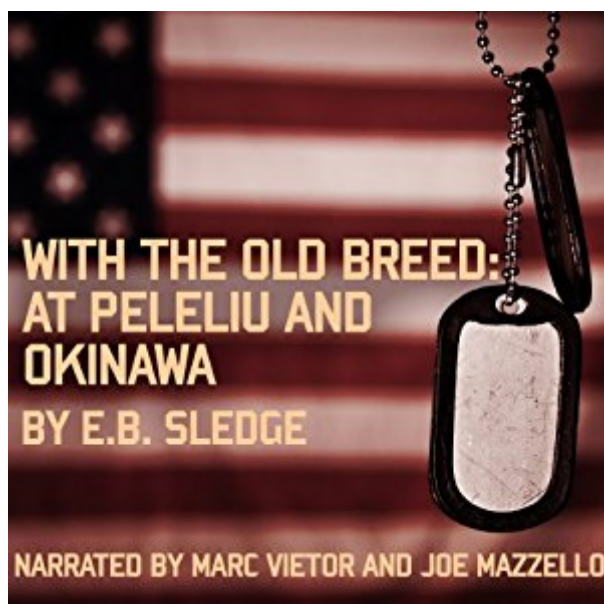


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# With The Old Breed: At Peleliu And Okinawa



## Synopsis

The celebrated 2010 HBO miniseries *The Pacific*, winner of eight Emmy Awards, was based on two classic books about the War in the Pacific, *Helmet for My Pillow* and *With The Old Breed*. Audible Studios, in partnership with Playtone, the production company co-owned by Tom Hanks and Gary Goetzman, and creator of the award-winning HBO series *Band of Brothers*, *John Adams*, and *The Pacific*, as well as the HBO movie *Game Change*, has created new recordings of these memoirs, narrated by the stars of the miniseries. James Badge Dale (who portrayed Robert Leckie) and Joseph Mazello (who played Eugene Sledge) bring all the passion and emotion of their riveting television performances to these new audio productions. *With the Old Breed* is a modern classic of military history AND has been called "one of the most important personal accounts of war that I have ever read," by distinguished historian John Keegan. Author E. B. Sledge served with the First Marine Division during World War II, and his first-hand narrative is unsurpassed in its sincerity. Sledge's experience shows in this fascinating account of two of the most harrowing and pivotal island battles of the Pacific theater. On Peleliu and Okinawa, the action was extremely fierce. Amidst oppressive heat and over land obliterated by artillery shells, the combat raged ferociously. Casualties were extreme on both sides, and by the time the Americans had broken through at Okinawa, more than 62,000 Japanese soldiers were dead. Against military policy, Sledge scribbled notes and jammed them into his copy of the New Testament. Those notes form the backbone of what *Navy Times* said "has been called the best World War II memoir of an enlisted man." **BONUS AUDIO:** Tom Hanks, one of the executive producers, has written and narrated an original introduction to *With the Old Breed* where he describes his appreciation for the book's author, the narrators, and the soldiers who had fought in the cauldron of the Pacific Theater during World War II.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As I found out shortly after I first read *With The Old Breed...* Gene Sledge and I were in the same replacement draft which joined the 1st Marine Division on Pavuvu, British Russell Islands, but were in different units in the division. We both made the Peleliu and Okinawa landings, and his account of both battles--the savagery and bloodletting is exactly as it was. Coincidentally, I was a stretcher bearer supporting Company K, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, Gene's outfit but I didn't know that until long after the war. Gene became a close friend after his book was published and we exchanged experiences. *With The Old Breed* deserves every commendation it has received over the years, from Marine veterans and others. We lost Gene to cancer several years ago, but his memory and memoir will live on and be an inspiration to Marines of this and future generations, as will the exploits of the 1st Marine Division in all of its combat operations. Benis M. Frank, Chief Historian of the Marine Corps, Retired.

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. The front of the drums were torn and shredded by large calibre fire -- probably .50 calibre I surmise by the size of the holes. Despite its layers of armour I could not help but think that the Marines probably knocked the position out early, though it would have done them little good, as this position was covered by innumerable others. Sledge describes the caves and squid pots all up to the top of the ridge. Day after day the Marines in Sledge's unit went into this horror. Okinawa was Peleliu magnified 10 times -- and they were dehumanised by the entire experience to a degree that those who have never, perhaps today few ever can, experience such a degree of fighting. It should be noted that the Marines and, later, the Army sieged the ridge after 4 months of fighting. 10,000 Japanese soldiers and about 2000 Americans died on this island 3 Miles Long and 1 mile wide. I came across their bones --- femurs, skull shards, and shredded bodies all over the island. All along I had Sledge's book to keep me dark company. And so I recommend you the book. In the same way that Robert Graves kept me company in my wet sojourns to Vimy Ridge and Ypres in Belgium, so too did Sledge keep me company in that hot hell in the South Pacific.

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 typo, 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. But war, Sledge notes, made savages of them all, and one day Sledge finds himself bending over a Japanese corpse with a knife to cut out gold teeth. A corpsman tries to dissuade him, first with one argument and then another, finally succeeding by pointing out the threat from germs involved. Relentlessly, Sledge and his comrades move steadily forward, forward into the "meat grinder," losing more and more men to injury and death, the grim "inevitable harvest." The sight of dead Marines who had been tortured and mutilated by the Japanese hardens Sledge and his comrades against the enemy. Sledge tells of the terror of walking across an open field facing Japanese machine gun fire while at the same time receiving friendly fire from the rear from a Marine tank. But there was something "Artillery is hell," and of all the terrors, "the terror and desperation endured under heavy shelling are by far the most unbearable." Sledge learned to steer clear of any and all second lieutenants, who invariably did not know what they were doing and were highly dangerous to the troops. Sledge made two amphibious landings on Peleliu and one on Okinawa. The rule recognized among the troops was that if you made more than two landings you had used up your luck. Even so, Sledge was one of less than 10 in his company of 235 men to escape alive and unwounded--thereby beating the "mathematics of death." ("Statistically," Sledge tells us, "the infantry unit had suffered 150 per cent casualties in the two campaigns.") Dr. Sledge, who is now a college biology professor, writes: "War is brutish, inglorious and a terrible waste. Combat leaves an indelible mark on those who are forced to endure it. The only redeeming factors were my comrades' incredible bravery and their devotion to each other." From Sledge's viewpoint, Peleliu and Okinawa were very close battles. His experience showed him that the success of the Marines was grounded on their discipline, esprit de corps, tough training, the ability to depend on one's comrades, and boot camp, which developed an expectation to excel, even under stress. Of all the books on combat, this ranks in the very highest tier. Reading it is an experience--a new and terrible experience--of what Marine infantrymen went through during and after an amphibious landing in the Pacific in World War II. Without Marines like Dr. Sledge, who put their arms and legs and lives on the line in these savage battles, history would have taken a far different course. I, for one, am profoundly grateful for what he and his comrades did, and want to thank him for what he endured. We owe him and his comrades more than we realize.

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