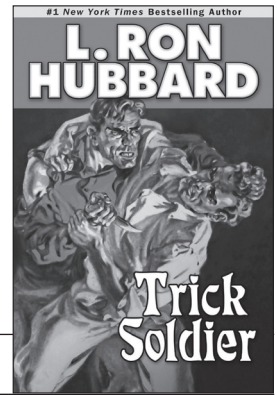


L. Ron Hubbard's *Trick Soldier* Discussion Guide

(also includes the short stories
He Walked to War and *Machine Gun 21,000*)



STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

Captain Turner commands Haitian gendarmes during a campaign against the *cacos* (armed Haitian groups that resisted governments) when Lieutenant Flint, a brutal Marine who bullied him years earlier, arrives as his subordinate. Flint undermines Turner's authority until the gendarmes desert and join the rebels. Forced to flee with the man he fears and hates, Turner discovers that Flint stole a treasured watch belonging to their murdered comrade MacLeod. Surrounded by *cacos*, the two fight together and are wounded. Although Turner is gravely injured, he hauls Flint fifteen miles to safety. His extraordinary endurance finally proves that the supposedly "yellow" trick soldier possesses remarkable courage.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: U.S. MARINES & HAITIAN OCCUPATION

Trick Soldier is set during the United States occupation of Haiti, which lasted from 1915 to 1934. U.S. Marines played an important role in organizing and commanding the Gendarmerie d'Haïti, a Haitian constabulary established during the occupation. Hubbard reflects that arrangement by making Turner and Flint transferred Marine officers commanding Haitian soldiers. The story also refers to the *cacos* who during the American occupation, fought against U.S. forces and the occupation-supported authorities. The author presents them primarily from the viewpoint of the American military characters, so the story can also provide an opportunity to examine how adventure fiction portrays insurgencies and colonial or occupation forces.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

📖 Turner and Flint immediately remember a conflict that began ten years earlier when they were Marine recruits. Flint still considers Turner a "trick soldier" because Turner excelled at drill and military discipline rather than fistfighting. Discuss why experiences from youth can continue shaping relationships long after circumstances and people have changed.

📖 Turner insists upon polished boots, correct uniforms, saluting, patrol schedules and military discipline, while Flint dismisses these things as meaningless "trick soldier" behavior. Discuss whether military discipline is primarily about appearance and obedience or whether seemingly small rules can serve a larger purpose.

📖 Flint openly challenges Turner in front of the Haitian gendarmes and Turner realizes that his authority depends partly upon the soldiers believing he can control his own subordinate. Discuss how leadership depends upon reputation. Can someone remain an effective leader after subordinates begin questioning his authority?

📖 Sergeant MacLeod's death deeply affects Turner, although Turner tries to dismiss his grief by telling himself that he is "getting soft." Discuss why people in dangerous professions may sometimes try to conceal grief or emotional attachment. Does suppressing emotion actually make someone stronger?

📖 Flint neglects his patrols, drinks while on duty, accepts favors from his men and eventually admits behavior that has helped destroy the company's discipline. Discuss how one leader's misconduct can spread through an organization. Why might people judge rules differently when those responsible for enforcing them ignore those same standards?

📖 After Turner's soldiers desert, he has an opportunity to head directly toward Cap-Haïtien. Instead, he returns to the post because Flint is still there—even though Flint has humiliated him and threatened him. Discuss what this decision reveals about Turner's understanding of duty. Do people have an obligation to protect someone they dislike?

📖 Flint believes physical toughness proves that he is courageous and Turner is cowardly. Yet when danger becomes real, their behavior becomes increasingly different. Discuss the story's distinction between aggressiveness and courage. Why are the two qualities sometimes confused?

📖 Flint reveals that he gave MacLeod's treasured silver watch—inscribed "To Mac from Nina. Always Faithful"—to a woman. The watch then remains in Turner's thoughts throughout the final ordeal. Discuss why an ordinary object can acquire such emotional significance. What does the watch represent to Turner?

📖 Turner and Flint make their stand in a narrow pass against approximately thirty attackers. Turner conserves ammunition and fights methodically, while Flint takes pleasure in causing suffering. Compare their behavior under fire. What does the scene suggest about the difference between being capable of violence and taking pleasure in violence?

📖 After both men are shot, Turner discovers a horse and uses it to save Flint. Turner has a severe chest wound, lung damage and a broken collarbone, while Flint has only a relatively minor wound to his thigh. Nevertheless, Turner walks all the way to Cap-Haïtien while Flint rides tied to the saddle. Discuss how this reversal challenges everything Flint has believed about strength, toughness and courage.

📖 At the end, the doctor cannot understand how Turner survived the journey and remarks, "I didn't think men had guts like that." Discuss how the ending changes the meaning of the nickname "Trick Soldier." By the conclusion, what qualities does the story suggest actually make a good soldier?

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L. Ron Hubbard's *He Walked to War*

Discussion Guide

STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

Sergeant E. Z. “Easy” Go maintains telephone lines for Marines fighting rebels in Nicaragua. Known as an “effort economist,” Easy requests a transfer to aviation because he is tired of walking through dangerous jungle. His apparent laziness masks remarkable efficiency and courage and he finally becomes an aerial gunner. After his plane is shot down, however, Easy must travel through hostile country on foot. When his wounded pilot can no longer continue, Easy carries him thirty miles to safety. Having discovered that flying may unexpectedly lead to even more walking, Easy requests his old assignment back—for the same reason: he is “tired of walking.”

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: NICARAGUA & U.S. MARINES

He Walked to War is set during the period of American military intervention in Nicaragua. U.S. Marines were stationed in Nicaragua for much of the period between 1912 and 1933 and during the late 1920s and early 1930s they fought forces resisting the American-backed government. The story reflects this environment through its references to Marines, Nicaraguan rebels, Managua, the Honduran frontier, isolated posts and difficult communications across mountainous jungle terrain. The story also reflects an important transition in warfare: the increasing use of aircraft for reconnaissance, communication, supply and ground support. Easy transfers into aviation believing technology will free him from the hardships of ground campaigning, only to discover that aircraft introduce their own dangers and uncertainties.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

📖 Easy is widely regarded as lazy, yet Captain Malone argues that he is actually an “effort economist” whose work is consistently efficient. Discuss the difference between laziness and efficiency. Why do people sometimes associate visible effort with good work even when another method produces the same or better results with less effort?

📖 Easy’s job requires maintaining twenty-five miles of telephone wire through mountains, rivers, swamps, hurricanes, earthquakes and enemy territory. Discuss how geography and environment can become as important as an opposing army during a military campaign.

📖 After Edwards is shot while repairing the telephone line, Easy climbs the same tree and calmly completes the repair while enemy riflemen continue firing at him. Discuss what Easy’s behavior suggests about courage. Is his calmness evidence that he feels no fear, or has he simply learned how to function despite danger?

📖 Colonel Bronson assumes that Easy’s request for aviation duty because he is “tired of walking” proves that he is a slacker. Yet while speaking with the colonel, Easy is repairing communications and fighting off attackers. Discuss the danger of judging someone’s character from appearances or incomplete information.

📖 Easy believes aviation will allow him to “ride to war” rather than struggle across Nicaragua on foot. Discuss how new technologies are often promoted or imagined as eliminating old problems. Why do technological advances frequently replace one set of difficulties with another rather than eliminating difficulty altogether?

📖 Easy forgets his parachute because retrieving it would require walking three hundred yards through the heat. Later, when the aircraft loses power, that decision becomes extremely important. Discuss how the story uses this incident humorously while also illustrating the potential consequences of neglecting a seemingly minor precaution.

📖 From the air, the jungle appears peaceful and almost harmless, but Easy knows from experience what the Marines on the ground are facing. Discuss how physical distance can change our perception of danger, war or suffering. How might firsthand experience affect what someone sees from a safer position?

📖 Easy and the pilot use their aircraft to attack rebel forces threatening Marines on the ground. Soon afterward, a bullet damages their aircraft and forces them down in the jungle. Discuss how the episode challenges Easy’s assumption that aviation places him safely above the hardships and dangers of ground warfare.

📖 After the crash, Easy immediately calculates that walking toward Pantasma will save approximately thirty miles compared with returning another way. Discuss how humor is created by keeping Easy’s dislike of unnecessary effort consistent even during a life-threatening emergency. Why does this trait make him memorable rather than simply lazy?

📖 Easy and the lieutenant enter an isolated house seeking food and encounter a woman who clearly resents their presence. Soon afterward armed men arrive and a gunfight begins. Discuss how the scene might look differently from the perspective of the Marines, the woman and the Nicaraguan fighters. How can examining several viewpoints deepen our understanding of a story set during a military occupation?

📖 When the lieutenant is badly wounded, he tells Easy to leave him behind. Instead, Easy treats the wound, crosses the flooded river with him and eventually carries him approximately thirty miles to Pantasma. Discuss what this decision reveals about Easy’s character. How does it challenge the reputation for laziness established at the beginning?

📖 At the end, Colonel Bronson praises Easy’s heroism and offers him special recognition, but Easy asks to return to his old telephone-line assignment because aviation is too uncertain. He again gives his reason as “Tired of walking.” Discuss how this final joke brings the story full circle. Has Easy changed through his experience, or has he simply learned that his original way of doing things suited him better?

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L. Ron Hubbard's *Machine Gun 21,000*

Discussion Guide

STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

Gunnery Sergeant Robert Blake commands a Guardia company in Nicaragua but has a notorious habit of losing equipment and neglecting paperwork. When Machine Gun 21,000 disappears, Major Butterick assumes Blake is incompetent—or has sold it to the enemy. Then Blake's soldiers mutiny, using the missing weapon to trap him and the major. Blake daringly recaptures the gun and discovers that trusted Sergeant Ojos Verdes engineered the entire crisis to discredit him and seize command. Ironically, the meticulous records Ojos Verdes keeps expose his conspiracy. Blake clears his name and reveals that his apparent carelessness conceals practical intelligence, courage and remarkable military skill.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: NICARAGUA AND U.S. MARINES

Machine Gun 21,000 is set during the period of U.S. military involvement in Nicaragua. American Marines were stationed in the country for much of the period between 1912 and 1933. During the later years of the intervention, the United States helped organize the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua, a national military and police force intended to replace competing armed organizations and provide greater political stability. The author incorporates this unusual command arrangement directly into the story. Blake is a U.S. Marine gunnery sergeant but simultaneously holds the rank of captain in the Guardia. The story explains that Marine noncommissioned officers could find themselves commanding Nicaraguan troops while holding much higher local ranks. The story also explores a timeless military problem: the difference between administrative competence and practical leadership.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 📖 Major Butterick believes that “good soldiers don’t lose things” and treats Blake’s poor record-keeping as evidence that he is fundamentally incompetent. Discuss how much administrative ability should influence our judgment of a leader. Can someone be excellent at the central responsibilities of a job while being consistently poor at its organizational details?
- 📖 Ojos Verdes appears to be almost everything Blake is not: organized, dependable, disciplined and meticulous about paperwork. The major therefore naturally trusts him. Discuss why visible signs of competence can become dangerous when we assume they also prove honesty or good character.
- 📖 When Machine Gun 21,000 disappears, Blake is charged five hundred dollars—nearly six months of his Marine pay—and is threatened with court-martial. Discuss the importance of accountability for military weapons. Why would an army treat the disappearance of a single machine gun as far more serious than the loss of ordinary equipment?
- 📖 Major Butterick quickly moves from believing Blake is careless to suspecting that he deliberately sold the machine gun to the opposition. Discuss the difference between reasonable

suspicion and reaching a conclusion before sufficient evidence exists. How might Blake's reputation make the accusation seem more believable?

📖 After Lieutenant Jerome is killed, Blake immediately arms himself and goes into the hills to investigate despite knowing that someone may be waiting to ambush him. Discuss how the story distinguishes professional courage from recklessness. What suggests that Blake understands the danger rather than simply ignoring it?

📖 Blake discovers evidence showing that the missing machine gun was used near the place where Jerome was attacked. Instead of relying only on assumptions, he examines cartridge cases, tripod impressions, bullet marks and other physical clues. Discuss how observation and practical experience can function as a form of intelligence even when someone is poor at paperwork and formal organization.

📖 When Blake returns to San Ignacio, he discovers that his company has mutinied and that Machine Gun 21,000 controls the only escape route. Discuss why control of terrain can multiply the power of a weapon. How can one well-positioned machine gun become more important than a much larger number of soldiers?

📖 Major Butterick carefully calculates range, trajectory, air density and windage for the one-pounder while Blake tries to tell him something important. Only afterward does the major discover that the weapon is missing its hinge pin. Discuss how the scene uses humor to contrast theoretical knowledge with practical awareness. Why are both necessary in military leadership?

📖 Blake climbs along a narrow cliff, deliberately exposes his hat to draw machine-gun fire and approaches the position while its crew believes he is somewhere else. Discuss the role of deception in successful strategy. Why can controlling an opponent's attention sometimes be more valuable than superior firepower?

📖 After recapturing the machine gun, Blake does not punish the entire mutinous company. Instead, he identifies Ojos Verdes as the organizer and offers the other soldiers forgiveness if they renew their loyalty. Discuss the advantages and risks of this decision. When can mercy restore discipline more effectively than punishment?

📖 Ojos Verdes keeps detailed records because he believes meticulous organization demonstrates his superiority to Blake. Yet his own records contain descriptions of stealing the machine gun and arranging murder, ultimately exposing his conspiracy. Discuss the irony of this discovery. What does it suggest about the difference between being organized and being wise?

📖 At the end, Blake reveals that he secretly removed the hinge pin from the one-pounder because he feared Butterick would destroy Machine Gun 21,000—and Blake would still have to pay five hundred dollars for it. Discuss how this final revelation changes our understanding of Blake. Is he genuinely forgetful, deceptively clever, instinctively practical or some combination of all three?

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