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In *Awaiting MacArthur’s Return*, James A. Villanueva places Filipinos in the forefront of their own story, a position they rarely occupy in histories of the Second World War. The book focuses on the 250,000 mostly Filipino guerrillas who resisted Japanese occupation from the time of the American surrenders at Bataan and Corregidor in early 1942, until the Japanese surrender in September 1945. Most monographs and official histories discussing the Philippine experience during World War II either have focused primarily on American efforts to defend and liberate the archipelago, or—when guerrilla units have garnered attention—scholarship has honed in on one particular unit.

In a methodical and measured way, Villanueva identifies and narrates the experiences of all the major guerrilla units that operated in the Philippines from 1942 to 1945. The monograph jumps from island to island and discusses the political, military, and social landscape in which the guerrillas operated. The successes, failures, abuses, and the patience of the Filipino and American soldiers receive adequate attention. The types of activities that they participated in, including everything from waiting and spying to fighting and ruling, are all thoughtfully considered in Villanueva’s informative history. Chapter 3, with its discussion of infighting and corruption among the guerrillas, is particularly fascinating, as are the descriptions and explorations of the various leading personalities among the resisters. Villanueva also adeptly describes the struggle between the guerrillas and the Japanese occupiers. Neither, he argues, was necessarily in a position to defeat the other. This made for a chaotic situation in which the ordinary people of the Philippines, the tao, suffered the most. The various guerrilla narratives highlighted in each chapter, individually and collectively, demonstrate the importance of population control and popular support for a successful insurgency.

In fact, the work serves as a well-grounded example of what ensures success or what leads to failure for an insurgency, with reference made to more recent conflicts in the Middle East. Villanueva also takes the time to touch on compar-
able resistance movements during the war, those in Yugoslavia and Russia. While Villanueva attempts to put the guerrilla movement in the larger context, more could be said about other movements, in Asia especially. The situation in other countries occupied by or engaged with Japan would be more relevant than some of the context included in the book. That said, by surveying the entire Philippine guerrilla movement—or movements, depending on one’s interpretation—Awaiting MacArthur’s Return firmly supports Villanueva’s several conclusions.

He argues that though they had limited combat roles, sometimes fought among each other, and occasionally committed crimes or atrocities against the Filipino people, “the guerrillas made life difficult for the Japanese occupiers, kept the spirit of resistance to Japanese occupation alive, [and] provided useful intelligence to the Allies” (p. 16). Villanueva concludes that alongside the Yugoslavian forces under Josip Broz Tito and the Russian partisans, the Filipino guerrillas were one of the most effective and organized guerrilla movements of the war.

Villanueva’s work is thorough, yet concise, and weaves together stories that have stood apart and have been understudied, awaiting the touch of a professional historian. He does so with proper intellectual rigor and skepticism. The book is well sourced and researched, drawing material from all of the relevant archives, memoirs, and other materials. Villanueva’s work is a wonderful jumping-off point, one from which future scholars can further study the experiences of the Second World War from the Filipino perspective. The monograph should be of great interest to anyone studying insurgency, the Second World War, Philippine history, or resistance movements in any context. It is written in a way so as to be accessible to the expert and layman alike. Those interested in the Filipino perspective will find Awaiting MacArthur’s Return a welcome addition to the slim selection of available scholarship.
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