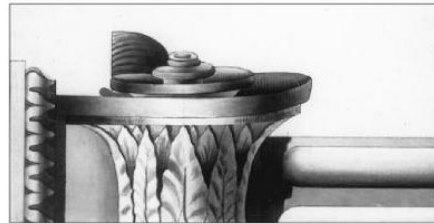


WHAT IF?

THE WORLD'S FOREMOST
MILITARY HISTORIANS IMAGINE
WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN



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What If?: The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine what Might Have Been
By Robert Cowley, Stephen E. Ambrose, Penguin Putnam Inc., New York, 1999 London,
Macmillan, 2000. (ISBN: 0333751833)

Essays by respected military historians, including Alistair Horne, Stephen Ambrose, David McCullough, James McPherson, and John Keegan, consider the consequences if history had turned out differently, such as if the weather on D-Day had been worse or if Washington had not escaped from Long Island. They ponder the 'what ifs' of history, concentrating on some of the most intriguing military turning points of the last 3,000 years. Clean square hardback in an unclipped d/w - 395 pages. 35,000 first printing.

Recensione editoriale - Kirkus Reviews. A child's imaginings about an apocalyptic day that might be looming turn into a heavenly view when his mother takes over and presents somewhat more positive prospects. Little Monster has a list of "what ifs" that are scaring him more even as he talks to his mother about them: What will happen if he wakes up and there's a great big black hole in the floor, what if there's a spider, what if he is falling down the hole, with the spider, and the house is on fire? His mother admits how frightening it sounds. From exquisite understatement to sublime overstatement, Mother Monster spins for Little Monster a day of such rapturous happiness--balloons, ice cream, playing--that she wipes away his fears. Collins's cartoons work well in this context, serving both to dispel the more evil intimations, and to inject the benign moments with a touch of monstrousness.

Recensione editoriale - [Cahners Business Information](#) (c) 1999. Counterfactuals--considerations of alternate outcomes--make up one of the main provinces of military history. This volume, for which an A&E companion TV documentary is scheduled in November, incorporates two dozen

essays and a dozen sidebars on what might have happened by writers of diverse specialties, including generalist Lewis Lapham, novelist Cecelia Holland and historians John Keegan, David McCullough and Stephen Ambrose. Readers willing to be open-minded can consider Europe's fate had the Mongols continued their 13th-century course of conquest. They can speculate on the death in battle of Hernán Cortés and the consequences of an Aztec Empire surviving to present times. Thanks to James McPherson, they can read of a battle of Gettysburg fought in 1862 (instead of 1963) and resulting in a Confederate victory, or the consequences of a Confederate defeat at Chancellorsville courtesy of Steven Sears. Ambrose suggests that Allied defeat on D-Day would have meant nuclear devastation for Germany in the summer of 1945. Arthur Waldron presents a China, and a world, that might have been far different had Chiang Kai-shek not taken the risk of invading Manchuria in 1946. Consistently well drawn, these scenarios open intellectual as well as imaginative doors for anyone willing to walk through them. Maps and photos not seen by PW. Audio rights to Simon & Schuster; foreign rights sold in the U.K. and Germany. (Sept.)

Replace "The World's" in the subtitle with "American and British," and you have an accurate description of the book. A series of essays, padded with a dozen or so one-page counterfactual presentations. An endlessly fascinating idea with great potential, unfortunately not fully realized. Through 2700 years of history the authors, with varying amounts of detail, and with varying degrees of success, review some great military turning points in history, and their alternate outcomes. One great flaw is the lack of consistency in approach, layout, and thoroughness; Cowley is too lax an editor. Of particular note, some of the more well-known historians, like Keegan and Ambrose, present pieces that are so brief, and so lacking in academic rigor, one wonders if they weren't written on the back of a cocktail napkin. Others, like Josiah Ober's essay which suggests a lasting, unified Roman-Persian empire (!!) simply if Alexander the Great had died early (!), are ridiculous. That said, there are also some truly outstanding pieces, such as Theodore Cook's detailed, thoughtful consideration of American Pacific long-term strategy following a defeat at Midway, or Arthur Waldron's speculation on a Nationalist China. About half of the one-pagers are good too, such as the one on the New York taxi that might have killed Winston Churchill. Overall, the essays provide good overviews of particular events, and at the very least, make you think about the whims of weather and men. Ultimately, this book is an enjoyable read, and a nice overview of military history. It cannot, however, be considered a work of serious scholarship. A few non-Western contributions, or some rebuttals of the sillier claims, might have given this book some weight.