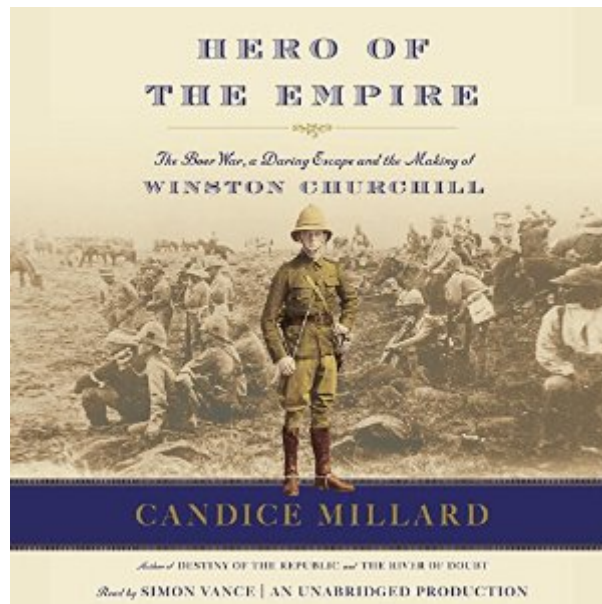


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Hero Of The Empire: The Boer War, A Daring Escape, And The Making Of Winston Churchill



Synopsis

From New York Times best-selling author of *Destiny of the Republic* and *The River of Doubt*, a thrilling narrative of Winston Churchill's extraordinary and little-known exploits during the Boer War. At age 24 Winston Churchill was utterly convinced it was his destiny to become prime minister of England one day, despite the fact he had just lost his first election campaign for Parliament. He believed that to achieve his goal, he had to do something spectacular on the battlefield. Despite deliberately putting himself in extreme danger as a British army officer in colonial wars in India and Sudan and as a journalist covering a Cuban uprising against the Spanish, glory and fame had eluded him. Churchill arrived in South Africa in 1899, valet and crates of vintage wine in tow, there to cover the brutal colonial war the British were fighting with Boer rebels. But just two weeks after his arrival, the soldiers he was accompanying on an armored train were ambushed, and Churchill was taken prisoner. Remarkably, he pulled off a daring escape - but then had to traverse hundreds of miles of enemy territory alone, with nothing but a crumpled wad of cash, four slabs of chocolate, and his wits to guide him. The story of his escape is incredible enough, but then Churchill enlisted, returned to South Africa, fought in several battles, and ultimately liberated the men with whom he had been imprisoned. Churchill would later remark that this period, "could I have seen my future, was to lay the foundations of my later life". Millard spins an epic story of bravery, savagery, and chance encounters with a cast of historical characters - including Rudyard Kipling, Lord Kitchener, and Mohandas Gandhi - with whom he would later share the world stage. But *Hero of the Empire* is more than an adventure story, for the lessons Churchill took from the Boer War would profoundly affect 20th-century history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What an enjoyable read. Both the character of Winston Churchill and the Boer War come to life in this narrative. Candice Millard is a talented journalist. She can write a gripping narrative from any historical event. Using diaries and biographies from the era, Millard creates a setting and paces the plot just fast enough to make this story engaging. Credit should also go to Winston Churchill himself, who was also a gifted writer sometimes prone to embellishment, who left all his journals, diaries and letters behind for public use. I have had co-workers and history teachers tell me that the Boer War was England's practice ground for World War I. Millard's story seems to justify this claim. But she also gives reason to the claims of English arrogance and snobbery. The English Empire had grossly miscalculated the perseverance of the Boers and figured a war with the natives would be a quick and decisive victory. That was England's first mistake. The second mistake was not arming their soldiers well enough. Add in Winston Churchill and his air of superiority (his father, Lord Randolph, was a popular politician and related to the Dukes of Marlborough) and one sees through Millard's gift of connecting tidbits here and there across literature that Winston Churchill became the man of his legacy because of his experiences during the Boer War and his captivity. His natural leadership qualities shine through, albeit with some flaws that Millard does not overlook. Millard introduces the reader first to some background on South Africa and the Boers, the Zulus, and England's demands of the region's natural resources (re: diamonds!). She introduces the reader to some key leaders, such as Louis Botha, the first prime minister of the Union of South Africa, the Zulu leader Shaka, and the unfortunate actions of Major-General Sir William Penn Symons. She doesn't waste too much time with this background, however, as the narrative quickly shifts to preparations for war and then the war itself. Churchill goes to the war as a war correspondent for the Morning Post, but still wants to be treated as the British Officer he was when he served in combat in the Sudan. He lost his father as a young adult, but uses his mother's influence to get him to South Africa. There he meets other war correspondents such as Leo S. Amery and John B. Atkins (both who also left journals of the Boer War behind). Another important person for Churchill is Sir James Haldane, who was a prisoner with him while at Pretoria. All three men later have different opinions of Churchill. Millard divides the story into five parts that summarize the history of South Africa, England's movement of troops into the country and the start of combat, then the unfortunate ride Winston took on the armored train that the Boers attacked, his imprisonment and finally his post-prison freedom. While Churchill never loses his ambitions to become prime minister of England some day, nor his love for

wine, glamour and public admiration, he does learn to respect and even admire his adversaries. This will pay off well as he leads his country through World War II decades later. This is a very enjoyable read. I appreciate having an engaging story about the Second Boer War and Winston Churchill in one narrative. Highly recommend for popular history readers and Winston Churchill fans.

My husband and I loved her other two books, *The River of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey* and *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President*, so it was with anticipation that I opened this one. True to form, the author grabbed me from the first paragraph in the prologue, making me forget about the world around me or the affairs of the day. I was there, in South Africa, and a war I had never studied, with all of the implications of the British Empire's magnitude, became alive. I will not repeat what other, more verbose reviewers, already and eloquently wrote about the contents of the book. I enjoy short reviews when I shop on . I highly recommend this book, as I do her other books, biographies told in a way that feel more like a thrilling adventure.

Winston Churchill is one of those people whose life, career, and accomplishments have fascinated us throughout the 20th century and will likely continue to fascinate people into the far future. He had such an interesting life, accomplished a lot, and affected millions of people with his wit and positions that it is no wonder that there is a constant stream of books documenting various aspects of his life and approaches. This book is one of those that document one of the more interesting and bizarre events in his long, distinguished career. This book looks at his early involvement in the Boer War when he was a war correspondent who was captured by the Boers, yet managed to escape and return to the British side to continue fighting as a cavalry officer. For those who have not studied Churchill's life, this episode took place when he was a young man in his early 20s. By the time that the Boer war started, Churchill had already completed his military training and was posted to a cavalry unit in India. Seeking adventure and fame, he had already participated in military campaigns in Cuba, Afghanistan, and Sudan. In all these cases he was acting as a civilian war correspondent while being on leave from his military duties. When the Boer War started, Churchill was a civilian and had just failed in his first attempt to enter political life "losing an election that would have him enter the House of Commons. Using his extensive set of contacts at the highest levels of the British Government, he managed to get appointed as a war correspondent to cover the war and set sail on a steamship that brought a new commanding general and troops to

South Africa. One day, he set out to accompany some troops on a reconnaissance mission; he was captured by a Boer ambush and was taken to Pretoria as a prisoner of war. Since he participated in the battle in full view of the Boers, he was not released, as was the custom of the time, but was kept with other British officers in a jail. He manages to escape the jail and make his way to neutral territory. The story of this escape, and the incredible luck that Churchill has in making it happen while not really having a plan or any support along the way is the meat of this book and is the most fun part of the read. It is just amazing to read his exploits and to think how unusually lucky he was in the results of each of his decisions. Once Churchill makes it back to British lines he manages to get commissioned and spends the rest of the war in a regiment. By being captured, and then escaping successfully, his exploits made him famous and a hero "at a time when Britain was desperately looking for a hero" which launched his political career and the rest of his incredible life. This book covers this one specific episode that took place over about three months. While the book covers many of the details of this specific episode in Churchill's life, it also sets the stage for how the Boer War was fought and why it became such a big deal at the time. The book covers the political situation in South Africa well, and also explains some of the other factors that swirled around the war in terms of the relationships between the British and the Boers, the British and the native Africans, the Boers and the native Africans and the wider political pictures. This book also covers some of the politics of Britain in its late Victorian era. The writing is relatively breezy and consequently is easy to read. While weighing in at about 300 pages, it does not take long to absorb. All that to the good, however, this book is not as good as it could have been. For a start, it becomes quite obvious that the author does not like the subject of her own book. From the beginning, she portrays Churchill in very negative terms "continuously mentioning his very un-British self-promotion, his cockiness, his brashness, and his egotistic view of himself as appointed by a supreme being to be the Prime Minister of England. Some of this is undoubtedly true. For instance, I could not help but shake my head in disbelief as she describes how Churchill misconstrues "the instructions of his co-conspirators and ends up escaping on his own while leaving the others to suffer. Nonetheless, the continual repetition of his negative traits throughout the book was a distraction. Secondly, there are several errors in the book that should have been corrected. To note just one: the ship that Churchill sails in to South Africa is stated to be one and a half tons in weight. That simply cannot be. Thirdly, there are many threads that are started, but then left hanging. For instance: the book goes off on a tangent to describe the Zulu and their ascendancy due to their incredible leader, Shaka. The book then notes that the tribe was only 200 member strong when Shaka took over their military. He then reorganized it into many

regiments, etc. What? How can a 200 member tribe " which presumably includes women and children who were not considered warriors at that time " support multiple regiments? Also, since his reign is stated as twelve years in length, how was he able to convince complete units to jump off cliffs to their deaths? Finally, what bearing did this have on the Boer War? Another such fault is that the author never states what happened with the British army between Churchill's capture and his escape that changed the situation? When Churchill arrives, the British lose every encounter. Three months later, they are able to defeat them so completely that they enter Pretoria six months later? For these reasons, and the many other smaller faults in this book, I took away a couple of stars. For those who are not aware of Churchill's rise to prominence and the various events that contributed to it, this book can fill the gap for one of the more famous items. It's an easy read and will give you the flavor of the time period and of Churchill at this early stage in his life.

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