

## **HACKSAW RIDGE (2016)**

- Released November 4th, 2016
- 2 hours 11 minutes
- \$45,000,000 million budget
- Mel Gibson directed
- Rated R for intense prolonged realistically graphic sequences of war violence including grisly bloody images
- Cross Creek Pictures, IM Global, Icon Productions
- Produced by Michael Bassick, Lawrence Bender, Len Blavatnik
- Received a 10-minute standing ovation at the Venice Film Festival in September.

## **ABOUT DESMOND DOSS/HACKSAW RIDGE:**

- Saved 75 men without firing or carrying a gun. He was the only American soldier in WWII to fight on the front lines without a weapon.
- Single-handedly evacuated the wounded from behind enemy lines, braved fire while tending to soldiers and was wounded by a grenade and hit by snipers.
- He was the first conscientious objector to ever earn the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- The island of Okinawa was one of the key battlegrounds during World War II, where Allied forces led by the United States Army and Navy fought against eight divisions of the Imperial Japanese Army for supremacy. It was also one of the bloodiest in the Pacific, with an estimated total of over 82,000 direct casualties on both sides. The battle lasted from April until June 1945

## **QUICK THOUGHTS:**

- Phil Svitek
- Marisa Serafini
- Demetri Panos

## **DEVELOPMENT**

- “Walden wanted a PG-13 movie and I thought the story would be hurt if we went that way because it’s so intense,” Mechanic says.
- Wallace, who had directed Gibson in “We Were Soldiers,” had been attached to direct but in late 2014, Gibson came on board as director.
- On Aug. 17, YooZoo Pictures acquired Chinese rights in the first high-profile acquisition for the company, which will also have a presentation credit in international territories.
- Hal Wallis was trying to get the rights to this man’s story back in the late ’40s. They even sent Audie Murphy to go and talk to Desmond Doss to see if they could loosen him up to give them the rights. He said, not for sale. He was a farmer. He was growing his vegetables. He never even went to a motion picture.

## **WRITING (Robert Schenkkan, Andrew Knight)**

- Schenkkan- *All the Way*, *The Pacific*, *The Andromeda Strain*, *The Quiet American*
- Knight- *Rake (TV Series)*, *The Water Diviner*, *Jack Irish (TV Series)*, *Tripping Over (TV Series)*, *CrashBurn (TV Series)*. Pulitzer-winning playwright
- Greg Crosby had been negotiating with the Seventh-day Adventist Church for rights, but the church opted to give control over to Benedict, who was working on the documentary.
- Mechanic, who was based at Disney at the time, funded the first screenplay.

## STORY/CAST

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Religion & Faith
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Pacifism

### ANDREW GARFIELD (Desmond Doss)

- *The Amazing Spider-Man 1 & 2, The Social Network, Never Let Me Go, The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*
- “It was beautifully written. The character was so compelling—it was one of those stories that rang a bell inside me. With this one I felt compelled enough that I knew my drive to do it would supersede any doubt I had about myself being able to do it. If the longing to do it goes beyond my self-doubt, then I’m in.”
- “for me it was all about getting my body as strong, and as seemingly not strong, as possible. I needed to look as thin as Desmond was, but create this kind of inner, core strength. So that took some work. And there was a boot camp that all the boys did.”
- “I think he was more method with the other characters in the film, but because we have such an intimate relationship that we’re portraying, I think he wanted to truly be himself around me so that we could really get to know each other and that connection could be very organic. So he dropped the accent with me, so that we could just get deeper and connect more and be very, very real with each other and have a beautiful open communication with one another, so it could be quite seamless, this connection and this draw that we have to one another. So that was pretty important.” - Palmer

### TERESA PALMER (Dorothy Schutte)

- *Lights Out, Triple 9, The Choice, Point Break, Knight of Cups, Warm Bodies, Take Me Home Tonight, I Am Number Four*
- Listened to audio tapes, photographs, Read Desmond & Dorothy’s love letters
- “So I had to completely transform my voice, even the intonation of my words and how I have certain lilts on my words that she didn’t have. So I had to work with a dialect coach and really changing the tone of my voice, as well as the accent.”
- “I put myself down on tape, sent [producer Bill Mechanic] my little iPhone audition, and then I didn’t hear anything for a few months, so I wasn’t sure that I got it. I just figured I hadn’t got the job. So I moved on with life, and then I found out that Mel had seen the tape and he really liked it and he wanted to Skype with me at some point. Then I got a phone call one night saying, “Mel has been waiting for you on Skype for 40 minutes.” Then I realized that obviously some emails had gone missing, and no one had told me when this Skype conversation would be, and so, I was completely unprepared. I hadn’t re-read the script in all those months, so I just had to jump on Skype immediately, and all my devices were dead. So I had like two percent on my iPad. I had no percent on my phone. I had to jump on my computer, and then the computer wasn’t working. It was literally the most disastrous Skype meeting I’ve ever had with a director, but I got the job somehow. At the end of it, he was like, “I like you. You’re real.” Because I was very flustered. I didn’t have any makeup on. It was the most unprepared I have been for a Skype meeting, but there was something about it that he liked, and I was cast from the Skype meeting.”

### **HUGO WEAVING/ RACHEL GRIFFITHS (Tom Doss) (Bertha Doss)**

- "I killed myself to get him. He wasn't going to do it but he finally did." - Gibson
- But Gibson kept inquiring; enough that Weaving agreed to look at the script. Weaving called Gibson and said he'd do it, but pulled out when the schedule didn't allow him enough preparation time. The production then had to reschedule, giving Weaving five weeks to work up the character. He was back in.
- "'I'd work with Hugo on anything, anywhere," she says. "The love and openness that I have on screen for him is actually genuine. I have it person to person and actor to actor. I just love him. I love watching him and being with him."
- Weaving: "We worked together years ago as a partnership and once you've established something like that, that becomes part of your history as actors. You develop a shorthand."

### **VINCE VAUGHN (Sergeant Howell)**

- But Vaughn says there's no "conscious" move to dramatic roles. He insists he's just picking scripts and roles that energize him.
- "It's more about feeling overtaken by something that makes you a little nervous and you just can't stop thinking about it, making sure you're stepping into stuff that you're really excited about," says Vaughn, 46.
- When Vaughn's Howell first ripped into the assembled battalion, "every single actor had tears in his eyes trying not to laugh in front of maybe one of the funniest men on the planet."

### **PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Simon Duggan)**

- *Warcraft: The Beginning, 300: Rise of an Empire, The Great Gatsby, Live Free or Die Hard, Underworld: Evolution, I, Robot*
- started shooting in September 2015, and went through to Christmas.
- 59 days.
- "Six weeks of war filming before, and also the barracks filming before [Hugo, Rachel, Teresa] came in. They finished with us, with me and Hugo and Rachel and Andrew, and that story." - Palmer
- It's maintaining safety and yet making it look incredibly insane or whatever the word is. A kind of madness in what's going on in there. A barrage of fire and explosives and guns and having it look real, and not hurting anyone.
- People being lit on fire. That's old but they're even getting better with that stuff, these neoprene suits and stuff they put on is amazing. The pyrotechnics of it to keep it really going. The Japanese called it a steel rain.
- They called it a steel rain, and it was the first real use of napalm. So when they were squirting these guys down with petrol and stuff that was so bad. They had to use it because of the caves and the underground stuff and it became a much feared new tool. The logistics of filming that with all the gunfire, with the explosions, with the flamethrowers
- Barry Robison- Robison and his team created a nine-by-12-foot model of the ridge and battlefield.
- Soundstage in Sydney
- A team sculpted farmland with bulldozers and backhoes to shape the devastated landscape. "The battlefield was really void of much color other than the blackened earth, the fog of war, the flamethrowers, whatever clothing the guys had," says Robison.

- The small town of Richmond in Australia’s Hunter Valley stood in for Doss’s home in Virginia. We had to change all the street signs, all the dressing in the fronts of the stores, and make it feel like you were in the United States. That was a huge challenge.“

#### **DIRECTING** (Mel Gibson)

- **Directing:** *Apocalypto, The Passion of the Christ, Braveheart, The Man Without a Face*
- **Acting:** *Edge of Darkness, Signs, We Were Soldiers, What Women Want, The Patriot, Lethal Weapon Franchise*
- “It was brought to me by the producers. They’d struggled with it for fifteen years to get it made. And they gave it to me and it was like, “Whoa.” It got me. So inspiring. Such a hero. What a great story to tell. I decided to just throw in and go for it. And then when I found out Andrew was doing it that was really cool. And, you know, what’s not to do?”
- “I met all those old diggers from the trenches. I talked to World War II guys, because I’m into research. I talked to murderers in prison. I find it intensely interesting to try to access somebody’s head who do some incredibly interesting things. I talked to the Korean War guys, a lot of the Vietnam guys. I’ve talked to the guys from Iraq, a lot of disabled vets. In fact, we showed it to the Disabled American Veterans conference. I went [with the film] to Georgia, South Carolina, Fort Benning. I’m really quite gratified that it played out the way it did, especially for the vets and the disabled guys is that they found it cathartic but they found it therapeutic. They really dug it.”- Gibson
- “He’s incredibly instinctive and emotional—all blood and guts, nerve endings, viscera and muscle. Simultaneously, he’s got a tremendous intellect. He’s very integrated. Even if we had a plan for the day, it would become null and void, because he was so awake and open to what the moment needed.”
- “Mel would sit and eat with the whole cast, the whole crew, knew everyone's name. We had a crew of 200 plus. Constantly be engaging with people”

#### **SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA**

- Damien Thomlinson makes his screen acting debut as Ralph Morgan, a soldier found with his legs blown off during the brutal Battle of Okinawa in the World War II drama. Thomlinson, 35, had both legs destroyed by a Taliban bomb in 2009 while serving with Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan, a tale that inspired director Mel Gibson while shooting the movie in Sydney. With three years of acting classes under his belt, Thomlinson reached out to the *Hacksaw* crew to see if there might be a role.
- Twenty-four other men would also receive the United States of America’s highest military for their actions during the Battle of Okinawa — 13 posthumously.

#### **EDITING/VFX** (John Gilbert)

- *The November Man, Chasing Mavericks, Killer Elite, Bandslam, The Bank Job, Bridge to Terabithia*
- Worked with Mel Gibson for about 10 weeks on it
- Done at the end of March and previewed in April or May
- Mixed at Sony in August / September 2016
- “I probably played with the structure less on this movie than I have on just about anything I’ve done.”
- “I had never worked with Mel. I had read the Hacksaw script because I was working with Bill Mechanic who was the producer. I was in New Zealand at that point and I knew that they were going on a location scout on the Gold Coast in Australia. It’s about a three or

four hour flight to Brisbane, so I flew there and had dinner with Mel and came home again. I had no idea whether I had the job or not until a month later Bill called and said: "We want you to do it." It's such a difficult decision for a director, because they just don't know how it's going to go until they actually work with you."

### **SOUND/MUSIC** (Rupert Gregson-Williams)

- *Hotel Rwanda, Over the Hedge, Bee Movie, Zookeeper, Made of Honor, Bedtime Stories, Winter's Tale, Veep, The Crown*
- British film score composer
- "Mel and I both felt it was important not to represent Desmond as a conventional war hero – he wasn't," Gregson-Williams
- The score was recorded at London's Abbey Road Studios, with an orchestra that included up to 70 musicians and a 36-piece choir.
- Gregson-Williams found his way into the Doss character by writing a theme built around two cellos and two bassoons, with a two-part harmony reminiscent of a Gregorian chant.
- "Mel was very hands-on with the birth of the themes for the film, and was careful to guide me emotionally, by that, I mean that it wasn't about musical style, instrumentation, tempo, etc., but about the subtleties of a principled hero. Mel and I had long conversations simply about story" says Gregson-Williams
- Initially James Horner – who scored Gibson's previous films *The Man Without a Face*, *Braveheart*, and *Apocalypto* – was attached to the film, but sadly he died in June 2015 before he could write a note. The project then fell to John Debney, Gibson's composer on *The Passion of the Christ*, and reports indicate that Debney *did* write, and possibly even record, some music for the film. However, just a month or so before the film's planned premiere at the Venice Film Festival, unspecified "problems" with the score resulted in a composer change – out went Debney, and in came Rupert Gregson-Williams, who was introduced to Gibson via a mutual friend of director David Yates, with whom Gregson-Williams worked on *The Legend of Tarzan* earlier this year.
- Even-note theme that runs throughout the length of the score, representing both Doss himself, and the strength of his convictions in the face of all manner of opposition.
- The theme is first heard 27 seconds into the opening cue, "Okinawa Battlefield," before gradually melting into something much more lush and sweeping, with lilting guitars and woodwinds, as Doss's memories of his life before the war come flooding back.
- Their Japanese opponents are given some identifying instrumental coloring, including shrill blasts from a *shakuhachi* bamboo flute, machine gun-like rat-a-tat Taiko drums, *jinkai* horns, and even allusions to Mongolian throat singing. The use of the *jinkai* – horns made from large conch shells with a brass mouthpiece
- "Sound design is of course very important. I made a music temp track, and my assistant Carly Turner added sound FX." - Gilbert

### **PROMOTION**

- "We tested it twice and I don't think anyone disliked it, and the scores were really good. Women liked it more than guys." -Gibson

## **BOX OFFICE**

- Domestic Summary (As of November 9th): \$19,907,246
  - Worldwide: \$19,907,246
  - Opening Weekend: \$15,190,758  
(#3 rank, 2,886 theaters, \$5,264 average)
- Widest Release: 2,886 theaters

## **RECEPTION**

- IMDB: 8.8
- Cinemascore: A
- RT: 88% Tatometer, 96% Audience
- Received a 10-minute standing ovation at the Venice Film Festival in September.

## **SEQUEL/LEGACY**

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**