of the personnel of the House has deteriorated.

### **Sunday 1 December**

Drove home very early for little Winston's christening . . . Have rather sore throat.

### **Monday 9 December**

The others went up early – leaving myself, Mr Seal & Papa to lunch. Papa was very worried and preoccupied and told me that at dawn this morning an attack was launched by the British troops in Libya. 'Pray,' he said 'for the victory of British arms.' I prayed most fervently. Very anxious waiting.

### **Wednesday 11 December**

. . . Wrote out Christmas cards – I took more trouble than I ever have before with them – somehow there's more point now that I am separated from most of my friends & acquaintances.

Mummie rang up at about 7.45 and told me that our army has had a victory – Sidi Barrani is taken & many prisoners.<sup>30</sup> Thank God – thank God – it is too wonderful – after this dreary winter with so many blows – I could weep with excitement.

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<sup>30</sup> Port on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, recaptured from the Italian 10th Army

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Mummie tells me that Papa conceived this campaign last July – and has been planning and developing it ever since. I am glad that it is a success so far anyway – of course for England's sake, but a little bit for my darling father as well. There have been so many buffets and burdens to bear – so much to discourage and dismay – so many heart-blows – but now this – ah dear God – it is wonderful.

How passionately I long for the day of Victory.

### **Thursday 12 December**

Work. Papers full of the victory at Sidi Barrani. Nana returned to London. Mummie and Papa came – also Jock. Papa tells us that approximately 30,000 prisoners have been taken!!

Our joy and elation is however a little darkened by the sudden sad death of Lord Lothian.<sup>31</sup> He will be a great loss. At dinner (Mummie went to bed with sore throat) Papa was pondering who to send to Washington – names mentioned were – Lloyd George, Lord Camborne, Mr Robert Hudson, Archie Sinclair, Vansittarts –

Papa in very bad mood over food and of course I couldn't control him & he was very naughty & rushed out & complained to the cook about the soup, which he (truthfully) said was tasteless. I fear the domestic apple-cart may have been upset! Oh dear!

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31 Lord Lothian had been the British Ambassador to Washington DC. He will ultimately be replaced by Lord Halifax, the former foreign secretary and Churchill's main rival for the premiership in May 1940.

## **Tuesday 24 December**

Day off. Drove with Mummie to Hitchin. Lunched with Pam, took babies their presents. Party arrived in evening. Diana – Duncan – Sarah – Pamela – Papa – Mr Martin. Everyone in good spirits. No reports of any air land or sea activity. So wonderful to have a family party. I have never had the family feeling so strongly.

## **Wednesday 25 December**

This was one of the happiest Christmases I can remember. Despite all the terrible events going on around us. It was not happy in a flamboyant way. But I've never before seen the family look so happy – so united – so sweet. We were complete, Randolph & Vic having arrived this morning. I have never felt the 'Christmas feeling' so strongly. Everyone was kind – lovely – gay. I wonder if we will all be together next Christmas? I pray we may. I pray also next year may be happier for more people.

EMMASOAMES is a writer, broadcaster and columnist who has been the editor of the *Literary Review*, *Tatler*, *ES Magazine*, the *Telegraph* magazine and *Saga*. She is the second child of Mary and Christopher Soames and is her mother's Literary Executor; she is the granddaughter of Winston and Clementine Churchill.



'I AM NOT A GREAT OR IMPORTANT PERSONAGE, BUT THIS WILL BE THE DIARY OF AN ORDINARY PERSON'S LIFE IN WAR TIME. THOUGH I MAY NEVER LIVE TO READ IT AGAIN, PERHAPS IT MAY NOT PROVE ALTOGETHER UNINTERESTING AS A RECORD OF MY LIFE — OR RATHER THE LIFE OF A GIRL IN HER YOUTH, UPON WHOM LIFE HAS SHONE VERY BRIGHTLY, WHO HAS HAD EVERY OPPORTUNITY OF EDUCATION, INTEREST, TRAVEL AND PLEASURE AND EXCITEMENT, AND WHO AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS WAR FOUND HERSELF ON THE THRESHOLD OF WOMANHOOD'

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