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"With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa," and "Peleliu, Tragic Triumph: The Untold Story of the Pacific War's Forgotten Battle"

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the Naval Institute Press will complete this trilogy and publish *Aces Wild*, which describes Captain Winston's "year of 'inactive' duty as a test pilot in Finland, Belgium, and France during the German Blitzkrieg...."

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Sledge, E.B. *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1990. 326pp. \$24.95

Ross, Bill D. *Peleliu, Tragic Triumph: The Untold Story of the Pacific War's Forgotten Battle*. New York: Random House, 1991. 381pp. \$22

These two books complement each other. Eugene Sledge describes his experiences as a private first class mortar man in K Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines at Peleliu and Okinawa. Bill Ross presents the big picture of the Peleliu campaign, from regiment, battalion, and company to the marine rifleman. In fact, Ross relies on Sledge's personal account of the campaign to lend authenticity to his book.

Eugene B. Sledge, a professor at the University of Montevallo in Alabama, originally drafted the outline of his story in 1946, using his notes written immediately after the fighting. The author states "It is not a history and it is not my story alone. I have attempted rather to be the spokesman for my comrades." In this he succeeds very well. Bill Ross served as a Marine combat correspondent at Iwo Jima

and in northern China just after the war. He landed with the first wave of assaulting Marines at Inchon, representing the Associated Press. His book is dedicated to the Marine combat correspondents and photographers killed in action in World War II—fifteen men who ranked from captain to corporal.

Sledge joined "K/3/5" as a replacement at Pavuvu, in the Solomon Islands, just before the Peleliu campaign. He was proud to be a member of the 5th Marine Regiment, the most famous Marine unit. He was assigned to the mortar section—which probably saved his life, since so many of the men in the rifle platoons were killed in action. His comments about the other Marines are usually warm and complimentary: he respects his noncommissioned officers and admires his officers, especially Captain Andrew A. Haldane, commanding officer of K Company, who was killed in action at Peleliu and to whom Sledge dedicates his book.

However, when Sledge speaks of Okinawa his tone changes. He is unhappy with the green replacements (many of whom were draftees), and he is critical of the new officers, whom he describes as incompetent (in that they showed poor judgment and lacked the necessary leadership). His assessment of the deterioration in the quality of Marine replacements is correct, particularly for the end of the Okinawa campaign.

Sledge's description of the stupefying heat on the coral ridges of Peleliu and the rains and mud of Okinawa

provides the reader a proper understanding of the conditions in which the heavy fighting took place. Sledge never became hardened to the sight of dead Marines (though he had no feelings for the Japanese dead); during one night of conflict on Peleliu, he dreamed of Marine dead coming to life and walking about. He speaks of the numbing effect of enemy mortar and artillery fire and of the thunderous chaos of friendly mortars, artillery, naval gunfire, and close air support.

After reading Sledge's account of the fighting on Peleliu, and of his few months on Okinawa, one wonders how anyone could have survived both campaigns without serious harm or death. It was desperate combat, unlike anything seen in Vietnam or Kuwait. In spite of it all the Marine veterans of both campaigns held to their basic philosophy, "If the country is good enough to live in, its good enough to fight for." This book may prove instructive to those who have come lately to the armed forces.

Bill Ross's *Peleliu, Tragic Triumph* begins with a discussion of the preliminary adventures of the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester, and soon begins a sustained early criticism of division commander Major General William H. Rupertus. Rupertus left for the United States with his chief of staff, Colonel John T. Selden, for a month just as the division began preparing for Peleliu. It was the assistant division commander, Brigadier General O.P. Smith, and the

division staff who organized the plans for the coming assault.

The author describes how Vice Admiral William F. Halsey recommended bypassing Peleliu in the American drive across the Pacific, but CincPac, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, insisted on taking the island (perhaps to retain control of the 1st Marine Division, which otherwise would have been lost to General Douglas MacArthur). Ross implies that the Peleliu operation was an unnecessary and useless sacrifice of U.S. Marines.

Ross describes the formidable enemy fortifications, made up of hundreds of caves (natural and man-made), that honeycombed the coral ridges of the island and sheltered artillery, mortars, and machine guns as well as the fanatical enemy, who planned to eschew the banzai charge and fight defensively, foot by foot. Despite this unpromising prospect, after only two days the commander of the Heavy Striking Force (TF 34), Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, stated that all the targets had been destroyed, and ceased fire.

The 1st Marine Regiment, under Lieutenant Colonel Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, landed on the left and ran into particularly heavy resistance. Captain George P. Hunt, leading K Company, fought to seize a point of land on the left of the beach from which the enemy could have enfiladed the 1st Marines. Hunt's company took the point, losing 157 men out of 235 brought ashore. After the war the captain

wrote a fine book about this fight, titled *Coral Comes High*.

The 1st Marine Division continued the struggle on Peleliu for four weeks. All its infantry units suffered heavy casualties operating in the rugged terrain and stifling heat, but Puller's 1st Marines, facing the main ridge, suffered the most. Major Raymond Davis's 1st Battalion was reduced to thirty percent of its original strength. Rupertus and Puller insisted that the weakened rifle companies continue the attack. Finally, with the regiment reduced to a fragment, Major General Roy S. Geiger, the corps commander, insisted on the relief of the 1st Marines by an army regiment. The sorely tested 1st Marine Division turned over the final mop-up of Peleliu to the Army's 81st Division and returned to Pavuvu to prepare for the assault on Okinawa.

Ross has presented an in-depth account of the bloody campaign. The book does contain a number of minor historical inaccuracies, but none that detract from the main thrust of the story. I recommend it to anyone interested in World War II or in American military history. The fight for Peleliu deserves to be remembered.

Both books maintain the constant theme of courage and sacrifice for others and for the country. In this increasingly high-tech world, and the seemingly bloodless military environment of today's battlefield, both authors remind us of the realities of war and of the dedication and valor necessary to win it. *Semper Fidelis!*

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Doughty, Robert Allan. *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1990. \$39.50

Colonel Robert Allan Doughty, who serves as chairman of the history department at the United States Military Academy at West Point, has written a detailed account of the battle fought in mid-May 1940 along the Meuse River that led to the disintegration of the French army. This battle pitted some of Germany's best combat units against a hodgepodge of French divisions, some of which were indifferently trained, led, and equipped. Despite the advantages offered by light field fortifications and terrain generally favorable to the defense, the French resistance along the Meuse collapsed. The French reinforcements that tried to close the gap created by the German offensive were too little and too late. The strategic result of the German breakthrough in the Meuse battle was that Germany's mobile divisions—armor and motorized infantry—were given an opportunity to reach the Channel coast and cut off the Allied armies fighting in Belgium and Holland.

Building on his earlier work, *The Seeds of Disaster*, which examined French military doctrine between the world wars, Doughty shows the consequences in battle of faulty doctrine, inadequate training, and poor