

FASHION



The siren-suit in red velvet, made by Turnbull & Asser.

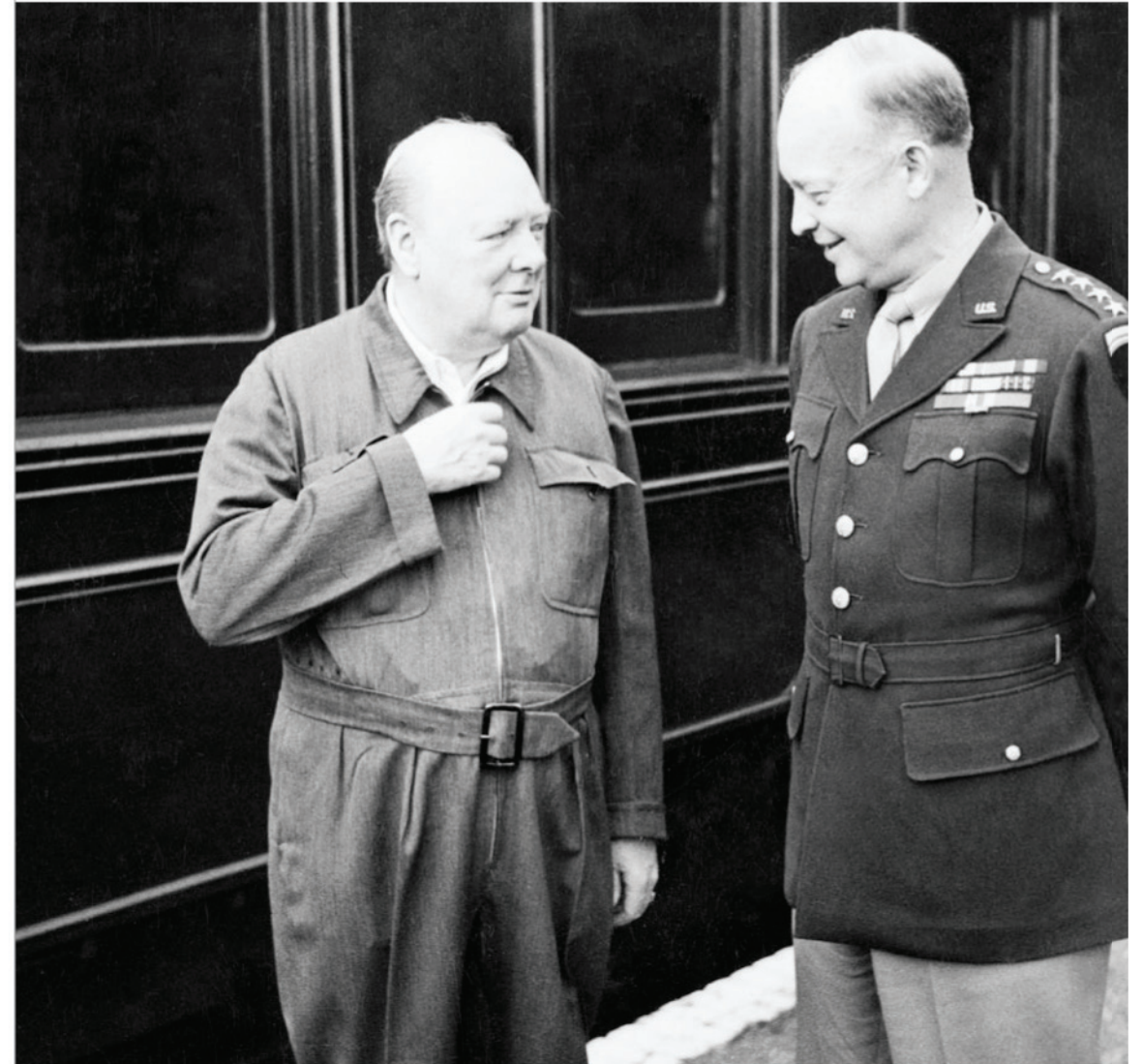
Churchill adored uniforms. He wore two different army uniforms as Prime Minister: Colonel, 4th (Queen's Own) Hussars, his original regiment; and Honorary Colonel, 4th/5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion, the Royal Sussex Regiment. His Cinque Ports uniform was made for him by Austin Reed and cost Churchill £150.

The First Lord of the Admiralty had no special uniform. Churchill's nautical uniform was that of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

His Royal Air Force uniform was that of Honorary Air Commodore of 615 (County of Surrey) Fighter Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

By far Churchill's favorite uniform was not a uniform at all but a garment he designed himself—his "siren-suit," a zip-up all-in-one that his children referred to as his "rompers." Though ideally suited to hurried dressing at the sound of an air raid siren, the siren-suit had, in fact, been conceived and designed by Churchill before the war in imitation of the boiler suits worn by his fellow bricklayers at Chartwell. Generously cut, with breast pockets and roomier side pockets, pleats to the trouser fronts, and fold-over cuffs, Churchill's siren-suit was a fashion apotheosis of simple practicality and comfort. He had a number made up for him by the bespoke tailors Turnbull & Asser in different fabrics for different activities, including examples in red, green, and blue velvet suitable for the dressiest occasions, a business-like blue serge, and, of course, one constructed of smock material for painting. Churchill's crested slippers or a pair of his zip-up dress shoes made for him by Peal & Co. completed the ensemble.

Churchill's distracted casualness about his own naked body was something all of his secretaries had to come to terms with—as, oftentimes, did others beyond his inner circle. During his first wartime visit to the White House in late December 1941, after a morning spent dictating from the tub, Churchill emerged and was wrapped in a big towel by Sawyers. "He walked into his adjoining bedroom, followed by me, notebook in hand," Churchill's traveling stenographer, Patrick Kinna, would later recall to Sir Martin Gilbert. Churchill "continued to dictate while pacing up and down the enormous room. Eventually the towel fell to the ground . . . Suddenly President Roosevelt entered the bedroom and saw the British Prime Minister completely naked . . . WSC never being lost for words, said, 'You see, Mr. President, I have nothing to conceal from you.'"



The siren-suit's proud designer demonstrates its workings to General Eisenhower during their tour of troop preparations for D-day near Lydd and Hastings in Kent, May 12, 1944.