

# Churchill and Roosevelt – Legacy of Atlantic Alliance part 1

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 11, 2006)

A unique and historic event occurred in Knoxville on March 29 and 30, 2006. I was privileged to be able to attend both days. While the media covered the event, with *The Oak Ridger* giving it better coverage than the Knoxville paper (in my opinion), and the second day was even filmed for future broadcast on CNN, I feel the nature of the speakers and their material, the discussion panels and the presentations are worthy of more in-depth commentary.

Therefore, I am departing from my standard approach to “Historically Speaking” of looking at our Oak Ridge past and will devote this column to a personal perspective on the conference – *The United States and Great Britain; The Legacy of Churchill's Atlantic Alliance* - sponsored by UT's Howard Baker Center for Public Policy and the Cambridge University's Churchill Archive Centre that focused on the “special relationship” between Great Britain and the United States that began with Churchill and Roosevelt.

It is my intent to select key thoughts from the conference to convey to the reader the magnitude of this monumental event. Oak Ridgers, in my opinion, deserve to know and appreciate the significance of the Atlantic Alliance that the Manhattan Project so greatly contributed to creating, and that Y-12's contribution to the winning of the cold war helped to create. I am not sure the conference speakers even fully realized the significance of Oak Ridge's role in making it possible for the “special relationship” to be realized (now that is not unusual, mind you – Oak Ridge rarely is credited fully for contributions made to world events, again - in my opinion).

Of note is the fact that as a part of this joint British and US event, Senator Frist read into the Congressional Record the text of Winston Churchill's “Iron Curtain” speech given March 5, 1946. Copies of this document were provided to both the Churchill archives and the Howard Baker Center for Public Policy. This pivotal speech is rightly credited with changing the course of world events by signaling the beginning of the “Cold War.”

In introducing the purpose of the conference, Senator Howard Baker made the assertion that “Churchill and Roosevelt saved western civilization when they defeated a monstrous foe and set us on a course that has impacted the world ever since.”

Lord Charles Powell, former Secretary and Foreign Policy Advisor to Prime Minister Thatcher, talked about the unique way that President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher maintained and advanced the “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain. He credited them with a primary role in the collapse of communism. Thatcher cultivated a relationship with Gorbachov and provided Reagan with the ability to influence the Berlin Wall decision and even make the historical announcement that will forever be remembered of “Mr. Gorbachov – tear down this wall” which proceeded the actual event of the Berlin Wall coming down.

Further, the special relationship even held up when the US invaded Grenada, although Thatcher was said to be “boiling mad.” The significance of such a relationship between Great Britain and the US was not lost on the audience when discussion of the Iraq war was brought up later in the conference. Tony Blair and George W. Bush continue to rely on the special relationship to combat terrorism in all its ugly and various forms today.

Jon Meacham, Newsweek Managing Editor, presented a humorous look at “Franklin and Winston” where he gave the audience an unusual glimpse into the behind the scenes interaction of the two world leaders who were actually unlike one another in almost every way but each recognized the value of the other's perspective. One such story told of the tendency of Winston to continue dictating his thoughts to his secretary even when taking a bath and the occasion when Franklin came to his room while he was staying at the White House to find Winston standing naked in the middle of the room with the dictation flying. Franklin is said to have remarked later that Winston was “pink and white all over.”

Allen Packwood, Director of the Churchill Archive Centre, provided a glimpse into the astounding array of Churchill documents preserved there. Not only the final documents are there but also the drafts with the development of Churchill's ideas are included.

Dr. Thomas Barnett, former strategist with US Naval War College and author, whose two recent books, *The Pentagon's New Map* and *Blueprint for Action* were used to call attention to the future possibilities when China, India, Russia and Iran are the leading influences in the world order and when the US will be trying to maintain its

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world leadership position while Great Britain may fall out of the picture. His radical thoughts challenged the audience to look at the realities of the worldwide impact of China's growth in technology and the manner in which it is investing in locations around the world. He broadened the thoughts of all who listened. Many ideas presented were new and intended to create new thought patterns regarding world events.

Dr. Henry Kissinger, 56<sup>th</sup> Secretary of State of the US from 1973 to 1977, was the final speaker on the first day. His remarks were outstanding. Howard Baker introduced him as being a "key architect of the world we live in today." Kissinger proceeded to put the world situation as he saw it as follows: Asia is like 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe; the Middle East is like 17<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. While these two are still functioning on a "balance of power" approach, the US and Great Britain have realized the importance of maintaining good relationships. Others in Europe and even some of the smaller countries other than the two sections of our world mentioned above are coming to realize that as well.

He concluded with two quotes from Churchill: 1. His definition of challenge - "It is not enough to do our best – sometimes we have to do what is required" and 2. "What is the use of living if it not to be to strive to make the world a better place." I personally found Dr. Kissinger to be as sharp as a tack with a brilliant mind capable of holding a huge overflow crowd spellbound. Great experience for an avid historian and best of all, it was had here in East Tennessee!

This is the first of a two part series on the Churchill Atlantic Alliance conference held at the University of Tennessee.



Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was one of the speakers at the conference 'The United States and Great Britain; The Legacy of Churchill's Atlantic Alliance in Knoxville on March 29 and 30 (Photo by Scott Fraker)

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Former secretary of state Henry Kissinger makes his way through the capacity crowd at the University of Tennessee after speaking (Photo by Scott Fraker)