

Churchill and Tito – S.O.E., Bletchley Park, and Supporting the Yugoslav Communists in World War II

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I really enjoy books that challenge my current understanding and thinking on aspects of the Second World War, and this one fits fully within that criteria. It was an area of the war I confess I knew little about, but this book has been very useful in understanding the complexities of waging total war, and the role of U.K. in Yugoslavia.

Chapter 1 sets the scene with a brief history of the Balkans, where religious and racial conflict was the catalyst for the outbreak of hostilities in the First World War. Yugoslavia was born out of the chaos of that war, and ceased to exist in 1941. In 1940, TITO came to power, and dominated the country until his death, after which the country fell apart in an ethnic war of fierce intensity and much barbarism.

The essence of the book is exploring why British Prime Minister, Winston CHURCHILL, and the British Chiefs of Staff, switched their support from the Serb Chetniks, to the Communist partisans led by TITO. For British readers, I would suggest it will provide a reality check, for as the book explains, about 85% of the German casualties in land warfare occurred on the Eastern Front. The Soviet Union and Germany were collaborating until 1941, and the U.K. nearly became embroiled in fighting against the Soviet Union in Finland, but when Germany attacked the Soviet Union in mid-1941, the whole context of the war changed.

This book explains the political strategic issues in clear, concise language, although some issues are repeated across different chapters. It includes the role of a small number of British officers who were sent to join the Partisans, and their eventual fates. There are twelve chapters in total, some of which detail the brutal nature of the war for ordinary people in Yugoslavia, and the desperate choices they had to make. It provokes the dilemma of armed resistance, where the other side are prepared to take extreme measures in reprisal, including murder, arson and looting. It was both fascinating, and sobering to read about these events.

There are thirteen photographs included, which on the whole add little to the value of the book. Personally, I would like to have seen more maps and diagrams to explain about the geography and topography of the areas mentioned in the text, main arterial routes, and where fighting took place. In conclusion, the purpose of the book is to explore and explain CHURCHILL's decision to support TITO, and to this extent, it does so impeccably.