

THE PACIFIC

A Classroom Supplement to the 10-Part HBO® Miniseries

World War II in the Pacific was marked by savage fighting, racial hatred, and a challenging natural environment unlike anything seen on the European front. HBO's 10-part miniseries *The Pacific*, Sundays at 9pm, brings this "other" war vividly alive, following the intertwined stories of U.S. Marines Robert Leckie, John Basilone, and Eugene Sledge as they make their way across the Pacific in a series of key battles from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. Based on memoirs by Robert Leckie and Eugene Sledge, Charles Tatum's book *Red Blood, Black Sand*, and new interviews with many of the men and women portrayed in the miniseries, *The Pacific* offers a truthful, unflinching depiction of war and its aftermath. This guide is designed to give educators starting points for viewing and discussing the miniseries, along with additional resources and ideas for related assignments.

BEFORE VIEWING

Some call the war in the Pacific "the forgotten war," overshadowed in popular memory by events in Europe. Is that true? Try a pop quiz to compare

students' knowledge of the two major theaters of World War II. Have them create a timeline of the war based only on key events they can recall without any research. Ask students to sum up their thoughts on World War II in just a few words. Do any themes emerge?

WHILE VIEWING

- Historian Richard B. Frank, author of *Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle*, says that for young enlistees, "the war was like this giant catapult shot that accelerated life beyond any possible prior imagining." How do experienced leaders help them cope with such an overwhelming experience? What do the young Marines teach one another?
- How do the tactics and fighting philosophy of the Japanese differ from those of the Americans? Can either side claim moral superiority?
- Historian Donald L. Miller, author of *D-Days in the Pacific*, says that only leadership and love hold men together in war. What are the qualities of a good leader? When do survival and the ideal of solidarity conflict?

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AFTER VIEWING

THE GOOD WAR World War II is often viewed as a just fight against an enemy who attacked us. What do you think about that description? Are any of our present-day wars necessary?

THE HOME FRONT How was the war viewed and portrayed in the media at home? How is that different from today? Would a war-bond drive or similar type of civilian sacrifice work today?

RULES OF WAR Does war protocol make sense? How do Japan's tactics compare with recent war crimes? Was the U.S. justified in using the atomic bomb to end the war?

By the Numbers A Statistical Look at the War in the Pacific

20.5

Average age of U.S. Marines serving in World War II

40%

U.S. casualties evacuated from Guadalcanal with a disabling psychological condition

9:1

Ratio of Japanese to American deaths at Okinawa. Of the 100,000 Japanese troops on the island, only 7,500 surrendered.

115°

Peak temperature recorded during the battle for Peleliu

178,830

Army hospital admissions for malaria in the Pacific theater, 1942-1945

Historical Background

In the summer of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was focused on the escalating war in Europe. He believed that America's entry into the conflict against Hitler was inevitable. On the other side of the world, the Japanese were also aggressively expanding their empire. Roosevelt hoped to delay a war with Japan as long as possible, however, considering Germany the major threat to American security.

"Japan hoped to establish an economic empire that extended into China and Manchuria, down into the Dutch, French, and British colonies of Southeast Asia, where there were great quantities of natural resources such as rubber, tin and, supremely, oil — the lifeblood of modern warfare," says historian Donald L. Miller. At this time, Japan purchased 80 percent of its oil from the United States, and the military insisted that this reliance on American oil curtailed Japanese diplomatic and military independence, since the U.S. could turn off the spigot at any time.

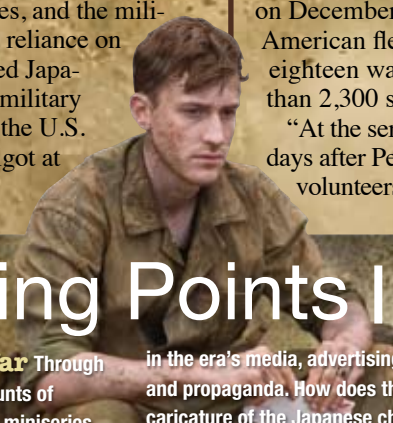
Despite Japan's increasingly aggressive posture, Roosevelt hoped diplomacy and trade sanctions would curb its territorial expansion. But when the Japanese army occupied French Indochina (now Vietnam) in preparation for an invasion of the oil-rich Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) — an area where the U.S. also traded heavily — Roosevelt placed an embargo on American oil and iron exports to Japan.

"Though Japanese militarists understood that seizing this territory would almost certainly mean war with the United States, they were willing to take that step," Miller says. The embargo went into effect in July 1941, and in the following months Japanese naval leaders were told to prepare a plan to attack Pearl Harbor, America's naval bastion in the Pacific. The attack on December 7, 1941 decimated the American fleet, sinking or damaging eighteen warships and killing more than 2,300 servicemen and civilians.

"At the service enlistment posts in the days after Pearl Harbor, almost all the volunteers wanted to fight the Japa-

nese; not the Germans, even though Germany had declared war on the U.S. on December 11," Miller says. "The country was in a state that can only be described as panic. With terrifying speed after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese seized Burma, the Malay Peninsula, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Solomon Islands, the Philippines, and other island outposts in the Pacific. Just months after Pearl Harbor, Japan controlled the largest oceanic empire in history."

Japanese territorial aggression continued until a Marine amphibious force began landing in August 1942 on a small island in the Solomon chain called Guadalcanal. The Japanese were building an airfield on the island, which would allow their planes to attack American ships delivering supplies to Australia, the island nation from which America intended to begin its great counter-thrust against Japan in the Pacific. The impending battle of Guadalcanal would be the test for the miserably unprepared American military as they faced the resolute enemy that was winning the war in the Pacific.



Starting Points | FOR RESEARCH AND WRITING

1 After the War Through studying the accounts of Sledge and Leckie, the miniseries goes beyond dates and tactics into personal metamorphoses. Read one of their books and write an essay about how fighting in the Pacific changed the Marines psychologically. Did they consider themselves heroes after the war?

2 Race and the War Before Pearl Harbor, Americans considered Japan a paper tiger that couldn't stand up to our military, says historian Donald L. Miller. But after the attack, there were no defenses between Hawaii and the West Coast, causing an invasion scare. Research the racial attitudes of both sides, as reflected

in the era's media, advertising, and propaganda. How does the caricature of the Japanese change during the course of the war? How did the Japanese view America and Americans? Prepare a multimedia presentation on your findings.

3 "News" vs. "History" Historian Richard B. Frank says, "There's a vast chasm between how World War II is remembered in this country and how it was lived. Now it's overwhelmingly Hitler, D-Day, the Holocaust. As it was lived, it was at least as much Hirohito, Guadalcanal, and China." Research newspaper and newsreel archives and compare how the two fronts were covered. Which stories are

still known today, and which ones have been forgotten? Analyze your findings and present them visually.

4 War and Mental Illness A large number of the wounded in the Pacific Theater were psychological casualties. What is the incidence of such casualties in wars today? How has the perception of mental illness during battle changed? Investigate how the U.S. military handles mental health problems today and compare current treatments with those developed during World War II.

5 The Bushido Warrior Historian Richard B. Frank says, "What made the Pacific war so savage was not

race but the Japanese battle ethics, that the choice was victory or death. Japan had not surrendered to a foreign power in its entire recorded history of 2,600 years." Research Japanese military history and the evolution of its Bushido — or "no surrender" — battle ethic. How was the decision to drop the atomic bomb our country's own moral struggle?

6 War and Women "The abrupt acceleration of life that World War II brought on affected not only the men but the women," says Richard B. Frank. Write an essay on how the war helped bring about a more modern conception of a woman's role in society. Examine women in the military or in the workplace.

A GEOGRAPHIC TIMELINE

Winning the Pacific

August 1942–February 1943

GUADALCANAL

In the first U.S. offensive in the Pacific, 11,000 U.S. Marines land on this strategically located island to capture a Japanese airfield. After a land, sea, and air campaign in which more than 1,700 Americans and as many as 30,000 Japanese die, the Allied victory here is a major turning point in the Pacific war.



December 1943–April 1944

CAPE GLOUCESTER

On a tiny island, U.S. and Australian forces face what historian Donald L. Miller calls “perhaps the vilest environment in the history of warfare” to capture a Japanese airfield and ensure the Allies’ sea passage through the straits between New Britain and New Guinea.



September–November 1944

PELELIU

A brutally hot coral island with no fresh water supplies, Peleliu is the site of a bloody and largely forgotten battle. Nearly 1,800 U.S. Army soldiers and Marines are killed, and 8,000 are wounded in what Richard B. Frank calls “a campaign of incredible difficulty and cruelty” amid “almost complete obscurity.”



February–March 1945

IWO JIMA

On February 19, some 30,000 U.S. Marines land on Iwo Jima, part of an island chain just 670 miles south of Tokyo. Facing heavy resistance, 6,000 U.S. Marines are killed, nearly a third of the total number who will die in the entire Pacific war.



April–June 1945

OKINAWA

In this assault, 183,000 Allied troops land on this island just 350 miles from mainland Japan. The battle is one of the war’s deadliest, leaving more than 12,000 American ground and naval forces, about 60,000 Japanese soldiers, and countless civilians dead.



THE MINISERIES AT A GLANCE

Synopsis

Part One After Pearl Harbor, John Basilone prepares to ship out for the Pacific, while Robert Leckie enlists in the Marine Corps. Eugene Sledge, unable to enlist, says farewell to his friend, Marines-bound Sidney Phillips. The 1st Marine Division, including Leckie and Phillips, lands on Guadalcanal determined to hold its vital airfield.

Part Two Basilone's regiment arrives on Guadalcanal to reinforce Leckie and the 1st Marine Division. Basilone plays a key role in repelling a nighttime attack, but suffers a frightful personal loss. After four months of continuous action, the exhausted and disease-ridden members of the 1st Marine Division are evacuated off the island.

Part Three To recuperate after the four-month ordeal on Guadalcanal, Leckie, Basilone, and their comrades land in Melbourne. While his buddies carouse, Leckie becomes attached to an Australian woman and her first-generation Greek family. Meanwhile, Basilone is awarded

the Medal of Honor and is sent home to help sell U.S. war bonds.

Part Four After landing on Cape Gloucester, Leckie and the others battle both the Japanese and the debilitating tropical environment. Surviving Gloucester, and now stationed on the godforsaken island of Pavuvu, Leckie begins displaying the physical and mental effects of combat and is sent to a naval hospital on nearby Banika for psychiatric observation.

Part Five Basilone's celebrity grows as he continues the war bond tour. On Pavuvu, Sledge is briefly reunited with Phillips while Leckie rejoins his company. Sledge, Leckie, and the rest of the 1st Marine Division meet fierce Japanese resistance while landing on the intricately and heavily defended coral island of Peleliu.

Part Six Despite intense heat and a lack of water, Sledge, Leckie, and other Marines capture the heavily defended Peleliu airfield. After seeing two comrades badly injured, Leckie himself is wounded and evacuated from the island. Sledge witnesses the shocking truth about what is sometimes required to survive and fight another day.

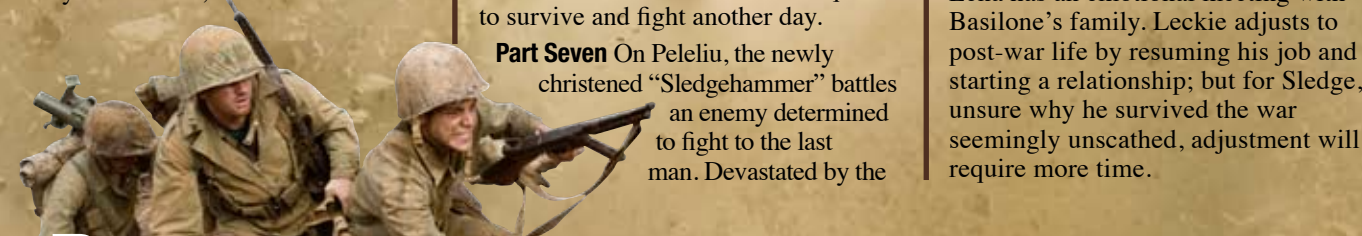
Part Seven On Peleliu, the newly christened "Sledgehammer" battles an enemy determined to fight to the last man. Devastated by the

loss of a revered leader, and witnessing unimaginable barbarity on both sides, Sledge veers to the edge of moral collapse. Their objective secured, the Marines return to Pavuvu fundamentally changed men.

Part Eight Increasingly frustrated selling war bonds, Basilone is sent instead to train troops headed for combat. At Camp Pendleton, he enjoys a whirlwind romance with Marine Sergeant Lena Riggi. The couple knows they are living on borrowed time, as Basilone will soon take in the Marine landing on Iwo Jima.

Part Nine On Okinawa, Sledge and his men relieve an Army division that has been in combat against the most strongly defended Japanese position on the island. The primordial conditions and moral dilemma posed by the presence of civilians strains the physical and psychological endurance of Sledge and the others.

Part Ten After the Japanese surrender, Leckie returns home and Sledge reunites with his family and Sid Phillips. Lena has an emotional meeting with Basilone's family. Leckie adjusts to post-war life by resuming his job and starting a relationship; but for Sledge, unsure why he survived the war seemingly unscathed, adjustment will require more time.



Resources

BOOKS

The Pacific, by Hugh Ambrose
The official companion book to the HBO miniseries fleshes out the on-screen story, drawing on research and interviews conducted in preparation for the miniseries.

With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa, by E.B. Sledge (*Presidio Press, 2007*) Sledge's 1981 memoir is "not just the classic account of Pacific combat, but one of the best accounts of combat ever written," says historian Donald L. Miller.

Helmet for My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific, by Robert Leckie

(*Bantam, 2010*) Leckie offers an unflinching yet poetic account of his service with the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal, New Britain, and Peleliu.

Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle, by Richard B. Frank (*Penguin, 1992*) Through Japanese accounts and declassified documents, Frank reveals the strategies and tactics of both sides.

D-Days in the Pacific, by Donald L. Miller (*Simon & Schuster, 2005*) An illustrated account of the Allied offensives in the Pacific, from Guadalcanal to V-J Day.

FILMS

With the Marines at Tarawa (1944) This Academy Award®-winning film, shot in color by Marine cinematographers, shocked audiences with its gruesome images of the 1943 battle.

The World at War (1974) Narrated by Laurence Olivier, this 26-episode documentary is considered the definitive visual history of World War II. Although its main focus is Europe, it also contains sections on the Pacific.

The War (2007), a documentary by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, explores World War II through the personal accounts of those who lived through it.

WEBSITES

www.hbo.com/thepacific

The official website for *The Pacific* on HBO is the ultimate online companion to the miniseries, featuring videos, images, downloads and episode guides.

www.archive.org

The Internet Archive contains a large collection of World War II newsreels and military propaganda films.

www.history.army.mil
www.history.usmc.mil

The websites of the U.S. Army Center of Military History and the U.S. Marine Corps History Division offer the official story of military action in the Pacific.