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men (p.67). This too is incorrect. Total French casualties at the Battle of the Somme were officially 202,567 men. This lower figure was due to their smaller commitment to the battle relative to the British Army, and also their superior tactical methods – this later point being strongly emphasised by Jonathan Krause in his chapter in this book.

It should be noted that the volume presents a summary and synthesis of the latest academic thought on the battle rather than a completely new set of interpretations. This is evident from the content of the chapters themselves and is further reinforced by an examination of the endnotes, which reveals a reliance on secondary sources. This, however, should not be taken as a criticism. The book serves a timely refresher for those familiar with the Somme and would make a fine introduction to the latest academic thought on the battle for general readers or undergraduates. Indeed, it is for this very reason that the work was chosen as key background reading for the British Army's Staff Ride to the Somme in September 2016.

Finally, Stohm and his authors are to be commended for the bold decision to publish with a 'popular' press in the form of Osprey, a company best known for its illustrated battle studies. A recurring complaint amongst military historians, made ever louder as the anniversaries of the centenary roll past, is the failure of academic interpretations to reach or influence the general public. There are a number of reasons for this problem, but one of the most obvious is the fact that most academic studies of the First World War are published at an inflated price point far beyond the means of the general reader. This is not the case with *The Battle of the Somme*, which is produced in a handsome volume and priced competitively.

Strohman and his contributors have carried out a valuable service in making the latest academic thinking on the Battle of the Somme available to a wider audience. Broad in scope yet concise and readable, this is a fine volume which deserves to be read widely.

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**Andrew C. Rath, *The Crimean War in Imperial Context 1854-56*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. xxiv + 301pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-54451-3. Hardback. Price £60.00.**

Wars frequently have unintended consequences and too often writing about specific wars is skewed by the desire to write national histories of a particular conflict. The Crimean War of 1854-56 has suffered much in this sense with a concentration on the events at Balaclava, particularly the siege of Sevastopol, to the exclusion of all else.

Andrew Rath's *The Crimean War in Imperial Context* is a comprehensive attempt to set the Anglo/French, Russian conflict, particularly the naval war, in a broader geo-strategic framework, which encompasses theatres of operations as diverse as the Black Sea, the Baltic and the Pacific Ocean. Furthermore it is based on an impressive array of primary sources in a number of languages. Instead of concentrating on the usual suspects, London, Paris and Moscow, Andrew Rath explores the role of minor players including the Baltic powers, Sweden-Norway, and Denmark as well as events in China and those surrounding the 1854-55 opening up of Japan to western influence. In addition to the standard Anglo-French sources Rath makes use of diverse archives in Britain, France, Alaska, St Petersburg, New Zealand and Finland as well as published document collections from late *Tokugawa* Japan and Imperial China.

The Crimean war is different from any other conflict in the hundred years between Waterloo and the Marne; alone of the 19<sup>th</sup> century wars, both in scale and scope, what began as a dispute over protection of the holy places in Turkish occupied Palestine, became a global encounter between the European imperial states comparable to the military struggles of the previous century. Moreover, it is the only conflict with more than two European great powers participating at the same time. It is precisely this aspect that makes the war so significant, as it has wide-ranging consequences above the direct or stated interests of belligerents.

Rath argues that the siege of Sevastopol was originally intended by the British Admiralty as a raid in strength, a preliminary to a more powerful operation in the Baltic aimed directly at the Kronstadt Naval base. The Royal Navy's actual military thrust was against the Bothnian coast in Russian ruled Finland, and that Britain's military effort became bogged down in the Black Sea. There is also an interesting discussion of the French Navy's medical experiments to treat scurvy (and its implications for limiting naval operations) in the same Baltic campaign. However, Britain's real success was in persuading Sweden that Russian ambitions posed a direct threat to its freedom, prompting her to join the allied alliance. At the same time Rath emphasises Tsarist Statesman Nikolay Nikolayevich Muravyov's opportunistic attempt to widen the war at China's expense by sailing a large fleet down the disputed Amur River. A whole chapter is given over to British and French operations in South America, intended to secure commercial concessions, which fatally weakened a major allied attack on Russia's main Pacific port at Petropavlovsk; which in turn had been mounted to defend west European commerce in the North Pacific. Rath also places great emphasis on the suicide of Rear Admiral David Price, British naval commander in the Pacific, which had disastrous consequences for Anglo-French actions in and around the Vladivostok region including the defeat of a battalion of marines in the face of determined Russian resistance. However, as the allied fleet limped away in late 1854 another British Fleet arrived off Japan. Owing to a series of misunderstandings (including the Japanese

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thinking that it was in league with Commodore Perry's American black ships of earlier that year) the Tokugawa Shogunate offered Britain favourable concessions, which went a long way to the opening up of Japan to the West after two hundred and fifty years. Even so, Rath points out that Russia was also able to negotiate with Japan to improve its overall position in the North Pacific as well.

Finally Rath argues that what forced a conclusion to the war in 1856 was the Russian belief that the 1855 allied summer attack on Sweaborg heralded a bigger and potentially more dangerous Baltic campaign by the allies, (including a newly belligerent Sweden-Norway) to invade Finland or devastate Kronstadt - St. Petersburg. The Tsar's decision to seek peace had more to do with this potential widening of the war, which threatened to include Austria and Prussia, than the famous fall of Sevastopol, which Tsar Nicholas dismissed as of secondary importance to the threat to St. Petersburg.

*The Crimean War in Imperial Context* is a well written and intelligent addition to our understanding of the Crimean conflict and should be recommended to all students of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century imperial history.

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**Tim Jenkins, *The Airborne Forces Experimental Establishment: The Development of British Airborne Technology, 1940 – 1950*. Solihull: Helion & Company, 2015. Notes, Bibliography, Index. xxv + 216pp. ISBN 978-1-91-077706-0. Hardback. Price £22.95.**

In early 1940 the German advance through Scandinavia and the Low Countries was spearheaded by elements of their parachute and glider airborne forces. Whilst not always successful, the capture of airfields in Norway and Holland in addition to the glider operation to capture the Belgian fort at Eben Emael demonstrated to the world the capabilities of this relatively new form of warfare and Prime Minister Winston Churchill was impressed enough to issue a directive on 7 June 1940 for Britain to form an airborne army of 5000 soldiers. This directive caused numerous problems at a time of severe equipment shortages both on land and in the air. Furthermore, the directive was initiating a new form of warfare for Britain and not recommending an existing facet be developed further.

British airborne operations in the Second World War have generated a mixed plethora of literature, and while the Airborne Divisions' exploits have been covered, their establishment has received much less academic attention, two exceptions being John