
Fighting in the Pacific: Eugene Sledge

Use the quote, the video segment and the prompts to answer the questions which try to get at the barbarity of the war in the Pacific. Write your responses in paragraph format citing both visual and written examples.

Disc #3, Part #5, Ch.4(31:25-49:05) Peleliu

"Until the millennium arrives and countries cease trying to enslave others, it will be necessary to accept one's responsibilities and be willing to make sacrifices for one's country - as my comrades did. As the troops used to say, "If the country is good enough to live in, it's good enough to fight for." With privilege goes responsibility."

— Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*

1. What does this quote mean to you? What privileges to you have as an American? What sacrifices do the troops in the Pacific Theater of WW II had to endure? What do you think they are thinking before the landing on the beach? For those who survive, how do you think they view the words sacrifice and responsibility?

Disc #3, Part #5, Ch.6 (31:25-49:05) *Looking Down Into It*

"Would the war dehumanize me so that I, too, could "field trip" enemy dead with such nonchalance?"

— Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*

Explain the above quote in the context of the "harvest" of the dead Japanese soldier by Sledge's friend. How does Sledge view his fellow soldier? Do you think there is a judgment by Sledge of his fellow soldier? If so, what moral code does Sledge seem to feel has been violated? If not, is Sledge any different from his friend? Do you think this will remain the same or change as the war drags on?

Disc#3, Part #6, Ch. 3 (13:02-19:05) Peleliu Airfield

"I concluded that it was impossible for me to be killed, because God loved me. Then I told myself that God loved us all and that many would die or be ruined physically or mentally or both by the next morning and in the days following."

— Eugene B. Sledge

After viewing the fighting at the airfield, how do you think Sledge and other fellow soldiers viewed their own mortality? If they were religious, how do you think they viewed God? After viewing this scene, do you think Sledge believed in a "greater good"? If so, how would he reconcile what he saw around him with a God?

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Disc #4, Part #7, Ch. 6 38:08-50:31 (Bad Germs)

“To the non-combatants and those on the periphery of action, the war meant only boredom or occasional excitement, but to those who entered the meat grinder itself the war was a netherworld of horror from which escape seemed less and less likely as casualties mounted and the fighting dragged on and on. Time had no meaning, life had no meaning. The fierce struggle for survival in the abyss of Peleliu had eroded the veneer of civilization and made savages of us all.”

— Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*

The scene showing the pieces of coral being tossed into the skull of the dead Japanese soldier is described vividly in Sledge’s book, *With the Old Guard*. It is a key moment in the book and I would guess in the author’s life. What “thin veneer of civilization” is Sledge talking about? What line is or is almost crossed here? Has the war made Sledge and his fellow soldiers “savages of us all” or does some moral compass still remain intact? Are the “Bad Germs” what deter him from going forward into the abyss or is something else drawing him back? If so explain.

"The Japanese fought to win - it was a savage, brutal, inhumane, exhausting and dirty business. Our commanders knew that if we were to win and survive, we must be trained realistically for it whether we liked it or not. In the post-war years, the U.S. 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 rifle 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."

— Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*

1. What is Sledge trying to convey in this statement? Why is he skeptical of those who look back at an experience like WW II and try to comprehend or pass judgment on what happened?