Clarion Review

Historical

Beyond Ultra
Robert A. Wright
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Mix family ties with war and world politics and the stage is set for the story of a loving family torn apart by divided loyalties. In 1888, Pedro Ortega of Spain and Wilhelm Hoffman of Germany forge a friendship that evolves into a life-long business partnership and the union of their families.

By 1915, the world is at war. Karl Hoffman, who is serving in the German army in the West African colony of Kamerun (also known as Cameroon), distinguishes himself in battle but has no wish to follow his father, Wilhelm, into a rigid military career. Karl is entranced by both the tropical climate of Kamerun and Pedro's daughter, Pilar.

Karl and Pilar marry after the war and Karl settles into the family wine, coffee, and cocoa businesses in Spanish Guinea. With astute business sense, the family fortunes grow as Karl and Pilar raise three sons; Hans born in 1917, Ernst in 1918, and Paul in 1921. The two older boys are sent to school in Germany, where they live with Karl's brother Walter. Paul is sent to America because Karl becomes concerned about conditions in Germany. Pilar's brother Ernesto, Pedro, and Karl become business partners and manage separate entities.

Pedro's brother, Ramon, has developed the family business in New York, and he takes young Paul under his wing. As Spain fights a civil war and the rest of the world moves toward WWII, national loyalty threatens to divide the family.

Author Robert Wright has brought to life two families whose futures and relationships hang on the fortunes of the political theater. Long separations and diverse ideologies divide the families, even as their choices strengthen them. Wright covers thirty years of tumultuous history and captures a wide spectrum of viewpoints. The reader develops an understanding of each side as the Hoffmans and Ortegas face life-changing choices.

Wright's extensive research has produced a history lesson about both well-known and

little-understood events, especially in Spain and the African colonies. The plot moves smoothly as the years pass and the family circle widens. The reader can almost smell the grape vines and taste the vintage wines, feel the heat of the tropics, and share the thrill of current events, such as Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight.

Like all good family sagas, the reader wants to know what happens next. Wright successfully maneuveres the Ortegas and Hoffmans through thirty years of war, relationships, new opportunities, intrigue, and tragedies. Perhaps he will follow them through the second half of the twentieth century in a sequel.

Pat McGrath Avery