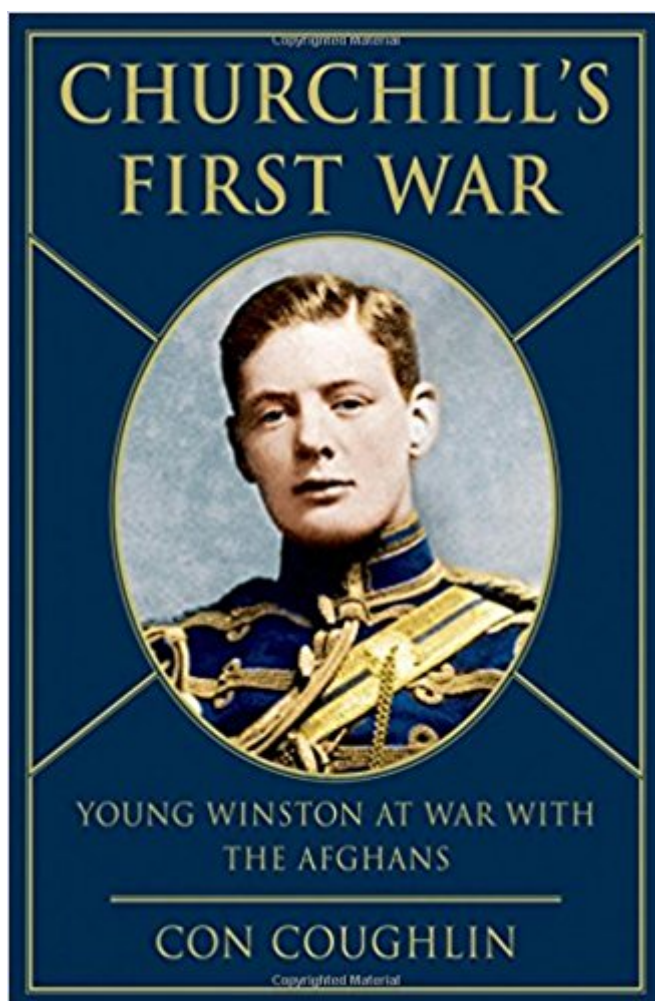


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Churchill's First War: Young Winston At War With The Afghans



Synopsis

Churchill's *First War* by Con Coughlin is a fascinating account of Winston Churchill's early military career fighting in the 1890 Afghan campaign, offering fresh and revealing parallels into today's war in Afghanistan. Just over a century ago British troops were fighting a vicious frontier war against Pashtun tribesmen on the North West Frontier – the great-great-grandfathers of the Taliban and tribal insurgents in modern-day Afghanistan. Winston Churchill, then a young cavalry lieutenant, wrote a vivid account of what he saw during his first major campaign. *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, published in 1898, was Churchill's first book and, a hundred years later, is required reading for military commanders on the ground, both British and American. In *Churchill's First War*, acclaimed author and foreign correspondent, Con Coughlin tells the story of that campaign, a story of high adventure and imperial success, which contains many lessons and warnings for today. Combining historical narrative, interviews with contemporary key players, and the journalist's eye for great color and analysis, *Churchill's First War* affords us a rare insight into both the nineteenth-century "Great Game" and the twenty-first-century conflict that has raged longer than World War II.

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Customer Reviews

“Coughlin's portrait of the Pashtun warriors the British fought with dubious success and the parallels he draws with the United States and NATO's struggle against their descendants are downright unnerving. • Foreign Affairs “[Coughlin] has given us a fascinating portrait of a young man who knew what he wanted in life, and set out to achieve it with the

relentlessness and determination that would later make him a legend. The book will be of particular interest to those who have fought in the most recent Afghan War. The Talib (students) that Churchill fought are the forerunners of today's Taliban. — Washington

Times — “Churchill's First War is a fascinating book with much to recommend it...While other writers have made note of Britain's earlier experience in Afghanistan, Coughlin has done a great job of accomplishing the same thing through the eyes of just one person, the larger-than-life character that is Churchill. — Middle East Policy (Vol. XXII, Spring 2015, No. 1) — “An absorbing youthful biography — Kirkus — “A fascinating book, especially for those not versed in the history of the region. Recommended. — Library

Journal — “Coughlin examines the elements of Churchill's life that later took the form of a legendary prime minister, but he also provides a history of Afghanistan that reveals the origins of its modern struggles. — Publishers Weekly — “Reading this book is both an indulgent pleasure and a genuine education. — Times Literary Supplement

CON COUGHLIN is the executive foreign editor of The Daily Telegraph and a world-renowned expert on the Middle East. He is the critically-acclaimed author of several books, including the international bestseller, *Saddam*. He appears regularly on television and radio in the United States and the UK to comment on international security issues.

This book is a tiny piece of Churchill biography and of Raj history. It also contains a chapter about the events in the same region after 2001. It is an indictment of the follies of the NATO intervention in Afghanistan. Considering that the book treats these 3 subjects in a not so very thick volume, it must remain somewhat superficial, but it is a good introduction. Young Churchill spent a few weeks as subaltern in a war in the North- West Frontier Province of India, near the end of the 19th century. There were troubles with Pashtuns from both side of the new pseudo 'border' with Afghanistan. That border, the Durand Line, was a nuisance created artificially by the Brits. These relatively minor events are told with the background of English adventures in Afghanistan in the course of the 'Great Game' against the expanding Russian Empire, since the early 19th. Frequent comparisons to current troubles in the region give an eery feeling of repetitive history. Will we ever learn? A century ago Britain seemed to have learned not to meddle there, based on Curzon's policy of leaving the tribes alone. That policy was continued by Pakistan and kept the area relatively peaceful for 100 years. Then the knowledge got lost, and US/NATO rushed straight into the troubles, achieving very little in the process. On Churchill, we observe him scrambling for opportunities to lay a foundation for

a political career. As impecunious offspring of the Duke of Marlborough, without prospects for title or fortune, he was desperate to find his way up the ladder. As we know, he found it. Army and press gave him his start. He made a name for himself as a fearless war correspondent and got involved in some action too. He turned his experience into optimum use by publishing his first book on this campaign. In his life, writing was his best source of income, far ahead of politics. While young Winston with his pushiness and perpetual self-promotion doesn't exactly strike me as a very likable man, I must admit his personal power and ambition. His role in history is ambivalent: on the positive side his success in rallying Britain in WW2, less than great his futile efforts at stretching out the lifetime of the doomed empire.

This book is very interested in many aspects. It describes the British upper class thinking of the time at the peak of the Empire and the Victorian era. It describes the dedicated young Winston Churchill and how early he had to work as war correspondent as he had no personal income to sustain cost being an officer. In the ancient Norse mythology is stated that the courageous are lucky and Winston Churchill did not lack courage, thus he accomplished all he wanted in life and more. The British Afghan conflict was termed by British officer Rudyard Kipling "The Great Game". Term made familiar by Kipling. The British suspected Imperial Russia to take the trail which Alexander the Great took from Uzbekistan to India, but India was the Crown jewel of the Empire. This conflict with the Afghans lasted for 80 years, or from 1839 to 1919. In comparison the introduction of Islam took two centuries. By looking up names and places mentioned in this book gives the student reader a whole new idea of Afghanistan as Kristjánsson, Iceland.

This effort on Churchill fills in a period of his life usually absent, except by brief comment or footnote, in larger biographies of his life. It is a critical read for anyone studying Churchill because his military experience in India and Afghanistan were crucial to the development of the political career he would later develop. The book begins as the story of Churchill during his first military experiences but soon shifts to the military and political story of Afghanistan and how the British experiences in the late 1890s are relevant to current events there today. While the military and political landscape of the world has changed significantly the social and political life of Afghanistan have not. The lessons learned there by the British were timeless and greatly beneficial to current involvements there. It was reassuring to learn that many of those lessons were well learned and reapplied. The reader will learn more about Afghanistan and what makes it tick than about Churchill.

but what you learn is also what he learned. This is a must read for anyone wishing to have any understanding of Afghanistan and our present conflict and involvement there.

great account of the early life of a great man

this is an impressive book of history that is as relevant today as at the turn of the last century. Churchill's observations are spot on about the Afghan tribal fighters and the difficulties of guerrilla war tactics, a key part of which is exploiting the adversary's impatience. I'm a Churchill fan and I very much enjoyed learning more about his early life and experiences, especially his drive to prepare himself for world leadership later on.

Winston Churchill had an amazing life. I have read his autobiographies and find his life fascinating in what he accomplished. "Churchill's First War" by Con Coughlin gives an in-depth look at Churchill's experience fighting the Afghans in the Hindu Kush mountains. Interestingly, there are many parallels to our troops' difficulties fighting in the same area many decades later. If you are a history buff and would like to see how we should learn from past events, read this book.

This is a very easy read and very easy to understand. The author makes many contrasts with present day situations which is a constant reminder of how we never seem to learn from history. The main theme of the book highlights Winston's personality and incredibly drive and his ability, because of his breeding, to network to his own advantage in the highest circles. well worth reading if you are a history buff or Winston is one of your heroes!

Well written review of Churchill's early life. Would probably be most valuable for one unfamiliar with his childhood and early career as much of the book is devoted to material that has been amply covered elsewhere.

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