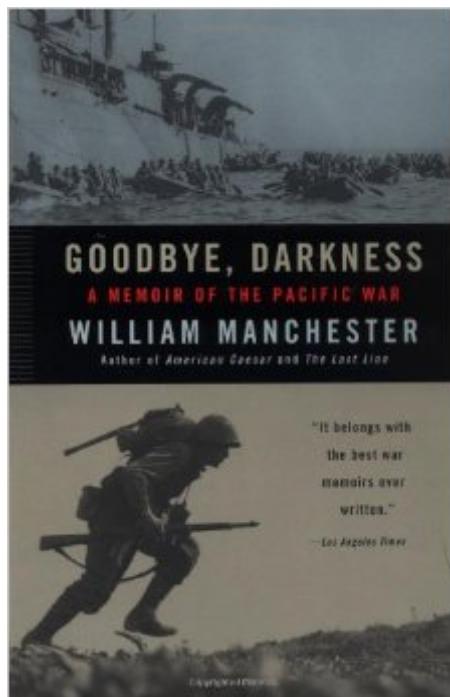


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Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir Of The Pacific War



Synopsis

The nightmares began for William Manchester 23 years after WW II. In his dreams he lived with the recurring image of a battle-weary youth (himself), "angrily demanding to know what had happened to the three decades since he had laid down his arms." To find out, Manchester visited those places in the Pacific where as a young Marine he fought the Japanese, and in this book examines his experiences in the line with his fellow soldiers (his "brothers"). He gives us an honest and unabashedly emotional account of his part in the war in the Pacific. "The most moving memoir of combat on WW II that I have ever read. A testimony to the fortitude of man...a gripping, haunting, book." --William L. Shirer

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books; First Edition edition (April 12, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316501115

ISBN-13: 978-0316501118

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (259 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #48,079 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #56 inÂ Books > History > Military > United States > Veterans #169 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War II #414 inÂ Books > History > Military > World War II

Customer Reviews

If one could read two accounts of the Pacific War written from the perspective of Americans this book and Sledges "With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa" would be the best that one can get. There are a lot of very good narrative history books on all aspects of the Pacific War, but the poet-gone-to-war genre is something that really the British usually do much better than the Americans. That is why when I stumbled upon Manchester's memoirs I was immediately sucked into the guts of wartime experience. Manchester writes with passion borne from desperation and experience of long times in the firing line. He waxes from the lyrical experiences of a fireside chat on the battle-line with a student of philosophy (himself?) regalling the troops with an exposition on the nature of time. One is left with the images of hard worn veterans from small American towns, experiencing the wonder of ideas for the first time on the eve of battle. Their far off, empty stares as

the philosopher marine finishes his exposition in sheer silence is something that one can almost feel. That very same night they cut up a large Banzai charge on Guam --- one can cut the atmosphere of the book with a knife. Manchester can then go on and describe his visceral uncomfortable feelings of being close to the Japanese today. Their inability to admit to former atrocities is something that Manchester admits, planted the seed of dislike deeply inside him. Try as he might he cannot shake it and we are at least amazed with his honesty. This contrasts with the cerebral, fair-minded Manchester we all know from his biographies. I have read more than 200 narrative histories and memoirs of the Pacific War, British, American, Japanese, Indian and Chinese, Australian, Canadian ... and this is one of the best. Like all good books, it stays with you for a long time....

Not only is William Manchester a first rate writer, but he was there. The title of this book depicts his nightmares as a repository left over from his experiences in the infantry in the South Pacific in WWII. His attempts to dispel them are worked out through visiting each island the marines fought on in the pacific theatre. His marine outfit was made up of Ivy leaguers like himself and the book is a distillation of his exploits. He takes the reader through the island fighting on Guadalcanal, Tarawa, New Guinea, the Philipines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. The scenes in which he describes the fighting are absolutely gripping. This is easily as good as any war novel I've ever read if only for the descriptions of the combat. His description of the apparition in the foxhole with him in the Philipines is some of the best writing I've ever read. True, I'm not a literature buff, but this man can really write. It's too bad that more people aren't aware of it today.

William Manchester is a great historian and an excellent writer. His history is well written and very fair. He goes to great efforts to keep his writing balanced, and he does so successfully. Just read his biography of MacArthur. So, I was quite surprised to read Goodbye Darkness and see and read Manchester's personal reaction to combat in the Pacific. This is some read. Graphic, disturbing, and yet giving you a great appreciation for what our WWII veterans accomplished in the Pacific. This book should be mandatory reading on WWII. The war in the Pacific was a horrible but necessary war. Manchester's journal of this combat is unforgettable reading. A must read.

As one who reads many WWII stories, I had heard about this book and decided to buy it when I saw it at a library sale. I had understood that this book was about Manchester's war time experiences while battling in the Pacific theater. However, I didn't realize that it would be written in a

Salinger-Vonnegut style. Before you read this book, you need to know that this book is not a month by month account of the authors' fighting in the Pacific. Rather, it appears to be an exorcism of his memories of entering boot camp, becoming a Marine, and then being shipped off to fight the Japs. The book switches from his narration of the past to his current (1978) trip back to the Pacific islands and then describes the comparison between the two. Initially, this writing style took me by surprise. But, once I understood how he was writing, the book became quite interesting as Manchester juxtaposes his past with the present. Manchester also does not disguise his anger and dislike of the Nips. He tells it the way it is without modern day political correctness. His writing allows the reader to feel as the Marines were feeling back in 1944/45 while battling on those hot, god-forsaken islands.

In June, 1992, I flew into Guadalcanal to begin research on my great uncle's experience as a Marine during the WWII campaign. My plan was to retrace his steps during the months-long battle fifty years to the day after he took those steps. My six-month-long stay on Guadalcanal was preceded by more than a year of reading every single thing I could get my hands on about the battle. I read every book I could find in the English language -- accounts from Brits, Kiwis, Aussies -- as well as a few translated from Japanese. I spent two weeks at the Marine Corps Historical Museum in D.C. going through my great uncle's unit's combat reports. This book was by far the best I read about our Marines in the WWII Pacific Theatre. Manchester is a writer for the ages, a national treasure. He didn't fight in the battle for the 'Canal -- his struggles came later. But he takes the reader to war like no other book because he takes us inside himself -- his fears, his hauntings and nightmares about what he saw and experienced firsthand. They are deeply personal and he makes them ours. Manchester was/is a Marine; but God has made him a writer first and foremost. As a sample of this man's soaring prose, consider his tribute to those who fought for Guadalcanal: "...[T]o me that struggle was more than a strategic victory. It was, and is, eloquent testimony to the fortitude of man. Men generally do what is expected of them; usually that is very little. On the 'Canal they were asked to do what was believed to be impossible, and the shining response of those Marines on the line is historic. I shall never forget them, nor should you.' Read this book!

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