



Forgotten Raiders of '42: The Fate of the Marines Left Behind on Makin (Military Controversies)

Tripp Wiles

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On October 16, 1942, on Kwajalein Atoll, at the fringe of the Japanese Empire, members of the Imperial Japanese Navy's 6th Base Unit ceremonially beheaded nine Marines from the 2nd Raider Battalion. The captives held no hopes for pardon or for rescue as they walked blindfolded, one by one, to the spot of execution, which also became their burial site. The Marine Corps and their families already thought they were dead, the men knew.

Forgotten Raiders of '42 is the account of how these volunteer patriots, unbeknownst to their command, were inadvertently left behind after the Marines' raid on Makin Island in August 1942. The raid, which was a morale boost for the Navy Department and the American public, was hailed at home as a great success even as the condemned Raiders knelt to await their fate. The heroism of the Raiders-under the command of Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson, who later received the Navy Cross-has been well documented by the press, in books, and in Hollywood. In a country craving good news and heroes, Carlson and the Navy delivered. The details of the raid's shaky beginning and tragic end, however, would not be known until many years later.

After a summary of the dramatic raid, Tripp Wiles focuses on the Raiders' withdrawal from Makin and on Carlson's decisions that directly affected the men who were left behind. Wiles also examines the actions, inactions, and conditions that led to their unintentional abandonment. Finally, he reviews the Navy's private reactions and, using new documents and interviews, the Raiders' fate, bringing a measure of closure to the disappearance and execution of the forgotten Raiders.

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