

Brian Lavery. *Churchill Warrior: How a Military Life Guided Winston's Finest Hours.* Oxford: Casemate, 2017. 448 pp. \$32.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-910860-22-9.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

There is no more popular or polarizing character in twentieth-century British history than Sir Winston Spencer Churchill. Consequently, he has inspired an entire subfield of historical study that vacillates between hagiography and demonization, but rarely provides novel insights into the man's political, intellectual, or military activities during a career that spanned more than sixty years. A new wave of studies, though, like Jonathan Rose's *The Literary Churchill: Author, Reader, Actor* (2014), or Warren Dockter's *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (2015) has integrated new archival sources into the existing narrative to produce insightful thematic analyses which reveal the complexity and range of Churchill's life and leadership. Brian Lavery sets out to provide a similarly new reappraisal of Churchill's experiences and expertise with military policy and strategy across his career, in *Churchill Warrior: How a Military Life Guided Winston's Finest Hours*. Lavery seeks to explore "how Churchill gained his unique insight into war strategy and administration, and the impact this had on his thinking and leadership" (p. x). The result of this effort is a sprawling narrative that spans Churchill's early military service and career as a war correspondent through his premiership during the Second World War.

The book is broken into four main parts, beginning with Churchill's political rise and prewar leadership as first lord of the admiralty. Lavery pays special attention to Churchill's naval reforms and construction programs, as well as his early interest in naval aviation development, an area in which he was far ahead of his contemporary elite political leaders and a frequently underappreciated aspect of his career. The second part examines his naval strategy during World War I, and, refreshingly, covers the breadth of his activities from Antwerp to submarine warfare, rather than providing an exhaustive rehashing of the Dardanelles debacle. Lavery also scrutinizes the impact on Churchill of his experience in the trenches, following his fall from power, and his political rehabilitation at the Ministry of Munitions. The third part dissects his interwar institutional reforms during his tenure as secretary of state for war and air, and makes note of his defining role in the survival of an independent Royal Air Force. Lavery goes on to examine how Churchill continued to interact with military policy matters through political machinations and publications, especially his multivolume history of the First World War and biography of his ancestor John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough. The final part covers Churchill's Second World War premiership, and focuses on how his, "unique and

unrepeatable experience” (p. 423) defined his military strategy and domestic policy. Lavery again covers a wide range of aspects of his policy decisions, including his creation of the position of minister of defense, but especially focuses on naval and air power strategy.

The book’s great strength is its clever intertwining of the existing secondary literature with a host of archival sources, and it complements more specialized works like Christopher M. Bell’s *Churchill and Sea Power* (2012), Carlo D’Este’s *Warlord: A Life of Winston Churchill at War, 1874-1945* (2008), and Eugene Beiriger’s *Churchill, Munitions and Mechanical Warfare: The Politics of Supply and Strategy* (1997), by showing how Churchill’s perceptions and policies towards the various military branches interacted with each other. Lavery’s background in naval history facilitates a narrative that is at its most compelling and insightful when discussing naval topics, but he also provides excellent analysis of Churchill’s interactions with all types of military strategy and administration. *Churchill Warrior* would appeal to those looking for a broad overview of Churchill’s career, and, due to Lavery’s extensive citation, scholars seeking a useful source of chronology and commentary. Overall, this is an excellent addition to a crowded field, that provides much-needed analysis to an aspect of Churchill’s leadership often taken for granted.

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