

Eugene Bondurant Sledge (also known as "Sledgehammer" and/or "E.B. Sledge") - whose real-life role in WWII was featured in "The Pacific" mini-series - narrates this video. It contains historical battle footage compiled from the U.S. National Archives, the U.S. Marine Corps History Division, the National Park Service and the Marine Corps University Archives.

Sledge joined the Marines during World War II as an enlisted man (despite the opposition of his parents). Serving on a mortar team - with K Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division (K/3/5) - he saw action at both Peleliu (part of the Palau Islands, located east of the Philippines and north of New Guinea) and Okinawa.

Before his death in 2001, Sledge wrote about the war and often gave interviews about his experiences with K/3/5. This is one of those interviews in which he describes the horrors of Peleliu.

His book - *With the Old Breed* - tells the story of an enlisted man's experience in the Pacific theater of World War II. When it was published, decades after the war was over, the *Navy Times* called it "the best World War II memoir of an enlisted man," while the *New York Review of Books* declared:

Of all the books about the ground war in the Pacific, [this] is the closest to a masterpiece.

Why did Sledge write his book so many years after the war was over? Why did he use such descriptive language as he wrote about what he, and others, endured?

In writing I am fulfilling an obligation I have long felt to my comrades in the 1st Marine Division, all of whom suffered so much for our country. None came out unscathed. Many gave their lives, many their health, and some their sanity. All who survived will long remember the horror they would rather forget. But they suffered and they did their duty so a sheltered homeland can enjoy the peace that was purchased at such a high cost. We owe those Marines a profound debt of gratitude. (Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, page xxiv.)

Describing his experiences in battle, Sledge takes us on a journey back in time. What was it like, for example, to be shelled by artillery or have mortars dropping all around? How could one hear commands when the rage of battle blocked-out all sounds except for the constant roar of explosions?

To be shelled by mass artillery and mortars is absolutely terrifying, but to be shelled in the open is terror compounded beyond the belief of anyone who hasn't experienced it. The attack across Peleliu's airfield was the worst combat experience I had during the entire war. It surpassed, by the intensity of the blast and shock of the bursting shells, all the subsequent horrifying ordeals on Peleliu and Okinawa. (Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, page 80.)

Training for an upcoming battle put enormous stress on Marines like Sledge. Later, he understood why extensive training was necessary:

I griped as loudly as anyone about our living conditions and discipline. In retrospect, however, I doubt seriously whether I could have coped with the psychological and physical shock and stress encountered on Peleliu and Okinawa had it been otherwise. The Japanese fought to win. It was a savage, brutal, inhumane, exhausting, and dirty business. Our commander knew that if we were to win and survive, we must be trained realistically for it whether we liked it or not. (Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, page 41.)

Then ... Sledge observes how combat veterans-of-the-Pacific reacted to criticism from those who were spared the horrors of personally fighting in the war:

In the postwar years, the Marine Corps came in for a great deal of undeserved criticism, in my opinion, from well-meaning persons who did not comprehend the magnitude of stress and horror that combat can be. The technology that developed the rifled barrel, the machine gun, and high-explosive shells has turned war into prolonged, subhuman slaughter. Men must be trained realistically if they are to survive it without breaking mentally and physically. (Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, page 41.)

He also attempts to explain the hatred between both sides during the war in the Pacific:

The Goettge patrol incident plus such Japanese tactics as playing dead and then throwing a grenade - or playing wounded, calling for a corpsman, and then knifing the medic when he came - plus the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, caused the Marines to hate the Japanese intensely and to be reluctant to take prisoners.

The attitudes held toward the Japanese by non-combatants or even sailors or airmen often did not reflect the deep personal resentment felt by Marine infantrymen. Official histories and memories of Marine infantrymen written after the war rarely reflect that hatred. But at the time of battle, Marines felt it deeply, bitterly, and as certainly as danger itself. To deny this hatred or make light of it would be as much a lie as to deny or make light of the esprit de corps or the intense patriotism felt by the Marines with whom I served in the Pacific.

My experiences on Peleliu and Okinawa made me believe that the Japanese held mutual feelings for us. They were a fanatical enemy; that is to say, they believed in their cause with an intensity little understood by many post-war Americans - and possibly many Japanese, as well.

*This collective attitude, Marine and Japanese, resulted in savage, ferocious fighting with no holds barred. This is not the dispassionate killing seen on other fronts or in other wars. This was a brutish, primitive hatred, as characteristic of the horror of war in the Pacific as the palm trees and the islands. To comprehend what the troops endured then and there, one must take into full account this aspect of the nature of the Marines' war. (Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, page 34.)*

See, also:

5-part Video Biography of Eugene (Sledgehammer) Sledge

Image: Merriell Snafu Shelton

Historic Footage from the Battle of Peleliu

Video: Eugene Sledge Describes the Battle of Okinawa

Credits:

Historic video footage from the U.S. National Archives, [U.S. Marine Corps History Division](#), the [National Park Service](#) and the [Marine Corps University Archives](#), narrated by Eugene B. Sledge. Clip online, courtesy [Lou Reda Productions](#) and National Museum of the Marine Corp.

Quoted passages from *With the Old Breed*, by E.B. Sledge.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Eugene-Sledgehammer-Sledge-Battle-of-Peleliu1>

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