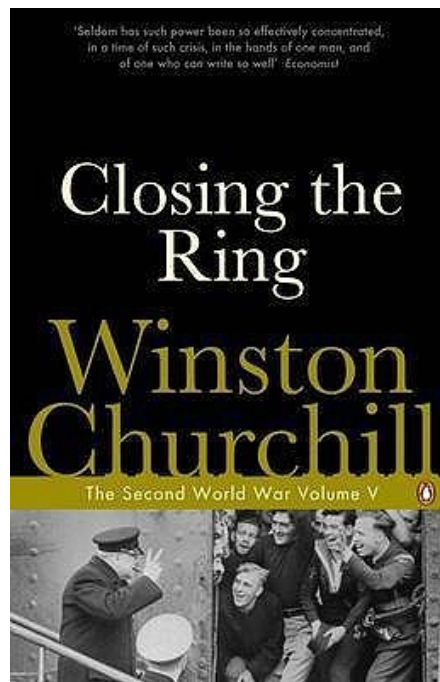




## Closing the Ring

*Winston S. Churchill*

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# Closing the Ring

*Winston S. Churchill*

## **Closing the Ring** Winston S. Churchill

Winston Churchill's six-volume history of the cataclysm that swept the world remains the definitive history of the Second World War. Lucid, dramatic, remarkable both for its breadth and sweep and for its sense of personal involvement, it is universally acknowledged as a magnificent reconstruction and is an enduring, compelling work that led to his being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Closing the Ring chronicles the period between June 1943 and July 1944 as the Allies consolidated their gains towards a drive to victory - the fall of Mussolini, Hitler's 'secret weapon', the mounting air offensive on Germany, strategies to defeat Japan and the plans for D Day.

## **Closing the Ring Details**

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Author : Winston S. Churchill

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## From Reader Review Closing the Ring for online ebook

### Jim says

This is actually a series of 5, sorry, 6 books written by Churchill himself and while slightly colored by his place in history the book is a must have if you wish to read of WWII and went on behind the scenes. The series is as brilliant as Sir Winston was himself. My copies are all well worn from reading.

---

### Tim says

About half way through reading this volume Dianne and I took a trip to England. We were last there at the time of Diana's funeral. Then, we stayed in Kent at the Tudor Park hotel in Bearsted. Having liked it then, we returned. From all the reading of these many volumes I was wanting to visit the historic places where great decisions had been taken by Churchill et al. So we made pilgrimage to the likes of Dover Castle, Blenheim, the War Rooms, Chartwell, No. 10, Parliament. In all, it was a nostalgic, emotional, educational, and completely delightful sojourn.

This book carried as its theme: "How Nazi Germany was Isolated and Assailed on All Sides". The character is one of growing optimism in the midst of the deadliest series of conflicts imaginable. Much of the story has to do with the centrality of "Overlord" - the code name for what came to be the invasion at Normandy, D-Day. Overlaying this was Churchill's anxiety about ensuring Britain's name would go down in history as having played a major role in actual combat. For him, as for the rest of us, there could never be any question about England's role as sentinel, stalwart antagonist, caller-to-arms, vociferous propagandist for Western Civilization and impudent upstart toward Nazism. But as he recorded the massive military effort extended by the Russians, and realized the extent of the men and materiel coming into play by the US, he agonized over lapses in engagement by his own military. Following the defeat of Rommel's army in North Africa the British involvement had dwindled to virtually nothing. To stimulate activity he proposed attacking and taking Rhodes and a few other islands in the neighborhood. He believed this would go a long way to convincing Turkey to enter the war on the Allies side or at least grant them some operational space. This became an obsession with him. His insistence brought many to think he would go so far as to jeopardize the buildup to Overlord just to get his way. In another book I have been reading - Churchill - An Illustrated Life (By Brenda Ralph Lewis, Amber Books, 2013) one of his top advisers, Alan Brooke "was furious with him and confided in his diary: 'I can control him no more. He has worked himself into a frenzy of excitement about the Rhodes attack, he had magnified its importance so that he can no longer see anything else and has set himself on capturing this one island even at the expense of endangering his relations with the President and the Americans ...' " (page 188). Subsequently, he developed a similar sort of stance on the invasion of Italy. In the former case he was totally thwarted, in the latter, he prevailed. The battle for Italy was a study in the horrors of warfare only just justified by the victory of good over evil.

As matters progressed and improved Churchill continued to have new run-ins with De Gaulle. The man (De Gaulle) was insufferable. Of course, there were those who thought the same of Churchill. But on this matter he found more than moral support from FDR. This man, who in the days of the Nazi invasion of France had suggested a quasi-political melding of England and France was now as condescending and demanding toward England and the US as one might imagine King of the World. On the other hand, Stalin took on new stature as the effective counter to Hitler and his previously undefeated war machine. No one, no one, had expected such a counter-punch as Stalin delivered. Even with all the aid from the US and England, there was common despair about what would happen to Russia. But Stalin prevailed and that made all the difference. Consequently, while he continued to despise Communism, and never really felt comfortable with Stalin,

Churchill stood in awe of him. While at the Tehran conference, Stalin repeatedly insisted that a firm date be given for Overlord. He had argued for a "second front" from day one of Hitler's attack on Russia. He said he would start a major attack on Hitler's armies to coincide with Overlord thus making Hitler decide which "front(s)" and to what extent he would defend and support it/them. But Stalin was also reminding Churchill and FDR that it was his efforts that had stymied Hitler and he wanted a firm, no wiggle-room date, for Overlord.

Italy was a special war theater. By taking it the Allies took the Italian army and navy out of the picture. Their army had provided most of the occupation troops for Greece. Their navy was modern, effective and a constant threat to English activity in the Mediterranean. The fall of Mussolini created something of an embarrassment to Hitler and certainly a distraction. Further, it brought him to the realization that this was a "front" he had to defend. And he did. The commitment of troops and equipment to Italy by both the Allies and Nazis was staggering. The brutality of the fighting unparalleled. Anyone who lived through those war years will never forget the names: Sicily, Solerno, Anzio, Cassino. For some time the Allies had referred to themselves as the United Nations. Looking at the list of countries who had participants fighting in Italy you could almost believe it: US, England, Poland, France, North African corps, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, India. But all Hitler's men could not save Rome. After months of fighting, the Allies finally took Rome in a rush and all was over.

On the other side of the world the war in the Pacific was being waged by the US essentially alone. FDR, Churchill and Stalin had agreed that the top priority was the defeat of Hitler. All believed that Japan was just a matter of time once Hitler was down. But the US, read FDR, was, in Churchill's thinking unduly convinced of the importance of China, read Chiang Kai-shek. To support the latter, and to build more airfields which would provide launch sites for attacks on Japan, the US was insisting on getting British help to rebuild the Burma road. To put it succinctly, Churchill thought this was nuts. He said everything he could, and mounted every subterfuge he could think of, to keep this from happening. This issue along with the Rhodes and Italy conflicts began to engender some unpleasant thoughts in the minds of many. And rumors were about that Churchill wasn't quite with the program, even to the extent that he was not wholly committed to Overlord. He, of course, totally dismisses any such disaffection in the book.

Again, as the light at the end of the tunnel became brighter, Churchill gave a lot of thought to what the policy should be toward the Axis countries and their citizens when Nazism and the Nazis were ground to dust. Early on, Churchill, as he stood alone, said there were to be no terms given the vanquished. There was to be nothing but "unconditional surrender". FDR had bought in to that position as well. Both being concerned about what that meant and how it would be interpreted by "ordinary citizens", realized they had to make some clarification. They did that in a joint document called The Atlantic Charter. It essentially said the Allies had no intention of taking over the vanquished countries. But rather wanted to ensure the native populations would be given opportunity to become self-governed and return to conditions of prosperity once the contagion of Nazism was removed. Then there was the question of the leaders of the Nazi political and military. Stalin offered a solution: round up the top 40 or 50 thousand and shoot them. When Churchill heard this he wasn't quite sure whether "Uncle Joe" was being serious. But, of course, we know: he was.

The book is replete with all kinds of information regarding the buildup to Overlord. One question I always had was: how was it possible to conceal all this from the Germans? The build up took two and a half years. Concealing men and equipment had to be a stupendous operation. And, how do you conceal the increased number of ships and landing craft that numbered in the hundreds? The occupied French coast was just a few miles away. He never gives much explanation for this, except to say that the German air force had so dwindled and was so occupied in other areas that they simply did not do much reconnaissance.

One of the most amusing statements is the opening few sentences of Chapter 13 in Book Two. Titled: "The Greek Torment". Ever since the Italians had been defeated, the Greek partisans had "only" the German forces to deal with. But they could well see the Nazis were eventually going to loose. So, many of the partisan

groups started spending more time and energy engaged in political maneuvers rather than in those of the military type. This prompted the following from Churchill: "The Greeks rival the Jews in being the most politically minded race in the world. No matter how forlorn their circumstances or how grave the peril to their country, they are always divided into many parties, with many leaders who fight among themselves with desperate vigour. ... Both have shown a capacity for survival, in spite of unending perils and sufferings from external oppressors, matched only by their own ceaseless feuds, quarrels, and convulsions. ... Personally I have always been on the side of both, and believed in their invincible power to survive internal strife and the world tides threatening their extinction." This the opening paragraph to a tawdry story of how Greece came out of the war. He presents a similar story of what occurred in Yugoslavia as the German occupation closed out; the rival political factions among the partisans, and the rise of Tito to dominance.

Once again, I was sucked in by the romance of the times and places. Among the places I can never get "out of", and remain forever "into": Khartoum; Marrakech; Casablanca; Algiers; Rangoon; Mandalay; and sunrise, sunset, on the Atlas mountains.

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### **James Richardson says**

The Drive to Victory for the Allies focusing on Driving Italy out of the war and the preparation for D-Day. Churchill noticed the warning signs of Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union well before F.D.R. or anyone else for that matter. D-Day was necessary not to win the war against Germany but to protect the west from an onslaught of Communism and Soviet hegemony.

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### **Ross says**

I did not like this volume 5 as much as the previous 4. Too much trivial stuff included about Churchill's personal life, rather than the war.  
Still pretty good history, however, and well worth reading.

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### **Mike Reinking says**

Detailed account of 1943 to just before D-Day in 1944. Lots of political discussion as well as detail as the Allies make progress against the Axis.

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### **Jim Gallen says**

"Closing The Ring" is the fifth volume in Winston Churchill's magnificent history of World War II. Covering the period from early 1943 to the eve of Overlord, this volume covers that stage of the war when the tide had turned in the Allies' favor and was falling in on Germany.

Churchill pays proper respect for the massive losses inflicted on Germany by the Red Army. Throughout this volume a major challenge is how the Western Allies were best able to contribute to victory and draw pressure away from the Soviets. Churchill makes the argument that there really were three fronts: Russia, Normandy, where German troops were held to await invasion, and Italy where Germans were in active

combat with the Anglo-American armies. The contentious debates between the priorities to take advantage of opportunities in the Mediterranean versus preparations for Overlord make for interesting reading and reflection.

It is in this volume that we follow the Anglo-American armies across Sicily and into Italy. The reader is made privy to negotiations between the post-Fascist government of Italy and the Allies both over the Italian surrender and Italy's participation in the war against Germany. Opportunities in the Aegean created by the Italian surrender and the reasons that they were not followed up on are examined in detail.

I value first person memoirs and remain a fan of Churchill's World War II series. While it is, by its own admission, limited to the perspective of its author and by his bias, "Closing The Ring" remains a useful and well written history.

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## Michael Scott says

TODO:

-- The summary of this book, in Churchill's words: "A deadlock supervened and was not relieved for eight months of severe fighting, which will be presently recounted."

Churchill, Winston (2010-07-01). Closing the Ring (Winston Churchill World War II Collection) (Kindle Location 3957). RosettaBooks. Kindle Edition.

--- GB has become a small Power in the war. As a consequence, its role in policy-making has reduced, and increasingly we see the US discussing directly with Russia. An account from the side of GB is, thus, reduced in importance.

+ Husky (Sicily)

"In the initial assault nearly 3000 ships and landing-craft took part, carrying between them 160,000 men, 14,000 vehicles, 600 tanks, and 1800 guns."

Churchill, Winston (2010-07-01). Closing the Ring (Winston Churchill World War II Collection) (Kindle Location 356). RosettaBooks. Kindle Edition.

-- In managing the disgraced government of Badoglio in Italy just after Mussolini, Churchill seems to forget his promise to Stalin that no peace will be signed by Allies without each Ally agreeing.

- The endless preparation for Overlord (Normandy, D-Day). The main problem was not that the preparation took long, but that the description through a long stream of multi-partite letter-based exchange is tedious.

++ Interesting discussions about the technical innovation needed to carry through the Overlord operation, including the floating harbors which would prove so important around the D-Day.

++ Interesting discussions about the technical advances of the Germans, including radio-controlled drones

(very long-range rockets, glider bombs, etc.) By June 1943, high-tech has become the only hope of Nazi Germany; on June 10, Hitler informs the military that the annihilation of London by the end of 1943 was imperative and certain, and would cause Britain to surrender. This anticipates the destruction of Hiroshima by the Allies.

++/-- An overview of the aerial bombing actions above Berlin, Hamburg, the Ruhr area, etc., of historical interest. We learn that the Allies also conducted blind bombing (e.g., the OBOE device), for example over Essen, and had overall in their bombing policy, besides destroying the Nazi machinery, "the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened." Churchill, Winston (2010-07-01). Closing the Ring (Winston Churchill World War II Collection) (Kindle Locations 8429-8430). RosettaBooks. Kindle Edition.

++ Glimpses of the smart battle to destroy German super-weapons. Mainly covert ops, especially involving Peenemünde.

+ The episode of the use of the provisions of a treaty signed between England and Portugal in 1373, albeit largely irrelevant for the war, is delicious.

+ The episode about smuggling an entire rocket from Nazi-occupied Poland to Britain is interesting and with important consequences for the defense of London.

+++ A lesson, alas, not learned: the treatment of the "liberating" armies by the local population. "The situation was at first bewildering for our troops on the spot. The Italians had been their enemies for more than three years. By joining the United Nations they had in the space of a few weeks acquired a new status, and some of them assumed a new attitude. Requisitioning was no longer possible. Accommodation was denied to British troops, and food refused to officers without Italian ration cards. British military currency was treated with suspicion." Churchill, Winston (2010-07-01). Closing the Ring (Winston Churchill World War II Collection) (Kindle Locations 3195-3198). RosettaBooks. Kindle Edition.

--- Regarding Italian prisoners, Churchill seems to suggest forced labor. (This is also what Stalin suggests of doing with Germans, for the purpose of repairing the damage they did during the war. Stalin refers here only to the Germans that he does not propose to kill at the end of the war.)

"in respect of the use of Italian prisoners of war and manpower? We cannot allow these large numbers of Italians to be freed from discipline and control and left at large in Britain or North Africa. There is no means of repatriating them without straining our shipping. Meanwhile we need their man-power." Churchill, Winston (2010-07-01). Closing the Ring (Winston Churchill World War II Collection) (Kindle Locations 3264-3266). RosettaBooks. Kindle Edition.

-- The string of justification for the apparent inability, sluggishness, and lack of courage of British commanders. Stalin does not mince words and claims that the British are slowing down their advance and even refusing to fight at all, for fear of risks. The blame-game includes Aegean islands (especially Crete, Rhodes, and Cos), taking of Rome in the Italian campaign, etc. It's always the fault of Russians, Americans, the weather, etc. The Anzio operation, which instead of taking Rome has turned into months of inactivity and

a delay of Overlord, is in particular attributed to the failure of Americans to follow the soft British commander (who "urged" instead of "ordered" the Americans to advance).

+ The insistence of Churchill to allow (push?) Turkey to join the Allies in the war seems a much longer-term game: Churchill seems to want to prevent the Russians (or any other Power but Britain) from claiming the Dardenelles (Canakkale). To close the link: Churchill is able to claim that no discussion about the strategic straights Dardenelles can take place until Turkey decides on whether to join the Allied side, effectively blocking Stalin's plans in this matter.

+/- The intention of Churchill to ensure British control the Balkans misfires. Stalin, having own intentions on the matter, insists on the British honoring first their commitments elsewhere. The Americans, under the claim of insufficient resources, side with Stalin. This anticipates the post-war spheres of influence.

+++ The beginning of the discussion about the after-war situation, with great consequences especially for the nations of Europe. For example, the discussion about new Polish frontiers, the treatment of Germany after the war, etc.

= There is an tragic tension between politicians and army commanders, in what concerns the Nazi combatants. Churchill wanted German capitulation on the Italian front. General Alexander wanted total annihilation of the Germans, on the battle field.

--- Although he is concerned with shortening the war and thus militates for taking negotiating with the German combatants, Churchill does not seem interested in the humanitarian treatment of Germans after the war. In his view, the Germans have broken the Atlantic Charter /Geneva Convention/ and should thus be guaranteed any protection. Churchill desires Britain and Ahe allies to remain humane, that is, to not torture unduly the Germans, but is indifferent to whether German prisoners are put on fair trial or are immediately shot, and to similar approaches. A similar debate was to occur at the fall of Communism in Europe, when decommunization /addressing the problem of former Communist officials and collaborators/ struck similar chords.

+/- The meeting in Teheran between Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill.

? Claims of hearty collaborationism from the Polish Government, regarding both working with the Germans and killing partizans, but these claims are attributed to Stalin.

--- During Teheran, there seems to be no mention of the Jewish problem.

--- Churchill is dismissive of China, but it seems that Stalin was seeing Britain as Churchill was seeing China: "The talks of the British and American Staffs were sadly distracted by the Chinese story, which was lengthy, complicated, and minor." Churchill, Winston (2010-07-01). Closing the Ring (Winston Churchill



World War II Collection) (Kindle Location 5342). RosettaBooks. Kindle Edition.

--- Churchill has often reproached Stalin of remorselessly repeating the arguments and causing endless discussions about the Second Front, but he was doing the same about Turkey (see my other point about this topic).

--- After Darlan in Northern Africa and Badoglio in Southern Italy, Churchill now supports Tito in Yugoslavia. (Stalin is so big that supporting him does not count.) Not for nothing Churchill mentioned publicly that he would make friends with the Devil to win the war.

--- The political situation in Greece seems mishandled by the British, who fail to help the King retain power and allow Communists to take over in the field.

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## John Doyle says

Closing the Ring covers the year preceding the D-Day invasion in June 1944. During this period the Russians began to reverse German advances on the eastern front and the Allies gained significant victories in the Pacific against the Japanese and in Italy. By the time British, American, Canadian, and French troops made it ashore in northern France the demise of Germany seemed assured and yet millions more died before final victory was achieved. Some have argued that the war was fought to the bitter end because the Allies had stipulated nothing short of "unconditional" surrender, which meant that in the event of defeat German leaders would be prosecuted for war crimes and the German nation would again be at the mercy of the powers that had stripped her bare after World War I. Amazingly, for this reason, the Allies had decided not to publicize a requirement for "unconditional" surrender but FDR slipped up in a news conference and uttered the word. This bound all to a course that seems correct in hindsight but was unintended at the time. For anyone, like me, who has said the wrong thing at the wrong time, this anecdote offers some comfort.

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## Manny says

It all goes to show: believe hard enough in your dream, and you can make it come true. Here, Adolf Hitler had the insane idea that the Jews, the Bolsheviks and the Americans were all involved in one big conspiracy to get him. Given that the Bolsheviks and the Americans were sworn enemies, it did seem a little far-fetched.

All the same, by this stage of World War II, Adolf's dream was a reality. The Americans and the Bolsheviks were indeed openly encircling him, working together to hunt him down and kill him without mercy. Not only that, a bunch of largely Jewish scientists were creating a deadly new science-fiction weapon, which they planned to use against him and his remaining allies at their earlier opportunity.

Faith is a mighty power. But he should perhaps have wished for something different.

## Aaron Crofut says

"His Majesty's anxieties would be increased if he heard his Prime Minister was at the bottom of the English Channel."

One has to love English wit. This book covers a wide array of topics during the year between the summer of 1943 and 1944. The Allies are on the offensive, but coming to learn the difficulties offenses entail. In particular, it's one thing to have troops, but another to have the transports necessary to get them to the battlefield. Italy is knocked out of the war, but brings up the uncomfortable question of who should rule it while fighting continues. De Gaulle continues to be a pain in the ass.

The great topics discussed are the Quebec Conference, the Cairo Conference, and the Tehran Conference, where the Allies hammer out the overall strategy. All agree to attack, and all agree to Overlord and the invasion of France, but by the latter two conferences Britain and the US are already ashore in Italy. Should resources, in particular very scarce landing craft, be used to expand those operations? Can they be spared for a diversion in the Aegean to tempt Turkey into the war? Should there be a supporting operation in Southern France? Friction is developing between the democratic allies. Stalin's call for a major second front is clearly stated, but Churchill's account has Stalin being far more reasonable about this than I had originally suspected.

Anzio is a great military case study for an opportunity lost...or perhaps never present. Comparison with Gallipoli and Inchon are most appropriate.

As always, Winston is witty, charming, and entertaining while being highly informative. Worth every second invested.

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## Mikey B. says

This fifth volume takes us from June of 1943 to the eve of D-Day (June 6, 1944).

Mr. Churchill is again travelling at a stupendous rate – to North America for the Quebec Conference, where he also journeyed to Washington DC – and then to Cairo meeting with both Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek and from there off to the first meeting of the “Big Three” (Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt) in Teheran. Security was lax there as the cars in the Churchill entourage made their way through streets teeming with on-lookers. All these voyages and meetings are recounted in stirring passages.

Page 339 (my book) November, 1943

*This was a memorable occasion in my life. On my right sat the President of the United States, on my left the master of Russia. Together we controlled a large preponderance of the naval and three-quarters of all the air forces of the world, and could direct armies of nearly twenty million men, engaged in the most terrible of wars that had yet occurred in human history. I could not help rejoicing at the long way we had come on the road to victory since the summer of 1940, when we had been alone, and, apart from the Navy and Air, practically unarmed, against the triumphant and unbroken might of Germany and Italy, with almost all Europe and its resources in their grasp.*

The continuing friction between the British and U.S. with the Soviet Union are also spoken of. On one

occasion Stalin wrote a nasty note to Churchill demanding, among other things, the continuation of Arctic convoys. Churchill very quietly handed this note back to the Soviet ambassador implying something on the lines of “don’t talk to me like this”.

The landings in the south of Italy and then of the Italian surrender to the Allies, is examined along with the stalemate that ensued. It had been hoped that Rome would have been liberated by the end of 1943, but German resistance was strong and Rome was only reached in early June, 1944 – just prior to D-Day.

Page 4

*In 1940 four million tons of merchant shipping were lost, and more than four million tons in 1941. In 1942, after the United States was our Ally, nearly eight million tons of the augmented mass of Allied shipping had been sunk. Until the end of 1942 the U-boats sank ships faster than the Allies could build them. ... During 1943 the curve of new tonnage rose sharply [due to the shipbuilding program in the United States] and losses fell. Before the end of that year new tonnage at last surpassed losses at sea from all causes, and the second quarter saw, for the first time U-boat losses exceed their rate of replacement.*

Page 139 House of Commons Speech, September 1943

*When I hear people talking in an airy way of throwing modern armies ashore here and there as if they were bales of goods to be dumped on a beach and forgotten I really marvel at the lack of knowledge which still prevails of the conditions of modern war.*

The preparations for D-Day are discussed in detail and as the above quotes indicate, 1944 was the earliest this could have been launched. This is convincingly presented by Churchill. Only in 1944 - was the U-boat war going well for the Allies, were there sufficient American troops in England for the assault on Normandy, and were there enough vehicles and landing ships present for this vast enterprise. Also the air space over France had to be dominated by the Allied air forces.

And I cannot refrain quoting from a couple of Churchill’s letters:

*Prime Minister to President of the Board of Trade 26 July 43*

*I am told that in spite of contributions from civilian supplies there is at present a shortage of playing cards for use by the forces and workers in industry. The importance of providing amusement for the forces in their leisure hours and in long periods of waiting and monotony in out-of-the-way places, and for sailors penned up in their ships for months together, cannot be overstated. Nothing is more handy, more portable, or more capable of prolonged usage than a pack of cards.*

*Let me have a report on this subject, and show me how you can remedy this deficiency. It ought to mean only a microscopic drain on our reserves to make a few hundred thousand packs.*

*Prime Minister to Home Secretary 3 Apr 44*

*Let me have a report on why the Witchcraft Act, 1735, was used in a modern court of justice.*

*What was the cost of this trial to the State? – observing that witnesses were brought from Portsmouth and maintained here in this crowded London for a fortnight, and the Recorder kept busy with all this obsolete tomfoolery, to the detriment of necessary work in the courts.*

## GoldGato says

*Truth is so precious that she always must be attended by a bodyguard of lies.*

After four books delving into the anguish and the distinct possibility (at that time) that the Axis could have won World War II, it was almost a relief to get to #5 in the series, when the Allies clearly had the upper hand. As always, it is a pleasure to read Churchill for his insight, his meticulous detail, and his haphazard wit (particularly with Uncle Joe Stalin).

*Your Majesty will also have noticed that I have heard from the Great Bear and that we are on speaking, or at least growling, terms again.*

The great Prime Minister is able to articulate specifics about his Allied partners, such as the Soviets having to take the brunt of the fighting but also having the advantage of fighting only on one front and being able to focus strictly on land power. He notes the Americans having to fight a two-front war with land, navy, and air, while also supplying everyone else with the weapons and machinery to win.

This volume also marks Churchill's inkling of Great Britain losing her place as the world leader. His realization that the Americans have the dominant industry and money to run the war their way is a bit heartbreaking to read, after staying with him through the days of the Brits acting as the lone lighthouse of hope in the first years of the conflict. As the Allies close the ring, Churchill must endure more criticism, particularly as the Yanks gently take over overall leadership and Britain heads into bankruptcy.

*...this class of criticism...reminds me of the simple tale about the sailor who jumped into a dock to rescue a small boy from drowning. About a week later, this sailor was accosted by a woman who asked, "Are you the man who picked my son out of the dock the other night?"*

*The sailor replied modestly, "That is true, ma'am."*

*"Ah," said the woman, "you are the man I am looking for. Where is his cap?"*

All glory is indeed fleeting.

Book Season = Spring (new hope)

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## Gijs Grob says

'Closing the Ring' continues Churchill's personal account of World War II. The book covers the events from July 1943 until the advent of D-Day in June 1944. The first book describes the invasion of Sicily and Southern Italy, the fall of Mussolini, the risk of an Italian civil war, and how the Italian invasion came to a standstill. The second book starts with the undisputed highlight of the book: a detailed account on the Teheran conference, the first meeting of all three allied powers and their leaders Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin. Further subjects are the renewed offensive in Italy, problems with general De Gaulle, the bombing of German cities (Churchill salutes the valiant allied pilots, but never mentions the countless civil victims they made), political problems in Yugoslavia and Greece, campaigns in the Pacific and in Burma, and last but not least, the Soviet Union's successes on the Eastern front (in fact the Soviets had cleared most of their own country from the Nazi foe when the allies finally unleashed the much demanded

second front). Churchill's account remains easy to read and personal. He sometimes appears as a grumpy old man, for example insisting on an attack on Rhodos, or on Sumatra, ideas that met with much resistance and never materialized. Also his account of his sickness, his friendship with Roosevelt, and his problems with Stalin are insightful. Some passages are even deeply moving. By reading Churchill you really *feel* the slow and tiresome progress of the Second World War. He ends the book with a feeling of hope for mankind, even though by 1952 he knew very well it was to be shattered all too soon.

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### **Doreen Petersen says**

What a great book! The book ends with the onset of D-Day. As always Churchill has a unique and determined viewpoint. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone interested in history or WWII.

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### **Terry says**

Again, wow!

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### **Richard says**

This book chronicles the Allied struggle in the time period spanning from summer 1943 up to the beginning of Operation Overlord, the long-awaited June, 1944 cross-Channel invasion of Europe, in World War II. As usual, Winston Churchill, as Prime Minister and, essentially, British military war lord, discloses a wealth of information on the workings of the British and other Allied governments in prosecuting the war, as well as his personal dealings and thoughts at the time. Churchill was the only head of government of any of the leading combatants on either side of the conflict to survive the war and also to write his memoirs. Japan's General Hideki Tojo, Prime Minister during most of the war, barely survived his suicide attempt in September, 1945. He was then taken prisoner by the Americans and was hanged later. Of course, Russia's Joseph Stalin lived into the early 1950's, but the murderous Communist-party super-apparatchik was not going to write a tell-all about his dark past. "Closing The Ring" and its sister volumes are therefore a special literary treasure.

The complexity of the planning and decision-making challenges faced by Churchill form the background of much of the book. It is simply phenomenal how many political, diplomatic and military problems constantly demanded his attention. The basis of this book's title derives from the situation as it existed in the period, 1943 going-into 1944, when, as Churchill warns, the end of the war was nowhere near, but growing Allied strength and ensuing wartime successes produced what is clear in hindsight, that the noose was beginning to tighten around the Axis' collective necks. Placing the end of this volume while the Normandy battle raged is therefore appropriate, since this is the point in time where a successful invasion of Europe would assure the inexorable countdown to the defeat of Germany, while a failed amphibious landing on June 6, 1944 would lead to an uncertain end of the war, both in terms of timing and type of peace which would have had to be accepted by the Allied governments.

The previous volume ended with the final victory against Germany and Italy in the North African desert. Two figures who emerged to world-wide recognition during that time were Great Britain's General Bernard Montgomery and the USA's General Dwight Eisenhower. Both individuals would be essential players in the fighting which would transpire during the remainder of the war in Europe. As Churchill rightly brags during

several sections of this book, the smooth-working relationship of the British and American leadership, from head of states down to the Generals and Admirals of the respective services, was really the most effective Allied weapon in the war, in Europe and in Asia. Much is written in these volumes about the close friendship between Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, and their sometimes strained, but ultimately successful attempts to form an effective collaboration with Stalin.

Churchill doesn't avoid admitting that there were occasional very forceful disagreements at times between himself and Roosevelt, and among their staffs, however. They could be piqued by each other, such as when Roosevelt insisted on bringing along the Chinese Nationalist Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek to the meetings in Cairo, en route to Teheran. Churchill found the attention paid to Chiang to be highly distracting and irritating then. This followed a tense period of arguing between London and Washington about Churchill's proposal to invade Rhodes and clear the Aegean Sea of Germans, which he claimed would enable the much-needed entry of Turkey into the war on the side of the Allies. Roosevelt and his advisors vehemently opposed the diversion of landing craft from the build-up for next year's Normandy landings for this operation, and Churchill eventually grudgingly surrendered in the interest of Allied cooperation. However, this continued to gall him, especially when Roosevelt promised Chiang significant help from American and British forces for an amphibious landing in the Bay of Bengal (later overridden) and the building of a road in extremely difficult terrain from Lido, in Burma, to supply Chinese forces for results of dubious value.

A lot of wire communications transpired among these leaders. However, it would be necessary to try to meet face-to-face when possible. "Closing The Ring" extensively covers the Roosevelt-Churchill meetings at the Quadrant Conference in Quebec and the Big Three conference in Teheran. Besides war strategies, there was serious discussion at these conferences about the state of the world after the war. Roosevelt and Churchill, at both meetings, delved into their already-known ideas about post-war organizations that could maintain the peace. Some of these ideas were almost utopian, especially on Churchill's part, with talk about the most powerful survivors of the war, the U.S., Britain and Russia, continuing their improbable alliance as the main arbiters of any disputes which would occur in the future. These discussions, however, were essential preambles to the subsequent post-war founding of the United Nations.

Roosevelt, to Churchill's constant dismay, continued to champion China's Chiang Kai-Shek as a fourth player in these scenarios. He referenced the four countries as the post-war world's "Four Policemen." It simply confounded Churchill and many other Europeans how Roosevelt and the American people in particular revered an idealized version of China that probably never existed and thereby placed the corrupt Chiang, leader of a large army that didn't hold its own in the fight against Japan while siphoning off huge amounts of American foreign aid, on such a high pedestal. In fairness to accuracy, these corruption allegations, however true historically, were not mentioned by Churchill in this book.

There were many more allied and co-belligerent nations than the "Big Four" mentioned above, taking the fight to the Axis. A sampling of some of the "United Nations" joining with the Allies is contained in the description of the struggle to wrest control of Monte Cassino in Italy, in which American, British, Moroccan, Indian and New Zealand army divisions were fighting toward common objectives, with the Monte finally being breached by Polish forces.

The last item on the above list highlights the predicament faced by the Allied leaders throughout the war concerning friendly, provisional governments formed by exiles from German-occupied Europe. Much thought and diplomatic talk took place among the Big Three (Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin), along with sometimes difficult negotiations with the principals who considered themselves the leaders of the countries under siege. This book gives enlightening revelations of the various hurdles Churchill faced in this regard, especially concerning three countries.

First, there was the example of France, whose exiles consisted of a Free French Army and leaders of a

Committee of National Liberation in Algiers. Roosevelt especially wanted this committee to be headed by General Giraud, but his rival, General Charles DeGaulle, became the strongest exiled French personality by far. Roosevelt and Churchill had numerous tense communications regarding the French situation, differing strongly as to the value of extending friendship to De Gaulle but also splitting hairs even to the advisability of using the term "recognition," since it was never clear to what extent the Committee should be considered the embodiment of French sovereignty; it was eventually decided that the Committee's civil authority over various colonial territories would be recognized, and its Free French forces would be co-belligerents with the Allies.

Likewise, there was a Polish government in exile in England, but in this as well as numerous instances, the Poles got short shrift when it came to Allied recognition during the War. To his credit, Churchill had tried to get concurrence from Stalin to back a United Nations effort to restore Poland's government after the war, but the Poles were basically treated as guests of the British and were not invited into any war planning. This extended even to the question of post-war borders. The Big Three discussed where Poland's east and west borders should lie, among their Teheran agenda items, with Churchill using match sticks to show how the current borders should shift, while no Polish representatives were even invited to the conference. This despite the fact that the war was started over Britain and France's guarantees to protect Poland if it was invaded.

One of the most satisfying parts of the book is the wealth of information provided by Churchill concerning Italy. He of course gives a thorough grounding of the entire conflict there, from Allied discussions and planning to invade, to the tragic Salerno landings and lengthly, hard-contested German resistance which delayed the liberation of Rome by many months, to just before Overlord. But there was also a huge story surrounding the political situation in the country, having to do with Mussolini's confinement by a new government sanctioned by the King, and later rescue by the Germans. For a while, who you recognized as your government, if you were an Italian, depended on which part of Italy you were in at the time.

After Mussolini fell, I found it highly interesting that the Allies didn't demand Italy's unconditional surrender, as would be required in the later event of German and Japanese capitulations. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin agreed that a lighter hand was needed in the handling of Italy, both to ensure civil calm during Allied military occupation and to get the cooperation of Italian military forces to join the fight against the Germans, in events where they were able to break away from German control at the time of Italy's surrender. It was agreed, therefore, to consider Italy to be a co-belligerent, but not an Allied government.

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## **Jeff Elliott says**

This volume of Churchill's account is the turning of the tide in 1943 and the ends with the day before D-Day.

Other significant passages in this volume:

- the British and American attempts to pacify, please and deal with Stalin in the efforts for the western front and to get him to meet (which ended up in Tehran).
- Much of this book was concerned with the war in Italy.
- DeGaulle's vexation of the Allies with his arrogance.
- the usage of the German v-rocket.

I see that it took me not quite a year to read. I certainly set it aside for a while to read some other stuff. I continue to marvel at Churchill's use of vocabulary and the British ability to say difficult things in a graceful way. Churchill is always convinced that he is right which was both a strength and a weakness (i.e. even in battles won he contends that it could have been done quicker or with less damage and casualties if it had

been done his way).

Many of my highlights are examples of this or significant things that I have wondered about. Many of them summarize or introduce chapters or themes.

ps. 527, 624.628, 630, 631, 632

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## **DougInNC says**

Winston Churchill's "Closing the Ring" is a masterpiece of the actual words by the actual man who lead the actual effort against Germany in World War II. Any discussion of this book should begin with the author's name, not the title, because the source makes the material matter more.

You are there, in the moments that changed the world. History is relayed, stunning in its depth even if you have studied the era. If the size of the book is daunting, know that each chapter has its own table of contents so each topic can receive the focus the reader wishes to give it.

Churchill wrote six volumes to recount World War II. I'm confident you can start with any of them because I began my walk with Winston right here, in the fifth.

The constant thread through these hundreds of pages is that of preparing for the Normandy invasion. June 6, 1944 marks the end of this book. Never has the journey to the destination been more interesting, more fact-filled, more clear, or more complete. No part of the campaign is ignored, from the Atlantic to Pacific, Mediterranean to Baltic, land, sea and air.

Maps were crisp and highly readable on the Kindle edition, not always true for past reviewers. This work also contains full text of telegrams and letters between leaders as well as to some field commanders.

I trust and wholly recommend this first-hand account with its vivid detail and exceptional insight. "Closing the Ring" opens the mind to history, war, and character. Thank you, Mr. Winston Churchill, for skillfully sharing, and shaping, these moments of history for us.

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## **Owen says**

It is fortunate for us as readers that Winston Churchill not only had the qualities of a writer, but that he also found the time to put them to such good effect. Many a retired politician has written his personal memoirs-few of them have ever done so quite as completely. In the war, Churchill used secretaries to help him cover the multitude of daily tasks he needed to get through and afterwards, when living at Chartwell, his home in Kent, he kept up the practise of using an amanuensis instead of writing himself. This allowed him to get far more work done, since he could literally do it with his eyes closed. Nevertheless, we may feel sure that the text is his own. Proud man that he surely was, there is little chance that he indulged anyone in much editing. When we see his virtually unedited copy sent from the field from India, the Sudan and South Africa at the end of the last century, we can feel sure that by the 1950s, he was a competent composer of text indeed.

"Closing the Ring" is the story of the climax of the Second World War. Although he refused to admit it, Hitler probably knew deep down what everybody else could see very clearly after Stalingrad. The once mighty armies of the Third Reich were being forced to withdraw; some of the best divisions had by then



been so savaged that little remained. Berlin was being mercilessly ground down to rubble by legions of British and American heavy bombers that ended up attacking their targets almost unopposed. It was the time when madness reigned in the Fuhrerbunker and when the Allies could see the fruit of their careful planning starting to ripen. Churchill was at once rewarded by the knowledge that he had been right in thinking America invincible, and at the same time he was sadly aware that an era was passing and the British Empire was fading away in front of his eyes.

This is a long sustained narrative, written by a man in full command of his enormous personal resources. In addition, Churchill had access to a vast quantity of documentation concerning the period, because he had written much of that too! Frankly, this is an admirable work of history, told with a writer's gift for spinning a yarn and I enjoyed every word of it.

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## Kathy says

This book covers the time from mid-1943 to just before D-Day, June 6, 1944. The amount of planning it took to launch that invasion is incredible. The fact that two different governments, with two separate military bureaucracies, managed to do such a good job is absolutely astounding. And during all this build-up phase they were invading Italy, negotiating with the Russia and and busy with all sorts of things. I was sadly amused to notice that during this time the Greeks had what amounted to a civil war on top of being invaded by the Germans. There were three different factions claiming to be the REAL government in exile. It got so bad an entire battalion of Greek infantry refused to obey any Allied orders unless one group was recognized and a Greek destroyer mutinied. The peaceful resolutions of these difficulties showed a lot of patience on the Allied commanders' part, I thought.

One reason I like reading histories is the applicability to our own times. I read the following quote right around the time of the election, and it seemed to sum up the problems I have with both GW Bush and Obama:

What holds us together is the prosecution of the war. No Socialist or Liberal or Labour man has been in any way asked to give up his convictions. That would be indecent and improper. We are held together by something outside, which rivets all our attention. The principle that we work on is, "Everything for the war, whether controversial or not, and nothing controversial that is not bona fide needed for the war. That is our position." We must also be careful that a pretext is not made of war needs to introduce far-reaching social or political changes by a side-wind.

We have been asked to be on a war footing for a long while, but except for a relatively small number, those sacrifices have been changes in the way we regard our freedoms. The war has been an excuse, not the cause, for a number of non-necessary controversial changes. I now worry that correcting those will also be an excuse, not the reason, for another round of forced changes. That's enough on politics for now. It is one of those things you either say very little or way too much.

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