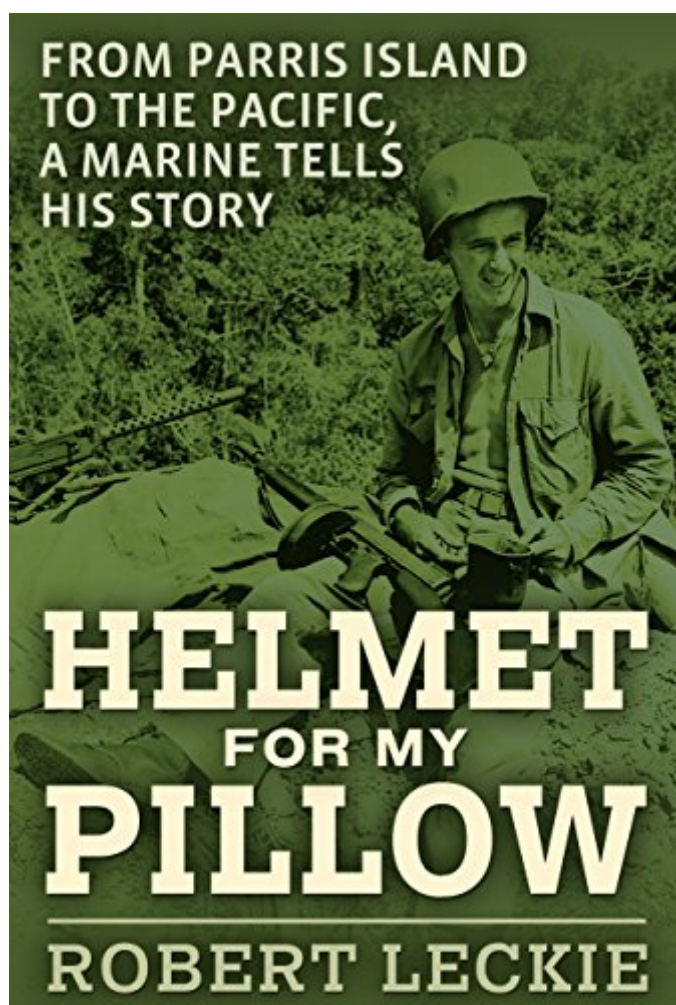


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Helmet For My Pillow: From Parris Island To The Pacific, A Marine Tells His Story



Synopsis

Helmet for My Pillow, first published in 1957, is Robert Leckie's masterful account of his service in the First Marine Division from basic training on Parris Island, South Carolina, to the hard-fought battles on Guadalcanal, New Britain, and Peleliu, with a brief respite in Australia. Leckie describes the fighting from a first-hand perspective, and interlaces his story with his thoughts about war and fighting. Helmet for My Pillow remains one of the classic accounts of the war in the Pacific and was the basis for the HBO mini-series The Pacific.

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Customer Reviews

I stumbled upon this book after watching the TV series the Pacific, part of it was based upon this book. The book chronicles one mans life changing journey from boot camp to battle hardened warrior and cynic. The story is told in such an open and honest manner as be shocking at times, and truly shows what depravity war can reduce men to. It also shows the highs that such an altering experience can bring as well. I highly related to the main character due to my own experiences of

being in the service and being a bit of hothead myself which also got me into some hot water at times! Not as much as this young Marine did though! Also learned some history about what really happened in the South Pacific in the war against Japan. Though I have been to some of these places I barely knew what horrors had taken place not that long ago. Have a read and see for yourself this book is worth it's price you won't soon forget it!

I gave this book five stars, because it was extremely well written, informative, exciting, and humorously sarcastic. As I read the book, I was very impressed by Leckie's intelligence as well as his written prose. I was kind of amazed that this enlisted man's point of view could rival that of any officer's in the descriptions of battles and their strategy; the morale of the men during training and in battle, etc. It does not surprise me that he was a successful writer and reporter.

Noted author Robert Leckie's first book, "Helmet For My Pillow", is rightly lauded as a stand out in war experience narratives. What sets Leckie's work apart from many others is the literary style in which the story of survival by front line troops in the atrocious battles of Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, and Peleliu are drawn. Leckie volunteered for the Marine Corps the day after Pearl Harbor was attacked. He was part of a large group of enlistees who swelled the rolls of an unprepared military. Training was hard and dreary with the enlarged ranks living in tents upon marshy fields at New River and Paris Island. But battle and life in the South Pacific was an ordeal through which both Leckie's Marines as well as their Japanese foes lived, suffered and died in the most trying circumstances. Leckie's regiment, part of the 1st Marine Division, was early into Guadalcanal and would be on the front for four for five months straight. This was during the period in which the Japanese controlled the sea around the landing area forcing Americans on half rations and captured Japanese rice. Fighting was brutal and Marines faced a long period in which they were on the defensive before being able to advance and eventually be withdrawn as Army reinforcements were introduced. Leckie also experienced the Battle of Cape Gloucester before his final fight at Peleliu. Peleliu is described as hell on earth with the Japanese emplaced into a series of tunnel connected bunkers which they had had years to establish. And from which they had to be driven or killed by direct assault. Marine casualties were high, including Leckie who was withdrawn to a hospital after a close hit by an artillery shell. He would miss his division's fight on Okinawa, which may be the reason we are all able to read this very fine work. The 1st Marine Division also recuperated between battles, the most memorable being in Melbourne, Australia after Guadalcanal. With Australians believing the Marines had saved their continent from invasion (which they probably

had along with the forces successfully holding New Guinea), Melbourne joyously welcomed their deliverers to their city and into their homes. With no Australian young men to be had, they quickly became the boyfriends, sons and spouses that were otherwise occupied in North Africa or New Guinea fighting with the Commonwealth. His stories of drinking (constant), womanizing (frequent) and high-jinx are entertaining and add terrific color to this war story. Leckie is a gifted writer and his highly descriptive style breathes a literary quality into his story without ever seeming overdone. This is not a book that tells unit lines of advance and casualty rates in clipped recaps of battle history but rather the war and waiting between battles through the eyes of a front-line fighter in possession of a sharp wit, and great powers of observation and description. No character is addressed by anything other than his nickname in the story. Thus we read of The Chuckler, Souvenir, Hoosier, Runner and Captain High-Hips and Lt. Ivy-league. Leckie himself is the not-as-imaginative "Lucky." He also is brutally honest and the book does not spare Leckie, who almost broke in one battle and spent time in the brig as well as off-island in a mental ward (though the book does leave it up in the air as to whether or not this was a "not-enough-space in the medical ward" issue or Leckie was truly in need of psychiatric help). Souvenir has his nickname because of the scores of gold fillings he keeps in a bag tied around his neck, courtesy of dead enemy (except in one case where a wounded son of Nippon contributed), a pair of pliers and his dental flashlight. Leckie and some of his patrol come across a dead Marine who had the part of his arm tattooed with the Marine Corps shield ripped from his flesh and stuffed in his mouth. The repetitive brutality of war and misery are not spared. While winter in Bastogne was hard and the fighting dangerous everywhere American troops fought in World War II, Leckie's book describes service in the Pacific that seemed more miserable on a daily basis than that had in other theaters of the war. Because of the nature of the Japanese soldier, fighting was frequently to the end with no quarter given and none expected. Field torture of our captured soldiers was more than an occasional occurrence as was the same treatment meted the other way. Leckie's brutal, honest and descriptive book provides an excellent picture of the war through one Marine's eyes.

I decided to read this after watching the mini-series, "The Pacific". I generally read fiction, but I couldn't put this book down. I've heard this style of writing described as narrative non-fiction, memoir, and creative non-fiction. Whatever you call it, it's a remarkable, beautifully crafted story of the war in the Pacific. I believe books such as this should be required reading in our high schools and colleges. I highly recommend this book to any reader who has a passion for history, and wants to feel as if they are in the midst of the action.

Robert Leckie writes with the soul of a poet as he brings to life the experiences of a Marine in the South Pacific during World War II. His writing is smooth and easy to read, despite the subject matter, which involves horrendous, wartime experiences. One of the central characters of the Pacific miniseries, it's interesting to read the experiences from his own viewpoint. I couldn't put it down. For fans of the miniseries, WWII history buffs, and anyone looking to understand the experience of our Marines at that time. I recommend it highly.

If you're a military buff or just curious about real war, you need to read "Helmet For My Pillow". A great telling of the life of a "grunt" during one of the most violent periods of our history. I've read and re-read this account of Robert Leckie's experiences in the Pacific during WWII and it just gets better every time. Mr. Leckie's story is most assuredly an eye-opening tale of the hardships of war on the ground. His telling will allow you to feel what it's like without the fear and malaise he lived through. I highly recommend his account of our Marines in combat!

The book details the Mr. Leckie's experiences while a Marine in the Pacific theater in WW2. It is engrossing and graphic. It is a good look at a past generation of young men who were required to be far braver and more mature than their years. If you have seen the movie series "Pacific," many of his stories will be familiar. My only criticism is that he sometimes goes off on short lyrical tangents that seem to interrupt the nature style of his writing. After what he went through however, I appreciate that he wrote it down in a way that was satisfying for him.

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