

The Bridge on the River Kwai

Encyclopedia Article

The Bridge on the River Kwai by David Lean

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As Colonel Nicholson's captured British troops march into the Japanese P.O.W. camp on the River Kwai, they whistle the jaunty "Colonel Bogey March." Nicholson (Alec Guinness) soon enters into a battle of wills with the camp commandant, Colonel Saito (Sessue Hayakawa). Nicholson wins that battle and assumes command of Saito's chief project, the construction of a railroad bridge over the river. Meanwhile, a cynical American sailor, Shears (William Holden), escapes from the camp but is forced to return with a commando unit on a mission to blow up the bridge. *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) critiques notions of pride, honor, and courage with penetrating character studies of Nicholson, Saito, and Shears. In the end, Doctor Clifton (James Donald) looks on the devastation and offers the final assessment: "Madness!"

Jack Hawkins (left) and William Holden (center) in a scene from the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

Further Reading:

Boulle, Pierre. *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*. New York, Vanguard, 1954.

Joyaux, Georges. "The Bridge Over the River Kwai : From the Novel to the Movie." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 2, 1974, pp. 174-82.

Watt, Ian. "Bridges Over the Kwai." *Partisan Review*, Vol. 26, 1959, pp. 83-94.