

command — the Communists' attempt to seize power was suppressed after a brief but bloody struggle. Mr. Argenti confirms that the Chioti's loyalty to the Western allies never wavered, even when the R.A.F. unfortunately bombed a Swedish Red Cross supply-ship in the island's harbour.

The book is written with Mr. Argenti's customary common sense and scrupulous accuracy, supported by substantial documentation, which occupies more than half the book, in Greek and German. One small error deserves to be corrected at once. He describes the arrival on the island in December 1943 of a mysterious party of four men, who said they were an American, an Englishman, a New Zealander and a Greek, abandoned there by the *caïque* on which they were crossing from the mainland to Turkey. Mr. Argenti gives as one reason for suspecting their *bona fides* "the difficulty of explaining the presence of an American in a party fleeing from Greece." But there were in fact already scores of Americans in Greece in December 1943. Apart from the officers in the Allied Military Mission to the Greek Resistance who had arrived since September, there were dozens of U.S. Air Force crews shot down in raids on the Piraeus. One of the main activities of the Resistance in that winter was to rescue and repatriate them, in some cases by sea across the Aegean. One hopes that the Germans, who eventually captured the four men, did not share Mr. Argenti's unjustified scepticism.

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I. McD. G. Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete, 20 May-1 June 1941: A Story of Lost Opportunity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966. Pp. xii + 518.

It is always difficult for those taking part in a battle to know exactly what is going on. The classic example is that of Fabrice, the hero of Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, who spent the rest of his life trying to make sure whether or not he had taken part in the battle of Waterloo. In the case of Crete in May 1941, one can be in no doubt whether or not one was on the island at the time. (Personally, I had the peculiar experience — I cannot now remember why — of breakfasting with General Freyberg on the morning of the first German parachutists landed). But it was quite another matter to understand

what was happening, and in the fullest sense, such understanding was denied even to General Freyberg. Indeed, it may fairly be said that the battle never has been fully understood until Dr. Stewart completed the exemplary research which underlies the present volume. No doubt Dr. Stewart, who was a Medical Officer with a battalion of the Welsh Regiment at the time, undertook his monumental task in order to resolve his own uncertainties, like Fabrice. Everyone interested in the history of World War II is immensely in his debt for doing so.

Dr. Stewart has reconstructed the story —no lesser expression will do— on a firm basis of evidence. This includes British, New Zealand, German (but unfortunately few Greek) sources, as well as innumerable reminiscences. He recalls some facts so startling as to be almost incredible—for example, that the German casualties on the first day of the attack were “greater than the *total* number of the *Wehrmacht* hitherto killed in the war.” He disposes of at least one long-established myth—that the Germans crashlanded powered aircraft anywhere except on the few available landing-grounds. He introduces quite a new aspect of the grim story by giving proper credit for the first time to the Cretan and other Greek troops who participated in the battle. (One can only record sardonically the naive belief of German Intelligence that the invaders could rely on “supposedly pacifist circles” among the Cretans) But probably the most important achievement of all in Dr. Stewart’s book is that he demonstrates beyond the possibility of argument a number of facts that one could do no more than suspect at the time.

First and foremost, the German capture of Crete could have been prevented. It could have been prevented if adequate preparations had been made during the six months before the attack, as Churchill ordered and believed to have been done. It could have been prevented even with the supply of very modest quantities of additional equipment, particularly a few tanks and about a hundred wireless-sets. It could have been prevented if the high command had not miscalculated the capabilities of the enemy air force, and overestimated the danger of a seaborne landing. It could have been prevented if one or two commanders had not committed errors of judgment at one or two precisely identifiable moments, and if two or three senior officers (including Freyberg himself) had not lost their nerve at critical moments. These are hard things to say of men tried almost beyond endurance, at least two of whom

held the Victoria Cross. Nevertheless, they are true and must be said, and Dr. Stewart proves them up to the hilt.

He writes, nevertheless, with the utmost fairness and compassion. Only towards General Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Forces, is he less than just. The injustice, such as it is, arises from the only two weaknesses in his armoury as a military historian. One is his incomplete understanding of the strategic factors governing military policy in the eastern Mediterranean. The other is his readiness to speculate about hypothetical consequences of different courses of action, and to take undue advantage of hindsight in doing so. In both cases the result is to lay upon Wavell's shoulders an excessive share of the responsibility that really rested with Churchill. More than once Dr. Stewart argues of a particular crisis that Churchill was right and Wavell wrong. Yet on his own evidence the environment within which Wavell had to work was created by Churchill's insistence, against Wavell's better judgment, that a British Force should be sent to Greece. As to the hypothesis that if Crete had been held in May 1941, it could never have been attacked again, this involves assumptions going far beyond any that Wavell (or even Churchill) could have made at the time.

Apart from the opening and closing chapters, which embody these weaknesses, Dr. Stewart's book deserves to be judged by its account of the battle itself. The verdict is one of superlative: incomparably the best account yet written of the Crete campaign, probably among the half-dozen best historical works on a particular campaign that have yet emerged from World War II. It is long, but without a superfluous sentence. It is clear, vivid and accurate. Above all, it is beautifully written, and so imaginatively composed that the reader will find himself hoping against hope to the very page, even though he knows the outcome in advance. (It needs no underlining that this is also the preeminent quality of Greek tragedy) But of many brilliant evocations of those terrible days, one may stand for all. The scene is the outskirts of the village of Galatas on the fourth night of the battle:

"Towards midnight a Cretan girl, about twelve years old, stole out from the broken masonry. She crouched over the bodies in the gutters covering them with rugs and carpets and returning, where she found response, to offer drinks of sweet goat's milk."

That child had sisters in Epirus and Roumeli, in Thessaly, Macedonia and the Peloponnese, whom every allied soldier came to know. In spite

of everything, σὸ κάτω-κάτω τῆς γρᾶφῆς, that is how the Nazi occupation was defeated.

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Lavender Cassels, *The Struggle for the Ottoman Empire 1717-1740*. London: John Murray, 1966. Pp. 226.

In August 1717, Prince Eugene of Savoy, though greatly outnumbered, routed a Turkish relief below the ramparts of Belgrade and took possession of "Stadt und Festung Belgrad" in the name of Emperor Charles VI. The hard thus pressed Porte was forced to sign the Treaty of Passarowitz in the following year surrendering to the Habsburgs the remainder of Hungary, most of Serbia, and parts of Wallachia and Bosnia as well. The military humiliation of the Turks dismayed the French, who for nearly two hundred years had been able to count on the Ottoman threat against the southeastern frontiers of the Habsburg dominions.

In the period following the Passarowitz Treaty, the Turks suffered further defeats by Persia; the time appeared ripe for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, for the next twenty-two years, Austria and Russia in concert attempted to exploit the weakness of the Turks, and at times the prize, total or partial dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, seemed well within the reach of their military and diplomatic resources. France, on the other hand, tried to stiffen the Turkish will to resist, and the hero of this book is the French ambassador to the Porte, the Marquis de Villeneuve, who, in Mrs. Cassels words, "achieved one of the most brilliant diplomatic coups of the century," by mediating the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739.

When both Russia and Austria attacked the Ottoman Empire in 1737, the Turks, with French military advice and assistance, were able to withstand the Austrians on the Danube and to contain the Russians along the Black Sea. Then Villeneuve's skillful diplomacy split the alliance and induced Austria, badly served by the unlucky Count Neipperg, to sign the Treaty of Belgrade, which returned to the Turks all the territory (including the fortress Belgrade) gained by the Habsburgs at Passarowitz. As an unavoidable consequence, Russia concluded the Treaty of Nissa barely one month later, thereby leaving the Ottoman Empire substantially intact.