



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors
February 9, 2015

We used to root for the Indians against the cavalry, because we didn't think it was fair in the history books that when the cavalry won it was a great victory, and when the Indians won it was a massacre.
~**Dick Gregory**

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron. **Dwight D. Eisenhower**

Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons.
Douglas MacArthur

The speaker will be Jose Amoros. Jose will present the history of El Moro Castle in San Juan Puerto Rico, including the unsuccessful siege of that facility by the British, in April, 1797.

***MEETINGS** take place the second Monday of every month at the **Riverfront Hotel Grand Rapids** 270 Ann St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 363-9001. Socializing begins at 6:00 (1800), dinner at 7:00 (1900), business meeting 7:15 (1915), and program at 8:00 (2000).*

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Company Notes

- ◆ **DUES \$40.00 a year, Associate \$20.00 are now PAST DUE. Send check to Mike Krushinsky or bring to meeting.**
- ◆ **We will discuss a change in menu options this meeting. Possibly a choice of 2 entrees and 2 lighter fare items.**
- ◆ **Lt. Col. Edward J. Saylor, 94, one of the last surviving members of the Doolittle Raiders died January 28. There are only three men left.**

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The Never Ending War

Straddling the border between Belgium and Northern France lay rolling hills where the land dips between gentle rises. Within this area is a crescent of farmland less than 20 miles in length with over 400 cemeteries containing the bodies of some 21,000 soldiers of the British Empire killed or fatally wounded on the day of greatest bloodshed in the history of their country's military. On one of the many low hills screened by a grove of trees are 162 crosses atop gravestones. Each has a name, rank and serial number, and when known the man's age. Ten simply say "A Soldier of the Great War, Known unto God." Almost all the dead are from Britain's Devonshire Regiment, the date on their gravestones July 1, 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Most were casualties of a single German machine gun placed several hundred yards away. A company commander, Captain Duncan Martin, 30, had made a clay model of the battlefield across which the British had planned to attack. He predicted the exact place where he and his men would come under fire from the nearby German machine gun when they emerged onto the exposed hillside. His name is on one of those gravestones. On a stone plaque next to the graves are the words the regiment's survivors carved on a wooden sign when they buried their dead: THE DEVONSHIRES HELD THIS TRENCH

THE DEVONSHIRES HOLD IT STILL.

Graves are not the only mark that war has made upon this land. Here and there, a patch of ground gouged by thousands of shells has been left alone. Decades of erosion have softened the scarring, but what was once a flat field now looks like rugged, grassed-over sand dunes. On the fields that have been smoothed out again, like those surrounding the Devonshire cemetery, tractors have armor plating beneath their driver's seat. Harvesting machinery cannot distinguish between potatoes, sugar beets, or live shells. More than 700 million artillery and mortar rounds were fired on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918, of which an estimated 15% failed to explode. Every year these leftover shells kill people—36 in 1991 alone when France excavated a track bed for a new high-speed rail line. Dotted throughout the region are patches of uncleared forest or scrub surrounded by yellow danger signs in French and English warning hikers away. The French government employs teams of *démineurs*, roving bomb-disposal specialists, who respond to calls when villagers discover shells. They collect and destroy 900 tons of unexploded munitions each year. More than 630 French *démineurs* have died in the line of duty since 1946. Like those shells, WWI has remained in the lives of those people, below the surface. Appearing again to remind them that they still live in a world formed by the industrialized total warfare it inaugurated.

For more than three years the armies on the Western Front were virtually locked in place, burrowed into trenches with dugouts sometimes 40 feet below ground, periodically emerging for battles that gained at best a few miles of shell-blasted wasteland. The destructiveness of those battles still seems beyond belief. In addition to the dead, on the first day of the Somme offensive another 36,000 British troops were wounded. The magnitude of slaughter in the war's entire span was beyond anything in European experience: more than 35% of all German men who were between the ages of 19 and 22 when the fighting broke out were killed in the next four and a half years and many of the remaining were grievously wounded. In France, the toll was proportionately even higher: one *half* of all Frenchman aged 20 to 32 at the war's outbreak were dead when it was over.

From 1914 to 1918 the war was astonishingly lethal for all the belligerents' ruling classes. On both sides, officers were far more likely to be killed than the men they led over the parapets of the trenches and into machine-gun fire, and they themselves were often from society's highest levels. Roughly 12% of all British soldiers engaged were killed, but for peers or sons of peers in uniform the figure was 19%. Of all the men who graduated from Oxford in 1913, 31% were killed. Under

pressure of the unending carnage, two empires, the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman, dissolved completely. The German Kaiser lost his throne and the Tsar of Russia and his entire family lost their lives. Even the victors were losers: Britain and France together suffered more than two million dead and ended the war deep in debt. Protests sparked by returning colonial veterans began the long unraveling of the British Empire. A swath of northern France was reduced to ashes and the United States retreated into isolationism. British stonemasons in Belgium were still at work carving the names of their nation's missing onto memorials when the Germans invaded more than 20 years later.

Many of the 21 million wounded survived for many years after the war. Institutions were established for the veterans crippled in body or spirit. A writer once visited a place where the men could not go home, a stone, fortress-like mental hospital in northern France, 1961. Some of the aged men he saw were sitting like statues on benches in the courtyard, faces blank, shell-shock victims from the trenches. Millions of veterans for decades filled such institutions. But most disquieting was the shadow that fell onto the tens of millions of people born after the war ended, the children of survivors. Many childhood memories are scarred by the remembrance of fathers waking up screaming in the middle of the night, suffering from recurring nightmares about the war.

One of the few benefits from this conflict was the opening up of voter eligibility in Britain with the passing of The Representation of the People Act 1918. This act was the first to include practically all men in the political system and began the inclusion of women. Prior to 1918 only 60% of male householders over the age of 21 had the vote, but it did not create a complete system of one person, one vote. 7% of the population enjoyed a plural vote in the 1918 election: mostly middle-class men who had an extra vote due to a university degree. The evident injustice of withholding the vote from the very men who had fought to preserve the British political system and Empire, and the subsequent revolution of workers and soldiers in November which had raised the possibility of a similar socialist revolution in Britain caused the politicians to expand the electorate. Voters tripled from the 7.7 million who had been entitled to in 1912 to 21.4 million by the end of 1918. Women now accounted for about 43% of the electorate. Had women been enfranchised based upon the same requirements as men, they would have been in the majority because of the large loss of men in the war. That population distribution did not sit well with the misogynists in Parliament so they allowed women to vote only if they were over 30 years old, a member or married to a member of the Local Government Register, a property owner, or a college graduate voting in a University constituency.

Why does this long-ago war still intrigue us? There was a stark contrast between what people believed they were fighting for and the shattered embittered world the war actually created. Even those who opposed the American wars in Vietnam or Iraq often hasten to add that we would defend our country if it were attacked. And yet, if the European leaders or even our own had been able to look forward in time to see the full consequences of their actions, would they still have sent their soldiers marching off to battle in 1914, or at anytime thereafter. What was and is in the minds of such political and military leaders? How can they feel that such a slaughter is admirable or magnificent. We ask the same question of those who are quick to advocate military confrontation today, when, as in 1914, wars so often have unintended consequences. Today as then there are men and women who passionately believe in the worthy fight, and those who are equally convinced it should not have been fought at all. It all comes down to a sense of loyalty. What should any human being be most loyal to? Country? Military duty? Or the ideal of the fellowship of Man? The end of WWI set the stage for WWII. The end of WWII has yet to see all of its unintended consequences. When we prop up dictators who allegedly support our economic system at the expense of the welfare of their own people we are sowing the seeds for future conflicts. Those seeds are now sprouting, only time will reveal the fruit it bears.

The Doolittle Raid

No one could possibly realize that what began as a thought expressed by President Franklin Roosevelt to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on December 21, 1941, turned into an idea presented by Navy Captain Francis Low, Assistant Chief of Staff to Admiral Ernest King on January 10, 1942, and was operationally tested on February 3, 1942 would become the most pivotable incident in the Pacific Theater. What FDR wanted was a morale booster for the American people, he achieved that and much, much more. A mere eighty men, flying sixteen B-24B bombers from the deck of the *USS Hornet* did very little damage tactically but strategically they altered the direction the war had been taking. Lt. Col. James Doolittle, USAF recounted in his autobiography that “the raid was intended to bolster American morale and to cause the Japanese to begin doubting their leadership. The Japanese people had been told they were invulnerable ... An attack on the Japanese homeland would cause confusion in the minds of the Japanese people and sow doubt about the reliability of their leaders.” The most disheartening aspect of the raid for the Japanese was the overflight of the Emperor’s Palace by several of the American bombers.

The war in the Pacific was not going well for the British in 1941. The Japanese were advancing unchecked, south and west in the Pacific. On December 10, 1941 the British battleship *HMS Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser *HMS Repulse* were sunk by Japanese planes off of the Malaya Peninsula. Hong Kong fell on January 25, 1942. Singapore, Britain’s “Gibraltar of the East,” now devoid of naval ships surrendered on February 15, 1942. On February 19, Japanese aircraft attacked the northern Australian port of Darwin, a staging area for supplies to help the beleaguered Australian forces on New Guinea. Eight ships were sunk, 25 damaged, 30 aircraft destroyed, and all the oil storage tanks obliterated. In North Africa Rommel was pushing out of Libya toward Cairo. The British Prime Minister was under fire at home for the uncontested losses in the Far East, and many of the imperialists in the cabinet saw the empire slowly disappearing. A provision in the Master Lend-Lease agreement had a stipulation for an eventual termination, at war’s end, to the trade tariffs known as “imperial preference,” which had unfairly benefitted Britain, was cause for concern. The once majestic British Empire was approaching a crisis of existence. Further insult was piled onto the British psyche when early on the morning, February 12, 1942, the German Kriegsmarine astonished the world. Two German battleships, the *Gneisenau* and the *Scharnhorst*—which had sunk the aircraft carrier *HMS Illustrious*, along with the cruiser *Prince Eugen*—which help sink the *HMS Hood*, ran the gauntlet of the English Channel. Racing at almost thirty knots through the entirety of the channel from Brest to their base at Kiel they survived without any serious damage.

The ever mercurial Winston Churchill was now in a serious funk and contemplating resignation. His pleas to FDR for a US naval presence in the Indian Ocean was meeting serious resistance. The British Empire was falling apart and the United States was forced to take over protecting British interests. The President believed that Churchill had invited the latest battlefield disasters by his inability to pick effective subordinates plus his refusal to understand why British soldiers were refusing to fight. The soldiers were fighting with their feet—for the most part simply no longer willing to lay down their lives in foreign fields on behalf of a colonialist empire in which they no longer believed. Churchill’s myopia in this instance never ceased to amaze President Roosevelt. The Prime Minister’s blindness reflected an earlier English generation’s unwillingness to surrender the privileges of their class. FDR realized that if the Japanese overran Burma not only was the pride of the British Empire, India, at stake, but also the overland route the US needed to supply Chiang Kai-shek’s forces in China was in jeopardy. He was certain that if the Indians were promised self-

government by the British they would fight for their country against the Japanese, as the Filipinos were doing. Churchill refused to even consider it.

Meanwhile the situation in the Far East was worsening. The Japanese Empire now occupied the Dutch East Indies, modern Indonesia, as navy and army units overran Dutch and Allied forces. The Dutch formally surrendered 96,000 troops on March 9, 1943. Rangoon, the capital of British Burma, was evacuated on the same day, after its port and oil refinery were destroyed. The remnants of the Burmese Army broke out to the north, narrowly escaping encirclement, and regrouped in Imphal, India. Sensing further losses the Prime Minister signaled FDR that he and his cabinet were “earnestly considering whether a declaration of Dominion status after the war, carrying with it, if desired, the right to try secede, should be made at this critical juncture.” The government appointed Sir Stafford Cripps, the leader of the House of Commons, to seek an immediate, if provisional, accommodation with Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru; bypassing the Viceroy of India, Lord Lithgow. On March 10, 1942 Cripps set off for India. Indian leaders were skeptical of Britain’s sincerity. How much fighting would the British really do to defend India? Judging by her performances in Malaya and Burma—where cases of cowardice, military incompetence, and racial as well as imperial misconduct were rampant, was it really worth the Indian Congress Party leaders time to consider fighting alongside the British.

On March 23 Cripps reached Delhi, but the Marquess of Linlithgow, along with General Sir Archibald Wavell, the British commander in chief in India, were secretly being encouraged by Churchill to thwart any negotiations with the Indian leaders. It was one thing to give self-governance to parts of the Empire ruled by men of the white race, but to give India to non-whites was unthinkable. Besides it was just of manner of time till the British soldier found his will to fight. He was not in the least disturbed by the rout of British forces in Burma, believing the Japanese would pass through that country into China. FDR was incredulous, given the deteriorating military situation—of which Churchill was either oblivious or blind. On March 31 British intelligence reported that a large Japanese carrier fleet was heading through the Malay Barrier into the Indian Ocean. Six aircraft carriers, five battleships and seven cruisers soon decimated British naval forces. Twenty-three ships were sunk in the Bay of Bengal, submarines sunk five more off the coast of India. On April 5, 1942 the British naval base at Colombo, Ceylon was attacked. Two British cruisers, *HMS Dorsetshire* and the *HMS Cornwall*, along with the carrier *HMS Hermes* were lost. Even though Bataan surrendered on April 9, FDR was proud of the efforts the U.S.-Filipino Army had shown holding out for so long with virtually no supplies or reinforcements (Corregidor surrendered 28 days later). But he was deeply disappointed by Churchill’s sabotage of self-government for Indians. It seemed impossible that the British would cling to their colonial “rights of conquest” in India, rather than welcoming her participation in the war on the British side.

On April 7, Britain’s ambassador to the United States, Lord Halifax, on a broadcast over CBS, gave many reasons (most of them disingenuous) for not being able to grant self-government to the Indians. Cripps felt the patronizing speech by Halifax had “done the greatest harm at the most critical moment.” Churchill broke into a victory dance in the Cabinet Room below Whitehall on the news that the talks had failed. He jubilantly declared: “No tea with treason, no truck with American or British Labour sentimentality, but back to the solemn—and exciting—business of war.” The next day Churchill cabled FDR in growing desperation asking if the United States Pacific Fleet in Hawaii could be ordered into action to “compel” the Japanese to “return to the Pacific. The American fleet must save India and the British Empire—forcing the Japanese to retreat. I cannot too urgently impress the importance of this.” On April 11, Churchill again cabled the President: “I feel absolutely satisfied we have done our utmost” in regards to the Cripps mission that had been ordered to return to London without an agreement. The President was dumbfounded. Churchill’s negative behavior was

indefensible at this point, even shameful given the mess the British had gotten themselves into in the Far East.

The President then asked for the Prime Minister to “postpone Cripps’ departure until one more final effort” was attempted. He warned Churchill that if he did not relent and the Japanese invaded India “with attendant serious military or naval defeats, the prejudicial reaction of the American public opinion can hardly be overestimated.” Harry Hopkins, one of FDR’s closest advisors travelled to London and delivered the message personally to Winston. Hopkins later recounted to Secretary of War Stinson that no “suggestions from the President to the Prime Minister in the entire war were so wrathfully received as those relating to the solution of the Indian problem. His string of cuss words lasted for two hours in the middle of the night.” Churchill was so adamant that he would rather resign than permit an American president to dictate British imperial conduct. It was no idle threat. It was, in effect, blackmail. FDR realized that Britain needed Churchill as their wartime leader. Clement Atlee would have been a disastrous replacement at this time. Like MacArthur in the Philippines, both men were oftentimes insufferable but they possessed that one quality FDR admired more than anything else, the unrelenting desire to defeat the enemy.

To mollify the President, Henry Hopkins suggested that Churchill should ditch the draft of his resignation letter he was planning to send as a reply to FDR’s request and begin a new message. He should ignore the President’s plea regarding India completely and promise wholehearted British military cooperation in carrying out General Marshall’s plan for a cross-channel Second Front that very year. The British military leaders were totally against such an endeavor in 1942 but were willing to practice such a deceit on behalf of their leader, who was hoping, over time, for the Americans to realize the impracticality of such an event this year. The cable was sent on April 12. A few days later Churchill reiterated his fear that Japanese naval forces would soon make a more determined attempt to control the Indian Ocean by occupying Ceylon and India. On April 17, the President assured him that the *USS Ranger* would immediately be tasked as a plane carrier to replace British losses. In a polite but firm tone he continued: “as for sending an American fleet to the Indian Ocean, I hope you will agree that because of operational differences between the two services there is a grave question of mixing forces.” Instead there is another plan to make the Japanese Navy withdraw without compromising the ever-growing U.S. Pacific Fleet in Hawaii. “Measures now in hand have not been conveyed to you in detail because of secrecy requirements, but we hope you will find them effective when made known to you.”

At that moment, a secret U.S. Navy task force comprising sixteen ships and submarines, and ten thousand sailors, was about to launch a raid that would dramatically change the course of the war in the Pacific. On April 18, 1942 FDR was told that monitored broadcasts from Tokyo reported an enemy raid on that city. The Japanese wanted to know where had they come from? A few days later at a press conference Roosevelt announced that the raid originated from Shangri-La. The mythical valley in James Hilton’s novel Lost Horizon. The triumph of the Japanese attack on Pearl had now been avenged, leading the Japanese military to embark on a series of reprisals beyond comprehension. They slaughtered every man, woman, and child that lived in the area where the planes had either crashed or landed. It was estimated that as many as 250,00 people were murdered. The Japanese high command was in a turmoil. They had not only failed to defend against such an attack but also allowed the task force to safely withdraw. The insult to the emperor could not go unanswered. The Japanese had to finish what the attack on Pearl Harbor had started: the destruction of America’s remaining power in the Central Pacific.

Admiral Yamamoto, commander in chief of the Imperial Fleet wanted to lure the Pacific Fleet from their base at Pearl Harbor and deal with it, once and for all. The seizure of the atoll at Midway, 1,325 miles west of Pearl would give the Japanese an airfield for land-based planes that would keep

the American Fleet bottled up in Hawaii. If the American Fleet allowed itself to be lured out to contest the Midway landings so much the better. The carriers that escaped destruction at Pearl Harbor could finally be attacked by superior Japanese fliers and sunk. Expansion into the Indian Ocean would be put on hold while they went ahead and launched an amphibious invasion of Port Moresby, on the southern coast of New Guinea, only 300 miles from Australia. Once the landing was completed the naval forces would be withdrawn to assist in the attack on Midway.

The breaking of the German wartime code was nicknamed ULTRA the breaking of the Japanese code was given the name MAGIC. Admiral Nimitz, based at Pearl Harbor, had a MAGIC unit stationed nearby that had deciphered the Port Moresby invasion plans by a mixed fleet of troop ships, supply vessels, carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. Only the *USS Lexington* and *Yorktown* would be dispatched, the carriers *USS Hornet* and *Enterprise* were still on their way to Pearl following the Tokyo raid. On 3–4 May, Japanese forces successfully invaded and occupied Tulagi, although several of their supporting warships were surprised and sunk or damaged by aircraft from the carrier *Yorktown*. The Japanese were now aware of the presence of US carriers in the area. Their fleet carriers advanced towards the Coral Sea with the intention of finding and destroying the Allied naval forces. For two days the two fleets engaged in an air battle where the ships involved never saw each other. Both sides suffered heavy losses in aircraft and carriers damaged or sunk; the US lost the *Lexington* and the *Yorktown* was heavily damaged. The Japanese lost the light carrier *Shohu* while the *Shokaku* was severely disabled. Most importantly, 96 of the 127 planes used by the enemy were shot down. On May 8, the two fleets disengaged and retired from the battle area. Because of the loss of carrier air cover, the commanding admiral recalled the Port Moresby invasion fleet and they returned to Truk. Instead of another amphibious attack on Port Moresby, it was decided to conduct an overland campaign later over the Owen Stanley Ridge—an impenetrable jungle that was to prove beyond their fabled capabilities.

Although it was a tactical victory for the Japanese in terms of ships sunk, the battle would prove to be a strategic victory for the Allies (a few Australian ships were involved) for several reasons. The battle marked the first time since the start of the war that a major Japanese advance had been checked by the Allies. More importantly, the Japanese fleet carriers *Shōkaku* and *Zuikaku* – one damaged and the other with a depleted aircraft complement – would be unable to participate in the Battle of Midway, which would take place the following month. Thus ensuring a rough parity in aircraft between the two adversaries and contributing significantly to the US victory in that battle.

On May 6, 1942, General Wainwright was forced to surrender his 13,000 man contingent on Corregidor to the 75,000 strong Fourteenth Japanese Imperial Army (Bataan had surrendered on April 9). For weeks thereafter MacArthur bombarded the President and his Combined Chief of Staffs with new warnings of impending catastrophes unless he received more aircraft and naval carriers. Aware that crying wolf was typical for MacArthur he was told that there were no Japanese naval forces headed toward Australia. Instructed to only communicate only with the Combined Chiefs, MacArthur's partisan Republican backers had lost a valuable source of information in which to discredit the President. Churchill's failure to give India quasi-independence was solely blamed on FDR's ineptitude. FDR harbored no rancor toward his political adversaries for many men in his cabinet were die-hard Republicans who realized the extraordinary situation and responsibilities facing the President and had nothing but praise and admiration for a man confined, for the most part, to a wheelchair.

The power of a single thought, derided by his closest political and military advisors, driven by an indomitable force of will changed the direction the campaign in the Pacific was taking. Midway may have been the turning point but the Tokyo Raid was the spark that ignited the conflagration of Japan.

Perfidious Albion

Perfidious Albion is a term I came across and was uncertain of its meaning or its references. Albion is the oldest known name of the island of Great Britain dating from Roman times. Perfidious was added to make it an anglophobic pejorative phrase used within the context of international relations and diplomacy. This phrase has a long history and examples can be traced as far back as 13th century France. It refers to alleged acts of diplomatic sleights, duplicity, treachery and hence infidelity (with respect to perceived promises made to or alliances formed with other nation states) by monarchs or governments of Britain (or England) in their pursuit of self-interest and the requirements of realpolitik, often as not employed by the loser in geopolitical affairs. Two recent articles used the term even though their application was separated by more than 700 years; attesting to the continual and persistent untrustworthiness of the English. President Roosevelt in 1942 mentioned that phrase when he applied it to Churchill and his government's machinations in denying India some degree of autonomy during WWII.

In another example several historians applied that same phrase to an incident that occurred at Runnymede on June 15, 1215. A charter was drafted by the Archbishop of Canterbury to make peace between the unpopular King John and a group of rebel barons. It promised the protection of church rights, protection for the barons from illegal imprisonment, access to swift justice, and limitations on feudal payments to the Crown. It focused on the rights of free men — specifically the barons — and not serfs or unfree labor. Victorian historians had shown that the original 1215 charter concerned the medieval relationship between the monarch and the barons, rather than the rights of ordinary people. This “Articles of the Barons,” later known as the Magna Carta has become such a part of English life and even though its true purpose has been mythologized into a political treatise concerning its protection of ancient personal liberties. It still remains a powerful, iconic document even after almost all of its content was repealed from the statute books in the 19th and 20th centuries.

King John in June 1215 felt he was forced to put his seal to the charter by a group who could no longer stand his failed leadership and despotic rule. A formal document to record the agreement was created by the royal chancery on July 15: this was the original Magna Carta. "The law of the land" is one of the great watchwords of Magna Carta, standing in opposition to the king's mere will. But the Magna Carta of 1215 contained clauses which in theory noticeably reduced the power of the king, such as clause 61, the "security clause". This clause allowed a group of 25 barons to override the king at any time by way of force, a medieval legal process called *distrain* that was normal in feudal relationships but had never been applied to a king. King John reneged on his promise and asked the Pope for help. The charter was annulled by Pope Innocent III, leading to the First Barons' War. The Pope declared the charter to be "not only shameful and demeaning but also illegal and unjust" since John had been "forced to accept" it, and accordingly the charter was "null, and void of all validity for ever"; under threat of excommunication, the King was not to observe the charter, nor the barons try to enforce it.

John was in south-east England recruiting mercenaries in preparation for his war with the barons. Situated on the River Medway was Rochester Castle. It served as a strategically important royal castle. During the late medieval period it helped protect England's south-east coast from invasion as it lay on the only direct route to London. In 1127 King Henry I granted Rochester Castle to the Archbishop of Canterbury, William de Corbeil, and his successors in perpetuity. He was given permission to build "a fortification or tower within the castle and keep and hold it forever". Corbeil is responsible for building the great tower or Keep that still stands today, albeit in an altered state. The

12th century saw many castles in England rebuilt in stone, an advancement in sophistication of design and technology. Although Rochester had already been given a stone curtain wall by Bishop Gundulf, the Keep dates from this period. It visually dominated the rest of the castle, towering above its outer walls, and acted as a residence containing the castle's best accommodation. A sturdy fortification, it could also serve as a stronghold in the event of military action. Such was the importance of the Keep as a symbol of Rochester it was depicted on the town's seal in the 13th century.

A group of rebels headed to Rochester to hold the city against John. Rochester blocked the direct route to London, which was also held by the rebels. The rebels at Rochester were led by William d'Aubigny, lord of Belvoir. Estimates of the size of Rochester's garrison vary, with the chroniclers' figures ranging from 95 to 140 knights, supported by crossbowmen, sergeants, and others. Hearing the news that the city was in enemy hands, John immediately rode to Rochester and arrived on October 13th. Royal forces had arrived ahead of John and entered the city on October 11th, taking



it by surprise and laying siege to the castle. Rochester bridge was pulled down to prevent the arrival of a relief force from London. The siege that followed was the largest in England up to that point, and would take nearly two months.

The rebels were expecting reinforcements from London but John sent fire ships out to burn their route in, the city's bridge over the Medway. Robert Fitzwalter rode out to stop the king, fighting his way onto the bridge but eventually being beaten back into the castle. He also sacked the cathedral, took anything of value and stabled his horses in it.

John sent out Orders to the men of Canterbury saying "We order you, just as you love us, and as soon as you see this letter, to make by day and night, all the pickaxes that you can. Every blacksmith in your city should stop all other work in order to make them and you should send them to us at Rochester with all speed."

Five siege engines were then erected and work carried out to knock down the walls. King John realized that the rock-throwing machines would never change the rebels' minds. So he decided to mine (that is, to dig underneath to help collapse) the castle walls. He ordered as many picks as possible be manufactured, so that the mines could be built quickly. Wall-mining involved miners digging tunnels under the castle to weaken them. The tunnel roofs would be temporarily supported with timber beams. The tunnel would then be enlarged, directly beneath the wall foundation. When the tunnels were completed, they would be filled with brush and then set afire. As the brush burned, so would the support beams; eventually, the beams would give way and the weight of the foundation would cause the walls above to collapse into the tunnel. By these means the king's forces entered and surrounded the bailey in early November.

Mining was a dangerous activity. The miners could hear the creaking support beams above them; they could collapse at any moment, crushing the miners or trapping them in an airless tunnel. And the rebels could hear the constant tapping and clanging of the miners' picks, day and night, but

could do nothing to stop it. They began attempting the same tactics against the Keep, including undermining the south-east tower. The mine-roof was supported by wooden props, which were then set alight using pig-fat (on November 25, 1215 John had sent a writ to the justiciars saying "Send to us with all speed by day and night, forty of the fattest pigs of the sort least good for eating so that we may bring fire beneath the castle," causing the whole corner of the Keep to collapse. The rebels withdrew behind the keep's cross-wall but still managed to hold out. A few were allowed to leave the castle but on John's orders had their hands and feet lopped off as an example.

Winter was now setting in, and the castle was only taken (on November 30th) by starvation and not by force. John set up a memorial to the pigs and a gallows with the intention of hanging the whole garrison, but one of his captains persuaded him not to hang the rebels since hanging those who had surrendered would set a precedent if John ever surrendered – only one man was actually hanged (a young bowman who had previously been in John's service). The remainder of the rebel barons were taken away and imprisoned at various royal-held castles. Of the siege – against only 100 rebels, and costing over a thousand pounds a day – a chronicler wrote "No one alive can remember a siege so

fiercely pressed and so manfully resisted" and that, after it, "There were few who would put their trust in castles."

On October 18, 1216, John died at Newark Castle, Nottinghamshire, and with him the main reason for the fighting. John's nine-year-old son, Prince Henry was the now favorite of the barons and a number of them rushed to have young Henry crowned king of England.

On November 12, 1216 the Magna Carta was reissued in Henry's name with some of the clauses, including clause 61, omitted. The revised charter was signed by the young king's regent William Marshal. Marshal was highly respected and he asked the barons

not to blame the child Henry for his father's sins. The prevailing sentiment, helped by self-interest, disliked the idea of depriving a boy of his inheritance. Marshal also promised that he and the other regents would rule by Magna Carta. Furthermore, he managed to get support from the Pope, who had already excommunicated Louis, the French pretender who had stepped in to help the Barons against John when he refused to abide by the 1215 Carta.

After a year and a half of war, most of the rebellious barons had defected and so Louis VIII had to give up his claim to be the King of England by signing the Treaty of Lambeth on September 11, 1217. Louis accepted a symbolic sum to relinquish his English dominions and returned home. Though it was not in the treaty, it was often reported that Louis would try to convince the King of France, his father, to give to the one known as Henry what he had conquered from his father John.

In popular culture **Ironclad**, a 2011 film starring Paul Giamatti and James Purefoy, chronicles the siege of Rochester Castle. **Robin Hood**, a 2010 film, is loosely based on the events surrounding it.

