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### Commander in chief

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historians of World War II – “Husky” forced Hitler to call off Operation “Citadel,” the vast (2 million man) offensive the Wehrmacht had launched on the Eastern front, at Kursk.

9. Success in Sicily led to tragic British hubris, however. Churchill traveled to North America for a second time in the summer of 1943 to call, yet again, for the abandonment of “Overlord.” This time FDR was compelled to threaten to exclude Britain from atomic bomb development unless the Prime Minister ceased sabotaging Overlord preparations.

10. The Allied near-fiasco at Salerno and failure to seize Rome in the fall of 1943 – as well as the humiliating defeat of Churchill’s British forces attempting to capture the Ionian Islands – justified FDR’s insistence that “Overlord” be the top priority in Allied military strategy, if the war against Hitler was to be won, not lost.

11. Even in 1943 Churchill admitted it was his intention to “bury his mistakes,” when the war would be won and he came to write his memoirs. In *The Second World War* (published 1948-1954), Churchill duly posed as the military architect of Allied victory in World War II by a strategy of “closing the ring.” This was to traduce the actual story. Biographer and military historian Joseph Persico was, like many other historians and biographers, quite wrong to claim in 2013 that “Roosevelt bowed to Churchill’s superior military credentials,” and that Churchill “exercised a disproportionate influence over Roosevelt.”

12. For all Churchill’s military mistakes and his tragic Mediterranean opportunism, the British Prime Minister’s reading of Stalin’s political intentions was nevertheless sound, as FDR recognized. For this reason FDR kept Churchill in America for almost a month after the Quebec Conference of August 1943: to demonstrate the unity of the western alliance, not only to Hitler (who was being urged to negotiate an armistice), but to Stalin.

13. Attempting to understand the “obstinate Dutchman” (as FDR called himself), is not easy, even after years of work. Not even his friend, the Canadian prime minister William Mackenzie King, always succeeded, either. When Queen Wilhelmina asked to travel from Canada to Hyde Park and Washington to stay with the President, FDR telephoned Mr. King in excitement. He wanted, he said, to get hold of a Dutch wife. “But Mr. President,” he protested – not knowing the pejorative English term for a stiff pillow – “you already have a wife!”

14. *Commander in Chief: FDR’s Battle With Churchill, 1943*, is part of a recent trend in “partial biography” (i.e. less than full-life chronicling) to which Professor Hans Renders drew attention in his lecture on “The Art of Biography” (BIO Conference, New York, 2013). Such works enable scholarly biographers to challenge commonly accepted myths, accretions and assumptions made by historians.

15. Given the importance of biography in the way biographers shape the way the public considers and judges historical figures, this aspect of biography deserves greater attention to be paid to the biographical process, and the development of the ultimate biographical text – not just the final work.

Nigel Hamilton, 28 April 2016