

Hiromichi Yahara's *The Battle for Okinawa*, and E. B. Sledge's *With the Old Breed at Peleliu & Okinawa* are war memoirs which give the authors' accounts of two of the most infamous and well known battles of the Pacific Theater of the Second World War between the United States and Japan. Yahara was a colonel and the man in charge of planning the Japanese defense of Okinawa. He wrote his book twenty seven years after the battle, in 1972. Sledge was a private in the United States Marine Corps, he published his account in 1981. In this paper, I will be examining and analyzing the similarities and differences between the two accounts.

The first thing to consider when examining the books is the authors themselves. As mentioned above, Yahara was a colonel. He was the "staff officer in charge of operations" and was involved in the planning of the Japanese defense of the island (prologue, p. 7/8). In his account, he never describes taking part in any actual fighting. He was more often than not giving orders instead of receiving them. He spent most of the battle in command posts, not out in the field. On the other hand, Sledge was a private. He was always out in the field, though not necessarily on the front lines. He saw and participated in a lot of combat over the course of the two battles he describes in his memoir. He and his fellow Marines received orders and carried them out. It is important to consider these fundamental differences between the authors when examining their accounts because it will undoubtedly cause some variation in their accounts of the battle.

Yahara and Sledge have different reasons for writing their memoirs of the war. In the case of Yahara, he writes to set the record straight. He states this very clearly in the prologue to the book when he declares: "This is how it really was." (prologue p. 7/8). It appears he writes his memoir because he finds previous accounts of the war to be incomplete, or incorrect in regard to details about the battle (prologue, p. 7/8). As the man responsible for the planning of the

Japanese defense of Okinawa, he is in a unique position to make this claim. Throughout his book, Yahara is often critical of the Japanese leadership during the war and he makes numerous references to the willingness of the Japanese leaders to destroy the Japanese people in an effort to preserve their honour. He even states his opinion that Japan should have surrendered with dignity before Okinawa was lost (chapter 24, p. 5/8). Though he never states so explicitly, I believe this indicates Yahara's dislike of the needless waste of human life caused by the war. It is worth noting that Yahara was willing to fight until the end for Japan. He frequently expressed the thought that he would die on Okinawa. However, in my opinion, he also seems to indicate that he would rather not fight a war and a battle that he sees as a needless waste of life. This is perhaps most clearly shown when Yahara explains that no one expected Japan to surrender so soon after the battle of Okinawa (chapter 4, p. 5/6). Yahara had planned the battle of Okinawa around the idea that there would be a decisive battle on the Japanese islands (chapter 2, p. 7/10). With Japan surrendering so soon after the battle of Okinawa, Yahara seems to indicate that he thought the battle was an unnecessary waste of life.

On the other hand, Sledge is much less explicit in his motive for writing his memoir of the war. He does make numerous and frequent references to the loss of life caused by the war. From the very beginning of Sledge's book, while he describes boot camp, he refers to infantrymen as cannon fodder (chapter 2, p.7/52). He also expresses his anger towards the officers for their seemingly reckless use soldiers (chapter 4, p. 65/86). He continues to refer to the tremendous waste of life that is war throughout the book and expresses his anger at the fate of the men who are sent out to die. After the battle of Peleliu, Sledge questions the utility of having taken the island (chapter 7, p. 1/26). Sledge seems to understand and accept the need to fight the war (chapter 6, p. 1/54). However, needlessly throwing away the lives of men is

incomprehensible. Having experienced the war from the frontlines, Sledge also puts emphasis on the horror of the infantryman's war. He describes war, as a "disease afflicting man" (chapter 9, p. 19/34). However, throughout his account of the battles of Peleliu and Okinawa, Sledge praises his comrades in arms and some of the leaders he deems worthy of praise. It is my opinion that Sledge writes his memoir both as a tribute to those comrades and as a reminder to the reader of the horror and tremendous waste of life that is caused by war. He does not hesitate to describe war in all its facets in an attempt to give the reader an understanding of what it was like.

Yahara begins his account of the battle of Okinawa long before the American forces land on the beaches of the island. This allows the reader to observe the progression of Yahara's thoughts as well as provide the reader with an understanding of the situation Yahara was facing with regards to troops and support from the Navy and Air Force. For example, Yahara tells the reader that he had to change his plans because the Imperial Headquarters sent more troops to the Philippines instead of sending them to Okinawa (chapter 2, p. 5/10). Throughout Yahara's account of the battle of Okinawa, he takes the time to explain his logic and reasoning to the reader. This is particularly interesting because Yahara is in charge of making many decisions regarding the defense of Okinawa. Giving the reader a logical explanation for the decision he makes, Yahara allows the reader to get a better understanding of the battle. This memoir of the battle allows the reader to understand the battle on a deeper level than a simple retelling of the facts would, no matter how meticulously the facts were presented. Yahara explains his decision to wage a war of attrition in preparation for a final, decisive battle on the Japanese main islands (chapter 2, p. 5/10). This belief is repeated throughout Yahara's account of the battle, along with

his belief that the battle of Okinawa was always going to be a losing battle and that the purpose of a war of attrition was to buy time to organize the defense of the main Japanese islands (chapter 2, p. 7/10). Yahara also shows the reader the inner workings of the command structure of the Japanese Army and its shortcomings. For example, when Yahara wants to suggest a retreat he arranges for one of his subordinates to suggest it so that he does not look like a defeatist, too eager to retreat (chapter 10, p. 3/24). The apparent incompetence of the Japanese High Command is shown several times in Yahara's account of the battle. Throughout his account of the battle, Yahara speaks highly of the soldiers under his command. He commends them for their valiant effort to hold back the enemy (chapter 13, p. 1/4). As it becomes obvious that defeat is approaching for the Japanese, living conditions go from bad to terrible for Yahara and the other Japanese officers. The headquarters cave is flooded and under constant bombardment (chapter 13, p. 1/4). The rations for the officers are cut to one rice ball (chapter 20, p. 3/10). The reader can only guess how bad it must have been for the Japanese soldiers in the field. Throughout all of this, Yahara describes a sense of duty and unity. He expresses his willingness to fight to the death and his desire for all Japanese forces on the island to make their last stand together (chapter 22, p. 1/4). Yahara presents the battle as a desperate fight that he and his comrades wage for Japan. He and the others are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. At the same time, Yahara is critical of the Japanese High Command and their willingness to sacrifice an entire people (chapter 24, p. 5/8). This is an interesting and unique situation Yahara finds himself in. He is simultaneously willing to fight for the death for his country and critical of the leaders who are asking him to do so.

Contrary to Yahara's account of the battle, Sledge is much more familiar with the experience of a soldier in the field. That is obviously because he spent his time in the field

among soldiers and not at a command post. This is reflected in his account of the battle of Okinawa. Sledge interacted very directly with the battlefield and all its horrors. He describes the horrendous conditions soldiers had to endure in the field (chapter 12, p. 37/38). Add to that the horrors of combat itself in the form of wounded and dying comrades (chapter 10, p. 15/28). While Yahara's account of the battle focuses strongly on the overall positioning of troops and the movement of various units, Sledge takes the reader inside the unit and even into his own foxhole. Each author's account is centered around the area of the battle he experienced and was familiar with. As Sledge points out in his account, the horrors of war are incomprehensible to those who have not lived through them (chapter 13, p. 11/38). His account of the battle from the perspective of someone who was in the field helps the reader get a better understanding of what the battle was like on the front lines. This account is unique and can not be reproduced without having lived through the battle. Throughout his account, Sledge is very critical of war, however, like Yahara, he has a sense of duty. He states so in his account of the time between the battle of Peleliu and Okinawa: "we were duty-bound to return" to the battlefield (chapter 9, p. 27/34). Sledge's account of the battle presents the reader with a view of the war from the perspective of a common marine. Sledge does not want to fight, he suffers tremendously both physically and mentally from his time on the battlefield. However, he knows he has a duty and he does it faithfully.

In conclusion, Yahara and Sledge provide different but complementary accounts of the battle. Due to the fact that they were in drastically different positions on the battlefield, their memoirs focus on different aspects of the same battle. As a colonel, and the man in charge of planning the Japanese defense, Yahara's account provides the reader with a good understanding

the battle from a tactical standpoint. On the other hand, Sledge, as a private, describes the battle as it was on the front lines. Combined together, they allow the reader to get a very good and accurate understanding of the battle. Each man has his own motive for writing their account. Yahara wants to set the record straight and correct any misconceptions about the battle from previous, less accurate accounts of the battle. He is critical of the Japanese High Command for the way they waged the war. In his account of the battle, Sledge shows the reader the horrors of war. He is very critical of the war and of the destruction it caused to the land and the people who lived through it. Sledge also takes the time to praise and pay tribute to those comrades he felt were deserving of the praise.