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Harold Guard, *The Pacific War Uncensored: A War Correspondent's Unvarnished Account of the Fight against Japan*. Ed. John Tring. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2011. Pp. 236. ISBN 978-1-61200-081-7.

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The best war correspondents have blended firsthand experience of combat with the word-crafting talents of professional writers to provide accounts that are both authoritative and accessible. Cornelius Ryan,¹ Richard Tregaskis,² and Ernie Pyle³ spring immediately to mind. In *The Pacific War Uncensored*, John Tring compiles stories told by his grandfather, Harold Guard, into a memoir of his war years. Guard worked for the United Press in various places in Asia before and during World War II. He narrowly escaped Singapore before it fell to the Japanese and spent the rest of war reporting on the Pacific campaign. Tring's introduction and epilogue describe his subject's life and career before and after the war. The body of the book is essentially a transcription of recordings Guard made in his retirement (supplemented by letters and personal documents). Tring provides corroborative material and connective narrative. Welcome enhancements include many photographs, detailed maps, and an index.

As a memoir, the book has no "thesis," but it does aim to achieve two things: first, to tell the "unvarnished" story of the war as soldiers lived through it; and, second, to use Guard's experiences as a correspondent as background for a discussion of the conflict between military censorship and freedom of the press.

The first third of the book concerns Guard's prewar career in the navy, early days as a newsman, and his work and family life in Southeast Asia. Now, a little background is essential in such a memoir and Guard's presence as a civilian in Singapore during the initial attack definitely adds authority to his account. But the devotion of eighty pages to these preliminaries in a book professedly about "the fight against Japan" is disproportionate. And when the first account of combat finally comes, it disappoints: "I hardly knew what to say at first, then, just as I started to speak [on the telephone], I saw a tank through the window of the office. There were also British soldiers, some wearing kilts, who started firing up the road with a machine gun. A pitched battle then ensued outside the office and suddenly I found myself chattering away to the person on the other end of the phone about everything I could see" (78). Guard's interlocutor that day may have received a full, unvarnished account of the fighting, but the reader unfortunately does not. Nor does Tring offer any elaboration based on his own research.

After escaping Singapore, Guard reported on American bombing missions in the South Pacific launched from Australia. The air war is certainly a legitimate front to cover as a war reporter and, to be fair, Guard was a rare exception in being allowed not only to accompany the aircrews on missions, but to actually man one of the plane's guns! Indeed, most of Guard's accounts concern experiences in the air, for which he is unapologetic: "from my own point of view the air was very much where the war was currently being waged, and it was far more useful for me to continue my time in this area, rather than stumbling my way around in the jungle with my stiff right leg" (129). But "stumbling around in the jungle" was a massive part of the Pacific War. If Guard's leg wound prevented his reporting from the ground front, his book can hardly claim to be an unvarnished account of the war.

The memoirist (and his editor) miss another opportunity in their handling of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, which Guard actually witnessed from an airplane circling the combat area. He tantalizingly reports that

1. *The Longest Day: June 6, 1944* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1959).

2. *Guadalcanal Diary* (NY: Random House, 1943).

3. *Here Is Your War* (NY: H. Holt, 1943).

“One of the first things I did when I got [back] was to sit down and write my story” (152), without actually telling the reader what he saw; nor has Tring tracked down the story and included it, with or without varnish, in the text. Again, Guard mentions that tropical diseases ravaged American GIs, but describes neither their symptoms nor how the soldiers coped with them. Elsewhere, Guard observes that Australians were slugging their way through the jungle, then moves on without so much as another word. Tring should have filled such gaps in his grandfather’s account, preferably in Guard’s own words. Though he often refers to research he conducted for this project, Tring includes no bibliography and only a single footnote (vaguely citing “further research”) (36). Family histories are not scholarly monographs or doctoral dissertations, but the lack of evidence here of serious corroborative work leaves the reader to assume Tring has simply taken the taped interviews at face value.

Only beginning on page 162 does Guard report on ground combat (at the Battle of Buna-Gona) in significant detail—“the first time I had really been involved in any coverage of the conflict on the ground.” The succeeding chapter 15, “Lae Landings,” is the first fully dedicated to frontline ground fighting, but Guard, not the engaged soldiers, is the focus. While the account qualifies as unvarnished, it contains nothing as shocking as the atrocities of Japanese (and Americans) recorded in the well-known and often reprinted memoirs of, for example, E.B. Sledge,⁴ William Manchester,⁵ and Robert Leckie.⁶ Such self-censoring likely resulted from the fact that Guard made his recordings when Tring was just a child: understandably, he was not going to talk about American GIs playing tiddlywinks with the half blown-open skull of a dead Japanese soldier. This is something Tring needed to consider in compiling the book.

Besides not providing an unwavering look at the realities of war, neither Guard nor Tring sufficiently addresses the broad issue of the military’s infringement of freedom of the press. Guard sometimes complains of stories being suppressed due to their content, but he makes no systematic case for the rights of the press—a topic the book’s title suggests will be at least touched on if not fully explored and debated. It remains a matter of one correspondent’s personal frustration, with no considered reflection on the effect of censorship on our understanding of historical events, in this instance, the Pacific War.

The last chapters—“Returning Home” and “Post War”—cover Guard’s reunion with his family, his postwar career, and his reports on the Middle East, none of which pertains to the Pacific War. The book seems to have been created as one kind of record and then misleadingly titled and marketed as something quite different, no doubt to enhance its appeal and increase sales. Less than a tenth of the text concerns the ground-level “fight against Japan.” A more accurate title for the book would be *Harold Guard: A War Correspondent’s Life*. The soldiers and pilots we encounter are mere characters in Guard’s own personal tale. In short, we have here a grandfather telling the story of his days in the war to be shared with friends and relatives. Well and good, but that story has been falsely packaged as a work of military history suitable for a much wider audience. Readers of this journalist’s after-the-fact diary will find little that is unavailable in abundant truly uncensored accounts of warfare and measured analyses of the struggle between the press and censors.

4. *With the Old Breed, at Peleliu and Okinawa* (Novato, CA: Presidio Pr, 1981).

5. *Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (NY: Little, Brown, 1980).

6. *Helmet for My Pillow* (NY: Random House, 1957).