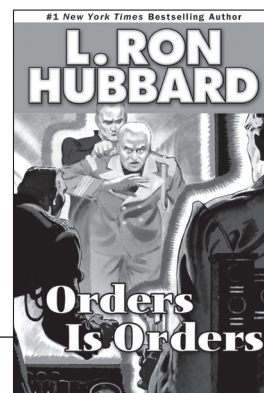


L. Ron Hubbard's *Orders Is Orders* Discussion Guide



STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

As war engulfs China in 1937, U.S. Marine Gunnery Sergeant James Mitchell is assigned a mission that seems nearly impossible: travel hundreds of miles through enemy-occupied territory to deliver desperately needed supplies to an isolated American consulate. Battling enemy soldiers, bombed roads, disease, exhaustion and his own struggle with alcohol, Mitchell must rely on determination, resourcefulness and an unwavering sense of duty. The author combines historical events with high-stakes adventure in a story that explores courage, perseverance, leadership and personal redemption.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Orders Is Orders is set during the opening months of the Second Sino-Japanese War, which began in 1937 after years of growing tensions between China and Japan. Japanese forces rapidly captured major cities along China's eastern coast and advanced inland, leaving widespread destruction, civilian displacement and humanitarian crises in their wake. Although the city of Shunkien is fictional, it reflects the many Chinese communities devastated during the conflict.

The story also portrays the unique role of the United States Marine Corps in China before the United States entered World War II. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, American Marines were stationed at embassies, consulates and treaty ports to protect American citizens and diplomatic interests while the United States officially remained neutral. Operating under strict rules intended to avoid provoking either side, these Marines often found themselves carrying out humanitarian and protective missions in dangerous and rapidly changing conditions.

When the story first appeared in 1937, readers recognized its setting from contemporary newspaper headlines describing the ongoing war in China, making the author's fictional adventure feel immediate and relevant.

CHAPTER ONE: A CITY UNDER SIEGE

📖 How does the opening chapter portray the human cost of war? The story immediately shows that war affects civilians as well as soldiers. Discuss how the author depicts the destruction of cities, displacement, disease and fear alongside military conflict.

📖 What qualities are most important for leaders during a crisis? Consul Jackson must make decisions despite uncertainty about food, disease and military developments. Discuss which leadership qualities become most valuable when complete information is unavailable.

📖 Why has disease often influenced the outcome of wars throughout history? The threat of cholera becomes nearly as dangerous as the fighting itself. Describe another historical conflict in which disease significantly affected military operations or civilian populations, and how did it compare to the one in the story?

CHAPTER TWO: CHOOSING THE RIGHT PERSON

📖 How should leaders respond when rules appear to conflict with urgent humanitarian needs? The captain must balance military orders with the practical realities of the situation. Discuss how leaders make difficult decisions when regulations and immediate needs seem to point in different directions.

📖 Should people be judged primarily by their past mistakes or by their overall character and abilities? Captain Davis recommends Mitchell despite being aware of the weaknesses in his record. Discuss how leaders should evaluate someone's potential when making important decisions.

📖 How do modern humanitarian missions compare with those portrayed in the story? Organizations working in today's conflict zones continue to face many of the same logistical, political and security challenges. Compare the fictional mission with a contemporary humanitarian operation.

CHAPTER THREE: ON THE ROAD TO SHUNKIEN

📖 Why do Mitchell and Toughy use humor while facing constant danger? Their conversations offer moments of relief despite the risks surrounding them. Discuss how humor can help people cope with fear, uncertainty and stressful situations.

📖 Why does Mitchell secretly bring a bottle of whisky even though he knows it may become a problem? Mitchell recognizes his own weakness but struggles to let it go. Discuss why people sometimes knowingly carry temptations with them despite understanding the consequences.

CHAPTER FOUR: DIPLOMACY UNDER FIRE

📖 How does war affect ordinary civilians caught between opposing armies? The chapter depicts both Chinese and Japanese forces operating within a chaotic wartime landscape. Discuss how civilians often face dangers regardless of which side controls their community.

📖 When is negotiation more effective than force? Mitchell relies on confidence, diplomacy and language skills when dealing with Japanese officers. Compare situations in which persuasion is more effective than confrontation and when force may become unavoidable.

CHAPTER FIVE: STAYING FOCUSED

📖 How might Goldy's arrival complicate the mission? A new companion introduces additional responsibilities and unexpected challenges. Predict how her presence may influence Mitchell, Toughy and the success of their assignment.

📖 Why is remaining focused on a clear objective important during a crisis? Mitchell repeatedly reminds Toughy that their purpose is not to fight the war but to complete their mission. Discuss how concentrating on a specific goal helps people overcome distractions and adversity.

📖 How can war blur the line between duty and self-interest? Some military leaders appear motivated by both official responsibilities and personal gain. Discuss how conflict sometimes creates opportunities for individuals to pursue their own interests.

CHAPTER SIX: TRUST ON THE JOURNEY

📖 Why does Mitchell refuse to abandon his mission despite exhaustion and repeated setbacks? Duty continues to guide Mitchell even when the personal cost grows greater. Discuss both the strengths and potential dangers of placing responsibility above personal comfort.

📖 How much caution is reasonable when meeting strangers during wartime? Mitchell quietly investigates Goldy's background before deciding whether he can trust her. Compare this situation with modern concerns about security and the evaluation of unfamiliar people during emergencies.

📖 How does the novel balance Mitchell's personal struggles with the larger events of history? The story combines one Marine's internal battle with the broader conflict unfolding across China. Discuss how personal experiences often help readers understand major historical events.

CHAPTER SEVEN: HOPE ARRIVES

📖 How does news that supplies are on the way change the characters' determination? The message from the USS *Miami* offers hope despite the enormous obstacles that remain between the shipment and Shunkien. Discuss how hope can strengthen people's resolve during difficult situations.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ENDURANCE

📖 Why do Goldy and Mitchell place different priorities on the mission? Goldy repeatedly urges Mitchell to change course, while Mitchell remains committed to completing his orders. Discuss why people facing the same crisis may arrive at very different conclusions.

📖 Why does perseverance sometimes matter more than talent or strength? The journey increasingly becomes a test of endurance rather than physical ability. Compare Mitchell's determination with examples from history, literature, or real life where persistence proved decisive.

CHAPTER NINE: LIMITS

📖 How can people distinguish between physical limits and mental limits? Goldy reaches a point where she believes she can go no farther. Discuss how people determine whether they have truly reached the end of their abilities or whether perseverance remains possible.

📖 Are Mitchell's methods of keeping the group moving justified? His leadership sometimes appears harsh, yet the dangers facing the expedition are extraordinary. Evaluate whether his decisions are appropriate given the circumstances.

📖 How does returning to his childhood home change our understanding of Mitchell? The revelation that Mitchell was born in Yin-Meng provides new insight into his past. Discuss how revisiting familiar places during times of conflict might affect a person's perspective and identity.

CHAPTER TEN: BURDENS SHARED

📖 Why do personal temptations often become stronger during times of stress? Mitchell again struggles with the temptation to drink while exhausted and discouraged. Discuss why difficult circumstances can make overcoming personal weaknesses even more challenging.

📖 How do family expectations continue shaping people long after childhood? Mitchell reflects upon his father, his upbringing and the choices that led him away from home. Discuss how family influences continue to affect decisions throughout adulthood.

📖 What responsibilities do people have toward members of their group during a crisis? Mitchell refuses to abandon Toughy after he is wounded despite the danger involved. Discuss how loyalty and responsibility influence difficult decisions during emergencies.

📖 How does shared hardship strengthen relationships? Each member of the expedition must carry a greater burden as the journey continues. Discuss how overcoming challenges together changes the way people view one another.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: DELAYED BUT NOT DEFEATED

📖 What are the strengths and weaknesses of unwavering determination? Mitchell refuses to abandon his mission despite armed opposition, delays and growing frustration. Discuss when persistence is admirable and when changing course might become the wiser choice.

📖 How do different perspectives shape conflicts between individuals and nations? The Japanese officers interpret Mitchell's actions very differently from the way he sees them himself. Discuss how differing viewpoints can influence misunderstandings and prolong conflict.

📖 Why can delays have consequences far beyond simple inconvenience? Every setback threatens the success of Mitchell's mission and the lives that depend on it. Compare this situation with historical or modern examples where delays had significant consequences.

CHAPTER TWELVE: TEMPTATION AND CHARACTER

📖 What does Mitchell's continued struggle with alcohol reveal about temptation and self-control? Even while injured and exhausted, Mitchell must confront his greatest personal weakness. Discuss why overcoming temptation often requires repeated effort rather than a single decision.

📖 How do Goldy, Toughey and the Reverend each view Mitchell differently? Each character sees a different side of Mitchell's personality and leadership. Compare their perspectives and decide which seems most accurate at this point in the story.

📖 How do family expectations influence a person's identity? The Reverend criticizes many of Mitchell's choices, while Goldy suggests there is more to his story. Discuss how family relationships continue shaping people's decisions throughout their lives.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: REPUTATION

📖 Why can two people develop very different opinions of the same individual? Blackstone's assessment of Mitchell differs from the picture readers have formed during the novel. Discuss why reputation often depends upon perspective and incomplete information.

📖 Why is it dangerous to judge the outcome of an important mission too quickly? History contains many military operations and expeditions that initially appeared unsuccessful before ultimately achieving their objectives. Discuss one example and compare it with Mitchell's mission.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: A NEW STRATEGY

📖 What is the difference between changing strategy and giving up? Although Mitchell appears defeated, he quietly begins developing a new plan. Discuss why adapting to changing circumstances is often a sign of strength rather than surrender.

📖 Which character responds most effectively to hardship? Goldy, Toughey and the Reverend each cope with adversity in their own way. Compare their responses and discuss which approach would be most effective in a similar situation.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE FINAL PUSH

📖 Which qualities contribute most to Mitchell's success at the city gate? Confidence, timing, preparation and an understanding of human behavior all play important roles. Decide which factor proves most significant and explain your reasoning.

📖 How does life change for civilians after a city has been captured? The chapter portrays Shunkien immediately following a siege and military occupation. Compare its situation with another historical city that experienced similar events.

 Has the idea that “orders is orders” become more convincing or less convincing by this point in the novel? Mitchell’s commitment to following orders has guided every decision he has made. Reflect on how your opinion of that principle has changed as the story has progressed.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

 How is accomplishing a difficult goal different from simply accomplishing the goal itself? Mitchell reaches Shunkien despite injury, exhaustion, enemy forces and countless setbacks. Discuss whether the journey itself can sometimes matter as much as the final outcome.

 Which character experiences the greatest personal growth during the story? Mitchell, Goldy, Toughy, the Reverend and several supporting characters all change through their experiences. Identify who develops the most and explain what events contribute to that transformation.

 What does Mitchell’s final response to the whisky bottle reveal about his character? Throughout the novel, the bottle symbolizes his ongoing internal struggle. Discuss what the ending suggests about personal growth, self-mastery and overcoming long-standing weaknesses.

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