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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-19th 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

Greenacre's *Churchill's Spearhead* and William Buckingham's *Paras*. While both cover the problems associated with the formation of the airborne forces neither deal with the experimental work required to identify the best equipment and practices required for force deployment. However, this gap has now been filled by Dr Tim Jenkins' *The Airborne Forces Experimental Establishment*.

Dr Jenkins' book is based on his PhD thesis and, as one might expect, provides an in depth analysis of the role the Airborne Forces Experimental Establishment (A.F.E.E.) played in providing the British military with airborne-related equipment. The A.F.E.E.'s development through its guises of the Experimental Flight and Technical Development is charted in detail, dealing with the inevitable bureaucracy surrounding staff and equipment of all shapes and sizes. Experimentation covered surprising aircraft such as the Manchester and Lancaster bombers as both glider tug and paratrooper transport, while the Horsa glider was tested for bomb carrying and as a 'mule' for the Comet airliner. However, these facts aside the book demonstrates a deeper problem with Britain's airborne forces.

Churchill's directive to form an airborne army created turmoil and its effects were felt in military, political, economic and manufacturing terms. Dr Jenkins' book makes it clear that the airborne requirements were difficult to develop and supply at a time of shortage and a reluctance in some quarters to form an airborne element. Experimentation with existing aircraft types and new glider designs were hampered by the allocation of an airfield which suffered from poor weather conditions which slowed progress. Furthermore, even when an aircraft type, such as the Whitley, was deemed obsolete for bomber operations it was retained for training bomber crews and not released for airborne training or operations. There was an element of the airborne army having to make-do with obsolete or unsuitable aircraft for parachuting or glider tug purposes suggesting that airborne operations were not a high priority; British aircraft manufacturers did not build one transport aircraft in 1942 despite the airborne requirement and later British transport aircraft, such as the York, were developments of existing aircraft and trials showed they were unsuitable for either parachuting or tug duties. In developing troop and supply gliders such as the Horsa and Hamilcar the A.F.E.E. and manufacturers had to start from the beginning as Britain only possessed sports gliders and small training aircraft. Development work was not only conducted on gliders but also on the important aircraft-tug combination and their towing characteristics. A fundamental question, probably not within the confines of this study, was whether Britain actually wanted an airborne arm or was the effort better employed in manufacturing and developing existing equipment?

The book has a few minor flaws. The role of the exiled Polish forces, who had developed their own parachute and glider troops prior to the war, in assisting the

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British is curiously missing and it would have been interesting to read how much their experiences helped. Secondly, while some airborne operations are mentioned, the glider landings at the Caen Canal and Orne River bridges (Operation DEADSTICK) on 5/6 June 1944 are omitted even though innovations in glider build and pilot training had been carried out to make the landings a success. Again, the involvement of the A.F.E.E. would have made interesting reading. Lastly, the illustrations are disappointing both in quality and choice as, for example, a photograph of the Hengist glider would have filled a gap.

Minor criticisms aside, Dr Jenkins' book is truly excellent and is highly recommended for all students of the British Airborne Forces in the Second World War.

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Caroline Keen, *An Imperial Crisis in British India: The Manipur Uprising of 1891*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015. 256pp. ISBN: 978-1-78-453103-4. Price £64.00.

Caroline Keen's *An Imperial Crisis in British India: The Manipur Uprising of 1891* begins with a *Dramatis Personae* and the narrative that follows assumes the characteristics of a Shakespearean tragedy. The list of characters on show range from a deposed Maharaja of Manipur (Sur Chandra) to palace guards (Usurba) and even the Secretary of State for India (R.A. Cross). Each scene is meticulously described – from the 'handsome shops, large hotels, and palatial banks and business houses of every description' and the contrasting 'filthy, badly drained alleys' of the 'densely populated native city' of Calcutta to the 'forests of oak' that lined the routes to the grassy valleys of Manipur in the North-East extremity of British India. The drama of courtly politics in the Princely State and its Residency is poignantly portrayed in 18 (including the Introduction and Conclusion) short but detailed chapters. We are introduced to jealous princes quarrelling at a *nautch* in September 1890 over a young woman each wished to marry, the forced abdication of the Maharajah of the State after an attack on the Palace and the escalation of hostilities that resulted from the British forcibly trying to restore a pliant leader.

But is this good history? Is there a historicity to the story being relayed? We live, as historians of South Asia and of Imperialism, in the wake of forty years of scholarship that has contested how we view historical agency; suddenly aware, if we were not aware before, of the problems that the colonial archive and its contents provide. It is not controversial or innovative to recognize that the colonial archive is a place of 'commencement' and 'commandment' or that the primary material we are often forced to use compels a construction of white agency and black marginality. But that