

He Changed From A Dead-End Kid – To A Dare-Devil Hero!

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Howard Johnson tells a story that will be an inspiration to every youngster who is forced to start at the very bottom of the ladder and longs for an opportunity to show his real worth.

Wrapped in shawls a baby boy was taken late one night to the ever open door of a Dr, Barnardo's Home in Essex.

Little was known of the precious bundle and so, from the tender age or three months, the boy started off on his lonely hazardous career into the world - a mystery child.

That was nearly thirty-one years ago. They gave that little bundle a name and christened him "Jack Churchill."

Today that child, now a strapping man, is one Of England's foremost heroes and one of the most romantic figures in the Royal Air Force. Yet he is now even more of a mystery than he was at three months old.

Today he is Flying-Officer Jack Churchill, D.F.C., D.S.O., of the RAFVR., now in a rest camp. He is the man who, because of secret flights into the jungles of Burma, become known throughout the South-East Asia Command as "The Lawrence of the RAF ".

His story is one of those that only come to wartime—the story of the foundling who grew up to be "not specially good at anything in particular," but who suddenly emerged as a man in a million.

For the present his exploits cannot be told, but those in the know say that, the former 'Barnardos's boy has shown daring and resource of the most original kind. Time and again he has challenged fate over some of the worst country in the world, always to come through smiling and successful.

The Empty File

Yet, until now, as I tell for the first time his romantic story, only a handful of people have known anything about this colourful adventurer.

Even at the Air Ministry Records Department in London, and there with few exceptions they have an up to date biography of every man in the service who has won a decoration they have a file marked "Jack Churchill" – *but it is empty.*

Secrecy has covered not only the work for which he has earned his two decorations (on each occasion that he has won an award all the London Gazette has revealed was that he had been flying on hazardous missions in Burma), but it has also covered the story of his life before he joined the RAF

Jack Churchill was born in Yeovil, Somerset. It was to Dr. Barnardo's Boys Garden City at Woodford Bridge, Essex, that he was taken at the age of a few months.

There, Captain Lewin, the Governor, told me: "Yes, I remember young Jack. All the years he was here he was always a bit of a problem child-an individualist. Not much of a boy for studying but brilliant at sport and as tough as they come. Yes, he was quite a character. Suddenly and unexpectedly he won a scholarship to Loughton High School.

At Loughton High School, Mr. O. G. Johnson, the headmaster, took up the story. "When Jack came to us," he said. "We began to wonder how he ever won the scholarship. He was a great lad - strongly built and dark - but although he was popular and excellent at Soccer and hockey, he never seemed to care much about studying.

"Even today, although since I must have had thousands of boys through the school young Jack Churchill still stands out sharply in my memory.

It wasn't that he was brilliant. But somehow there was something about him. He was the kind of boy you couldn't miss in a crowd."

Jack was restless. He never found a job he really liked - never one he could keep.

Lonely Life

At twenty-one he was working as clerk in Wardour Street, London, living in digs, miserable lonely, with few friends ,and lodgings that didn't provide for him a fire in the winter and gave him bread and butter for tea.

Someone found him at that time. Young Cyril and Fred Weaver, two young Londoners, of Burges Road, East Ham, came to know him. One day the two Weaver sons told their parents of the hard life of their new-found "orphan" friend. "Could we find a room for him in our home?" asked young Fred.

Of course, the answer was "Yes." From that day onwards - and that was nine years ago - the dark, curly-haired, . blue-eyed, lonely Jack Churchill became one of the Weaver family and found his first real "Mother and Father."

To Mr. and Mrs. Weaver he is now "son." When, he writes "home" from India or Burma, it is to "Dear Mum and Dad" In the RAF his next-of-kin are "Mr and Mrs Weaver."

No Confidence!

The Weaver boys would ask him to go to dances with them. Sometimes he went. But he would never dance. He said he was "too shy," this boy who was just finding life."

Mr Weaver would try and teach him to drive the family car. Somehow he would "muff" the gears and say, "I haven't the confidence to drive a car."

Then, something happened which seems to have been the changing point in his whole life. He had only been in the RAF a short time, and he had gone to the recruiting office saying, "I'll never be any good at this sort of thing," when he heard that Fred Weaver, who had looked upon Jack as his big brother, had been captured by the Japs at Singapore.

"It seems remarkable," Mr Weaver told me. "but from that day onwards it seems as though a new Jack Churchill was born. He told us, 'Somehow I'll get the chance to avenge Freddie.'

"Then, in rapid succession, we heard that he had been promoted Sergeant Pilot; that he was on his way to fighting the Japs himself; that he had been granted a commission; that he had won the D.F.C.; that he had won the D.S.O.; and now that he is known throughout the command as 'The Lawrence of the RAF'."

The Unwanted Boy

That is Flying-Officer Jack Churchill, the first man in the RAF to fly more than 30,000 miles in the South-East Asia Command.

And this was the boy who, before the war, thought he would never make a success of anything. The boy who hadn't the confidence to learn how to drive a car. The boy who was in a dead-end clerk's job. The boy who started off in life without the love of a mother and father-unwanted.

It seems to me that Jack Churchill's story will come like an inspiration to hundreds of young Britons who have started at the bottom of the ladder, never managed to impress their schoolmasters and merely yearn for a chance to dazzle us by their courage.