

# With the old breed book report

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

"With The Old Breed" begins with the start of the author's military career. Eugene Sledge was a freshman at Marion Military Institute, his family pushing for him to eventually become an officer in the United States Army. But the author's desire to serve his country in battle with the enemy before the war was over was strong enough to make him end his college career and begin anew in the Marine Corps. Already while reading this book I felt closer and more understanding of the, because I too left college in the fear that if I didn't join now, I would never have another chance to serve my country.

Eugene Sledge started school at Georgia Tech to eventually become an Officer. But realizing that he would spend most of the war sitting in classrooms instead of fighting the enemy, he intentionally flunked out to become an enlisted marine. Already, even though he hadn't even been through boot camp yet, Eugene Sledge exhibited the three Marine Corps values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Honor for wanting to serve his country. Courage for stepping off the path laid out by his family. And Commitment for not giving up and trying his hardest to get in a position to fight the Japanese.

The next section of the book details Eugene Sledge's transformation into a Marine while in boot camp. Through most of the book I could only learn and read about the author's experiences in war, but this section was one that I could relate to and compare. Eugene Sledge graduated Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego on December 24, 1943, and was shipped off to infantry training at Camp Elliot, a small installation located on the northern edge of San Diego. It was here that the author chose to become a 60mm mortar man, whose primary job is to provide indirect fire to support the rifle man.

After being attached to 1st Marine Division, 3rd battalion, 5th Marines, he is sent to pre-combat deployment to Pavuvu. Here the author and his fellow marines learn the basics of amphibious landings. After learning the basics for a short while, Eugene Sledge boards a ship and heads off to invade Peleliu, a small island in the Pacific. It is here that he learns the true chaos, confusion, and terror of war. His experiences from this point on in the book are something that members of any branch of service can learn from when seeking knowledge on what war is like, especially during the Pacific campaign.

Sledge and his company spend three days on Peleliu before they are relieved and sent to another island, but during these three days he witnesses the first aspects of war. On one occasion he witnessed a Marine kill another Marine at night after the Japanese broke through their lines. I think that this is something that unfortunately happens more often than it should on the battlefield, both in the past and modern day. Situations like that can only be avoided through a more constant focus on the situation and situational awareness. Eugene Sledge is greatly disturbed by this event and it causes him to realize the waste and cruelty of war.

Although perceived by the author as a terrible thing, the Pacific Campaign showed Eugene Sledge several things a normal man usually wouldn't notice. Throughout the book marines are seen on litter duty; volunteering to run into the midst of battle with a stretcher to carry out dead or wounded Marines. This mindset of never leaving someone behind is still taught today. What it comes down to at its basic level is the love and loyalty that brothers in arms share

with one another. Examples of such selflessness can be seen today still, with the example of Corporal Jason Dunham.

In 2004 Corporal Dunham jumped on a grenade to save the lives of the Marines around him, dying in the process and receiving a Medal of Honor. In his memoir *Sledge* mentions several instances where his company or squad had to risk their lives in extremely dangerous ways. One of these instances is while he was on Okinawa, during the final days of the war. The author's team of mortar men had to dash across an open draw in order to set up a position to effectively cover the rest of the company's attack on Japanese defenses. This act of bravery and courage in order to complete the mission is a lesson that all Marines can learn from.

It's an example of a concept that is still drilled into recruits at boot camp today: mission accomplishment no matter what. There are several instances I can remember in boot camp where we were given seemingly impossible tasks. But in the end we were able to complete them after hard work and thinking. Training like this, while possibly viewed during my life in boot camp as a waste of time, teaches and trains us to have the mindset that with enough hard work and drive, we as Marines can complete the mission even when it seems impossible.

Something that I think gets overlooked a lot when people mention the Pacific Campaign is the insurmountable misery of the Marines due to the humidity and the rain. Eugene Sledge mentions the constant rain and humidity often during his memoir, and how it negatively impacted the moral of him and his men. He describes how Marines would almost constantly have trench foot

and malaria. The high humidity also caused bodies to rot at a severe rate, and in one part of the book the author describes with disgust how bodies would sometimes just fall apart when picked up, turning into a mess of maggots and rotten flesh.

With this came a constant stench of death throughout the author's campaign. Combined with the severe jungle fighting that took place, it's surprising to see how the men could have kept going on for days and weeks with no relief. The rain also increased the amount of work that was required to do normally simple things. Vehicles carrying desperately needed supplies on the battlefield got stuck in the mud, and already exhausted Marines had to carry boxes of ammunition and supplies miles through mud and heat to the frontlines.

Because of this, Eugene and his squad run out of ammunition and supplies several times throughout the book. At one point they resort to drinking water that was used to wash out an oil drum, and several Marines get sick. While on the frontlines, the mud made their mortar and other weapon systems inaccurate, as the recoil from each shot drove the weapon into the mud and threw the aim off. Marines are trained from boot camp to be used to miserable conditions, and in fact we take a perverse pride in it.

It is this fact that I believe helped Sledge and his fellow Marines make it through the Pacific Campaign. In boot camp and MCT we learn what it is like to be constantly filthy and dirty and eventually become accustomed to it. It is training like this that I believe helped all the Marines in the Pacific. I also believe that the Marine Corps combat training that taught them to kill

efficiently and to try to survive. But training also taught them loyalty to each other and love. It trains to be able to be dependable on the battle field.

The esprit de corps sustained them through the fighting and kept the men together when spirits were low, and I think every Marine can take something away from that. Eugene Sledge survived his tour of the Pacific unwounded and eventually came back to the United States after months of hard fighting. He was a member of the 26 Marines left of the first landing at Peleliu. The intense warfare had claimed the lives of 14,191 Marines and attached navy personnel. It is estimated that over 107,500 Japanese were killed on the final attack of Okinawa alone, not including the other islands in the campaign, like Peleliu and Pavuvu. "With The Old Breed" was in my opinion an exceptional book, however I think that there were some issues with it that could have been omitted in order to make the book easier to read. The biggest one is that the author spent a lot of writing describing the deployment of Marines across the battlefields, and the descriptions were long, confusing, and only slightly interesting. There are several things that I learned from "With The Old Breed", both about war itself, and how it changes the Marines involved in it.

All of the Marines involved in the fighting came out changed men. The biggest thing, however, is that I learned through the author's experiences to never give up on yourself. Eugene B. Sledge faced many adversaries throughout the book, both in how he can achieve his goal of serving his country and the many difficult things he faced once he was on his own path. From reading Eugene Sledge's memoir of the Pacific Theater I think we can

apply his qualities like courage, selflessness, and honor to our lives in order to make us better marines.