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Suicide Squads: W.W. II: Axis and Allied Special Attack Weapons of World War II: their Development and their Missions

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1880s right up to today. There are discussions of the secret societies, the Sino-Russian imbroglio, industrial espionage, etc., etc. In reaction, therefore, to Mr. Deacon's avowal on p. 1 that this topic has "been very much neglected," we can affirm that he has, if nothing else, struck off in the right direction.

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O'Neill, Richard. *Suicide Squads: W.W. II: Axis and Allied Special Attack Weapons of World War II: their Development and their Missions*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981. 299pp. \$15.95.

Works on the technology of warfare fall into several categories. Scholars such as Bernard Brodie, William H. McNeill, and Carlo Cipolla have tied technological innovations to historical changes that stretch over centuries. John F. Guilmartin and Dennis Showalter have traced the impact of technological change within a few decades. There are also authorities such as Siegfried Breyer or Ian Hogg who study the evolution of specific weapons. The most common works on military technology, however, are those lavishly illustrated and elaborately diagramed tomes which are always being remaindered at bookstores. These last books are the military historian's guilty pleasures. His training teaches him to dismiss military minutia as "button collecting" or "buff" trivia. Yet few military historians do not own at

least one coffee-table book with an unscholastic title such as *Gurkha Knives, 1800-1950 or P-25 "Wombat" at War*. Richard O'Neill's *Suicide Squads: W.W. II* is an interesting example of this genre because it demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to military studies.

As the rather long title suggests, this is an overview of the various weapons used for suicide missions in World War II. O'Neill deals primarily with midget submarines, motor torpedo boats, airplanes, manned bombs, and human torpedos. There are also accounts of several missions in which these weapons were used. The book is profusely illustrated with photographs, drawings, and maps. There is also a great deal of data on armament, speed, construction, number of models built, and so on. Readers who are interested in the machinery of suicide warfare will doubtless find this book well worth the price.

The chief problem with *Suicide Squads: W.W. II* lies in the author's attempt to place suicide weapons within the broader context of both World War II and military history. When he is not dealing with specific material details, O'Neill's work is unfocused and lacks thought. It is never clear, for example, whether the author believes that suicide weapons represent a tactical response to modern warfare, a unique technological invention, or (in the case of the major practitioner of suicide war) a holdover from Japan's samurai past. While the author emphatically believes that kamikaze tactics were

effective, he can come up with very little evidence to support this conclusion. Moreover, O'Neill does not deal with Ivan Morris' thesis that a major result of Japan's kamikaze strategy was to provide the Americans with a justification for the atomic bombing of Japan.

O'Neill compounds this lack of analysis with a penchant for controversial and unsubstantiated statements. In his introduction, for example, he writes, "I disagree with those historians who cite Japan's greed for conquest and military glory as a major cause of the Pacific War; in my opinion, American policy from 1905 onward was aimed at a showdown with the United States' great Pacific rival, until, because of both racial provocation and economic warfare, Japan had no choice but to seem the aggressor." If the "Rape of Nanking" and Pearl Harbor only "seemed" to be acts of aggression it is hard to imagine what real Japanese aggression would have consisted of. In the same vein is the author's assertion that although the kamikazes apparently failed in all three of their major war aims they "made possible the post-war miracle of reconstruction." Assertions such as these must cast doubt on the author's credibility in other areas of his research.

Suicide Squads: W.W. II is thus a book that must be read with a great deal of skepticism. The pictures and diagrams of several little known suicide weapons may justify its purchase. However, as is sometimes the case in books of this genre, the author cannot integrate his subject into a

historical context. His analysis of both World War II and Japanese history suffers from a lack of background and objectivity. Like the kamikazes that he writes about, the author often misses his target.

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Nish, Ian, ed. *Anglo-Japanese Alienation, 1919-1952: Papers of the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the History of the Second World War*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 305 pp. \$37.50

If you start this book by reading the two final essays first, you will understand what the organizers of this conference hoped for when they brought together a group of distinguished Japanese and British scholars. In the final paper, Donald Cameron Watt writes: "I felt that the historiography of the far eastern aspects of the Second World War so far as English-speaking countries were concerned had come to be dominated by American and Americo-centric historians" In the immediately preceding essay, the doyen of Japanese diplomatic historians, Hosoya Chihiro, expresses the belief that there had been no clash of true interests in East Asia between Japan and the United States and that the real conflict of interests was between Japan and Great Britain. Other essays by Japanese scholars follow Hosoya's interpretation, arguing that Anglo-Japanese conflict, based as it was on commercial rivalry, was deep and long-standing. But Japanese-American