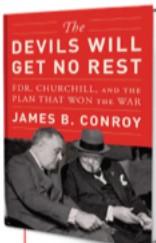




President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill take time for the photographers at the Casablanca conference.

## REVIEWS BOOKS

# HOW TO WIN A WAR



**THE DEVILS WILL GET NO REST**  
FDR, Churchill,  
and the Plan that  
Won the War

By James B. Conroy.  
432 pp. Simon &  
Schuster, 2023. \$34

IN JANUARY 1943 American and British representatives met in the Moroccan city of Casablanca to wrangle over their competing visions about the best way to defeat the Axis powers. The British delegation, led by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, advocated strongly for a “beat Germany first” strategy, starting with operations in the Mediterranean. The Americans, led by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, pushed for a cross-channel invasion of France—an operation for which the Allies were woefully unprepared—and advocated for more effort against the Japanese in the Pacific. Of the stakes, Conroy writes, “The blessings of success were immeasurable; the consequences of failure too horrific to consider.”

Simply getting to the conference in Morocco was difficult. Roosevelt started his trip to Casablanca aboard his customized train car. After feinting toward the president’s

home in Hyde Park, New York, the train rolled back through Washington and on to Miami, where the president and his entourage boarded two Boeing flying boats for a flight to South America and then across the Atlantic. Support staff flew ahead aboard a pair of C-54 Skymasters that FDR and his party borrowed for the final leg of their journey. By the time he returned to Washington, the president had flown 14,000 miles.

Churchill and his immediate entourage had it a little easier, flying from Britain aboard an American B-24 Liberator. Conroy paints a ludicrous image of the prime minister, clad only in a silk nightshirt, on his hands and knees attempting to adjust a heater during the overnight flight, which he passed on a cot in the bomb bay.

But despite some levity, the conference was serious business. The Americans found themselves outmatched by the British, who had

already been at war for more than three years, the United States just over one. The Americans were “scandalously unprepared,” Conroy writes, a lack of preparation that was “negligent.” As one U.S. general noted, “We came, we listened, and we were conquered.” In private, the Britons mocked the Americans’ tendency to begin statements with “It is believed that,” and even waggishly found a way to introduce the statement into the final report. Britain ended up getting the Mediterranean campaign Churchill wanted, and delayed the cross-channel invasion (probably correctly) as much as it could.

Conroy includes detailed—perhaps too detailed—accounts of the bickering around the conference table but lightens his narrative with colorful accounts of the strong personalities involved, among them cantankerous Admiral Ernest King (“a schoolyard punk in a hand-tailored Brooks Brothers uniform”), Major General George S. Patton (who was responsible for security), General Sir Alan Brooke (a dedicated bird watcher with the appearance of “a predatory owl”), Roosevelt aide and confidant Harry Hopkins (“who looked as though he slept in a hay loft”), and many others whom Conroy sketches with sure brushstrokes. And then there’s Charles de Gaulle, the petulant head of the Free French who had to be coaxed into making an appearance and never overlooked a slight, real or imagined. (In the index there’s a listing under de Gaulle for “easily bruised ego.”)

The British may have gained most of their aims at Casablanca, but things were changing now that America was injecting its growing industrial might into the war effort. Conroy describes how Churchill was taken aback at the end of the conference when FDR blithely announced to the press that the Allies were seeking unconditional surrender, without bothering to clear it with the prime minister. When FDR was informed that Churchill resented the impromptu announcement, Conroy writes, “It did not upset him. Nothing much did.” The tides were starting to shift—not only against the Axis, but also in favor of the Americans. —Tom Huntington is the editor of *World War II*.