

Discussion Questions for *Ghost Soldiers* by Hampton Sides

1. Did you like the book? If yes, why? If no, why not?
2. What did you think about the way the author opens the book, with the terrible story of the mass burning of American prisoners?
3. I was struck by this line on p. 34: “The men of Bataan had fallen back to the place where there was no more back to fall back to.” Were their passages or parts of *Ghost Soldiers* that stuck with you?
4. On p. 28-29, the commander says,
“There’ll be no atheists on this trip.” Upon adjourning the meeting, he said he wanted every last one of them to meet with the chaplains and pray on their knees. Services would be held in a half hour. “I want you to swear an oath before God,” he told them. “Swear that you’ll die fighting rather than let any harm come to those prisoners.”

Pivoting with a flourish, Little MacArthur bid his men adieu and left them to their swirling thoughts. Then all 120 of them, even the cynics and doubting Thomases in the ranks, went to church.”

Why did Mucci insist that all of the Rangers go to church before the mission?

Later, on p. 96, the author writes, “It was a chaplain on the battlefields of Bataan, Father Cummings, who had coined the famous phrase *There are no atheists in foxholes*. Certainly the aphorism resonated with Bert Bank. He was not a particularly religious person, but he found himself praying a great deal during the five days and five nights it took him to reach Camp O’Donnell...he prayed not as a practitioner of Judaism but as a supplicant to any deity or spirit who would listen.”

5. Was the author’s technique of switching back and forth between the prison camp and the Rangers’ mission effective? Why or why not?
6. What qualities made Colonel Mucci, the commanding officer of the 6th Ranger Battalion, a successful leader?
7. The author writes about the monkey that was the unofficial mascot of the Rangers, and the dog that was the mascot of the prison camp. Why do you suppose he put that information in to his story?
8. What did you think when you read the plan to carry the prisoners away from the camp by carabao, the native water buffalo?
9. As noted on p. 137, the Navy men used a rusty metal triangle to “sound the watch” throughout the day. What did this naval tradition represent to the prisoners? Why do you suppose the Japanese allowed them to do it?

10. If this were fiction, you couldn't have written a more poignant occurrence than that of the doctor, participating in the raid despite pleas not to, being one of the only casualties. (p. 181, p. 285) Were there other things that happened that seemed almost too strange to be true?
11. Did this book alter your opinion of the Japanese during World War II?
12. Did the author provide enough background material on the subject to allow you to get involved in the story? Are there parts you wish had been developed further or more clearly?
13. I really enjoyed the two passages where the author describes the effect of the diversionary plane on the Rangers, the Japanese, and the prisoners. [Read the first two complete paragraphs on page 249 and the third paragraph on page 267.]
14. How vividly did the author re-create the historical time? What drew you in? Was anything too dry or unnecessarily detailed?
15. Does anyone have a friend or relative who was a survivor of Japanese prison camp?
16. Is the book objective and balanced or deeply personal and strongly biased? Does the author have an agenda?