Imagining Future War: The West’s Technological Revolution and Visions of Wars to Come, 1880–1914
Antulio J. Echevarria II. Praeger Security International. 120 pages; black and white drawings; index; $39.95.

By James Jay Carafano

The Army constantly prepares to fight wars of the future. Today there are more men and women on operational missions around the world than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Still, the majority of the American Army spends its days preparing for the next battle, not fighting the one at hand. Cadets study. Troops train. Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) develops new requirements. Army Materiel Command refurbishes equipment. Army scientists push the envelope, applying new knowledge to combat capabilities. Few organizations spend more time worrying about what challenges—and pondering what possibilities—tomorrow will bring.

Antulio Echevarria’s Imagining Future War: The West’s Technological Revolution and Visions of Wars to Come, 1880–1914 offers a rare, exceptional and penetrating case study in analyzing predictions about the changing face of conflict. It is a book military professionals ought to read—a cautionary tale of the pitfalls and potential of writing, thinking and preparing for the war of the future.

The assumption today is that the Army will have to participate in persistent operations requiring years of effort and tens of thousands of boots on the ground, an all too obvious lesson from the current conflicts, but no more insightful than the need for an “expeditionary Army” as trumpeted a few years ago to win the first conventional battles in Afghanistan and Iraq. In contrast, new Navy and Air Force briefings highlight the potential for conflict with China—a mere coincidence that this theater places a higher premium on air, sea, cyber and space forces. All these predictions suffer from the tendency to envision the future merely by extending the trends of the present.

Perceptions of the future often contain impressionable impulses from the past as well, which skew thinking about how the next chapter of war will unfold.

Popular cultural and other societal influences (science fiction, for example) that shape how today’s Army thinks about tomorrow’s challenges were also present in the age leading up to World War I. Imagining Future War explores all of them and more in broadly examining how intellectual trends affect imagination and the effort to turn imaginative visions into real combat power.

Echevarria, a retired career Army officer and Clausewitz scholar, who currently serves as director of research at the Army War College, chose a particularly fertile subject for his study in military imagination. The period covered comes at the apex of the Industrial Revolution and the wave of globalization that swept across the 19th century. Not surprisingly, the dynamics of technological innovation, scientific development and social change weighed heavily in envisioning the future.

Imagining Future War delves into all of the salient factors that shaped 19th-century imagination, with chapters that describe in a jargon-free, straightforward manner the times and dominant intellectual movements of the age. Echevarria reviews the writings about future war in popular literary forms and professional military journals and books, and examines how futurists interpreted the lessons of the conflicts that preceded World War I, such as the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). Even those not steeped in the history of the period or not deeply familiar with military affairs will profit from reading Imagining Future War.

Echevarria argues that when World
Timing may not be everything, but as Imagining Future War demonstrates, timing can have a dramatic impact on the process of turning imaginative vision into reality. This may turn out to be the case for network-centric warfare, the popular future vision of only a few years ago, now largely derided as a failure in dealing with the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Critics dismiss all too easily the fact that the military’s experience and the technologies available to wage network-centric operations are in their infancy, no more reliable than the primitive tanks that overheated and broke down on the trench lines of the Western Front. On the other hand, the Army’s increasing expertise and effectiveness in combating improvised explosive devices in Iraq demonstrates that the services are learning how to fight systems with systems. Network-centric operations may yet prove to be the next big thing.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of Imagining Future War is the danger of outsourcing imagination to others. The military services must become adept at thinking outside the box, geographically and otherwise. Military imagination, however, must be more than aping what soldiers hear from pun-
Eventually, the Japanese believed, their enemies would be unable to continue their costly, punishing efforts and would agree to end the war on terms favorable to Japan’s ambitions. Wood argues that, given the international situation and the strangling Western embargoes, this was a reasonable strategy and a propitious time to execute it. Thus Japan had no other choice but to go to war.

Yet there were possible alternatives. By withdrawing from China, Japan could have ended the embargoes completely and freed its financial assets frozen in the West. This would doubtless have caused tremendous turmoil at home, but the result would have been much less costly than the major war on which Japan was about to embark. Or Japan could simply have pulled its forces out of southern Indochina, signaling that it no longer intended to push farther south. This would at least have brought a lifting of the oil embargo; other resource concessions might then have been negotiated.

A third, more risky alternative would have been to ignore British and American territories in the Far East and strike directly at the Indies. This would have left Japanese lines of communication to the south vulnerable to air and naval interdiction from the Philippines and Malaya. Yet Britain was fighting for its life in Europe and North Africa, while the United States was focusing on supporting Britain and the Soviet Union and was still restricted by strong antiwar public opinion. Neither the British nor Americans were in a position to declare war on Japan.

All of this notwithstanding, Japan did go to war with the West and carry out the first phase of its basic plan. It worked surprisingly well. Within three months, Japanese forces had overrun their target area and established a great strategic defensive line from Japan’s home islands south through the central Pacific to the Bismarck Archipelago and then west to Burma. Within this huge perimeter lay all the natural resources that Japan required and the vital internal lines of communication of the new empire.

This remarkable success, however, led Japanese military leaders to abandon their original strategy. Instead of consolidating their hold on what they had won and strengthening their defenses against the expected Allied counteroffensive, Japanese forces surged forward in search of further conquests. This would prove fatal. Defeats in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway and on Guadalcanal and New Guinea, plus the increasing attrition of Japanese airpower, proved disastrous. By the end of 1942, the Japanese strategic offensive had been halted and thrown back upon itself, and a major Allied counteroffensive was underway. Japan had all but lost the war.

For example, Japan’s large, capable submarine force was used primarily in fleet support missions to attack enemy warships, or often in impractical efforts to deliver needed supplies to beleaguered military outposts. Had it been focused instead on attacking shipping along the vulnerable extended supply line between the United States and Australia, it might have seriously delayed the buildup of American forces in the southwest Pacific, drastically weakening their ability to take offensive action. By the same token, better protection and enlarging of Japan’s own merchant fleet—much earlier establishment of viable convoy and air cover systems and higher shipyard priorities—could have significantly increased the flow of captured resources from the south to the home islands and of war materials back to the fighting fronts.

Throughout the war, Japan’s powerful combined fleet concentrated on seeking a decisive battle while wasting its surface and air strength in futile efforts to defend strategically marginal forward island positions. Instead, Wood suggests, it should have remained a fleet in being, strengthening the Japanese defensive perimeter and holding itself in readiness for an ultimate decisive battle at a key opportunity late in the war. It would thus have been able to slow or even thwart the American naval advance on Japan itself and, indeed, the culminating strategic bombing campaign that devastated that nation.

In like manner, Wood says, Japan’s army and naval air assets were misused. They should have avoided overextension and attritional decline by integrating themselves into the great Japanese defense zone, delaying the onrush of American airpower and preparing to fight an all-out battle when it finally became necessary. At the same time, the Japanese kamikaze effort could have been maximized, with thousands of outmoded, expendable aircraft thrown in against American amphibious fleets. Given the significant losses kamikazes were able to inflict on U.S. forces at Okinawa, a
fuller kamikaze commitment earlier in the war would certainly have slowed, and possibly crippled, the American Pacific offensive.

Finally, Japanese army ground forces were surely a wasted asset. Hundreds of thousands of troops were trapped on bypassed islands, engaged in China or held in reserve in Manchuria and the home islands until late in the war. Most of these would have been far more effective if fully committed to the defense of key areas along and within the strategic perimeter. Backed by strong air and naval forces, they could have made vital points in the central Pacific—along with the Philippines, Saipan and Okinawa—far more difficult, if not prohibitively costly, to invade and capture.

How much the United States would be willing to pay for these islands would determine how the war would end.

Wood makes a convincing argument that the Japanese would have been far better off had they adhered to their original strategy. By failing to solidify their strategic defense zone, improperly using their military resources and frittering away their strongest assets, they lost the opportunity to achieve a better outcome of the great Pacific conflict. A different course could have made the fight far more difficult and costly for America. Had the struggle gone on into 1946 or 1947, war weariness and growing casualty rates might have forced Americans to conclude that the price of total victory was far higher than they could afford.

Wood’s careful examination of alternative possibilities in the Pacific war is an impressive example of good counterfactual history. Still, an important aspect of that war that he does not investigate is the possible timing and impact of the Soviet entry, leaving just one more “what if” for readers to contemplate.

COL. STANLEY L. FALK, AUS Ret., Ph.D., is a military historian and author of five books on the war in the Pacific.


Six weeks after his appointment as Secretary of State in January 1947, George C. Marshall was on his way to Moscow to join the next in a series of foreign ministers’ meetings attempting to guide the international relations of the post-World War II world. His experience there, which confirmed his understanding of the economic crisis facing Europe and the obstinacy and obstructionism of the Soviet Union, sowed seeds that would sprout five months later in a speech that would become the Marshall Plan.

In The Most Noble Adventure, Greg Behrman provides a comprehensive and detailed study of this massive humanitarian effort that served equally as an economic and political recovery program for the free nations of Europe. The lesser heroes on both sides of the Atlantic are identified and given deserved credit for making things work. Behrman details discussions of the political and economic means, which are thoroughly researched, interestingly presented and well documented.

Marshall was a conceptual thinker, seeing an ultimate goal and the strategy needed to achieve it, then expressing those aims in logical, understandable terms. He relied on the work of his staff officers, advisers and consultants to add the details, effect the management, obtain the resources and champion the plan to obtain governmental and public approval. That spadework was essential in both Europe and the United States. Marshall understood that success was primarily dependent upon European understanding and willingness to participate collectively.

It became apparent early on that subversion of the plan was a paramount aim of the Russians. The spread of communism to the West was dependent upon exploiting misery, proving the failure of capitalism and convincing all that the U.S. intent was the establishment of its own hegemony.

That the entire program, from concept to the dismantling of the management bureaucracy, was completed in four years is testament not only to the soundness of Marshall’s thinking, but also to the bipartisan work of the U.S. Congress and the cooperative unity with which Western Europe responded. There are obvious lessons for today’s world leaders about what can be accomplished when a plan is well crafted, when obstructionism is dismissed and when finite goals are established. Western Europe remained free and recovered economically from World War II not because U.S. dollars subsidized the effort, but rather because, thanks in large measure to the Marshall Plan, the public and its governmental representatives became convinced psychologically that it was possible.

Gen. Marshall is rightly revered and rightly honored by this volume as a principal architect of that success, but it is an honor he willingly shared and distributed among the many who made the Marshall Plan work. The Most Noble Adventure is a fitting record of the process; it is also a worthy educational contribution to its readers.

—Gen. Frederick J. Kroesen, USA Ret.

“Welcome to the infantry” is how SSgt. David Bellavia begins his memoir House to House: An Epic Memoir of War. “This is our day, our job. It sucks, and we hate it, but we endure for two reasons. First, there is nobility and purpose in our lives. We are America’s warrior class. We protect; we avenge. Second, every moment in the infantry is a test. If we measure up to the worst days, such as this one, it proves we stand a breed apart from all other men.”

House to House centers on the Battle of Fallujah, which took place in Iraq in the fall of 2004, and SSgt. Bellavia gives a realistic and sometimes gut-wrenching account of combat through the eyes of combat infantrymen—America’s warrior class—whose mission it is to find the enemy and kill or capture them.

House to House is about infantry combat in Iraq, but discounting the references to 21st-century weapons and technology, this story could be about men fighting at Yorktown, Gettysburg or Normandy. If he replaced the M4s with M1s or M16s, Bellavia could be describing infantrymen fighting in the mountains of Korea or the jungles of Vietnam.

The life (and death) of an infantryman has changed very little over the years. Infantrymen are the first ones in and the last ones out. They are carrying the biggest load on their backs and are armed to the teeth. They are wet, too cold or too hot because they have little or no protection from the weather. They are always tired, hungry and filthy. You may think you know what it’s like to be tired, hungry and filthy, but if you’re not a combat infantryman or a member of a special operations team, you don’t have a clue.

An infantryman lives in a world where the number one priority is his weapon, whether individual or crew served. Is it clean; does it work; is it loaded; and is it within arms’ reach at all times? He cares for it as if his life depends on it, because it does.

SSgt. Bellavia describes life as a combat infantryman at the squad and fire team level: a place where men bond so strongly that they are willing to die, not for the cause, but for each other; a place where leadership philosophy is not conveyed by a PowerPoint presentation, but by the squad leader looking over his shoulder and announcing to his men, “Follow me and do what I do”—a place where leaders don’t employ the principles of Lean Six Sigma or consider Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. It’s a place where a leader looks each man in the eye and decides who needs a word of encouragement and who needs a kick in the rear end to get him moving.

Emotions run high in an infantry unit in combat. Fear, stress and the will to survive are constant companions. No one thinks of himself as a hero; it’s always the other guy. And the disdain an infantryman feels for anyone he considers a nonwarrior, regardless of rank or station, borders on insubordination.

House to House is a well written story about the Battle of Fallujah and the men who fought there. This is their story—real American heroes who seem, from the very beginning, to be there when needed. I highly recommend this book; it will appeal to the serious and not so serious historian alike. Anyone who has ever answered to the term grunt, dogface, ground pounder or doughboy will love it.

—CSM Jimmie W. Spencer, USA Ret.

War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today. Max Boot. Gotham Books. 624 pages; maps; black and white photographs; index; $35.

Although not widely used now, four years after the high-technology attack into Iraq, the term “revolution in military affairs” does endure. Yet the notion of a technically based revolution in military affairs seems almost surreal, given that the United States finds itself confounded in large measure by an enemy using fairly “low-tech” methods.

It was not so long ago that to question the efficacy of technological solutions placed those who did so squarely in the camp of the Luddites. At the turn of the last century, the Army proposed replacing armor with knowledge. Now it seems that armor has a future, particularly as we rush to find ways to up-armor vehicles that were not intended as fighting platforms. The knowledge-based revolution has not yet won the day, so “old” technology is recycled and improved.

Max Boot’s thesis in War Made New is explicit: “Technology sets the parameters of the possible; it creates the potential for a military revolution.” Revolutions, however, stem from the technological conditions only when the combination of leadership and structure is right. Thus great minds are re-
quired to take advantage of technology and see combinations or uses where no one else has. The argument does not hold up well, however, even when Boot gets to choose the examples.

Boot’s foray into the nature of revolutions in military affairs is fundamentally about the centrality of technology as the means by which the conduct of war is changed. He divides some 500 years of history into four discrete eras including the gunpowder revolution, the first Industrial Revolution, the second Industrial Revolution and the information revolution. Within these four general eras, Boot explores five major themes that exemplify phenomena that he says persist. Among them: Technology alone is not enough to dominate; countries that are able to ride the wave of change succeed, whereas those that do not fail; leadership in some countries might see the wave, but miss it because of miscalculation; no military innovation has conferred indefinite advantage to the innovator; and, finally, the pace of innovation has accelerated.

Concepts drive technology rather than the reverse. Technology is nearly always the consequence of someone trying to solve a problem. Boot is right, of course, in noting that some technologies might be applied in new ways to support a revolution in military affairs, but as he himself says, no revolution can happen without intellectual capital being expended. For example, track-laying vehicles were possible—and some existed—before the invention of the tank, but the British invented the tank to solve a problem on the battlefield. Blitzkrieg, the nom de guerre for German tactical innovations before World War II, grew from a concept developed at the end of World War I, before the weapons existed to wage blitzkrieg warfare.

Much of what Boot describes is adaptation rather than revolution, but on the whole War Made New is not a bad read and offers some important insights, including his observation that effective bureaucracy is a key to generating revolutions in military affairs. This is an argument that requires more thought, as does his notion of finding the balance in the rate of change. Sadly, Boot does not spend as much time with these ideas as he does telling the reader everything he ever read, sometimes at the expense of focusing his argument.

—Col. Gregory Fontenot, USA Ret.

**Stonewall Jackson: A Biography.** Donald A. Davis. Palgrave Macmillan. 204 pages; black and white photographs; index; $21.95.

Lt. Gen. Thomas J. (Stonewall) Jackson emerged from the American Civil War with a glorious military reputation, which at the time eclipsed that of Gen. Robert E. Lee. To most historians, Jackson’s untimely demise in the aftermath of the Confederate victory at Chancellorsville deprived the South of its most formidable battlefield commander.


The Jackson who emerges from these pages is a leader shrouded in mystery. Drawn to West Point by the prospect of a free education, Jackson adapted easily to military life and improved his academic standing every year until he graduated in the class of 1846. Subsequent service during the Mexican War marked Jackson as a most promising young officer of undeniable martial ability.

In examining Jackson’s career, Davis follows a traditional and chronological path. He sheds little new light on Jackson’s retirement from the U.S. Army in 1852 and his years as professor of natural and experimental philosophy and of artillery tactics at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Va., a post he held until the Civil War began in 1861. Nor does Davis provide new insights into the conventional interpretation of Jackson’s strengths and weaknesses as an independent commander. Series editor Gen. Wesley K. Clark, USA Ret., substantially covers the same ground in a few pages of the foreword that Davis discusses in the entire monograph.

To his credit, Davis provides a very balanced assessment of Jackson’s merits as a battlefield commander. Davis does a commendable job addressing the darker side of Jackson’s personality, specifically his reckless disregard for personal safety, his vendettas against subordinate commanders, and his secrecy of orders and plans. These problems were exacerbated during the Seven Days Battles, during which Jackson repeatedly failed to support Lee’s offensive designed to raise the siege of Richmond in 1862.

These personal idiosyncrasies were offset by Jackson’s rapport with his soldiers, which inspired his command to achieve unparalleled military success. Jackson also made substantial improvements in the Confederate logistical system. In addition, his penchant for seizing tactical opportunities to throw his strength against the enemy’s weakness resulted in a number of Southern victories by his outmanned forces. Davis does provide a fresh perspective on his subject’s relationship with Lee, who remained Jackson’s most ardent supporter.

Davis is not as strong on his contingency theories as to what the repercussions might have been had Jackson
not succumbed to pneumonia in May 1863. Davis posits that Jackson’s death did not alter the final outcome of the Civil War, as eventually the “strong, resilient and wealthy North overcame the stubborn, poor South.” Lee certainly would have disagreed. Moreover, Davis’ opinion that Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s turning movement at Inchon and Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf’s “wide left hook,” to use Davis’ term, during Desert Storm reflect Jacksonian influence is dubious at best. So, too, is Davis’ assessment that “when Vietnam came along, Stonewall Jackson would have embraced the potential of such a force-multiplying machine as troop-carrying helicopters.”

These observations aside, Stonewall Jackson is a good read, but do not expect the book to lead to a novel interpretation of Jackson’s distinguished military career. If anything, this addition to the Great Generals series lacks the critical analysis that characterizes previous volumes.

—Col. Cole C. Kingseed, USA Ret.


In Homeward Bound, Richard H. Taylor records the problems American veterans have faced when they returned home from various wars. Beginning with the soldiers of the American Revolutionary War, who found few job opportunities and limited support waiting for them at home, Homeward Bound relates many of the shared experiences and hopes of those who served their country and describes the difficulties they encountered moving from battleground to the home front.

Taylor explores and connects the individual experiences of veterans from the Continental Army, the Mexican-American War and the War of 1812 through the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, describing their dreams and their disappointments and noting significant legislation along the way. Among the recurring concerns veterans have shared over the years are medical care, job training and placement, social acceptance, disability payments, education, retirement and even their own burials. Taylor also brings the treatment of women and minority veterans into his story, recording their many contributions as far back as the late 1700s and addressing the unique biases they encountered.

The organization of Homeward Bound is consistent, but the reader may find it choppy. Each chapter begins with a brief description of the era—a diary entry or a personal statement—relevant to the war being discussed. A summary of the social situation follows, then diaries or reflections of specific veterans and the U.S. government’s response to the needs of veterans. It is difficult, at times, to keep track of the many people presented, most of whom are mentioned only once, and some of whom reappear later with no reintroduction. The text sometimes seems disjointed.

A firmer editorial hand would have improved Homeward Bound. There are grammatical errors and typos, a couple of which are so glaring that, were the words not spelled correctly elsewhere, they would cast doubt on what is otherwise a carefully researched and lovingly compiled book. But Taylor’s is a knowledgeable voice. He is a Vietnam veteran, now retired from the Army, whose wife accompanied him from base to base and now shares his byline; their son and daughter are veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Taylor personally understands “why homecoming dreams are so hard to realize.” Veterans, those who share in their lives and readers who enjoy history will appreciate the insights of Homeward Bound.

—Toni Eugene

Briefly Noted...

West Point: An Inside Look at The Long Gray Line. Roger Charles Miller and Linda Foster. Image Publishing Ltd. 168 pages; color photographs; $44.50. To order, visit www.rogermillerphoto.com or call (410) 566-1222.

Following a foreword by Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, U.S. Army retired, West Point: An Inside Look at The Long Gray Line provides a stunning visual tour of the U.S. Military Academy. Photographs by Roger Charles Miller are accompanied by explanatory text and divided into thematic sections, including the campus, cadet life, academic programs, military instruction, athletics, commencement and the surrounding area. There is also a section in which a few notable graduates reflect on their West Point experiences.

Detracting from the book’s message are the numerous grammatical errors throughout the text, but fortunately, the real substance of the book is in its...
photographs, and they are sharp, clear and rich in color. The campus is captured thoroughly. Readers who have never been there will feel as if they have, and images of cadets in classrooms and training with tanks and howitzers truly offer an inside look at today’s U.S. Military Academy.

The Old Guard in 1898: A Short History of the Third United States Infantry Regiment. Richard M. Lytle. Scarecrow Press Inc. 226 pages; black and white photographs; index; $35.

Organized as the First American Regiment in 1784, the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, also known as The Old Guard, has served with distinction for more than 200 years and is the oldest active infantry regiment in the U.S. Army. Nevertheless, surprisingly little has been written on the history of the 3rd Infantry, and Richard M. Lytle’s book The Old Guard in 1898 is a welcome addition to the historiography of the subject.

As the title suggests, Lytle focuses on the history of The Old Guard in the Spanish-American War. The chapters relating the history of The Old Guard before and after the war against Spain, however, are comprehensive enough to make the book an excellent summary history of the regiment. Although too reliant on period newspaper accounts, Lytle adeptly weaves the article excerpts into an interesting narrative that is a springboard for anyone interested in the 3rd Infantry or the Spanish-American War.

Images des Américains dans la Grande Guerre. ECPAD. Éditions Italiques. 160 pages; black and white photographs; 18€. To order, e-mail the publishers at contact@italiques.com.

In 1917, as World War I raged, American soldiers arrived in France to battle the Central Powers along with their French comrades. Renewing ties that had been forged during the American Revolution through the Marquis de Lafayette’s assistance to the fledgling United States, the American soldiers trained and fought side by side with the French. The strong relationship that grew and the skills that were shared paid off in the decisive battles of 1918.

Images des Américains dans la Grande Guerre is a fascinating compilation of black and white photographs documenting this period of brotherhood. Coverage includes the volunteers who served in France before the U.S. declaration of war, the arrival in France of Gen. John J. Pershing and American troops, training for trench warfare and combat. With introductory material and captions in both French and English, this book sheds light on an interesting historical period as well as the solidarity allies share in times of war.


A veteran of Korea and Vietnam, John D. Roche relies on his experience as both a Veterans Affairs (VA) claims adjudicator and a county veterans’ service officer to advise veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on how to file a successful claim in The Veteran’s PTSD Handbook.

PTSD can result from numerous traumas, and a veteran must first establish a connection between service and the condition, a difficult diagnosis at best. Roche explains what documents are needed, where to find them and how to collect them. He stresses the importance of filing a well-grounded claim to obtain benefits and assistance and takes the reader through the dos and don’ts step-by-step.

The appeals process is a time warp, and Roche shows how to avoid it. (Once a claim is denied by the VA, an appeal can take three to five years—as many as 10—and involves a mass of red tape and paperwork.) He explains the regulations and reality of the VA adjudication process, describes what evidence to present and how to organize it, and outlines a veteran’s rights and how to protect them. The Veteran’s PTSD Handbook contains many facsimiles of correspondence and forms that illustrate the claims process and is a comprehensive do-it-yourself guide to obtaining PTSD disability compensation.