

GET PHOTOGRAPH #123p40

Caption:

*Here, from the jacket of *They Fought Alone*, are two photos of Col. Wendell Fertig, the upper taken in Mindanao in 1945 and the other at the time of the book's publication in 1957.*

Wendell Fertig's Fictional "Autobiography": a Critical Review of *They Fought Alone*

By Clyde Childress (U.S.A. retired)

This article is a review of *They Fought Alone*, a book that purports to be the story of Colonel Wendell W. Fertig, Commander of the Tenth Military District, Mindanao guerrilla force, of the Philippine Resistance Movement during World War II. It is based on my service for over two years as an officer under him.

Why would I write this highly critical review so many years after the book was written, some may ask? *They Fought Alone* has had wide distribution, including military libraries and archives [and is now being used as at least part of the basis for a possible movie biography of Fertig-ed.]. Occasionally I have had people ask me about this "strange" book, knowing I had been with the Mindanao guerrillas. Several months ago, the archivist of a noted institution contacted me, saying he had read *They Fought Alone* and was going to send me a questionnaire to clear up some bewildering aspects of it. I told him that I had only skimmed the book to pick out certain events I was familiar with, and when I saw the remark on page 307, "Childress was almost a stranger. He knew that Childress was an army officer who had started a guerrilla in the early days..." I had thrown the book down in disgust. I promised the archivist I would carefully read *They Fought Alone* and write a review of it.

This report is the result. It has been difficult to write. I would have preferred to make this account of my former commanding officer and my review of his book a testimonial of praise for his accomplishments and his honest depiction of the events that occurred during the time he commanded the Tenth Military District. That is not possible, as can be seen from the material he furnished here about his activities, achievements, philosophy of command, and military subordinates. *They Fought Alone* contains grossly untrue representations of the history of the Tenth Military District and, therefore, must not be accepted as the authoritative chronicle of the Mindanao guerrillas. Despite the passage of many years, I have decided I cannot continue to sit idly by and allow the reputations of those who served in the Mindanao

guerrillas to be tarnished and their contributions diminished before posterity by Wendell Fertig, the true author of this flawed narrative of a real World War II operation.

Although this is an unfavorable review of the book about the C.O. of the Tenth Military District, it is not to be considered adverse criticism of John Keats, the author of record. I can understand and sympathize with the situation in which he found himself when he was engaged by Fertig to write *They Fought Alone*. No doubt Keats was impressed with Fertig when he first met him, as we were in Mindanao. To exculpate Keats, I shall treat Fertig, who furnished all the material for the book, as the author.

Keats wrote this disclaimer in the Preface:

From beginning to end, this is essentially the story and work of Colonel Wendell W. Fertig. Not only did Colonel Fertig live the experience, but he provided diaries, memoirs, an official history of the Mindanao guerrilla, and a 600-page rough draft of a manuscript of his own. He also escorted the author to the Philippine Islands, and spent hundreds of hours in conversation with him... Parts of the book are based on the diaries and manuscripts of several Americans who served in the guerrilla and on conversations with Filipino "guerrilleros" on Mindanao.

Mr. Keats could also have said that Colonel Fertig was most selective in his subject matter and in the people he introduced him to for interviews in the Philippines, but he probably didn't know that at the time.

The full title of the book reads *They Fought Alone: A True Story of a Modern American Hero*. But it also says on the book's dust jacket, "For while the story is told in the form of a novel, it depicts real events and real people." Which is it, a true story or a novel? It must be a novel because it is not a true story!

Unfortunately, when Fertig had the opportunity to compile a true history of a part of the war, he chose to write an account that contains so many errors that they can hardly be attributed to lapse of memory. His comments about the people who served with him are neither fair, truthful, nor even-handed; it is difficult to understand his motive for making such outrageously contemptuous remarks. One of his problems was his inability to give proper credit to the military personnel in his command; instead he belittles their contributions, yet extols the actions of his prewar civilian friends in an account that fatuously depicts him as the tough, aggressive guerrilla leader fearlessly leading his troops in combat and making right the incompetent decisions of his subordinates.¹

Later I learned that the MacArthur Memorial Library in Norfolk, Virginia, had acquired Fertig's papers, including his handwritten diaries. I went there, as I had previously gone to Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, to the U.S. Army Military History Institute, to read other papers relating to Fertig's activities, and was appalled that a man with his background could produce such inaccurate, contemptuous, incomplete and erroneous reports of the activities of an important military command!

Worse yet, the book is grossly inaccurate as history. The chronology of events is faulty. Fertig puts many of the happenings described in the wrong context as to the time they were said to have taken place; the wrong people are named and credited with actions in which they did not participate; important events are ignored. Completely absent from mention in *They Fought Alone* is any reference to the Filipinos and their major contributions to the Tenth Military District. Without their diligence to duty and dedicated loyalty to the cause of the Resistance Movement against the Japanese invaders, Fertig would not have enjoyed the success that he did.

Such discrepancies turn this book into a counterproductive novel, when it could have been a grand narrative and a wonderful experience for all who participated in the Philippine resistance movement in Mindanao.

* * *

On or about 20 November 1942, I took part in a conference with Lt. Colonel Fertig (who at that time was calling himself a brigadier general) and Major Ernest E. McClish at Jimenez, Occidental Misamis, Mindanao, Philippines. The purpose of the meeting was to formalize the structure of the growing guerrilla force on the island by creating a unified command, deciding what our individual roles would be in this undertaking and agreeing on the methods for carrying on guerrilla warfare against the Japanese invaders. We resolved in this meeting that Mindanao would be divided in half on a north-south axis. Fertig would be the overall commander of the Tenth Military District, the prewar military designation of Mindanao and Sulu. He would be responsible for organizing a guerrilla force in the western half of the island. Maj. McClish would command what was to be called the 110th Division and organize the eastern half of Mindanao; I was named 110th division chief of staff. Fertig promoted me to the rank of major and McClish to lieutenant colonel in Letter Order No. 4, issued and signed by him. These assignments and promotions were later confirmed on 29 October 43 on General Orders No. F-2. McClish and I proceeded by sailboat to the town of Balingasag in Oriental Misamis to begin our new assignments to organize a guerrilla force in the eastern half of Mindanao.²

Ernest E. McClish was a captain in the 57th Infantry Regiment, Philippine Scouts, Philippine Division, stationed at Fort McKinley on the outskirts of Manila. I was a lieutenant in the 31st Infantry Regiment, Post of Manila, also in the Philippine Division. McClish and I were sent out as instructors to the Philippine Army when it was mobilized on 1 September 1941. By the time the war started on 8 December, McClish was a major in command of the 3rd Battalion of the 61st Infantry Regiment, PA, and I was a captain in command of the 2nd Battalion. On 1 January 1942, the regiment arrived on Mindanao to be part of Gen. Guy O. Fort's 81st Division, stationed in Lanao Province. Gen. Fort was under Gen. William F. Sharp, the island commander. We participated in a battle beginning at Malabang, Lanao, on 29 April and ending on 10 May 42 near Ganassi, Lanao, at which time our Philippine army units were dispersed and further resistance was not possible. McClish and I headed for the hills in different directions. We met up again in November at Fertig's headquarters, each of us

responding to information that an American general had landed on Mindanao by submarine to start guerrilla warfare. That so-called general was Fertig.

Before the war, Wendell W. Fertig was a mining engineer employed by various mines in the Philippines. As a reserve lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, he was called to active duty and assigned to airfield construction; he was evacuated from Corregidor to Mindanao on a navy PBY flying boat, landing on Lake Lanao just before the Mindanao forces under Generals Sharp and Fort surrendered. He evaded capture and “headed to the hills.”

What I can say positively about Wendell W. Fertig is that he was mature, educated and experienced in the field of engineering, especially in the mining industry. He had the ability for detail work, although he relied on Filipino officers on his staff to comply with proper Philippine Army administrative procedures. His aptitude for organizing enabled him to set up and operate the radio stations of his large coast watcher net, manage his own headquarters radio to communicate with Headquarters Southwest Pacific (SWP) and establish the divisional commands within the Tenth Military District.

I will say that he was easy to get along with if one overlooked his lack of social skills and his obvious egocentricity. Fertig was a soft-spoken, rather mild mannered, shy man, the exact opposite of his two prewar friends, the loud-mouthed Charles Hedges and the abusive Cecil Walter, mentioned frequently in the book. I never heard him raise his voice or display any kind of anger or irritability. He presented to the world a mien of amiability that masked the adverse side of his makeup.

Apparently Fertig’s civilian and military background, life experiences and psychological makeup had not prepared him for such a large and important independent military command. He performed the technical aspects of his job well but failed miserably in his personal relationships and displayed serious character flaws that were inconsistent with the professionalism expected of a United States Army officer. He appeared to be unaware of, or at least ignored, the normal customs of the service involving the proper relationship between himself and the officers and personnel under him, to the extent of being disdainful of the abilities of people in the military, even including the theater commander, General Douglas MacArthur, and his staff, about whom he wasn’t abashed at making his usual deprecatory remarks. He solicited all the perquisites he felt were due to his position, while doing nothing for the welfare of his subordinates. His worst trait was an underhanded predilection for entering undeserved defamatory reports on his people without their knowledge in his dispatches to headquarters SWP and in their papers when they departed from Mindanao for repatriation. I was one of the people to whom he did this; I did not find out about it till much later.

As illustrations of some of the inaccuracies and false statements in the book, I offer the following excerpts highlighted on individual pages from *They Fought Alone*.

The “Man of Destiny”

Page 44. This page contains the statement that “*General Fort surrendered today [10 May 1942].*” The reasons: “*Outlaw Moros stole his food supplies, Don Salvador said. His ammunition caches were looted. His troops were going home one by one, then by squads and whole platoons.*”

Fertig got it wrong. General Fort, before the surrender, had prepared what he called a “redoubt” behind lake Lanao at a place called Bubong. He had it stocked with cattle and other supplies in preparation as a base for carrying on guerrilla warfare when the islands inevitably fell. After the Battle of Lanao, starting at Malabang and continuing toward Lake Lanao, his troops of the two regiments of the division, the 61st and the 73rd, were overrun and dispersed by the attacking Japanese. Some surviving officers withdrew individually to Bubong as planned, but soon a messenger arrived with surrender orders from General Wainwright to Generals Sharp and Fort. General Fort made the statement that he was a soldier and always obeyed orders. Therefore he commanded his people to surrender forthwith, not because of lack of supplies or because the Moros had stolen everything, as Fertig claimed, but because he had a surrender order and obeyed it.

Page 52. Fertig mused about his situation, “*As long as there had been an army fighting on Mindanao, he could believe himself part of it, and bound up within the army’s demands and actions. Even though he had not really expected Sharp or Fort to make much of a fight against the Japanese, Fertig could still imagine himself being—in the Army’s phrase—under military control. As long as there had been some army or even rumor of an army to walk toward, he had something to do, and something outside himself in which to believe.*”

This sounds noble on Fertig’s part, but he wasn’t there during the battles for the island and had no reason to disparage either Sharp’s or Fort’s intentions or capabilities because, for one thing, he knew neither of them. In fact, there had been a fierce running fight up the highway from Malabang to Lake Lanao, where it all came to an end, not because there was no will to put up much of a fight but because Sharp’s and Fort’s commands lacked the substance to carry on a protracted battle against a far superior enemy.

Page 53. “*You are, he [Fertig] told himself, probably the senior United States officer alive and free on the island, and possibly in all the Philippines. You are the commanding officer of all the army that is left, namely Capt. Charles Hedges and Chief Petty Officer Ducklegs Offrett. On this island you are the United States Government. Since the island is United States Territory, and since you are the United States, in a way, that is why you can tell the people what to do.*”

This was an incorrect assumption, because Mindanao, as part of the Philippine Commonwealth, had not been a Territory since 1935, when the United States granted the Philippines commonwealth status. This belief that the Philippines was owned by the United States was a misconception on the part of many Americans, who either weren’t aware of or had forgotten about the islands’ commonwealth status, which made the Philippines independent in all but name by the time the war had begun. General MacArthur was in the Philippines at the invitation of the President of the Philippine Commonwealth to build up the defenses of the islands and lead its armed forces. Nevertheless, the United States felt an obligation to defend the Philippines, called General MacArthur back to active duty, sent

reinforcements and underwrote the costs of the Philippine Commonwealth Army. The money was disbursed to the Philippine Commonwealth government, which paid it own troops on their scale of pay.

Page 77. A reference to Deisher's camp³ was typical of Fertig's disparagement of others' efforts, calling it nothing but "*a wet hole in the jungle... The thirty-some American soldiers and sailors at Deisher's were as impossible as the camp's location. They wanted only to be left alone. They resented officers, would not take orders, and would do nothing but sit there, rotting in the jungle, living off the store of army rations which Deischer, an old prospector and boar hunter, had somehow acquired. Fertig wondered what they would do when the food was gone.*"

What did Fertig expect? He had already assumed that he was the senior unsundered officer on Mindanao and was in command. Did he try to do anything for these American servicemen, who had just evaded surrender the same as he had? Apparently not. The only thoughts he had were of disdain towards these people and the conditions under which they were living. It never occurred to him that many of them were still in their teens or not much older and many were on their first enlistment in the Army Air Corps, which was not known for its discipline.

Furthermore, they were aware their world had caved in with the surrender and had no idea where they were or what was going to happen to them. No wonder they were confused and resentful. Yet, since Fertig believed he was now the ranking officer on the island, these were his men! What was needed instead of disparagement was leadership, which Fertig didn't offer. These servicemen at Deisher's camp later took part in the Tenth Military District units and became radio operators, code clerks and operators of coast watcher stations, without whom he would have had difficulty running his headquarters. These were the same servicemen who became loyal supporters of Major McClish in Bukidnon because of McClish's character, leadership qualities and personality.

Mr. Deisher and his wife deserved a commendation for setting up the camp. Without it, there was no prospect of food or lodging in the rain forest these servicemen were traversing. He shared what he had with these young men without asking for anything in return. Even though it might have been a "wet hole in the jungle," it provided a safe haven, even if temporary. The men I have talked with who stopped at the camp spoke highly of Mr. Deisher, appreciated his hospitality and resented the disparaging remarks Fertig made about the rest area the Deishers set up.

Page 104. Fertig philosophizes about himself and makes the first mention of his belief that he is a man of destiny: "*I am called on to lead a resistance movement against an implacable enemy under conditions that make victory barely possible even under the best circumstances. But I feel that I am indeed a Man of Destiny, that my course is charted and that only success lies at the end of the trail...*" So he wrote, the ostensible author says, "*lost in a dream of grandeur among the rice paddies...*"

Fertig and McClish

Page 123. *“Captain McClish was a whipcord, darkly handsome officer who dreamed of the days when cavalry charged with lance and sabre. He had wanted to be a cavalryman, but it seemed the world had changed. He was now reduced to practicing polo by himself riding a little Filipino horse, driving a coconut down a barrio street with dreams of the past. McClish had fought well early in the war, and had refused to take part in the surrender. Indeed, he looked upon the surrender as an opportunity to show the world what he could do with an independent command and... had assembled a force of young American enlisted men—fugitives like himself.”*

On this and the previous page, McClish is referred to as a captain. Fertig knew better, having himself promoted him from major to lieutenant colonel. The description of McClish is patronizing and disrespectful. The bit about playing polo with a coconut is a preposterous figment of someone’s imagination, no doubt Fertig’s.

Fertig uses the term “fugitive,” as he has done before. This is a poor choice of words: it implies runaways, defectors or deserters, which are pejorative terms. None of us was any of those things. We evaded capture for the purpose of carrying on the war against the invading Japanese.

“McClish had a practical problem to consider. He had just expended nearly all his little army’s ammunition in an inconclusive attack on a Japanese garrison.” Another example of events taken out of context, this is in reference to the battle of Butuan that took place much later (March 12, 1943), after McClish and I had visited with him in late November 1942, and received our orders to organize the eastern half of the island.

Page 126. The remarks about the Butuan garrison are again taken wholly out of context and are about a battle that took place at another time. The reference to attacks on Japanese convoys en route to Cagayan to reinforce Butuan *“by guerrilleros under Filipinos named Jaldon and Limena, and under an American civilian named Walter”* is a complete fabrication.

References to guerrillero leaders such as *“a Syrian peddler named Khalil Khodr and a comedian named Zapanta”* are an example of Fertig’s tendency to denigrate everyone around him. This belittling remark about Khodr would be as bad as referring to Fertig as an itinerant miner. Khalil was an educated Christian Lebanese who was raised in Beirut. He was brought to the Philippines by his uncle, who was a successful Manila businessman. After the surrender of the Philippines, Khodr organized his own guerrilla unit, which later comprised the 113th Regiment of the 110th Division and fought well in the Battle of Butuan under his command. He was so well thought of that years after his death, the Filipino members of the American Legion post in Butuan named it the Khalil Khodr Post.

Captain Vicente Zapanta owned the two-masted outrigger, diesel-powered *banca Athena*, which he used to transport guerrillas and supplies around the island. He was a dedicated, loyal and fearless guerrilla who would go anywhere at any time when his services were requested. To refer to the *Athena* as a “barge” is a put-down. Later Fertig used this vessel

to move his headquarters to Agusan Province and spoke better of it and its captain. I doubt that he thought of him as a “comedian” at that time.

Page 162. “‘As commanding general, I have authority to commission officers,’ Fertig explained.” He had assumed this authority and commissioned enlisted men who worked for the Tenth Military District, but he wasn’t recognized as a general by Headquarters SWP, although the commissions and promotions he put in for others were honored.

“What’s Wrong With These People?”

Pages 162–163. “Fertig felt much more secure in the case of Cecil Walter, a civilian, and general manager of the Anakan Lumber Company... He was a leathery man in his fifties, as hard a man-driver as Hedges and every bit as ready with his fists. He had been cited for bravery under fire in the First World War and he had already begun a guerrilla of his own in the Anakan area... Walter and Hedges mounted as vicious a close-in infantry action as men have fought. Their soldiers not only ambushed Japanese along the coastal road but patrolled the streets of Japanese garrison towns at night.”

References to the fact that Cecil Walter had already formed a guerrilla of his own in the Anakan area are totally false, as is the comment about him and Hedges mounting a close-in infantry action. I can’t speak for Hedges, but Walter never engaged in any guerrilla action. He stayed in his evacuation area behind his sawmill operation with other civilians, including the Americans Fred Varney and his wife and an Englishman named Mears and his American wife. It was reported to McClish and me, when we began our operations in that area, that Walter had negotiated with the Japanese to open his sawmill and furnish bridging material to the enemy. We were also told that he had coerced some American servicemen who had camped in the upper region of his forest property to surrender, which they did. Those who remained were ordered to leave.

Walter was still in his evacuation camp when I took Lieut. Cmdr. Charles “Chick” Parsons to visit him at Parsons’ request in early 1943. The Varneys and Mears’s were still there at that time. Walter didn’t come down to the seacoast until elements of the 110th Division under Lieut. Col. McClish had organized and pacified the area. Walter never engaged in any armed guerrilla activity, but devoted his time after contacting Fertig to *cargador* work, delivering supplies and equipment from the submarines being distributed to the various guerrilla units.

Page 173. “What’s wrong with those people down there [in Australia]? Fertig asked himself. Were those West Point prima donnas so ashamed of having surrendered the Philippines that they were afraid to acknowledge... that some men were still fighting? Did they think that if they helped those who had not surrendered the Japanese would kill the prisoners who had? Slowly, as the days passed, the suspicion grew in Fertig’s mind that MacArthur’s headquarters was deliberately ignoring him... But damn it, they can’t ignore me! I’m doing their work for them! They don’t know what I have here! But I can’t hold this thing together, forever, all by myself...”

Fertig takes the opportunity to rail against and disparage the people in General MacArthur's headquarters, because he felt they weren't acknowledging his position and catering to him enough, in effect, giving him what he thought was his due. This is an interesting philosophical point. Fertig demanded full recognition and reward for his activities and took advantage of the perquisites to which he felt he was entitled. But this was a one-way street. He did not bestow on his subordinates the same consideration for their accomplishments. Instead he was inclined to diminish them.

He admitted his inadequacies as a commander when he writes, "*Fertig needed official recognition to nail down his authority. He had no practical control over Mindanao's local commanders.*" Not to belabor the point, but had he worked with his local commanders and not maintained such an aloof posture, his control would have been assured, as explained more fully in the next paragraph.

Page 185. "*If I only had someone to talk to, Fertig thought. If Hedges were here I could talk with HIM... Charlie is the one man I CAN be friends with, because everybody knows Charlie and I were friends before this thing started.*" These statements are the key indicators why Fertig lacked communication with his subordinates, and even with his top American officers. He felt himself to be so much above them in his position that he couldn't afford to be friendly. He justified this attitude by claiming that if he ate with Americans, the Filipinos would be offended, and if he ate with the Filipinos, the Americans would complain.

"Therefore, Fertig ate and slept alone. He was friends with no one, for to hold himself apart was to wrap himself in the mystery of command. The commander who was a buddy, or a pal to his men, softened them, just as a man who 'pats a hunting hound' converts a useful animal into a worthless pet. Fertig held himself as deliberately aloof from his officers as an old time sea captain—and for exactly the same reasons. It is impossible to give orders to friends."

It appears from this statement that he compared his subordinates to dogs who couldn't be treated well because they might become too soft to do his bidding. This explains why he had problems with his people and engendered little respect in return. I don't recall his ever holding a policy meeting in person or even transmitting his tactical commands or policy statements to us in writing. In other words, Fertig exercised no direct control over his subordinate commands. It was like dealing with a ghost. We knew he was there, but that is about all, except we couldn't help but observe his close relationship with his civilian friends.

Pages 187–188. "*Couldn't those thickheads understand that he did not want to be a general because of the pay, or out of vainglory, but because it was absolutely essential for the Filipinos to believe they had an American general leading them? Didn't those idiots at Headquarters know that face was the most important fact in Asia? That there had to be ONE commander and not a swarm of lieutenant colonels knifing each other in the back?"*

After Fertig radioed the War Department demanding that the command situation of the guerrilla areas be clarified at once, he received a prompt reply briefly outlining his position, mission and rank. He was still a lieutenant colonel. And again he railed against those

“idiots” at headquarters for not giving him the proper recognition his important position warranted, coupled with the fact that he had not surrendered when all others did. He complained that not only wasn’t he recognized as a general, the position he deserved, but not even as a full colonel.

The Advent of the Submarines

Page 194 It is March 1943. Lt. Commander Chick Parsons arrives in Mindanao by submarine from Australia and explains the viewpoint of Headquarters SWP about Fertig’s command. Says Parsons, *“I’m just trying to tell you we were sent here to find out what’s going on.’ ...Fertig was finding it difficult to accept that other men were inspecting his work. ‘You know,’ Parsons continued in his soft, mild way, ‘You didn’t do yourself any good at Headquarters when you set yourself up as a brigadier general, Wendell. You can guess who blew up over that.’ ‘What do you mean?’ Fertig asked.”*

Fertig continued his complaint that he needed the rank to bolster his position as commander, as MacArthur should know, being an old Philippines hand himself. *“All I have to do is make sure we’re keeping constant pressure on the Japs everywhere, so that no matter where they are or which way they turn, somebody is kicking them in the ass. Now to do this, you need two things, control over all the organizations, and accurate information.”*

How could he exert this type of control without communicating with his subordinate commanders? His aloofness precluded this type of control and communication. Besides, Fertig never said anything to us about keeping constant pressure on the Japs and was critical of me and McClish for our attack on Butuan—though he never mentioned it directly to us.

Page 198. ... *“‘You are to avoid contacts with the Japs,’ [Parsons said,] ‘and use those radios to send us information on ship movements.’” “‘Damn it, Chick,’ Fertig said, ‘I am trying to make clear that any guerrilla has to keep the pressure on, everywhere and all the time, killing Japanese. Otherwise, no public support. The public wants to see dead Japs.’”*

This is a continuation of the conversation between Parsons and Fertig, where Parsons is explaining to Fertig what his new mission is, such as setting up a coast watcher net. Fertig is still putting forth his bellicose argument that his mission is to fight Japs.

Page 219. *“Under heavy attack from two directions, McClish was retreating and desperately needed eight cases of .30-caliber ammunition. It seemed little enough to send. ‘Goddamn it,’ Fertig snapped, ‘don’t answer him, period.’ McClish might as well have asked for eight carloads of diamonds, but Fertig could not tell this to Ball, nor to anyone else. It would be fatal to admit he had no ammunition to send his local commanders. It would be equally fatal to lie; to tell McClish that nonexistent ammunition was en route.”*

This kind of nonsensical statement is typical of the misrepresentations in the book, references to events without any relationship to what was happening where or when and with whom. Worse yet, the tone of Fertig’s remarks gives the reader the impression he is dealing with a fool instead of with his most competent division commander.

Escaped Prisoners of War

On the same page, Fertig finds Hedges *“talking with one of the young Americans who had just escaped a few days before from a Japanese prison camp. It seemed to Fertig that all who had escaped from Japanese prisons were still in a state of shock. Some could hardly wait to throw themselves at the Japanese in a suicidal attack. Others lived only for the day when they could have a Japanese to themselves, tied to a tree. This one was sick and hysterical.”*

Maybe Fertig really thought this. I became acquainted with the ten servicemen who escaped from the Davao Penal Colony (POW camp). They were all in complete control of their faculties, none was “sick or hysterical” or harbored bizarre dreams of striking back at their former tormentors in suicidal attacks. This was utter nonsense and totally out of character for these men. If anyone had a mental problem, it was probably Fertig. He had delusions that people who were repatriated to Australia might be overly talkative and possibly say something that detracted from the image of himself that he wished to establish with his superiors. This was borne out by his consistent habit of including derogatory reports in the papers of people leaving his command. The best example of this is his saying that Commander McCoy, co-leader of the escape party from Davao, was “stir crazy” in a dispatch to General Casey at Headquarters SWP.

Page 224. This page refers to two regular officers, Commander McCoy, previously mentioned, and Major Mellnik, and accuses them of wanting no part of his guerrilla. *“They frankly told Fertig what they thought of country boys who promoted themselves to the rank of general officer, advised him that he had no chance, and demanded transportation to Australia by the first available means. Fertig considered their public behavior so damaging to Headquarters morale that he finally wrote them a formal letter of instruction that confined them to house arrest.”*

The contents of this paragraph are a complete fabrication. In the first place, neither of these officers had indicated to anyone that they had no wish for any part of his guerrilla, per se. In making this statement, Fertig is covering up what really happened. McCoy had nothing against the guerrillas and wasn't unappreciative of what we were doing. He had to get out of Mindanao and get to the States, because he had an important mission to reach Washington, D.C. and make an official report to the government about the Japanese atrocities perpetrated against American and Filipino prisoners of war on the Bataan Death March and the brutal conditions in the POW camps. There had been a news blackout on what happened in the Philippines after the surrender. Fertig was standing in McCoy's way by refusing to allow him contact with Headquarters SWP to arrange transportation for him, actually trying to prevent him from leaving. McCoy was an experienced naval officer, formerly the communications officer of the 16th Naval District and a man who didn't suffer fools gladly. Fertig acted foolishly in this matter, which precipitated a strong argument over his refusal to recognize the importance of McCoy's mission and do all he could to help him. Then he wrote in his book a complete distortion of the episode.

Page 245. *“[McClish] came to Jimenez by launch, just after the Japs had landed. He tied up at the seaward end of the dock before he found out the Japs had the landward end. He and Richardson abandoned the launch, jumped into the swamp, and had a hell of a time getting out and working around the Japs.”*

This is another made-up story. To my knowledge, while I was the chief of staff of the 110th Division until May of 1944, McClish never went to Jimenez or any other place in western Mindanao. I made a trip there with Parsons at that time.

Page 256. *“McClish was right. Fertig would have to move out of Misamis Occidental; out of the Zamboanga Peninsula altogether... McClish wanted him to come to Agusan province, explaining if they were driven out they could still retreat into the unexplored interior of Mindanao...”*

The remark that McClish was right implies that McClish was at his headquarters at Jimenez, which is not true. McClish never returned to that area after our first meeting with Fertig [in 1942]. I was there at that time, but I never suggested that Fertig move to Agusan.

This page also contains more belittling remarks about McClish to the effect that he *“had no confidence in McClish as a strategist; no confidence that McClish had real command over his own men, and every reason to believe that McClish did not understand Filipinos and made a mess of his relationship with them.”* And *“To Fertig’s mind the only reason McClish’s force was still in existence was that they had not made themselves enough of a nuisance to encourage the Japanese to finish them off.”*

This is the most uncalled-for attack on McClish imaginable and makes one wonder about Fertig’s mental state. He had met McClish only once during less than a week while we were at Fertig’s Jimenez headquarters in late November 1942, when Fertig had promoted McClish to lieutenant colonel and given him command over what could be considered one of the most important areas of Mindanao, which the new division commander carried out very well. Even when Fertig arrived in Agusan, he had very little contact with McClish, due to Fertig’s habit of aloofness. Nevertheless, Fertig, on such a casual acquaintance, saw fit to mount a most vicious character assassination of him in his book. In saying that McClish had *“never made enough of a nuisance of himself to where the Japs would try to finish him off,”* maybe Fertig forgot about the 11-day battle for Butuan!

Fertig writes, *“That’s another reason for moving there [to Agusan]. It’s time we found out what is wrong with that outfit,”* of course referring to McClish’s 110th Division. Fertig’s statement is a prime example of his habitual disparagement of his 110th Division commander. The real reason for Fertig’s decision to bring the submarine into the Agusan was his realization that the location of his headquarters near Kolambugan, the site of Hedges’ prewar lumber operation, was untenable. The safety of his growing headquarters was at stake. Hedges, despite remarks to the contrary, was unable to afford the security needed. Therefore, Fertig moved his whole headquarters to Agusan, in McClish’s zone of operation.

Lt. Col. McClish’s 110th Division was the largest, best armed and most fully operational guerrilla division of the Tenth Military District, with its well-organized regiments under competent commanders. The division had American and Filipino civilians attached to the headquarters for ancillary duties. Among these duties was procurement of oil from the

Mayon, an interisland passenger vessel sunk by the Japanese at Nasipit, and nearby mines, distilling *tuba* (palm liquor) for alcohol, producing crops of rice, distilling seawater for salt, processing sugarcane for making sugar and procurement of other types of food including fish. The 110th was capable of performing any task required of it, such as protecting and supplying Fertig's headquarters. The real reason for Fertig's moving to Agusan was to get under McClish's umbrella for protection and sustenance, so it is difficult to understand Fertig's dislike of the division's commander and the disparagement of his accomplishments and capabilities.

Moving Tenth M.D. Headquarters

Page 304. *"Simple geography made Agusan inevitably the site of a guerrilla headquarters. 'If it hadn't been for Morgan, I'd have gone there [Agusan] when the Japs ran me out of Misamis,' Fertig said [to Hedges], looking at the map. 'But as long as we had to worry about him I wanted to be close enough to handle him, but with your outfit as bodyguard.'"*

It is ironic that both Morgan and Knortz are mentioned on the same page, because the characters of these two men illustrate the difference between the commands of Fertig and McClish. It was Morgan, an American mestizo and former Philippine Constabulary officer, who gave Fertig the idea of calling himself a brigadier general and taking command of the guerrillas. He had the same title with Fertig that I had with McClish, chief of staff. There the resemblance ended. Fertig could neither rely upon Morgan nor trust him. In truth, he was a real problem. Fertig wasn't able to control Morgan and Hedges' outfit didn't have the proper makeup of personnel or the location to be of much help. Therefore, he had to move everything to McClish's area of Agusan Province and leave it to another American officer, Lieut. Col. Robert V. Bowler, to take over as commander of western Mindanao.

"Absolutely unafraid, glorying in hand-to-and combat, Knortz had done a marvelous job in bringing rival guerrilla chieftains of Surigao province into line... Persuading when he could, and administering physical beatings when he could not, Knortz had singlehandedly cleaned out bandit gangs. He had led attacks on Japanese patrols, and McClish had made him a captain. But a few days ago, Knortz had drowned when a sudden storm at night swamped the overladen motor launch he had been trying to take across Gingoog Bay."

McClish had a strong nucleus of American servicemen, such as Bill Knortz, who were loyal, dependable and capable of carrying out difficult assignments. This group of Americans and some Filipino guerrillas were formed into a unit called the Division Special Troops. What Fertig said about Knortz is true. He was a very unusual young man. Much of the success of the early organizing days of the 110th Division was the result of the work done by Knortz and his Division Special Troops in bringing recalcitrant guerrilla bands under the control of the division. He went about his assignments quietly but with great determination. Fertig and Hedges never knew Knortz and got their information about him from Bob Ball. That Knortz was forced to dare a storm at night to avoid the Japanese patrols because they had been aroused by the recent submarine arrival is another bit of fiction. We always traveled at night when out in the Mindanao Sea (now called the Bohol Sea) in launches.

Page 307. Fertig commented that he had an American officer commanding each of his six divisions and listed each by name stating, *“At this time, Fertig had not yet met Grinstead, McGee or Bowler and Childress was almost a stranger. He knew that Clyde Childress was an army officer who had started a guerrilla with McClish in the early days...”*

Again, these assertions are out of the time frame and are erroneous. I can't understand why Fertig would allow such evident mistakes to be written in his book. He knew me and McClish, our backgrounds, and that I didn't "start a guerrilla with McClish." He knew that I came to his headquarters in Occidental Misamis Province in November 1942 from northern Zamboanga Province, which is in the opposite direction from where McClish came from in Bukidnon Province, and that McClish and I met again at his headquarters for the first time since we were in the Battle of Malabang together in May 1942. If Fertig had any sort of memory and supposedly kept a diary, he would have no basis for such discrepancies. Maybe he and Keats felt that such minor deviations from fact didn't make any difference in a "novel." In my thinking, what difference would it have made to get the facts straight, even in a novel? If it were truly a novel, Keats could have used fictitious names, but he used names of real people who took part in a real operation, only to have their actions skewed into something not true.

Pages 310-311. *“Fertig found himself meeting the legendary Zapanta; formerly the bus driver Zapanta, then Zapanta the owner of the small bus line and of the small fleet of Agusan River launches; now Zapanta of The River, or more properly, Major Zapanta, admiral of the Suicide Navy of Mindanao, and commander of its flagship Athena.”* This time, at least, Fertig refers to Zapanta as legendary, not as a comedian, as he did on Page 126.

Imaginary Geography

Page 316. *“By the time Fertig returned downstream to McClish's headquarters at Buenavista, a pretty little town on the river plain four miles inland, Fertig had the Agusan and its problems well fixed in his head.”*

On this page Fertig is already in Agusan Province and is writing about his trip to acquaint himself with the river. His descriptions are completely wrong—so much so, I wonder what river he was talking about. He was familiar with this waterway from its mouth on the Mindanao (Bohol) Sea to the site of his last headquarters at Waloe, near its headwaters.

The last sentence in the last paragraph states, *“For more than fifty miles, the Agusan twisted thick and fast through mountains in a bed that was white-water rapids during the dry season.”*

There were no white-water rapids on the Agusan River in any season. I traveled that river by *baroto* (log canoe) and by motor launch at all seasons of the year and never encountered any rapids.

Page 317. *“It [the Agusan] swung in a great bend of limestone cliffs near the Agusan-Davao provincial frontier, and a road led from this bend sixteen miles to the Pacific Ocean.”* Another misstatement: there were no limestone cliffs along the river nor was there a road from a bend in the river 16 miles to the Pacific Ocean. A quick look at a map will disclose a roadless range of mountains between the Agusan River and the Philippine Sea (not the Pacific Ocean) passable only on foot trails or in streams.

“Rocky narrows below Talacogon impounded the runoff from the great basin, resulting in the river’s being at high stage for five months and at extreme low water for three and a half. Thus, most of the year, there was either too much or too little, with each condition creating different problems in navigation and transportation...” This is all wrong, to the extent that I would think the writer had never been there, except this was Fertig’s book and he was familiar with the river. There were no rocky narrows below Talacogon and there was no impounded runoff. The only impediment to navigation on the river was the occasional high water due to extra heavy rains. This condition quickly subsided and the river was again open to boat traffic with no problem.

“Past the narrows the river meandered across a heavily forested plain leading to the sea. Here, the river was a swift, dark green, with orchid-smelling jungle growing flush to the banks. It was a liana-hung forest of giant hardwoods; of apitong, luan, narra, dao and to-og that towered over thick brush at the water’s edge... Behind sandbars where crocodiles lay as if in open-mounted death, Fertig could see palms growing...”

This paragraph is like a passage from a South Seas novel in the description of the exotic tropical flora. The river was neither swift, except at high flood stage, nor dark green. It was a muddy river, all the time. There were no crocodiles in the river. I was told there were crocodiles in the clear water swamp at the headwaters of the river and warned to look for them before jumping in for a bath, but I never saw any.

Page 318. This page contains some of Fertig’s most egregious misrepresentations of fact in this book, completely bending the truth and making slighting comments about the way McClish was handling his divisional operations. Describing the area around Butuan, Fertig said, *“...The city and the river had all been fought for by McClish. Everyone counted it a victory that the Japanese had been driven out, but Fertig thought the barrio teniente had the truth of it. After eating all they could, the Japanese had left. To grow another crop would invite the Japanese to return.”*

This is complete hogwash, offensive to the people who took part in the battle for Butuan. The statement that he took the word of a barrio teniente as the truth as to why the Japs pulled out of Butuan is an affront to McClish. Fertig knew about this battle and the results of it. Although the attack didn’t immediately drive the Japs out of the town because we lacked heavy weapons to dislodge them from their fortified schoolhouse bunker, they pulled out in a few days, realizing their position was untenable. It was not because they had eaten all the available food in the area. The Japs didn’t forage for food or grow crops in the vicinity of

Butuan because it was too dangerous for them with all the nearby guerrilla activity. They remained within the limits of the town and were supplied by boat from the outside.

The benefits that came with the Japs' departure included the possession of several diesel-powered river and seagoing boats captured by the guerrillas during the battle and the opening up of the highway and the river for the guerrillas to carry on their organizational efforts east to Surigao and south to Davao. The presence of the Japanese garrison at Butuan had made communication difficult with those areas. The main benefit to Fertig was that now he was free to move his headquarters to Agusan Province and make use of the river. Fertig never acknowledged these benefits accrued to him by the Japs being driven away from the area, but instead chose to belittle McClish and the others who took part in the battle.

Fertig and McClish—Again

The rest of the statements on this page are so patently untrue and deprecatory that it leaves me to feel that Fertig was a compulsive liar to have said such things. *"The refugees were a problem. News of an unusual concentration of American civilians in one place could not fail to find its way to the Japanese. Moreover, the Americans were seriously taxing the headquarters food supply. Fertig sent them upriver, where a small barrio was converted into an isolation camp. He wondered why McClish had not already done this."* Not only was there no problem with the refugees waiting to go out on the submarine—Fertig wasn't in the area to be concerned about it.

"McClish's command had the quality of unfinished business about it. There was the matter of the trucks... Months ago Fertig had told McClish to distill alcohol from tuba [palm liquor] to use as fuel in the engines... Angrily, Fertig ordered distillation to begin at once." Nonsense. We and everyone else had been distilling alcohol from tuba and using it for vehicle and battery charger fuel long before Fertig arrived on our scene. In the last paragraph, *"Nor had anyone thought to inspect the bunkers of the inter-island steamer Mayon, now a rusting, bomb-torn hulk in Nasipit harbor... Fertig ordered it salvaged immediately."* Another complete falsehood. The McClish organization had been removing oil from the wreck of the *Mayon* long before Fertig arrived. The calumny against our organization continues onto the following page without letup.

Page 320. *"No one had adequately prepared against the attack the Japanese would surely mount once they learned that the area was to serve as a supply depot for all the guerrilla forces in the southern Philippines. There had been plenty of time for McClish to have prepared at least preliminary defenses. Fertig thought it inexcusable for McClish to be absent at this time, for the Narwhal's scheduled arrival was only days away, and Fertig needed to know what arrangements had been made for handling her cargo."*

Fertig never expressed such concerns to either me or McClish and remained almost in seclusion in his headquarters, never taking part in any discussion about tactics or exhibiting a hands-on, in-charge attitude about anything. How could he properly run an organization if he never talked with anyone?

“Aware of the danger that the Japanese could also come down-river, Fertig ordered Childress to place a guerrilla force near the Agusan-Davao provincial border, to prevent Japanese attacking from Davao from coming upon guerrilla rear areas. Another force under Tony Haratik was sent to shut the side door—the road that led to the Pacific to the great river bend of the limestone canyons.”

Again Fertig couldn't get it straight. As stated previously, there were no limestone canyons on the Agusan River, but that is a minor point considering the errors in the main statement. Special Orders NO. 70, 25 April 1944, designated me commander of the 107th Division. True, my mission was to guard the approaches from the south and to prevent the Japs from coming up from Davao, as Fertig wrote, but principally, my duties were to guard the Tenth Military District Headquarters, now at Waloe, and to supply it with provisions. Lieutenant Anton Haratik did not have a separate command “to shut the side door,” as Fertig implied; he commanded a unit of the 107th Division under me that was informally designated the Division Special Troops but officially known as the 112th Provisional Battalion. When I read such remarks in this book, I sometimes wonder whether Fertig was ever on Mindanao or whether he ever proofread what Keats wrote in his name.

Page 327. *“For his part, Captain Latta [of the Narwhal] was impressed too. In fact, it was the only instance in United States naval history where a United States warship had moored at a pier to discharge cargo in enemy territory, and knowing this, Fertig had carefully set the scene.”*

The only thing wrong with this statement is that Fertig had not set the scene. He wasn't there. This was wholly a 110th Division operation. Brig. General Austin C. Shofner (then a major), U.S. Marine Corps, acting G-3 of the 110th Division, was in charge of unloading the submarine, using division personnel and civilians in the area and division equipment.

Page 328. *“Belowdecks, Fertig said goodbye to [the Narwhal's passengers], giving Nell Varney money with which to buy Christmas presents for him for Mary and the girls...”*

Fertig is holding to the story that he was on board this submarine to see the 32 people, including eight women and two children, evacuated from Mindanao. Fertig couldn't have been there because he didn't arrive in the Agusan area of the 110th Division until later.

Page 330. *“‘Another thing, Chick,’ Fertig said. ‘About those twenty-millimeter guns. When I saw them, damn it, I felt about ten feet tall—until I found out that nobody had sent any shells. Who was the genius who thought we could fire cannons without ammunition?’”*

This statement is untrue; our 20-mm. guns had ammunition when they were delivered. These guns were well used on Vitos Hill and by Waldo Neveling on his banca, the *So What*.

Eating Alone

Page 342. *“He (Fertig) worked alone through the morning until it was time to eat the solitary lunch that helped cloak him in the mystery of command. He sipped from a cup of hot, faintly stained water that represented the last of the drip-ground coffee the Narwhal had brought.”*

This is a telling statement. The nonsense about eating alone to cloak him in the mystery of command might have had another and more sinister purpose. The admission about the drip-ground coffee the *Narwhal* had brought might be a hint. It had been rumored but not proven that the submarine had dropped off surplus food, not needed for the return trip to Australia, to the guerrillas and this food had found its way to Fertig's table without any distribution to his headquarters mess or to anyone else. I know I never saw any of it; I had been in his headquarters several times at Waloe but was never invited to lunch, even though I was his direct subordinate in charge of the protection and supply of his headquarters.

“Hammocks, for God's sake. When the same space on the submarine could have been used for medicines; for bullets. Tented hammocks with mosquito netting zippered to them; hammocks that were death traps for soldiers caught in them in surprise night attacks; hammocks that were good only for siestas in safe rear areas. They might as well have sent jockstraps. We could have made slingshots out of jockstraps.”

If he believed what he wrote about the jungle hammocks, this proved how out of touch he was with the day-to-day lives of the people, especially the Americans, in his command. He was able to sleep in his bed and never had to spend a night in the forest while traveling, as many of us had to do in patrolling our area and inspecting our outposts. The hammocks were the best piece of personal equipment sent in to us and were immediately put to good use, but not just for taking a siesta, as he so sarcastically put it.

Page 355. Reference to the 37-mm cannon on this page is inaccurate. The 37-mm gun in use in World War I, which was called a one pounder and could be broken down for hand carrying, did not resemble what the submarine brought in to us. Many times I wished I had one of the old ones instead of the heavy, rubber-tired field piece sent to us. Poorly designed for modern warfare as an antitank weapon because of its small caliber, it came in handy a few times, but normally it was of little use in the jungle without a vehicle to pull it.

Fertig was correct that it was a *“complete surprise. They were the first United States artillery to speak in the Philippines since the fall of Corregidor, and with them, a jubilant McClish, who had won and lost and won this country before, blew the Japanese back in to Butu'un. At that point, the Japanese called for air support.”* However, the surprise was not at Butuan; it was at the battle for Vitos Hill and it was not McClish. I fired the 37-mm and the Japs quickly retreated. Fertig is getting his battles and people mixed up again. If he was speaking of the earlier Butuan fight, we had no weapons such as the 37-mm, but the Japs did call in air support. At Vitos Hill, they did not.

As previously stated in this review, Neveling had equipped his large banca, *So What*, with a 20-mm cannon, with which he manned to shoot down a Betty bomber that strayed within his range to get a better look at his vessel.

Page 360, and the three following pages, are based on a true event, but like so many things described in this book, never happened the way it was written. It is about the bombing of Talacogon where Fertig had his headquarters at the time. This is another instance of an event where the wrong people were credited with an action and the described scenes never took place, which makes one wonder why Fertig would have Keats write up a completely fallacious account of something when the truth would have been more interesting for the historical record.

A Feast of Roast Pig

Page 361-362. *“A delicious scent of roasting pig hung in the still air of the schoolhouse compound. The pig was part of the good luck. Indeed it seemed a miracle when the villagers came to [Fertig] that morning bringing a spindly, dejected young boar, with the priest and the barrio teniente leading the procession... Pedro, the houseboy, set the smoking, golden-brown pig before Fertig when the noise burst upon them all. The bomber came over at tree level... One instant there was a group of officers laughing and joking as they sat down to a feast, and in the next there was the rushing racket of the plane... The side wall of the building was torn off and lay in a jumble with blown papers scattered through it... There, incredibly still sitting at the table, was Fertig. He was picking splinters and dirt from the still-smoking carcass of the pig.”*

The feast is fiction. That this pig was the first fresh meat Fertig's men had seen in days is a lie. Talacogon was a fairly good-sized township, although mostly deserted because of the war, but some food was available, including *carabao* (water buffalo) meat. There was a Catholic church in town with three Dutch priests living there. They had enough food to sustain themselves. I know because I ate with them several times. The bombing that was said to have occurred while Fertig and his staff were eating the pig also never happened.

Page 362. The untrue story of the bombing and the pig feast continues. The last paragraph of this page says, *“Every day Japanese aircraft came boring up the Agusan, hitting all the river towns one after another. The only surprising thing about the Japanese was the stolidity of their tactics.”*

The only correct statement was the last sentence about the stolidity of the Japanese tactics. All the rest is wrong. The Japanese never carried out a concentrated bombing mission of the river towns. The reference to McClish's holding the Japanese before Vitos was actually being done by elements of Khalil Khodr's 113th Regiment of the 110th Division. I had gone down the river to witness the action and arrived just as the Japs had driven off Khalil's defenders and captured the 20-mm gun set up on the hill. Major Khodr was watching the action with a 37-mm gun nearby not being used. I manned the gun and opened fire point blank at the Japanese, bore-sighting the target, and driving off the Japs in confusion. McClish wasn't present at this action.

As mentioned previously, it is true that, *“Incredibly, the German [Neveling] shot [a Betty bomber] down with his 20-mm cannon.”*

The true story of the bombing of Talacogon is somewhat different from Fertig’s account of it. The remark on page 362 about the stolidity of the Japanese tactics was the key to what happened in this episode. It was well known to us who had been fighting the Japanese in Mindanao since January 1942 that they followed a set pattern in their bombing, which they did at Talacogon. They sent a scout plane to check out the town where Fertig had established his command center, which was a commonplace Japanese tactic. If they saw anything unusual on the ground, they would circle several times and then leave. This circling pattern was the clue that the next day their dive bombers would arrive.

As soon as that happened at Talacogon, frantic orders were sent out for all the river launches of the 110th Division to be sent there immediately. One by one, several launches arrived and every stick of Fertig’s headquarters—the radios, diesel engines, office furniture, mess equipment, personal effects and all the headquarters personnel—were loaded and headed up river to Fertig’s next headquarters site at Waloe. The next day the dive bombers arrived and dropped bombs on an empty town, damaging only a few buildings. This isn’t nearly as dramatic as the made-up story in Fertig’s book, but it is what took place and was the only bombing of an Agusan town I know of.

Page 366. The bottom paragraph speaks of heavy bombing, *“Together with this story of disaster, the real bombing began. No longer did lone light bombers strike the river towns. A squadron of six heavy bombers began methodically to obliterate them...”*

Nothing could be further from the truth. No heavy bombers came back to obliterate the river towns for several reasons. The few river towns in existence were hardly more than a collection of vacant nipa shacks not worth the expenditure of gasoline for a lone light bomber, to say nothing of six heavy bombers. At that stage of the war, the Japanese didn’t have the resources left to waste on senseless bombing of negligible targets.

Page 367. The paragraphs at the bottom of this page are more blatant examples of Fertig’s inability to tell the truth and his failure to give credit to people working for him in their efforts to sustain his headquarters. The first paragraph attempts to portray his headquarters at Waloe as being surrounded by *“pagan bandits and Christian outlaws”* that posed a security problem and *“for the first time since he came to Mindanao, Fertig found himself in an area where he could expect nothing from the populace.”* While the Magahats were not a serious military problem to the heavily armed guerrilleros, *“Fertig nevertheless had to patrol against them.”*

It is true he could expect nothing from the populace because there weren’t any people living anywhere near the isolated place where he decided to locate his last headquarters. It was the safest place he could find on Mindanao. Whatever the situation might be, Fertig himself never patrolled against anyone. He left that to his subordinates. In this particular situation, my soldiers and I were the ones who did the patrolling to safeguard the headquarters.

The most untruthful scenario he could devise was expounded in the last paragraph. *“Not that there was much to expect. There was even less to eat than there had been at Talacogon, where the diet had run heavily to bamboo shoots. At Waloe, the diet consisted of edible ferns, a few muddy fish, coconuts, bamboo, whatever kind of meat could be found flying, hopping or wriggling, and a few camotes [sweet potatoes] and a ration of rice or corn.”*

The only place Fertig ever ate bamboo shoots was in a Chinese restaurant! There was sufficient food at both Talacogon and Waloe. As previously reported, there were a Catholic church and priests at Talacogon and a port on the Agusan River that was adequately but not richly supplied with victuals despite the wartime isolation of the town. To claim that at Waloe Fertig and his headquarters personnel had to survive on muddy fish, edible ferns, etc., is completely preposterous, because an elaborate supply system for the Tenth Military District Headquarters had been established and operated by the chief of staff and supply officer of the 107th Division, Capt. Fred Feigle. He set up a procurement organization in Surigao Province to obtain foodstuffs and organized a supply route to the Agusan area. Storage bodegas were built alongside the trail, covered bamboo rafts were constructed at relay points on the river approaches and in the swamp near Fertig’s headquarters. Sufficient food, including live pigs, were transported to Fertig over this route.

Page 367. *“The rice, and most of the camotes and coconuts, were packed in. Cargadores, starting in Misamis Oriental [sic] crept through 120 miles of Japanese-infested country, then labored over 200 miles of mountainous jungle to bring a few sacks of palay to Waloe. The journey took a month.”*

That sentence describes a supply operation so impractical as to be laughable even if included in a bad novel. Anyone with a modicum of experience in the Philippines, and especially in Mindanao during wartime, would be amused by the silliness of Fertig’s claim that his headquarters at Waloe was supplied by cargadores from Misamis Occidental, almost diagonally across this large island from Waloe. The cargadores would require more food for themselves than they could carry on this long trek. Camotes, coconuts and sacks of *palay* (unhusked rice) would not be items transported long distances on the backs of cargadores because of the weight and bulk of these items. Rice would not be carried this way before it was milled.

Friction with Headquarters SWP

Page 387. This page describes a group of “weather people” landing in Mindanao in June 1944 that signaled the beginning of a difficult period in the Mindanao guerrillas. It was instigated by then Major Stephen Mellnik, West Point 1932, who was now in Headquarters SWP, and promoted the insertion of Captain Harold Rosenquist into Mindanao on a special assignment that he (Rosenquist) refused to tell anyone about. Mellnik contrived this whole mission and sold it to the Chief of Staff, Headquarters SWP, who signed off on it after requiring its revision to lessen the authority of Rosenquist over the C.O. of the Tenth Military District as originally written. Considerable dissembling by Mellnik in his proposal convinced the Chief of Staff to go ahead with this operation, which resulted in the avoidance of the

established chain of command in the Mindanao guerrilla force by Rosenquist and his carrying on a most militarily unprofessional operation in relation to the Mindanao guerrillas already in place.

Page 388. *"'And then,' Fertig concluded, 'send a message to Headquarters asking them what is hell is going on. Tell them all activities in the island of Mindanao must, and will be, controlled by me. You'd think those thickheads would know by this time that we can't have a bunch of people running around here at cross-purposes.'"*

Fertig was rightfully upset about this intrusion into his command by an outsider. He ordered that it be understood by all who entered Mindanao that they came under his control and said, *"Bowler is to tell Rosenquist that as far as we are concerned Rosenquist is just a visiting staff officer without authority."* *"The arrival of an intelligence officer was something else again. Special missions were very well, unless it turned out that their performance would jeopardize the guerrilla itself."*

These were prescient words and would have been correct had Fertig stuck to his assessment about an unassigned staff officer having free rein within his organization. Unfortunately, with Fertig, it was all talk. He allowed Rosenquist to come in and run around at "cross-^opurposes" with everyone who had been with the guerrillas since the beginning.

Page 390. Still greatly frustrated and disappointed that he had not been promoted, Fertig wrote, *"When before, in all United States military history, had a colonel been asked to lead a military district in two years of combat? Without a promotion? Few noncombatant colonels in rear areas could escape promotion during two years of war. And a military district was not properly a colonel's command even in peacetime, but was a major general's. Fertig felt the weight of the Moro silversmith's stars on his collar. He was Colonel Fertig to Australia, but here on his island he wore his stars. On Mindanao, he was, and would remain, The General."*

In Australia, General MacArthur had become aware of Fertig's insufferable attitude and had Fertig's file flagged that he was not to be promoted to brigadier general. I learned this from Colonel Lee Telesco, a former member of the Allied Intelligence Bureau of Headquarters SWP, when I visited with him in Manila during the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the Liberation of Manila.

Page 394. Rosenquist shows up at Fertig's headquarters. *"'My instructions are to give you any assistance I can,' Fertig said, in the tone of a man immune to compliments or curses. 'But whether I can depends on whether your mission is practical, I want to make that clear.'"*

Pages 395-397. *"'We intend to free the American prisoners from Davao [the Davao Penal Colony, then serving as a POW camp] before they can be moved,' [Rosenquist] said. 'I have no information that they are about to be moved,' Fertig told him. 'When are they going, and where are they going?' ... 'Tell me this,' Fertig continued in his flat way. 'Is Headquarters going to provide a hospital ship to pick up the prisoners as soon as they are released? A hospital ship and a task force to protect it' The look on Rosenquist's face told Fertig the answer. The planning in MacArthur's headquarters had gone no farther than the idea of releasing the prisoners."*

“Now let me ask you this,” Fertig went on, “Can you imagine anybody stupid enough to think of releasing two thousand men who can’t take care of themselves, on a overburdened economy that is absolutely incapable of sustaining or protecting them? On an economy that can barely sustain or protect itself? I don’t ask you to accept my word for the situation. I want you to go to Davao and see for yourself. But until you can show me that I’m wrong, you are to make no attempt to get those men out of there.”

These were good questions and the proper assessment of the situation by Fertig—if this conversation ever took place. I suspect, as future events indicated, he arrived at these conclusions after the fact, when this book was being prepared, and not when he was interviewing the newly arrived M1 S-X intelligence officer, because Rosenquist continued to carry out his mission as though Fertig had never discussed the subject with him. I am sure Fertig must have known what Rosenquist was up to and must have been aware that McClish and I were cut out of the loop, so to speak. I was told to cooperate with Rosenquist but denied knowledge of what he was doing. Rosenquist acted as though it was none of our business. He brazenly avoided going through channels, completely ignored the chain of command and independently induced subordinate personnel to follow him in carrying out this impractical scheme. I don’t know if he had the support of Fertig when he went behind McClish’s back and mine to continue with his implausible mission, but I think Fertig was at least tacitly aware of it and acquiesced in Rosenquist’s activities. Therefore, I believe Fertig put false information in his book that he didn’t approve of Rosenquist’s plans as stated.

When Fertig advised Rosenquist to go to Davao to determine the situation at the Penal Colony himself, it was not known that the Japanese had already evacuated the camp to transport the prisoners to Japan. Unfortunately, the coast watchers efficiently reported the progress of the ship and our submarine sank it with the loss of all the POWs aboard except about 83 who reached shore.

Rosenquist’s stated mission to Mindanao ended with the discovery of the removal of the prisoners from Mindanao. This Rosenquist episode wasn’t one of the best decisions made at Headquarters SWP in its relationship with the Mindanao guerrillas; but it is a defining example of the lack of communication between the Tenth Military District Commander and Headquarters SWP and between the district commander and his division commanders on Mindanao. Rosenquist was brought to Mindanao for what turned out to be a useless mission. There were guerrillas already in place who were perfectly capable of performing the task that Rosenquist was sent in to do. In fact, his mission was at odds with the instructions Chick Parsons gave to Fertig to stay away from the Davao Penal Colony, which were never rescinded or discussed again.

Had the guerrillas been directed, or even permitted, to keep the Davao Penal Colony under surveillance, this failed mission might have been prevented and possibly the loss of the POWs too. The secrecy of Rosenquist’s mission to Mindanao denied the guerrillas a legitimate mission they were in a much better position to carry out. Had Fertig stuck to his original

assessment of Rosenquist and engaged in better communication with his superiors in Australia and with his troop commanders in Mindanao, this fiasco could have been avoided. .

Page 399. A good example of the curiousness of this book is the statement by Wheeler, “He’s had it. How are we going to get him out of here? Who is going to take over?”

Wheeler’s remark strongly points out what I suspected about Fertig’s mental condition. I said earlier that *They Fought Alone* probably reveals more about Fertig than was intended. What baffles me is how this man, with such an overweening desire to create a distinguished reputation for himself as the great guerrilla leader, could allow these personally damaging remarks that expose his obviously unsound frame of mind to creep into his biography for everyone to read and assess. This is indeed a strange book!

Summing up my feelings about our guerrilla commander and considering Keats’ remark, I think that Fertig was more than “a little nutty.” It is my sincere belief that we were not dealing with a man who was in complete possession of his mental faculties. I doubt that anyone in his right mind could prepare for publication such an unsympathetic and false portrayal of the people under him, misrepresent their activities and so highly laud his personal friends and attribute to them exploits that didn’t happen.

—May 1999.

Endnotes

1. On pages 88 and 89 of *Witness to History, 1929–1969*, the autobiography of Charles E. Bohlen, there is a statement referring to an American ambassador to the Soviet Union he served under, “He was vain and highly egocentric, seemingly driven by a compulsion to make a reputation for himself, a characteristic that... led him to the edge of fabrication...” I immediately thought of Fertig when I read this. I couldn’t have put it better! Chip Bohlen was a Russian language expert assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in 1933 when President Roosevelt recognized the Soviet Union. He served in that capacity and in other important positions in the U.S. Foreign Service until he was named U.S. Ambassador to the U.S.S.R. in 1953.

2. There was no mention of this meeting or its outcome in Fertig’s diaries or in *They Fought Alone*, although orders were cut making the results official.

3. J. D. Deisher was a veteran of the Spanish-American War and took part in the Philippine insurrection beginning in 1900, when his regiment was sent to Cagayan (now Cagayan de Oro) in Mindanao to pacify the people there and engaged in several battles, in the last of which he was severely wounded. He was discharged from Company “L,” 40th Volunteer infantry, at Cagayan on May 10, 1901. He remained in Mindanao, worked as a prospector and mine operator and married a Moro woman.

Clyde Childress is a retired army officer who fought as a guerrilla in Mindanao in World War II. More than that about himself he does not wish to say.