

the day I met DESTINY

by Sir Winston Churchill

On the eve of his 85th birthday, the man who rallied Britain during the darkest days of World War II recalls one of his greatest moments

THE MORNING of the 10th of May (1940) dawned, and with it came tremendous news. Boxes with telegrams poured in from the Admiralty, the War Office, and the Foreign Office. The Germans had struck their long-awaited blow. Holland and Belgium were both invaded. Their frontiers had been crossed at numerous points. The whole movement of the German Army upon the invasion of the Low Countries and of France had begun.

Chamberlain (the Prime Minister) was inclined to feel that the great battle which had broken upon us made it necessary for him to remain at his post, but the new crisis made it all the more necessary to have a National Government, which alone could confront it, and Mr. Chamberlain had accepted this view.

At 11 o'clock I was again summoned to Downing Street by the Prime Minister. There once more I found Lord Halifax. We took our seats at the table opposite Mr. Chamberlain. He told us that he was satisfied that it was beyond his power to form a National Government. The response he had received from the Labour leaders left him in no doubt of this. The question, therefore, was whom he should advise the King to send for after his own resignation had been accepted. His demeanour was cool, unruffled, and seemingly quite detached from the personal aspect of the affair.

I have had many important interviews in my public life, and this was certainly the most important. Usually I talked a great deal, but on this occasion I was silent. As I remained silent, a very long pause ensued. It certainly seemed longer than the two minutes which one observes in the commemorations of Armistice Day. Then, at length, Halifax spoke. He said that he felt that his position as a peer, out of the House of Commons, would make it very difficult for him to discharge the duties of Prime Minister in a war like this. He spoke for some minutes in this sense, and by the time he had finished it was clear that the duty would fall upon me—had in fact fallen upon me.

Presently a message arrived summoning me to the Palace at 6 o'clock. I was taken immediately to the King. His Majesty received me most graciously and bade me sit down. He looked at me searchingly

and quizzically for some moments, and then said, "I suppose you don't know why I have sent for you?" Adopting his mood, I replied, "Sir, I simply couldn't imagine why." He laughed and said, "I want to ask you to form a Government." I said I would certainly do so.

During those last crowded days of the political crisis, my pulse had not quickened at any moment. I took it all as it came. But I cannot conceal from the reader of this truthful account that, as I went to bed at about 3 a.m., I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.

On Monday, May 13, 1940, I asked the House of Commons, which had been specially summoned, for a vote of confidence in the new Administration. After reporting the progress which had been made in filling the various offices, I said:

"I would say to the House as I have said to those who have joined this Government: 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.' We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war by sea, land, and air, with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: it is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival. But I take up my task with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say: Come, then, let us go forward together with our united strength."



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Cover:

The attractive young star on today's cover is Carroll Baker, a lady with a mind of her own and a talent to match it. See "Carroll Baker Fights Her Way" on page 18.

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