

FEATURED PAPER – JANUARY 2008

Churchill the Agile Project Manager  
Churchill's Team – Beaverbrook  
Part 17 in the Series

*By Mark Kozak-Holland*

**Parts 1 - 16 in this series available at:**

[http://www.peworldtoday.net/featured\\_papers/2007/dec.htm](http://www.peworldtoday.net/featured_papers/2007/dec.htm)

Most people are very familiar with Winston Churchill but may not be familiar with his “agile” approach to project management and his skills as a PM in the summer of 1940. Part 16 looked at how Churchill’s organization prepared itself for the air battle to meet his short term objectives of staving off the invasion. This article looks at how Beaverbrook and his leadership style made an immediate impact at the Ministry of Aircraft production (MAP).

The U.K. economy in spite of all efforts was still on a civilian footing. Household goods and new automobiles were still being built and diverting critical manufacturing resources and raw materials. Churchill had to prioritize fighter production over everything, even bomber production which the Air Ministry had been prioritizing.

The fighter production rate was still well under the target of 200 fighters per month. Even the boost of a new Spitfire fighter factory was plagued by the complexity of the Spitfire’s elliptical wings and had failed to produce anything in 6 months.

So how did Churchill address this situation? Churchill believed that the Air Ministry had to relinquish fighter production because it had failed to meet its targets. Churchill wrestled fighter production out of its control by creating the Ministry of Aircraft production. He then made one of the earliest and most important decisions in the running of war production, and appointed Canadian Lord Beaverbrook as its minister.

Churchill needed a strong leader that could turn around fighter production. Lord Beaverbrook was a close confidant he had known since they both served in the First World War cabinet of Lloyd George. Churchill could trust him and gave him a clear mandate to transform fighter production. Beaverbrook was a no nonsense man , a newspaper magnate, who could cut through the red tape of government bureaucracy. He was an outsider who a different view and would take a very different approach to accelerate production, and to improve the supply chain by lock-stepping it to the daily demands of RAF Fighter Command.

Beaverbrook thought that the Air Ministry was not well suited to running aircraft production. He described people as “*air marshals*” were not appropriate by character or training. He envisioned making his ministry into a fast-growing enterprise run by business people who knew what they were doing. They had a business background and an administrative approach that was more spontaneous and informal than the established practices of government departments. The latter was grounded in red tape, routine, paper work or, as Beaverbrook put it, “*organization was the enemy of improvisation.*” Beaverbrook reasoned that even if this existed at the lower levels of the Ministry pyramid, the top levels would be run by an informal group of his personal advisers drawn from business and industry, with Mr. Hennessy of Ford Motor's at its head. This reflected how best practices were brought in from the automobile manufacturing industry to speed up fighter production. In a short time the ministry closely reflected the personality of Beaverbrook and the critical urgency of the tasks he had to face.

As pointed out by Frank Winters, PMP (April 16, 2003) “*The project manager is in a position to pull the management team together and rally them around the project. This can be done through exemplary behavior as a manager and by focusing very closely on the project.*”

Beaverbrook was aware with a fighter force of just 34 squadrons industry would need to produce 350 new aircraft a month just to maintain front-line strength. He was aware that the average life of a fighter in war was 2 months and although battle losses could be replaced from manufacturing, reserves, or repair he recognized that even with major increases in production likely losses would out strip these. As a result, Beaverbrook had to approach the problem with “out of the box” thinking so he instituted or supported the following initiatives:

- The acute shortage of workers as the military draft took its toll:
  - Women were encouraged to enter the workforce in large numbers to fill the gaps created by military conscription.
  - The Minister of Labor, Ernest Bevin, ended the poaching of skilled workers by rival employers. The Restriction on Engagement Order of June 1940 made it compulsory for recruitment to occur only through employment exchanges. As a result, thousands of workers were directed out of civil industries into war production like fighters.
- Spitfire funds where an individual, organization or town could present the cost of an airframe (for a Spitfire this was set at £5,000 (\$20,000) although the real cost was nearer £12,000 (\$48,000, or equivalent to £200,000 today)) and an aircraft would be allocated to bear the name of the donor on the fuselage. The idea of donation caught on, and Beaverbrook organized the project on an industrial scale. Many towns and organizations started to raise funds quickly joined by counterparts in the Dominions and Colonies (see Figure below), as well as other

countries around the world. Eventually, there were around 1500 presentation Spitfires or 17% of the total production.



- An aluminum appeal that promoted people to save their old pots, pans and kettles and metal appliances and donate these to the government. Posters were printed and newspapers ran advertisements asking for old scrap metal to build fighter planes. In reality, very little was ever used in aircraft construction, but it boosted people's morale. They felt satisfied that they were "doing their bit" and this was part of a concerted effort to get people more involved.



- Further, Beaverbrook, a Canadian, had good relationships with industrialists in the U.S. and leveraged these to secure supplies of precious raw materials and key parts and subassemblies. This was the outset of the transatlantic supply chain that ran the course of World War II so successfully.

## Conclusion

In today's projects, there will be some areas of the business that will need a radical approach to improving efficiencies. Beaverbrook's approach aimed to solve the problems holistically by bringing in qualified leaders, securing raw materials, resolving labor issues, and building public good will.



*Mark Kozak-Holland*  
*Author*



**Mark Kozak-Holland's** latest book in the Lessons-From-History series is titled "*Project Lessons from the Great Escape (Luft III)*" <http://www.mmpubs.com/books-LFH.html>. It draws parallels from this event in World War II to today's business challenges. His previous books include "*Churchill's Adaptive Enterprise: Lessons for Business Today*", "*Titanic Lessons for IT Projects*", and "*Avoiding Titanic Disasters: Project Lessons for IT Executives*". Mark is a Senior Business Architect with HP Services and regularly writes and speaks (presentations and workshops) on the subject of emerging technologies and lessons that can be learned from historical projects. He can be contacted via his Web site at [www.lessons-from-history.com](http://www.lessons-from-history.com) or via email to [mark.kozak-holl@sympatico.ca](mailto:mark.kozak-holl@sympatico.ca). For more information on the Great Escape Memorial Foundation see [www.thegreatescapememorialproject.com](http://www.thegreatescapememorialproject.com)