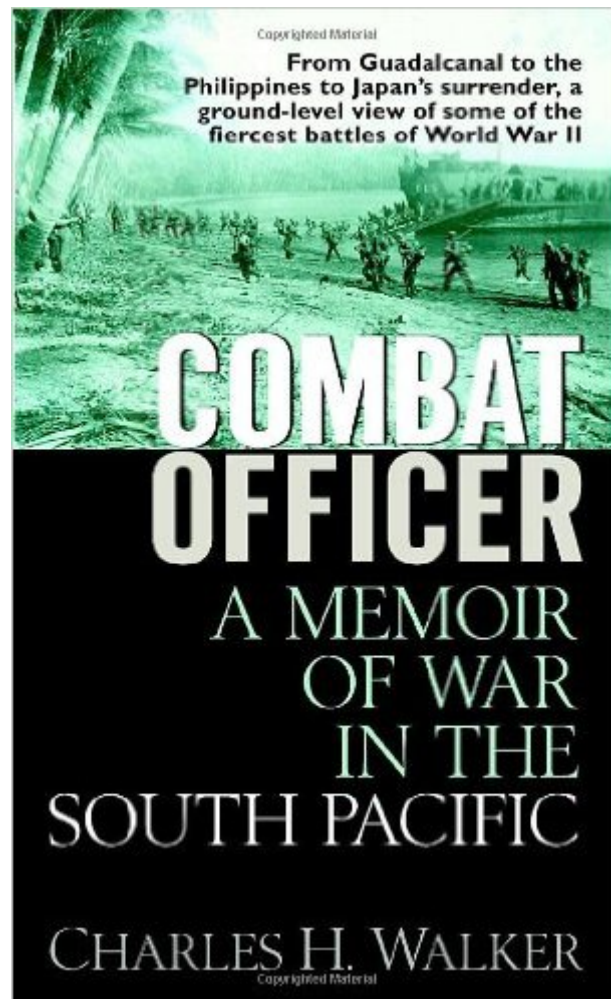


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Combat Officer: A Memoir Of War In The South Pacific



Synopsis

TO HELL AND BACK For the U.S., Guadalcanal was a bloody seven-month struggle under brutal conditions against crack Japanese troops deeply entrenched and determined to fight to the death. For Charles Walker, this horrific jungle battle “one that claimed the lives of 1,600 Americans and more than 23,000 Japanese” was just the beginning. On the eve of battle, 2nd Lt. Walker was ordered back to the States for medical reasons. But there was a war to be won, and he had no intention of missing it. In this devastatingly powerful memoir, Walker captures the conflict in all its horror, chaos, and heroism: the hunger, the heat, the deafening explosions and stench of death, the constant fear broken by moments of sheer terror. This is the gripping tale of the brave young American men who fought with tremendous courage in appalling conditions, willing to sacrifice everything for their country.

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Customer Reviews

Walker was an officer with 164th Infantry Rgt of the Americal Division. He fought on Guadalcanal, Bougainville and Leyte. Initially with the heavy weapons Co, he is promoted and most of his combat is as commander of E Co. As such he is in the line quite a bit and given the nature of the jungle war

he encounters Japanese soldiers on a frequent basis and to put it bluntly, personally accounts for many of them. A lot of this is with grenades and his rifle but also, in a first for me in my memoir reading, his combat knife! So there is combat in spades. The 164th, a National Guard unit, is the first to assist the 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal. Walker's role is positioning machine guns and seeing that they stay in action. His unit is hit hard in the attacks of late October and he encounters quite a few Japanese infiltrators. His thoughts on operating with the Marines are interesting (and I smiled to read about being on the receiving end of Marine 'scrounging'). In the offensive phase he is frequently on patrols and involved in assaults. After rest in Fiji he spends a year on Bougainville and there are a lot of patrols, ambushes and company level actions. There is a lot of insight here into the role of a company level officer. The most notable campaign to me though was the fight for Leyte. Again Walker commands E Co but the intensity of the fighting is much greater. Walker's units (and Walker himself) account for large numbers of Japanese. The extent of these actions was news to me! Walker also deals with much else. He discusses the particular challenges of the tropics (including large poisonous centipedes!), disease and in particular weaponry. One of the more surprising aspects was issues with the officer Corps.

4.25 stars: Walker provides an extensive and intriguing account of his part in the fighting on some of the Pacific's most brutal battles of WW2. Walker started off as a junior officer in the 164th Americal Regiment and ended the war as a major. He saw action on Guadalcanal, Bougainville and Leyte - fighting in the first American offensive action of 1942 all the way to one of the last in 1945. After his stint overseas, Walker would receive several promotions and combat medals for valor (IIRC, at least one Silver Star and Bronze Star each) and run the gauntlet of WW2 experiences. After spending ~4 years in combat, Walker would eventually come home to a three year old daughter as a complete stranger. I usually prefer enlisted men/NCO memoirs to officer memoirs because the latter seem to be less involved in personal combat or focus more on a leadership role/the red tape that is the US Army officer corps. Though I enjoy those accounts too, Walker's account has a good mix of both subjects that make this one of the better officer memoirs I have read. Despite spending most of the book as a company commander, Walker is often in the thick of fighting and is open and frank about his own personal combat deeds. Open and frankness are a major positive aspect of this account, too. A lot of topics are discussed, from office politics between officers, incompetence and bad calls from leadership to more nuanced topics like American citizenship, working with guerrilla fighters and civilian mistreatment (and good treatment as well) and lots of interesting anecdotes. Walker's account is certainly one of the best officer memoirs I have read and is the best non-USMC account

of the PTO I've read so far but it isn't written in a very compelling manner.

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