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Nimitz at Ease

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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

Chester Nimitz would be difficult to write. In spite of that, there is a quite valuable biography of Nimitz written nearly fifty years ago by Naval Academy professor E. B. “Ned” Potter (*Nimitz*, first published in 1976 and still in print). Yet, as Nimitz’s former staff officer noted, a combination of the character of Nimitz’s job and the enigmatic nature of the man himself kept much of his personal life in the shadows.

That is why this new book, *Nimitz at Ease*, from retired Navy captain Michael Lilly, is so useful. Lilly is a descendant of H. Alexander Walker (known as Sandy) and his wife, Una, who owned two houses on Oahu during the years Nimitz was Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, and who were great friends of Nimitz. Moreover, Una kept a daily diary in which she chronicled the social events of the Walker family and their friend. Captain Lilly came into possession of the diary, as well as scores of private letters and family photographs, and he has assembled them into an account of Nimitz’s private life during the admiral’s time as Pacific Fleet commander.

What emerges is a portrait of Nimitz as a man who was entirely comfortable in his own skin. He enjoyed not only playing horseshoes and practicing pistol shooting (well chronicled elsewhere) but also playing lawn tennis, roughhousing with the Walker grandchildren, swimming long distances in the ocean, and playing poker in shorts and an aloha shirt after dinner on the Walkers’ lanai. Una’s diary proves just how much time Nimitz spent at their beach home, called Muliwai, where he could escape from the frenzy of his Pacific Fleet headquarters in the “Cement Pot” on Makalapa Hill.

This is not a full biography by any means, and it does not supplant

Potter’s book as a life history, but it does illuminate an aspect of Admiral Chester Nimitz that heretofore has been hidden.

CRAIG L. SYMONDS



Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World, by H. R. McMaster. New York: HarperCollins, 2020. 560 pages. \$35.

Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, USA (Ret.), whose *Dereliction of Duty* is a foundational case study of American civil-military relations during the Vietnam War, has produced another superb exposition of civil-military relations. This time, McMaster himself emerges as the case study, even if unintentionally, in *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World*. Ostensibly a memoir of McMaster’s time as national security advisor from 2017 to 2018, *Battlegrounds* offers so much more. McMaster’s achievement is all the more commendable (yet easily overlooked) as he presents a timely model of military professionalism and civic virtue in the context of a sobering analysis of the grave threats currently facing the so-called free world.

Combining easy prose and an approachable style with the experience and intellect of a decorated general with a PhD in history, McMaster has written a book as accessible to the lay reader as it is valuable to the national-security professional. McMaster even exposes the secret to his success; when asked why he “was spending more time packing books than clothes” for his work as national security advisor, McMaster responded that he “intended to draw on history to help frame contemporary challenges to national security” (p. 426).