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Helmet For My Pillow: From Parris Island To The Pacific



Synopsis

The inspiration behind the HBO series THE PACIFIC Here is one of the most riveting first-person accounts to ever come out of World War 2. Robert Leckie was 21 when he enlisted in the US Marine Corps in January 1942. In *Helmet for My Pillow* we follow his journey, from boot camp on Parris Island, South Carolina, all the way to the raging battles in the Pacific, where some of the war's fiercest fighting took place. Recounting his service with the 1st Marine Division and the brutal action on Guadalcanal, New Britain and Peleliu, Leckie spares no detail of the horrors and sacrifice of war, painting an unsentimental portrait of how real warriors are made, fight, and all too often die in the defence of their country. From the live-for-today rowdiness of Marines on leave to the terrors of jungle warfare against an enemy determined to fight to the last man, Leckie describes what it's really like when victory can only be measured inch by bloody inch. Unparalleled in its immediacy and accuracy, *Helmet for My Pillow* tells the gripping true story of an ordinary soldier fighting in extraordinary conditions. This is a book that brings you as close to the mud, the blood, and the experience of war as it is safe to come. 'Helmet for My Pillow is a grand and epic prose poem. Robert Leckie's theme is the purely human experience of war in the Pacific, written in the graceful imagery of a human being who - somehow - survived' Tom Hanks

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First, I must admit a particular regard for this book as the granddaughter of Bill Smith (whom Leckie refers to as 'Hoosier'), who served with Leckie in How Company. Leckie offers nuanced insight into the ways in which he and his friends understood national military service, the `enemy', and the war

more generally, and how these perspectives or ideas evolved among the men from North Carolina to Guadalcanal, Australia, and New Britain. Leckie steers clear from prototypes or clichés; there is no emblematic enlisted man or officer. Rather, these men are treated as real people coping (or not) with the profound uncertainty of their situation. Perhaps this appreciation says more about my own lack of experience with combat/warfare. Thinking of Guadalcanal from a macro or military history perspective, it is easy to take for granted that marines' objectives - and the most efficacious means to pursue them - were always apparent to those involved. In this context, Leckie's account of warfare as a learning process was deep, reflexive, and fascinating. For example, he describes: 1) the marines' first reactions to air battle and subsequent adjustment to air battle as a simple process of attrition; and 2) the uncertainty confronted by officers at various stages, against the backdrop of the US' limited military experience in the Pacific or in jungles more generally. In this way, Leckie also makes apparent the need - and efficacy - of severe hierarchy. For this reason, I think that reviewers' arguments positing a lack of regard for officers deserve qualification.***UPDATE/REFLECTIONS***Hoosier was wounded and evacuated early in the Battle of Peleliu; I believe that Chuckler and Runner were wounded later and evacuated with Leckie.

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