

Lt-Col "Mad Jack" Churchill. D.S.O, M.C. (1920-21)

Jack Churchill was probably the most dramatically impressive Commando leader of the Second World War. His exploits-charging up beaches dressed only in a kilt and brandishing a dirk, killing with a bow and arrow, playing the bagpipes at moments of extreme peril-and his legendary escapes won him the admiration and devotion of those under his command, who nicknamed him "Mad Jack". He was awarded two DSOs and an MC, and mentioned in dispatches.



Lt-Col. Jack Churchill

On the outbreak of war in 1939, he was recalled to the Colours and went to France, taking with him his bow and arrows which he used on patrols against the Germans in front of the Maginot Line. The weapon was silent, accurate to 200 yards and lethal.

After the Germans attacked in France, Churchill was awarded the MC in the retreat at the Battle of l'EpINETTE (near Bethune) where his company was trapped by German forces.

Churchill fought back using two machine guns (and his bow) until ammunition was exhausted, then extricated the remains of the company through the German lines at night and reported back to brigade HQ. Later he was wounded and carried a bullet in his shoulder all his life.



The entrance to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp

The Germans thought wrongly, that Churchill must be a relation of the Prime Minister. Eventually he was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen Camp, near Berlin. Churchill tunnelled out of the camp with an RAF officer, but was recaptured and transferred to a POW camp in Austria. When the floodlights failed one night he escaped and, living on stolen vegetables, walked across the Alps near the Brenner Pass. He then made contact with an American reconnaissance column in the Po Valley.

In his last job he would sometimes stand up on a train journey from London to his home, open the window and hurl out his briefcase, then calmly resume his seat. Fellow passengers looked on aghast, unaware that he had flung the briefcase into his own back garden.

After returning to England, he joined the Commandos and in 1941 was second-in-command of a mixed force from 2 and 3 Commandos which raided Vaagso, in Norway. The aim was to blow up local fish oil factories, sink shipping, gather intelligence, eliminate the garrison and bring home volunteers for the Free Norwegian Forces. Before landing, Churchill decided to look the part. He wore silver buttons he had acquired in France; carried his bow and arrows and armed himself with a broad-hilted claymore; and led the landing force ashore with his bagpipes. Although he was once again wounded, the operation forced the Germans to concentrate large forces in the area.

Churchill saw action in Sicily and then at Salerno. In further fighting along the Pigoletti Ridge, he was recommended for the VC but eventually received the DSO. His action had saved the Salerno beachhead at a critical time.

Churchill's next assignment was in the Adriatic. Playing his pipes, Churchill led No 40 Commando in a night attack which reached the top of the objective where he was wounded and captured.



The Brenner Pass between Austria and Italy