Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War Study Guide

Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War by William Manchester

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The personal memoir contains a mix of biographical and autobiographical elements combined with retrospective analysis of events during World War II. Most, but not all, of the material concerns US Marine Corps combat actions. The major military actions considered include the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the American defeat in the Philippines, the successful American attacks on New Guinea, Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, Guam, and Peleliu; the American victory in the Philippines, and Iwo Jima; and the American invasion of Okinawa. All of these actions are presented as biographical and historical accounts, though they are treated as capsule histories and are in no way intended to be comprehensive historical accounts.

The second major constituent of the book is a series of autobiographical reminiscences about the author's personal involvement in military action and combat. William Manchester, the author, enlisted in the US Marine Corps shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He describes his stateside training, including the typical shenanigans of a young enlistee, and his deployment to the Pacific Theater of war where additional training and idle time were experienced. The author then entered combat on the island of Okinawa and, as a corporal, led a section of men involved in intelligence work—largely running messages, reading maps, and providing security. Many of the author's fellow soldiers are named and very briefly described, but none of them receive much biographical detail; the author mentions that names have been changed to protect privacy.

The book's biographical portions are related in a fairly chronological order, but the author's autobiographical recollections are presented in a non-chronological fashion, interspersed with other segments of the book. This presentation of material has led some readers erroneously to conclude the author personally participated in numerous combat actions across a wide geography. The final major constituent of the book involves a late 1970s series of trips undertaken by the author to visit and revisit Pacific Theater battlefields in an apparently successful attempt to come to terms with prior combat experiences. The book features over two-dozen black and white photographs and over a dozen simple maps. Chapters are named but not enumerated; there is unfortunately no index.

Preamble, Prologue, Able

Preamble, Prologue, Able Summary and Analysis

In the Preamble, Blood That Never Dried, the author describes the process of traveling from the West Coast to the Pacific theater during 1978. He recalls an episode on Okinawa when he came face-to-face with a Japanese sniper and, for the first time, killed another human being. During the episode, the author urinates in his pants and immediately afterward vomits on himself. The episode establishes the memoir as a personal war-time narrative.

In the Prologue, The Wind-Grieved Ghost, the author recalls returning to civilian life after being severely wounded in combat on Okinawa. He retained a .45 service pistol until 1968, when he threw it into the Connecticut River. After that, the author began experiencing nightmares where a much-younger incarnation of himself appears to torment him. In the dreams, the younger author is a sergeant and the older self is an aged civilian; they climb a peak toward each other and then stand looking at each other. The author concludes that to purge the memories of the young combat veteran, the older self must revisit the Pacific battlefields of World War II. The book, a personal memoir that in many ways reads like a travelogue, is the result of that series of visits.

In Chapter Able, From the Argonne to Pearl Harbor, the author provides autobiographical information about his parents and his early life. This information is presented within the context of the military sweep of history of American involvement in the Great War and World War II. The narrative begins with the great American achievements in the Argonne Forest, an action participated in by William Manchester, Sr., the author's father. William Manchester belonged to the fifth Marines and was twenty-two years old during 1919. William was severely wounded and initially was thought to be mortally wounded. After surviving five days without medical attention, he finally received medical care. His wounds resulted in his right arm becoming virtually useless. William's attitude toward the Marine Corps was ambivalent; during his recovery he met and married a nurse, Sallie Elizabeth Rombough Thompson. Some family traditional history of both parents' lines is offered. The author was the happy couple's first child, born in 1923. He grew into a mild, fragile boy, with an incapacity for violence or even self defense, but possessed of an inordinate fondness for valorous acts. The author did well in school and was particularly drawn to literature and theater. The author's father died when the author was eighteen, just weeks before Pearl Harbor. The author, long ambivalent about military service, immediately enlisted in the US Marine Corps.

Baker, Charlie

Baker, Charlie Summary and Analysis

Chapter Baker, Arizona, I Remember You, is about the initial entry of the United States into World War II. The United States was largely unprepared for war. While most Americans watched developments in Europe with some interest, the Pacific machinations of Japan were nearly unknown. American policy was viewed by the Japanese as restrictive, and their increasing need for petroleum caused conflict with the Western world. The memoir does not present a well-developed rationale behind Japan's decision to attack the United States, but instead makes a few simple statements. Then, the Japanese launched a surprise attack against Pearl Harbor, a major United States Naval base. The attack was a complete surprise. The author's first airplane ride, 1945, was to Hawaii from Saipan, when he was medically evacuated. The author recalls the transfer and the excruciating pain of his wounds—one caused by a piece of a friend's shinbone embedded deep in his back. The author returns to Hawaii and tours Pearl Harbor, reflecting on the military history that permeates the locale. He finds it ironic and somewhat unpleasant that commercial Hawaii is dominated by Japanese tourists.

Chapter Charlie, Ghastly Remnants of Its Last Gaunt Garrison, is about the American surrender of the Philippines. The author is feted as a hero upon his visit to the Philippines but finds the official venues unappealing. He thus steals away and visits rural areas. Throughout his early visit he contemplates the nature of General Douglas MacArthur's defense of the Philippines, centered at Corregidor, during the initial weeks of World War II. The American defense of Bataan, in particular, is noted as incredibly heroic. Eventually, though, the Americans capitulated. Most survivors were then taken on a forced march for ten days, across seventy-five miles of rugged terrain. This is today known as the Bataan Death March. Survivors of this brutal experience were then placed in prisoners-of-war camps where they were forced to labor under appalling conditions. Most did not survive the war. The author retraces the route of the Death March during his visit, and notes several war memorials. The author also recalls a combat experience on Okinawa when he hallucinated a sexual fantasy of sorts during one night in a foxhole—the imagery is both graphic and repellent. A later episode recounts how the author's entire squad was killed by an artillery burst—the author was saved because of accidentally tripping and sliding into a mud hole seconds before the explosion.

Dog, Easy

Dog, Easy Summary and Analysis

In Dog, The Rim of Darkness, the author considers MacArthur's New Guinea campaign and the United State's general strategy toward the Pacific Theater. Throughout much of 1942, the United States was clearly losing the war. The public was largely ignorant of the geography of the Pacific Theater, and military planners were unprepared for the realities of island warfare. On the other hand, Japan was wholly given over to warfare and aggression. The Japanese attack found most of the world unprepared—even Australia and New Zealand were caught by surprise. There was a real possibility that Japan would invade and conquer Australia; to that end, they invaded through the Solomon Islands, capturing parts of New Guinea and New Britain (refer to map on p. 82). The American overarching response gave an outward arc of attack to Admiral Chester Nimitz and the Marine Corps, while an inward arc of attack was given to General Douglas MacArthur and the Army (refer to two-page map in front matter).

Most Americans entered combat expecting South Seas paradises full of buxom girls and pineapple. Few encountered such paradise. The author visits New Guinea and tours some old battlefields—little evidence remains of combat, but the terrain is still incredibly rugged and the vegetation still impenetrable. Other inland areas, much less accessible, still have many rusting machines of war. Much of the chapter is devoted to a consideration of the native flora and fauna, and the extreme difficulty and danger of traversing the inland jungles. The author, meanwhile, contemplates his early training in the Marine Corps and recalls some homosexual soldiers, none of them stereotypically gay. The author recalls entering combat with one homosexual non-commissioned officer on Okinawa who cracks up under pressure, then offers several paragraphs of Marine Corps slang. The author then considers the incredible heroism and determination of the American soldiers who attacked the Japanese on New Guinea and successfully stymied the Japanese advance toward Australia.

In Chapter Easy, The Raggedy Ass Marines, the author relates his boot camp experiences. The author trained at Parris Island, South Carolina, and compares the facility to Alcatraz. The author's first military friend was Lawrence Dudley, a heavy, flaxen-haired, round-shouldered youth, who irked the drill instructor but really desired to be a Marine. The author enjoyed boot camp and found a great sense of belonging and identity within the Marine Corps. Much boot camp idiom is explained, as are several boot camp traditions, including the occasional institutionalized hazing of a particular recruit by a particular drill instructor—in this case, Dudley is hazed by Coffey. Also, the author became aware that as a wartime enlistee, he and many like him were second-class citizens among the professional soldiers of the Marine Corps. During rifle qualification, the author scored expert rifleman with an unprecedented score of 317 of 330. The officer then transferred to Quantico for officer training. The author hated Quantico and came to realize that he did not want to be an officer—the camaraderie enjoyed in the enlisted ranks of the Marine Corps was absent among officers.

Eventually the author left Quantico by mutual decision and returned to the Marine Corps as a Corporal.

The author was assigned to "intelligence" (p. 133) work, essentially performing reconnaissance, conducting map-reading instruction, and performing various other functions—mostly patrolling, reading maps, and carrying messages. The author was assigned to lead the intelligence section in his battalion; the original members of the section are considered (refer to pp. 134-136): Bubba Yates, Dusty Rhodes, Barney Cobb, Lefty Zepp, Chet Przyastawaki, Wally Moon AKA Whipeye, Izzy Levy, Whitey Dumas, Shiloh Davidson, and Hunky O'Banion. Later in the memoir many other men are also mentioned, though none of them receive extensive biographical treatment. The section engaged in extensive field training in North Carolina and other shenanigans, and then shipped out to California. The author attempts, unsuccessfully, to visit his mother before leaving. In California, the author meets and develops reciprocal feelings for Taffy Meredith. Taffy and the author plan a pre-departure sexual tryst but it never quite works out, and eventually she decides it's best to not proceed. Frustrated, the author meets Mae, a near-prostitute, older, alcoholic, married woman. They attempt sexual intercourse but don't quite figure it out—the author thus departs for combat a virgin. The writing of Mae's and the author's sexual exploits is fairly graphic.

Fox, George

Fox, George Summary and Analysis

Chapter Fox, The Canal, is about Guadalcanal. The author arrived at Guadalcanal only after the combat there had ended. He found the island marred by destruction but a "vision of beauty, but of evil beauty" (p. 160). The jungle dominated the island and the stench of rotting vegetation was pervasive. Insects, particularly biting insects, were omnipresent. Other animal dangers—sharks, snakes, leeches, scorpions—were common. The story of the Marine Corps assault on Guadalcanal—the first major US amphibious operation of World War II—is related. The Marines were landed from ships to shore largely by Higgins boats. They were armed with weapons and equipment from Great War vintage. American amphibious techniques were primitive and American skill and knowledge was very new and raw. The attack used a typical methodology—the beach was shelled by ships and bombed by planes and then waves of Marines went ashore. The Japanese defense was strong at the waterline and the initial waves met strong resistance and took many casualties. Even after the American forces were ashore, Japanese resistance was furious. The island campaign took much, much longer than anticipated, largely because the American Navy was unable to provide continuous support to the Marines ashore and because the Japanese Navy constantly reinforced the island's defenses; many Marines subsisted on captured Japanese food stores during combat.

For many weeks the outcome of the American attack was in doubt, and only the stalwart Marine attack created the attitude of victory that ultimately emerged. Much of the bloodiest fighting centered around a rocky prominence which came to be known as Bloody Ridge, and the book offers considerable detail of much of the combat action. The island finally was captured, as were other islands in the immediate archipelago. Given the ferocity of the combat and the steep cost of victory, it is surprising that most Americans, even at the time, remained more or less ignorant of the campaign. The author's visit to Guadalcanal in 1978 finds the island largely controlled by international companies. The author voyages to Bloody Ridge, uses a pick to hack out a foxhole, and spends a very uncomfortable and wet night inside an insect shelter.

The author recalls the death of Lefty Zepp during the night, the first soldier to be killed in action under the author's command. Zepp was a distinctive soldier who adopted various eccentricities of dress and behavior. Zepp is killed by being shot in the groin while the battalion is on the front lines. The author and his men are deeply affected by the first death of a friend, and looking at Zepp's gory bloodstained groin, the author comments that he felt finally he had lost his virginity. This scene culminates the conflation of the memoir's presentation of sexuality and violence. The transition from Guadalcanal geography to Okinawa combat in this section is not particularly notable, leaving many readers erroneously convinced that Zepp was killed on Guadalcanal. After surviving his single night camping out, the author resumes a sort of travelogue about Guadalcanal; the native populace is very pro-American, the author tours the island and finds much of

it still pristine, war detritus is still commonly found, and several other islands in the archipelago are visited and commented upon.

Chapter George, Les Braves Gens, is about Tarawa. Tarawa is an atoll comprised of several small islands composed of coral and sand covered by scrub brush. The islands have little elevation and are long, thin, and tiny (refer to map on p. 216). Most of the combat in the Tarawa atoll took place on the largest island in the archipelago, Betio, about half the size of Manhattan's Central Park. The island of Betio is at its widest about six hundred yards across and was desirable because it was home to a Japanese airfield. Tarawa was ringed by an uncharted and treacherous reef and its beaches were strongly defended by many large guns. The assault was planned without sufficient information about tides, water depths, and reef positions. American equipment, including uniforms and small arms, proved insufficient. The American bombardment proved woefully insufficient and the Japanese defense was ferocious. The American amphibious landing ran ashore on the reef due to shallow water and the Marines had to wade ashore for hundreds of yards through withering fire—many drowned. After a battle of utmost savagery, Tarawa was secured by American forces but at a very high price in lives. After the battle, the American military made numerous adaptations of strategy, equipment, and tactics. Graphic photographs of the aftermath of combat were published and received strong reactions from the public.

The author visits Tarawa and finds it undeveloped; several photographs are included in the book. The island is still littered with many pieces of rusting equipment—tanks, artillery—and concrete blockhouses. The author then recalls combat on Okinawa when his men were pinned down behind a seawall and the logical course of action was to wait while flanking American units drove off the Japanese defenders. Instead, a brand-new and officious officer assumes command and orders a direct frontal assault over the seawall and into Japanese machine gun positions. The officer gives the order then scales the seawall ahead of the men—and immediately is shot dead through the chest.

How

How Summary and Analysis

In Chapter How, We Are Living Very Fast, the author discusses the invasion of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian, three of the Mariana Islands. The American military invasion of these three islands was conducted as a single operation and the plan of attack assumed rapid victory and relatively thin defenses. In fact, resistance was furious and victory was difficult, costly, and involved prolonged combat. The book presents the biographical information about Saipan, then Tinian, and finally Guam. Tinian receives little coverage in the memoir. At Saipan, the US Marines encountered a strong and determined defender who attempted to repulse the initial landings. The Japanese defenders realized they would not be rescued or substantively reinforced but were determined to fight to the end. While the Marines fought ashore, the US Navy engaged the Imperial Japanese Navy in a prolonged series of naval and aerial combats. The Japanese aviators largely were inexperienced and the American victory in the air was lopsided, resulting in that conflict gaining the sometimes reference of the Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.

Unfortunately for the Marines ashore, the land-based combat was brutal, prolonged, and waged with professionalism. American casualties were high. One of the final days of combat was marked by a massive Japanese banzai charge; most of the Japanese soldiers fortified their courage with huge doses of alcohol; many of them attacked with swords or other manual implements. Saipan had a large Japanese civilian population, including women and children. As defeat became inevitable and apparent, the civilians worried that American servicemen would rape and abuse the populace. Fueled by anti-American propaganda and the feeling of national duty, nearly all the islands civilians committed mass suicide by leaping from high cliffs; the book provides two photographs of the most-commonly-used cliffs. The author was evacuated to Saipan after being wounded on Okinawa and spent some time there convalescing.

When the author visits the island in the late 1970s he finds it commercialized, strongly pro-American, and populated with many Japanese. He also finds the presence of so many Japanese difficult to accept. Tinian is examined next but in much less detail; the combat there was noted as being also very difficult and deadly.

The chapter continues with a consideration of the island of Guam. Captured by the Japanese early in the war, Guam's populace was subjected to brutalization, torture, and murder by Japanese soldiers. Several accounts of atrocities are provided. The US invasion of Guam was preceded by a prolonged bombing, but even so the initial attack and subsequent campaign generally are considered to have been even more difficult than on Saipan. Guam apparently had huge stores of alcohol and many drunken Japanese banzai charges were encountered. Usually these tactically were ineffective, though frightening. The Japanese also heavily utilized nighttime tactics on Guam including terror tactics.

The author's 1970s-era visit to Guam is healing to him and he finds Guam's enthusiastic pro-American attitude and democratic culture appealing. In connection with Guam's Japanese alcohol store, the author also remembers a particular drinking binge on Okinawa when he passed out in his foxhole. The next day he had a heavy hangover during patrol and even a firefight. He also recalls various soldiers in his section and reminisces about several humorous bull sessions they held.

Item

Item Summary and Analysis

Chapter Item, I Will Lay Me Down for to Bleed a While..., discusses the Palau Islands and the combat on Peleliu, a small island measuring about seven miles by two miles. The chapter name is continued with the next chapter's name and both are taken from a verse by John Dryden. As the Marine Corps and Army thrusting toward Okinawa began to converge, they passed in the vicinity of Peleliu. An invasion of the island was planned, but before it was executed it became strategically unnecessary; nevertheless, it was already being executed and was therefore allowed to go forward. The invasion was expected to be an easy victory—it was not. The island is dominated by a massive rocky ridge known locally as Umurbrogol and known to the US Marine Corps as Bloody Nose Ridge.

The Japanese defenders had been written off as lost by the Japanese command structure, but they were ordered to kill as many Americans as they could. The Marines were met by concentrated fire during the beach landings; the pre-landing bombardment had done virtually nothing against the heavily dug-in Japanese defenses. Umurbrogol was a warren of caves, tunnels, and strong points. American casualties were massive and the battle front was often fluid.

The author notes that souvenirs were popular with soldiers and recalls a particular experience on Okinawa when a rear echelon soldier had wandered to the front to collect souvenirs. The man was so oblivious to danger that he stood up and walked around and was shot dead.

Today, Peleliu is nearly forgotten—very remote, rural, and seldom visited. Old tanks and guns rust and concrete pillboxes crumble to the touch. The author visits Umurbrogol in the 1970s and finds the American memorial there in poor repair—the Japanese memorial is in good condition. About when the Marines were fighting on Peleliu, MacArthur led army forces ashore to the Philippines, first on Leyte and later to Luzon. The author's 1970s visit to the Philippines finds the islands intensely cosmopolitan and diverse. The author particularly notes the appalling distance between the few ultra-rich and the many desperately poor.

Chapter Item concludes with a consideration of Iwo Jima. The small island stinks of sulfur and is covered with coarse black sand, with little vegetation and no water. The island is dominated by Mount Suribachi. The Marine landing there was not contested at the water—instead, the Japanese remained dug in within concrete defensive networks of tunnels, caves, and pillboxes. The island was heavily mined and the defenders had numerous large-caliber guns and machine guns. The Japanese defenders realized they would all be killed and were determined to inflict as many American casualties as possible—Americans, both Marines and Army units, suffered enormous casualties throughout the prolonged battle. Today, Iwo Jima is remembered as one of the worst

combat crucibles of the entire war. The author makes a rare technical mistake in describing the Japanese Type 89 Grenade Launcher, or "Knee Mortar", as intentionally being braced for firing against the knee (see p. 342); a common but mistaken opinion. The author's 1970s visit to Iwo Jima is difficult to arrange—civilians generally cannot travel there. The island was formally returned to the Japanese in 1968 and is today remote. The remains of dead soldiers still are routinely discovered on the island.

Jig, Author's Note

Jig, Author's Note Summary and Analysis

Chapter Jig, ...Then I'll Rise and Fight With You Again, discusses the author's autobiographical combat experiences on Okinawa. The chapter name is continued from the previous chapter's name and both are taken from a verse by John Dryden. The chapter is the most autobiographical in the memoir but does contain an imprecise, complex, and often confusing chronology. The Japanese defense of Okinawa did not focus on the beach; instead the defenders holed up in extensive and strong prepared redoubts. The fortifications were so massive they could not be destroyed by aerial bombardment and had to be cleared out by infantry. The civilians were hostile and the geography complex. The author describes going ashore in a Higgins boat, relieved that there is no active defense. In the distance, kamikaze planes attacked the US fleet. The Marine invasion of Okinawa was slow, painful, and difficult—numerous American casualties were taken. The heavy Japanese defense used combined arms and proved quite effective. Defensive positions often required prolonged siege to capture and the battlegrounds often came to resemble trench warfare from the Great War.

One particularly strong local defensive position was situated on Sugar Loaf Hill and its environs. Sugar Loaf Hill changed hands several times during the bloodiest fighting on Okinawa, and the author served in combat on and around the hill. The author's regiment landed 3,512 men on April 1st and by early May had taken 2,812 casualties. He relates his reaction to receiving replacement troops and relates several other combat anecdotes.

On one occasion the author and Chet Przyastawaki are running a message and become pinned down by a Japanese sniper; they take cover behind a huge boulder. They eventually devise a plan—Przyastawaki throws a grenade to distract the sniper while the author rolls out and shoots the sniper. During the brief exchange a mortar round comes into the area and kills Przyastawaki.

Many other men, friends of the author, are noted as having been killed (e.g., refer to pp. 376-377). The author is wounded in the leg, receiving a 'million dollar wound', and goes to hospital for treatment. Learning that his unit is about to deploy, the author leaves the hospital and rejoins his unit—wondering why. After more combat, he is then with two other soldiers who take shelter during an artillery barrage. During the barrage an eight inch shell lands close by, vaporizing Rip Thorpe and driving a part of his shinbone into the author. The author receives other severe wounds, including injuries to the head and brain. He is left for dead for four hours before receiving medical attention. This echoes his father's medical treatment during the Great War, described earlier in the memoir. Manchester is then evacuated to an LST and then on to Saipan for convalescence before moving on to Hawaii for treatment and, ultimately, to San Diego where he makes a slow but full recovery.

The author returns to Okinawa in the late 1970s and finds the island exceptionally commercialized and the culture superficial and unappealing. He locates a few minor war remnants and visits some battlefields but the history of World War II is, here, largely effaced. The author meets, in dream, his younger self—The Sergeant—and mulls over his decision to leave the hospital and rejoin his unit. He decides it was performed as an act of love for his fellow soldiers. The book then briefly comments upon the natures of patriotic devotion and nationalism that once existed but no longer exist. The author realizes that his journeys have, somehow, healed him, and the sergeant no longer will come in dreams.

The Author's Note discusses the text, specifically noting it is intended as a personal memoir and not a definitive history. The author notes problems of chronology and dismisses any attempt to exactly reconstruct a precise chronology, noting brain and head injuries would make any such reconstruction suspect in any case. The author acknowledges the events are discussed from the vantage point of thirty-five years' experience, with the attendant problems of precision associated with such a retrospective. The book concludes with a lengthy thank-you list.

Characters

William Manchester

William Raymond Manchester (1922 - 2004) was an American biographer and historian. He published eighteen books, any of which have been translated into other languages. Manchester's father served in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War I and was partially disabled from combat wounds.

After his father's death and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Manchester enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps, expecting to serve in Europe. Instead, he was sent to the Pacific Theater. He gained the rank of sergeant, turning down an opportunity at commission, and saw combat duty in the final campaign of World War II on the island of Okinawa. There, he was severely wounded in the head and elsewhere. Manchester's personal memoir, the book here under consideration, juxtaposes descriptions of Marine Corps campaigns with personal experiences drawn from his fighting on Okinawa—this often confuses readers who mistakenly conclude he fought in most of the major battles of the Pacific Theater.

After recovering from his wounds, Manchester gained a college education, married, and raised a family. He worked professionally as a journalist and professor. During the 1970s, Manchester decided to visit several Pacific Theater battlefields, including Okinawa, in an attempt to integrate his wartime memories with his adult life. In the memoir, Manchester refers to his combat memories and personifies them as 'the Sergeant'; the author is often referred to as an old man and some of the memoir consists of the Sergeant and the old man coming to know and accept each other. The memoir concludes with the Sergeant's absence and the old man keenly feeling the loss.

Douglas MacArthur

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur (1880 - 1964) was an American general of great renown. During the 1930s, he was the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, and throughout World War II he played a prominent part of strategic planning. While the memoir provides some background information on MacArthur prior to World War II, the dominant focus is on his leadership role from 1941 - 1945. The two-page front-matter map of the Pacific Ocean shows MacArthur's forces main thrust from New Guinea through Peleliu and the Philippines to Okinawa.

MacArthur is characterized as a brilliant but vain man with a complex personality. MacArthur's army efforts were paralleled by Nimitz's Navy efforts. The author repeatedly states that MacArthur's military achievements were superb while conceding that, for many Americans, MacArthur's bloated self-image and eccentricities have proved troubling. The author has also published a biography of MacArthur, in part explaining

the general's representation within the memoir to a greater extent that would otherwise seem justified in a book based on Marine Corps experiences.

Colonel Horace F. Hastings

Hastings is the regimental commander of the author's unit during its stateside training in North Carolina. He is older and tough, with brooding eyes, corded neck, windbitten face, and sinewy hands. Hastings is described as fairly stupid, though popular with the ladies. Hastings is much given to redundant speech patterns and is a veteran of the Great War and various campaigns in Central America. Hastings invents a complex and ineffective device to capture insects. Eventually, Hastings is fired for gross incompetence. He appears only within Chapter Easy.

Whitey Dumas

Dumas is one of the original enlisted men in the author's intelligence section. A confidence man in civilian life, Dumas is well-equipped for military life. Jailed in Portsmouth, Dumas talked his way out by claiming to read and write Japanese. One enlisted, Dumas invented a series of nonsensical syllables and taught 'Japanese' lessons to his section. Dumas occurs in several of the minor incidents described in the memoir.

Lefty Zepp

Lefty Zepp is one of the original enlisted men in the author's intelligence section. Zepp, a Jew, was not known as such by his fellow soldiers. He is described as having slanted eyes, black curly hair, and high cheekbones. Zepp affects peculiar dress, carrying a swagger stick, binoculars, a fancy pistol, and handmade boondockers. The author feels these accoutrements made Zepp appear as an officer. Zepp was convinced that he would survive the war but didn't want to merely survive—he wanted to stand out as a brave man, and to this end he often took risks. Zepp is the first man under the author's control to be killed in action—he is shot in the groin and his bleeding, apparently dead body is handed back down the ranks. Zepp, a student at Harvard, was nineteen when killed. The author is disturbed by Zepp's death and conflates Zepp's groin wound to losing his virginity. Prior to military service, Zepp attended Harvard with the class of 1945 as a premed student.

Bubba Yates

Bubba Yates is an enlisted man in the author's intelligence section. Yates is a Southern boy who attended Ole 'Bama with the class of 1945, majored in divinity, and was killed in action on Okinawa after making a heroic defense. During one memorable exchange, Yates and the author discuss the relative value of wearing steel helmets. They sit in a foxhole, wearing helmets, and carry on their hypothetical discussion, the author stating

helmets are good protection and Yates arguing that helmets are useless and a waste of time. While they talk, an artillery burst sprays shrapnel into the area, a piece of which impacts Yates' helmet and deeply dents it. Yates takes off his helmet and examines the dent, both men conclude Yates would be dead without the helmet, and Yates puts the helmet back on, and then calmly continues to argue that helmets are useless.

Chet Przyastawaki

Chet Przyastawaki is one of the original enlisted men in the author's intelligence section. Przyastawaki is described as intense, athletic, and wiry—but without much intuition. During one memorable episode, Przyastawaki and the author are running a message when they are pinned down by a Japanese sniper. Being unable to escape the situation, the two men devise a plan to kill the sniper. Przyastawaki throws a grenade at the sniper—who is out of grenade range—to distract the sniper; meanwhile, Manchester rolls into firing position in the open and kills the sniper with several well-placed shots. During the exchange, a mortar shell explodes in the area and kills Przyastawaki by striking him in the face. The author describes the horrible feeling of seeing his friend without a face. Before entering the military, Przyastawaki had attended Colgate with the class of 1945, and was an undecided major.

Wally Moon

Wally Moon is one of the original enlisted men in the author's intelligence section. He is described as a little corpulent, eccentric and peculiar, devoid of social graces, but very intelligent. Before his military service, Moon attended MIT with the class of 1943, intending to become a physicist. Moon adopts the peculiar habit of always sleeping alone in his own foxhole—nearly all Marines paired off for security reasons. Moon dies during one rainy night when an artillery barrage collapses his foxhole and he is trapped under the mud and drowns. The author comments particularly upon the waste of life and future possibility when Moon's death is described.

Horst von der Goltz

Horst von der Goltz attended Maine University with the class of 1943 and intended to become a professor of political science. He led a flamethrower team against a Japanese prepared position on Sugar Loaf Hill when the flamethrower operator was killed by a sniper. Von der Goltz had not been trained on the flamethrower but nevertheless strapped on the weapon and advanced against the enemy. He triggered the device without leaning into it, and the substantive recoil threw him over on his back, where he was saturated with fuel and cremated.

Shiloh Davidson III

Shiloh Davidson was one of the soldiers in the author's intelligence section, and seems to have been a close personal friend, though little biographical information is offered about him. He attended Williams' University with the class of 1944 and came from a wealthy family of influence. During a night patrol, Davidson was shot several times and thrown back against barbed wire. The Japanese illuminated the body and area with eerie green flares so that the author and his men could see Davidson hanging on the wire, writhing in pain, and screaming for several hours until he finally died. The author visited Davidson's mother after the war.

Objects/Places

Pearl Harbor

Pearl Harbor, a natural harbor on the Hawaiian Island of Oahu, was and is a US Naval base. Much destruction was wrought there on December 7, 1941, by a surprise attack by the Imperial Japanese Navy. The American forces were caught entirely by surprise and the devastation was considerable. America, previously neutral, responded to the attack by entering World War II.

Bataan and Corregidor

During the early months of the war the Japanese invaded the American-held Philippines and won early victories. The American defensive forces fell back to the peninsula of Bataan where they were compressed and, unsupplied, ultimately surrendered. The prisoners of war were then marched cross country under brutal treatment in what has since become known as the Bataan Death March. The fortress island of Corregidor, off the coast from Bataan, held out for several more days but ultimately also capitulated.

Guadalcanal

A small island in the Pacific Ocean in the Solomon Island chain, Guadalcanal was the site of a major battle during World War II. The island is mainly jungle and during 1942 became the site of the first major American amphibious operation of the war. Guadalcanal is today viewed as a major turning point in the war as the American victory stopped the expansion of the Japanese empire.

Tarawa Atoll

The Tarawa Atoll in the central Pacific Ocean was the site of a major battle during World War II. Most of the combat in the atoll took place on Betio Island at the southwestern corner of the atoll. The island is tropical and during 1943 became the site of one of the most widely-known and savage American amphibious operations of the war. The lessons learned about amphibious assault at Tarawa were later applied at Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and other island operations.

Saipan

Saipan is an island in the Pacific Ocean in the Mariana Island chain. The island became the site of a major battle during World War II. The combat there was notable because of the massively entrenched Japanese defensive preparations. As the American victory became evident, most of the many Japanese civilians on the island—women and

children included—committed mass suicide by leaping from cliffs into the surf far below. After being grievously wounded at Okinawa the author spent some time on Saipan convalescing.

Peleliu

Peleliu is a tiny island in the Palau islands, with a total land mass of only about five square miles. During 1944 the island became the site of a major battle between the US Marine Corps and forces of the Japanese Empire. Planners believed the island to be lightly defended but in fact it was heavily defended. Today the battle for Peleliu is controversial because it is now known there was no strategic need to capture the island.

Iwo Jima

Iwo Jima is a tiny island about six hundred and fifty miles south of the Japanese mainland. It is most famous at the location of a two-month battle, in 1945, between American and Japanese forces. Iwo Jima was occupied by American until 1968 when it was formally returned to Japan. Today, travel to the island is restricted and difficult. The island is volcanic and devoid of most plant life. The Japanese defenses of Iwo Jima were considerable and strong, and American losses were great. The island was used as a bomber base in the closing weeks of World War II. Along with Guadalcanal and Tarawa, Iwo Jima remains one of the most-remembered battles of the war.

Leyte and Luzon

Leyte and Luzon are two of the islands that saw heavy combat during the American recapture of the Philippines during World War II. The combat operations were largely conducted by the US Army and the memoire's mention of the two campaigns is correspondingly slight. The Japanese occupation of the Philippines was virulent and brutal and many American servicemen starved to death or were murdered or worked to death in prisoner-of-war camps.

Okinawa

Okinawa is a long but narrow island to the south of the Japanese Islands; it is considered to be part of the Japanese homeland. The island has complex geography and was the site of the largest amphibious battle of World War II when American Marines and Army units invaded. The Japanese defense of Okinawa was similar to that of Iwo Jima in tactics—the Americans were allowed to come ashore relatively uncontested but subsequently faced determined defenders in prepared positions. All of the author's autobiographical combat elements transpired on Okinawa, a fact that is not always immediately obvious within the text.

The Sergeant

The memoir uses a metaphysical dream element to symbolize the author's internal conflict. Often, in later life, the author dreams of himself meeting a younger version of himself known as the sergeant. The younger man is the combat-centered soldier of World War II, caught in a time, place, and emotion of great significance to the author. In the book the sergeant represents the internal conflict of the survivor and ceases to visit the author's dreams after a series of healing and introspective visits to World War II battlefields.

Themes

Healing

The basic theme of the memoir is that of the psychological healing of an individual amidst the larger sociological healing process of a nation. The author presents the autobiographical memoir with a complex chronology that juxtaposes experiences of 1945 with the reality of 1979. Manchester had been an inexperienced but enthusiastic soldier prior to combat on Okinawa. There he received critical psychological wounds as well as severe physical wounds, including substantive brain trauma. Though he survived, the author remained permanently marked, and perhaps marred, by his experiences.

Many of the autobiographical combat elements of the memoir deal with the direct experience of violence and conflict too great to comprehend. Clearly, the author's experience was not singular, and this is illustrated by the memoir's inclusion of dozens of other soldiers, casualties in one way or another, who experienced roughly the same things as the author experienced.

The author describes his physical rehabilitation process, moving from Okinawa to Saipan to Hawaii to San Diego, and the surgeries and many months of recovery. By the mid 1970s, the author began to experience psychological repercussions of his military experience, and by the end of the 1970s he determined to make a series of visits to Pacific Theater battlefields, including Okinawa, in an attempt to better understand his own history and somehow heal the psychological wounds of battle. Along the personal voyage, the author notes the various changes to islands once devastated by combat—some have reverted largely to nature, others are pro-American, and some are vibrantly commercialized. The memoir is the result of the two voyages and the healing of the author's physical and psychological wounds, and the sociological healing of the nations involved.

The Personal Experience of Combat

Roughly one half of the memoir is devoted to the author's personal experiences of combat, from the reckless but unsuccessful quest to lose his virginity prior to shipping out to the violent destruction that ended his military service. The author describes about a dozen major combat incidents and dozens of other wartime anecdotes occurring on the periphery of combat. For the most part, the various combat episodes cannot be assembled in any definitive chronology, but the Author's Note at the end of the memoir makes it clear that any such arrangement would be supposition only. In general, the author landed with other US Marines on Okinawa and participated in at least two major battles. The first at Sugar Loaf Hill was a prolonged siege involving many thousands of troops. There, the author was wounded in the leg and transferred to hospital for treatment. Manchester voluntarily left hospital to rejoin his unit as they redeployed to the

Motobu Peninsula, where he was seriously wounded in an artillery barrage, being temporarily blinded, injured in the brain and other locations, and being judged dead for at least about four hours. Manchester later received medical care and recovered, though his personal experience of combat left him at least partially psychologically damaged for the next three and a half decades. His successful attempt to come to terms with his combat experiences is the major driving force of the memoir's narrative.

History of the US Marine Corps

Roughly one half of the memoir is devoted to the general sweep of history involving the US Marine Corps in the Pacific Theater of World War II. While some actions of the US Army and Navy are considered, the focus of the narrative is clearly on the Marine Corps. The front-matter two-page map shows the arc of action pursued by the Marine Corps in the convex sweep moving from the Solomon Islands, through the Gilbert, Marshall, Mariana, and Volcano Island groups, to Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands. The major Marine Corps battles described in detail include Guadalcanal, Tarawa Atoll, Saipan, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Tinian and a few other battles are described in less detail. Each of the major battles includes a description of the basic plan of attack, the basic defensive strategy employed by the Japanese, a concise geography of the battle, and a mention of the American tactics used. Combat equipment, from clothing through small arms to artillery, is discussed in basic terms, and the various tactical approaches typically used are also considered. Special obstacles—the jungles of Guadalcanal, the reef at Tarawa Atoll, the prepared defenses of Iwo Jima—are noted and discussed. While the memoir does not attempt to be a tactics primer or even a comprehensive detailed history of the US Marine Corps, it does provide a general overview of the history of Marine Corps activities in the Pacific Theater of World War II. Semper fidelis.

Style

Perspective

The book is a personal memoir, as indicated by the secondary title, and it is presented as such throughout. While a good amount of historical fact is presented, the book nevertheless does not attempt to present an authoritative history of the Pacific Theater of the Second World War. Chapters typically comprise of a recounting of historical facts juxtaposed with the author's personal experiences. Usually, the personal experiences related did not happen at the same time or place as the historical material included in the same chapter—this causes confusion for some readers. The personal experiences are drawn from two main time periods. The dominant set of personal experiences includes the author's military enlistment during World War II, with a focus on his combat experiences on Okinawa. Secondary experiences include the 1970s-era travel the author takes to various Pacific Theater battlefields in an attempt better to understand his own history. This mingling of historical fact and personal reflection inextricably link the personal narrative with the larger narrative of the US Marine Corps' collective experience. The author clearly considers himself to be one of the many participants and considers his own experiences to be as typical as any single person's experiences could be. The memoir has the perspective of years, and this is made clear by the front-matter photograph of the author near the time of his combat experience and its contrast with the 1979 photograph of the author on p. 394. The book is thus retrospective and introspective and provides a unique perspective on the wartime experience.

Tone

The book is a personal memoir, as indicated by the secondary title, and is presented with a complex blend of journalism and intimacy. Portions of the book dealing with major historical events tend to have a journalistic tone, though subjective commentary is offered. Portions of the book dealing with the author's personal experiences are much more subjective and are related in a personal style that is often ironic, sarcastic, and humorous. For example, the book considers the massive enlistment and compulsory military service programs of the United States with a somewhat dry and objective tone, but contrasts that with the author's personal and unsuccessful attempts to lose his virginity before 'shipping out' for combat, which are offered in a self-effacing and risible tone. The book's contents are therefore uneven; it does not attempt to be a thorough military history, but yet it is not content completely to be a personal memoir either.

The tone emerging from the overall text is that of a competent participant who is reflecting upon the past in both general and personal methods. The writing is professional and accessible, though some readers might be offended by frank discussions of sexuality—both heterosexual and homosexual, graphic depictions of combat violence, and infrequent but repetitive use of profanity.

Structure

The 401-page book contains front-matter, including a photograph and a map, as well as a preamble and a prologue. The main section of the book consists of ten named chapters of uneven length. Chapters are named Able, Baker, Charlie, and so forth, so even though they are not enumerated, their sequence is readily understood. The book concludes with an Author's Note; there is unfortunately no index. The book includes several photographs and various maps.

The book features a complex chronology that is difficult to understand in some places. Whereas the overarching history of the US Marine Corps' involvement in the Pacific Theatre of World War II is related in a fairly straightforward chronology, these segments of the memoir are supplemented with details of personal involvement in combat which are drawn from different periods of the author's experiences. In fact, while it is impossible to correctly identify a precise chronology of the author's personal experiences, a rough approximation can be fairly easily pieced together. Because the author's personal experiences are presented within chapters considering various combat locations, readers may erroneously assume the author was somehow present at numerous major combat periods. In fact, the author's combat experience was limited to the Okinawa campaign discussed in Chapter Jig, beginning on p. 349. Thus, the author's personal experiences discussed within the chapter on Guadalcanal did not happen on Guadalcanal. The relatively constant interleaving of different chronological periods is often somewhat difficult to follow, and careful attention should be given to shifts in time as they are not always called out exceptionally well within the text.

Quotes

"My first shot had missed him, embedding itself in the straw wall, but the second caught him dead-on in the femoral artery. His left thigh blossomed, swiftly turning to mush. A wave of blood gushed from the wound; then another boiled out, sheeting across his legs, pooling on the earthen floor. Mutely he looked down at it. He dipped a hand in it and listlessly smeared his cheek red. His shoulders gave a little spasmodic jerk, as though someone had whacked him on the back; then he emitted a tremendous, raspy fart, slumped down, and died. I kept firing, wasting government property." p. 6

"The United States was distracted by the war in Europe, with Hitler's hammer blows that year falling on Yugoslavia, Greece, Crete, and—the greatest crucible of suffering—Russia. Virtually all Americans were descended from European immigrants." p. 37

"Abruptly she hoisted her skirt to her hips and spread her legs. My pulse was hammering, my sexual craving almost overwhelming. This was my moment of maximum temptation. For the first and only time in my life I understood rape. I have never been more ready. Then, from her sultry muttering, I learned her fee. I couldn't mount her here. She gestured toward the Japanese lines. I shrank back, shaking my head and whispering, No, no I won't, no, no, NO." p. 73

"It was like a grotesque scene from a Durrenmatt play: bodies, severed limbs, and gouts of blood everywhere. The noise of our loudmouthed sober attracted the attention of the battalion surgeon, who came over, wiping his blood hands on his bloody apron. He stared, incredulous. I doubt that he had ever seen waters more troubled than the sergeant major's tears. He asked, 'That's Mike Powers?' I said, 'It was.' He said, 'I thought you'd crack before he did.' I said, 'So did I.'" p. 107

"Once we boarded our troop train for California, I knew my expectations of fighting the Nazis were a pipe dream. Now I would have to learn to hate the Japanese, a people whom at the moment I hated less than, say, I hated the troop train. We slept there in built-in tiers of bunks, like those in SS concentration camps, and we all swore that no one could be confined in closer quarters and survive. (We were wrong. Troop transports—APAs—followed the same principle and were even more cramped.)" pp. 143-144

"On the first Wednesday after the landing an English-speaking Japanese seaman was captured alive. Plied with medicinal alcohol, he disclosed, apparently with reluctance, that hundreds of other Japs, starving in the bush, were ready to quit. A native guide and several termites entering the perimeter confirmed this, and a young Marine officer returning from patrol reported that a white flag was flying over an enemy camp near the Matanikau. That was good enough for Vandegrift's G-2, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Goettge. He told the general he wanted to board a Higgins boat with a patrol of his own and land beyond the Matanikau. Vandegrift agreed, though not without misgivings. Goettge picked his patrol—the prophetically named Stephen A. Custer, a sergeant, and twenty-five other intelligence men, among whom, I am glad to report, I was not." p. 183

"Americans at home thought all the island battlefields in the Pacific were pretty much alike: jungly, rainy, with deep white beaches ringed by awnings of palm trees. That was true of New Guinea and the Solomons, but most of Admiral Nimitz's central Pacific offensive, which opened in the autumn of 1943, was fought over very different ground." p. 215

"'Men,' a sergeant told his people aboard ship before our invasion of the island, 'Saipan is covered with dense jungle, quicksand, steep hills and cliffs hiding batteries of huge coastal guns, and strongholds of reinforced concrete. Insects bear lethal poisons. Crocodiles and snakes infest the streams. The waters around it are thick with sharks. The population will be hostile toward us.' There was a long silence. Then a corporal said, 'Sarge, why don't we just let the Japs keep it?'" pp. 252-253

"Appropriately, the Japs then made their last stand astride the prewar rifle range of Guam's old Marine Corps barracks. Here the conflict was very different, U.S. tanks versus Japanese pillboxes. GIs of the Seventy-seventh played the key role. Friday afternoon nearby Orote Airfield fell, and on Saturday, with the enemy in full flight, an honor guard of the Twenty-second Marines presented arms still warm from fighting while the Stars and Stripes was hoisted on the top of the Marine barracks flagpole." p. 287

"MacArthur's scowl, which millions of readers interpreted as a reflection of his steely determination, was actually a wrathful glare at the impertinent naval officer. When the general saw a print of the photograph, however, he instantly grasped its dramatic value, and the next day he deliberately waded ashore for cameramen on a safe beach which had been secured by troopers of the First Cavalry Division." p. 325

"'Load and lock[.] Ready on the left[.] Ready on the right[.] Ready on the firing line[.] Stand by to commence firing[.]'" p. 372

"A cloud passed overhead, darkening the hill. Then the old man grasped what had happened. Embers would never again glow in the ashes of his memory. His Sergeant would never come again. He turned away, blinded by tears." p. 395

Topics for Discussion

Casual readers of the book often mistakenly conclude that the author personally participated in numerous combat situations on Guadalcanal, Saipan, and others. Do you think the text adequately explains why the author's personal memories are interspersed with historical segments?

The author believes that by revisiting World War II combat zones he can gain some measure of psychological peace from the memories of his own combat experiences. Do you think the author's journey was successful in this regard?

Of the various combat campaigns discussed in the book, the author believes that Peleliu was probably unnecessary for overall victory. Summarize the rationale offered by the author in support of this argument.

Most of the combat operations described focus on the US Marine Corps, though a few focus on the US Army. Do you get a sense that these two branches of the armed forces were particularly suited to the combat methodologies they were asked to utilize? Why or why not?

The memoir begins with a particularly graphic episode of the author attempting sexual intercourse with an older woman. How does this segment function within the larger narrative? Is the episode more significant if the memoir is viewed as the collective experience of many soldiers? Later, the author states he felt he lost his virginity after his first buddy was killed by being shot in the groin. How does this imagery become symbolic within the narrative?

During the memoir, the author expresses the opinion that the use of the atomic bombs saved many American and Japanese lives (e.g., refer to p. 210). Explain the author's reasoning behind this opinion. Do you agree or disagree?

Of all the combat campaigns described, which is the most significant to you personally? Why?