

**REFLECTIONS AT PLACENTIA BAY**  
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**August 14, 2016**

It is a great honour to be here in Newfoundland at Ship Harbour to commemorate the 75th anniversary of this powerful and influential document, the Atlantic Charter. And thank you for your warm welcome during these last few days.

Events such as these do not come together without a lot of effort by a large team. While there are too many to name, I hope you will allow me to recognise one individual whose deep passion and commitment to marking the Atlantic Conference was the catalyst for today's ceremony and the events of the last few days. That man is the Patron-Emeritus of the Atlantic Charter Foundation and your former Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable John Crosbie.

Of the many quotes attributed to Winston Churchill, one he said a number of times, including to my father as a schoolboy, was "to keep your eye on history for that is the only way we can make guesses at the future". In this spirit, I want to pay tribute to the people of this Province – the Newfies as I believe you are called – for all that you have done and continue to do to keep alive and fresh in new generations the memories and importance of these critical days, three quarters of a century ago.

One of the great privileges of my accident of birth is the ability, on occasion, to follow in the footsteps of my great grandfather. And so it is that I find myself here, a short distance from where Winston Churchill was, in a place he described as consisting of "fog, bog and cod". Earlier, I tried to imagine the scene here in August 1941 of the bay teeming with warships – and planes flying overhead – and I can well imagine the worries and concerns felt by the small population who witnessed these momentous events – and which were so well portrayed in the Placentia Area Theatre D'Heritage's groundbreaking production, *Mysterious Visitors*.

When in the summer of 1941, Franklin Roosevelt suggested to Winston Churchill that they meet to discuss the war situation, Churchill jumped at this prospect. This would be Churchill's first overseas journey since the fall of France more than a year before and it gave him an opportunity to have a change of schedule and routine.

His wife, Clementine, who was always concerned for Winston's health, wrote that she hoped the "momentous journey" would "rest and refresh" him. I am not sure that Churchill felt able, at this point in the war, to relax but during the outward crossing, heavy seas forced upon Churchill what he described as "a lull in my daily routine and a strange sense of leisure". He used that time to read CS

Forester's novel, *Captain Hornblower*, which had been given to him by his friend Oliver Lyttelton who was serving in Middle East Headquarters in Cairo. Churchill told his friend of his enjoyment of the book in a very brief wire: "I find *Hornblower* admirable". Subsequently, Churchill learned that his message had caused a mini panic in Cairo as they scrambled to identify the secret mission codenamed *Hornblower*!

Winston Churchill had high hopes for this conference and was in good spirits as they crossed the Atlantic. His bodyguard, Sergeant Thompson, noted that Churchill "probably never had shown so much exuberance and excitement" since his school days. He eagerly anticipated meeting Roosevelt but was overly optimistic as to his hoped for outcome.

On arrival aboard the USS *Augusta*, Churchill said the President gave him "the warmest of welcomes". But he nearly blew it by forgetting that he and Roosevelt had met once before at a dinner in London in 1918. The President did not allow it to cloud relations which was fortunate because, as late as 1939, he remained unimpressed by the First World War Churchill whom he said he "always disliked" and found that he "acted like a stinker".

Quickly, president and prime minister got down to work. Roosevelt suggested that they might want to issue a joint declaration outlining principles for the future. Churchill dictated an initial draft which he submitted to the President. He was proud that this first draft, and what became the basis for the Atlantic Charter, was as he called it, "a British production".

Before leaving London, Churchill had briefed Dominion prime ministers that he thought it inconceivable that Roosevelt would have called the meeting unless he was prepared to enter the war. In that vein, Churchill's first draft included two clauses which committed Britain and America "to resolve and concert the means of providing for the safety of their respective countries in the face of Nazi and German aggression", and that "they seek a peace which will cast down for ever the Nazi tyranny". Unsurprisingly, these clauses did not survive American editing.

On the second day of the conference – Sunday 10th August – the President and his entourage came aboard HMS *Prince of Wales* for a church service. The Prime Minister had planned every aspect meticulously and could be seen on the quarterdeck making final checks on the placement of chairs and how the flags draped over the pulpit looked. It was a resounding success – "unforgettable" – and "a deeply moving expression of the unity of faith of our two peoples". Churchill went on: "every word seemed to stir the heart. It was a great hour to live".

The following day saw the Declaration move from draft to near final version. Remarkably, the editing process does not appear to have been painful and through these hours together, Churchill and Roosevelt bonded and as Churchill

put it, they “established warm and deep personal relations”. But both men had sought multiple reassurances from aides that the other liked them! (I guess they were both true politicians at heart!) This time together stood as a good omen for their upcoming close and effective partnership for the remainder of the war – in my view, the most important immediate outcome of the conference.

But it had not been all work. On both the Sunday and Monday afternoons, the British contingent came ashore not far from where we are now. For my great grandfather, they must have been agreeable expeditions because his military aide, Colonel Jacobs, wrote in his diary that “we clambered over some rocks, the PM like a school boy, getting a great kick out of rolling boulders down a cliff” and Elliott Roosevelt observed that “Mr C gathered up a handful of rocks and amused himself with a few well-aimed tosses” in the direction of his colleagues lying on the sand below! One can only imagine the scene of this red-headed boy masquerading as the British Prime Minister!

On departure, in spite of the strong bonds and the real affection, each man left here with severe private doubts as to what the conference outcome meant in practice. Both sides had wished to achieve a successful text for the Declaration but it was a compromise infiltrated by political realities. Roosevelt did not want to get ahead of American public opinion and Churchill wished for more definitive and actionable promises from the Americans. And inadvertently with the Charter, Churchill was to open up a hornet’s nest over independence for the Colonies.

Churchill worried that Roosevelt might not act on his words due to the reticence of the American public to edge closer to war. The President described the conference as “a bit of a let down” but said that the “afterthoughts” were good.

Back in London, Churchill gave a positive report to the War Cabinet and delivered a bullish broadcast cleansed of any doubts. He described the conference as a “decisive moment” and appears to have stretched the Charter’s interpretation by saying:

“You will have perhaps noticed that the President of the United States and the British Representative have jointly pledged their countries to the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny. That is a solemn and grave undertaking. It must be made good; it will be made good. And, of course, many practical arrangements to fulfil that purpose have been and are being organised and set in motion”.

Back on the presidential yacht off the coast of Maine (on which the press believed Roosevelt had never left), the President made clear to reporters the gravity to the world of Nazi domination and terror – and the importance of bringing it home more and more to democratic nations. But this was tempered by his insistence that the conference was merely “an interchange of views” and that America was no closer to war.

Despite these worries, four months later in December 1941, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Atlantic Charter would come into its own. The warm words of the Third Clause – “they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them” – were immediately transformed into a promise of real action. As Winston Churchill was to ask aloud before the United States Congress later that month:

“What kind of people do they think we are? Is it possible they do not realise that we shall never cease to persevere against them until they have been taught a lesson which they and the world will never forget?”.

In writing his memoirs after the war, Churchill had the opportunity to reflect further on the significance of the Atlantic Conference. Hindsight provided him with certainty as to its importance, describing the Declaration as “an event of first magnitude”. But perhaps Churchill’s most startling postwar observation was his astonishment that the United States “still technically neutral” had joined with a “belligerent power” to make a declaration that gave, in part, “the impression of war-like action”.

We are gathered here today, on the edge of Placentia Bay, where seventy-five years ago, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill formed their relationship that provided the strategic direction to save Western civilisation and shape the world to come. The ability of these two men – in just a matter of days – to write and agree – such a clear, powerful and succinct document – that has lasted and will last through the ages – is in itself remarkable – and is something for which all peace-loving men and women should be grateful.