Ghost Soldiers: The Epic Account of World War II's Greatest Rescue Mission Study Guide

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Plot Summary

In 1942, following the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese assaulted the Philippine islands and ultimately captured them. This action resulted in many prisoners of war as the American Navy was unable to evacuate most soldiers. Many thousands of prisoners were interred in the Cabanatuan Camp where they languished without medicine, adequate food, or other supplies. In 1945, American forces were recapturing Luzon. Fearing the Japanese would massacre the approximately 500 surviving prisoners of war at Cabanatuan, a rescue mission was successfully carried out.

Subsequent to the overpowering Japanese assault on Luzon, the defending forces retreated to the Bataan peninsula and were then concentrated in a tiny area. Those who could not be evacuated surrendered by order of General King. The Japanese ordered a forced mass evacuation to clear the area for use as an offensive staging area. Under the direction of General Homma, the Japanese conducted a forced march through difficult terrain and weather with insufficient medicine, food, or transport, resulting in massive American and especially Filipino casualties in an event subsequently known as the Bataan Death March. The destination, Camp O'Donnell, proved a breeding ground of disease and many thousands of men who survived the march succumbed in camp.

Several thousand men were later transferred to Cabanatuan Camp, a smaller but still significant prisoner of war camp near Cabanatuan City. The camp served as a source of slave labor for Japanese military construction efforts, and conditions were exceptionally harsh with a correspondingly high mortality rate among the prisoners. When the American forces started to recapture the Philippines in 1945, many Japanese guards responded by massacring the prisoners of war. Fearing such an atrocity at Cabanatuan Camp, the army launched a rescue mission led by Colonel Mucci. The rescue party was composed of about 125 American Rangers and about 175 Filipino guerrillas, and was highly successful—over five hundred prisoners were rescued and approximately 1,000 Japanese combatants were killed. After the rescue, both the rescuers and the rescued were greeted in America as heroes even though the raid was quickly eclipsed by other major wartime developments.

Prologue

Prologue Summary and Analysis

In 1942, following the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese assaulted the Philippine islands and ultimately captured them. This action resulted in many prisoners of war as the American Navy was unable to evacuate most soldiers. Many thousands of prisoners were interred in the Cabanatuan Camp, where they languished without medicine, adequate food, or other supplies. In 1945, American forces were recapturing Luzon and fearing the Japanese would massacre the approximately 500 surviving prisoners of war at Cabanatuan, a rescue mission was successfully carried out.

On December 14, 1944, the 150 American prisoners of war interred at Puerto Princesa Prison Camp, Palawan, Philippines, spent the morning doing what they had done nearly every morning for about thirty-months—repairing a large and isolated runway. Early in the afternoon they were returned to their prison camp and ordered by Japanese Lieutenant Sato to seek shelter in extemporized air raid tunnels even though no aircraft were apparent. Japanese soldiers then poured aviation fuel into the tunnels and ignited it, incinerating many of the men. Survivors were shot, bayoneted, or tortured to death. Several dozen men managed to flee from the massacre scene, but over the next several hours concerted efforts were made to hunt them down and execute them. Eleven men are known to have survived, including Eugene Nielsen who, on January 7, 1945, gave an official deposition about the atrocity to Army intelligence. The Japanese soldiers at Puerto Princesa Prison Camp were carrying out an order known as the "August 1 Kill-All Order"—an order specifying that all prisoners of war were to be executed if camp liberation appeared imminent. About 500 miles northeast of Puerto Princesa Prison Camp, a larger prisoner of war camp existed near Cabanatuan City, Luzon, Philippines. The Cabanatuan City Prison Camp held about 500 men at the end of January, 1945, though it had housed up to 8,000 men at a time. Most prisoners had died of disease, starvation, or torture; however, the survivors included many men of the infamous Bataan Death March. Local insurgent resistance leader Major Robert Lapham, an American, contacted U.S. Sixth Army headquarters in late January, 1945, and informed them of the existence of the Cabanatuan City Prison Camp. He stated the likelihood that the prisoners would be massacred in the next few days, offered his help, and urged a rescue mission. General Walter Krueger heard Lapham and agreed, even though the rescue would be complicated by the estimated 9,000 Japanese soldiers massing around Cabanatuan City.

During World War II Western nations typically captured four enemy soldiers as prisoners for every one enemy soldier killed in action. However, only one Japanese soldier was captured for every 120 Japanese soldiers killed in action. The death rate for Allied POWs held in German and Italian prisoner camps was about four percent; the death rate in Japanese prisoner camps was a stunning 27 percent. Given these extremities, the Japanese view on the value of a prisoner's life was at marked odds with the American view. Krueger consulted with Lapham and Horton White, Krueger's ranking

intelligence officer, and the three men decided a rescue mission was imperative and should be led by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Mucci, commander of the 6th Ranger Battalion. The prologue is vital to understanding the prisoner of war paradigm discussed in the odd-numbered chapters and the rescue mission discussed in the even-numbered chapters. Note that many of the individuals and situations discussed in the prologue do not recur in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1 begins the larger book segment titled "Book One - Blood Brothers," which is inclusive of Chapters 1 through 7. Most of the American forces stationed in the Philippines prior to the outbreak of World War II found the station enjoyable, desirable, and relaxing. In particular, Manila was held in high regard. Most felt that the Japanese would never attack the Philippines; however, they were wrong, and after months of siege the American defense collapsed. Chapter 1 is focused on April 1942 and follows the fate of the American and Filipino defenders of the Bataan peninsula; information is particularly derived from interviews with several survivors from the 31st infantry battalion. During the defense, Major General Edward King commands the forces at Bataan under direct command from the island fortress of Corregidor. The Japanese attack is sustained, vicious, and ultimately victorious, forcing Filipino and American forces into an ever-shrinking perimeter at the southern tip of Bataan. There, the defenders run out of medicine, supplies, and most food. Dr. Ralph Emerson Hibbs works at a sprawling hospital complex that cannot house all the wounded, that has no supplies, and that can offer little beyond first aid—in effect the hospital is a place to warehouse the dying. Faced with an insoluble problem, King surrenders his forces without the consent of his command structure, freeing them of blame but also ensuring his action will be forever questioned by some. King's surrendered forces amount to about 78,000 combatants and some 20,000 associated civilians; of these, fully 24,000 are incapacitated in the hospital complex.

One surrendering soldier, Lieutenant Edward "Tommie" Thomas had been employed as a signals specialist with the 31st infantry, laying telephone lines through the jungle. His unit surrendered to a small Japanese detachment and for several days Thomas is pressed into semi-voluntary service as a chauffeur for a Japanese officer desirous of improving his English. During this period Thomas is treated fairly well. Eventually Thomas is handed over to a prisoner detail and joins thousands of other prisoners of war. One group is told they must self-elect ten men to be executed as reparations for supposed atrocities committed against Japan. Thomas, single and young, volunteers for execution. The Japanese carry out a mock execution before laughing about the American soldiers' fear; they explain the whole episode was simply a joke. Thomas and the other nine men are returned to the stockade. The men are then organized for a forced march to Camp O'Donnell.

The Japanese forces are led by General Masaharu Homma, an upper-class man of letters. Homma's plans estimated the needed evacuation of about 25,000 prisoners, and his system utterly collapses under the weight of nearly four times that many. Medicine, food, fuel, and transport are all lacking. Rather than realign the plan, Homma ignores the situation and a humanitarian catastrophe emerges. Homma's overriding concern is getting the prisoners out of the southern portion of Bataan so he can concentrate Japanese forces for the impending assault on Corregidor.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2 begins in January 1945, and starts the narrative thread of the Ranger's mission. Colonel Henry Mucci is a West Point graduate and has been selected to plan and lead the rescue mission to Cabanatuan Camp. Mucci's parents were Italian immigrants and he was born 1909 in Connecticut. In 1943 Mucci took command of the US Sixth Army's 98th Field Artillery Battalion; the battalion was then scaled back to 500 men and converted into the army's first Ranger battalion. The battalion trained for over a year on New Guinea; although somewhat slight of stature, Mucci was physically fit and possessed of a remarkable constitution. Mucci plans the general outline of the mission and decides to take a small force, selecting Robert Prince as the assault leader. Prince is a young man with no combat experience but much beloved of his men; his reserved nature and unflappable demeanor give his men great comfort during times of stress. Prince does not disclose that he is battling a foot infection that will dog him throughout the mission. On January 28, 121 Rangers and four photographers set out from the American lines on the rescue mission. The force rides on army trucks as far as Guimba (refer to the map inside the back cover) which is essentially the extent of American control. At Guimba the force begins a long and hasty march through hostile territory. The march is complicated by the fact that the mission is so secret that the army air force has not been notified, thus overflying planes must be evaded and American artillery must be avoided. At Lobong the force is joined by Captain Eduardo Joson, a Filipino guerrilla leader, and about eighty of his men. Joson is in his mid thirties and is a shorter man than Prince. The guerrillas act as guides and a screening force. The march continues toward the prisoner of war camp, covering difficult terrain. Note that the writing in this chapter devotes considerable detail to the physical aspects of the region.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 describes the forced relocation of Filipino and American prisoners that has since become known as the "Bataan Death March." Much of the chapter is derived from interviews with two soldiers, Staff Sergeant Abraham Abraham and Captain Bertram Bank. Abraham was a member of the 31st infantry and a Syrian-American; he grew up in western Pennsylvania and completed a military tour in Panama before shipping out to the Philippines in 1939. Tattooed, pug-nosed, and gregarious, Abraham was a champion boxer. He is described as fast-talking, scrappy, and stubborn. Abraham is wounded in the back and thigh prior to surrendering; his wife and three children are also captured by the Japanese but are interred in a civilian prisoner camp. Abraham provides eyewitness details regarding the forced march; he relates numerous anecdotes of torture, cruelty, and hardships. He repeatedly mentions how insistent the Japanese guards are about the desired speed of evacuation. Captain Bertram Bank, the son of Russian Jews, grew up in Searles, Alabama. Bank, a university graduate, is described as irreligious and a joker, a lively, garrulous man with a pointed nose and bushy eyebrows. Bank speaks with a southern drawl and tells tall tales. Bank joined the 27th Bomb Group of the army air force and arrived at Manila in November 1941. Like Abraham, Bank provides eyewitness details regarding the forced march; he relates numerous anecdotes of torture, cruelty, and hardships. He also mentions how introspective many men became during the death march and how many turned to religious faith to survive the ordeal.

The entire period of the death march covers about three weeks, though the average soldier spent only one week marching. Of the 78,000 prisoners making the mark, some 750 Americans and 5,000 Filipinos died—leaving a body every twenty yards on average across the sixty-mile trek (refer to the map inside the front cover). The prisoners were force marched from their point of capture to San Fernando where they were packed into railroad cars—112 men to one car—and transported by rail to Capas; in one car, 12 men died from heat-related problems; this is assumed to be average for the death toll on board the train. From Capas, the men marched another ten miles to Camp O'Donnell. By the time of arrival, many men were already sickened with various diseases, and overall, Camp O'Donnell internees would experience a ten percent mortality rate. For example, while imprisoned at Camp O'Donnell, Thomas suffers cerebral malaria. Chapter 3 includes a brief analysis of the causes of the Japanese atrocities committed on the Bataan Death March—root causes are said to be Homma's lack of preparation, a Japanese military predilection for corporal punishment, and a diffuse but individual desire for vengeance against the American troops.

Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 4 the Rangers continue to traverse difficult terrain until reaching Balincarin (refer to the map inside the back cover). There, they discover Balincarin has been recently subjected to a mass execution of about 100 citizens as reprisals for supporting anti-Japanese guerrilla activities. Even so, the citizens are happy to see the Americans and offer aid and support. The expedition rests at Balincarin as Mucci and Prince continue to plan the raid details. Mucci is very concerned about the lack of information regarding the camp's layout and facilities; Prince is much troubled by his feet. Both men are concerned about extensive movements of large groups of Japanese forces in the general area, and they learn that several large Japanese forces are camped close by Cabanatuan Camp, while a considerable Japanese force is inside the camp itself. The Rangers are then joined by Captain Juan Pajota, a Filipino guerrilla leader, and about ninety of his men. In addition, Pajota brings about 160 civilian laborers who are unarmed but will participate in various non-combat activities in the rescue mission. As the Rangers continue onward, they move from Joson's area of control into Pajota's area of control; Joson and his forces continue with them, however. The entire rescue force now numbers approximately three hundred combatants. Many of the noncombatants drive carts drawn by carabao, a local variety of cattle. The carts will be used to transport prisoners too sick to walk. Other noncombatants act as carriers, guides, and so forth. Note that the writing in this chapter devotes considerable detail to the physical aspects of the region.

Chapter 5 discusses Cabanatuan Camp in detail. The camp had been established as a large, forced labor camp, with several smaller satellite camps at work sites. The bulk of the camp's forced labor activities were focused on constructing a nearby runway and running a large farming unit. Of the roughly 9,000 men imprisoned at Cabanatuan Camp during the few years of its operation, at least 3,000 died there, mostly of disease and starvation. The camp had no medicine, vastly insufficient food, rampant disease, and much forced labor. The chapter offers numerous anecdotes relating to camp living and the prisoner society which gradually developed within the camp. One notable event concerned Christmas, 1942, when Red Cross packages were delivered. The starving men supplement their diets with rats, dogs, snakes, insects, and anything else they can catch. Rumor mongering and gossip are developed to a fine art. The camp's hospital offers few amenities and the sick ward is called Zero Ward, referring to a patient's chance for survival. Within the sick ward the diphtheria ward is referred to as Zero-Zero Ward. The camp guards are vicious and frequently use torture and murder, though some are more humane than others. The Japanese prefer mass punishment for single infractions, and prisoners are banded together into groups of ten so-called blood brothers; if one of the ten escapes, the remaining nine are executed. The chapter devotes considerable detail to a description of camp life and provides some of the most compelling material in the book.

Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 6 the Rangers continue through difficult terrain to Platero (refer to the map inside the back cover) and halt there. The village is converted into a staging area and fallback location for the impending raid. Captain James Fisher, the senior medical officer on the expedition, converts one house into an extemporized emergency operating theater. Fisher will accompany the raiding party as he feels some of the prisoners of war may need immediate medical attention. Meanwhile, Mucci and Prince continue to plan the details of the raid; due to large-scale Japanese movements, the final assault is delayed. Meanwhile two Alamo Scouts, Lieutenant Bill Nellist and Private Rufo Vaquilar successfully scout the camp by gaining a vantage point in a shack a few hundred yards from the camp. They take angles, measure distances, plot strong points, note vehicles, and draw maps that correspond to aerial photographs. They note construction materials, fences, power sources, guard rotations, and many other details. Once this detailed information is delivered to Mucci and Prince, the rescue plan's details are worked out. The plan calls for a main rescue effort to be launched against Cabanatuan Camp by the Rangers. Joson's guerrilla forces will move to the west of the camp and block the road to Cabanatuan City, some four miles away; many Japanese forces are in the city. Pajota's guerrilla forces will move to the east of the camp and block the road to Bongabon at a bridge spanning the Cabu River: about 1,000 Japanese forces are encamped on the east bank of the river scarcely one mile from the camp. The blocking forces will simply buy time for the primary rescue mission. The main mission will start with an assault meant to surprise and overwhelm the guards. The Ranger force's F Company will have the toughest job—to move to the back of the camp and begin the assault. Pajota mentions that the approach to the camp is over a very wide and flat expanse—it will be difficult to move unseen. He suggests that a flyover mission would distract the guards; Mucci agrees to the unusual tactic and calls in the request. The flyover becomes a major topic in the later narrative.

In Chapter 7 the narrative considers numerous clandestine operations that in some way impact life in the prisoner of war camp. Several individuals or networks are mentioned but focus is given to two: the camp chaplains and Clair Phillips. In the camp, the organization and clandestine operations focus around several chaplains who emerge as moral men of devotion. One man in particular, Chaplain Robert Taylor, is noted as being tortured for involvement in a medicine smuggling operation. Clair Phillips was born in Portland, Oregon, and moved to Manila in 1941. She married shortly thereafter and in October, 1942, opened Club Tsubaki with a friend. The club was not precisely a whorehouse but catered to an exclusive male clientele. During the Japanese occupation, Club Tsubaki became a social hot spot. As Phillips' husband was interred as a prisoner of war, she demonstrated an interest in helping not only prisoners of war but also the resistance. Phillips went under the assumed identity of Dorothy Clara Fuentes, an Italian, and engaged in wholesale clandestine operations under the code name High Pockets. After many months, she eventually sickened from stress, then was

apprehended by Japanese police, tortured, and imprisoned. However, many in Cabanatuan Camp survived disease or starvation because of medicines and foods Phillips smuggled into the camp.

As American military influence returned to the area, flyovers became common at the camp. The Japanese, realizing that Luzon would soon be lost, evacuated all able-bodied men from the camp to Japan to work as slave labor—1,600 men were evacuated, leaving only about 500 of the sickest and weakest men behind. Those evacuated were packed into the hold of Oryoku Maru where fifty men quickly died of suffocation and heat. Later, the Oryoku Maru was bombed by American planes, killing another 250 prisoners of war. The survivors were herded into a temporary prison enclosure where about 75 more died of wounds or disease—15 of the sickest men were simply executed. The survivors then boarded Enoura Maru and traveled to Formosa with about 60 casualties en route. At Formosa, the Enoura Maru is bombed killing about 115 prisoners. The survivors then continue on to Japan aboard the Brazil Maru. Of the 1,600 men evacuated only 931 survive the trip to Japan, including Taylor. The Cabanatuan Camp poet, Lieutenant Henry Lee, died during the voyage—samples of Lee's poetry are presented throughout the book. Chapter 7 concludes the major division "Book One - Blood Brothers".

Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11

Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 begins the larger book segment titled "Book Two - Harrow Hell," which is inclusive of Chapters 8 through 13. Chapters in this section of the book tend to be much shorter than previous chapters, and this is especially true for Chapters 8 through 11. In Chapter 8 the Rangers cross the Papanga River and arrive at the vicinity of the camp. They make a long, difficult, crawling approach across nearly a mile of rice fields. Lieutenant John Murphy leads F Company on the longest approach, moving around the camp and gaining position at the camp's rear. Many of the Rangers fear they have been spotted, though they have not.

Chapter 9 returns to the prisoners' of war experience. In early January they hear and see distant artillery barrages as the American invasion of Luzon begins in earnest. The airfield they have been constructing for the past years is destroyed by American bombers—the destruction makes the men very happy as the Japanese are thus deprived of their slave labor. The prisoners worry about their ultimate fate and fear the Japanese will massacre them at some point. Then, however, the Japanese guards announce that they (the guards) are leaving. They instruct the men to remain in the camp and then—amazingly—the guards pack up and leave. Over the next few days the men explore the Japanese areas of the camp and find caches of food and supplies—they raid these and move them to the prisoners' quarters. The reprieve lasts for only a few days, however—by mid-January Japanese forces return to the camp. The new forces are not prison guards, but combat units, and for the most part they leave the prisoners alone. As the days go by the prisoners gorge themselves on meat and canned milk, their health rebounding to a remarkable degree.

In Chapter 10 Pajota's suggested flyover materializes. The army air force sends a P-61 "Black Widow," the newest type of night fighter that looks bizarre and futuristic. While the Japanese stare skywards at the circling plane the Rangers complete the last stages of their approach over open ground. The narrative spends considerable time describing the antics used by the P-61 pilot and the effectiveness of the unusual tactic; the focus is somewhat misplaced as the flyover has little relation to the greater narrative. As darkness falls the Rangers are in assault positions, only a few dozen yards from the guard towers, pillboxes, and barracks. Meanwhile Joson and Pajota have established their respective roadblocks; Pajota's forces have placed a demolition charge on the bridge spanning the Cabu River.

Chapter 11 considers the prisoners' of war point of view through the days leading up to the raid itself. Through the last half of January, more Japanese troops move into the camp and through the area. The guard towers are again manned and the camp sees much movement of men and equipment as the Japanese reposition to meet the American attack. On one occasion a Piper Cub flies over the camp and makes reconnaissance films. There is much talk of evacuating the prisoners. During this

section, Robert Body provides some anecdotes about life in the camp, focusing on the rumors, the mental stresses, and the physical recuperation fostered by an adequate diet. The January 30th flyover of the P-61 entrances the prisoners as they view it as an "eerie emblem of how far American technology had evolved in the three years of their captivity" (p. 267). When the assault comes and the prisoners hear gunfire erupting, they assume the Japanese have begun the dreaded massacre. Chapter 11 ends the narrative division between the prisoners' of war experiences and the Rangers' experiences.

Chapters 12 and 13 and Epilogue

Chapters 12 and 13 and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter 12 begins a new phase of the narrative; from this point forward, the two groups are joined and treated as one group; whereas, previously, chapters alternated between events experienced by the prisoners of war and events experienced by the rescue party. Chapter 12 describes the rescue by 121 Rangers of 513 prisoners of war; the Rangers suffer two killed and the prisoners of war suffer one casualty, a man who succumbs to a presumed heart attack. The Japanese suffer a presumed approximate 200 casualties. The Rangers' assault achieves total surprise, and in the opening seconds machine guns fire at point black ranges into barracks crammed with sleeping and resting Japanese. The towers and pillboxes are destroyed in the opening salvos. The Japanese forces are destroyed or routed and resistance is very slight. Staff Sergeant Manton Stewart leads his bazooka team into the camp and destroys the principle vehicle shed and several armored vehicles inside it. Many of the prisoners of war are distraught, frightened of Japanese reprisals, and argue with their liberators about vacating the camp. Some are forcibly evacuated but most reorient after a few minutes and willingly leave. Those too ill to walk are carried to waiting carts drawn by carabao. The Rangers give clothing, shoes, and food to some of the prisoners. While some Rangers perform the evacuation, others continue to attack the routed Japanese forces. One Japanese soldier fires off a few knee mortar rounds, one of which explodes near Fisher, seriously wounding him. The other Ranger casualty, Roy Sweezy, is killed by friendly fire. As the rescue operation concludes, the forces withdraw to Platero and consolidate. Fisher receives emergency surgery. The combat writing is terse and exciting. Several combat anecdotes are presented.

Chapter 13 considers the guerrilla blocking forces and withdrawal operation. Joson's force encounters no enemies, and after the raid, Platero and joins the main rescue retreat. Pajota's forces disable but do not destroy, the bridge and then faces wave after wave of banzai charges. Pajota's machine guns mow down the suicidal Japanese until many hundreds of enemy bodies cover the bridge and fall into the river. A guerrilla soldier uses a bazooka to destroy several Japanese armored vehicles. Pajota then engages in a fighting retreat. His forces suffer about 20 wounded, but amazingly none are killed. As Pajota's men begin their withdrawal, Prince makes a final footsore sweep through the camp and the Ranger rearguard withdraws. Fisher remains in Platero while the rest of the force begins to march back to the American lines. Fisher is then moved to Balincarin but dies. The withdrawal continues to Rizal Road where one more prisoner of war dies from disease. The Rangers learn that the American advance has been more rapid than anticipated and they divert to Talavera, now in American hands. Reaching a friendly area the force then boards motorized transportation and is quickly relocated to a safe rear area where they enjoy food, rest, safety, and showers.

The epilogue has a compressed style that sums up the aftereffects of the raid. The former prisoners of war are evacuated to hospitals, regain their strength and health, and are sent home. Most travel aboard a ship, the General Anderson, but the sickest are flown home. The Anderson finds a warm welcome at the Golden Gate Bridge. The epilogue offers some additional notes about some of the individuals in the book. The raid resulted in an estimated 1,000 Japanese dead at the cost of two Rangers and two prisoners of war; about 20 Filipino guerrillas are wounded. After the war, the commandants of Camp O'Donnell and Cabanatuan Camp were sentenced to life at hard labor; Homma was executed. Today, the camp is a park with trees and a white memorial wall listing the 2,656 prisoners of war who died there.

Characters

Colonel Henry Mucci

Colonel Henry Mucci is a West Point graduate who is selected to plan and lead the rescue mission of Cabanatuan Camp. Mucci's parents were Italian immigrants and he was born 1909 in Connecticut. In 1943, Mucci took command of the US Sixth Army's 98th Field Artillery Battalion; the battalion was then scaled back to 500 men and converted into the army's first Ranger battalion. Mucci is thus the commander of the US Army's first Ranger Battalion, an organization based on the concept of elite or special forces. The battalion trains for over a year on New Guinea; although somewhat slight of stature, Mucci is physically fit and possesses a remarkable constitution. Throughout the difficult training, Mucci leads his men from the front, usually outperforming picked men a decade younger. Mucci finds, however, that his unit's unique capabilities are generally not understood, and the men spend time performing guard duties or being shuffled around like typical infantry. This all changes when Mucci's unit is selected to execute the rescue mission to Cabanatuan Camp. Mucci leads the rescue mission and, with Robert Prince, plans the details of the raid. During the assault, Mucci remains in the rear area directing the overall rescue operation. He demonstrates courage, expertise, and innovation throughout the mission and is willing to work with others to achieve common goals. For example, Mucci works with and trusts the various insurgent leaders as well as his own subordinate officers. Mucci demonstrates the proper blend of aggressiveness and caution and emerges as a nearly superhuman leader of men during the withdrawal phase of the operation. Several survivors recall Mucci's unflagging enthusiasm and devotion to success during the withdrawal phase. The text features two photographs of Mucci.

Claire Phillips

Clair Phillips is born in Portland, Oregon, and moves to Manila in 1941. She finds Manila enjoyable and even as most Americans flee the area due to the looming war, Phillips remains behind. She marries an American soldier shortly after arriving, and in October, 1942, opens Club Tsubaki with a friend. Phillips works as the hostess while her co-owner works as a featured exotic dancer. The club is not precisely a whorehouse but caters to an exclusive male clientele. The text suggests that the club features exotic, semi-nude dancers, offers male companionship, and does not discourage female employees from negotiatiing prostitution with clients on a personal basis. During the Japanese occupation, Club Tsubaki becomes a social hot spot. Phillips fosters the club's elite reputation by charging ridiculously high prices and otherwise catering to Japanese officers. During this time, Phillips learns that her husband has been interred as a prisoner of war (he does not survive the war) and begins to demonstrate an interest in helping not only prisoners of war but also providing information to the resistance. Within months, Club Tsubaki becomes a hub of anti-Japanese activity, funded by Japanese officers' money. During the war, Phillips uses the false identity of

Dorothy Clara Fuentes, purportedly an Italian, and engages in wholesale clandestine operations under the code name High Pockets. The book reports numerous anecdotes of Phillips' clandestine aid to prisoners of war. After many months of anti-Japanese efforts, Phillips eventually sickens from stress and is apprehended by Japanese police, tortured, and imprisoned. However, many in Cabanatuan Camp survive disease or starvation because of medicines and foods Phillips smuggled into the camp. Much of Chapter 7 is devoted to Phillips; she survives the war in a civilian prisoner of war camp. The text features a photograph of Clair Phillips as well as a photograph of her Tsubaki Club.

General Walter Krueger

Krueger (1881 - 1967) is described as the businesslike and non-dramatic commander of the U.S. Sixth Army. Krueger is a career military officer and is beloved by his troops for his gruff humility. Krueger had fought in the Philippine Insurrection after the Spanish-American War during c. 1908. The text offers little other biographical data, and apart from making the command decision to attempt the rescue at Cabanatuan Camp, Krueger remains a fairly minor person in the narrative. Data about Krueger are featured in several military biography compilations.

Captain Robert Prince

Captain Robert Prince is selected by Henry Mucci to lead the assault mission on the Cabanatuan Camp. As the forward leader, Prince is directly responsible for the execution of the rescue plan. Prince works with Mucci to develop the detailed plan and then leads his men to the camp and successfully directs the assault and subsequent rescue operations. Prince performs the final sweep through the camp, inspecting all the prisoners' barracks—the sweep is effective inasmuch as only a single prisoner is left behind. Prince then withdraws with the rearguard force. Throughout the mission Prince suffers from a foot infection that makes walking painful; he doesn't disclose the condition for fear he will not be allowed to participate. On the latter half of the withdrawal operation Prince spends most of his time riding on a cart. The text features two photographs of Prince.

Major Robert Lapham

Lapham (1917 - 2003) is described as a thin, shrewd, and flinty man from Davenport, Iowa. Having escaped capture at the surrender at Bataan, Lapham spent c. 1943 through early 1945 leading a band of Filipino insurgents in the Nueva Ecija region of Luzon, Philippines. Lapham delivers information about the Cabanatuan Camp to General Krueger's command and notes that in the past the Japanese army has often massacred prisoners of war rather than allow their liberation. Lapham strongly urges Krueger's command to attempt a rescue at Cabanatuan Camp and supplies general

intelligence about the area. The text offers little other biographical data and apart from the initial suggestions, Lapham remains a fairly minor person in the narrative.

Staff Sergeant Abie Abraham

The unusually-named Abraham Abraham was a member of the 31st infantry and a Syrian-American; he grew up in western Pennsylvania and completed a military tour in Panama before shipping out to the Philippines in 1939. Tattooed, pug-nosed, and gregarious, Abraham was a champion boxer and world-champion tree-sitter. He is described as fast-talking, scrappy, and stubborn. Abraham is wounded in the back and thigh prior to surrendering; his wife and three children are also captured by the Japanese but are interred in a civilian prisoner camp; the entire family survives the war. The text features three photographs of Abraham, and in many respects he is the primary source of anecdotal information for the narrative.

Dr. Ralph Emerson Hibbs

Dr. Ralph Emerson Hibbs was a surgeon with the 31st infantry and was imprisoned at Cabanatuan Camp after the surviving the Bataan Death March to Camp O'Donnell. He is described as a friendly and honest man with a basically optimistic outlook. During the final stages of the American defeat on Bataan, Hibbs worked as a massive hospital station where as many as 24,000 patients were incapacitated, many from disease and early starvation. During that time Hibbs himself was afflicted with malaria. Much of the book's early chapters are derived from Hibbs' eyewitness accounts. The text features a photograph of Dr. Hibbs, as well as a photographic reproduction of one of the censored postcards he sent home during his imprisonment at Cabanatuan Camp.

Lieutenant Edward Thomas

Lieutenant Edward "Tommie" Thomas spends the final days of the war as a signals specialist with the 31st infantry, laying telephone lines through the jungle. His unit surrenders to a small Japanese detachment and for several days Thomas is pressed into semi-voluntary service as a chauffeur for a Japanese officer desirous of improving his English. During this period Thomas is treated fairly well. Eventually Thomas is handed over to a prisoner detail and joins thousands of other prisoners of war. One large group is told they must self-elect ten men to be executed as reparations for supposed atrocities committed against Japan. Thomas, single and young, volunteers for execution. The Japanese carry out a mock execution before laughing about the American soldiers' fear; they explain the whole episode was simply a joke. Thomas and the other nine men are returned to the stockade. The men are then aligned for a forced march to Camp O'Donnell. Thomas is described as likable and talkative. The text features two photographs of Thomas.

Chaplain Robert Taylor

Chaplain Robert Taylor is a prisoner of war at Cabanatuan Camp and, later, is evacuated to Japan. Taylor is described as well-liked, trusted, and friendly. During his period of incarceration at Cabanatuan Camp, Taylor is involved in the camp's social life and clandestine smuggling operations. He was identified by the Japanese as the principle contact of High Pockets, or Claire Phillips, and thus when Phillips was arrested, so was Taylor. He was placed in solitary confinement in a metal cage in the full sun and left until he nearly died. He was essentially rescued by other prisoners of war who used subterfuge to misguide the Japanese about Taylor's identity. He thereafter recovered. Taylor was fit enough that when the Japanese evacuated the healthy workers from Cabanatuan, he was selected. He survived a harrowing transit to Japan, surviving the sinking of two transport ships. Taylor survived the war. The book presents several anecdotes involving Taylor.

General Masaharu Homma

General Masaharu Homma is the Japanese commander of the assault on Bataan; as such he is also in command of the evacuation of prisoners that results in the Bataan Death March. The book describes Homma as intellectual, educated, and often detached from the minutia of command. His approved evacuation plan anticipates only about one-quarter of the number of prisoners actually surrendering; his refusal to revise the plan results in many, many deaths. His refusal to oversee the minutia of the plan's execution results in more deaths. Homma, known as the "poet general," was condemned and executed by a war crimes tribunal following the war. The book largely exculpates Homma's role in the atrocities. The text features a photograph of Homma.

Objects/Places

Soochow

Soochow was a dog, a marine regimental mascot, and was kept in regal style at Cabanatuan Camp. Perhaps the only animal safe from being considered food, Soochow was cared for with attentive devotion. He died in 1948 in the USA and is buried on the grounds of the marine recruit station in San Diego, California.

Philippines

The Philippines is a country in Southeast Asia, with Manila as the capital city; it is comprised of more than 7,100 islands. The Philippines were ceded by Spain to the United States in 1898, but Filipino independence movements caused military conflict with the United States from 1901 to c. 1913. The Philippines became an American colony in 1935, and were captured by the Japanese in 1941 and 1942. The Americans recapture the Philippines in 1945.

Bataan Death March

The Bataan Death March was a forced march of prisoners of war from the Bataan peninsula to Camp O'Donnell. The march extended over about three weeks, though the average prisoner spent about one week on the march. An estimated 78,000 prisoners of war participated in the march with a death toll of about 750 Americans and 5,000 Filipinos—a mortality rate of about seven percent. The distance covered meant that, on average, there was a corpse every twenty yards. The prisoners at Cabanatuan Camp generally referred to the march simply as "the Hike" (p. 91). The text presents several photographs of the Bataan Death March.

Camp O'Donnell

Camp O'Donnell was a United States military facility in the Philippines. During the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, Camp O'Donnell was used as a prisoner of war camp and was the final stop of the Bataan Death March. The book does not give exact figures of internees but estimates that about ten percent of all inmates of Camp O'Donnell die there, most from disease, malnutrition, starvation, or torture. The death toll has been estimated at 2,200 Americans and 27,000 Filipinos.

Cabanatuan Camp

Cabanatuan Camp is the principle setting of the book. It is a prisoner of war camp constructed by the Japanese as a centralized location to house prisoners of war. The

camp was used as a source of slave labor for the Japanese war effort, and several satellite camps were established at various work locations. The camp housed about 8,000 inmates at its peak; at the time of the raid only 500 remained.

Cabu River Bridge

The Cabu River lies about one mile east of Cabanatuan Camp and with its steep embankments forms a robust defensive line. During the events described in the book, the river was spanned by a bridge capable of supporting armored vehicles. During the raid, Filipino guerrillas partially demolished the bridge and then fought a highly successful delaying action as Japanese infantry repeatedly tried to cross the unstable bridge in an attempt to reinforce the forces at Cabanatuan Camp. The Cabu River Bridge was thus an immensely significant tactical point during the raid.

Alamo Scouts

The Alamo Scouts was a reconnaissance unit for the US Sixth Army during World War II. They were organized in 1943 and trained to conduct reconnaissance and hit-and-run raids. The unit was comprised of all volunteers and was named after the Alamo of San Antonio, Texas. The book describes the Alamo Scouts' participation in the rescue operations at Cabanatuan Camp.

Rangers

The US Army Rangers are a specialized, elite force of light infantry capable of conducting direct action operations. World War II saw two independent Ranger organizations; the book is concerned only with the 6th Ranger Battalion, which was deactivated in late 1945. The Rangers, led by Mucci, comprised the main assault force during the liberation of Cabanatuan Camp. The text features two photographs of army Rangers en route to Cabanatuan Camp.

Filipino Guerillas

The book presents several Filipino guerrilla operations but focuses on two groups led by Joson and Pajota. Joson's guerrilla unit leads the Rangers to Pajota's unit and then provides a blocking force on the west side of Cabanatuan Camp during the raid. Pajota's unit leads the Rangers to the camp and then provides a blocking force on the east side of the camp. Pajota's forces engaged in a heated battle with Japanese forces. The book does not explore deeply the motivation of most guerrilla units or their typical tactics. The text features a photograph of Filipino Guerrillas.

P-61 Black Widow

The Northrop P-61, or Black Widow, was the first operational US military aircraft designed specifically to use radar. The airplane was a twin-boom, twin-engine, propeller-driven night-fighter used during World War II. On January 30, 1945, a single P-61 flew various acrobatic maneuvers above Cabanatuan Camp as a distraction; while the Japanese watch the bizarre plan the Rangers creep across the open ground outside the camp and achieved total surprise in their assault. The book considers the P-61 at considerable length.

Themes

Imprisonment

The basic narrative arc of the book is that of imprisonment and rescue—while the narrative focuses on Cabanatuan Camp because the men there were rescued, the dominant theme of the book is that of imprisonment during a time of war. Many prisoners are described in the book—obviously the prisoners of war in Cabanatuan Camp, Camp O'Donnell, Puerto Princesa Prison Camp, and others are described. But clandestine collaborators such as Clair Phillips eventually are imprisoned, as are other noncombatants such as Abraham's wife and children. In a greater sense, the Filipino people are not much better than prisoners during the Japanese occupation. The psychological, physical, and moral aspects of imprisonment are all investigated in the book through anecdotes, transcripts of letters, and narrative analysis. The result of long imprisonment is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than by the fact that many of the prisoners of war argued with their rescuers about leaving the camp because they feared Japanese reprisals even in the face of rescue. This mental conditioning is noted as being parallel to physical conditioning derived through years of hard work, malnutrition, and starvation. Nearly all the men rescued displayed signs of disease, vitamin deficiency, and injury. By any measure, imprisonment is the dominant theme of the book.

Rescue

The basic narrative arc of the book is that of imprisonment and rescue—the narrative focuses on Cabanatuan Camp precisely because the men there were rescued; the massacre Puerto Princesa Prison Camp is related in the prologue as a cautionary example of what might have occurred without a rescue. The rescue performed by the Rangers is presented as a dominant theme in the text and is developed as a laudable, even heroic, effort. Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 all develop the theme of rescue by directly describing the rationale, the planning, the preparation, and the execution of the rescue mission. The rescuers' attitude is related through anecdotes; the men felt their mission was fundamentally right and moral. The theme is supported by the prisoners' constant talk of escape, rescue, and survival. The theme of rescue comes full circle in Chapter 12, where the actual rescue operation is described in detail. The approximate 121 American Rangers and 160 Filipino guerrillas effectively rescue 513 prisoners of war; of these, 511 survive to reach the rear area refuge where they receive medical attention and adequate foods and medicines. The rescue is a resounding success, and this fundamental theme is developed throughout the books and is, in fact, the reason for writing the book.

Faith

Many of the prisoners of war exhibit a deep religious faith, and even in times of particular pain or suffering their individual faiths typically are not destroyed. Various quotes offered by multiple prisoners of war discuss faith and religious belief, while some of the survivors were themselves chaplains; at least one survivor turned to being a professional chaplain after the war. In fact, the book points out at considerable length that within the prisoner of war camp the main social organization revolved around chaplains and most of the clandestine operations, aimed at securing medicines and additional foods, were organized by chaplains. The idea that survival in desperate situations evokes, and in fact requires, strong faith is a central theme of the book. The theme is further supported by a few anecdotes relating how men who gave up faith quickly succumbed to disease or starvation. Perhaps the most developed individual example of faith presented in the book is that of Chaplain Robert Taylor, who was tortured nearly to death for his involvement in smuggling operations. He later recuperated and then survived the arduous evacuation to Japan, never wavering in his religious faith.

Style

Perspective

The book is related from the third-person point of view typical of most journalism. The author states a personal involvement in the material, caused by professional interest. The book presents an extensive amount of period materials, including reproductions of photographs, letters, memorabilia, poems, and official documents. Much of the narrative is derived from numerous personal interviews conducted by the author and much of the writing about the place and setting of Cabanatuan Camp is derived from personal inspection by the author. These first-hand perspectives are obvious in the written material, which is engaging, lively, personal, and accessible. For example, many anecdotes are offered as quotes attributed to a specific prisoner of war, and most of the frequently-cited prisoners of war appear in one or more of the photographs included on the photographic plates. The book is intended to be an enjoyable and accessible account of the raid instead of a scholarly or military history; this perspective is successfully achieved by a subjective, engaging tone and a lack of formal structures such as footnotes or indices. Even so, the book suffers from the lack of an index.

Tone

The book is written is a fairly subjective journalistic tone from the third-person point of view. The author is obviously personally invested in the material and makes frequent but minor judgments upon historic events. The writing is informal and obviously not intended as a rigorous military history; instead, the book tries to tell a story in a cohesive and accessible way. The book successfully uses various techniques more typically found in fiction, such as developing a sense of setting by descriptive writing focused on natural elements of the environment. From time to time the author places jarring profanity directly into the narrative, which gives an jarringly off-balance tone to the otherwise consistent narrative. For example, the author describes some prisoners of war as: "[a]ll those fate-fucked men" (p. 62). The total lack of footnotes, endnotes, citations, index, and a formal bibliography all indicate the work is intended more as popular literature than as scholastic research. Finally, the book presents graphic scenes of warfare, torture, murder, and deliberate maiming, as well as descriptions of thousands of deaths due to starvation and disease. Several passages infer or refer to heterosexual and homosexual rape. Many prisoners recall stealing, smuggling, or other acts of violence.

Structure

The 342-page book is divided into thirteen chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue. There are additional minor materials including a list of prisoner of war names at the front and a fairly lengthy "Acknowledgments" section that is partially explanatory in nature. The

book is divided into two major portions, each an enumerated and titled book, namely: "Book One - Blood Brothers", containing Chapters 1 through 7; and "Book Two - Harrow Hell", containing Chapters 8 through 13. The front of the book features an area map of the route of the Bataan Death March with an inset regional orientation map. The back of the book features an area map of the ranger raid on Cabanatuan Camp with an inset detail of the camp layout. The book features two sections of black and white photographic plates, the first section (between pages 118 and 119) has eight pages and twenty photographs; the second section (between pages 214 and 215) also has eight pages and twenty photographs, including nine photographs of persons mentioned in the book taken during August, 2000. The book features primarily narrative action drawn from previously printed materials, oral histories, and extensive personal interviews. The book also includes published memoranda from Cabanatuan Camp, transcriptions of personal letters, and several samples of poetry or other journal entries of Cabanatuan Camp prisoners of war—predominantly those of Henry Lee. The book's chapters interleave events from the prisoners' of war point of view and the Ranger rescue mission point of view, each alternating from chapter to chapter. This provides two narrative rivers that gradually converge on the actual, exciting rescue event itself. From this point forward, the narrative joins into a single narrative.

Quotes

"Then, peeking out the ends of the trenches, the men saw several soldiers bursting into the compound. They were carrying five-gallon buckets filled with a liquid. The buckets sloshed messily as the soldiers walked. With a quick jerk of the hands, they flung the contents into the openings of the trenches. By the smell of it on their skin, the Americans instantly recognized what it was—high-octane aviation fuel from the airstrip. Before they could apprehend the full significance of it, other soldiers tossed in lighted bamboo torches. Within seconds, the trenches exploded in flames. The men squirmed over each other and clawed at the dirt as they tried desperately to shrink from the intense heat. They choked back the smoke and the fumes, their nostrils assailed by the smell of singed hair and roasting flesh. They were trapped like termites in their own sealed nest." (p. 10)

"In August 1944, the War Ministry in Tokyo had issued a directive to the commandants of various POW camps, outlining a policy for what it called the 'final disposition' of prisoners. A copy of this document, which came to be known as the 'August 1 Kill-All Order,' would surface in the war crimes investigations in Tokyo. Bearing a chilling resemblance to actual events that occurred at Palawan, the directive stated:
'When the battle situation becomes urgent the POWs will be concentrated and confined to their location and kept under heavy guard until preparations for the final disposition will be made. Although the basic aim is to act under superior orders, individual dispositions may be made in [certain] circumstances. Whether they are destroyed individually or in groups, and whether it is accomplished by means of mass bombing, poisonous smoke, poisons, drowning, or decapitation, dispose of them as the situation dictates. It is the aim not to allow the escape of a single one, to annihilate them all, and not to leave any traces.'" (pp. 23-24)

"Crickets fiddled in the grass as the first rays of dawn seeped through the night fog. A rooster was crowing in a nearby barrio, and a breeze stirred from Lingayen Gulf, rattling the palm trees. At four-thirty in the morning of Sunday, January 28, 1945, it was still too dark to see, but the Ranger encampment of Calasio bustled with life. Jeep engines revved, generators hummed, cauldrons clanged in the mess tents. The Rangers were wide awake, dressed in their combat boots and jungle greens, sipping cups of Nescafé. Some fussed with their weapons, while others loaded up the big six-by-six GI trucks parked in the dusty field. As the men worked in the feeble light, the sandy soil beneath their boots periodically shuddered from artillery shells exploding far in the distance." (p. 61)

"[Bert Bank] ... was not a particularly religious person, but he found himself praying a great deal during the five days and five nights it took him to reach Camp O'Donnell. Although he was the son of Russian Jews who had somehow landed in the hard red hills of Alabama, he prayed not as a practitioner of Judaism but as a supplicant to any deity or spirit who would listen. 'You're not supposed to pray for results,' Bank said, 'but that's what I did. I didn't pray in any particular tradition, I just prayed for myself, for my

friends. Prayed for the strength to make it through this. I was not angry at God. Who was I to second-guess God? But I was theologically confused. Why had I been spared? Why had my friends died? They were good people. They loved their families. They were honest and true. You ask these sorts of questions all the time, and you never get a satisfactory answer. God does strange things. But sometimes you can feel a presence. You can sense that this is all happening to teach us something about the nature of free will.'" (pp. 96-97)

"For some, the torture continued even after death. On one occasion, the Japanese affixed the decapitated head of an American Indian soldier to a long pole and paraded it around camp for several days. The display was intended as a deterrent to escape; the prisoner, purportedly, had been caught trying to break through the fence." (p. 110)

"However lowly and humble our present position, we are fortunate in being assembled here alive and more or less physically fit. I desire to impress upon you that we are operating under a strictly absolute power. There is only one interpretation, and that is the Japanese interpretation. The Japanese make all decisions. From their orders, once formally issued, there is no appeal. Ours is a state of complete subjugation. Your duty therefore is to obey. Not only for your sake, but for the welfare of the entire personnel of the camp, I know that you will obey..."
From a circular by Colonel Curtis Beecher, the American commanding officer at Cabanatuan Camp (p. 132)

"The tedium was excruciating—the monotony, the starchy sameness. The mental torpor wasn't merely caused by vitamin dearth—it inhered in the long spool of undifferentiated days. 'Rice brains,' they called their dull-witted condition. Three years dragged on without plot. The prime of their lives floated away, unaccounted for. Henry Lee, in one of his poems, wrote of the 'bitter penance, living day to day, and watching the years unfold unused and slow, the youth starved in the breast.' There was day and night. Rainy season and dry. The Navy chimes went off. Each evening the same strains of 'Kimigayo,' the Japanese national anthem, blared through the tinny loudspeaker. Each day had its little notches and markings. The trick was filling the long gaps in between." (p. 140)

"Platero was a pleasantly run-down village of a few dozen thatched huts perched on knobby legs of lumber and set among rice fields near the alluvial plain of the Pampanga River. The barrio was scarcely different from any of the others the Rangers had passed through except for one detail: The POW camp lay two miles away, a half hour's hike at best. But for the haze and the thick brush growing along the river, the villagers in Platero could have made out the uard towers of the stockade directly to the south." (p. 163)

"In a world of perpetual suffering, the chaplains played an exceedingly important role in the life of the camp. Theology was an immediate, and intensely practical, matter. The mysteries of survival often condensed down to spiritual mysteries. The prisoners saw daily evidence of the spirit world, felt the constant beckoning tug of dead comrades beseeching them to join the ghostly ranks. The men saw the way some individuals kept

their faith even through their moments of deepest anguish, while others seemed to give up easily and will themselves to go, almost as though surrendering the spirit were a disease in and of itself." (p. 197)

"A fighter was hurtling across the sky toward them at low altitude, coming from the direction of Lingayen Gulf. Soon the aircraft was on top of them—a strange-looking plane, black as anthracite. It had a long capped snout, a swollen abdomen set with cannons, and sweeping black tails—two of them. There was a hooked needle stuck in its nose that looked vaguely like a stinger. Stair-stepping back from the cockpit was a confusing array of nacelles and bulbous Lucite housings. On the side of the nose was painted a zaftig nude, in the style of Vargas, with the hand-sketched moniker Hard to Get." (p. 246)

"Standing next to the young, strapping Rangers, the prisoners realized anew how sorry they must look, and some were overcome with self-pity and shame. 'The pallor of death shone on our faces,' Abie Abraham later wrote. 'Our hip bones protruded sharply through our thin underwear. We stared vacantly, unable to believe we were no longer prisoners of the Japanese.'" (p. 281)

Then, in a flash of gleaming metal, a vent opened in the mist, and they could see the Golden Gate Bridge, only a few hundred yards ahead. The Anderson was aiming straight for it. The Marin headlands were clothed in a soft nubby green, the first suggestion of spring. The fog was fast peeling away as though to herald their arrival. When they approached the bridge, they looked up and realized that it was filled with people, thousands and thousands of tiny human specks, waving handkerchiefs, screaming from the rails. When the boat passed beneath the span, all sorts of odd trinkets began to rain down upon the deck—flowers, money, tickets to movies and musical shows, bras and lingerie. A banner on the rail said: GOD BLESS YOU, EX-POWS. (p. 329)

Topics for Discussion

Who are the "ghost soldiers" of the book's title? Is "ghost soldiers" an appropriate appellation for these men? Discuss.

The book uses a dual narrative approach, where one narrative development begins in 1942 and another narrative development begins in 1945. Both narratives join in Chapter 12 after having been explored in alternating chapters. Discuss how this construction technique builds excitement and welds the two narratives together into a single story.

The book largely excuses General Masaharu Homma for the Bataan Death March, but at the post-war War Crimes Trial, he was convicted and executed. Discuss how the vantage point of time often modifies the historical perception of culpability.

Most of the American officers involved in planning the rescue mission believed the mission to be a good use of military force and, essentially, the "right" thing to do. Yet the prisoners rescued were not combat effective men. Discuss the morality of making difficult decisions during a time of warfare; how might battlefield necessities make moral decisions difficult?

The book notes that the Filipinos in general hated the Japanese and supported the Americans. Why do you think the Filipinos were so pro-American? What ideas does the book put forward to explain this attitude?

During Pajota's defense of the Cabu River Bridge, the Japanese launched repeated human wave charges directly into machine gun fire. Nearly the entire Japanese force was obliterated without tactical gains. Explore how the Japanese mindset, as presented in the book, explains this seemingly pointless, and obviously suicidal, behavior.

The book does not include an index, footnotes, endnotes, or a developed bibliography—all typical elements of standard historical works. Discuss how the book is presented: is it a history? Is it a story? Is the book's credibility diminished by the lack of these supporting academic resources? Is the book written in a professional style or does it read too much like fiction?