

BOY GUERRILLA  
by Christo Sandiablo  
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Rudy De Lara, 21, a blindfolded captive, stands aboard a paddleboat at gunpoint. He narrates: "They say the only thing war does is take lives. I disagree. It created mine."

Dissolve to his childhood -- an idyllic barrio where his father, a personal hero and role-model, teaches Rudy life lessons in humility and dignity. In school, young Rudy learns about his country's long and bloody struggle for freedom. The Filipino historical heroes inspire him.

Family life is full of love and celebration; their home is the neighboring towns' center for sports and cultural activities. But he isn't complete without his gang and his best friend, Tambok.

Forward to Rudy's teenage years. In 1941, his peaceful life is suddenly disrupted as Japan attacks Pearl Harbor and the American *Nichols Air Force Base* near his home. Incessant bombings force his family to separate and seek shelter in another town. Rudy remains, and from the beach, watches the Japanese planes pummel Bataan and Corregidor in the horizon.

The Americans leave the Philippines with MacArthur's promise to return. Vicious stories of war haunt the villagers' minds as they attempt to go on with life during the Japanese occupation. Rudy's first encounter with them while trying to cross his local bridge results in torture and humiliation. This prompts him to join the guerrilla movement that is taking place in the Philippines led by a local. His first assignment: shut down gambling houses on weekdays.

Meanwhile, the Japanese conduct *zonas* which are random round-ups for the public execution of underground resistance members. The murder of fellow guerrillas drives Rudy to take on increasingly violent actions. Yet he never kills. Confessing to his father about joining the guerrillas, he assures him of this.

Life as a guerrilla is alleviated when Stella, a childhood love, reenters his life. She initially ignores

him, but notices his improved behavior and compassionate side. She offers him piano lessons and they fall in love to Schubert's *Serenade*, a recurring musical theme throughout his life and the film itself.

Shortly thereafter, Stella develops tuberculosis and lies bedridden. Still unaware of his life as a guerrilla, her suspicions rise over his late nights and "double" life. He eventually reveals he's a guerrilla and reasons that his fight increases their chances to go to America together.

Forward to 1944. MacArthur and the American forces return to the Philippines. Rudy is on a mission in the jungles of Infanta and has been struck with malaria. He's distracted by his own personal search for the then-rare penicillin for his ill love, Stella.

Rudy returns home to barren isolation. The war had caused everyone to flee. Rudy and Tambok set off to retrieve the de Laras and encounter the battle-torn landscapes of the country. They see the evening skies adorned with dogfights of American flyboys' double-bodied P-38's versus the Japanese zero planes.

Rudy reunites with his family and brings them back home.

By the end of the war, corruption spreads throughout the guerrilla organization as Rudy is set up as an accomplice to the murder of the town mayor -- who is also a godfather to the de Lara family. Upon realizing this, Rudy's malaria is immediately triggered. His hallucinatory sickness is intercut with the imagery of war: hard times drive women to prostitution, young teens are conscripted to be comfort women, corpses are hung from trees, and mutilation thrives. The montage ends. War is over.

The vigilante-like corruption of the guerrillas forces Rudy to resign from the movement. He returns to working for his father who has taken advantage of post-war conditions catering to American soldiers. However, heated conflicts between the black and white Americans force the business to be shut down.

Given a strange message, Rudy is lured into a trap, kidnapped at gunpoint. He's blindfolded and taken by a boat to an island where he's held captive for several weeks. He

manages to escape and upon returning, becomes a local hero. But his fame suddenly turns to notoriety. He and six guerrillas are arrested for the murder of the town mayor. He's tortured in prison by crooked guards. Defended by then-attorney Ferdinand Marcos, he is eventually exonerated but learns...

Stella grows weaker and their plans of going together to America collapse. She doesn't have much time. Rudy proposes to her.

A few days later, Stella dies. The tragedy devastates Rudy yet he continues to study and is accepted to Stanford University. But he can't go to America without Stella.

Tambok offers a compassionate outlook and urges him to move on and look forward to a new life in a new world.

Days later, Rudy's parents watch as he boards a plane.

"But no one will be there to greet you when you arrive. You'll be alone."

"No, I won't." And expressing a traditional Filipino attitude, Rudy shrugs and says "Bahala na" which means 'Que sera, sera'.