



Battalion of the Damned: The 1st Marine Paratroopers at Gavutu and Bloody Ridge, 1942

James F. Christ

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In May 1942 the Japanese landed on a number of southern islands in the British Solomons and began constructing an airfield on Guadalcanal. Their actions threatened Australia and her vital American supply lines and could not be tolerated by the Allies. The 1st Marine Division, with its attached 1st Marine Parachute Battalion, was directed to spearhead the assault on Gavutu Island and take the Guadalcanal airfield, even though it was not prepared for such an offensive action. The result was a bloodbath, and when it was over, less than one in five of the Marine paratroopers walked off Bloody Ridge.

Although crucial to the action, the 1st Parachute Battalion is rarely credited for its part in what Gen. Alexander A. Vandergrift, USMC, called the key battle of the Guadalcanal campaign. Here, James F. Christ draws not only on government documents but also on hundreds of hours of interviews with the men who were there to tell their remarkable story. It is a story of how in the face of overwhelming odds and seemingly irrational decisions from above, the battalion fought heroically, accepting orders without question and adapting to circumstances beyond its control despite sickness and a critical shortage of resources. In bringing public attention to the contributions made by these men during the first amphibious assault by U.S. forces in World War II, this book adds significantly to the history of the war in the Pacific.

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