

Ghost soldiers



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Ghost Soldiers: The Epic Account of World War II's Greatest Rescue Mission written and published by Hampton Sides in 2001. The non-fiction book gives a comprehensive account of the popular raid by the troops drawn from the U. S. Army Ranger Battalion at the Japanese Allied Camp in Cabanatuan, Philippines where well over five hundred prisoners of war were detained in January of 1945. Besides a plain chronicle of the Allied prison camp raid, the Hampton goes on to describe the historical backgrounds leading to the raid as well as the deplorable conditions under which the prisoners lived for the entire period of their detention at the Japanese operated concentrated camp in Cabanatuan. The book is very fundamental in the general understanding of the World War as far as the formation of alliances during the period preceding World War I (1914) and shortly after World War II (1945) and the attitudes of the then world major powers such as United States of America, Britain, Germany and Japan to one another are concerned.

Summary of the Book

The book opens with the selection of one hundred and twenty one (121) high profile American troops drawn from the 6th Ranger Battalion of the United States Army under the command of Lt. Colonel Henry Mucci to steal their way past the enemy lines in the far country of Philippines for the purposes of rescuing prisoners of war held by the Imperial Japanese Army. On this particular life threatening mission, the American troops are fully determined to march to the city of Cabanatuan, thirty miles away into Philippines, have their way into the Allied Prison camp without the knowledge of Japanese forces and further rescue the remaining five hundred and thirteen British and American prisoners of war after a series of systematic executions that was

many prisoners of war lost their lives in the hands of brutal Japanese guards. The aim of the Japanese soldiers was not to allow the escape of a single one, to annihilate them all and not to leave any traces” (Sides 24).

After the series of massacre of the American soldiers, prisoners of war for this matter, by the Japanese guards in a Bataan Death March, the remaining prisoners were subjected to all manner of harsh yet deplorable conditions for a period exceeding three years. They suffered the gnawing pangs of chronic starvation, physical assault from the Japanese guards and succumbed to different infections of tropical diseases. Despite all these hardships, frequent unspeakable tortures and day to day activities under extreme duress, the resilience of the American and British prisoners of war is remarkably outstanding. The heroic prisoners of war defied the Japanese authorities even at the crucial times when they proven most helpless and vulnerable to yield to their (Japanese) figures of authority.

The American elites troops led rescue mission held on the twenty eighth day of January, 1945, was prompted by the directive issued by the Japanese War Ministry to commandants in charge of all prisoners of war (POW) concentration and detention camps to execute all the prisoner in their custody. This policy, also referred to as August 1, Kill-All Order, put all the relics of the Bataan Death March (POW) to the imminent danger of mass execution. “ Japanese wanted to dispose prisoners either in groups or individually by means of decapitation, drowning, poison, poisonous smoke or mass bombing as the situation would dictate” (p. 23). With the help of the Filipino guerillas, the rangers and other strong willed American spies, including a cabaret owner and priest, risked their lives to liberate the

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prisoners from the long ordeal. At the end of the raging battle with eight thousand Japanese soldiers at the Cabanatuan garrison, the Rangers under the command of Lt. Mucci managed to rescue all the remaining 513 prisoners of war with a loss from two men within their rank.