



Encyclopedia Idiomatic: History's Worst Decisions and the People Who Made Them

By Stephen Weir



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The 64 A.D. burning of Rome during the reign of Nero . . . Winston Churchill's ill-conceived and disastrous World War I plan to invade Turkey at Gallipoli . . . the Maginot Line, built in France in 1929-34 in a foolhardy effort to prevent the feared German invasion . . . the 1950s thalidomide pharmaceutical disaster that resulted in at least 20,000 babies born with deformities . . . the 1989-91 misappropriation of company funds by publishing executive Robert Maxwell, and the collapse of his financial empire . . . the Enron scandal of 2000 that brought down a yet larger business empire. Chronicled in these pages are stories of corporate chicanery, poor military decisions, engineering disasters, diplomatic blunders, and other appalling, large-scale mistakes that resulted in ruin and misery for countless innocent bystanders. Here are baleful tales motivated by false hope, anger, greed, pride, lust, and many other instances of erratic human behavior. A selection of approximately 50 disastrous decisions are presented, each grim account summarized in a report of roughly a half-dozen pages and enhanced with sidebars and thumbnail-sized cartoon-style illustrations. Each account opens with its cast of characters, then sets the story's background before reporting the grim details and concluding with the unhappy moral. Here is a page-turner of a book that recounts some of history's most dramatic-but also catastrophic-moments.

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

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“Those Who Cannot Remember the Past Are Condemned to Repeat it.”

George Santayana

Mankind's past is strewn with mistakes, colossal blunders driven by virtue as often as by vice. *Encyclopedia Idiomatica* is a historian's look at such monumental missteps, from Adam and the apple and Hannibal's avalanche to the destruction of the Himalayan rain forest and the billions of dollars wasted on the Y2K scare.

Author Steven Weir's eccentric and insightful chronicle introduces us to the people and reveals the motivations behind the most detrimental of dreadful decisions. Consider Churchill's brash overconfidence in World War I's Gallipoli campaign, which took the lives of over 100,000 soldiers and gained the Allied forces virtually nothing. Or Enron, once the world's fastest growing energy company, which is estimated to have defrauded utilities—and by extension, their customers—out of \$1.1 billion through an audacious combination of price manipulation and smoke-and-mirrors accounting.

We alternately despise and empathize with the ill-fated figures and organizations while their cautionary tales compel us to reflect on our own choices for better or for worse. *Encyclopedia Idiomatica* is an engrossing and enlightening collection of the most disastrous histories, lest we forget.

About the Author

Stephen Weir has worked on three continents as a book publisher and author, and writers he has worked with have included National Book Award winners. Among his past editorial positions was that of director of Northwestern University Press. He lives in New York.

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