Commandant’s Professional Reading List

- Why Read *With The Old Breed*? -

“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.”

- From *With The Old Breed* by E. B. Sledge

For the Marine Corps, the Pacific Theater of World War II is an iconic period of time in its history. There have been numerous historical books written about how the Marine Corps pioneered the tactics and techniques for amphibious warfare and on the operational planning of the “island hopping” campaign. What is often lost in history books is the personal story of the men, the Marines, and Sailors that struggled, fought, and died in the defense of freedom. *With The Old Breed* is a book that portrays the personnel experience of a mortar man who vividly describes the human dimension of war.

The author, E. B. Sledge, is not your typical author writing about Pacific Theater in World War II. He was not a well-known General or Admiral, but a PFC with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division, who fought in and survived the battles of Peleliu and Okinawa. E. B. Sledge did not set out to write this book about his experiences to become famous, but to be a “spokesman for [his] comrades.” As he states, “In writing it, I’m fulfilling an obligation I have long felt to my comrades in the 1st Marine Division, all of whom suffered so much for our country.”

*With The Old Breed* gives a firsthand account of a 60 mm mortar man and his fellow Marines and Sailors from Company K, who fought in the bloodiest and most challenging battles for Peleliu and Okinawa. Uniquely told by E.B. Sledges, it serves as a testament to courage, sacrifice, and camaraderie. Throughout the book, the author gives a detailed account of the human dimension of war and the actions that humans undertook in different circumstances. Often graphic, he unveils the harsh realities faced by Marines during combat and how they suffer both mentally and physically. *With The Old Breed* clearly depicts war as a violent struggle between two hostile forces trying to impose their will on the other. This book also provides an intimate look at the moral and ethical challenges faced during and after the battles and the difficulties faced on the road to resiliency.

In the end, the message in *With the Old Breed* is clear: wars have a significant impact on those young men and women who commit to the ideals of their nation. Wars involve viciousness and often reveal the very awful aspects of the human character. However, the book reinforces the value of training, leadership, and pride. As E. B. Sledge states, “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.”

As you read the book, consider the importance of the training required during the Peleliu and Okinawa campaigns. Think about the team-building involved in bringing together combat veterans and new personnel and the leadership involved in forging a cohesive unit. Reflect on the character of the Marines and Sailors involved in the battles and the choices that were made before, during, and after the battles. Consider the lessons learned and how they can be applied in today’s Marine Corps.