

## TV Review: Everyone Should Watch Masterful ‘The Pacific’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 14, 2010 - 10:16am

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CHICAGO – I must admit to some trepidation about HBO’s WWII mini-series “The Pacific” from producers Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, debuting tonight, March 14th, 2010 at 8pm CST. Why? Because “Band of Brothers” is the best mini-series of all time and it’s difficult for anyone to pitch a perfect game two starts in a row. I knew it would be good, but doubted it would be great. I was wrong. It’s spectacular.



TV Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Far more than merely a shadow or duplication of “Band of Brothers,” “The Pacific” stands on its own for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the war in the Pacific arena of battle was much different than the European fight. There’s nothing in Europe that compares to the jungle of Guadalcanal, the main setting for the first hour of the ten-hour piece. There are hundreds of stories of the American soldier experience in World War II and even just the setting for the episodes of “The Pacific” makes them feel immediately distinct from “Band of Brothers”.



The Pacific

Photo credit: David James/HBO

It also appears that “The Pacific” is going to be more about the specific human toll of war than the first mini-series. It’s all there in the titles. The first mini-series was about how boys band together as they become brothers. The second is about how a deadly destination forever changed the young men sent there. It’s clear that “The Pacific” will be more about the psychological damage of something most of us cannot

possibly imagine going through and coming out sane than the unity of men traveling through Hell. It’s more about what’s on the other side than what’s on the actual journey.



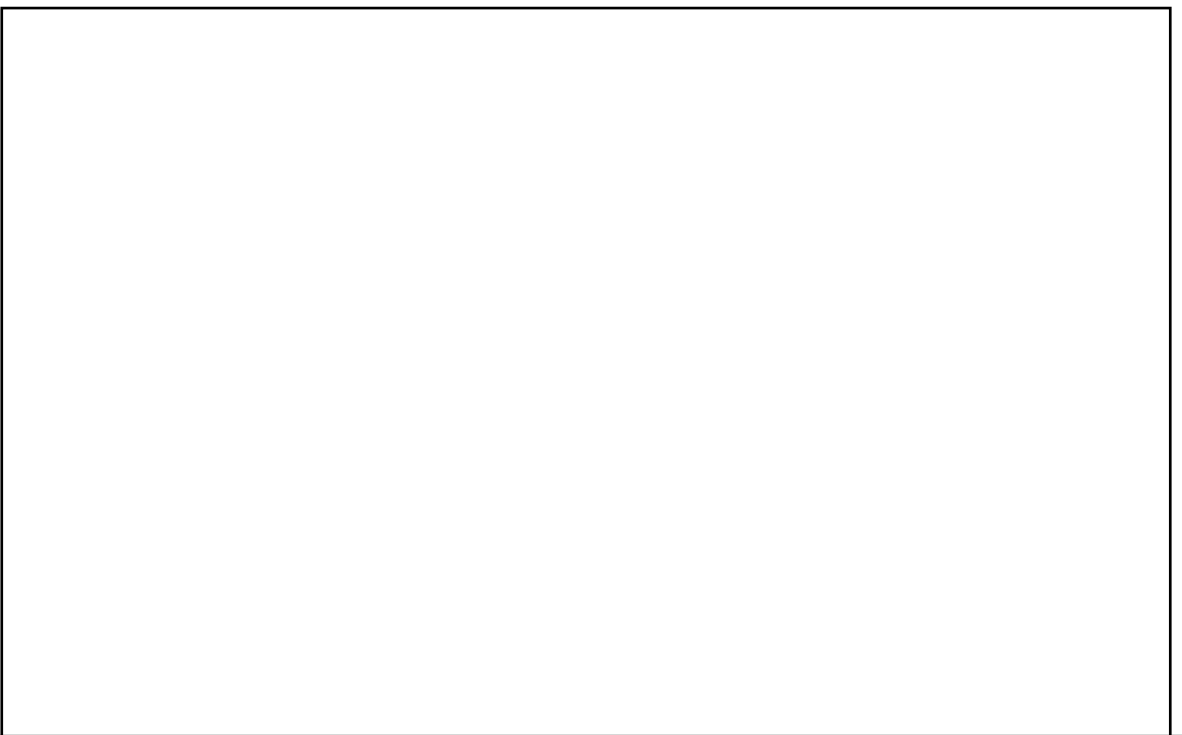
The Pacific  
Photo credit: David James/HBO

And it would be remiss not to note that this mini-series comes after a decade spent largely at war and spawned by a tragic event compared to Pearl Harbor. When “Band of Brothers” launched in 2001, I don’t think anyone expected that we would again send young men to die on the other side of the world for practically the next ten years. “The Pacific” has an added resonance when one considers that there are Marines going through something not that dissimilar to the harrowing action on-screen right this very minute.

The first episode of “The Pacific” focuses on four of the major characters of the entire piece during two crucial periods of the beginning of our involvement in World War II. It opens in the weeks after Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 as troops were being formed to send overseas. We meet PFC Robert Leckie (James Badge Dale) as he says goodbye to his distant father and meets a girl at church who he promises to write, Marine Sgt. John Basilone (Jon Seda) as he listens to his superior (William Sadler) detail the importance of what these young men are about to do, and Eugene Sledge (Joe Mazzello) and his friend PFC Sidney Phillips (Ashton Holmes). The former is torn apart by the fact that his heart murmur will keep him from serving alongside his shipping-out buddy.

The bulk of the premiere takes place at Guadalcanal in August of 1942. The 1st Marine Division, including Leckie and Phillips, lands on the hellish island in an attempt to secure the crucial land mass and stem the Japanese progression towards Australia. Like so many stories of war, long stretches of “The Pacific” are spent with soldiers marching through the jungle from one strategic location to another.

We get to know some of them, but the piece never focuses too strongly on any young man, not valuing one over another. If there’s a lead, it’s Dale as the intellectual Leckie. He’s instantly good at selling the everyman quality in his eyes that makes something like this all the more resonant. The centerpiece of the premiere is a firefight on a river that is one of the most harrowing and disturbing war scenes ever filmed. Just the look in Dale’s eyes makes clear that this man is different the morning after than he was the night before.







The Pacific  
Photo credit: Andrew Cooper/HBO

Technically, “The Pacific” is simply unbelievable. Directed by Tim Van Patten (a veteran of “The Wire,” “Deadwood,” and 20 episodes of “The Sopranos”) and written by Bruce McKenna (three episodes of “Band of Brothers”), the first episode is paced perfectly and as expertly executed as any major feature film. The cinematography, score, editing, etc. would all be considered Oscar caliber if this was an awards season film.

Considering their notable and incredibly influential history, it’s amazing to note that this could be the best year HBO has ever delivered to paying subscribers. They have more than weathered the departure of their first wave of mega-hits like “The Sopranos” and “Six Feet Under” to find new ones in shows like “Big Love” and “True Blood”. 2010 brings a new show from the creator of “The Wire” called “Treme,” a new series from Martin Scorsese called “Boardwalk Empire,” a few returning favorites like “Entourage” and “Eastbound and Down,” and, of course, “The Pacific”. Showtime and FX have improved into two of the best networks on television but no one can touch HBO.

The quote that leads the production notes for “The Pacific” says more about war and what the mini-series will clearly be about than this critic possibly could, from the real Eugene Sledge - *“It is not history, and it is not my story alone. I have attempted, rather, to be the spokesman for my comrades, who were swept with me into the abyss of war.”* “The Pacific” is the story of a few and the story of many. It is both historical document and something that feels remarkably current. And, most of all, it is amazing, riveting television of a caliber that does not come along too often. You don’t want to miss a minute.

*‘The Pacific’ premieres on HBO on Sunday, March 14th, 2010 at 8pm CST. It stars James Badge Dale, Jon Seda, Joe Mazzello, William Sadler, Caroline Dhavernas, Jon Bernthal, Joshua Bitton, Tom Budge, Linda Cropper, Josh Helman, and Toby Leonard Moore. The first episode was directed by Tim Van Patten and written by Bruce C. McKenna. The series was executive produced by Tom Hanks, Steven Spielberg, and Gary Goetzman.*



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