

William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham, PC, FRS (15 November 1708 – 11 May 1778) was a British Whig statesman who served as Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1766 to 1768. On Pitt's return home it was necessary for him, as the younger son, to choose a profession and he opted for a career in the army.[19] He obtained a cornet's commission in the dragoons with the King's Own Regiment of Horse (later 1st King's Dragoon Guards).[18] George II never forgot the jibes of "the terrible cornet of horse".[20] It was reported that the GBP1,000 cost of the commission had been supplied by Robert Walpole, the prime minister, out of Treasury funds in an attempt to secure the support of Pitt's brother Thomas in Parliament. Alternatively, the fee may have been waived by the commanding officer of the regiment, Lord Cobham, who was related to the Pitt brothers by marriage.[21] Pitt grew close to Cobham, whom he regarded as almost a surrogate father. He was stationed for much of his service in Northampton, on peacetime duties. Pitt was particularly frustrated that he had not been tested in battle since Britain had not entered the War of the Polish Succession that began in 1733 owing to Walpole's isolationist policies.[22] Pitt was granted extended leave in 1733 and he toured France and Switzerland. He briefly visited Paris, but spent most of his time in the French provinces,[23] spending the winter in Luneville in the Duchy of Lorraine.[24] Pitt's military career was destined to be relatively short. His elder brother Thomas was returned at the general election of 1734 for two separate seats, Okehampton and Old Sarum, and chose to sit for Okehampton, passing the vacant seat to William who, accordingly, in February 1735, entered parliament as member for Old Sarum.[18] He became one of a large number of serving army officers in the House of Commons. Rise to prominence Patriot Whigs Further information: Cobhamites The huge monument to William Pitt the Elder, in the Guildhall, London stands opposite an equally huge monument to his son, William Pitt the Younger in a balanced composition Pitt soon joined a faction of discontented Whigs known as the Patriots who formed part of the opposition. The group commonly met at Stowe House, the country estate of Lord Cobham, who was a leader of the group.[25] Cobham had originally been a supporter of the government under Sir Robert Walpole, but a dispute over the controversial Excise Bill of 1733 had seen them join the opposition. Pitt swiftly became one of the faction's most prominent members. Pitt's maiden speech in the Commons was delivered in April 1736, in the debate on the congratulatory address to George II on the marriage of his son Frederick, Prince of Wales. He used the occasion to pay compliments, and there was nothing striking in the speech as reported, but it helped to gain him the attention of the House when he later took part on debates on more partisan subjects.[18] In particular, he attacked Britain's non-intervention in the ongoing European war, which he believed was in violation of the Treaty of Vienna and the terms of the Anglo-Austrian Alliance. He became such a troublesome critic of the government that Walpole moved to punish him by arranging his dismissal from the army in 1736, along with several of his friends and political allies. This provoked a wave of hostility to Walpole because many saw such an act as unconstitutional--that members of Parliament were being dismissed for their freedom of speech in attacking the government, something protected by Parliamentary privilege. None of the men had their commissions reinstated, however, and the incident brought an end to Pitt's military career.[26] The loss of Pitt's commission was soon compensated. The heir to the throne, Frederick, Prince of Wales, was involved in a long-running dispute with his father, George II, and was the patron of the opposition.[27] He appointed Pitt one of his Grooms

of the Bedchamber as a reward.[28] In this new position Pitt's hostility to the government did not in any degree relax, and his oratorical gifts were substantial.[18] War Spanish war Main article: War of Jenkins' Ear During the 1730s Britain's relationship with Spain had slowly declined. Repeated cases of reported Spanish mistreatment of British merchants, whom they accused of smuggling, caused public outrage, particularly the incident of Jenkins' Ear.[29] Pitt was a leading advocate of a more hard-line policy against Spain and he often castigated Walpole's government for its weakness in dealing with Madrid. Pitt spoke out against the Convention of El Pardo that aimed to settle the dispute peacefully.[30] In the speech against the convention in the House of Commons on 8 March 1739 Pitt said: When trade is at stake, it is your last entrenchment; you must defend it, or perish ... Sir, Spain knows the consequence of a war in America; whoever gains, it must prove fatal to her ... is this any longer a nation? Is this any longer an English Parliament, if with more ships in your harbours than in all the navies of Europe; with above two millions of people in your American colonies, you will bear to hear of the expediency of receiving from Spain an insecure, unsatisfactory, dishonourable Convention?[31] Owing to public pressure, the British government was pushed toward declaring war with Spain in 1739. Britain began with a success at Porto Bello.[32] However the war effort soon stalled, and Pitt alleged that the government was not prosecuting the war effectively--demonstrated by the fact that the British waited two years before taking further offensive action fearing that further British victories would provoke the French into declaring war.[33] When they did so, a failed attack was made on the South American port of Cartagena that left thousands of British troops dead, more than half from disease, and cost many ships. The decision to attack during the rainy season was held as further evidence of the government's incompetence. After this, the colonial war against Spain was almost entirely abandoned as British resources were switched toward fighting France in Europe as the War of the Austrian Succession had broken out. The Spanish had repelled a major invasion intended to conquer Central America and succeeded in maintaining their trans-Atlantic convoys while causing much disruption to British shipping and twice broke a British blockade to land troops in Italy, but the war with Spain was treated as a draw. Many of the underlying issues remained unresolved by the later peace treaties leaving the potential for future conflicts to occur. Pitt considered the war a missed opportunity to take advantage of a power in decline, although later he became an advocate of warmer relations with the Spanish in an effort to prevent them forming an alliance with France. Hanover George II leading his forces to victory at the Battle of Dettingen (1743). Pitt incurred his lasting displeasure by attacking British support for Hanover, which would blight their relations for twenty years. Walpole and Newcastle were now giving the war in Europe a much higher priority than the colonial conflict with Spain in the Americas. Prussia and Austria went to war in 1740, with many other European states soon joining in.[34] There was a fear that France would launch an invasion of Hanover, which was linked to Britain through the crown of George II. To avert this, Walpole and Newcastle decided to pay a large subsidy to both Austria and Hanover, in order for them to raise troops and defend themselves. Pitt then launched an attack on such subsidies, playing to widespread anti-Hanoverian feelings in Britain. This boosted his popularity with the public, but earned him the lifelong hatred of the King, who was emotionally committed to Hanover, where he had spent the first thirty years of his life. In response to Pitt's attacks, the British government decided not to pay a direct

subsidy to Hanover, but instead to pass the money indirectly through Austria—a move that was considered more politically acceptable. A sizeable Anglo–German army was formed that George II led to victory at the Battle of Dettingen in 1743, reducing the immediate threat to Hanover.[35] Fall of Walpole Many of Pitt's attacks on the government were directed personally at Walpole, who had now been prime minister for twenty years. He spoke in favour of the motion in 1742 for an inquiry into the last ten years of Walpole's administration. In February 1742, following poor election results and the disaster at Cartagena, Walpole finally was forced to succumb to the long–continued attacks of opposition, he resigned and took a peerage.[18] Pitt now expected a new government to be formed led by Pulteney and dominated by Tories and Patriot Whigs in which he could expect a junior position.[36] instead, Walpole was succeeded as prime minister by Lord Wilmington, although the real power in the new government was divided among Lord Carteret and the Pelham brothers (Henry and Thomas, Duke of Newcastle).[18] Walpole had carefully orchestrated this new government as a continuance of his own, and continued to advise it up to his death in 1745. Pitt's hopes for a place in the government were thwarted and he remained in opposition. He was therefore unable to make any personal gain from the downfall of Walpole, to which he had personally contributed a great deal. After the dismissal of Carteret, the administration formed by the Pelhams in 1744 included many of Pitt's former Patriot allies, but Pitt was not granted a position because of continued ill–feeling by the king and leading Whigs about his views on Hanover. In 1744, Pitt received a large boost to his personal fortune when the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough died leaving him a legacy of GBP10,000 as an "acknowledgment of the noble defence he had made for the support of the laws of England and to prevent the ruin of his country".[37] The inheritance was probably as much a mark of her dislike of Walpole as of her admiration of Pitt.[18] In government Paymaster of the Forces William Pitt the Elder, by Joseph Wilton, National Portrait Gallery, London Reluctantly the king finally agreed to give Pitt a place in the government. Secretary of State Pitt the Elder, by William Hoare In December 1756, Pitt, who now sat for Okehampton, became Secretary of State for the Southern Department, and Leader of the House of Commons under the premiership of the Duke of Devonshire.[40] Upon entering this coalition, Pitt said to Devonshire: "My Lord, I am sure I can save this country, and no one else can".[45] He had made it a condition of his joining any administration that Newcastle should be excluded from it, which proved fatal to the lengthened existence of his government. With the king unfriendly, and Newcastle, whose influence was still dominant in the Commons, estranged, it was impossible to carry on a government by the aid of public opinion alone, however emphatically that might have declared itself on his side.[40] The historian Basil Williams has claimed that this is the first time in British history when a "man was called to supreme power by the voice of the people" rather than by the king's appointment or, as the choice of Parliament.[46] Pitt drew up his plans for the campaigning season of 1757 in which he hoped to reverse Britain's string of defeats during the war's opening years. He is also known for his popular appeal, his opposition to corruption in government, his support for the American position in the run–up to the American Revolutionary War, his advocacy of British greatness, expansionism, and empire, and his antagonism toward Britain's chief enemies and rivals for colonial power, Spain and France.[3] Marie Peters argues his statesmanship was based on a clear, consistent, and distinct appreciation of the value of the Empire.[4] The British parliamentary historian P.

D. G. Thomas argued that Pitt's power was based not on his family connections, but on the extraordinary parliamentary skills by which he dominated the House of Commons. At the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 British colonial conquests were exchanged for a French withdrawal from Brussels.