With the Old Breed, at Peleliu and Okinawa Study Guide

With the Old Breed, at Peleliu and Okinawa by E. B. Sledge

Contents

Plot Summary

E.B. Sledge writes his personal memoir of marine infantry combat operations in the Pacific theater during World War II. The text commences with Sledge's induction into the marines, follows his training through boot camp and infantry school, and describes his pre-combat deployment to Pavuvu. Sledge then recalls his days in combat, assigned as an assistant gunner on a 60mm mortar, on Peleliu and Ngesebus, followed by a period of rest and retraining once again at Pavuvu. Sledge then recalls his second stint in combat during the assault and capture of Okinawa, followed by the end of the war and eventual demobilization. Special emphasis is placed on the mental and moral aspects of warfare.

As a personal memoir, the text is properly concerned less with overarching strategy and more with personal experience. Periodic textual segments are inserted to align personal memories with larger world events—these segments are presented in italic typeface and orient the events of the book in a larger historical framework. The book opens with Sledge's pre-enlistment life and examines his desire to enter the combat forces during World War II. After enlistment, Sledge explains how he came to be assigned to the marine infantry and examines his training experiences in boot camp and subsequently in infantry training. He selected service on the 60mm mortar and operated that weapon throughout his military experiences.

After months of physical and mental training, Sledge was deployed to the Pacific theater and assigned to the 1st Marine Division, 5th Regiment, 3rd Battalion, Company K—usually rendered in the text as K/3/5. K/3/5 is stationed at Pavuvu Island for an extended period of training in amphibious assault techniques and tactics. The 1st Marine Division then deploys for the amphibious assault on Peleliu, a largely forgotten but hotly contested island battle. The text then describes the physical and mental challenges of combat and relates many "war stories" and other events as the marines capture Peleliu and Ngesebus Islands. After about one month, the marines are triumphant and return to Pavuvu for several months of rest. They are reequipped and receive under-trained reinforcements.

Once again a period of training in amphibious assault techniques and tactics is pursued. The 1st Marine Division, with other marine and army divisions, then deploys for the amphibious assault on Okinawa, the devastating final large battle of World War II. The text again describes the physical and mental challenges of combat complicated by civilian refugees, massive prepared fortifications, and a dedicated defense to the death. After about two months in combat, the marines are triumphant. Days later, atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Japan surrenders unconditionally. The text concludes with summary reflection and introspection.

Chapter 1, Making of a Marine

Chapter 1, Making of a Marine Summary and Analysis

E.B. Sledge writes his personal memoir of marine infantry combat operations in the Pacific theater during World War II. The text commences with Sledge's induction into the marines, follows his training through boot camp and infantry school, and describes his pre-combat deployment to Pavuvu. Sledge then recalls his days in combat, assigned as an assistant gunner on a 60mm mortar on Peleliu and Ngesebus, followed by a period of rest and retraining once again at Pavuvu. Sledge then recalls his second stint in combat during the assault and capture of Okinawa, followed by the end of the war and eventual demobilization. Special emphasis is placed on the mental and moral aspects of warfare.

Sledge, born in November of 1923 and died in March of 2001, is the author of the text and also the primary participant in most of the narrative structure; the text is presented as his memoir of World War II. Sledge was born in Alabama and graduated from a Mobile high school in 1942, subsequently joining the Marion Military Institute. He enlists in the Marine Corp at Marion, Alabama in December of 1942 after completing his freshman year. Edward, an older brother, is a 2nd lieutenant in the army and Sledge wants to enter combat operations. Sledge is transferred to Georgia Tech and placed in an officer's training program. Fearing that the war will be over before he can graduate, Sledge and about one-half of his class deliberately flunk out and are subsequently transferred, with a wink from their commanding officer, to the enlisted ranks in the Marine infantry.

Sledge is transferred to San Diego and enters boot camp. He is assigned to Platoon 984 under Drill Instructor Corporal Doherty. Doherty demands a relentless regime of exercise under stress and focuses heavily on discipline during stressful situations. The platoon spends several days on the rifle range learning about safety and "snapping in", or dry-firing, to learn how to sight and handle their weapons. After they are trained in dry-firing, they begin live firing at various ranges from various positions. Sledge, serial number 534559, graduates from boot camp on Christmas Eve, 1943, and is officially recognized as a marine. Most of his classmates are transferred to Camp Pendleton but Sledge is transferred to Camp Elliot. Retrospectively throughout the memoir, Sledge notes that his survival in combat was due in large part to Doherty's unrelenting demand of discipline under stress.

As with any text, chapter one sets the tone and texture of the remaining narrative. Sledge is a gung-ho young man eager for combat and eager to serve. He is joined by many others with similar interests. He comes from a family that values military service and sees combat as his calling. His early enlistment was designed to get into the marines and into a combat company as quickly as possible. Sledge uses correct grammar and construction mixed with an accessible and unpretentious voice which makes the text simultaneously interesting and enjoyable.

Chapter 2, Preparation for Combat

Chapter 2, Preparation for Combat Summary and Analysis

Sledge is housed in modern barracks at Camp Elliot and finds the entire experience satisfactory and even enjoyable. The non-commissioned officers who provide training are relaxed, confident, and encouraging. Compared to boot camp, Sledge finds infantry training enjoyable. Training focuses on combat tactics and weapon utilization. Surprised to be offered the choice, Sledge opts to specialize in 60mm mortar use. He is trained in the weapon and gains experience in the various roles including gun captain, assistant gunner, and ammunition carrier. The camp also offers extensive hand-to-hand fighting instruction, including judo and knife-fighting courses. Each marine is trained to use their Ka-Bar, or fighting knife. They are advised to not hesitate to fight "dirty" and are promised that they will need to know how to fight with a knife.

One day they meet some Bougainville veterans who are passing through the camp and the new marines smother the veterans with questions about combat. While the training proceeds, the marines, far away, assault and capture Tarawa. The training completed in late February and a few days later Sledge and the other troops board the President Polk, a ship which has been converted into a troop transport. As the ship sails Sledge is tense and worries about upcoming events—he does not know his destination. Life aboard ship is unpleasant and boring. The ship is not purpose-built to house troops and is therefore crowded and poorly ventilated. Sledge watches the officers aboard the ship in their separate billets and considers the differences between an enlisted man and an officer. Finally the ship makes port at Noumea on New Caledonia; the marines debark and are transported to Camp Saint Louis. They spend more weeks engaged in training and marching; training often focuses on bayonet use in close-quarters combat. At the end of May, Sledge and other marines board the USS General Howze, a purpose-built troop transport. Life aboard is agreeable but boring and shortly the marines debark at Pavuvu.

Sledge is assigned to K Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1st Marine Division, or K/3/5. He is assigned to a 60mm mortar platoon as an assistant gunner under the direct supervision of Merriell A. "Snafu" Shelton, a combat veteran. Sledge is highly pleased—K/3/5 is a distinguished and exceptional unit with a long history and he will serve on the weapon with which he is most familiar. Over the next few weeks, the inexperienced replacements integrate with the veterans. Sledge is equipped for combat and enumerates his many new possessions and weapons—his personal weapon is an M-1 Carbine. Sledge also meets Captain Andrew Allison "Ack Ack" Haldane, the company commander. The men adore their commander and find him the very essence of a marine officer. Sledge also meets Gunnery Sergeant Elmo M. Haney, a highly peculiar individual who is a World War I veteran and has gone, as the men say, a touch "Asiatic" in his thinking. Haney uses a stiff bristle brush to scrub his genitals in the shower,

cleans his weapons three times every day, and talks to himself while performing bayonet drills.

Life on Pavuvu is fairly disagreeable. Vermin are everywhere and the food is poor. Time is spent on work parties, performing manual labor to improve camp infrastructure. Sledge particularly dislikes hauling away a seemingly endless supply of slimy, rotting coconuts. When not on work duty, the men are trained in amphibious assault techniques. One day he meets one of the few survivors of the famous Goettge Patrol; on another occasion he enjoys a show put on by Bob Hope and Frances Langford. The chapter includes a map of the central pacific.

Chapter 3, On to Peleliu

Chapter 3, On to Peleliu Summary and Analysis

Late in August, Sledge and other marines board LST 661 for transport to combat. They first touch at Guadalcanal where they participate in extensive large-scale amphibious assault training. In early September, they depart for an unknown objective. Eventually they learn their destination is Peleliu, a tiny island in the Palau group. The plan calls for 28,000 marines, about nine thousand of whom are combatants, to assault ten thousand entrenched Japanese. General William H. Rupertus, the commander, believes the attack with be like that upon Tarawa. That is, the Japanese are expected to perform an all-out beach defense followed by banzai charges. Rupertus predicts a rapid victory. The day before the assault the marines chatter nervously and are gripped by fear. Like Rupertus, they all expect an all-out beach defense and numerous banzai charges.

On D Day, Sledge boards an aging amtrac. He sits behind his gun captain, Merriell A. "Snafu" Shelton. They exchange nervous comments. Sledge swoons with fear and clutches to the amtrac's side to avoid collapsing as his knees buckle. He is ashamed until he looks around and sees Snafu and other veterans also ashen-faced and scared. After forming up, the amtrac turns toward the beach and begins the long run to land. The chapter includes a map of Peleliu and Ngesebus Islands.

Chapter 4, Assault into Hell

Chapter 4, Assault into Hell Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 details the initial assault on Peleliu; in many respects it is similar to Chapter 10. H Hour is 0800; numerous 16" and 8" naval guns open fire, along with smaller naval guns, airplanes, and other forms of weapons, to pulverize the landing zone. Sledge watches in fascination while nearly collapsing with fear. The bombardment lifts moment before the amtracs hit the beach. Sledge and the other marines jump over the side of the amtrac and rush inland—they have been trained to get off the beach as quickly as possible. Japanese fire is intense and effective—Sledge watches a marine DUKW explode from a direct hit.

K/3/5 and K/3/7 land overlap and the men from each company intermingle in confusion. Heavy machine gun and mortar fire comes from the entrenched Japanese and casualties mount. Sledge and his platoon move inland and he sees his first dead Japanese—the men lie about with their intestines and organs exposed from horrific artillery wounds. Sledge is sickened but the veteran marines loot the Japanese corpses, searching for souvenirs. K/3/5 continues inland, loses contact with flanking units, and reaches its objective. The company riflemen shoot a score of Japanese infantry as they run away. K/3/5 then falls back to establish contact with flanking units. The day is unbearably hot. In the early evening, the Japanese counter attack—but it is not a banzai charge. Instead it is a combined forces attack with infantry supporting light armor. The counter attack is wiped out. Sledge is momentarily pinned down by "friendly" fire from Sherman tanks. He finds the experience appalling and mentally damaging. K/3/5 finally makes contact with flanking units and digs in for the night, posting a 360º perimeter guard. That night a huge artillery barrage nearly drives Sledge to mental collapse. He finds the shelling psychologically devastating. The marines lose 1,111 casualties on day one of the assault.

The next day the troops are resupplied with water, which is foul and polluted. The front line is straightened and realigned. Sledge and his companions are forced to advance across an airfield, in the open, under a heavy artillery barrage. As he advances, he repeats the Lord's Prayer. Snafu is knocked down by an explosion, but not wounded. The day is hot, reaching 105º F; at each stop Sledge lifts his feet and pours sweat out of his boots. As they advance beyond the airfield they come under sniper fire. Howard Nease, a Cape Gloucester veteran, enters the brush and kills the sniper. The men move on and tie in with the main line. Once they reach their objective they dig in. That night the Japanese infiltrate all along the front line; they sneak in and do not perform banzai charges.

The Japanese defenses are well hidden and fortified, often behind steel shutters or doors. The defenses have interlocking fields of fire and are effective. The next day Sledge is sent on a resupply mission and meets Captain Paul Douglas, later a senator. Douglas is over fifty years of age during the assault. That night Sledge sits with some

buddies and feels nervous and fearful; he alone then hears a voice clearly state "'You will survive the war!'" (p. 99). In latter years Sledge identifies the voice as a message from God; during the war he remembers it and takes comfort from the message.

Peleliu's main defenses are focused on a dominating ridge which runs down the island's spine—the marines name it Bloody Nose Ridge and it is the focus of unrelenting artillery barrages. K/3/5 moves parallel to the ridge for a few days and is then sent to patrol the eastern areas of the island. They get a rare hot meal and see many dead Japanese in various states of decay. The company searches the area, patrols, camps, but finds nothing. Sledge spends time watching the native birds and is later surprised to find how peaceful those moments were. K/3/5 continues to patrol until ten days have elapsed since the initial amphibious assault. The chapter includes maps of southern Peleliu and the marine deployments.

Chapter 5, Another Amphibious Assault

Chapter 5, Another Amphibious Assault Summary and Analysis

Furious fighting continues on Bloody Nose Ridge but K/3/5 is not directly involved. One day, Sledge resupplies the company command post with water, and after delivering the supplies, he sits and watches operations. Captain Haldane is competent at his post and demonstrates a remarkable concern for his men. Sledge is impressed and returns to his mortar team and comments favorably on Haldane's command. On another occasion some Japanese soldiers infiltrate the marine's foxhole at night and Sledge witnesses a disturbing incident of mistaken identity—a marine kills a wounded marine, erroneously believing him to be a Japanese soldier. The effect upon Sledge is profound and he despises the waste and cruelty of warfare.

After three days on Peleliu, Sledge's company, along with others, is assigned to assault Ngesebus Island—a small island just to the north of Peleliu. They pull out of the lines, march to the embarkation area, and board amtracs. From the amtrac, Sledge watches a powerful naval bombardment of the landing beach supported by Marine Corps aircraft. Sledge feels the Marine Corp pilots are highly effective. The landing is not strenuously opposed, but at one point the soldier huddling next to Sledge is hit by rifle fire. Corpsman Ken "Doc" Caswell tends the wound and also received an accidental knife thrust to the face. Sledge admires Caswell's coolness under fire and comments favorably on the vast majority of marine corpsmen.

After securing the landing areas, Sledge's company moves inland and the mortar platoon deploys near a supposedly abandoned Japanese pillbox. As the men set up their mortars they realize the pillbox is anything but abandoned. They soon receive fire from the pillbox and they are so close that many of the men shelter on top of the pillbox. They drop grenades through ventilation openings but this does not silence the enemy fire. Sledge reconnoiters one entrance and sees a Japanese soldier with an automatic weapon not more than a few feet away. He retreats under fire. Several Japanese soldiers attempt to retreat from the pillbox but are shot down. After a long exchange of small arms fire an armored vehicle is brought up and shoots multiple rounds of explosive shells into the pillbox, destroying it. Still, however, some Japanese continue to fire from the pillbox. Sledge catches one in his sights and shoots the man, seeing him fall over. Even in the midst of combat he is shocked by this, his first observed direct kill, and he spends several moments in mental confusion. Then, a flamethrower is brought up and flames are shot into the rubble of the pillbox, eliciting muffled screams. Sledge is horrified by the brutal efficiency of the flamethrower—the pillbox is finally completely silenced. The chapter contains several simple illustrations of the pillbox and its layout.

The marines begin to harvest souvenirs from the dead enemy. In the most brutal American scene of the dehumanizing aspect of war depicted in the text, Sledge watches one marine use his Ka-Bar to extract gold teeth from the mouth of a seriously wounded

but still living Japanese soldier. Another marine shoots the Japanese man in the head to stop his screams. A few hours later Sledge contemplates collecting gold teeth from dead Japanese; as he begins to take his first gold tooth, Caswell stops him, urges him to reconsider, and states that such trophies are not suitable for men of integrity. Sledge does not take any teeth throughout the war.

On another day, Sledge and his company stop near a destroyed Japanese machine gun emplacement. The dead gunner sits behind his gun as if still firing—except the top of his head is missing. A marine with a vacant stare sits some feet away, tossing tiny pieces of coral into the dead gunner's shattered skull case—each piece lands with a tiny splash. Later that day Sledge comes under heavy fire from a nearby Japanese 75mm artillery piece using direct fire. The marines take heavy casualties and shelter until an army tank destroys the gun. Finally, Ngesebus is secured and the marines receive a brief respite from combat. Sledge is near mental collapse and wonders how anyone can go on under such conditions. Then rumors circulate that K/3/5 will soon be re-deployed to support the assault on Bloody Nose Ridge.

Chapter 6, Brave Men Lost

Chapter 6, Brave Men Lost Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 details the continuing combat on Peleliu; in many respects it is like Chapters 11 and 12. The chapter includes many graphic and disturbing portrayals of combat and warfare. Memories of the intense combat described in this chapter remain with Sledge throughout the remainder of his life. K/3/5 is assigned to the front lines on the final assault of Peleliu, against the Umurbrogol Ridge pocket, or Bloody Nose Ridge pocket, measuring about four hundred by twelve hundred yards. The chapter includes a detail map showing the area discussed. The terrain is noted as being incredibly rough, rugged, and broken. In fact, the terrain is so confusing that Sledge is usually not quite sure where his unit is deployed—and even years later studies of maps and official reports have not erased all confusion. Numerous attacks have been launched against the pocket of resistance—they have been costly and largely unsuccessful. K/3/5 and other companies reinforce the assault and participate in many offensive pushes, which are largely abortive but always costly. Sledge frequently works as a stretcher bearer. Marines that are lightly wounded are often enthusiastic and exuberant because they will leave the combat area without suffering death or maiming. Sledge envies these marines and their "million-dollar" wounds.

During night, between attacks, the Japanese constantly infiltrate the front lines, sneaking in quietly to attack with knives or hurl grenades into occupied foxholes. During daylight, rear-echelon souvenir hunters often encumber the area and make combat support operations difficult. After a few days of fighting, Sledge and others receive the news that their beloved company commander, Captain Haldane, has been killed while reconnoitering terrain features. The men are devastated by the news and hatred toward the Japanese intensifies. First lieutenant Thomas J. "Stumpy" Stanley is promoted to replace Haldane. He proves a capable commander until being seriously wounded at Okinawa.

Sledge comments on the horrific stink of battle, a feature of warfare often overlooked in official accounts. Similar material can be found in Chapters 11 and 12. The weather is stiflingly hot, rain showers are common, and the coral terrain of Peleliu prevents burial of corpses and even human waste. Thousands of dead bodies are strewn across the area as are piles of human feces—diarrhea is common. Vermin such as land crabs and flies are ever-present. Sledge comments on the nausea he feels to see clouds of flies ascending from rotting corpses only to settle on his chow. Intermixed with all of this is a vast amount of discarded detritus of war materiel. The stench is overpowering, omnipresent, and horrible. On one occasion, Sledge relieves another marine only to discover the foxhole is coated in semi-dried blood from another marine who was slain in hand-to-hand combat by a nighttime infiltrator. He sits and broods over the destroyed and violent vista of Peleliu. On another occasion, Sledge views the mutilated bodies of marines—the Japanese had hacked off their heads and hands; one of the corpse's

penis has been severed and stuffed into its mouth. His hatred of the Japanese intensifies.

The Umurbrogol Pocket is gradually reduced, but at very high cost. On one occasion, Sledge's mortar fire places a round on a high-value target but the round is a dud. Snafu blames Sledge for failing to arm the round and an intense argument ensues—it ends only when Sledge produces the arming wire, proving the round a dud. After several days of front-line combat, the unit is relieved to the company reserve and then the rear area. There they enjoy better and more food, replacement equipment, and the ability to improve on personal hygiene. One of the men in the company had collected a gruesome "souvenir"—a severed and desiccating Japanese hand. Amidst the voluminous protests of his companies, the addled marine discards his war trophy. On the last day of October, Sledge and his unit finally board Sea Runner to be sent back to Pavuvu. Even from the ship and at some distance, Sledge finds the island of Peleliu to be ugly and disagreeable. Aboard ship, Sledge consults with the redoubtable aged veteran Haney, expecting him to dismiss Peleliu as average fighting—instead Haney flatly states that it was intense and horrific, and that he is done with combat.

K/3/5 experienced thirty days of combat on Peleliu; it started operations with regulation 235 men and exited the theater of operations with only eighty-five men unhurt. The 1st Marine Division suffered 1,252 dead and 5,274 wounded; the army suffered an additional 542 dead and 2,736 wounded. Japanese losses were estimated to be 10,900 dead. Only 302 prisoners of war were taken, most of these non-Japanese laborers; only nineteen Japanese soldiers and sailors were taken prisoner.

Chapter 7, Rest and Rehabilitation and Chapter 8, Prelude to Invasion

Chapter 7, Rest and Rehabilitation and Chapter 8, Prelude to Invasion Summary and Analysis

These brief chapters cover the period of time during which Sledge was not in combat. The text discusses events transpiring between the end of combat on Peleliu and the beginning of combat on Okinawa. Sledge and others on board the troop transport are depressed and war fatigued. They talk about lost comrades and wonder if the capture of Peleliu was even necessary—a debate which has continued until modern times. In early November, the ship reaches Macquitti Bay, Pavuvu, and the troops debark. They find camp life disconcerting and resent inexperienced officers giving orders. One evening, 1st Sergeant David P. Bailey gathers the veterans and gives them a brief speech praising their morale and courage—they find the veteran Bailey's words welcome. On Pavuvu, vermin are common and the men kill them with gusto. They dispose of the belongings of their dead comrades. Christmas Eve arrives and is celebrated mutely with good food and not much else. On New Year's Eve, Howard Nease arranges a distraction and steals several cooked turkeys from the officers' mess—the enlisted men enjoy their boosted feast.

The mortar section receives a new commissioned officer, Mac, who is not well liked. Mac's tendency to brag about his combat prowess—he is entirely inexperienced—irritates the veterans. The division also receives a new commanding officer, Major General Pedro del Valle. The units participate in drills, work parties, parades, and receive decorations and medals for Peleliu. Sledge is interviewed as an officer candidate but flatly states that he could never order men into harm's way. Replacements arrive and begin to integrate with the combat veterans; their low level of training is shocking—many are draftees. Sledge wonders how they will survive the first moments of combat without adequate mental training. A hepatitis outbreak sweeps through the island, as do rumors that their next assault destination will be Okinawa. The men receive numerous inoculations, which are painful. Most of the corpsmen are compassionate and careful—one corpsman, nicknamed "Doc Arrogant", is neither until he is sternly rebuffed by a Peleliu veteran, whereupon he is jokingly re-nicknamed "Doc Meek".

Sledge and his unit are sent to Guadalcanal to practice maneuvers. They ship out aboard USS McCracken in the middle of March, 1945, after about four months on Pavuvu. While at Guadalcanal, the marines often sneak into the food lines of other units where the chow is much better—they are always received with courtesy. Leaving Guadalcanal, the ship anchors at Ulithi where a vast fleet—the largest amphibious fleet ever assembled—organizes. The fleet departs Ulithi in late March and the marines are briefed on their objective—Okinawa. They are told to expect eighty to eighty-five

percent casualties on the beachheads. A map and description of the landing organization is presented. D-Day is, ironically, April Fool's Day, 1945. Sledge is so scared he nearly swoons but, along with his buddies, clambers down the side of USS McCracken and into an awaiting Higgins Boat. He realizes that his fear is not the same as during the attack on Peleliu—it is tempered by horrible experience.

Chapter 9, Stay of Execution

Chapter 9, Stay of Execution Summary and Analysis

The chapter title is derived from the fact that the landing is largely unopposed. Sledge lands amidst only intermittent and desultory fire. The various units move inland very quickly. A map of the initial force deployment at landing is provided. On the first night ashore, nerves get the best of Sledge and he fires at what he is sure is a Japanese infiltrator. In the morning he discovers it to be a haystack. K/3/5, with other units, quickly traverses the island and gains the far shore, encountering only a few Japanese soldiers—Okinawa civilians are more common but also fairly scarce. One day Sledge and a few other marines watch with interest as a Japanese mother nurses her baby. On another day Sledge and men from the entire company rescue a horse from a mud pit. For most of April, K/3/5 patrols areas without encountering any enemy, though they occasionally see evidence of past hard fighting. Even so, they are aware that, to the south, intense combat has been joined with the enemy and casualties there are very high. They enjoy their luck at being posted to a quiet area.

Mac proves a bizarre blend of capable leadership and nonsensical behavior. During one tense moment, when contact with the enemy is expected, he passes the time by shooting his carbine at a decaying animal jawbone, trying to dislodge some teeth. The fire startles the men. On another occasion, he snipes at a Japanese corpse until he shoots off the corpse's penis. On another occasion, he uses a grenade to scare the men, pretending that he is under attack. All these shenanigans from the commanding officer are ridiculous and, coupled with Mac's oft-repeated desire to charge the Japanese lines with only a knife and a pistol, earn the veteran men's contempt. Mac's strange preference to urinate only in the mouth of a Japanese corpse is also cause for concern. The men receive news in mid-April that President Franklin D. Roosevelt has died; they are, by and large, nonplussed. Finally, on May Day, 1945, K/3/5 is redeployed south into the front lines to replace a combat fatigued company.

Chapter 10, Into the Abyss

Chapter 10, Into the Abyss Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 details combat events transpiring May 1 through 4, 1945; in many respects it is like Chapter 4. K/3/5 heads south through vast stockpiles of materiel and tent cities. The company moves forward into the active combat zone and comes under constant heavy fire. Sledge is afraid but feels it differently—as a veteran, he knows what to expect. This does not eliminate his fear, but does make it different in the experience. The mortar platoons dig in—Sledge finds the Okinawa clay much more suitable for digging than was the Peleliu coral. Word comes back quickly that Howard Nease has been killed—the men take the news particularly hard. Okinawa was Nease's third campaign, and many marines hold a deep superstition about surviving a third campaign.

The mortarmen begin to haze Mac, urging him to keep his promise to charge the Japanese with a knife and a pistol. He ignores them and instead digs a gigantic foxhole—more of a basement, really. He then lines the roof with wood salvaged from a packing crate and hides within. The men egg him on and harass him for quite some time. It is the first of fifty days of combat. An afternoon bombardment leads to an attack, which stalls and then falls back. Sledge is called forward as a stretcher bearer but does not have to enter the combat zone. Gunnery sergeant Hank Boyes is the last to fall back, his clothing shot up, but unhurt. Sledge provides biographical data on Boyes and notes him to be a courageous but stern leader.

As combat continues rain begins to fall; Okinawa clay becomes Okinawa mud and the mud is one more unpleasant detail of life on the front line. On several occasions, Sledge witnesses comrades under fire while proximity of other friendly troops prohibits supporting fire. Sledge finds the helpless spectacle to be heart-breaking and his hatred of the Japanese increases. The second day on the line involves another assault, which is costly but somewhat effective. During combat lulls, the veterans gather in small groups of two or three and try to support each other with pep talks or simply by listening. After a third attack, the company is so depleted that it goes into reserves. That night there is a massive Japanese counterattack, complete with an amphibious flanking maneuver. Sledge's area is relatively unaffected, though nearby areas are heavily engaged. The counterattack is very costly for the Japanese and results in hundreds of casualties without appreciable gains. The next morning Sledge watches a Japanese kamikaze crash-drive into the cruiser USS Birmingham, with great damage and loss of life.

Chapter 11, Of Shock and Shells

Chapter 11, Of Shock and Shells Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11, like Chapter 12, details ongoing combat operations on Okinawa; in many respects, these two chapters are like Chapter 6. The chapter includes many graphic and disturbing portrayals of combat and warfare. Chapter 11 discusses the events transpiring between May 6 and 14, 1945, on Okinawa.

Heavy rain begins to fall and the clay soil turns to thick, glue-like mud. The mud prevents armor and vehicles from moving and resupply operations must be performed by men. Loaded with heavy burdens of ammunition, water, and food, the men struggle through knee-deep mud and occasionally come under enemy fire. Sledge notes that most accounts of war ignore this taxing struggle of manual resupply. On May 8, the troops hear that Germany has unconditionally surrendered; their response is a nonplussed realization that the surrender does not alter their situation in the least.

Sledge then comments on a new officer, nicknamed Shadow, who joins K/3/5. Shadow is tall, skinny, and incredibly sloppy. The men hold his sloppy appearance in disdain. He is moody, ill-tempered, excitable, and obnoxious. Most of the men immediately dislike him. On one occasion, Shadow reprimands John Redifer, a buddy of Sledge's, for demonstrating bravery under fire.

On one day the Marines make a full-scale assault against the Japanese-prepared defenses. An artillery barrage elicits heavy Japanese counter fire. Sledge's mortar fires moments before the attack launch—the recoil drives the baseplate into the mud and the crew must re-seat the mortar after every few rounds. The marines suffer heavy losses without substantive gains. Later in the afternoon mail arrives—the rain is so heavy that it washes away the ink on the page in moments. Sledge reads news from home that his boyhood dog has been killed by an automobile. In the midst of combat, he weeps for his loss. That night a Japanese counterattack is launched. The mortar and weapons crews are used as riflemen and reinforce the front lines. They are not needed, however, and again march to the secondary line. Sledge comes to feel that all soldiers do is march though mud. At one point during the attack, K/3/5's plunging mortar fire kills fifty Japanese in a steep ravine. Sledge broods in combat—like most marines, he fears maiming and pain more than death. As the days progress, the marines slowly gain costly ground. Through it all, heavy Japanese artillery fire continues to kill marines and shock survivors.

Chapter 12, Of Mud and Maggots

Chapter 12, Of Mud and Maggots Summary and Analysis

Chapter 12 continues to detail ongoing combat operations on Okinawa; in many respects it is like Chapter 6. The chapter includes many graphic and disturbing portrayals of combat and warfare. Chapter 12 discusses the events transpiring between May 15 and 23, 1945, on Okinawa.

Another push begins with a heavy artillery bombardment combined with air strikes. As Sledge waits for the orders to move out, he watches a priest deliver communion to other marines, and despairingly wonders what use religion can serve in war. During the advance, corpsman Caswell is seriously wounded. Sledge administers first aid and carries Caswell out, doubting he will survive his wounds. Caswell does survive, however, as Sledge learns some weeks later. As the assault continues, the Japanese deliver a staggering artillery barrage—heavier than anything Sledge has before encountered. The heavy barrage continues hour after hour and Sledge feels his sanity is slipping away. Throughout most of the bombardment he acts as a stretcher bearer. Platoon sergeant Burgin is wounded—a grave loss because all of the men value his leadership skills; he returns to the company after about a month of recuperation.

The chapter includes a detail map of Half Moon Hill and environs—this is the location of K/3/5's deployment during the advance. Sledge comments on the dead strewn everywhere and the stench of war. He details the tactical situation and comments on the devastated terrain as well as placing the tactical situation into a lager picture. This description of larger events differs markedly from prior descriptions of combat on Peleliu where Sledge often did not know his precise location.

The rain continues and turns everything to mud. Sledge broods over horrible vistas of mud, artillery craters, and exploded corpses. The language in this section of the text is disturbing and compelling. The mud is knee-deep, the stench of rotting corpses and human excrement permeates everything, and fat and writhing maggots cover nearly every surface. Like many marines, Lieutenant Stanley contracts malaria, collapses, and is evacuated. The command of the company is turned over to Shadow, much to the dismay of the men. The marines continue to slowly advance. They suffer high casualties and endure nearly endless artillery barrages. On several occasions, they gain the crest of a ridge to see dozens of fleeing Japanese soldiers heading for the protection of the next ridge. The marines particularly enjoy shooting down the groups of fleeing soldiers.

During one lull in the horror, Sledge sits with a marine nicknamed Kathy. Kathy is married but had an affair with a beautiful chorus girl named Kathy before leaving the United States. He is plagued by feelings of guilt, but carries around a photograph of the chorus girl and thinks of her constantly. Sledge looks at the picture and is surprised by how beautiful the girl is. It is a strange moment, soon shattered by incoming artillery.

Sledge feels combat fatigued and comes to doubt that a world outside of combat exists. A few hours after their discussion, more Japanese are seen running in the open. Kathy leaps to his machine gun and shoots down one soldier, the tracer rounds ignite his equipment and the corpse lies in the mud and burns. Kathy exults over his success as the marines slog through an apparently endless field of mud and maggots.

Chapter 13, Breakthrough

Chapter 13, Breakthrough Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13 continues to detail ongoing combat operations on Okinawa. The chapter includes graphic portrayals of warfare. Chapter 13 discusses the events transpiring between May 24 and June 1, 1945, on Okinawa. The marines are assaulting an area of interlocking fortifications referred to as the Shuri Line. The title of Chapter 14 refers to the Shuri fortifications. It is the penultimate fallback position prepared by the Japanese, and taking the Shuri area will nearly complete major combat operations on Okinawa.

The rain continues heavy and constant. The ground becomes thoroughly saturated to a depth of several feet and foxholes begin to fill up with water which leaks in from the sides and bottom. The marines must use ration tins or helmets to constantly bail out foxholes. The mortar sections use pieces of ammunition packing crates to line the bottoms of the foxholes above the water, retaining a small deep area to function as a sump. In this method, they reinvent the duckboards of World War I. Mortar recoil drives the baseplate into the mud after only a single shot, so the mortar crews construct fairly elaborate footings as firing platforms—these are made by digging a deep hole and filling it with gravel, then topping it with packing crates.

Nightly infiltrations continue. On one night, Sledge and Shelton see infiltrators heading for the command post. Because there are intervening friendly troops they cannot fire, but the Japanese are killed by other soldiers. Shelton admits to having seen the infiltrators, but jokingly claims to have withheld fire on purpose. While at Peleliu, Shelton had killed an infiltrator near the command post and was then ordered to bury the corpse. He claims he has since made a vow to never again shoot infiltrators heading for the command post to spare himself burying detail by ungrateful officers. The experienced Sergeant Boyes realizes Shelton's quirky sense of humor is at play and lets the incident pass.

As combat continues, many marines are wounded, many suffer from combat fatigue, and a few become insane. Malaria and fever combine with exhaustion to make many marines too ill to continue fighting. Nearly all marines on the line suffer to some degree from immersion foot. Sledge, for example, does not take off his boots or socks for a two-week period and during that entire time his feet are either soaking wet, in the mud, or under water. From time to time mail arrives from old buddies who have rotated home—their attitudes often are jarring and confusing to the men still in combat. Replacements constant filter into the company and usually have difficulty adjusting to the repulsive conditions. The replacements lack even basic training, are usually combat ineffective, and are frequently killed or wounded before their paperwork makes it to the company headquarters. On the front, weapons constantly rust, equipment rots, the food is cold and tasteless, and sanitation is impossible. Personal cleanliness is not even contemplated.

As bad as the scenery is during the day, nighttime parachute flares convert it into a nightmare landscape. Sledge memorizes the locations and positions of various corpses so as to distinguish enemy infiltrators from the dead. He suffers from constant nightmares and often, in a semi-awake state, imagines that the dead arise and walk about. One dead marine is located in a foxhole some distance in front of Sledge's foxhole. Over the days he watches the corpse rot away and the nearly brand-new equipment rust and decay. One day a slightly humorous event breaks the catastrophe of existence—two mortar men in another section fight strenuously over a range card. This is strange because every crate of ammunition has a range card, and the cards litter the battlefield. Their disagreement suddenly makes sense when Sledge sees that a female factory worker from back home has impressed a lipstick kiss onto this particular range card.

Constant small-scale counterattacks are launched by the Japanese. On one occasion, K/3/5's mortar fire concentrates and kills about two hundred Japanese within just a few minutes. A final major assault is planned in advance. While waiting for the launch of the assault, Sledge watches graves-registration personnel gather dead marines. They use what is essentially a giant spatula to scoop up corpses and pieces of corpses and place them in body bags. On May 28th, the final major assault begins. With great loss of life, the marines reach Shuri Castle, a focus of the Shuri defense, by the next day. A photograph of the wreckage of Shuri Castle is included in the photographic plates of the text. At the last of May, Shuri has been secured. The mortar sections are ordered to dig in. Sledge digs through mud which reeks of rotting flesh and writhes with fat maggots. He is horrified when his spade plunges into the rotting abdomen of a buried Japanese soldier, easily slicing through the deliquescing flesh. Later, one of Sledge's buddies slips and tumbles down a slick mud embankment. He stands at the bottom covered in the gore of putrid corpses and a layer of writhing maggots. Sledge uses a stick to scrape the horrible mixture from the man's body. It is so horrific an event that they never speak of it.

Chapter 14, Beyond Shuri

Chapter 14, Beyond Shuri Summary and Analysis

In early June, the marines quickly advance south, having destroyed the major Japanese defenses at Shuri. On one strange occasion, a Japanese prisoner wearing only a loincloth steps in front of marching troops and defiantly blocks the way. As combat veterans unlimber weapons, military police rush forward and move the man aside. Sledge wonders whether the man deliberately was attempting to be killed rather than face the supposed shame of capture. Marine casualties mount as the advance continues. The marines frequently come across abandoned caches of materiel. Sledge scavenges Japanese rations as he finds them superior—and different—from American K rations. He frequently carries stretchers. The rain continues but slackens somewhat.

One day Sledge enters a hut and discovers an aged Okinawa woman who has a gangrenous wound. She puts his gun muzzle to her head and beckons for him to kill her. Instead, he leaves the hut and rounds up a corpsman to offer aid. As they return they hear a gunshot and see a grinning marine exit the hut—he has obliged the woman by execution. An NCO argues with the marine as Sledge walks away in dejected disgust. In early June, Sledge removes his shoes and socks for the first time in two weeks. The stench is overpowering and he buries the rotting socks. Like nearly all marines, Sledge's feet are red, shriveled, and sore. For the next few days they continue to dig foxholes at night and patrol during the days. Combat becomes less frequent and less intense and rations become more frequent and more varied.

On one day Sledge and another marine are sent off as messengers. On the way back to the company they are pinned down by a lone Japanese machine gunner. They wait for dark to make an escape—but their company's NCO had feared for their return and sent out a follow-on patrol. The patrol finds the Japanese soldier and kills him, sparing Sledge a long wait.

The final Japanese holdout position is Kunishi Ridge and, eventually, all marine units focus on this final location. On June 14th, the marines begin a final assault operation. Sledge notes that armored vehicles have been equipped with sirens for psychological warfare reasons. He finds the sirens as annoying as, probably, do the Japanese. The next day Sledge's unit moves into attack position. He fears that his luck has finally run out and anticipates he will be killed shortly. The combat is fierce and snipers are everywhere. Sledge acts as a stretcher bearer and comes under frequent fire. Sergeant Boyes rallies less-experienced officers with reassuring pep talks. The men learn that General Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr. has been killed—the highest-ranking American officer killed during World War II. The fighting is so intense that on June 18th K Company loses one-half of its remaining men in twenty-two hours—it retains only forty-nine men capable of mustering. But, Kunishi Ridge is captured.

Chapter 15, End of the Agony

Chapter 15, End of the Agony Summary and Analysis

Sledge reflects on the combat of the previous weeks. Having seen so many replacements die so quickly at the front, he is thankful for having received thorough training during boot camp and infantry school. He states unequivocally that such training is necessary for survival in combat. He sees other veteran units, including veterans of Saipan and Tarawa. Over the next few days, many minor incidents occur and are related. The unstable officer Mac usually approaches holed-up enemies shouting memorized Japanese phrases such as "I will not harm you" (p. 334) before emptying his magazine into the cave or dugout. Finally, K/3/5 reaches the sea at the southern tip of the island. On the way, they often shoot small groups of disorganized, fleeing Japanese. Sledge notes that the Japanese also utilize a 320mm-spigot-mortar in the final days of the war—a frightful weapon which causes many casualties. On June 21st, the island is declared secure.

Unbelievably, the marines are then ordered to police the entire combat area of the island. They bury all enemy dead, salvage all military equipment, and even police all brass casings for large caliber weapons. It is an ignoble task that is strangely foisted upon the valiant combat veterans. Rather quickly, officers distance themselves from enlisted men and grow distant and smugly superior. Finally, most combat units are rotated to rear areas. At the end of the Okinawa campaign, only twenty-six veterans of Peleliu remain on the muster of the company. American losses at Okinawa are 7,613 killed; 31,807 wounded; and 26,221 "non-combat" psychiatric casualties. Japanese losses are estimated at 107,539 dead; about ten thousand prisoners of war; and about twenty-thousand missing in action. About forty-two thousand Okinawa non-combatant citizens are killed. The 1st Marine Division alone lost 7,665 casualties—added to 6,526 casualties at Peleliu the division suffered greater than one hundred fifty percent losses in the two campaigns.

Some men rotate home. Sledge remains and the invasion of Japan proper is planned. It is estimated that over one millions American soldiers will become casualties in order to secure Japan. Then, on August 8 news of the atomic detonation reaches the troops and on August 15, 1945, the war comes to an end. Some marines initially believe the surrender to be a Japanese ploy. In September Sledge is transferred to occupation duty in China and finally, in February of 1946 he rotates home and leaves the military.

Characters

Eugene Bondurant (E.B.) Sledge

E.B. Sledge, born November 4, 1923 and died March 3, 2001, is the author of the text and also the primary participant in most of the narrative structure; the text is presented as his memoir of World War II. Sledge was born in Alabama and graduated from a Mobile high school in 1942, subsequently joining the Marion Military Institute. Desiring to enter combat activities, he enlisted in the marines and was sent to an officer training academy. Fearing the war would end before he graduated, Sledge, along with many others, deliberately flunked out of the course and was subsequently assigned to the marine infantry as a private, ending in the 1st Marine Division, 5th Regiment, 3rd Battalion, Company K, as a 60mm mortar assistant-gunner. The text comprises Sledge's memoir of combat operations and life in the marines from mid-1944 through early 1946. He participated in two major combat operations, the amphibious assault of Peleliu and the battle of Okinawa—the largest air-earth-sea battle in history. He was discharged from service in early 1946l, having attained the rank of corporal. Sledge published the text in 1981, and it has been reprinted in 1990 and 2007.

After the war, Sledge completed Bachelor of Science, Master of Science (botany), and doctorate (biology) degrees. He worked as a biologist and botanist and then took teaching positions at various universities until retiring in 1990. Sledge died of stomach cancer at age seventy-seven, in 2001. A second memoir, detailing post-war experiences, was posthumously published in 2002. Two photographs of Sledge are presented in the photographic plates of the text.

Corporal T. J. Doherty

Doherty is Platoon 984's Drill Instructor during boot camp in November and December, 1943 in San Diego. Doherty's unusually low rank for a Drill Instructor is noted by the men at first, but it in no way compromises his ability to perform his work. He is 5' 10" in height and weighs about 160 pounds. Sledge describes him as muscular, with thin lips, green eyes, and a ruddy complexion. He is fearless, mean, and relentless in the pursuit of his duties. He focuses on harsh exercise and discipline under stressful situations. He prefers to march his platoon in the sand on the beach as this is much more difficult than marching on firm terrain. Doherty does not engage in any mean-spirited psychological abuse, but merely demands a high-level of performance. Retrospectively, Sledge realizes that Doherty's insistence of discipline under stress truly readied the men to survive combat; later recruits and draftees who did not receive similar treatment usually lasted only hours or days in combat before becoming casualties. Doherty does not appear in the text outside of boot camp.

Gunnery Sergeant Elmo M. Haney

Haney is a peculiar individual who is the gunnery sergeant for K/3/5, Sledge's combat company. Haney is a World War I veteran, as well as a veteran of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester, and over fifty years old at the time period considered by the text. He is of slight stature and weighs in around 135 pounds, though he is heavily muscled. He is a loner and often talks to himself. He uses a stiff bristle brush to scrub his genitals in the shower, cleans his weapons three times a day, and spends an hour daily muttering and chuckling while performing bayonet drills; he is obsessed with bayoneting the Japanese. He has received the Silver Star. Haney participates in the assault on Peleliu, but after the second day of combat, withdraws from the front lines, admitting that his age has finally caught up with him. After Peleliu is secured Sledge consults with Haney, and the older man states that the combat at Peleliu was the worst he had ever experienced. After Peleliu, Haney retired from the service. Although a gunnery sergeant, Haney apparently was not referred to as "Gunny", due to his eccentricities and aloof demeanor.

Captain Andrew Allison

Haldane was born August 22, 1917, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He served with K/3/5 at Guadalcanal and was subsequently placed in charge of the company. He led the company with distinction at Cape Gloucester, receiving a Silver Star, and in the attack on Peleliu. He was killed on Peleliu on October 12, 1944, by a sniper, while reconnoitering his company's segment of the combat lines. Sledge describes him with praise, noting him to be personable and a genuine leader of men. Nearly all K/3/5 marines view Haldane with respect and consider him the very essence of a proper marine officer. His "Ack Ack" nickname is derived from his initials, A. A.; his "Skipper" nickname is routinely shared by many company commanding officers. Two photographs of Haldane can be found in the book's photographic plates. It is significant to note that the book is dedicated to the memory of Haldane as the epitome of the "old breed" of stalwart marine combat veterans.

Corporal Merriell A. Shelton

Shelton is an enlisted marine and a veteran of Cape Gloucester. He is from Louisiana and is the gun captain and nearly-constant companion of Sledge. Surprisingly, little biographical data are offered for Shelton other than that he smokes, has a good sense of humor, and is a typical marine in most respects. Sledge admires him and finds his company enjoyable. Shelton and Sledge are assigned to the same mortar on both Peleliu and Okinawa, and hence nearly everything that Sledge experiences is also experienced by Shelton. The two buddies normally see everything in about the same light, though Shelton is more battle-hardened and less introspective. On one occasion, their mortar places a round on a high-value target without effect. Shelton vituperates Sledge for failing to arm the round while Sledge insists the round was a dud. The argument goes on and on until Sledge, crawling on hands and knees, finally produces

the arming wire—proving the round a dud; Shelton then backs down and complains about the munitions manufacturer.

Corpsman Ken

Caswell is a marine corpsman attached to Sledge's company. Little biographical data is offered on Caswell. Sledge notes that he is fearless, compassionate, and dedicated. On one occasion, Caswell renders first aid to a wounded marine; another marine cuts open medical supplies and accidentally thrusts his knife into Caswell's face. Seriously wounded, Caswell continues performing first aid while Sledge holds a bandage to his face to staunch the bleeding. Later, when Sledge is about to knock a gold tooth out of a Japanese corpse's mouth, Caswell intervenes. He suggests that such activities are particularly brutalizing and urges Sledge to reconsider. Sledge does reconsider and does not collect such souvenirs at any point during the war. Sledge notes that nearly all marine corpsman were nicknamed "Doc", as was Caswell.

Caswell is seriously wounded during operations on Okinawa, and Sledge renders first aid—fearing that the wounds are not survivable. Even so, Caswell is evacuated and survives. After the war, Caswell and Sledge remain good friends in civilian life. There are a few photographs of corpsmen in action presented in the photographic plates of the text—these are not identified as Caswell, however.

Howard Nease

Nease is a marine in Sledge's company and a veteran of Cape Gloucester and Peleliu. Nease is universally liked and respected by the other men. Sledge describes him as large, nimble, and physically powerful. On at least one occasion, Nease sneaks into the jungle and kills a sniper which has other men pinned down. On New Year's Eve, 1944, Nease orchestrates a diversion and steals cooked turkeys from the officers' mess. He shares the turkey with fellow veterans and thereby cements their admiration. Like many other marines, Nease holds a superstitious fear of his third combat campaign—and, he is killed by a sniper on May 1, 1945, during the first day of combat operations on Okinawa. Sledge recounts that the popular Nease's death was particularly hard on the veterans of K/3/5.

Lieutenant Mac

Mac is the nickname given to the mortar section commander, a commissioned officer, arriving between Peleliu and Okinawa. Sledge offers little biographical data on Mac, probably to obscure his identity as he is portrayed in an unfavorable light. He is a New Englander and an Ivy League graduate; blonde and of average size. Mac is well-built, energetic, and talkative. He performs his duties in a conscientious method but is a braggart and has little common sense. After taking command of the veteran unit, the inexperienced Mac brags about how he will charge the Japanese with a knife in his teeth and a pistol in his hand to repay them for the first marine casualty. Such

braggadocio does not impress combat veterans; Mac's continued bragging rubs all of the men the wrong way and he is not well liked.

Chapter 9 contains several events wherein Mac appears either stupid or mentally deranged. During one tense moment when contact with the enemy is expected, he passes the time by shooting his carbine at a decaying animal jawbone, trying to dislodge some teeth. The fire startles the tense men. On another occasion, he snipes at a Japanese corpse until he shoots off the corpse's penis. On another occasion, he uses a grenade to scare the men, pretending that he is under attack. All these shenanigans from the commanding officer are ridiculous and, coupled with Mac's oft-repeated desire to charge the Japanese lines with only a knife and a pistol, earn the veteran men's contempt. Mac's strange preference to urinate only in the mouth of a Japanese corpse is also cause for concern.

Gunnery Sergeant Hank Boyes

Boyes replaced Haney as K/3/5's gunnery sergeant after Peleliu. He was a former dairy farmer from Trinidad, California, and a combat veteran of Cape Gloucester and Peleliu. He was awarded the Silver Star on Peleliu, was promoted to platoon sergeant during the assault on Ngesebus, and was later wounded on Peleliu. He recovered from his wound and returned to combat duty. During an early attack on Okinawa, described in Chapter 10, Boyes led two platoons into a ravine where they encountered severe enemy fire and had to withdraw. Boyes remained until all the other men could be evacuated. He emerged from heavy fire with several bullet holes in his clothing but no wounds on his body—a post-action photograph of Boyes in his perforated clothing is included in the photographic plates. Sledge calls Boyes stern, but compassionate and inspiring. After the war, Boyes moved to Australia and was successful in logging and cattle ranching.

Captain Thomas J. Stanley

Stanley is a veteran officer attached to K/3/5 at Peleliu where he capably serves. The men hold him in high regard and he appears to be a normal officer in most respects. After Captain Haldane is killed on Peleliu, Stanley assumes command of K/3/5 and leads it through the conclusion of Peleliu and into mid-May during the assault on Okinawa. Stanley contracts malaria, however, and is evacuated after collapsing in the command post. He is missed by the men. The text offers little biographical data on Stanley, though he did write the foreword for Part II of the text. A photograph of Stanley is included in the photographic plates of the text.

Lieutenant Shadow

Shadow, an officer, is tall, skinny, and incredibly sloppy. The men hold his sloppy appearance in disdain. Sledge offers his nickname only, probably because he has nothing positive to say about the man. Shadow is moody, ill-tempered, excitable, and

obnoxious. Most of the men immediately dislike him. On one occasion, Shadow reprimands John Redifer, a buddy of Sledge's, for demonstrating bravery under fire. He apparently joins K/3/5 during the early phases of operations on Okinawa and first appears in Chapter 11. After Lieutenant Stanley is evacuated due to malaria, Shadow assumes command of K/3/5, much to the dismay of Sledge and others. Although he is disliked and is often verbally abusive, Shadow appears to be at least a competent officer.

Objects/Places

Tarawa, Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucesterappears in non-fiction

The places indicated were the sites of previous marine amphibious assaults. Although victorious, the marines suffered enormous casualties and experienced utmost savagery. Many of the marines in K/3/5 are veterans of Guadalcanal or Cape Gloucester, or both. The behavior of the Japanese defenses in all three battles consisted of an all-out beach defense followed by repetitive banzai charges. This defense was not particularly effective and was anticipated—wrongly—by the marines at Peleliu.

Pavuvuappears in non-fiction

Pavuvu is a small island in the Russell Island chain, northwest of Guadalcanal. It was used by the marines as a training and rehabilitation camp prior to the assaults on both Peleliu and Okinawa. Sledge found life on Pavuvu boring and largely unpleasant. A photograph of Bob Hope and officers attending a show on Pavuvu is included in the photographic plates in the text.

Peleliu and Okinawaappears in non-fiction

These two areas are the islands where Sledge and the marines engage in amphibious assault and combat operations against an entrenched Japanese enemy. Peleliu is a tiny island in what is today known as Palau; Sledge describes it as being shaped like a lobster claw. The need for the assault on Peleliu has been hotly contested since 1944. Okinawa is a small island some hundred miles south of Japan. Considered by the Japanese as part of Japan, proper, Okinawa was hotly contested and was the final major battle of World War II. Several photographs of combat action on both Peleliu and Okinawa are included in the photographic plates of the text.

Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), M1 Rifle, M1 Carbine, .45 Coappears in non-fiction

The listed weapons were the basic small arms of marine organization throughout the period considered in the text. The Browning Automatic Rifle, or BAR, was capable of automatic .30 caliber fire and was heavily used in the Pacific, usually considered a platoon-level weapon. The M1 Rifle, or Garand, was a semi-automatic .30 caliber rifle and was the standard rifle used by infantrymen in the war. The M1 Carbine was a semi-automatic .30 caliber weapon firing a lighter cartridge than the M1 Rifle and used by supporting troops such as ammunition bearers. The .45 Colt, a Browning design, was the standard semi-automatic pistol of the United States during both world wars. All rifles

and most carbines could accept a bayonet—Sledge's carbine was not equipped to accept one, however. The Thompson Submachine gun was a shoulder-fired, automatic weapon firing .45-caliber pistol rounds; Sledge frequently carried a Thompson during his tour of duty. The Ka-Bar knife was the standard marine personal knife. All of the weapons are mentioned in the text at various points and their use is often described. Several photographs of these weapons are included in the photographic plates of the text.

60mm Mortarappears in non-fiction

Each company was assigned two or three 60mm mortars and they, along with .30 caliber machine guns, formed the basic heavy weapons of every marine company. The 60mm mortar was considered light, at forty-five pounds, and was transported and emplaced whenever the platoon moved. Like virtually all mortars, it was a muzzle-loading weapon shooting with a high-angle of fire, capable of delivering plunging explosives beyond intervening ground features such as ridges. Sledge was assigned to a 60mm mortar team throughout his military service; as such, the weapon is fully described and often considered in the text. A photograph of a typical 60mm mortar section, emplaced for combat, is included in the photographic plates of the text.

81mm Mortar, 37mm anti-tank gunappears in non-fiction

Company heavy weapons usually included 81mm mortars and 37mm anti-tank guns. The mortars were considered man-portable but the anti-tank guns were towed pieces. These weapons often served in a rear area because their range was considerable. Though slightly slower to deploy, their effects were considerable. Larger weapons were usually not attached to marine units, though some, such as Sherman tanks, were employed by army forces operating alongside the marines. A photograph of an 81mm mortar section on a fire mission is included in the photographic plates of the text.

.50 caliber machine gun, .30 caliber machine gunappears in non-fiction

Units, such as companies or battalions, would often be assigned heavier automatic weapons such as the .50 caliber Browning machine gun, a tripod- or vehicle-mounted weapon, and .30 caliber Browning machine gun in a variety of configurations, usually tripod-mounted and water- or air-cooled. The .30 caliber machine guns, in particular, formed the basis of a company's firepower. Sledge's text contains only scarce reference to the .50 caliber weapon. A photograph of a tripod-mounted, air-cooled, .30 caliber Browning machine gun is included in the photographic plates of the text.

Unit of Fireappears in non-fiction

A unit of fire was the approximate amount of ammunition, determined from experience, a unit would expend in one day of heavy fighting. It included 100 rounds for each M-1 rifle; 45 rounds for each M-1 carbine; 14 rounds for each .45 colt; 1,500 rounds for each light machine gun; and 100 rounds for each 60mm mortar in the unit.

Amtracappears in non-fiction

An amtrac was an amphibious tractor used by the marines for the amphibious assault on Peleliu and Okinawa, among others. They were medium-sized armored vehicles, often mounting weaponry as large as 75mm cannon, and capable of crossing land on their tracked wheels or moving through water. Their capability of moving from the open sea to the landing beaches by "crawling" across coral reefs, was particularly important to the amphibious assault tactics used by the marines in the Pacific Theater. Several photographs of amtracs are presented in the photographic plates in the text.

Themes

The Cost of Combat and Warfare

One of the prevalent themes of the text is the terrible cost of combat and warfare. Sledge is undoubtedly a patriotic and dedicated marine and he considers his military service as a privilege and a duty. His resolute dedication to further and foster the American cause is beyond dispute. Yet, he often contemplates the negative aspects of war and combat. Nearly every discussion of combat is followed by a contemplative reflection from the distance of decades about the horrible cost. This is offered not only in terms of absolute counts of killed soldiers, wounded soldiers, and mentally-damaged soldiers, but also in terms of the degradation of morality, the brutalization of participants, and the psychological price paid by nations entering into warfare. This holds particularly true for the first half of the text, which considers the amphibious assault and eventual capture of Peleliu, which Sledge refers to as a "neglected" battle. He records that within days of the termination of hostilities, the troops themselves questioned the basic need to capture Peleliu, given the overall American war strategy. Since the time of combat, this basic question has haunted studies of Peleliu and the larger war strategy—was the combat even necessary? Could Peleliu have been simply bypassed, as were many other Japanese-held islands? What is today viewed as a largely academic question has far greater impact on the families of the 6,256 marine and 10,900 Japanese casualties suffered during combat operations.

Okinawa is, perhaps, an entirely different type of battle. Its necessity has never been questioned within the strategic framework of World War II and certainly the participants did not view it in the same questioning light as they applied to Peleliu. Strategically, as well as tactically, the necessity of Okinawa is firmly established. Sledge's commentary on Okinawa is therefore based upon a far more profound observation—why was the World War fought? There is no grandiloquent political or social analysis. Instead, Sledge summarizes the war by stating of the many combatants, "their lives were wasted on a muddy stinking slope for no good reason" (p. 280).

War Stories

The text is a personal memoir of Sledge, a combat infantry soldier. By far, the bulk of the material is therefore personal in nature—personal observations, personal experiences, and personal feelings. Most of the text focuses on actual combat experiences and is perhaps best accessed and understood as one soldier's collected "war stories". This is not to say that the narrative does not have a profound impact or meaningful purpose—instead, the narrative is composed of personal experiences presented in chronological order and the individuals considered, largely Sledge himself, progress through a series of mental and physical challenges which come to support and develop other, more profound themes within the framework of anecdotes and experiences.

Sledge begins the text with a recounting of his enlistment and various machinations to quickly become a combat marine. He follows this with discussions on training—critical to the text's overall development—and eventual deployment. He spends time on the island of Pavuvu, a place with which he is less than enamored. Sledge then is sent into combat at Peleliu and Ngesebus, participating in two amphibious assaults against prepared Japanese defenses. Surviving Peleliu, Sledge is returned to a rest, training, and work camp on Pavuvu—this time, the island does not seem so inhospitable. Sledge then is sent into a second tour of combat at Okinawa, participating in a largely unopposed amphibious landing. The next several weeks are spent in various types of combat operations, often assaults against prepared Japanese defenses. Surviving Okinawa, Sledge then wraps up his memoir and the narrative concludes.

Training Helps

Much of Chapters 1, 2, 7, and 8 are devoted to training issues. Sledge obtained the basics of a military-focused college education before entering boot camp. In boot camp, he receives about eight weeks of instruction by Drill Instructor Doherty. To the marines in boot camp, much of the training seemed bizarre, superfluous, or needlessly harsh. For example, Doherty forced marches through sand, and ensured his trainees were routinely deprived of sleep, over-worked, and over-loaded on maneuvers. He deliberately fostered an atmosphere of deprivation and mental stress and demanded unquestioning obedience to arbitrary orders. Doherty would routinely wake the trainees during their scheduled sleep periods for impromptu hikes, musters, or trips to the rifle range. Coupled with this was a great focus on weapons training and safety as well as basic range marksmanship.

Completing boot camp, Sledge then transferred to infantry training school and received a further few months' training in infantry tactics and maneuver as well as heavy weapons training. This secondary training was perhaps less stressful but equally intense to boot camp. Completing infantry training, Sledge deployed to Pavuvu, where additional training was provided in amphibious assault and larger, complex maneuvers. This seemingly endless series of training was felt by some marines to be boring or pointless—at least, that is, until they had combat experience.

All of the marines involved in the assault of Peleliu were either combat veterans of Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, or both, or were combat inexperienced but had received training similar to that of Sledge. With few exceptions, they performed in combat admirably well. This situation did not hold through the assault on Okinawa. By this latter period in the war, military losses had been so high that men were desperately needed. As the normal training regimen was so extensive, men could not be provided in time with full training. Sledge thus recalls that many men arrived at the front without basic rifle skills and with only a few weeks of drill training. These new replacements were often killed even before their paperwork could be processed and, even if they survived the first few days of combat, they were not as combat effective as might be desired. Sledge states this difference is entirely due to training—his training had been adequate

and therefore he was effective and he survived. Men who joined later had inadequate training, and they paid the price.

Style

Perspective

The text is presented as a personal memoir of a combat infantry soldier participating in combat operations in the Pacific Theater of World War II. It is written in the first-person point of view, which is appropriate and ensures an engaging and accessible text. Sledge, the author, is also the primary participant in nearly every aspect of the narrative—as expected for a book of this type. Sledge is clearly qualified to deliver a book of this type. He was a combat veteran marine and participated in nearly all of the events described. Thus, as an eye-witness and participant, his narrative is credible, accessible, and highly engaging. Sledge's focus is on personal experiences—thus, he relates carrying ammunition, bearing stretchers, slogging through mud, and living in foxholes more than he relates shooting down enemy soldiers or engaging in close-in fighting. Assigned to a 60mm mortar section, Sledge often relates mortar firing missions with the precision that only an experienced mortarman could afford.

The text was originally written as a personal memoir for the author's family only. As the narrative developed, the author's family encouraged him to finish and polish the book and seek publication, which was originally accomplished in 1981. Since that time, additional editions have included various front-matter. The author states that the memoir is personal in nature but that it also develops several themes of larger importance, such as the horror of combat and the futility of warfare as a routine methodology of politics.

Tone

The text is related in a somber tone, devoid of sentimentality. The texture is gritty and captures the essential horror of combat. Each chapter of the text uses a slightly altered tone that is suitable to the events being discussed. For example, the tone used in the State-side pre-combat training is less intense and slightly more open than the tone later used to present combat on Peleliu. This is not to say the memoir features an uneven tone; rather, the tone is constructed such that it matches the material considered and as such it develops throughout the text.

In general, the narrative is a subjective memoir; the author relates reconstructed dialogue of a simple nature but neither claims nor attempts to present an official viewpoint of the topics considered. Instead, constructions such as 'I did' or 'I felt' are standard. Because of the intensely personal and subjective nature of the bulk of the narrative, the memoir's structure is reinforced with objective statements regarding larger activities in history. These structural elements are presented in italic typeface and read somewhat like objective vignettes from a history book. Appropriately, the tone of these short segments is reserved and serious.

The even, developed tone of the text makes the book accessible and engaging. Free of maudlin portrayals of patriotism or artificial heroism, the book realistically describes the role and plight of the combat infantryman during extended field operations in a major theater of war.

Structure

The 353-page text is divided into several components. Front-matter includes twenty-seven pages of preface material including a table of contents; a foreword by Brigadier General Walter S. McIlhenny; a preface and a concise introduction by the author; and, a longer introduction by Victor Davis Hanson. The text proper is divided into two main parts. "Part I PELELIU: A NEGLECTED BATTLE" contains a foreword by Lieutenant Colonel John A. Crown and six enumerated and named chapters (Chapters 1 through 6). "PART II OKINAWA: THE FINAL TRIUMPH" contains a foreword by Captain Thomas J. Stanley and nine enumerated and named chapters (Chapters 7 through 15)—note that Stanley is discussed in the text. The two main parts of the text each consist of almost exactly the same page count. The text end material includes an appendix, a bibliography, and a fairly comprehensive index. Various chapters in the text include maps that help readers locate the areas and locations discussed. The text also features sixteen pages of glossy photographic plates containing forty-five photographs gathered from various sources.

In general, the text is presented in a straightforward chronology, with events related in the order in which they occur. On various occasions, the author will make brief note of future events—often that the person being described was later killed in action. Such deviations from the main chronology are obvious and do not detract from the accessibility of the narrative. The progression of time within the memoir is fairly uneven, and this is by design. Events which are largely monotonous, such as life at Pavuvu, are often discussed in only a few paragraphs, though they may span several months. Combat events which might transpire in only a few minutes usually command much more in-depth discussion. This construction ensures a highly readable and compelling narrative and is eminently suitable to the memoir.

Quotes

"A typical day at boot camp began with reveille at 0400 hours. We tumbled out of our sacks in the chilly dark and hurried through shaves, dressing, and chow. The grueling day ended with taps at 2200. At any time between taps and reveille, however, the DI might break us out for rifle inspection, close-order drill, or for a run around the parade ground or over the sand by the bay. This seemingly cruel and senseless harassment stood me in good stead later when I found that war allowed sleep to no man, particularly the infantryman. Combat guaranteed sleep of the permanent type only." p. 11

"'My job is to train you people to be 60mm mortarmen. The 60mm mortar is an effective and important infantry weapon. You can break up enemy attacks on your company's front with this weapon, and you can soften enemy defenses with it. You will be firing over the heads of your own buddies at the enemy a short distance away, so you've got to know exactly what you're doing. Otherwise there'll be short rounds and you'll kill and wound your own men. I was a 60mm mortarman on Guadalcanal and saw how effective this weapon was against the Japs there. Any questions?'
"On the chilly January morning of our first lesson in mortars, we sat on the deck under a bright sky and listened attentively to our instructor.
"'The 60mm mortar is a smoothbore, muzzle-loaded, high-angle-fire weapon. The assembled gun weighs approximately forty-five pounds and consists of the tube—or barrel—bipod, and base plate. Two or sometimes three 60mm mortars are in each rifle company. Mortars have a high angle of fire and are particularly effective against enemy troops taking cover in defilades or behind ridges where they are protected from our artillery. The Japs have mortars and know how to use 'em, too. They will be particularly anxious to knock out our mortars and machine guns because of the damage these weapons can inflict on their troops.'" p. 19

"My combat pack contained a folded poncho, one pair of socks, a couple of boxes of K rations, salt tablets, extra carbine ammo (twenty rounds), two hand grenades, a fountain pen, a small bottle of ink, writing paper in a waterproof wrapper, a toothbrush, a small tube of toothpaste, some photos of my folks along with some letters (in a waterproof wrapper), and a dungaree cap.
"My other equipment and clothing were a steel helmet covered with camouflaged-cloth covering, heavy green dungaree jacket with a Marine emblem and USMC dyed above it on the left breast pocket, trousers of the same material, an old toothbrush for cleaning my carbine, thin cotton socks, ankle-high boondockers, and light tan canvas leggings (into which I tucked my trouser legs). Because of the heat, I wore no Skivvy drawers or shirt. Like many men, I fastened a bronze Marine emblem on one collar for good luck.
"Attached to my web pistol belt, I carried a pouch containing a combat dressing, two canteens, a pouch with two fifteen-round carbine magazines—clips, we called them, and a fine brass compass in a waterproof case. My kabar hung in its leather sheath on my right side. Hooked over the belt by its spoon (handle), I carried a grenade. I also had a heavy-bladed knife similar to a meat cleaver that my dad had sent me; I used this to chop through the wire braces wrapped around the stout crates of 60mm mortar shells.

"On the stock of my carbine I fastened an ammo pouch with two extra clips. I carried no bayonet, because the model carbine I had lacked a bayonet lug. Onto the outside of my pack, I hooked my entrenching tool in its canvas cover. (The tool proved useless on Peleliu, because of the hard coral.)
"All officers and men dressed much the same. The main differences among us were in the type of web belt worn and the individual weapon carried." pp. 56-57

"To be under a barrage of prolonged shelling simply magnified all the terrible physical and emotional effects of one shell. To me, artillery was an invention of hell. The onrushing whistle and scream of the big steel package of destruction was the pinnacle of violent fury and the embodiment of pent-up evil. It was the essence of violence and of man's inhumanity to man. I developed a passionate hatred for shells. To be killed by a bullet seemed so clean and surgical. But shells would not only tear and rip the body, they tortured one's mind almost beyond the brink of sanity. After each shell I was wrung out, limp and exhausted.
"During prolonged shelling, I often had to restrain myself and fight back a wild, inexorable urge to scream, to sob, and to cry. As Peleliu dragged on, I feared that if I ever lost control of myself under shell fire my mind would be shattered. I hated shells as much for their damage to the mind as to the body. To be under heavy shell fire was to me by far the most terrifying of combat experiences. Each time it left me feeling more forlorn and helpless, more fatalistic, and with less confidence that I could escape the dreadful law of averages that inexorably reduced our numbers. Fear is many-faceted and has many subtle nuances, but the terror and desperation endured under heavy shelling are by far the most unbearable." p. 79

"Even in the midst of these fast-moving events, I looked down at my carbine with sober reflection. I had just killed a man at close range. That I had seen clearly the pain on his face when my bullets hit him came as a jolt. It suddenly made the war a very personal affair. The expression on that man's face filled me with shame and then disgust for the war and all the misery it was causing.
"My combat experience thus far made me realize that such sentiments for an enemy soldier were the maudlin meditations of a fool. Look at me, a member of the 5th Marine Regiment—one of the oldest, finest, and toughest regiments in the Marine Corps—feeling ashamed because I had shot a damned foe before he could throw a grenade at me! I felt like a fool and was thankful my buddies couldn't read my thoughts." p. 127

"To this private first class, Peleliu was also a vindication of Marine Corps training, particularly of boot camp. I speak only from a personal viewpoint and make no generalizations, but for me, in the final analysis, Peleliu was:
"- thirty days of severe, unrelenting inhuman emotional and physical stress;
"- proof that I could trust and depend completely on the Marine on each side of me and on our leadership;
"- proof that I could use my weapons and equipment efficiently under severe stress; and
"- proof that the critical factor in combat stress is duration of the combat rather than the severity." p. 171

"Most of the men in my troop compartment had already been to the head and by then had donned their gear and moved out on deck, so I was about the last one in the head. I settled comfortably on a seat. Next to me I noticed a cagelike chute of iron mesh coming trough the overhead [ceiling] near one of the 40mm antiaircraft gun tubs. It extended down through the deck, and into the compartment below.
"Startled out of my wits by an incredibly loud sound of clattering, clanking, scraping, and rasping metal, I sprang up with a reflex born of fear and tried to bolt out of the head into the troop compartment. I knew that a kamikaze had crashed into our ship right above me. My trousers around my ankles hobbled me, and I nearly fell. As I reached to pull them up, the loud clanking and clattering—like a thousand cymbals falling down stone steps—continued. I looked over at the iron mesh chute and saw dozens of empty brass 40mm shell cases cascading down from the guns above. They clattered and clanked through the chute to some collecting bin below decks. My fright subsided into chagrin." p. 201

"We watched two women and their children getting a drink. They seemed a bit nervous and afraid of us, of course. But life had its demands with children about, so one woman sat on a rock, nonchalantly opened her kimono top, and began breast-feeding her small baby.
"While the baby nursed, and we watched, the second child (about four ears old) played with his mother's sandals. The little fellow quickly tired of this and kept pestering his mother for attention. The second woman had her hands full with a small child of her own, so wasn't any help. The mother spoke sharply to her bored child, but he started climbing all over the baby and interfering with the nursing. As we looked on with keen interest, the exasperated mother removed her breast from the mouth of the nursing baby and pointed it at the face of the fractious brother. She squeezed her breast just as you would milk a cow and squirted a jet of milk into the child's face. The startled boy began howling at the top of his lungs while rubbing the milk out of his eyes." p. 212

"There was a massive enemy air attack against our fleet at this time. We saw a kamikaze fly through a thick curtain of flak and crash-dive into a cruiser. A huge white smoke ring rose thousands of feet into the air. We heard shortly that it was the cruiser USS Birmingham that had suffered considerable damage and loss of life among her crew." pp. 241-242

"Over the sound-powered phone, Burgin said, 'On my command, fire.'
"Mac was with us at the gun pits and ordered us not to fire. He told Burgin the same over the phone.
"Burgin told him to go to hell and yelled, 'Mortar section, fire on my command; commence firing!'
"We fired as Mac ranted and raved.
"When we finished firing, the company moved against the ridge. Not a shot was fired at our men. Burgin checked the target area and saw more than fifty freshly killed Japanese soldiers in a narrow ravine, all dead from wounds obviously caused by our mortar fire.

The artillery shells had exploded in front of or to the rear of the Japanese who were protected from them. Our 60mm mortar shells fell right into the ravine, however, because of their steeper trajectory.
"We had scored a significant success with the teamwork of our mortar section. The event illustrated the value of experience in a veteran like Burgin compared with the poor judgment of a 'green' lieutenant." p. 255

"The enemy soldier who fell near the ditch began crawling and flopped into it. Some of the men started firing at him again. The bullets kicked up mud all around the soldier as he slithered desperately along in the shallow ditch which didn't quite hide him. Machine-gun tracers ricocheted off the ground like vicious red arrows at the Japanese struggled along the shallow ditch.
"Then, on one of the rare occasions I ever saw compassion expressed for the Japanese by a Marine who had to fight them, one of our men yelled, 'Knock it off, you guys. The poor bastard's already hit and ain't got a snowball's chance in hell.'
"Someone else yelled angrily, 'You stupid jerk; he's a goddamn Nip, ain't he? You gone Asiatic or something?'
"The firing continued, and bullets hit the mark. The wounded Japanese subsided into the muddy little ditch. He and his comrades had done their best. 'They died gloriously on the field of honor for the emperor,' is what their families would be told. In reality, their lives were wasted on a muddy stinking slope for no good reason." pp. 279-280

"The men digging in on both sides of me cursed the stench and the mud. I began moving the heavy, sticky clay mud with my entrenching shovel to shape out the extent of the foxhole before digging deeper. Each shovelful had to be knocked off the spade, because it stuck like glue. I was thoroughly exhausted and thought my strength wouldn't last from one sticky shovelful to the next.
"Kneeling on the mud, I had dug the hole no more than six or eight inches deep when the odor of rotting flesh got worse. There was nothing to do but continue to dig, so I closed up my mouth and inhaled with short shallow breaths. Another spadeful of soil out of the hole released a mass of wriggling maggots that came welling up as though those beneath were pushing them out. I cursed and told the NCO as he came by what a mess I was digging into.
"'You heard him, he said put the holes five yards apart.'
"In disgust, I drove the spade into the soil, scooped out the insects, and threw them down the front of the ridge. The next stroke of the spade unearthed buttons and scraps of cloth from a Japanese army jacket in the mud—and another mass of maggots. I kept on doggedly. With the next thrust, metal hit the breastbone of a rotting Japanese corpse. I gazed down in horror and disbelief as the metal scraped a clean track through the mud along the dirty whitish bone and cartilage with ribs attached. The shovel skidded into the rotting abdomen with a squishing sound. The odor nearly overwhelmed me as I rocked back on my heels.
"I began choking and gagging as I yelled in desperation, 'I can't dig in here! There's a dead Nip here!'

"The NCO came over, looked down at my problem and at me, and growled, 'You heard him; he said put the holes five yards apart.'" pp. 301-302

"The man next to me was a rifleman and a fine Peleliu veteran whom I knew well. He had become unusually quiet and moody during the past hour, but I just assumed he was as tired and as weary with fear and fatigue as I was. Suddenly he began babbling incoherently, grabbed his rifle, and shouted, 'Those slant-eyed yellow bastards, they've killed enougha my buddies. I'm goin' after 'em.' He jumped up and started for the crest of the ridge.
"'Stop!' I yelled and grabbed at his trouser leg. He pulled away.
"A sergeant next to him yelled, 'Stop, you fool!' The sergeant also grabbed for the frantic man's legs, but his hands slipped. He managed to clutch the toe of one boondocker, however, and gave a big jerk. That threw the man off balance, and he sprawled on his back, sobbing like a baby. The front of his trousers was darkened where he had urinated when he lost control of himself. The sergeant and I tried to calm him but also made sure he couldn't get back onto his feet. 'Take it easy, Cobber. We'll get you outa here,' the NCO said.
"We called a corpsman who took the sobbing, trembling man out of the meat grinder to an aid station.
"'He's a damn good Marine, Sledgehammer. I'll lower the boom on anybody says he ain't. But he's just had all he can take. That's it. He's just had all he can take.'
"The sergeant's voice trailed away sadly. We had just seen a brave man crack up completely and lose all control of himself, even to the point of losing his desire to live.
"'If you hadn't grabbed his foot and jerked him down before he got to the crest, he'd be dead now, for sure,' I said.
"'Yeah, the poor guy woulda gotten hit by that goddamn machine gun; no doubt about it,' the sergeant said." p. 328

"It's ironic that the record of our company was so outstanding but that so few individuals were decorated for bravery. Uncommon valor was displayed so often it went largely unnoticed. It was expected. But nearly every man in the company was awarded the Purple Heart. My good fortune in being one of the few exceptions continues to amaze me.
"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. Marine Corps training taught us to kill efficiently and to try to survive. But it also taught us loyalty to each other—and love. That esprit de corps sustained us.
"Until the millennium arrives and countries cease trying to enslave others, it will be necessary to accept one's responsibilities and to 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." p. 344

Topics for Discussion

Shortly after victory at Peleliu, the surviving participants wondered openly if capturing the island was strategically or tactically necessary. After reading the book's description of larger events in the Pacific theater, do you think that the assault on Peleliu was a strategic blunder?

World War II ended with the use of atomic weapons by the United States of America. Since that time, many have criticized the use of atomic weapons as immoral. After reading about the assault on Okinawa and the preparations to invade the Japanese mainland, do you feel that the use of atomic weapons was immoral? Why or why not?

Sledge states that the 1st Marine Division suffered over one hundred fifty percent casualties during the Peleliu-Okinawa assaults. What was the structure of a World War II Marine Division? What is the technical definition of a casualty? What does it mean to say the division suffered over one hundred fifty percent casualties? Discuss.

Many of the marines in Sledge's company feared the pain of being wounded or the disfigurement of being maimed more than they feared being killed outright. If you were a combat infantry soldier, would you fear being killed in action more or less than you would fear being wounded in action? Discuss.

At the beginning of the war, the United States Marine Corps provided adequate training to new recruits. Near the end of the war such training has been seriously reduced. Why do you think the military reduced training regimens during wartime? Discuss.

Sledge discusses two situations where mortar ammunition was out of the ordinary. On one occasion a round was a dud, which allowed several Japanese officers to escape unharmed. On another occasion the packing crate contained an informational card which bore a lipstick imprint of a woman's kiss. Both situations caused the mortar gunners to argue and even fight. What responsibilities did the working men and women in munitions factories bear toward the fighting men of World War II?

After reading the text, which weapon do you consider to be the most effective on the battlefield? Why?

Sledge was offered the choice of being trained on 37mm anti-tank guns, 60mm mortars, or 81mm mortars. He chose 60mm mortars. Which would you choose? Why?

The narrative recounts numerous atrocities and barbarous inhumanity inflicted by both the United States Marines and the Japanese. After reading the text, in your opinion, which nationality was more inhumane?

Nearly all soldiers collected souvenirs, or war trophies, from enemy corpses. Some soldiers collected gold teeth by knocking them out of the mouths of (usually dead) enemy soldiers. Do you think that collecting teeth is somehow different from collecting something like knives, flags, or pistols? Why or why not?

At one point early in his career, Sledge hears a disembodied voice announce that he will survive the war. Sledge feels this voice was a comforting message from a divine power. Do you believe that God would so comfort an individual infantry soldier on the eve of terrible combat between two nations? Why or why not? Discuss.

Sledge reports that many marines had a dreadful superstition of engaging in a third campaign—thus, veterans of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester particularly feared the pending assault on Peleliu, while veterans of Cape Gloucester and Peleliu particularly feared the pending assault on Okinawa. Do you think that there was something supernatural about a third campaign? Or was this simply a matter of the odds eventually catching up with most lucky soldiers?

In most war moves—even those designed to be "realistic"—the actors are generally clean and healthy. Sledge presents combat as a miasma of mud, maggots, gore, and filth, and states that combat soldiers were always filthy, unshaved, unkempt, and often afflicted with diarrhea and other diseases. Which portrayal do you think is the most accurate?