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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Dutch Clarke: The War Years

Brian D. Ratty
Brian D. Ratty, illustrator
Brian Ratty
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Just as the news photographer focuses the camera for the perfect shot to capture a moment, the novelist writing about World War II must hone in on the details that will create a compelling reality. Author Brian D. Ratty, a photographer and novelist, has done that in *Dutch Clarke: The War Years*, the second book in a series.

When war breaks out, Dutch, a wealthy young Alaskan, has no desire to sit at a desk job, either in the Marine Corps or his family's oil business. Dutch wants to be part of combat, and resents his uncle Roy's use of national connections to have him assigned to the Office of War Information in Hollywood after boot camp. However, Dutch learns to use a camera with the help of Black Jack, a former magazine photographer, who because of race is not utilized for his skills in the military. A third friend, Riku Togo, a Japanese-American, is also discriminated against. This small band of brothers, partly because of Uncle Roy's behind-the-scenes maneuverings, is armed with cameras and sent on missions in the Pacific Theater. Ultimately, Dutch gets his wish—combat—in some of the bloodiest venues of the war.

Dutch's tiny spy camera, which escapes detection by his captors, is filled with shots that graphically depict the horrors he and his buddy have seen: executions and important information about Japanese operations.

The novelist misses nothing as his narrative snaps pictures of racism, injury, death, heroism, revenge, and redemption in nonstop action. Ratty effectively weaves a combination of current drama and flashbacks as Dutch narrates his saga. A skilled storyteller, Ratty has moments of elegant prose.

Near death after riding out a typhoon on a flimsy raft, Dutch says, "Lady Death had woven her long fingers through the hairs on my chest while whispering in my ear about forgiveness. Then she kissed me with that sweet taste of redemption. With her call, warm and seductive, this temptress was drawing me even closer … Why I closed my eyes to her siren song, I will never know."

This otherwise excellent book is peppered with proofreading errors involving mostly punctuation, capitalization and consistency of abbreviations. Because the book is part of a series, the author assumes that Dutch's relationship to his girlfriend, Laura, is known to readers, and, unfortunately, it is not explained. These editing distractions, however, should not deter those who enjoy action-packed war stories.

Ratty has created a character so engaging that readers will want to follow the rest of the series. Dutch is a hero, but that isn't his motive. Like many veterans, service to his country comes before personal ambition, and that leads to bravery, brotherhood and righting wrongs.

It's no wonder that the book is a ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year finalist and an Eric Hoffer Award-winner.
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