



Marlborough: His Life and Times, Book One

Winston S. Churchill

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"It is my hope to recall this great shade from the past, and not only invest him with his panoply, but make him living and intimate to modern eyes."—from the preface to Volume One

John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough (1644-1722), was one of the greatest military commanders and statesmen in the history of England. Victorious in the Battles of Blenheim (1704), Ramillies (1706), and countless other campaigns, Marlborough, whose political intrigues were almost as legendary as his military skill, never fought a battle he didn't win. Although he helped James II crush the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth, Marlborough later supported William of Orange against James II in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and brilliantly managed England's diplomatic triumphs during the War of the Spanish Succession. Marlborough also bequeathed the world another great British military strategist and diplomat—his descendant, Winston S. Churchill, who wrote this book to redeem Marlborough's reputation from Macaulay's smears.

One million words long and ten years in the making, Churchill's *Marlborough* stands as both a literary and historical masterpiece, giving us unique insights into the Churchill of World War II, for just as Churchill's literary skill helps us understand the complexities of Marlborough's life, so too did his writing of Marlborough help Churchill master the arts of military strategy and diplomacy. This two-volume edition includes the entire text and almost all the original maps.

Marlborough: His Life and Times, Book One Details

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From Reader Review Marlborough: His Life and Times, Book One for online ebook

Jan says

Biased to a fault, but with charming eloquence and passion for the subject. The fifth star must be subtracted for the wear and tear of time, while recognising that there was good reason for giving the quintessential warrior-author the Nobel Prize for Literature rather than Peace. This first volume sets the scene for Marlborough's primary achievements during the War of The Spanish Succession and viewed from a distance of 70+ years spends an in-proportionate amount of pages in (unsuccessfully) white washing its hero from all suspicion of being an avaricious opportunist - like most of his contemporaries in Restoration and Jacobite England.

George Serebrennikov says

As always Churchill is Churchill: unbelievable clarity of writing, amazing vocabulary, and the beauty of the English language. The trait is consistent from "History of the English-Speaking People" to the last volume of "The Second World War". However, "Marlborough: His Life and Times" is different. It is extremely personal. Duke of Marlborough is clearly the Churchill's childhood hero, a knight in shining armor, and as such cannot do wrong. Betrayal of King James, to whom Duke owed so much, desertion, attempt to betray William to James, for everything Churchill managed to find excuses and explanations. Although it was sometimes annoying, I still think the book is great, and history in Churchill's words, as always, is so much alive and interesting. The book is well worth the effort.

Michael Fuller says

Winston Churchill, in a relatively well-known bad patch during the 1930s, began to write this history of his famous and much maligned ancestor. The first volume contains the first two books of the original four book set. The life of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, is both a fascinating look at an historical era as well as a personal portrait of a great military general. Book One consists of a large chunk of history, spanning the downfall of Charles I through Cromwell, to the Restoration of Charles II, through the overthrowing of his brother, the Catholic James II by William of Orange married to James II's daughter, Mary, to the crowning of Queen Anne. The second Book of Volume one concentrates on a mere 3 years of Anne's rule.

I will not reiterate what other reviewers have already said. However, I would add that in the writing of this book, Winston Churchill prepared himself to become even greater than his general ancestor. It can hardly be surprising that as this history was being written, events were conspiring to lead Winston Churchill into the biggest world confrontation ever. After studying the campaigns in Europe of Lord Marlborough, it can hardly be surprising that Churchill fully suspected the coming of the war long before his fellow MPs.

This is a scholarly work and shouldn't be undertaken without serious patience. Each of the two volumes are in themselves close to 1,000 pages long. The history is written from the point of view of a defender, though Winston Churchill is careful not to gloss over details that might cast an unfavorable opinion of his ancestor. Well worth the effort.

Rik Brooymans says

Overall a very good start to what looks like it will be a very entertaining and informative volume of books. Clearly Churchill has a lot invested in setting the historical record straight with regards to his illustrious ancestor. Unfortunately, when he sets out to do specifically that by tackling points and minutiae raised by previous biographies, the book bogs down and becomes a little tedious. I could also have done with fewer full transcripts of the "love" letters between John and Sarah, the future duchess - a sampling would have been sufficient to demonstrate who wore the pants in that relationship.

But when Churchill gets back into his wheelhouse of describing political machinations and military manoeuvres the book moves along at a cracking pace, with some of Churchill's best writing. Beyond that, he does an excellent job of getting to the meat of who John Churchill was and why. My personal favourite was the chapter dedicated to exploring the impression that he was a cheap bastard.

Looking forward to the remaining three volumes.

Frank Ashe says

In a burst of enthusiasm while younger, I read all 2000+ page (4 volumes) of this work in a week, while fulfilling family duties by going on holidays with my parents. The fact that I could do that, and the books still stick in my mind, gives an idea of the force of the work.

Matt says

The first Duke of Marlborough during his life and afterwards was a controversial figure that tended to be seen in a rather bad light by history until Winston S. Churchill set about to fully rehabilitate the English/British general and statesman. *Marlborough: His Life and Times (Book One)* contains the first two volumes of Churchill's four volume biography of his ancestor John Churchill that cover the first 55 years of the general's life.

The first volume of Churchill's biography of Marlborough covers the first half of the book from the Duke's birth to the death of William III at the beginning of the War of Spanish Succession. Events and Marlborough's actions throughout this period colored contemporaries views of him as well as later historian's opinions of him. Yet this was a turbulent time in English history, as politics was first dominated by Roundheads and Cavaliers before becoming Protestant and Catholics along with Tory and Whig followed by Jacobite and Anti-Jacobite. Without the deep understand that Churchill gives the actions of Marlborough would make him look wish-washy. The second volume consists of the first four years of Marlborough's time as commander-in-chief of the Grand Alliance as well as de facto co-Prime Minister of England. Throughout this second volume of Churchill's biography, the life of the commander-in-chief of an alliance was not easy and many of Marlborough's military plans were frustrated by the want of will by his allies, mainly the Dutch. But it wasn't until Marlborough marched to the aid of the Holy Roman Empire that he was able to conduct the military operations that he wanted which gave him the first great English victory on the Continent since Agincourt, yet the next year his designs were once again frustrated leading to military and

political unrest amongst the Great Alliance.

Given the author's relationship to his subject and stated purpose to readjust the historical view of his ancestor, one could expect a true glorification of Marlborough but to Churchill's credit he did not. While Churchill does take time give the reader an understanding of the changing political environment throughout Marlborough's life and explained his actions in relation to them. When it came to Marlborough's military operations, Churchill is actually balanced in his approach to his ancestor's military decisions as well as "what if" scenarios when Marlborough was frustrated in his planning. Yet Churchill savages those who did frustrate Marlborough's planning through either over caution or plain envy.

Marlborough: His Life and Times (Book One) gives an in-depth look at the second half of the 17th century and the early part of the War of Spanish Succession through the life of John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough. Winston Churchill writes engagingly and makes a full picture of events that leaves the reader in no doubt the facts surrounding an issue. After finished Book One, you'll be wanting to start Book Two.

Dan Cowden says

Winston Churchill had something of a man-crush on his ancestor John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough. In Winston's own dark period of life, he undertook this exhaustive biography of Marlborough and produced a remarkable work. One common complaint about biographies of military figures -- even recent military commanders -- is that the reader is more often treated to a dry recitation of their military career and not left with much of a description of the man who lived it. Churchill avoided that, and with an enormous collection of the Marlborough's private correspondence attempts to tell the story of one of Great Britain's most illustrious military commanders, a man who humbled the greatest of France's kings while at the head of an inconsistent and fractious group of "allies".

Churchill's take on Marlborough can not be considered unbiased -- Churchill is not only a descendant of Marlborough's eldest daughter, but was even born in Blenheim Palace. Indeed, Churchill's partisanship is rather clear from the start, as he first describes why he felt that Marlborough's name and career required rehabilitation in the first place.

Despite this, Churchill's prose is as lyrical and well-crafted as anything else the man wrote or said, and few moment's of Marlborough's life are unaccounted for. It is not entirely easy to write an account of the life of a man who died more than three hundred years before the book was published, and particularly not when there are so few primary sources from which to draw information. Still, Churchill deftly explains the political, military, and social issues wrestled with by Marlborough, his wife and his friends during the course of the Glorious Revolution and War of Spanish Succession, and provides a plausible explanation for the many charges leveled at Marlborough since he first rose to prominence.

This is a fascinating read whether your interest is on politics, warfare, or life in the 17th & 18th centuries.

Bev says

Interesting, not only for the subject, but also for the glorious prose, Sir Winston's voice echoes in every sentence.

L Greyfort says

[4-volume paperback edition, edited by Henry Steele Commager]

Got very good at reading - and understanding - descriptions of battles. Sometimes it is clear Churchill wrote this for a British audience, who would know who the other major players were without a scorecard; I needed some wikipedia backup to be clear about who was who among some of the British political figures.

Of course, Winston is going to defend his great-great (great-great?) grandfather very strongly. He's perfectly willing to call out other historians on their "mistaken" or judgmental assessments (Macauley certainly comes off as a Major Prude). The praise he heaps on his ancestor is very calculated to make you admire him, despite some, um, dodgy dealings in the course of his life ("Hey, it was only prudent to play both ends against the middle in such turbulent times....and besides, everyone was doing it"). Even so you do see what was admirable about the man.

And Winston's very sure that things worked out the way they were supposed to. But he does manage sometimes to give one a sense of how it all could have gone terribly wrong...or, at least, differently. Not all historians are able to tell you the story without giving away the end, so to speak.

And I got new insight into this period too. I certainly did not know how completely Louis XIV overshadowed all of Europe at the time. Nor did I fully realize how vulnerable and shaky England's internal society was after the restoration of the monarchy (despite studying Restoration comedy; too busy laughing, I guess), or how minor it's standing in Europe.

...And then you remember that Winston wrote this in 1933. A little whistling past the graveyard there, Winnie? But that all came out all right too, didn't it? (but you need to read another book on my list [Masters & Commanders] to know what a near thing the later history was)

Bettie? says

Wiki description: *The serial presents the lives of John and Sarah Churchill from their meeting in 1673 until a time shortly before the first duke's death in 1722, and illustrates, along the way, much of the context of contemporary English politics. Like many BBC serials of the era, it was made on a low budget, with sound studio sets, and generally avoided battle and crowd scenes due to inability to stage them in a convincing manner. The series is based on the Marlboroughs' famous descendant Winston Churchill's life of his ancestor the Duke, and as such presents a very favourable portrait of the Marlboroughs.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lizLU...>

1/12 The Chaste Nymph

2/12 Bridals

3/12 Plot Counter-Plot

4/12 The Lion and the Unicorn

5/12 Rebellion <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZebi...>

James II of England (James VII of Scotland) from 6 February 1685 until he was deposed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. He was the last Roman Catholic monarch to reign over the Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland. - wiki.

Laura says

Produced by the BBC and aired in 1969..12 Episodes following the lives of John&Sarah Churchill..starting in 1673 when they 1st met.

Actors/Actresses..John Standing,John Neville,Robert Robinson,Susan Hampshire.

The First Churchills-(The Chaste Nymph)-Episode 1/12.

John Churchill is an able soldier who has proved himself on many occasions and is a favorite of Kings on both sides of the English Channel. He quickly became a senior officer, based on his skill and not his aristocratic background.

The First Churchills-(Bridals)-Episode 2/12

John Churchill pursues the young Sarah Jennings but she is convinced they can have no future together. Sarah is poor, much as Churchill is, and her mother is convinced that Churchill's father will arrange a marriage for his son only with a rich woman.

Plot Counter-Plot -Episode 3/12

John is promoted to Brigadier and much to Sarah's dismay, is off to Holland. There is much intrigue at court with Titus Oates telling King Charles II there is a Jesuit plot to have him killed and install a Catholic King on the throne.

Jonathan says

Rightly considered one of the best biographies and histories of the 20th century, Winston Churchill's work on his illustrious ancestor is not only an in-depth and infinitely wise look back on the early modern era in Europe in general and England in particular, it is also a great pleasure to read, thanks to Churchill's unsurpassed prose. Not an easy or light read at 1000 pages of text per book, it will reward the patient and diligent reader with the skillfully illustrated career of this remarkable soldier, put tirelessly into the political, diplomatic and military contexts in which he worked. Simply not to be missed by lovers (and makers) of history.

Bobby O'Malley says

Brilliant

Sometimes you can almost see and hear him speak as you read what a pleasure it must have been to listen to his oratory live

John Nixon says

Persevere through the first chapter on John Churchill's ancestors. The writing is, well, Churchillian, and this is a fantastic intro to the England of Charles II through Queen Anne. The audience is clearly British, so if you don't have British history at your fingertips, you might need some Google-fu to look up a few players. The description of Marlborough's campaigns and battles during the War of the Spanish Succession is amazing and vivid. Here was a true military genius about whom Churchill wrote:

"He commanded the armies of Europe against France for ten campaigns. He fought four great battles and many important actions. It is the common boast of his champions that he never fought a battle that he did not win, nor besieged a fortress he did not take. Amid all the chances and baffling accidents of war he produced victory with almost mechanical certainty. Even when fighting in fetters and hobbles, swayed and oppressed by influences which were wholly outside the military situation, he was able to produce the same result, varying only in degree. Nothing like this can be seen in military annals."

Marks54 says

This the first part of Churchill's life of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough. There are some problems in syncing with some of the paperback editions, which have four parts. This volume covers the first two parts of Churchill's work, culminating in the epic battle of Blenheim and its immediate aftermath. (I had originally treated these as two books, but this combination fits with more editions.) The work begins with the initial period of Marlborough's life up to the death of King William and the ascendancy of Queen Anne. This is just before Marlborough began the key later portion of his military career, in the wars against Louis XIV. The second half of the volume picks up with the Duke's initial campaigns against Louis IV and in a grand confederation with the Dutch and assorted German principalities. This is a very sympathetic biography of Churchill's famous ancestor, with Winston Churchill serving as the historian. He spent much time on this work in the 1920s and 1930s. I am reading this to make good on a commitment to read the series, a used version of which I obtained a few years ago. These volumes are difficult to find in a set and I have always enjoyed reading Churchill, especially his history - although if I recall he won a Nobel Prize for literature.

As a history, this book is hugely informative about the Glorious Revolution and the political situation in England up through the reigns of William and Mary and Queen Anne. I have always felt a bit less confident about this time and find the book valuable on this account alone.

As to the quality of the history, it is Winston Churchill - what else is there to say? The writing is marvelous and Churchill aggressively paints a positive picture of John Churchill. The prose alone makes this worth reading. How objective is Churchill's treatment of the Duke? I suspect it is not fully objective and impartial. In the first part of the book, Churchill is at pains to take on prior claims about Marlborough to expose their errors of fact and perspective. His responses to Macaulay's criticisms of Marlborough are especially sharp.

Along with this not being a critical biography, I also have some minor issues with the focus, with combines battle tactics and politics. There are lots of descriptions of battles and who moved which units where and at what time to win the day. I normally do not like this sort of history and do not read many hagiographies. While I may take some points with a grain of salt (or two), the result here is still immensely entertaining and a joy to read, although I may not remember as much about these battles as I do from other wars. This was a different time, with lots of maneuver and infrequent major clashes between armies fought to the finish. This was not modern warfare and the general public was not as involved as in the great wars of the last two centuries. Marlborough was the master of warfare prior to Napoleon and his great changes in armies and tactics.

The key personalities are also well drawn, especially Queen Anne, Marlborough, and his wife Sarah. It is a fun book to read and I am moving to the second half of the work with enthusiasm.
