



DAVID JAMES/HBO

On the set of The Pacific, Captain Dale Dye critiques actor Leon Ford, who portrays Lieutenant Edward "Hillbilly" Jones. Scott Gibson, who plays Captain Andrew "Ack Ack" Haldane, meanwhile waits directly behind Captain Dye.

Building Marines *Hollywood Style*

BY CAPTAIN DALE DYE,
U.S. MARINE CORPS (RETIRED)

How do you convert more than 50 film actors and extras—many who've barely heard of World War II—into combat-hardened Pacific-war Leathernecks? Call on the pros at Warriors Inc.

It took liberal doses of General Holland M. “Howlin’ Mad” Smith’s tenacity and Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey Jr.’s aggressiveness to get it done, but worldwide television audiences are in for a stark, brutal, and extremely realistic view of World War II in the Pacific when HBO premieres its newest military miniseries in March 2010. And Warriors Inc., the company I founded and operate that provides military advisory services to the entertainment industry, is proud to have participated in the production. Over the year my advisors and I spent in Australia re-creating the major battles fought by the 1st Marine Division from 1942 through 1945, we constantly invoked the spirit of legendary warriors such as General Alexander A. Vandegrift, Lieutenant General Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller, and Gunnery Sergeant “Manila John” Basilone to inject a special look and feel into the project that HBO has given a simple, evocative title: *The Pacific*.

In the summer of 2007 when executive producers Steven Spielberg, Tom Hanks, and Gary Goetzman finally got a green light to begin work on this monster undertaking, we received our marching orders in plain and direct terms. Hanks called and said he wanted me to do everything possible in my billet as the project’s senior military advisor to “take audiences on a trip to hell and back.” And this time, he continued, bring us right in there “under the helmet” where we can experience the thoughts, emotions, and passions of men who faced a brutal, tenacious, and unfamiliar enemy in the Pacific campaigns of World War II.

Almost immediately, we began receiving scripts for the planned ten episodes from writer-producer Bruce McKenna, who did yeoman work on the earlier and hugely successful *Band of Brothers* miniseries. It was obvious we had a big challenge facing us and one that was quite different from what we faced in doing that series, which focused on one company of paratroopers from the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the famed 101st Airborne Division in the European Theater of Operations.

This new project required us to employ and train actors and special-ability extras who would realistically portray World War II-era Marines from all three infantry regiments of the 1st Marine Division. Audiences would be expected to know and follow three primary players—Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone from 1st Battalion, 7th Marines; Private First Class Eugene Sledge from 3d Battalion, 5th Marines; and Private Robert Leckie of 2d Battalion, 1st Marines—through intricate and difficult shifting of roles and missions as the “Old Breed” fought, rested, trained, and fought again from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. Much of the source material for our scripts was taken from books written by the latter two Marines (*With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa* by Sledge and *Helmet for My Pillow* by Leckie), so we had at least two immediate touchstones for historical research, which continued, expanded, and deepened throughout the entire project.

As departure time for Australia approached, producer Tony To, the primary driving force behind *Band of Brothers* and a fan of our methods, issued the “attack orders” and we began to assign tasks at Warriors Inc. On a preproduction flight to Australia, where To had established a command post at Melbourne’s Central City Studios, Warriors’ executive officer Mike Stokey and I worked out a table of organization for a training unit and began to outline the schedule. We hoped the scant 14 days allotted would allow us to raise a credible World War II Marine infantry company prior to the beginning of principal photography.

Julia Dewey Dye, our “adjutant” and primary trainer for World War II-era women Marines, meanwhile, recruited and organized the cadre required to train the performers and stage the action for two complete shooting units work-

ing simultaneously under a variety of directors. She came up with outstanding people who had intimate knowledge of the Corps. All hands were advised to pack their seabags for a long deployment and to begin researching World War II Marine Corps weapons, equipment, uniforms, and tactics.

In Melbourne, the city in which the 1st Marine Division rested and reorganized after the grueling campaign on Guadalcanal, Stokey and I began to interview the special-ability extras who would be trained along with the cast members and who would support the mission throughout the production. All of the young Australian or New Zealand men we saw were excited to be a part of the production, but few had much more than a rudimentary knowledge of World War II. Virtually none had any understanding of the intimate relationship between their country and the vaunted 1st Marine Division. In fact, only one of the 300 or so we saw in the process of selecting 50 men knew that the division's official marching song is "Waltzing Matilda." He was hired immediately without the series of physical training (PT) tests we put the others through to assess their fitness, stamina, and motivation.

This insight prompted us to add a few extra history lessons to the training schedule. These guys—and the actors who were being cast back in the States and in the United Kingdom—would need plenty of background information to effectively portray the attitudes and orientation of the young Americans who volunteered for Marine Corps service in World War II. Stokey and I also used this trip to interview and hire 30 Asian extras who would be trained as Imperial Japanese Army infantrymen to oppose our Marines.

With T-day—the first day of field training—rapidly approaching, we moved to Far North Queensland and selected a site for our training ground in a huge patch of triple-canopy jungle running up the slopes of steep hills next to several rural cattle ranches. Our training cadre arrived just a week before we were slated to take the field. At this remote site we would conduct a curriculum that ran the military gamut from terrain appreciation through tactical formations and movement, to fire and maneuver and into combat engagements between our Marines and the Japanese forces training at a site nearby. We would take an absolutely minimalist approach to creature comforts, as we wanted our trainees to experience life in the field as it was lived by Pacific

Marines who were chronically short of everything except Japanese enemy.

Initial assignments were made that allowed the training staff to work out the details of the hectic schedule. I advised them to stock up on sleep, as there would be little of that in the field where we would be conducting both day and night operations. Given the requirements of the scripts for *The Pacific*, we organized into three platoons: an assault platoon under command of Mark Shuster with Sean Bunch as his platoon sergeant; a machine-gun platoon under Charles Currier with Roberto Garcia as his senior NCO; and a mortar platoon, commanded by Bruce Whitfield with Tony Lidyard as his NCO. I commanded the training company with Stokey as my XO and Freddie Joe Farnsworth as company gunnery sergeant.

Very early on T-Day, Gunny Farnsworth and his cadre NCOs met the actors and the extras at the Melbourne studios. There they had been issued vintage Marine dungarees, boondockers, and a seabag full of period field equipment, which left them both clueless and apprehensive. That situation was reinforced as the NCOs gave them a typical welcome based on personal experience with Marine drill instructors. It was loud, profane, and scary, which put our trainees in the desired mindset: numb, sweaty, and confused.

At our field command post, Tom Hanks, who flew in from California, gave a motivational speech in which he reminded the actors and extras that he'd been where they were in two projects (*Saving Private Ryan* and *Forrest Gump*), and that no one was likely to die if they paid attention to what was being taught. Tom's welcome but unexpected appearance

Training the Enemy

It is a given that war is hell, but it's also combat. A skilled enemy is just as anxious to kill you as you are to reciprocate, and that makes it such a seminal experience. That visceral reaction makes for riveting drama in war films. If the good guys are facing a gaggle of stuntmen who die too easily or never seem to actually maneuver or exercise sound military tactics, you might just as well buy a video game for all the reality you'll see on screen.

The most effective portrayals of combat derive from skilled adversaries rather than cartoon characters in enemy uniforms. This was a vital concern for *The Pacific*. Despite propaganda portrayals from the World War II period, Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) soldiers were anything but cartoons. Just ask any Pacific combat veteran. To

effectively communicate the jeopardy and the difficulties encountered by our forces facing tenacious and dedicated Japanese forces, we needed an on-screen enemy who demonstrated those characteristics. Fortunately, we had on our standby cadre roster three subject experts who had helped us train Japanese forces in previous projects such as *The Great Raid*, and we alerted them for immediate activation prior to filming in Australia.

After selecting 30 young Asian men to portray Japanese soldiers in *The Pacific's* battle sequences, we called on Brad Hartsell, a former Marine who has spent years studying the IJA and scouring Pacific battlefields. His assistants were Yuki Nagashima, an Australian school teacher, and Yutaka Izumihara, a popular Japanese

reinforced for our training company my beliefs from the time I came on the scene in Hollywood as the military advisor on the Academy Award-winning film *Platoon*.

I've always believed the most effective training tactic is to work from the inside out rather than the other way around. You can train actors to walk, talk, maneuver, and handle weapons appropriately—that's been done by others before me. But the convincing performances come from the heart and places deep in the brain that are unreachable without full and complete immersion in the alien experience of intimacy, lack of privacy, total interdependency, deprivation, hardship, and unselfish devotion to a larger ideal that only those who have served in the military can understand. The idea then, with *The Pacific* and all the other projects we've worked on, is to give the performers a large, unavoidable dose of experience with the way real military people must feel, think, and function to survive. The only remaining question is how to get it done. For that I rely on my own experiences during 20 years as an active-duty Marine.

Any Leatherneck would recognize the regimen. Isolate the recruits completely—no cell phones and no contact whatsoever with the world outside their training unit. From the start, work them hard in physical training and manual labor, such as calisthenics, long formation runs, and digging their own fighting positions, until they are numb and focused exclusively on surviving the next five minutes. At that point, most of the civilian nonsense has been squeezed out of their heads and you have a blank slate, a receptive mind, and an open heart. We committed three days to reaching a point beyond rote replication of what they saw the cadre doing, and then entered a steep learning curve

actor. Both men have made extensive studies of Japanese Army philosophies, weapons, and tactics. The trio hammered out a training schedule for their troops that paralleled ours in basic instruction but differed radically in the approach to teaching. With the Japanese trainees, the Code of Bushido trumped all other considerations.

All training for the IJA force was conducted in Japanese, and the emphasis was always on offensive maneuvers. The unit learned quickly, and by the second week of training they were regularly springing effective ambushes from camouflaged jungle positions. At one point, I had to put the brakes on Hartsell, as his guys were too often—and too effectively—infiltrating our lines. Fortunately, the Japanese unit had a couple of excellent cooks in its

ranks. Rice, which they boiled and spiced, served as their ration staple. Toward the end of field training I also had to forbid our Marine cadre NCOs from sneaking over to the Japanese camp for a meal with the enemy.

Those 30 IJA soldiers stayed with us throughout the long shooting schedule and never failed to reinforce the jeopardy real Marines faced in Pacific battles. We disguised them by changing uniforms and equipment configurations and staying away from radical close-ups, but for the most part, you'll see the same Japanese soldiers effectively fighting from Guadalcanal to the last battles on Okinawa. What they lacked in numbers they made up for in martial spirit. Their ancestors would be proud.

—Captain Dale Dye, USMC (Ret.)

during which the trainees gradually worked their way up into the appropriate positions of leadership and followership called for in the scripts.

Here's how a typical day went, about halfway through the regimen. Reveille was at 0500, which was a bit early because the unit had been on 50 percent alert throughout the previous night. It had been punctuated in thrilling fashion by a Japanese probe of our lines at 0300. No breakfast was served on this or on any other day, as we believed two ration meals in a 24-hour period were plenty. It also provided the reduction in soft body fat desired for the slim, wiry, slightly underfed look in an episode about Guadalcanal, which was first up immediately after training. The entire company formed for PT at 0530, which was followed by a four-mile formation run during which our chants scared the hell out of local cattle herds and set the farmers to complaining about "bovine trauma." At 0700 the platoons were set against each other in full-contact, close-quarters battle drills followed by bayonet drills with sheathed blades.

By 0800, when it began to get hot, rapid-reload and firing-position drills began on the firing line with blank ammo streaming through Garand rifles, Browning automatic rifles (BAR), and carbines. These had just been issued after five straight days of learning to manipulate the M1903A1 Springfield bolt-action rifles required for the Guadalcanal sequences of "the mission." During training, we never mention or utter the words film, movie, miniseries, or TV project, and we never allow anyone else to mention those terms under threat of exhaustive PT punishment.

While the riflemen and BAR duos worked their weapons on the firing line, the machine-gun platoon conducted its drills—fire in support of maneuvering squads, displace, and re-engage area targets—with both the .30-caliber M1917A1 water- and M1919A4 air-cooled guns. The mortar platoon conducted fire missions with their 60-mm weapons firing creeping barrages using shells that gave a satisfactory and attention-grabbing blast via 12-gauge shotgun shells embedded in the base of dummy high-explosive rounds.

After noon chow, we conducted a jungle camouflage class and briefed a company-sized reconnaissance patrol that would take us on a route through the heavy green foliage to the top of a jungle-covered hill where listening posts had reported enemy movement. Prior to moving out, we issued machetes needed to



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Cameras prepare to roll during filming of a scene from *The Pacific* featuring (seated in front, from left) Toby Moore, Ashton Holmes, Joshua Helman; (squatting) Jacob Pitts; and (standing) Tom Budge and James Badge Dale.

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cut through the bush and conducted a review of field telephone and wire procedures that would keep everyone in contact with the command post. Field radios were notoriously unreliable in World War II, and we reinforced that concept by requiring the assault platoon's wire section to constantly run lines and keep maneuvering units in contact using EE-8 field telephones.

As we began to climb and cut through the tangle of vines and undergrowth under field marching packs (approximately 40 very real pounds of weight), the heat was overwhelming. The jungle humidity often matched the air temperature, and those who rolled up their sleeves or unbuttoned their dungaree shirts rapidly became familiar with stinging nettles, which added significantly to the agony of their march. The climb was particularly difficult for machine gunners and mortarmen, who had to hump all their gear and a heavy load of ammo just in case we ran into a Japanese patrol.

And, of course, we did just that, having arranged for it to happen in a conference with our Japanese force the previous evening. A firefight developed in the thick jungle where the only signs of enemy positions were muzzle flashes. Machine-gun crews had to constantly reposition themselves in support of the creeping infantry squads closing on enemy hard points. Mortars were working their sights and tubes according to rapid-rate adjustments I sent to them by wire as student officers observed the technique.

Once we returned to the CP, cleaned all weapons, and ate parts of a second meal, we opened the schoolhouse to conduct lectures on Marine Corps history and the state

of the world and the United States in the war years. We also worked on 1940s vocabulary and Marine jargon. When the inky darkness particular to Pacific jungles descended, we set the watch and waited for a preplanned, full-scale banzai assault. This had been arranged to happen some time close to 2200, when Marines on our perimeter would be nodding off. By the time we were hit in a sector defended by a pair of water-cooled machine guns, our men were demonstrating admirable fire discipline and even got off a few satisfying bursts while the mortars fired an area-suppression mission to drive off the attackers. We stood down at about 0300 for yet another 0500 start.

And so it went from the beginning until our final field exercise, when we staged a full-scale amphibious assault from LVTs and LCIs on a heavily defended beach. When the series airs, you'll see the pay-off in the meticulous attention to the details in uniforms, weapons, equipment, and tactics. The result is gratifying and an overdue tribute to the men who fought the great naval campaigns in the Pacific during World War II. But for all of us involved in making it happen, the real thrill is bringing that underappreciated, misunderstood, and frequently forgotten aspect of the global conflict to life and to the attention of worldwide audiences.

My personal payday occurred when actor John Seda, who portrays Manila John Basilone in the miniseries, sought me out at the end of the final field exercise. "You know, Skipper," he said, "that thing—*Semper Fidelis*—I get it now. Thanks. And I won't let the Marine Corps down." He didn't, and neither did the hundreds of people behind and before the cameras on *The Pacific*. 