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The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost

Richard J. Norton
The U.S. Naval War College

Cathal J. Nolan

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continue to challenge the statute the United States is using to prosecute Guantánamo detainees, arguing that it is an illegal *ex post facto* law. And just last year, Paradis obtained legal relief for a Guantánamo detainee after arguing that the military judge was biased.

To be sure, the legal landscape for military justice has changed since *Sawada*. On the heels of World War II, the international community expanded the judicial protections in the Geneva Conventions and Congress passed the Uniform Code of Military Justice. These changes tethered military tribunals to widely accepted legal standards, which steadily enhanced their judicial character over the next several decades. Do the military commissions at Guantánamo honor that tradition or resurrect the same types of injustices the Doolittle Raiders faced at the hands of their Japanese captors? *Last Mission to Tokyo* is a must-read book within the national-security community, especially for people trying to place the current military commissions at Guantánamo in historical and legal context.

JACOB MEUSCH



The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost, by Cathal J. Nolan. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2017. 670 pages. \$25.

From first page to last, *The Allure of Battle* is a remarkable, exceptional work. Already gathering awards—notably, the Gilder Lehrman Prize, recognizing “the best book on military history in the English-speaking world”—Nolan’s book should be read by every serious student of military history, as well as every military officer and national-security

professional. It is a literary rarity, boasting exceptional scholarship, clear arguments, and a writing style so sure and compelling that the reader is both disappointed and surprised to finish the last of its 670 pages.

Nolan examines what might be termed the *cult of the decisive battle* that leads to sharp, quick victory, as well as the near-mythical reverence that military scholars afford to commanders who emerge victorious from such conflicts. While acknowledging that decisive battles can happen, Nolan then convincingly demonstrates that such battles are rare, and many (if not most) battles thought to have been decisive were not. He argues that wars very rarely are won in such fashion; rather, they are grinding contests of strength, attrition, and force that, as warfare has evolved, increasingly exhaust the victors and destroy the losers.

The fact that some wars *have* been won quickly—by great leaders who either created or benefited from the rare decisive battle or quick campaign—has had a pernicious effect on the evolution of military thought and culture. The so-called cult of the offensive may have reached its high-water mark in 1914, but it had been building for centuries and still survives to the present day. In contrast, as Nolan points out, the benefits of defensive strategies, of the careful husbanding of troops and resources, rarely are extolled.

Nolan’s position puts him in direct contradiction with canonical theorists of war, including Carl von Clausewitz and Alfred Thayer Mahan. Both argued for the need to create the conditions for victory through a decisive major engagement. Criticizing these masters guarantees that intellectual battle lines will be drawn. *The Allure of Battle* then

goes further when it depicts Napoléon as the man who doomed France by relying on ever-diminishing tactical and operational success instead of creating a long-term strategy to preserve and strengthen his state. Napoléon had a remarkable ten-year run, and at one point truly was the master of Europe, but his lack of strategic vision and planning cost him his armies and his crown, and devastated France in the process.

Weaker states have been drawn to the chimera of the fast win, because their leaders know it is their only chance, however long the odds, of winning at all. In other cases, initial success may obscure a stark reality for a time, as when the Japanese fleet roared across the Pacific and German armored divisions sliced through Europe in the early 1940s. Nevertheless, Nolan argues that German and Japanese leaders knew, well before 1943, that their wars were lost; the Allies' industrial might and resolve to stay in the fight signaled an eventual, inevitable Axis defeat.

Although the book is a gem, there are areas for small improvements. Despite its look at the wars of Japan, the work is self-admittedly Eurocentric. Coverage of the U.S. Civil War is all but absent, and there is not one mention of the wars of South America—in particular, the War of the Pacific, the War of the Triple Alliance, and the Chaco War. The omission is felt more keenly as the history of these wars supports Nolan's thesis. Also missing is a serious look at the centuries of colonial wars in which there were many decisive battles, and their potential impact on the ideal of the quick win. It is deceptively easy—but wrong—to dismiss these wars as sideshows. Expanding the scope of the book beyond the shores of Europe

obviously would entail additional chapters, but readers willing to invest in nearly seven hundred pages of material would not balk at a few hundred more.

Nolan also could have spent more time examining when a strategy based on decisive battle and a quick campaign actually resulted in victory. He does look at some cases, such as the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War and Frederick the Great's conquest of Silesia, but only to show that those conflicts were not the avatars of decisive victory that the victors and history made them out to be. Conversely, although he extols the virtues of more-defensive strategies, more material on when and where they worked would be welcome.

It would be grossly unfair to end this review on a negative note, however slight. *The Allure of Battle* is a great book. Destined to be a classic, it is a welcome and necessary addition to our understanding of military history. It is also a great read—exciting, engaging, and evocative.

RICHARD J. NORTON



Nimitz at Ease, by Michael A. Lilly. Apache Junction, AZ: Stairway, 2019. 367 pages. \$29.95.

One of Chester Nimitz's staff members, interviewed in 1969, suggested that “[i]t’s so easy to write about a man who swings wildly when he’s on the quarter-deck of a ship, but Nimitz had to pull together the pieces of a terribly riven situation . . . , and these aren’t the things that make exciting reading.” (See James Bassett, oral history, Nimitz Library Special Collections, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, p. 9). As a result, this staff officer concluded, a biography of