

## FDR and CHURCHILL

By Edward I. Bloom

The celebrated and momentous personal relationship between FDR and Churchill can be said to have begun when FDR, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was overseas on an inspection trip in 1918. The two were introduced to each other during a dinner honoring the Lord Mayor of London. While FDR remembered this occasion Churchill did not.

Their true relationship began on September 11, 1939 when FDR wrote to Churchill to both congratulate him on becoming First Lord of the Admiralty and to open a private, personal communication channel. This initiated a series of letters and messages between them that continued until FDR's death in April 1945. FDR came to address his correspondence to "Former Naval Person"; Churchill in turn addressed his messages to POTUS [President of the United States] – a designation that has since come into general use. The breadth of their correspondence ranged from details of their personal lives, Lend-Lease issues, wartime strategy and dealing with the personalities of various world and Allied leaders.



In August 1941 FDR and Churchill, both now leaders of their respective countries, met secretly in Newfoundland for the Atlantic Conference. The "Atlantic Charter", a communique of the results of the meeting, set

out a vision of a post-war world. After the Pearl Harbor attack Churchill came to Washington in late December and stayed at the White House for more than two weeks. He brought with him several military maps, had them pinned to the walls of his White House sitting room and had them updated every morning. FDR thought this a good idea, although some thought it was out of jealousy, and ordered that a small room on the first floor of the White House be converted to a war map room, with daily updates and a 24-hour guard stationed outside the door. It was during this stay that Churchill may have suffered a minor heart attack while straining to raise a second-floor window. This was kept a closely guarded secret.

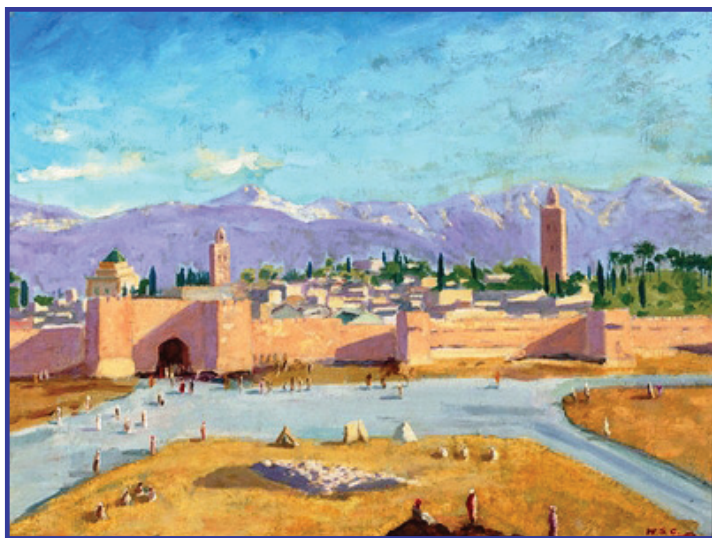
At this time FDR studied Churchill preparing for a major speech to a joint session of Congress. Pacing up and down,

dictating, changing his wording and his inflection, he orally rehearsed his remarks. In this speech Churchill quipped that if his father had been American and his mother British, rather than the other way round, then he might have gotten there on his own.

A year later, shortly after the Allied invasion of North Africa, they met at Casablanca. At a joint press conference FDR made an unplanned announcement that the Allies would



accept nothing short of "unconditional surrender" from the Axis powers. Churchill at once seconded this position, though it had not been previously discussed. After the end of the conference Churchill insisted that FDR accompany him on a drive to see the Marrakech Mountains at sunset. After viewing the scene from a tower, Churchill had his art supplies brought up to him and painted a water-color that he then gave to FDR as a present and memento of that time together.



*Painting by Winston Churchill given to FDR in 1943.*

The personal bonds between FDR and Churchill smoothed the way for the most successful wartime alliance between nations, which sometimes had conflicting interests and goals. Despite differences as to the allocation of Lend-Lease material, whether to pursue a Mediterranean or a Western European strategy, when to open the "second front", and numerous other diverse issues, the example of the obvious friendship and good will between the two top leaders enabled their respective staffs and advisors to work things out and cooperate as never before seen in world history.