

Book Review Stephen Roskill, **Churchill and the Admirals**, Pen and Sword Maritime, 2013 (paperback)

Stephen Roskill's, "Churchill and the Admirals" is an exceptionally fine and detailed work. This book provides an intimate background regarding relations between Churchill and his admirals during the Second World War.

Churchill was a man who knew his own mind. His ideas and experience influenced his management of the war. A case in point was Churchill's strong belief in "offensive" action.

Churchill's' view concerning "offensive" action affected his appointments. This framework favoured, who was in who was out, as he always acted based on that train of thought. It also greatly influenced his conduct of operations that were always judged on and framed from "offensive" action! Thus it was the one reason why he favoured the primacy of the strategic bombing campaign. Churchill favoured the allocation of resources there that seemed to be conducted to the exclusion or consideration of other commands.

Churchill was so blinded by "offensive" action, that he often disregarded the needs of his strategic centre of gravity. That centre was arguably, his supply train over the Atlantic, that was in constant jeopardy from both aerial and marine attack, but greatly, from the U-boat threat. He left the aircraft needs of Coastal Command unattended for a time, creating a gap in air coverage over the Atlantic. It was known as the "Air Gap" and the priority required to address it was given to Bomber Command. That left his war in grave peril. Churchill was blinded in the belief that the bombing campaign over Germany, at its U-boat construction sites, was the far more effective strategic object than protecting his supply chain at sea. Such and similar decisions may have led to an increase loss of life and the lengthening of the conduct of war some authors have concluded.

Churchill proved to be a hard task master and it was his wont to interfere directly in the conduct of operations and appointments. It was his way not only as prime minister, but also as, his actions as his own minister of defence. In some respect, Churchill was not only responsible for the successful outcome of the war but was also responsible for many of its disasters because of his meddling. Regardless, he was successful because in his own mind, winning at all costs, for good or bad, was what counted. And for good or ill, he moved the markers on steadily towards victory.

Roskill's work is very enlightening and although not analyzed here, one cannot help but observe that the managerial style of Churchill and Hitler were remarkably similar. Both made great strides/success and yet both had strategic failures because of what they did, and how they directed their respective war machines. There the similarity ends though. Still on an intellectual plain, one cannot help but wonder if the war was won or loss on a set of strategic probabilities. Perhaps it was won based on who made the fewest errors or who made the best decisions concomitant with the most successful outcome in time!

Stephen Roskill's, "Churchill and the Admirals" should be read in conjunction with other works concerning Churchill's life and times. It provides a great insight into his management and conduct of war. It also provides a valuable insight into the character of the man and his actions. In the end, Churchill although flawed, was the man for his time to whom we indeed owe a great debt of gratitude!