

Behind the Lines Study Guide

Behind the Lines by W. E. B. Griffin

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Plot Summary

This book demonstrates the wry observation that "military literature is to literature as military music is to music." It proceeds with a great mechanical clattering and rumbling, like a Sherman tank plunging into battle. The author is adept at weaving an engaging narrative weighted down with the sort of procedural and descriptive detail that one might expect to find in the Marine Corps Field Manual. This deadening effect suffocates the kind of humor and irony, for example, that lifts the antiwar novel "Catch 22" to the status of absurdist masterpiece, or the lyricism that endows "A Soldier of the Great War" with the warm glow of profound humanism. Ultimately, the sensitive reader desires to know a great deal more about the characters and their motivations than the format of a military log book, which forms the structure of this novel can provide. However, for those readers fascinated with the minutiae of military life, the novel is convincing and even overwhelming in its detailed descriptions and coarse-grained narrative thrust.

The reader discovers that what goes on "Behind the Lines" is a maelstrom of internecine scheming, status-seeking, gossip, genuflecting to rank, and incestuous rivalry with a thick dollop of military protocol. Page after page of two-dimensional characters discuss their own careers, hopes for advancement, petty resentments and the minutiae of daily functioning in the Marine Corps. A clinical dysfunction and emotional paralysis seems to grip the principal characters. The reader may well see a parallel between the lives of these men of war and the classic, textbook dysfunctional family modeled on the alcoholic family. In this paradigm, the father (an alcoholic, a ranking officer, and politician) is an unpredictable person with the power to make or break the members of his family (regiment, unit, and patrol). The mother (co-alcoholic, and symbolic of most of the women in this book) is both victim and enabler who unwittingly perpetuates the disease of the alcoholic. The children (lower-ranked officers and recruits) fear and worship the father at the same time (ambivalence), which is a form of neurosis that renders them emotional zombies disconnected from their own feelings.

The book details the comings and goings of upper-rank Marine officers in the Philippines in the early days of World War II after the Japanese have overrun the islands and American fighting forces, plagued by a shortage of supplies and personnel, are reduced to defensive sparring. There is plenty of rank-pulling alongside an institutionalized deference for eccentricity in top brass, such as General Douglas MacArthur ("El Supremo") and even Brig. Gen. Wendell Fertig whose disdain for military life is coupled with his brilliance as a soldier. Fertig organizes a roan campaign of counter-attack deep in the tropical jungles that is not officially sanctioned and that raises many thorny questions about leadership and protocol. As a sort of protégée of the unpredictable General MacArthur, Fertig is a guerrilla fighter who commands his own militia and survives by his wits while ignoring military bureaucracy and field manuals. In this regard, MacArthur secretly admires Fertig, although he is irritated by his unconventional methods that hold up a mirror to his own style of fighting.



The thick layers of protocol and rank that suffuse the action in this book can make the prose nearly impenetrable to all but the most hardened career Marine Corps soldier. Perhaps this is nothing more than the author focusing on his "target audience" to the detriment of the general reader who may feel alienated from both character and plot as frustrations mount with the seemingly endless recitation of rank, privilege, paranoia and misplaced pride that hold the book together. With 80-something books in this and closely-related genres to his credit, W.E.B. Griffith is obviously prolific, but as in any mass-produced product, the reader may with good reason, question its quality.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

On an April day in 1942 at Luzon on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippine Islands, reservist and engineer Lieutenant Wendell Fertig arrives at headquarters for an appointment with Maj. Gen Edward King, commander of Luzon Forces. The general asks Fertig whether the unit is prepared for and capable of destroying all weaponry as the Japanese are overrunning the island, getting closer each day. Fertig reassures the general that all is prepared, and the general hands Fertig the silver leaf signifying his promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel. In Corregidor, Maj. Stephen Paulson sends First Lt. James Weston on a mission to purchase replacement parts for the failing electrical generator, and gives him a huge stash of cash.

Sgt. Percy Lewis Everly, a native West Virginian whose career in the Marines has been punctuated by drinking and fighting bouts, seriously contemplates desertion as the Japanese forces approach. His job is to manage the two-gun .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun battery at Kindley Airfield. Everly is convinced that he will either get killed in the Japanese invasion or be taken as a prisoner of war, which he considers worse. "The Aid" that everyone expects to deliver supplies and weaponry to stem the invasion will never come, Everly is convinced. So desertion makes perfectly good sense to him. He is assigned to accompany Weston on the search for generator parts.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

As the Japanese overrun the Philippine Islands, Wendell Fertig is one of a group of American Marine Corps officers who have grown disenchanted with the war and particularly offended that the Allied forces don't seem able to stanch the Japanese invasion. At the outset, the reader sees Fertig as a straight-arrow Marine who is promoted to lieutenant colonel and given the task of destroying American weapons to keep them out of Japanese hands. But Fertig is galled that his first major combat assignment is one of surrender. He finds companionship in the company of other Marines, such as Sergeant Percy Everly, a hard-drinking West Virginian who is disgusted with the turn of the war. Even in the early pages, Fertig's independent streak and sense of soldierly honor are evident, as well as his disdain for military bureaucracy.



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

With Sergeant Everly and 12 other servicemen aboard, Weston's two boats make a stop at Bohol Island before proceeding island-to-island toward Mindanao, then Brisbane. The entourage sails only a few hours a day then hides from detection by the Japanese. Along the way, at each stop they pick up more servicemen also trying to get to Mindanao. But Weston harbors a conviction they will never reach Mindanao, much less Australia. When the men finally reach the military base at Mindanao, they discover it is a Japanese provincial capitol originally built by Americans before the war but abandoned after the American surrender. At the still-operating American base, "Weston's Weary Would-Be Warriors," as they now call themselves are welcomed to the island. After a long trek through the jungle, Weston and his men finally reach a house where he is introduced to "General" Fertig, who has so designated himself in what seems an extraordinary act of egoism. Fertig tells Weston that, according to military law, he and his men are now under his command. After speaking with Fertig, Weston reflects "there was a disconcerting aura about the whole conversation, at once amusing and frightening. It was simultaneously insane and utterly practical."

Fertig has his Filipino house servant deliver a set of locally-made silver captain's bars to Weston, whom he has ordered to shave off his beard. Everly and Weston return with parts for the generator and get it to function. Someone produces an obsolete M94 cryptographic machine so the Mindanao base could begin communicating with the American base at Brisbane, Australia. The code used by the machine is an endless series of jumbled letters and words. Although they can't reach Australia, the radio short wave operators reach the naval base at Mare Island, San Francisco. Through that connection, they send a coded message from Fertig to his wife in Golden, Colorado saying, "Pineapples for breakfast," a reference to earlier days when the couple vacationed on the Dole Plantation in the Philippines. Mrs. Fertig sends the return message that "all is well."

At the Office of the Military Governor of Mindanao, Brig. Gen. Kurokawa Kenzo is becoming agitated because of the intercepted code messages sent back and forth by Americans on their outdated encryption device. He demands to know whether there is, in fact, a real General Fertig but his subordinates can't tell him for certain. The decoders and interpreters run into semantic difficulties with such Americanisms as "hot poop" and "hot Yankees." By triangulating radio signals between California and the provincial capitol, the Japanese determine that Fertig probably is real and hiding somewhere in the mountains.

President Roosevelt summons Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox to the White House to discuss the military situation in the Philippines; specifically, Fertig's guerrilla operations in the face of a declaration by Gen. Douglas MacArthur that such efforts would be "impossible" at present. Knox remarks, sarcastically, "We all know that Douglas



MacArthur is incapable of being wrong, don't we?" The president instructs Knox to investigate Fertig and his operations and to report back to him. A detachment of Americans under the command of Fertig and led by Everly and Weston ambush a Japanese convoy, killing all the drivers and taking the supplies of rice, other staples and gasoline. The men douse the trucks in gasoline, torch them and escape back into the jungle.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Fertig wastes no time in recruiting other Americans and Filipinos to his rapidly-growing guerrilla militia. Fertig matter-of-factly informs a brigade sent into the jungle to find him that they are now all under his command. Using an encryption machine from the technological dark ages, Fertig's volunteers establish communications lines with Brisbane, Australia and the United States.

Fertig and his guerrilla force are a burr in the saddle of both Americans and Japanese. The forces of Emperor Hirohito desperately struggle to decipher the code used in these communications, while also attempting to locate the transmitter. Meanwhile, American military brass fumes over this rebel movement and debates whether to send reinforcements. At the same time, Fertig's group ambushes a Japanese convoy, killing all the soldiers and taking their supplies into the jungle. Fertig thus establishes both his leadership qualities and his savage fighting spirit.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

The Japanese high provincial command on Mindanao is "outraged" by the highway ambush and Major Ieyasu Matsudaira demands that 43 Filipino males from the surrounding area be hanged for the massacre of Japanese soldiers. Captain Saikaku cautions that the emperor's policy is to promote the support of people in the Philippines; hanging innocent civilians would be counter to that objective. The major insists that U.S.-led forces, including Filipinos, are guilty because of the copious American shell casings and other debris left behind.

Saijaju says it would be better to arrest all the able-bodied Filipino males within a five-mile radius of the ambush site and subject them to intensive interrogation, rather than commit a mass execution, because of the effect on the Filipino population. A Japanese colonel calls Saikaku's idea "very interesting" and says he wants to consider it. Cryptographers tell the group they have deciphered Fertig's coded messages and have determined that the frequency of the messages between Fertig and Australia has dropped and that his radio transmitter is constantly being moved around in remote parts of the jungle.

Staetside, the reader learns of the romantic liaison between socialite Ernestine Sage of Bernardsville, N.J. and Marine Lt. Kenneth McCoy. At "The Congressional Country Club," Marine Maj. James Brownlee, a Princeton graduate who has just completed his officer's training, hangs out while waiting for an assignment. There he meets First Lt. Robert Macklin, a veteran fighting marine who has been in combat at different locations around the world, wounded and decorated. Brownlee admires Macklin but is puzzled that he has not been promoted to a higher rank because of his service. Macklin tells him the reason is that his records have been lost. Brownlee then goes to Marine Corps headquarters in Washington and puts in a request that Macklin be promoted to captain.

After receiving his commission, McCoy is assigned to the cryptographic unit in Brisbane, Australia. It is evident to McCoy that two officers—Maj. Hon Song Do, Signal Corps, and Second Lt. John Moore, meet daily with Gen. Douglas MacArthur and thus are privy to some of the most sensitive military secrets. Meanwhile, Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Fleming Pickering sends a telegram to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox telling him that the more he looks into Fertig's guerrilla campaign, the more sense it seems to make. He asks for supplies and \$250,000 in gold to be delivered to Fertig to sustain his operations.

Marine Brig. Gen. Fleming Pickering, who is on a first name basis with General MacArthur, learns that Admiral Nimitz may loan the Marine Corps the American submarine Narwhal because of the unavailability of an Australian submarine to make the reinforcement mission to Fertig. Pickering suggests that Fertig may have a few loose screws, and admits that the top brass may secretly be hoping that his guerrilla



effort fails because a success would make them look bad. Secretary of the Navy Knox tells Admiral Leahy that President Roosevelt is trying to convince General MacArthur to let the Office of Strategic Services take over the Fertig mission. And General Pickering learns that a Navy psychiatrist has created a checklist for the leader of the Fertig reinforcement team to use as a way of testing Fertig's sanity.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Fertig gains an ally in Brig. Gen Fleming Pickering, a close associate of General MacArthur, who forwards to Navy Secretary Knox a request for arms, ammunition, supplies and \$250,000 in gold coins to sustain the guerrilla campaign. Somewhat backhandedly, President Roosevelt gives his approval to Fertig's operation by requesting General MacArthur to put the effort under the aegis of the Office of Strategic Services. This would also, of course, give Roosevelt some control over the breakaway effort and help to prevent both military and public relations disasters. Both political and military officials begin to question Fertig's sanity and suspect that he may be in the grip of a messiah complex—too much to bear alongside MacArthur's egotism and grandiosity. In sharp contrast to the easy life of military rulers in Washington, with their country clubs, opulent lifestyles, and infighting, there is the bare-knuckle idealism and risk-taking quality of Fertig and his followers.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Washington, Marine Col. F.L. Rickabee receives an angry cable from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox excoriating him for complaining that Captain Macklin, assigned to Rickabee from the Office of Strategic Services, is "unacceptable." Captain Haughton assures Rickabee that he will escort Macklin to the airport for his flight to Pearl Harbor, as directed by Knox. Macklin has been assigned to participate in the supply mission to Fertig. In Brisbane, Australia Brig. Gen. Pickering demands a meeting with General MacArthur to discuss how President Roosevelt's politics is affecting the mission.

Roosevelt is loth to order MacArthur directly to include OSS men in the guerrilla campaign; MacArthur doesn't support the mission to Fertig because if Fertig's counter-offensive fails, it would be demoralizing to the Filipinos. MacArthur tells Pickering that if Fertig's mission should fail, after he has announced he would return in victory to the Philippines, then it would be "playing right into the hands of the Japanese." Ignoring MacArthur's towering ego, Pickering tells him he plans simply to carry out the orders given to him, to get into Mandanao with supplies and return immediately.

At the naval air base in Brisbane, Marine Corps officers review the list of personnel to be included in the mission to Fertig and debate each man's pros and cons. Meanwhile, Japanese officials can't make heads or tails of the intercepted, coded American transmissions. The only thing they can identify is that "first dog" is code for "first sergeant" of a company of Marines. The Japanese work furiously to decode messages between Brigadier General Fertig and Australia which they suspect to be about confirmation of Fertig as a legitimate American soldier on an approved mission. The death of Major Brownlee, who was to be a key officer in the Fertig mission, causes confusion and prompts this elliptical, double-speak response from Brig. Gen. Fleming Pickering to a question about whether the promised submarine will be forthcoming: "I never heard a word about it. Until I do, I am forced to draw the conclusion that either [Navy Secretary Frank] Knox or [Col. 'Wild Bill'] *Donovan has decided I don't have the need to know." Capt. Robert Macklin, who is intensely disliked by Pickering, is recuperating from his injuries when summoned to Col. Jack Stecker's office where he learns of Brownlee's death and is informed that he is now in command of the Fertig mission, known as Operation Windmill. At a top-level meeting of Navy and Marine Corps brass, General Pickering learns from Admiral Wagan there is a good chance the submarine Narwhal will be replaced by the Sunfish, a standard submarine not capable of carrying as much cargo as the Narwhal on Operation Windmill.

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

The reader is given a total immersion baptism in the internecine struggles and political infighting within the military. Acronyms, titles, covert and overt schemes erupt like



Vesuvius, covering the war effort in a paralyzing lava flow of anger and outrage around the status of Capt. Robert Macklin. The author also unveils how personal and political motives prevent the mission to Fertig from coalescing into action. For reasons of self-preservation, both President Roosevelt and General MacArthur seem incapable of action. The dithering at top levels of government, though, has little effect on Operation Windmill, as the mission to Fertig is called. Plans go forward for the selection of personnel and equipment for the undertaking. Despite the passions and procrastination at the top, Brigadier General Pickering quietly organizes the mission to Fertig that he's been commanded to execute.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary

Navy Lt. Chambers Lewis, recovering in a Brisbane hospital from a head injury he sustained in a drunken bathtub fall, ruminates on how many submarine missions he's been on despite the fact he is a coward, terrified of being in a metal tube underwater. A messenger from Admiral Wagram delivers word to Lewis that he is being released from the hospital as recovered from his concussion, and must report for duty as the admiral's aide. Six weeks later, the Navy determines that the submarine Remora is missing at sea and presumed lost with all hands. Lewis volunteers for service aboard the Sunfish on Operation Windmill and is so assigned. Six weeks later, the submarine Remora on which Lewis served many missions, is determined to be missing and presumed lost at sea with all hands.

Col. "Wild Bill" Donovan in Brisbane receives a copy of a telegram from Brisbane Station Chief Waterson to the director of the Office of Special Services in Washington, DC, that "strongly recommends" the removal of Captain Macklin from Operation Windmill on psychiatric and competency issues. Waterson also strongly recommends a "suitably trained and thoroughly evaluated" replacement for Macklin be sent immediately. Attorney Stanford Morrissette and Donovan discuss their options. Morrissette tells Donovan he should comply with the request, but Donovan fears it would make him look stupid to his superiors. Because, as Donovan puts it, "I don't want to look like a fool before the president, Knox and MacArthur. It is my decision that Captain Macklin goes on the mission."

Pickering, McCoy, Lewis and Macklin discuss the mission of the Sunfish over a bottle of Famous Grouse: the timing of its surfacing a few hundred yards offshore, the logistics of getting men and materiel to shore—plus the fact that they are scheduled to arrive on Christmas Eve. This is not popular among the men; some tongues turn sharp under the influence of whiskey but no serious disagreements arise. After Macklin leaves, Sessions explains to Lieutenant Lewis that the reason McCoy despises Macklin "is not that Captain Macklin has far less than the normal issue of testicles, but that Captain Macklin considers his first duty to take care of Captain Macklin, and fuck everybody else."

Everly and Weston ride a motorcycle to the beach area of Mindanao where the Sunfish is expected to make landfall. As they proceed through the jungle with their Thompson sub-machine guns, they see a Japanese patrol of four soldiers walking along the beach. As they approach, they see a small boat headed toward the beach. Everly greets the boat, McCoy aboard, and Weston tracks the Japanese patrol. He gets close enough to them while still secluded to attack; he takes out two Japanese with his sub-machine gun and shoots the other two with his pistol. Then he gathers up their rifles and ammunition and heads back to the spot where he left Everly.



They watch proudly as the Sunfish surfaces and approaches, crew members streaming on deck and loading up its large-bore cannons. McCoy orders Weston to wade into the water up to his waste and help to unload carbine rifles and other supplies that will be floated ashore; then he is to take the small boat and head to the submarine for a briefing with General Douglas MacArthur. Weston makes it to the Sunfish and is hoisted by rope to the deck, where he is welcomed. While he waits for his meeting, Weston hungrily eats steak and eggs, cookies and coffee. Meanwhile, the men on the beach shuttle four rubber boats back and forth between the submarine and the beach unloading supplies that they stash in the jungle vegetation.

Staff Sgt. Stephen Koffler meets Brig. Gen. Wendell Fertig at last, after being brought to his secluded lean-to on a motorcycle driven by a Filipino. Koffler is one of a group that includes three officers and a Marine sergeant sent to meet the elusive Fertig, who appears shabbily dressed and suspicious. Koffler tells him the supplies of guns, ammunition, feed, and gold coins are unloaded and headed for his camp. Fertig tells himself that the shipment of gold means that the military establishment takes his guerrilla operation seriously.

Chapters 13-15 Analysis

The author's freewheeling style of writing sometimes causes the reader confusion, as in this sentence in Chapter 13, p. 384: "One did not cross someone like Fleming Pickering. Donovan should be smart enough to recognize this, Morrissette believed, and didn't." In strict grammatical construction, the subjunctive "didn't" links to "should be," which is ungrammatical. "Wasn't" is the proper verb joined to the subject, Donovan, so the fully formed sentence must read: "Donovan should be smart enough to recognize this, Morrissette believed, and wasn't." Any style of writing that slows the reader, or causes him/her to reach for a grammar book, is a capricious style that does not serve the narrative or reader.

Doubts about Fertig's sanity persist and reach top officials in Washington, although Colonel Donovan declines a suggestion that he find a "replacement" for Fertig. Again, the motive is not the strength or mission of the military, but personal ego gratification. Donovan doesn't want to look bad to his superiors. With the arrival of emissaries from the Marine Corps who tell Fertig his requested supplies and gold coins are on their way, he gains something close to credibility. The military is shown as functioning somehow despite its inherent dysfunction. The difference between defeat and victory can hinge on fate and timing as well as upon the sanity of military leaders.



Chapter 16-17

Chapter 16-17 Summary

Brig. Gen. Fertig takes umbrage at the fact the military delegation has come, among other reasons, to assess and analyze the effectiveness of his operation. He reminds them that he has been fighting against overwhelming odds without adequate men or supplies. Fertig nurses a resentment about the situation and particularly the well-fed, well-clothed and well-armed Americans who have tracked him down. He tells them that his volunteers are potentially a valuable asset to the war effort and "not a motley crew of insubordinate lunatics headed by a self-promoted egomaniac." They discuss the logistics of getting the Sunfish safely out of Japanese-held waters, then have a drink of scotch. At Japanese headquarters, Brig. Gen. Kurokawa Kenzo excoriates Colonel Himasatsu for the poor performance of his unit in fending off attacks by American "bandits" who have killed seven officers and 116 enlisted troops. Himasatsu confesses that he has found no one who understands the movements of Fertig's forces. The general tells him to interview thousands of Filipinos, if necessary, to get some intelligence.

Aboard the submarine as it departs Mindanao, Weston observes Lieutenant Commander Houser on the conning tower scanning the horizon with his binoculars. Suddenly, Houser spots what appears to be a Japanese bomber headed directly for the sub. He orders an emergency dive but just as the H8K plane comes within firing range, the plane's wing explodes in a ball of fire and the craft spins out of control into the sea. Fast behind the Japanese plane is a squadron of smaller, American Marine Corps fighter planes that have shot down the enemy aircraft. A swell of cheering rises from the Sunfish. Weston and Pickering meet General MacArthur at his home on the Brisbane military base; they share drinks with Mrs. MacArthur and El Supremo praises Fertig and his campaign emphatically. The group enjoys a well-prepared dinner as MacArthur reminisces about his days as a cadet at West Point.

Fertig, Everly and McCoy discuss various ways of getting personnel aboard the Sunfish before it sails for more supplies. The Marines position themselves out of sight at various spots on the highway and await the Japanese truck convoy. When the convoy comes into view, they kill the driver and passenger of the first truck, and take out the driver and passengers in the last truck. They notice that Captain Macklin shoots the Japanese bodies along the road in the head with his rifle. Macklin, McCoy and the others lead six women evacuees to the beach. They put the evacuees on the rubber boat to take them to the submarine, and Macklin asks Major Fredericks when he should board the lifeboat. The major tells Macklin he will stay there because he is needed. McCoy hands his carbine to Fredericks and says, "Take care of yourself, Macklin." Then he wades off in the surf. Operation Windmill a success, President Roosevelt sends a congratulatory telegram to Brig. Gen. Pickering notifying him that he has been promoted to deputy director, Office of Strategic Services, Pacific Operations.

Chapter 16-17 Analysis

In the wake of another attack on a Japanese convoy, Japanese leaders are outraged and want revenge. Ambivalence about Operation Windmill continues until the mission is a success. General MacArthur even joins the jubilant supporters of Fertig's fighting fanatics. Roosevelt promotes General Pickering, who has supported the effort consistently. Even Macklin is redeemed by showing bravery during a second guerrilla ambush of a Japanese convoy. The supplies are on their way aboard the Sunfish and a Japanese retreat seems imminent. Daring, discipline, and passionate leadership win the day.



Characters

Wendell Fertig

Brig. Gen. Wendell Fertig, whose name means "ready" in German, is the undisputed anti-hero of this war novel. He is a lovably eccentric renegade warrior, but not as much of a square cog in a round hole as Yossarian, the anti-hero of the absurdist, comic novel *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller. Fertig seems a true patriot, impatient with the military bureaucracy and itching for a fight with the enemy instead of a neurotic survivalist like the reluctant bomber pilot Yossarian. The rogue officer commands a great deal of respect and loyalty from his men as he organizes a guerrilla attack against the Japanese in the Philippine Islands in 1942. Although he is absent and only alluded to by other characters for most of the novel, his presence is nevertheless felt as a kind of inevitable force for right not unlike the command by Gen. George Washington of the ragtag Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur

General MacArthur is a tall, courtly, otherworldly figure who seems to float above the struggles of the ordinary soldier. He wears rumpled khakis and chews on a corncob pipe, and is given to such majestic and somewhat opaque statements as, "I shall return." A West Pointer, MacArthur is at once the embodiment of the American soldier and a first-class eccentric. The general is a puzzlement and a thorn in the side of President Roosevelt, who has him stationed in Brisbane during the heat of the campaign for the Philippines after their egos clash over military tactics. MacArthur says a guerrilla operation by American forces in the Philippines is unwise and impossible, yet he reluctantly warms to the outlaw guerrilla campaign waged by Brig Gen. Wendell Fertig. MacArthur seems torn between the rigid protocols of the Army and the need to win in combat by any means. The novel also suggests that MacArthur sees a lot of himself in Brigadier General Fertig.

President Franklin Roosevelt

Ever the adept politician, Roosevelt stays one step ahead of MacArthur's crafty power plays until he finally removes him from the Philippines and stations him in Brisbane, Australia after a clash of egos. Roosevelt thus buys himself some time and neutralizes the general's power by placing him out of the combat zone without demotion or dismissal. To Roosevelt, World War II is as much a political as a military fight. The president must get approval in Congress for his wartime budget and serve as commander-in-chief while ensuring that military brass do not overstep their authority. Despite their differences, the relationship between Roosevelt and MacArthur is cordial, respectful and free of rancor—probably because both powerful men may need each other at some future time.



Lt. Col. Philip J. (Phil) DePress

Lt. Col. DePress' name says it all. He is a crestfallen officer on the staff of General MacArthur. DePress was a member of the defeated 26th Cavalry whose members had been forced to eat their horses or face starvation just before the Philippines fell to the Japanese invasion. Colonel DePress is sent to Washington as an office courier for General MacArthur to bring a personal letter from El Supremo congratulating him on his promotion to brigadier general.

Captain Robert Macklin

If there is an evil enemy within the ranks of the Marines, it is Captain Macklin. First Lieutenant Kenneth McCoy thinks Macklin is a coward who puts his own safety and survival ahead of the welfare of his fellow troops.

First Lieutenant Kenneth McCoy

McCoy is a hot-blooded, meat-and-potatoes Irishman with the nickname "killer." He is one of the troops who despises Macklin initially, but he comes to respect Macklin after he demonstrates courage in combat.

Capt. Matsuo Saikaku

Captain Saikaku is the primary Japanese officer stationed at the Mindanao military installation charged with deciphering American code being transmitted on obsolete equipment between the Philippines and the U.S. and Australia.

Brig. Gen. Fleming Pickering

Brigadier General Pickering is one of the top Marine Corps brass stationed in Brisbane, Australia who reports directly to General MacArthur. His idiosyncrasies include driving his own car and living in a rented house near the race track instead of in military barracks provided for the officers. The general also refuses a personal bodyguard, and usually seems impatient with military bureaucracy, which angers his fellow officers but endears him to the rank-and-file troops. Pickering is known to be on a first name basis with El Supremo.

Mrs. Hortense Cavendish

Mrs. Cavendish runs the domestic services for officers in Brisbane under the direct command of General MacArthur. She is a plump, 50-ish, matronly woman who is both efficient and orderly. She has a husband and two sons in military service in the Royal Australian Army, Navy and Air Force stationed in Africa. Brigadier General Pickering



introduces her to newly-arrived Marine Corps Capt. Ed Sessions as someone "you disobey at your peril."

Ernestine Sage

Ernestine (Ernie) Sage is the fiancée of First Lieutenant Kenneth McCoy. They meet occasionally whenever McCoy is in Washington, and exchange telephone messages whenever possible during McCoy's combat duties in the Philippines. She is an irreverent, high-spirited woman in her 20s who obviously loves him as much as he loves her. Their relationship provides the only real semblance of a romance during the novel.



Objects/Places

Famous Grouse

Famous Grouse is a type of Scotch whiskey that appears and reappears throughout the book. It is the drink of choice among the Marine Corps, Navy, and Army brass. It is considered both a status symbol as well as fine liquor.

Thompson .45 ACP submachine gun

This weapon is a relatively light, portable type of machine gun used extensively by American troops in the Philippine Islands during World War II. It is well-adapted for jungle warfare both because of its fire power and ease of handling.

Washington, DC

The nation's capitol is the center of the military infrastructure web that extends into the Philippine Islands and other operations in the Pacific region. Much of the action of the novel involves interaction between high-ranked officials in Washington and the various military bases throughout the world but especially in the Pacific at places such as Luzon, Pearl Harbor, Mindanao, Brisbane and elsewhere.

Mindanao

Mindanao is the island where both Japanese and Allied forces have military bases.

Model 94

The Model 94 cryptography machine is an outdated, outmoded device for sending telegraphic messages in code. To the Americans, the Model 94 is a clunky, painfully slow and obsolete technology. To the Japanese who try to decipher American messages, the Model 94 is a pain and a problem because they do not know how to translate the many American slang terms employed in communication, which makes the code successful despite the outdated equipment.

Consolidated PB2Y-3 Coronado

The Coronado is a four-engine seaplane that is popular as a personnel transport, especially for American military brass. It is the airborne equivalent of an armored personnel vehicle, despite the fact it is awkward to maneuver and uncomfortable to ride in.



Cadillac Model 62

The black Cadillac 1941 Model 62 is the official car of General MacArthur, commander-in-chief of American Pacific forces.

Quantico, Virginia

Quantico is the primary boot camp training camp for the U.S. Marines and thus every Marine has a personal connection to the facility.

Pearl Harbor U.S. Naval Base

After the Japanese attack on the American naval base in 1941, the base is once again operational by 1942 at the time of this novel.

Sunfish

The Sunfish is a new, standard-size submarine based in Brisbane, Australia that Navy Admiral Nimitz assigns to a reinforcement mission to take arms, ammunition, food and other supplies to Brig. Gen Fertig for his guerrilla campaign against the Japanese. Nimitz denies a request for the larger Narwhal submarine that could carry more cargo.

Carbine

A carbine is a weapon described as "halfway between a pistol and a rifle," with a firing range of 100 yards. Because of their small size and ease of handling, carbines are given to Filipino soldiers for jungle combat.

Kawanishi H8K

The Kawanishi H8K is a four-engine, long distance reconnaissance and bomber seaplane similar to the American Catalina although it is faster, better armored, and armed than the American plane.

Arisaka

The Arisake is a Japanese rifle in widespread use during the Philippine conflict, and often compared to the American-made Enfield rifle.



Themes

Courage and cowardice

Capt. Robert Macklin is, for most of this story, the personification of cowardice. But toward the very end, he transmutes into a soldier with courage. How does this happen? One possible explanation is the power of shame. Although few mention their contempt for Macklin directly to his face, he can't possibly be unaware of the festering resentments against him held by people like First Lieutenant Phillip McCoy who even boasts that he may shoot Macklin during combat as retribution for his cowardice and evasion during previous engagements. The general perception among the troops is that Macklin will always place his own safety and welfare ahead of others'. There is also an undercurrent of fear that Macklin may, in fact, become a traitor. Thus he is ostracized and held in contempt. But Macklin redeems himself during an ambush raid on a Japanese convoy on Mindanao where he takes an active role in the fighting and puts a bullet in the head of every Japanese soldier who lies wounded or dead beside the road. His esteem among his peers rises dramatically until, as they part company at the end of the book, McCoy congratulates him and wishes him well.

Conviction and convention

Brig. Gen. Wendell Fertig defies the conventions and protocols of the American military to recruit, train and command his own guerrilla force of GI dropouts and Filipinos to rout the occupying Japanese in the Philippines. Although some see Fertig as a madman, it becomes evident that Fertig is a true patriot who acts out of his own convictions. With his ragtag guerrilla army fighting against a better-armed, better-fed and larger army, Fertig's rebel group brings to mind nothing more appropriate than George Washington and the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Both generals fought against an occupying foreign power; both managed to hold their militias together through sheer force of leadership; both had nightmares over the suffering of their disadvantaged troops; both were ultimately helped to victory through outside assistance—France, in the case of Washington, and the American military establishment in the case of Fertig.

Rank and power

Much of the novel is fixated on all the various gradations of military rank, from buck private to general or admiral. In a rough way, these military rankings reflect rank, or pecking order, in civilian society. In the military, these rankings have specific titles and pay grades; in civilian life, power and prestige may belong to those who earn them, but sometimes rank depends on other factors such as family background, ethnic group and social networking. The reader sees examples of how those of superior rank often use their power to reward—or control—those who are lower in the power structure by delegating or denying them power in terms of their military rank. It is apparent how this

system of rewards and punishments is used to reinforce the organization and loyalty within the ranks. Those with power use it to increase their own power and to diminish that of others they see as undeserving or as a threat to their prestige. The good old boy network is epitomized in military structure and function.

Leadership

The question is leadership is always central to this novel. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, or "El Supremo" as he is known among the troops, unquestionably has officially designated leadership of American forces in the Philippines but is often seen by those her commands as high-handed, capricious and vain. Because of the centrality of rank in military life, his commands must be obeyed by everyone beneath him in rank regardless of individual beliefs or reservations. On the other hand, Brigadier General Fertig commands his rebel force through respect and a willingness on the part of his troops to have him as their leader.



Style

Point of View

The story is related from the omniscient-narrator point of view, but there is a problem for the reader in knowing what is factual and what is fictional. The author combines real people, places and incidents with imaginary dialogue and character motivation that are imaginary. Thus, it is difficult to identify this genre as historical fiction or roman a clef—a shadowy land between the real and the invented. The reader may well pause occasionally and wonder just how far the author has gone in presenting reality, as he sees it. The book is identified as a novel but it is so laden with the concrete minutiae of military life and actual combat, that it might be labeled as "faction" rather than "fiction." A note from the author addressing this issue would have been very helpful for the sake of clarity. A dedication in the front of the book to three real individuals who lost their lives in military service further complicates matters. The author's obviously chummy relationship with the Marine Corps undoubtedly grants him the ability to write persuasively but also raises questions about his objectivity. Sometimes the self-congratulatory tone between the characters leaves the impression that the reader has been issued a visitor's pass to the Good Old Boy Club of the Marines and can only experience awe at the seemingly immortal feats of these all-too-human men. The author's point of view is too close to his subject matter to achieve a voice of unbiased, authoritative narration.

Setting

The novel is set almost entirely in the Philippine Islands towards the end of World War II, after a Japanese invasion has driven back American forces and subjected prisoners of war to torture, forced labor and gratuitous murder. There are occasional shifts to Washington, DC, to the level of top military brass at the Pentagon and even the White House but by far the bulk of the action takes place in the remote, steamy jungle islands of the Philippines. The psychological setting is close to the border of madness; in some cases, across the border as with Brig. Gen Wendell Fertig who is the ersatz antihero of this story because of his renegade guerrilla campaign against the occupying Japanese. Whether Fertig is a hero or a madman depends, in this tale, upon the viewpoint of the individual character. Fertig is a major irritant to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, perhaps because El Supremo sees much of himself in Fertig with his braggadocio, swagger, and single-minded pursuit of his goal regardless of protocol or even higher authority.

Language and Meaning

The superabundance of military jargon, acronyms and inside jokes makes for difficult reading. For example, to describe boarding priorities for air transport at the Pearl Harbor air base, the author writes: "Authority to issue AAAAAA air travel priorities had been removed from lesser headquarters. AT the present time, only Commander, U.S. Naval



Activities, West Coast (COMNAVACTWEST); Commander, U.S. Naval Activities East Coast (COMNAVACTEAST); CINC-PAC (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific) and SWPOA (Supreme Headquarters, South West Pacific Ocean Area) had the authority to use AAAAAA air travel priorities. Plus, of course, the U.S. Army Chief of staff and the Chief of Naval Operations" (Chapter 10, p. 284). It is unclear whether the author intends this as absurdist humor although the context is flat and unambivalent. At this juncture, military abstractions and acronyms have distorted the English language into gibberish. In other ways, everyday military speech patterns reflecting the hierarchy of command are commonplace.

Structure

The novel follows the traditional conflict followed by struggle, crisis, character development, and resolution format of contemporary fiction. In this instance, the conflict is obviously World War II and the struggle is that of American Marines fighting against Japanese troops. The crisis involves finding and assessing Brigadier General Fertig and his apocalyptic guerrilla campaign against the Japanese occupiers. Character development occurs when the military brass recognize Fertig as a real patriot who can make a significant contribution to the war effort. Resolution comes when a rescue mission arrives with supplies, food and weapons for Fertig's army, which grows to 30,000 American and Filipino soldiers who then rout the Japanese from Mindanao. Within this conventional plot structure, the author inserts the texts of various telegrams, military orders, and radio messages in an effort to keep the narrative immediate; chapters are broken into separate headings giving date, time and location for bits of narrative. This shifting perspective also gives the story a sense of real time immediacy.



Quotes

"Everly had been a Marine for almost eight years. He liked the Marine Corps and he could not imagine doing anything but being a Marine. If his enlistment hadn't been extended, he would have shipped over, sewn a second four-year hash mark on the sleeves of his uniform and gone on being a Marine" (Chapter 2, p. 16).

"Only two things were going to happen to the men in the Philippines, Marines, soldiers or sailors. They were going to get killed or they were going to get captured. And getting captures was likely to be as bad as getting killed. Everly had seen people starve to death in Chine, too, and he didn't think he wanted to die that way, either" (Chapter 2, p. 24).

"Two days before, the Japanese assault on Fortress Corregidor had begun with a massive, unceasing, around-the-clock artillery barrage. Someone had calculated that 11 explosive rounds were landing on the fortress every minute. That translated to 667 rounds per hour, 16,000 rounds every 24 hours. The Japanese landed on the island the day before at what was called the Tail of the Tadpole, and suffered heavy losses. But they kept coming and it was impossible to throw them back into the sea" (Chapter 3, p. 55).

"The notion of getting out of the Philippines to Australia now seemed unreal. And Weston privately thought that when they got to Mindanao it wouldn't be very different from any of the other islands they'd been to. There would be no organized military force to which they could attach themselves. If they found any Americans at a they would almost certainly be just like themselves, desperately dreaming of getting to Australia but with no real hope of doing so" (Chapter 4, p. 62).

"'What's an emergency SOI?' 'It means you don't have valid signal operating instructions, so use the emergency one,' the chief said absently, and then thinking aloud, 'And maybe they ain't.' 'Maybe they aren't what?' 'Fucking with us.' 'Then what the hell is this?' Miller asked. 'I don't know,' the chief said, 'but I'm going to find out'" (Chapter 4, p. 95).

"If he himself did not intimidate Brig. Gen. Fleming W. Pickering, USMC, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox concluded, and if Wild Bill Donovan didn't either, no admiral in the Pacific was likely to daunt him; nor, for that matter, was General Douglas MacArthur" (Chapter 5, p. 107).

"'Douglas,' the President of the United States said, 'has stated that guerrilla operations in the Philippines are impossible at this time.' 'And we all know that Douglas MacArthur is incapable of being wrong, don't we?' the Hon. Frank Knox said, taking off his pince-nez and starting to polish his lenses. Roosevelt looked up from his wheelchair at the dignified, stocky, well-dressed Secretary of the Navy and smiled. 'Admiral?' the President asked. 'We really know nothing, Mr. President, except that this man Fertig has chosen not to surrender and that he has a radio'" (Chapter 6, p. 142).



"Captain Weston made his way through the convoy to the pickup truck at its rear, desperately hoping he would not come across a wounded Japanese and have to kill him. He did not. Taking their cue from Everly, the Filipinos quickly put their machetes to use, taking care of the problem of the wounded Japanese. Now the Filipinos were stripping the Japanese bodies of their weapons, their boots, their ammunition, their bayonets, their leather accoutrements and their watches, jewelry, and even their spectacles" (Chapter 6, p. 169).

"Willoughby vaguely remembers hearing something about Fertig getting promoted to major, but the records have of course been lost and officially they have to consider him as still being a captain,' Pickering said. 'Christ,' McCoy said in disgust. 'A captain who appoints himself commanding general of anything looks like somebody who may not be playing with a full deck'" (Chapter 9, p. 247).

"Douglas is worried about two things: he has stated publicly that guerrilla operations in the Philippines are impossible at this time; and he doesn't want to be proved wrong. Even worse than that, from his perspective, he would hate to admit that he was wrong, that this chap Fertig is a lunatic,' Donovan said. 'That would make him wrong twice. Douglas MacArthur doesn't like to be wrong at all'" (Chapter 9, p. 258).

"The storm struck as the Consolidated PB2Y-3 Coronado made its final approach. As Capt. Edward Sessions, USMC, saw the flashes of lightning, heard the rain drumming on the fuselage, felt the huge plane being buffeted by strong winds and saw the whitecaps on the water, he thought it entirely likely that having flown literally close to halfway around the world, he was about to get killed on landing" (Chapter 11, p. 295).

"When they arrived at the cottage, Macklin's first reaction was favorable. Two young Marine officers—both second lieutenants—slid their rattan chairs closer to a coffee table as a middle-aged woman in an apron - obviously some kind of servant - entered the room carrying a tray on which were a silver coffee set and a plate of pastries" (Chapter 12, p. 350).

"'I am here, with several hundred courageous men, American and Filipino, living on the edge of starvation, like hunted animals in the jungle, attempting to wage war against the Japanese, and I find myself a humble supplicant, on my knees begging for the tools to do that,' Fertig said. 'I confess that from time to time I find myself growing a little bitter'" (Chapter 16, p. 477).



Topics for Discussion

What is General Douglas MacArthur's attitude toward Brig. Gen. Wendell Fertig? And Fertig's attitude toward MacArthur? What do the two men have in common?

How does First Lt. Weston feel about the American war effort in the Philippines? About his own chances of survival?

Characterize the relationship between President Franklin Roosevelt and General Douglas MacArthur.

Why is Capt. Robert Macklin despised by his fellow Marine Corps officers? What happens to change that?

Who displays the most courage in this novel? How?

What prevents the occupying Japanese forces from randomly executing Filipino males after an American-Filipino ambush of a Japanese truck convoy?

Why does the Office of Strategic Services disregard a request to have Capt. Robert Macklin removed from Operation Windmill?

What is General Fertig's attitude toward a military delegation sent to assess the effectiveness of his guerrilla campaign?

What happens at the end of the book to indicate that Capt. Robert Macklin has finally won the respect of his peers?