Winston Churchill Lived To Old Age Despite Disregard For Doctor's Advice

By ROBERT MUSEL

LONDON (UPI) — A visitor, pacing the lounge at Chartwell, said one day:

"I've heard of siesta but this is ridiculous!"

Upstairs the daily battle was under way to pry Winston Churchill loose from his bed.

The great statesman picked up the custom of a mid-afternoon snooze while observing the Spanish campaign in Cuba in 1895 and as with most things he really liked (alcohol, cigars and good food among them) he expanded the habit to Churchillian proportions.

The ritual of waking him in the days before he retired as prime minister in 1955 at the age of 80 — and even thereafter — called for a combination of daring and diplomacy on the part of his male staff, and the training of shockproof maids.

Forecast Weather

His valet generally called him at 8:30 a.m. and presented him with a glass of bottled orange juice (which he preferred to fresh). Then Churchill would heave himself from bed and look out the window to forecast the weather — with well-chosen curses if it happened to be raining.

While he was addressing the weather gods his bed was remade, pillows were placed in position to prop him up and his breakfast was laid out on a large bedside table.

Churchill lived to be 90 years old by disregarding almost every warning doctors give lesser men — and that includes injunctions from his longtime friend and physician, Lord Moran.

He drank too much, he smoked too much, he ate too much (plenty of cholesterol), he worked too hard, he was overweight and after an exceedingly active youth and middle age (he played polo till he was 55) he refused to exercise.

Thrived On "Dont's"

On this list of medical "dont's" he throve mightily, becoming the longest-lived former British prime minister in history.

So his breakfast might be anything from oysters and champagne (with which he started his 88th birthday) to an ordinary, solid repast of bacon and eggs perhaps with some cold ham on the side. He liked hot and cold foods at meals.

Then, when the dishes were cleared away, he was ready to work, dictating to several secretaries who took turns coming to the bedside. This, of course, is thirsty work so by mid-morning Sir Winston would be ready for his first beverage of the day, generally a whisky and soda. The drinks were apt to follow each other at intervals from then on.

Sir Winston liked to drink, had no complexes about it and apparently an infinite capacity. Since he had seen most of those who warned him about alcohol precede him to eternity he conceived the idea that brandy might actually be good for him.

Admired Capacity

The admiring manager of London Club still recalls how in the gloomy days before the war Sir Winston would drop in with another member of Parliament and kill a fifth of brandy while considering the fate of the world. Night after night.

Marty Rackin, a Hollywood executive who came to discuss a film project with Sir Winston, then 86, reported that he was offered a tumbler size glass of whisky to match his host's.

Sir Winston noticed that Rackin held himself a bit stiffly and inquired why.

"I hurt my back," said the 44-year-old film man, "and I've got to wear a steel corset."

"I broke a bone in my back," boasted Sir Winston, "and I got up off the floor myself."

"I'll bet," said Rackin, a former comedy writer, "that the American half got up first."

The joke delighted Sir Winston whose mother was Jennie Jerome of New York.

First Things First

In 1932 when Churchill was on a lecture tour in New York Scotland Yard sent word that there might be a danger of assassination because of the troubles in India. His manager rushed in with the news. Winston listened, then remarked that they were out of champagne.

"Well," said the manager with heavy sarcasm, "which do you want me to do. Arrange for your security - or get champagne."

"First things first," said Churchill. "Get the champagne."

But back to the start of Sir Winston's day. By noon, unless the staff managed to think of some strategem like pretending his lunch guests had arrived early, Churchill would still be in bed.

Eventually he would dismiss the secretaries and have his valet run a hot bath.

And more than one maid got a cheery good morning from the master as he strolled to the bath clad largely in a happy smile.

Denied Story

But Churchill denied he was naked when President Roosevelt showed up at his White House suite unannounced one morning as alleged in a famous wartime anecdote ("the prime minister of Great Britain has nothing to hide from the President of the United States.") Sir Winston claimed he was wrapped in a bath towel.

It was just as hard to get Sir Winston up after his long afternoon nap and down to dinner at 8:30 p.m. He was apt to wander off in his silk undershirt and underpants during the process to dictate a memo to his unflappable secretaries.

For dinner he usually wore a blue velvet overall with matching slippers embroidered with his initials. He was wearing one of these outfits (a copy of his wartime siren suit) at his 90th birthday party at Hyde Park Gate last Nov. 30 when, said one of those present, the old man looked at each of the dozen guests in turn as though he knew this was the last time they would all be about him on such an occasion.

Nap Anywhere

During the war—he was first lord of the Admiralty in 1939, prime minister 1940-45—he had to give up some of his sleep routine because of the demands of duty. But one of his aides, Gen. Sir Ian Jacobs, marvelled later at his ability to nap anywhere at any time. After observing Sir Winston for most of those critical years Sir Ian understood the stubborness in defense of his ideas that had kept Churchill from leadership of the government for so long.

"He longed for fame," Sir Ian said, "but only of a historic kind. He was not interested in being popular."

Sir Winston's life was not without its personal and political tragedies. He was a notable failure as chancellor of the Exchequer when Britain returned to the gold standard in 1925. He was blamed for the bloody Dardanelles campaign in World War I. He was out of office for ten years starting in 1929. Although he brooded about it, it was probably the best thing that could have happened to the free world for he could give his full attention to Hitler's Germany. As early as May 1932 he warned that permitting Germany military parity with France would lead to war.

Mixed With Sadness

His marriage to Clementine Hozier in 1908 was one of the most successful of the century but there was much sadness, too. One daughter, Marigold, died as a child. Another daughter, Diana, committed suicide, in 1963. Beautiful Sarah Churchill who played opposite Fred Astaire in one of his films, divorced her first husband, the second committed suicide, the third died of a heart attack.

His son and heir Randolph, who will be his father's official biographer, was twice divorced. Only one of Sir Winston's children, Mary, wife of politician Christopher Soames, had a happy marriage.

In recent years his staff sometimes kept papers from Sir Winston if they contained stories or pictures of any of his children that might distress him.

Churchill was attractive to women in his youth and middle life and most of the eligible heiresses of British society threw themselves at him before he married Clementine. It was his personality rather than his looks or lisp (the letter "S" often threw him) that drew the attention. His red hair thinned rapidly but he brushed it vigorously even when there were only a few strands left.

Advocated Brushing

"Brushing is the only way to keep your hair," he said, when it was already mostly gone.

He also had faith in turtle soup and liked to have a bowl of it before bedtime. Once at the Danish Royal Palace his valet forgot to arrange for it and Winston's complaints, so it was reported, came to the ears of King Frederik who brought the soup to his guest himself.

"I don't mind you forgetting my soup," Churchill later told his valet, "if you can get a king to serve it to me."

One of his recipes for remaining youthful was hobbies. He used to keep live butterflies and he became an authority on gold fish. He played golf and polo in younger days. He was an expert bricklayer (he held a union card) and a talented painter. Late in life he became a racehorse owner. The story goes that he thought a kindly admirer had given him a horse. He was surprised to get a bill for it later on but he finally assembled a winning stable.

Chewed Cigars

Churchill went through quantities of large Havana cigars when he was young but in his last years he chewed as often as he smoked them. He developed a gummed brown paper wrapping to keep the end of the cigar from becoming too wet. He called it a "bellybando."

In 1898 when young Churchill went off to the Sudan he promised the president of the Society for Psychical Research that if he died or was killed he would try to "communicate" from the beyond.

At least one member of the society believes the promise is still in effect.

Churchill was a master of the English language, the only man ever to get the Nobel Prize for literature (in 1953) for the spoken word—his wartime speeches—as well as his writings. He coined many memorable phrases but not "Iron Curtain" with which he is generally credited. This was first used by a travel writer who went to Russia in 1920 and at least twice more by others before Churchill burned it into the language in his great Fulton, Missouri, speech in 1946.

Detested Syntax

He detested muddy syntax. To one author of a bit of officialese he wrote:

"This appears to contain every cliche known to the English language except: 'Please adjust your dress before leaving.' "

Once, surveying the vast landscape of his past, he said he would not want to live even his life over again. But, he added:

"The journey has been enjoyable and well worth taking."

Although he never used the title he was—as are all male descendants of the Duke of Marlborough — entitled to call himself Prince of Mindelheim, after a city saved by the duke.

So, to quote his favorite author, Shakespeare, once again:

"Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

ON WAY TO FUNERAL — Former president Dwight Eisenhower talks to reporters as he waits for his plane to be refueled at Kansas City airport on his way from California to Washington. He will leave Washington Thursday for London to attend the funeral of his wartime comrade, Sir Winston Churchill. — UPI Telephoto

House Okays State Budgets

SALEM (UPI) — The House Tuesday approved the following 1965-67 budgets.

Oregon School for the Blind, $775,768; State School for the Deaf, $1,838,710; State Soil and Water Conservation Committee, $80,574; State Board of Eugenics, $4,070; Patton Home, $3,000; State Library and library programs, $850,718.

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