

Frank Jastrzembki. *Admiral Albert Hastings Markham. A Victorian Tale of Triumph, Tragedy and Exploration*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen & Sword Maritime, www.pen-and-sword.uk, 2019. xxvi+197 pp., illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. UK £19.99, US \$34.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-52672-592-9.

Admiral Sir Albert Markham is not a name well known to many. He led, in some ways, the quintessential naval life of the late Victorian era, but his distinction was the misfortune of being a lead participant of a collision between the ship in which he flew his flag (as Rear-Admiral), HMS *Camperdown*, and that of his superior, Vice-Admiral Sir George Tryon, in HMS *Victoria* on 22 June 1893. The sinking of the latter, involving the death of Tryon, shook the Royal Navy profoundly. The subsequent court martial of the captain of *Victoria* returned an acquittal and assigned responsibility to Tryon's misconceived formation manoeuvre preparatory to coming to anchorage off the now-coast of Syria (then the Ottoman Empire). This verdict was considered deeply unsatisfactory by many within the RN and opinions split between those who blamed Tryon and those who condemned Markham and his flag captain for failing to take appropriate action on receipt of an impossible signal. The controversy swirled around Markham for the balance of his life, and he, in the event, never had a seagoing command again. His last appointment, prior to retirement at age 65 in 1906, was as Commander-in-Chief, at the Nore.

Frank Jastrzembki has previously written about Valentine Baker, a Victorian army hero with blots on his copy-book. This volume is his second. There is clearly something that Jastrzembki finds attractive about individuals with

colourful, but flawed, life narratives. (Baker was a LCol of cavalry who distinguished himself in the Crimea, but on conviction for sexual assault in the 1870s, was imprisoned for a year and dismissed in disgrace. He later took up with the Ottoman Empire's army, winning a rearguard action as commander of a division.) In the case of Markham, the trajectory of his career is both typical and uncommon. He joined the RN as a midshipman in 1856 at age 15 (rather later than normal), and spent eight years on the China Station. The activities of piracy suppression, dealing with the Taiping Rebellion and showing the flag were eventful as were his later times on the Australia Station where he was involved in interrupting the near-slave trade ('blackbirding') of Pacific islanders, who were forcibly brought to Australia as plantation workers. He was promoted to commander in 1872, essentially on time, after which he devoted himself to Arctic exploration for the next six years. Markham displayed considerable courage in the 1876 expedition in HMS *Alert* and was subsequently awarded promotion to captain (1878). He commanded the flagship, HMS *Triumph*, from 1879-82, then in shore postings at HMS *Vernon* (the torpedo school), albeit being involved in a collision between the school's tender, HMS *Hecla*, and a schooner in 1885. Thereafter, he was commodore of the training squadron out of Portsmouth, then on promotion to rear-admiral in 1891, was appointed second-in-command of the Mediterranean squadron. In between all these postings, Markham was involved in significant travel, taking him to Hudson's Bay, the American mid-west, as an observer of the Peru-Chile War of 1879-83, and explorations of the Russian Arctic in the vicinity of the island of Novaya Zemlya. His services were not sought during the

Great War and he died just before its conclusion in October 1918. Unquestionably Markham led an eventful and remarkable life.

It was not, it must be said, one replete with extraordinary professional success. He was a prim and sanctimonious man, rarely partaking in normal wardroom life, with many of his postings marked by setbacks or misjudgements that were to dog, yet not derail, his career. The catastrophe of the sinking of the *Victoria* was merely the most spectacular. He lacked self-confidence regarding his mastery of the complexities of naval life, and was consequently diffident, prone to second guessing his decisions, and terrified of making mistakes. Indeed, in an earlier episode, Markham had been humiliated in an exercise where he was supposed to blockade Tryon's force in port or at least shadow his progress at sea. He failed at both, with Tryon's triumphant exposure of British naval vulnerabilities as a result—leading, it must be said, to the 1889 Naval Defence Act and the Two Power Standard. He was also a reluctant naval officer, embarking on the career on a *faute de mieux* basis and looked to the experiences of an older cousin, Sir Clements Markham, whose exploits in terms of exploration, freemasonry, and membership of the Royal Geographical Society served as a model for his real passion. Markham was a prolific writer and a steady stream of volumes describing his exploits punctuated his life, although with remarkably little on his naval activities.

Jastrzembki's purpose is to bring to life a colourful Victorian RN officer, who is underserved in the historiography. In fact, the last biography devoted to Markham was published in 1927. And, it is conceded, the story of Markham's life and his highly varied career is certainly an interesting one at

the time of the *Pax Britannica's* zenith. The book's strength is in recounting the unconventional aspects of Markham's career and rather less on its significance. The chief event of Markham's life, by his account, was the Arctic expedition of 1875, which failed in its objective of reaching the North Pole. For others, that pinnacle was certainly the *Victoria* disaster. In important ways, Markham was a poor choice for his post in the Mediterranean and that reflects badly on the Admiralty. As well, the conduct of the court martial after the incident was a sham, designed to minimize publicity and fuss, rather than apportion blame appropriately. Indeed, its unwillingness to censure either Markham or his flag captain for failing to take necessary action to avoid the collision bore unhappy consequences that were manifest in the RN's uneven performance throughout the Great War. Andrew Gordon's important exploration of this theme in *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (1996) is absent from the thin, final chapter of Jastrzembki's book, which is consequently, inadequate. Strangely not included in the bibliography is Richard Hough's *Admiral's in Collision*, which provides a book length account of the incident and could have been profitably referenced notwithstanding its 1959 publication.

The jacket blurb indicates that Jastrzembki has sought to rescue Markham from the tarnish to his reputation of the *Victoria* sinking. This has not been achieved. What has been accomplished, however, is an account of the most fascinating career of a man who did not find his *métier* in his workaday life. Many are they who have similar experiences—all of whom surely live in fear of being found out, and when the day of trial comes, found wanting. This is a hard thing and worth pondering. With that reflection, I am of the view

that much can be learned from Jasztrzembski's book on Albert Markham, even if the tarnish must remain.

Ian Yeates,  
Regina, Saskatchewan

Angus Konstam. *Tirpitz in Norway. X-craft midget submarines raid the fjords, Operation Source 1943*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.osprey-publishing.com, 2020. 80 pp., illustrations, map, bibliography, index. UK £13.99, US \$22.00, CDN \$29.00, paper; ISBN 987-1-4728-3585-7.

Osprey Publishing is well known for its wide ranging illustrated aviation, naval and military history books that have been produced since the late 1960s. There are now literally thousands of titles covering all manner of subjects. While this could lead to some mediocrity—the X-Craft midget submarine attack on the *Tirpitz* is not one of them.

Angus Konstam, one of Osprey's more prolific writers, has done a good job in detailing the raid from beginning to end. While not perfect, nor as in-depth as some of the many works previously written on the topic, it is not meant to be. Like so many of Osprey's works, this is a primer that allows the reader, especially school children and young adults, to gain a reasonable insight into a topic and thus, let them decide if more in-depth reading is required. Many distinguished military historians have 'cut their teeth' on Osprey books and then moved onto more 'weighty tomes'.

*Tirpitz in Norway* describes why the ship was there and the risk it posed to the Allied convoys resupplying the Soviet Union via the Arctic Convoys. (The weighty tome for those interested in exploring this further is Richard Woodman's *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*

reprinted for the seventh time in 2019.) Thus, *Tirpitz* was a classic example of the 'fleet - in -being' doctrine; even anchored in a fjord, she was a risk to Allied shipping and tied down Allied forces fearing what she might or might not do. The risk to Allied merchant shipping was real, as shown by the actions of *Graf Spee* in 1939, the *Admiral Scheer* sortie into the Atlantic and Indian Oceans in 1940-41, and *Scharnhorst's* attacks on Atlantic convoys in 1941.

After attempts to destroy *Tirpitz* by air attack had failed, the British sought a new method to bring about the ship's demise. This was the midget submarine or X-Craft. Midget submarines were not a new concept—they had been employed by the Italians and Japanese with some success in penetrating Allied harbours and ports. Konstam describes the creation of the X-Craft from concept to reality, the training of the crews and their deployment in September 1943 to attack *Tirpitz* in Kaafjord, Norway.

Konstam clearly describes the difficulties encountered by the X-Craft crews, including bad weather, German defences and the poor construction of the midget submarines. The litany of defects that affected the X-Craft during the operation shows both poor workmanship in the British shipyards, but also potentially a paucity of rugged training in the lead-up to the attack that may have better identified the submarine's many mechanical and electrical short-comings. Only three of the six X-Craft deployed actually entered Kaafjord due to engineering failures in the others. Due to ongoing technical failures in their vessels, the three mini-sub that did make it struggled to lay their explosive charges. That two crews successfully laid their charges underneath *Tirpitz* is a testimony to the courage and the resilience of their crews.