

Churchill and Roosevelt – Legacy of Atlantic Alliance part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 19, 2006)

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second story of a two-part series. The first story published on April 11.

At the March 29 and 30 conference in Knoxville “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, the focus was on the “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain that began with Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I discussed the first day of the conference in the *Historically Speaking* column in the April 11 edition of *The Oak Ridger*. In this week’s column, I will focus on the events of the second day.

Dr. David Reynolds, Professor of International History at Cambridge University, UK, featured the “Iron Curtain” speech of March 5, 1946, in Fulton Missouri. While this speech was not the first use of the term “Iron Curtain” it was the one that struck a nerve around the world and accomplished exactly the result Churchill intended.

He purposefully chose this venue to regain his stature after being booted out of the Prime Minister position on August 1, 1945, immediately after the Potsdam Conference where he was on the world stage with Stalin and Truman. An interesting historical note is that the actual name of Churchill’s speech was not *Iron Curtain*, but *Sinews of Peace*. Churchill was Prime Minister again from 1951 through 1955.

Two panel discussions led by Dr. Mike Fitzgerald, Professor of Political Science at UT, provided insight into the transitions into the Cold War and eventually the breaking of the Berlin Wall. Interaction with the audience led these sessions to be excellent forums for exchange of ideas. However, the role of the Manhattan Project and Oak Ridge’s contributions to the nuclear weapons race was not mentioned except in a question from the audience.

It is interesting to note this omission regarding the significance of Oak Ridge relative to the winning of the Cold War. I believe we are allowing a most significant contribution of Oak Ridge to lose its place in history. I am speaking of World War II’s Secret City and the heart of the economic engine that broke the Soviet Union’s economic back by producing more nuclear weapons than they could – Oak Ridge’s Y-12.

Heritage Tourism, if successfully implemented in Oak Ridge, has the potential to help change this lack of proper focus on Oak Ridge’s past accomplishments.

Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Advisor to Presidents Ford and Bush, brought the history of the “special relationship” between the US and Great Britain through the years since Roosevelt and Churchill to today and noted the importance it has played over the years. He concluded by noting the US and the rest of Europe exist as three circles with Great Britain serving as the bridge between the other two.

Winston S. Churchill, former member of the House of Commons, author, and grandson of Winston Churchill, noted that but for Winston Churchill in 1940 Britain would have surrendered to Nazi Germany. Then Hitler could have gone and defeated Stalin after which he could have returned to Britain and ruled the entirety of Europe. In this position it is entirely feasible that the atomic bomb would have been developed in Nazi Europe!

What a horrible thought – yet in retrospect one man at the right time in the right place just might have made the difference. When it seemed Great Britain was going to fall to Hitler, Churchill was looking for a way to effectively fight the Germans when he is said to have exclaimed to his son Randolph early one morning in 1940 while standing naked shaving, “I think I see my way through – we shall have to drag in the Americans!”

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Churchill phoned Roosevelt and said, “I shall go to the House of Commons and declare war on Japan.” This bold move on his part would likely have made it easier to get the Americans engaged in the war in Europe, however, the fact that within 72 hours Hitler declared war on the US made it even easier for Churchill to get his desired end of “dragging in the Americans” accomplished.

Senator Howard Baker concluded the conference with both a humorous “grandchild” story and an observation. First the grandson story – when his fourth grandson, Sam, was seven years old the Senator was on a television

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show in Nashville and took his grandson with him. After the show while driving home, Sam said to the Senator, "Papa, did you used to be somebody?" Of course all the grandfathers in the audience got this story right away.

Now for the observation – the Senator encouraged the audience to guard against over-sentimentalizing the past regarding the "special relationship" and to take it for what it is and has been rather than the only way for the future. He spoke to his experience as Ambassador to Japan and noted they are also a world power and genuinely the friends of the US.

He noted that the firebombing of Tokyo produced more deaths than both the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that after the surrender to close World War II Japan has returned to the world stage as a successful contributor and thinks of itself as a part of the "special relationship" with the US and Great Britain.

The Senator continued by stating that the real challenge cannot be measured on what's gone before. Although there is currently no Hitler and no Stalin to confront, what we do have ahead is the need for major changes in the world. The major players in addition to the US and Europe are China, Japan, India all of whom are either present nuclear powers or in the case of Japan could easily become one if they so desired. He encouraged both the US and Great Britain to take full account of how the "special relationship" can help by not only looking at what it has been but also looking closely and what is ahead and what the "special relationship" can be.

A concluding thought. Such conferences as this are as valuable for what they do to challenge current thinking as for what they do to build relationships such as those of UT and Cambridge. The future of this "special relationship" between the two universities and the two directors of the centers looks great and I, for one, am thankful for the historic first endeavor at a shared opportunity and am looking forward to forthcoming events and even more historic accomplishments brought about by this unique alliance. Special thanks to Allen Lowe, Executive Director, Howard Baker Center for Public Policy and Allen Packwood, Executive Director, Churchill Archives Centre for an EXCELLENT learning experience – may it not be their last collaboration.



Billy Stair, Oak Ridge National Laboratory's communications and external relations director, far left, and ORNL Director Jeff Wadsworth, far right, meet with Luce Churchill and Winston S. Churchill in the Graphite Reactor
(Photo by Manuel Gillispie of ORNL)

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Winston S. Churchill signs the front panel of the Cray X1E supercomputer, while ORNL Director Jeff Wadsworth looks on (Photo by Manuel Gillispie of ORNL)