



The World Crisis, Volume II: 1915

Winston S. Churchill

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Linda says

I read this volume because it deals with the decisions surrounding the ill-fated attempt to take the Gallipoli peninsula. First off, I found Churchill's style EXTREMELY easy and fun to read. I hadn't expected that. I didn't expect a dry academic style, but how he writes makes me want to read more of his work.

Of course, one must take his words with a grain of salt. Although he does admit some responsibility for the debacle, and he is never derogatory about people who did not, you must realize that not all that he says accurately reflects the entire event, but only his view of it.

What does come through though, which is vindicated by other histories of the conflict, is that most of the blame must be placed on the navy and military commanders. Naval Commander De Robeck and military commander Sir Ian Hamilton did not use common sense to pursue the attack. De Robeck refused to continue up the Dardenelles Strait in spite of few losses and the use he had of older ships for just that purpose. Sir Ian Haminton is perhaps even more to blame for causing the enterprise to wait a full two weeks so that he could bring up the forces he thought he needed to make a full attack, thus giving the Turks first, the knowledge of basically where the attack was going to be, and second, two full weeks to prepare for it.

Anyway, the point is that this is actually a lively and fascinating account of the personalities and decisions involved, with support from actual documents sent and received at the time.

Paul says

Complemented by visiting the Imperial War Museum

E. says

1915 was the year of Gallipoli, and Churchill was one of the architects of the Dardanelles strategy. When the campaign failed, it led to his fall from government, from which many thought he would never recover. So, I was intrigued to read his account of that year and the decision-making processes involved.

And this book should be read by people in government and bureaucracies, as it is a textbook in how poor decisions can be made and then have devastating consequences.

The basic strategy of the campaign, as Churchill relates it, was bold and could have dramatically changed the course of the war, possibly ending it more quickly. And, it could have been successful, according to Churchill, who quotes extensively from the record, including Turkish and German accounts of the enemies strength. But the Allies' tactics were deeply flawed, never sending enough troops until after the enemies armies had been reinforced and never exploiting the opportunities which they could have.

You could chalk all this up to hindsight, but as the record of memos makes clear, at every turn someone was

advocating for the tactics which would have been successful. And the government or the military superiors made the wrong decisions.

Even if Churchill's account favours his perspective, the book still reveals how flawed thinking can occur.

And Churchill is a master of prose, which is one reason he won a Nobel Prize for Literature. His accounts of battles and government committees are filled with suspense and eloquent descriptions. His characters, all real people of course, come alive in his descriptions of them.

And his analysis is perceptive. The final chapter of the book is his reflection on the consequences of failure. Among his conclusions is this one, prescient for 1923:

The abandonment of Gallipoli dispelled the Russian dream. In her darkest hours, under the flail of Ludendorff, driven out of Poland, driven out of Galicia, her armies enduring disaster and facing death often without arms, the cost of living rising continually throughout her vast, secluded Empire, Russia had cheered herself by dwelling on the great prize of Constantinople. A profound chill spread through all ranks of the Russian people, and with it came suspicion no less deep-seated. England had not really tried to force the Straits. From the moment when she had conceded the Russian claim to Constantinople, she had not been single-hearted, she had lost her interest in the enterprise. Her infirm action and divided counsels arose from secret motives hidden in the bosom of the State. And this while Russia was pouring out her blood as no race had ever done since men waged war. Such were the whispers which, winged by skilful German propaganda, spread far and wide through the Tsar's dominions, and in their wake every subversive influence gained in power. Lastly, the now inevitable prolongation of the struggle was destined to prove fatal to Russia. In the war of exhaustion to which we were finally condemned, which was indeed extolled as the last revelation of military wisdom, Russia was to be the first to fall, and in her fall to open upon herself a tide of ruin in which perhaps a score of millions of human beings have been engulfed. The consequences of these events abide with us to-day. They will darken the world for our children's children.

Erik D. says

Masterville

A master not only of the English language, but of the nuanced details of political, diplomatic, and military events as they relate to each other, Churchill provides here a long, detailed look at the events of 1915 with a focus on the failure of the Dardanelles venture and what that meant for the War. highly recommend

Stinger says

This second volume of the World Crisis follows the year 1915 and highlights the campaign in Gallipoli. Winston Churchill is a sagacious teacher, and what follows are a few lessons I derived as well as some direct quotes from the book.

- Follow orders, but also be open to taking initiative.
- Be adaptable, not completely rigid in plans of attack / schemes.
- Be willing to gamble / risk it all if the cause is great. Sometimes conservatism in matters is a guarantee for

failure.

- Strike while the iron is hot. Press your advantage while you have it or you will give it away & may face failure.
- Don't be out-worked by the enemy. Work when work is to be done; rest comes later.
- Gains, easily won, once given up freely, may never be had again.
- In some situations, a great / full / maximal effort in a quick & short period of time will gain victory easily. Whereas a half-hearted, halfway effort & devotion will accrue only losses, even if carried out over a great period of time.
- Dragging one's feet / delaying action in some matters can lead to certain disaster.
- Be an optimist about a just cause.

"While time is young, while prospects are favourable, while prizes inestimable may be gained, caution, hesitancy, half measures rule and fetter action. The grim afternoon of adverse struggle alone brings the hour of desperate resolve. The hopeful positive is rejected while all may be gained; the awful negative is embraced when nought but escape remains in view; and the energy and conviction which might have commanded victory are lavished upon the mere processes of flight." (pg 534)

"True daring in war arises from a just sense of proportion, which again can only spring from a wide comprehension." (pg 542)

Karen Sofarin says

Fascinating book loaded with insight about war and the best plans gone awry. Sir Winston Churchill's telling of trying to take the Dardanelles. The result of Gallipoli. A lot of philosophy and I hear his certainty that war when waged must be total. Interesting clashing of views and then loss of opportunity through delays and miscommunications.

Toby says

Could be subtitled "Why Gallipoli really wasn't my fault."

Nina says

Where to begin with this amazing volume? Finally reading Churchill's own blow by blow analysis of the Dardanelles disaster has breathed life and meaning into an account I had read many times in other books by other authors, and given me so much to think about with respect to the curious nature of both politics and men in wartime.

Though my progress with these books has been slow, this volume confirmed for me that without a doubt The World Crisis will be one of the most important books I read in my lifetime. Though I plan to take a short break to finish up a few other books I do hope I can at least get through Volume III this year as well.

Ruth says

Once again Churchill astonishes with his ability to convey incredible historic and military detail in a readable way. As with Volume I of this series, there is a lot of detail about ship capacity, but it seems truly necessary to understand the military tale.

What a sad and tragic story this volume tells. Could the entire tragedy of WWI have been avoided with a few actions early in this time? Quite possibly. Could the epic tragedy of the loss of the Dardanelles have been avoided if the British government hadn't changed at a critical moment? Quite probably. But the entire Dardanelles story is filled with one frustrating, avoidable mistake and delay after another. A volume worthy of Churchill.

Jim Savage says

cold

Martin says

Not nearly as good as volume one. I am left wondering how much criticism Churchill received upon this volume's publication, as the book comes across as whining. The book can be summed up in 4 lines:

--Churchill claims he is primarily responsible for the development of the tank.

--Churchill says every British leader, both civil and military, was on board for the Dardanelles Campaign, both the naval action and on the beaches.

--Churchill says everyone shares the blame for the failure of the Dardanelles.

--Churchill says the Dardanelles would have been won if they just did what he wanted, when he wanted, and the enemy did not change any responses in kind.

Listening to this book got old, as the 4 points above were repeated ad nauseam. I did learn a lot about the Dardanelles Campaign that I did not know. However, this book does not reflect well on Churchill as it is meant to cover 1915 of the Great War, and his writings regarding the Western Front may have consumed 4 pages total, if all the single paragraphs about the Western Front were stitched together.

There is also a point upon which I judge Churchill to be dishonest. He wrote the high ground was taken during the Dardanelles by Gurkhas, but that soon after this success friendly naval fire decimated the successful attackers, forcing them back down the hill, with the all-important ridge line never to be retaken. He wrote it is unknown who fired the shots that lead to 1,500 friendly casualties. However, it seems there were only 4 ships with the armament that could have fired those shots. The whole mess was later subject of an inquiry by Parliament. Either the story is an embellishment or it did happen as Churchill wrote and the idiot who ordered the barrage was known and was covered up for. There is no way a barrage of the largest guns goes unnoticed by all the other ships moored in the area.

I also judged Churchill to be dishonest in his appraisal of forces. He wrote that he believes the British will prevail in Turkey in battles with a 3:2 advantage. He wrote this after the Great War, when it was clear that entrenched machine guns could hold off superior forces and incur substantial, unacceptable losses. Unlike the Western Front, the Turkish entrenchments also had the advantage of being up rough terrain. Attacking

uphill into machine guns with a 3:2 advantage is a bad choice, but Churchill wrote that this is what he'd been hoping for, to get up to that 3:2 ratio, as though it would make a difference.

I have come to think of French general Joffre as one of the most evil men of the past century. This volume reinforces my opinion.

Terrific narrator!

Tony says

THE WORLD CRISIS: Volume 2, 1915. (1923). Winston S. Churchill. ****.

This second volume in Churchill's great history of WW I focuses on the year during which the actual fact of the war was brought home to the Allies. The high point (or low point) of the year was the campaign in the Dardanelles, specifically Gallipoli. Churchill was removed from his post as Lord of the Admiralty primarily because of the debacle in that region. It was the time when England realized that the war would not be won by their superior navy, but that the war would wind down to the series of trench battles that took so many lives. Prior to the major battles with the Turks, England began to concentrate on potential new ways of waging a war. They had to develop the machinery of war. These included methods of hiding troop movements: smoke. Methods of being mobile and safe from armaments while moving about fields of battle: tanks. Methods of combating the German's superior undersea power that required a shift in their tactics to those dependent on submarines. In all, this was a pivotal year in the war for the Allies, and also a year when Russia suddenly became focused on their internal problems more than on war planning. It's a wonder that we managed to win the war after all. Recommended.
