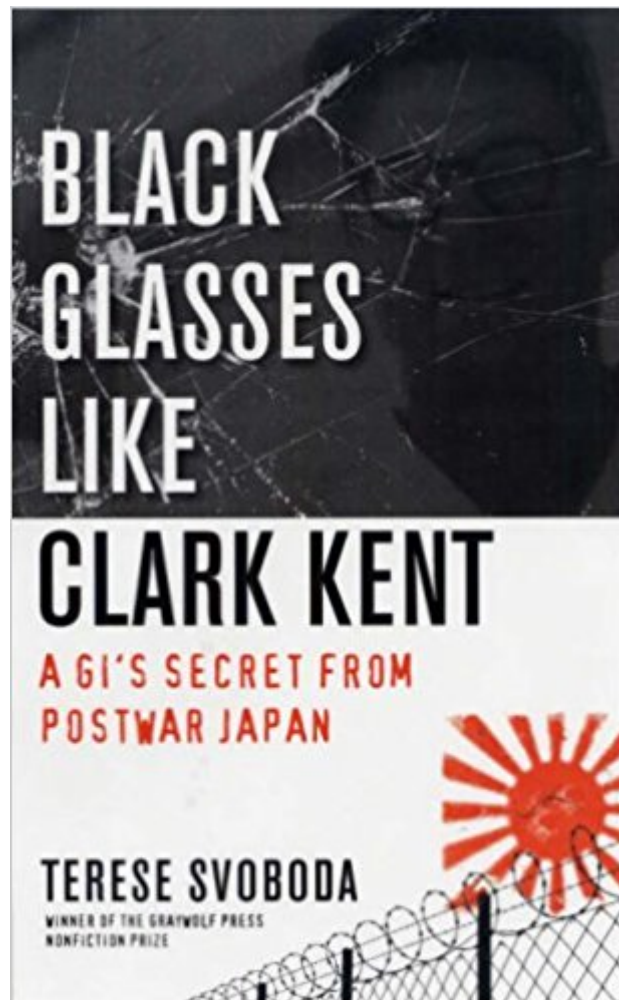




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Black Glasses Like Clark Kent: A GI's Secret From Postwar Japan



Synopsis

After her Uncle's suicide, Terese Svoboda investigates his stunning claim that MPs may have executed their own men during the occupation of Japan after World war II[Our captain] commended us for being good soldiers and doing our job well and having a minimum of problems. Then he dropped a bomb. He said the prison was getting overcrowded, terribly overcrowded.As a child Terese Svoboda thought of her uncle as Superman, with "Black Clark Kent glasses, grapefruit-sized biceps." At eighty, he could still boast a washboard stomach, but in March 2004, he became seriously depressed. Svoboda investigates his terrifying story of what happened during his time as an MP, interviewing dozens of elderly ex-GIs and visiting Japan to try to discover the truth.In Black Glasses Like Clark Kent, winner of the Graywolf Nonfiction Prize, Svoboda offers a striking and carefully wrought personal account of an often painful search for information. She intersperses excerpts of her uncle's recordings and letters to his wife with her own research, and shows how the vagaries of military justice can allow the worst to happen and then be buried by time and protocol

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Customer Reviews

In spare, controlled prose, novelist and poet Svoboda (Tin God) turns to nonfiction to deliver a powerful memoir-turned-political exposé. Svoboda sets out to document the military experiences of her uncle Don, but the Abu Ghraib prison scandal unleashes her uncle's repressed memories, sending him into a deep depression. Before his eventual suicide, Don confesses long-unspoken secrets on cassettes for the author. The tapes reveal more about his service in post-WWII Japan, as well as detailed accounts of human rights abuses. As the book progresses,

Svoboda grows increasingly aware of the consequences of Don's words. His stories are interspersed through-and haunt-every chapter "I listen to his tapes several more times. His voice sounds much lower than I remember, it's so gravelly I could walk on it." The raw quality of Svoboda's relationship to her uncle is as captivating as Svoboda's investigations of the postwar period are alarming. Because she tries to include so much, the author occasionally runs into structural problems-though some of her digressions actually help the reader: by including interviews with Japanese citizens, tales of frustration with the National Archives, and conversations with her father, Svoboda illuminates her text. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“A sense of urgency pervades all of [Svoboda's] work, giving the words a pulse, making her language race with insistence.”
Poets & Writers

Svoboda also writes poetry and novels. *BLACK GLASSES LIKE CLARK KENT* is a personal journey of discovery. An uncle's WWII secret unravels and the author and reader are into an unexpected journey in geography and history. Everyone in the United States needs to read this book! There are lessons of national betrayal, of the fluid nature of writing, and the fluid nature of history. There is even a bit about creative persistence and perhaps about what it means to be related. I have given away countless copies of this book. Every time I do, I get back gushes of gratefulness for introducing another to this wonderful author's amazing book.

Anyone who is curious about postwar Japan should read this book. It answers many questions, but also points out that many are still unanswered and that postwar military censorship of our occupation still exists. It is curious that postwar Europe is very well documented and known, not only by historians, but by the public of both the victors and the defeated. Yet the story of Japanese occupation was never of much interest to America. And Japanese officials cooperated with MacArthur in tightly controlling the press. *Black Glasses* peeks into this murky and fascinating time after WWII. Unlike Dower's "Embracing Defeat" which is pure history, this book is also an interesting personal story that keeps your attention. Maybe someday complete closure will be forthcoming.

This book would lead you to believe it is an expose of some illicit executions conducted by Military Police in Japan during the early years of US Occupation of Japan. The author continually refers to the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq and infers that this incident somehow caused her uncle, a WWII MP,

to recall his service and caused deep depression, leading to suicide. She uses a broad brush painting MPs as recruited "for size and primitive persuasive skills". more prone to brutality than compassion, while in fact the Military Police Corps had established schools for their soldiers as early as 1941. The 483rd MP EG Company trained at Fort Custer. Even describing her own life, she states "In 1969, I shake my fist outside the White House, at 2 AM, marching with all the other braless (SP?) and hairy 18 to 20 year olds." She continues, Together we scream our slogans as if the noise will change LBJ's mind. In January 1969, Nixon was President, not LBJ, and the anti war protests were later that year. As an Army MP Criminal Investigator, I had watched several of those demonstrations and had never seen or heard of the "black O mouths of the tank muzzles pointed at us." Although the author professes doing so much research, she fails to locate any documentary evidence of executions, to substantiate her uncles dream of waking up to see the shadow of a hanging man on the wall of his room. Army records do reflect that one man was executed at the Stockade but she infers there were several others. On Page 143, she includes a mug shot of a Billie Greene, one of two prisoner her uncle had mentioned in his memoirs. However, she does not provide any information on Greene. It took me a matter of 30 minutes online for me to learn he enlisted in the Army on 13 Feb 1943, at Sullivan County, TN, and had 3 yrs of high school. He and a man named Bill Harris were tried by General Court Martial, for shooting to death another soldier on 21 Jan 1946, were convicted and sentenced to "hang by the neck until dead." The case was reviewed and was approved as to the findings and sentence. Since the war was over, all death sentences had to be signed by the President, but in this case the Judge Advocate General, the final reviewer, suggested that the sentence be commuted to Dishonorable Discharge and confinement in a U.S. Penitentiary for their natural lives. In the book, Ms. Svoboda mentions she contacted the Military Police Historian and requested the History of the 8th Army Stockade but was told it was not available. I requested the same file yesterday and received a copy this morning. I question the veracity of anything she has written!

The author rambled on and jumped from one thing to another and made no sense where or what she was writing about. The big secret of why her uncle committed suicide because of some war thing that happened never did show up. I read the whole book thinking that the thing that happened that was the reason for this book would be revealed never was revealed.

With an uncle who served as a very young military policeman in occupied Japan after WWII, Svoboda discovers that even so-called "good wars" warp their own participants and produce guilts

that last a lifetime. We follow her dealings with family and with government archives (and their gaps), and we watch her aged uncle's preoccupation with Abu Ghraib. The fascinating writing style relies on provocative juxtapositions of events that turn out more parallel than we would have thought.

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