

## REVIEWS

for dis-jointed reading. For example, the conclusion to the infamous case of Private McGuire, introduced on p.50, is delayed until p.213 in favour of a strict chronology of the war. The cultural and social historian would have benefitted from more detailed analysis of the truism, expressed in this book and elsewhere, of the VCs egalitarian values, its focus on individual acts of valour, and how this and the humanitarian emphasis on the saving of life may have shaped Victorian perceptions of soldiering, violence and negated the war's strategic failures. A better balance could have been achieved therefore between the stated aims of this book and the events and battles of the Crimean War, which are well-narrated elsewhere.

The book contains some generalisations and leaps that would need to be substantiated or qualified in an academic context. For example, Grehen links the legacy of the VC and increased public appreciation of the Army at the end of his book with a 'rush to the recruiting stations at the outbreak of World War One' (p.220). *The First VCs* does not engage in a nuanced and critical analysis of the inauguration of the VC and its political and cultural symbolism for the image of war, the soldier and the Army. However, the book provides an eloquently written, well-paced summary of the Crimean War and the often overlooked men and deeds that inspired one of the most prestigious military awards in the British Army.

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**Christopher M. Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 439pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-870254-2. Hardback. £25.00.**

In 2013 Christopher Bell, Professor of History at Dalhousie University, published an acclaimed study *Churchill and Sea Power* (also OUP). In his introduction to this new volume he says that he is, in effect, dealing with 'unfinished business', as his volume had only allowed about 25 pages to the opening months of the First World War and the Dardanelles campaign. Now he returns to examine Churchill's role in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns in a forensic study, which, if not wholly exonerating Churchill, goes at least a very long way towards doing so, while also pinning down his weaknesses. Bell is also acute in his laying of the blame as to where the two campaigns went so wrong.

The first half of the book describes the Dardanelles campaign from inception to conduct. Bell is fascinating in his gradual building of facts, so that we can see that the Naval Staff never objected to the naval attempt to force the Dardanelles. They were not overborne by the First Lord as many would have liked us to believe. In particular, the First Sea Lord 'Jacky' Fisher hardly gave it his attention initially. He was far more concerned with operations in the North Sea. Indeed, his only objection to the idea was to say that it would detract from the Grand Fleet's superiority over the High Seas Fleet, which it did not do. The naval officers on the spot, Carden and then de Robeck, were initially confident that they could force a way through against the Turkish forts and mines. Bell shows the faults began in the political direction of the war. He is deeply critical of Asquith's leadership and suggests he was incapable of directing the war effort. The Prime Minister's chairing of the War Council failed to ask any of the critical questions consequently it never provided the close and regular oversight of the war effort that it should have done. Co-ordination was amateurish at best and was not suited to the demands of modern warfare.

Churchill is frequently criticised as the originator of the Gallipoli campaign, i.e. the land campaign, as opposed to that of the Dardanelles campaign, the purely naval campaign. Yes, he did originate the former, and there can be no doubt that a combined offensive, as opposed to a purely naval offensive, might well have succeeded, if the arms and munitions could have been spared from the Western Front. However, that was vetoed by Kitchener. As Bell states

In January 1915 this was not even considered an option; by March it was already too late – the best, if not the only, shot at victory had, by then, passed. From this date on it was consistently a case of too little too late. The window of opportunity was a narrow one.

The idea of an assault by the Royal Navy on its own seems in retrospect to have had little chance of success. The combination of mines, forts, batteries and mobile howitzers was too powerful. Even if a portion, even a large portion, of the fleet had got thorough to the Sea of Marmara, it does not follow that there would have been a revolution in Constantinople. The worst-case scenario was of a battered fleet having to fight its way back through the Dardanelles having accomplished nothing. But Churchill's original

## REVIEWS

plan allowed that the loss of some obsolescent ships was insignificant compared to the potential gains. It was this that allowed many to support Churchill's plan. The loss of a few out of date battleships could be accepted. Certainly, the political calculations are more easily understood if that is grasped. As Bell states

Churchill and the War Council were prepared to contemplate an operation that was rightly regarded at the time as an experiment, confident that the technical obstacles identified by the naval professionals would lead, at worst, to stalemate, light losses and an embarrassing withdrawal, not to heavy naval losses and humiliating failure – and certainly not to a protracted and costly land campaign.

It was this assumption, that the campaign could be called off, which was both the greatest weakness and greatest strength of the original plan. Bell contends this was Churchill's great mistake. When it was clear on 18 March 1915 that the naval offensive had failed, it was Churchill who was the greatest advocate of resuming the attack with or without troops. His natural combativeness, combined with an awareness that a naval defeat would affect him politically, guaranteed that he would try to keep going. The War Council joined him in effectively moving from an 'experiment' to a 'commitment' which gradually led to a tacit abandonment of the original plan. Once troops were allocated, 'escalation' became the likely outcome of any naval failure. While Churchill tried to place the blame for this on Kitchener, he must accept some responsibility for advocating the use of troops to help the Navy force their way through the Dardanelles. The War Council's decision to commit troops was the worst of all worlds. It did nothing to help the fleet's chances, while making the eventual escalation into a land campaign far more likely. The ultimate responsibility for launching the undertaking must rest with Kitchener, who alone had the power to initiate it. Churchill's responsibility was slightly larger than other Cabinet ministers, since he was better informed than most, but he did not irrevocably commit the government to a major land campaign.

Bell's major criticism is reserved for what he terms 'the informal and amateurish' co-ordination of Britain's two fighting services by the politicians, particularly the War Council. It was Hankey who pointed out with increasing urgency that the British political system was wholly unsuited to running a

modern war. Only the Prime Minister could provide the co-ordination and oversight necessary, and Asquith was simply not up to it. The War Council, bluntly, did not do its job effectively. It did not ask the right questions, for example not asking Fisher's views about the operation when it was first proposed, nor when a final decision was taken. Kitchener did not help matters by being such a law unto himself. He would not share information with political colleagues, did not use the general staff properly and was not subject to any close scrutiny from the War Council. When the final decision to use the army was taken Asquith simply stopped calling meetings of the War Council for eight weeks. The trouble was that Churchill was overconfident of success, highlighting his weaknesses: his impatience and willingness to run unnecessary risks; his tendency to downplay professional advice he did not like; and his readiness to escalate Britain's commitment to the east after there were clear signs that the naval offensive had broken down. As Bell summarises,

the drift from limited naval commitment to a major combined undertaking was driven by Kitchener more than anyone, and was facilitated by a flawed decision-making process at the highest levels.

Churchill became the political scapegoat for obvious reasons. The Conservative party were never going to allow him to get away with having left them to join the Liberals in 1904. He was always going to be the price of their joining the Liberal government in coalition. Interestingly Bell makes the point that Kitchener, far more to blame for the Gallipoli fiasco than Churchill, was protected from press criticism by his status as a popular hero, while Churchill was virulently attacked by the Conservative press, notably *The Morning Post*.

The second part of the book is a fascinating account of the way in which Churchill conducted his defence, firstly at the Dardanelles Commission, then through the Official Histories, and finally in what might well be called 'The Battle of the Memoirs'. In much the same way that he said of his six volume *Second World War*, "This is not history; it is my case", so in *The World Crisis* he set out his case very successfully. As an example of superb writing it cannot be faulted; as an example of looking at history from one perspective only, it can equally not be faulted. He crafted a plausible, and seductive counter-narrative, one in which he had nothing to apologise for. By the late

## REVIEWS

1920s and early 1930s the British public were growing weary of discussion about the cost and conduct of the war and so Churchill's case was gradually accepted, so that the cry "What about the Dardanelles?" which was an effective piece of barracking after 1918, by the 1930s was hardly to be heard.

Did Churchill learn the lessons of history? I would assert that he unquestionably did. When he returned to the Admiralty in September 1939 he was a more mature and experienced politician. The famous signal "Winston is back" was not just a thankful cry of relief that the Royal Navy had a politician of the top rank in post, but also a warning. In fact, it was unnecessary. Churchill rarely sought to over-rule his naval advisers. Nor did they say a direct "No" to him. Instead, at the cost of much time, energy and gritted teeth the Naval Staff were directed by the First Sea Lord, Dudley Pound, to produce papers refuting and countering his proposals for aggressive, but impractical, actions. Where had Pound got that inspiration from? Here is one minor fault with Bell's volume. He misses out that Pound had left the Grand Fleet in January 1915 on promotion to Captain, and became an extra Naval Assistant to Fisher at the Admiralty. He remained there until 17 May, when he was appointed to command *Colossus*, back in the Grand Fleet. Is it too fanciful to think that those four to five months must have been at the heart of his dealings with Churchill a generation later? I suspect not.

In conclusion, this is a marvellous book, casting an extended and critical look at Churchill and the way the war was run in 1915. It does not exonerate Churchill fully, nor should it, but it does provide a spirited and nuanced defence of Churchill, while exposing quite how badly the war was overseen in the early years by a political system that could not cope with the pressures of modern war. It is wholly recommended to all students of World War I, of Churchill, and of political systems under pressure.

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