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Guerillas in Mindanao: 1942-1945: They Fought Alone

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Be that as it may, this reviewer would heartily recommend a reading of Mr. Kaiser's Prologue, and especially of his Epilogue. "In the close of the Renaissance, the fool's laughing face takes on an aspect of tragedy and sadness, and the last of the great Renaissance fools is known to the world for his mournful countenance. At the very moment that we watch Shakespeare's fat old fool and all his company leave the tavern world of Eastcheap for the Fleet, in another country and from another prison Don Quixote de la Mancha is preparing to come onstage and enter another inn which he will call a castle." It is perhaps this tragic element in the fool that attracted the genius of Cervantes and Shakespeare.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

GUERRILLAS IN MINDANAO: 1942-1945

THEY FOUGHT ALONE. By John Keats. New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1963. 425 pp.

In some respects John Keats has drawn the picture of Colonel Wendell Fertig true to life and has told the story of the resistance movement led by him in Mindanao, Philippines, from 1942 to 1945 with a certain measure of accuracy, humor and never flagging interest. Colonel Fertig played an important and honorable part in the recent history of Mindanao. His name is still on many lips. Now we have it in a book.

Colonel Fertig impressed everyone at first meeting. Keats says that he pronounced each name of people he met carefully, "and later remembered." And again he refers to Fertig's "frantic inventory of people and motives" and to how well Fertig could store "information away in his photographic memory to be evaluated at a later time." First impressions were confirmed as men saw more of him. He even improved with wearing. There was always an air of reserve about him, an unflinching courtesy and, one felt, competence to do the job he had assumed. I believe all who knew him in Mindanao were indignant at the shabby treatment he received from Gen. MacArthur in the matter of army rank. In 1942 he was a Lt. Col. In 1945 he had advanced only to colonel. His services merited the rank of General.

Col. Fertig did not start the guerrilla movement in Mindanao. Fertig had left Corregidor on the last navy flying boat to set out of the island fortress. It crashed on landing in Mindanao but Fertig was unhurt. In the book we first meet him wandering in the hills of Bukidnon and Lanao with Capt. Charles Hedges. Since the army had surrendered to the Japanese, his aim seems to have been survival until

the peace. Very soon however he changed his mind as he heard of Japanese atrocities and of the awakening of resistance on the part of small detachments of Filipinos in scattered places; of the lack of discipline and of the jealousy between these units that broke out in feuds and murder. He then reflected that since he was the senior American officer in the district he was qualified to lead and unify the various guerrilla units. Still he could not force himself on the Filipino officers. Who was he, the representative of a country which had gone down in defeat? Would they give America, as it were, a second chance? Fertig reasoned correctly: "We wait until we are asked. Then we'll help. We can lead a guerrilla, he told Hedges, but we cannot start one."

He bided his time until Sept. 1942 when a certain American mestizo, Lieutenant Morgan, asked him to assume command of his guerrilla organization in Lanao. From there he passed over to Occidental Misamis where all the 125 (sic) Japanese had been killed by the guerrillas. On the eve of Oct. 1 Fertig mimeographed and distributed copies of a proclamation to the Filipino people that he had assumed command of Mindanao as senior representative of the United States government and the Philippine government.

There in Misamis Occidental province under his patient and efficient leadership a civil government was set up, prices were controlled, money printed, arms were manufactured and very near normal peace time conditions prevailed for many months, as I can testify. Guerrilla units, one after another, hearing of Fertig's success submitted to him and he became in fact the one in command of the resistance movement in Mindanao.

The story of contact with Australia through an improvised transmitter, the safe arrival at Port Darwin of three American engineers from Mindanao, the coming of the "aid" by submarine, the solution of the Morgan problem by sending him to Australia, the reprisals of the Japanese and the dash to the hills or up to the river for safety and then the slow re-awakening of assurance, the building up of a network of radio transmitters in contact with Gen. MacArthur, the sight of the first American planes flying overhead, the thunder of bombs and gunfire in the Mindanao sea are all relived, thrilling chapters for the reviewer who heard and saw much of it.

There is much to admire in the hero. Keats quotes from Fertig's diary, "My action in taking command is a response to the kindness offered by people who could have taken full advantage of my helplessness." He has a vague sense of religion, one cannot call it very intelligent, a "feeling that a Power greater than any human power has my destiny in hand." Sometimes he prays. Organized religion however, plays no part in his life. It is a thing to be used by the

guerrilla, at least so Keats says. On page 135 Fertig is quoted: "I'm going to try to make a deal with the padres—we'll take all our men to Mass if the padres preach the guerrilla", and then the church is matched with sex appeal in the words: "We want to make friends with both the Church and the dalagas [girls]."

I must say at this point that neither the Columban priests nor Father Haggerty* and I ever sensed that we were being used by Colonel Fertig. On the contrary he was very helpful to us, generous when supplies came on the submarine, and courteous and respectful in every way. We valued his friendship. May we not however assume that Fertig had approved of the quotation above before the book was printed? Col. Fertig was just and impartial. He told Morgan who was not averse to robbery, "Pay them [the fishermen]. We need the people. The people will never support us if we rob them".

While I admire Colonel Fertig and maintain that John Keats has by no means impaired his stature, I do say that Col. Fertig is not in good company when Keats speaks out for himself.

Many pages of the book reek with reference to excrement. There is a morbid adolescent obsession with sex all through the book. Things Filipino are ridiculed. Pages of fancy writing throw a Hollywood atmosphere over Mindanao. Vulgar language, cursing, and perhaps blasphemy shocked and disgusted all who admitted to me that they had read the whole book. Some, after a chapter or two, threw the book down. On page 79 Hedges curses, and Keats adds, "It was not a comment, but a prayer." Fertig is quoted as having addressed his mosquito netting on p. 53, "God, you've helped me this far." The sick sexuality of the Japanese, which Keats mentions on p. 350, is his own, I fear. For example read the story of the Chinaman and his concubines on p. 390 or page 289 where Fertig is pictured as the pander of Morgan.

Indeed the "ugly American" raises his head quite often under the name of Keats. The town of Tangub is called a "wretched little fishing town". The Filipino babies are "baretailed babies". A Filipino's credulity is ridiculed this way: A man comes to Fertig and asks, "Sir, Lieutenant Chaves hears where a radio is buried, but the man who told him is a liar. Does he speak the truth?" The misspelled dialect words are often insulting. "Misamis woke from its 400 year old sleep" we learn on p. 134. Neither 400 nor 300 would be true here. And on page 153 we read that the radio man who had contacted Australia was helped "by another who had once listened to a radio." On p. 115 he sagely observes that "centuries had taught them [the Filipinos] that all subordinate functionaries are either thieves or incompetent relatives or both." Nearly thirty years residence in the Philippines has taught me that the Filipino people

*Guerrilla Padre—Edward Haggerty, Longmans, N.Y., 1946

are very tolerant; that they are quick to see differences in individuals and that they do not seek revenge from the son for the sins of his father, or class all Americans as one; no, nor Spaniards either.

History is turned upside down to provide sport at the expense of the Spaniard. On p. 272 we read that the Moros sent "gifts" to Fertig. This Keats says is "the intricate Filipino game they learned from the Spanish." His knowledge of the Filipino hardwood is evidently very sketchy. He calls apitong and luan "hardwoods" on p. 317. They are softwoods. He calls Father Calanan (correct spelling is Callanan), "the Jesuit priest of the city of Jimenez". Father Callanan is a Columban priest. Then there is the patronizing air with which he describes the Ozamis family in Jimenez on p. 133 and the fantastic, far away, fairyland atmosphere he casts over them. For us who know these people the emotions aroused were first anger and then laughter.

If there had been more of Fertig and less of Keats, the book would ring more true to life. Still, even as it stands Colonel Wendell W. Fertig walks through the pages strong, sincere, courageous, loyal—an American who continues to do honor to many a place in Mindanao that in gratitude and admiration is named after him.

THEODORE DAIGLER

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF ATHEISM

ATHEISM IN OUR TIME. By Ignace Lepp. Translated by Bernard Murchland, C.S.C. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963. 195 pp.

In the rising tide of unbelief throughout the world, Christians must achieve some understanding of unbelievers, if there is to be peaceful co-existence with them and collaboration. Ignace Lepp, who for many years was a Marxist atheist and is now a Catholic priest and psychotherapist, is eminently qualified to help us see into the heart and mind of the unbeliever, and understand not merely the theory of atheism, but also why and how a flesh-and-blood atheist denies the existence of a personal God.

For although most atheists put forth reasons from history or science to justify their unbelief, Lepp contends that its basic causes are generally of the existential order, and best revealed by a psycho-