

REVIEWS

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

recognition is absent in Keen's work. The narrative is told through three characters – Colonel James Johnstone, the British Political Resident in Manipur from 1877 to 1886, Frank St Clair Grimwood, the British Resident between 1888 and 1891, and Frank's wife Ethel. Everything is conveyed as they retell it in their published memoirs – Johnstone's *My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills* (1896) and Grimwood's *My Three Years in Manipur and Escape from the Recent Mutiny* (1891) – or though the Report of the Inquiry that followed. I long to read of

Usurba the palace guard, of what he thought, felt, hoped or dreamed, but his account is absent – not so much a *dramatis persona* as a dumb and benumbed stage-prop. We also live in the wake of social and cultural histories of revolt and protest and sociologies of violence. Keen's pithy conclusion that the Manipur Uprising was sparked by 'the traditional uncritical devotion of Indian subjects to their local ruler' is not supported by any evidence in her work or by what we know of similar rebellions of the period. There is nothing simple or uncritical of the act or manifestation of violence.

So is this good history? Caroline Keen's work on Manipur is an interesting piece on an under-explored episode and corner of British India. But its lack of theoretical and methodological rigour does not make it a particularly successful or convincing work.

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Spencer Jones (ed.), *Courage without Glory: The British Army on the Western Front 1915*. Solihull: Helion & Company Ltd., 2015. 448pp. ISBN: 978-1-910777-18-3. Hardback. £26.95.

Spencer Jones is rapidly gaining a commendable reputation as an academic editor. In *Courage without Glory* he has assembled a team of fifteen contributors, many of them from the emerging powerhouse of First World War studies in the West Midlands, and has given them the opportunity to write, often in extraordinary detail, upon aspects of the British military experience on the Western Front in 1915. He has also identified a theme that underpins most of these essays, namely that the learning process of the British Army began not with actions on the Somme, and its aftermath, but in the fighting of 1915 and the lessons drawn from it. Finally, he has found a publisher in Helion & Company willing to provide both substantial space for each essay and support for the writing with proper footnotes, 60 illustrations, and 15 colour maps of a very high quality. Doubtless the decision to include Helion's commissioning editor on his team, and allow him to write the longest and most heavily footnoted chapter, helped!