

Fires on the plain: a reflection



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Fires on The Plain: A Reflection Fires on the Plain is truly the most depressing, haunting, and sad story I have ever endured reading. The complete abandonment of the Japanese soldiers on the island of Leyte by the Japanese Army is revolting, as well as the complete disregard for each others well being among them. It becomes a battle between one another for survival. The lack of comradery among the Japanese soldiers is dumbfounding, and leads me to believe that it may very well have been there demise.

The weaknesses we see in Tamura and the other soldiers not only have a great impact on their unfortunate outcome, but are also a result of a weakness within the Japanese Army itself. The awful fate of these soldiers, at the hands of their own command, is infuriating. Shohei's story holds powerful, and several dangerous implications of what war is like and what it's effects can be on those who fight in them. I would like to start by talking about comradery. Comradery can be defined as the spirit offriendshipand community in a group, like a group of soldiers.

Tamura's story shows zero evidence of any sort of comradeship, he even describes the way in which it he saw it disappear on Leyte, “ Before long any comradeship that we once felt for each other had virtually disappeared. ”(pg. 9). I could also see this in the way they treated each other. Initially, Yasuda and Nagamatsus' relationship could be mistaken for comradeship, but I realized that they were only using each other and did not care at all about the others well being. Which becomes quite clear at the end of the book.

I have no doubt that this complete lack of comradery was mostly a result of their horrific situation, but I also believe that it could have existed before it.

The way in which Tamura laughed while watching his fellow soldiers run around like “insects”(pg. 59), and the fact that Nagamatsu would hunt, kill, and eat his fellow soldiers are disturbing examples of the complete disregard they had for one another. These instances serve as proof to me that there couldn't possibly have been much of a comradeship between these men at any point. One dangerous implication that this story holds expressed directly by

Shohei, “For people like us, living day and night on the brink of danger, the normal instinct of survival seems to strike inward, like a disease, distorting the personality and removing all motives other than those of sheer self-interest.”(pg. 9). While this certainly seems true for the Japanese soldiers in this story, I refuse to believe it to be true for all men. My personal experiences from being a Marine and doing two tours in Afghanistan have showed me what true comradeship is. My fellow Marines and I would have gladly died for one another, and some did.

In class, we discussed how the way in which these Japanese soldiers turned on one another when torn down to their most animalistic nature, could be true of all men or soldiers when under the same circumstances. The fact that somebody could believe that to be true is not only offensive, but scary. It is scary to me that examples from a book written by someone who is clearly insane, could be generalized to all men or all soldiers of every kind. What really irks me about this is that Shohei, portrayed through Tamura, shows absolutely no characteristics of a soldier.

I think his most accurate depiction was when he said they resembled domestic animals “helplessly uprooted and perplexed”(pg. 35). I believe that

he portrays someone with certain mental weakness. He wonders about the island countryside, it seems, waiting for his death to come. He has no plan but death. I understand that his circumstances are beyond my understanding, but the way in which he so easily abandons any hope of surviving, and doesn't put up any real fight for his survival, doesn't sit with me.

It makes me realize that this weakness is most likely due to reasons beyond his control, such as the way in which, and the culture in which, he was brought up. As well as the poor military training and/or lack thereof, did not properly prepare him for the nightmare of a situation he was put in. Which forces me to re-evaluate my initial reaction to write him off as a pathetic, weak individual who should have shot himself right then and there after he murdered the Filipino women.

I am sympathetic for poor Tamura, who was drafted into the army and clearly given incredibly insufficient training. Tamura did not belong there and, I feel, none of them belonged there. The infuriating part of this story is the way in which these men were sent to what any person with intellect could tell was a certain, horrific death. Not only were they ordered to go that island, to that shit hole of a situation, it seems as if the people who ordered them there just left them for dead. Even his commanding officer told him that the best thing he could for his country was kill himself.

They were given absolutely no support against an enemy whose support was rivaled by none. Which resulted in them fighting each other for survival. Fires on the Plain is a very disturbing story from a war that resulted in many awful things. It has many implications of what war can be like, but I want to

emphasize that not all wars are the same, and the men and women who fight in these wars certainly are not either. I would hope that those who read this understand that they shouldn't generalize the behavior of these poor Japanese soldiers to all soldiers or fighting men.

I believe that the circumstances surrounding this horrific example of what war can be like are incredible and the ingredients that went into making this shit sandwich are hard to come by all at the same time. My final thoughts of this story are wrapped around Shohei's idea that life is nothing more than “ a mere succession of chances”(p. 233). I have been debating over this idea with myself ever since I came back from my last tour in Afghanistan, and I can't say that Shohei's story has helped me in making a decision.