

Film review Hacksaw Ridge



Director: Mel Gibson

Screenplay: Andrew Knight, Robert Schenkkan

Starring: Andrew Garfield, Sam Worthington, Hugo Weaving, Vince Vaughn

This biographical drama details the real-life story of Desmond T. Doss (Garfield), from his early years in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Virginia to his army training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and finally into battle at Okinawa, Japan. A devout Christian and pacifist, his refusal to bear any weapon sets him at odds with his fellow soldiers initially, but they gradually come to understand his firmly-held beliefs brought about by significant experiences as a young adult.

The opening image of the film is a powerful reminder of the human cost of war, and then the first act focuses on Doss' pleasant childhood in America, despite the presence of a troubled father (Weaving), a war veteran. Doss falls in love before following his brother to enlist in the army, to the dismay of his father who fears losing his sons as he lost his friends, joining as a combat medic.

Act two serves as the calm before the storm with comic relief provided by Sergeant Howell (Vaughn) barking orders at new recruits, whipping them into shape. Doss receives a hostile reception from Captain Glover (Worthington), Howell and the other Privates, enduring humiliation, beatings, incarceration and near discharge before finally being permitted to serve with his unit in the 77th Light Division.

At Okinawa the tone darkens considerably.

As Doss and his comrades arrive, a convoy of the dead and dying of the 96th Light Division are evacuated, giving us an undoubted sense of the foreboding. Before the battle begins, the camera peers over the edge into the charring abyss and the score is silenced, in a little-used cinematic technique.

In a moment the senses are assaulted by a wall of noise; mortar shell explosions rupture the earth and machine gun fire rips a dozen soldiers to shreds of flesh and bones. At one point, blood splatters across the camera lens as bodies are decapitated and fall to the ground, with some still writhing in anguish. This no holds barred approach to the portrayal of war brutality is excruciatingly effective, bearing a similarity to the opening scenes of 'Saving Private Ryan'.

Shooting gives way to stabbing and fist fights for those who make it to the front lines of the Japanese as flame throwers engulf unidentifiable men. When night falls and firepower eases, the rats come as does the score, throbbing and pulsating back into our conscience, but when day returns the Japanese begin the offensive, forcing an American retreat. Garfield carries the rest of the story as a muddy, bloodied and exhausted Doss staying to rescue the injured from the devastation of the battlefield and lower them down the ridge, one by one. An extraordinary decision of selflessness and a seemingly impossible aim. From here on, Doss is on his own.

Doss was eventually awarded the Medal of Honour by President Harry S. Truman, the highest military honour the United States can bestow, and the first given to a conscientious objector for his extraordinary courage and bravery in service in rescuing 75 soldiers in battle.

Unsurprisingly, 'Hacksaw Ridge' has been nominated for multiple awards including six Oscars, five BAFTAs and three Golden Globes. Masterfully directed by Mel Gibson and featuring an outstanding performance by Andrew Garfield, the

film benefits further with excellent film editing from John Gilbert.

One obviously cannot confirm the absolute accuracy of the battle as illustrated in the film, but what it does portray is one of the most realistic you will see on screen. If you want a truthful depiction of the horror of war, go and see this film.

Hacksaw Ridge in in cinemas now.