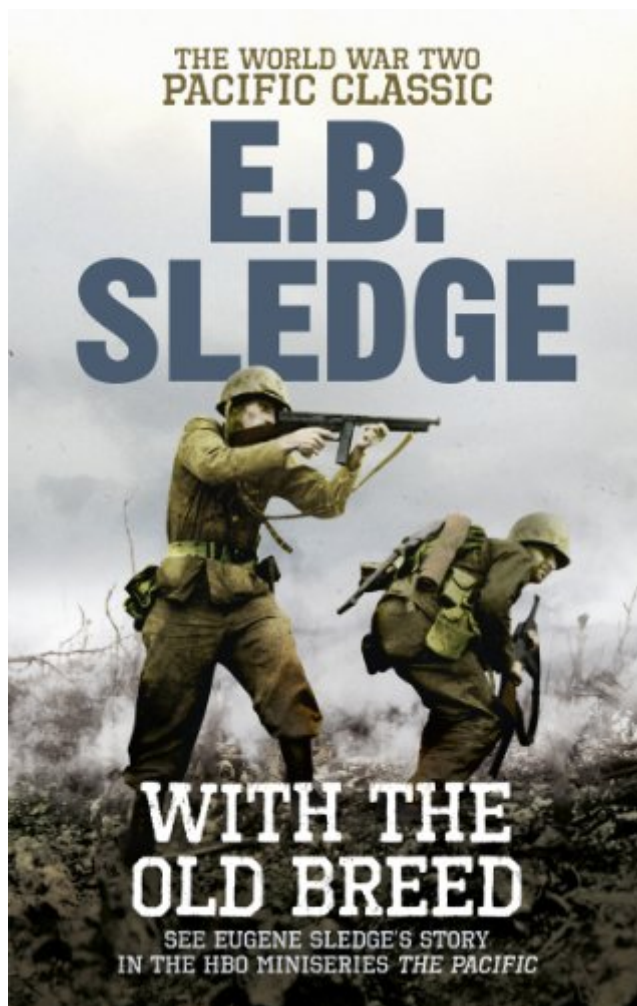


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With The Old Breed: The World War Two Pacific Classic



Synopsis

The inspiration behind the HBO series *THE PACIFIC* This was a brutish, primitive hatred, as characteristic of the horror of war in the Pacific as the palm trees and the islands...Landing on the beach at Peleliu in 1944 as a twenty-year-old new recruit to the US Marines, Eugene Sledge can only try desperately to survive. At Peleliu and Okinawa - two of the fiercest and filthiest Pacific battles of WWII - he witnesses the dehumanising brutality displayed by both sides and the animal hatred that each soldier has for his enemy. During temporary lapses in the fighting, conditions on the islands mean that the Marines often can't wash, stay dry, dig latrines, or even find time to eat. Suffering from constant fear, fatigue, and filth, the struggle of simply living in a combat zone is utterly debilitating. Yet despite horrendous conditions Sledge finds time to keep notes that he would later turn into a book. Described as one of the finest memoirs to emerge from any war, *With the Old Breed* tells with compassion and honesty of the cruelty, bravery and deaths of the men he fought alongside, and of his own journey from patriotic innocence to battle-scarred veteran. 'Eugene Sledge became more than a legend with his memoir, *With The Old Breed*. He became a chronicler, a historian, a storyteller who turns the extremes of the war in the Pacific - the terror, the camaraderie, the banal and the extraordinary - into terms we mortals can grasp' Tom Hanks

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Customer Reviews

Although the cover and the title may not sound that eloquent or poetic, make no mistake, Sledge's elegy stands along perhaps 10 other wartime biographies written this century. He not only recounts war and the charnel houses of these two battles, but does it in a way that is both extremely moving in a prose style that is very reminiscent of the Robert Graves' WWI "Goodbye to all That" or WWII's Farley Mowat's "And No Birds Sang." Sledge, who is not a professional writer like the above gentleman but writes, in my opinion, equally as well. As such Sledge has written the quintessential experience of the Marine in the Pacific War. It is one of the best, eloquent, haunting, and poetic reads I have ever come across, and more than most war memoirs it is very, very scary. I think that one should be able to read through it quickly. I also liked it cause I ended up clawing through the jungle in the Horseshoe region on Peleliu and seeing nothing but gun positions, caves, and small human shaped holes in the coral landscape with Sake Bottles and used and unused cartridges in the holes. I took this book to Peleliu in 1998. The Jungle has mostly come back and there are few tourists on the Island, and none off the very few trails. The caves are littered with broken Japanese Army helmets, some rusted badly, others with the green in good condition. One can see nothing but jungle cleaved coral. After passing the usual "squid pots" (what the Japanese called the small coral caves and holes the dot the island), I was suddenly standing on an old oil drum, now rusted the same colour as the brown moss of the jungle. Then another drum.... rows of drums filled with coral. About at least 50 of them lined to a depth of three or four-deep covering the entrance to a coral cave.

This account by E.B. Sledge, a Marine PFC who landed on Peleliu and Okinawa, details the violence and brutality of these two battles so realistically that it is a disturbing and haunting book. Peleliu was supposed to last 3 to 4 days, but went on for 2 months and cost the Marines 1,262 dead and 5,274 wounded. The statistics from Okinawa contain a action, and 26,221 neuropsychiatric "non-battle casualties." At Peleliu, Sledge "had tasted the bitterest essence of war, the sight of helpless comrades being slaughtered, and it filled me with disgust." Peleliu was a jagged coral island which caused cuts and tears on contact with human flesh, and there was a lot of such contact. "It was almost impossible to dig a protective foxhole in the rock." Once inland one's senses were overwhelmed by the sight and smell of corpses filled with maggots, human excrement on top of

coral everywhere, dysentery, rotting American and Japanese rations, huge flies, knee deep mud, rainstorms, tropical oven heat, snapping bullets, and exploding shells. More than once Sledge saw a Marine slide down a ridge into rotting Japanese corpses to find himself covered with maggots and vomiting from the smell. Peleliu was an "assault into hell;" the landscape "hell's own cesspool." After the landing, with Marines suffering from heat prostration, even the water came from hell -- it came in old oil drums, and the oil residue caused the troops to retch in the broiling sun. When Sledge sees his comrades cutting gold teeth from the Japanese--some while they are still alive--he is disgusted and sickened.

"With The Old Breed" is a stunning eye witness account of one Marine's trip from Boot Camp to the South Pacific during World War II. Sledge writes an autobiographical and historical account of his own experiences as a member of K Company, Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division. Coming late to the war in 1944, Sledge "only" participates in two of the famous 1st Marine battles - Peleliu and Okinawa. Throughout his account he speaks of his training, the closeness of combat and the horrors of war. After initially enlisting in the Marines in 1942, Sledge enrolled in Marine ROTC but like many others in his class, he felt the call of the war and after a semester he went to boot camp. It was here that he got his first taste of Marine training. By this time the Marines had plenty of combat veterans who had been rotated home to fill the ranks of instructors. The effect of having veterans train the newest can be measured by their initial survival in combat. The instructors prepared Sledge and his peers well with tough, realistic training - training that would keep them alive in the first days in combat. His state side training was followed up with more once he reached the Pacific and a healthy dose of iron discipline. Again, the hard training paid off for Sledge. Later in the war the Marines ran out of time for proper training and integration of new troops. The result was dead Marines, too new to know what to do. Training and discipline were the difference between life and death in the initial days in combat. Sledge received and absorbed his training and went home without a scratch. Though Sledge does not specifically address it, I was struck by the closeness of the combat he faced. Peleliu was a only 12 square miles - 6 miles long by 2 miles wide.

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