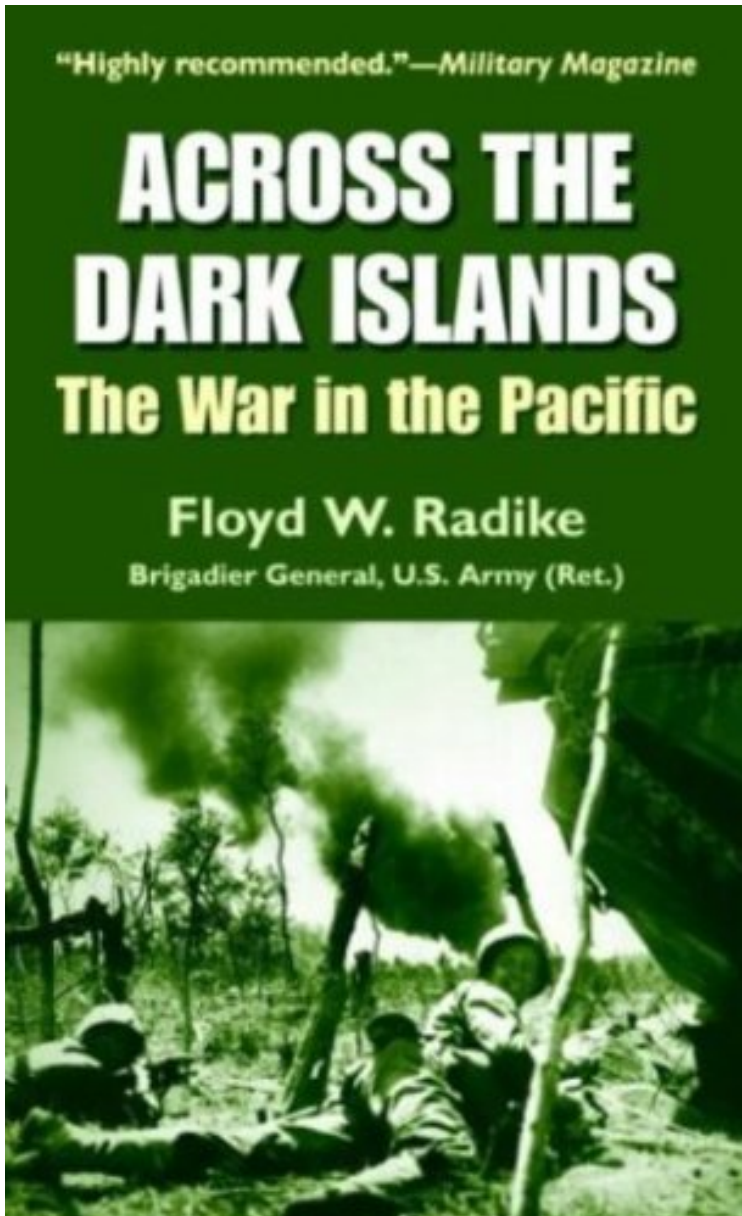


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Across the Dark Islands: The War in the Pacific



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurACROSS THE DARK ISLANDSThe War in the PacificFloyd W. RadikeBrigadier General, U.S. Army (Ret.)I remember sitting in a foxhole on Guadalcanal in the rain. The sergeant I shared the hole with shook his head and asked me: What in the hell are we doing on this godforsaken island? Why dont we let the Japs keep this stinking rock? I didnt have an answer.The war in the Pacific has never been

portrayed more honestly or in prose more powerful than in *Across the Dark Islands*. In this unflinching account, Brig. Gen. Floyd W. Radike remembers how he started his military career in the mud and mayhem of Guadalcanal, fighting a campaign as crucial to the war's outcome as it was chaotic and cruel. Here is no whitewashed view of that war or the men who waged it. Here instead is the sobering story of a junior officer in a National Guard unit suddenly shipped off to the front lines, disdained by regular army elitists who served beside him, and given second-class status so that others could earn headlines and promotions. While struggling to survive amid dirt and disease, routine and monotony, Radike endured harrowing missions incompetently, arrogantly, or just impatiently planned. As no book ever has, *Across the Dark Islands* reveals shocking details removed from myth and sentimentality: how American commanders were intimidated by the Japanese stereotype of fearlessness, night attacks, and cries of *banzai* . . . how imitations of John Wayne heroics caused immediate death . . . threats of court-martial quieted accusations of Army injustice . . . and panic and flight destroyed a fight for the enemy's Munda Field airstrip, an event that disappeared from the record and appears in no official history. Emerging from the hellish conditions and military miscalculations is a tribute to common sense, courage, and respect for proper procedure, attributes that would help the author and soldiers like him to save their lives, succeed in battle, and win the war. From Guadalcanal to the Philippines to a planned invasion of Japan ended by the atom bomb, General Radike's experience spanned the entire course of the pivotal Pacific theater conflict. Candid and cautionary, his memoir is an important work whose writing rivals that of classic novels like James Jones's *The Thin Red Line* and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. It should be read by anyone looking to join an army or wage a war.

From the Hardcover edition. **Chapter one: Background: Guadalcanal.** We knew as much about the island as we did about the dark side of the moon. Most of what we knew came from the flow of war correspondent stories that appeared daily, stories emphasizing the bravery of the marines, the maniacal courage of the Japanese, and the hot, dark, mysterious, disease-filled jungle. The best impression I could call up was of something dark, dark and sinister and shapeless. This was a place where the form and outline of battle was lost in the free flow and violence of the jungle encounter; a place where the enemy was never there, but here. The announcement of our destination created a stunned silence, followed almost immediately by an uproar of conversation. Our captain leaned toward us and said, "This will give us a chance to get at those slant-eyed monkeys quicker. We ought to be able to clear the island in a few weeks, I'll bet that. . . . But he was interrupted by the XO who figured that there had been enough chatter. I attended a meeting this afternoon on the command ship, and there is little or no written information available for distribution here. After all, when we left Pearl we were heading for Australia to join General MacArthur's forces. That remark brought a few whistles and considerable shuffling around. After all, we knew a little about the country down under: the swagger of its fighting men, the lovely girls, the kangaroo and wallaby, the walkabout, and the rambunctious history of a people who had tackled a tough continent similar to our own and conquered it. But that was not to be. The XO continued. One of our regiments is already going ashore there [Guadalcanal]. As soon as the navy can turn its convoy protection around and send it back for us, we'll be on our way. He paused, looked down, and once again smoothed the rug with the toe of his shiny low-quarter shoe. What information do we have? You know there is a marine division there along with some army regiments that have been sent in. The fighting in the early days was very bitter, and the marines kicked the hell out of the Japs whenever they used their *banzai* tactics. But, he said, the Japs have been reinforced. There have been a lot of naval battles in the Solomons and the navy has been closed-mouthed about the results. Which means we didn't win. The marines are still game, but tired, sick, and their strength is down. The army units are beginning to look the same way. So it looks like it's going to be up to us to complete the job. He pointed at the red line that marked U.S.-held territory on Guadalcanal. It started at the sea, twisted inland, and finally emerged at the coast farther west. That's what we control now. I'm not saying the enemy controls the rest of the island, because he doesn't. But you will soon find out that what's in the perimeter is what's yours. There's a meaning to perimeter there that you never read in a field manual. You'll find out a lot more about it when we get there. He was right. Perimeter was going to be a way of life. We will have to fight with what we are carrying on these ships. Most of our combat gear and heavy equipment is on the docks in Brisbane. We'll have to depend on the army and marine units on the island for support. And that, he paused and looked at us, scanning the room from side to side, is not a hell of a lot. He lit up a cigar and puffed a few times, creating a small cloud in front of the map. He motioned to the British officer he had brought with him. This is Captain McGregor. He is the deputy resident commissioner for the Solomon Islands. He has been at his post for a little more than four years, and he was at Tulagi when the Japs came. He escaped to one of the other islands

and has been an advisor to the marines since the early days in August. He will try to give you some ideas of what may be ahead. The captain stood up, saluted smartly, stood at ease and smiled at us. If there was a stereotype of a British officer, McGregor was the complete and perfect example. He was tall, well set up with a fitted, starched uniform. His hair was much longer than U.S. officers wore. His mustache was copious but in good repair. Well, chaps, he started with the same accent we had heard in Suva, let me give you a short geography and history lesson. The Solomons are a chain of volcanic islands that stretch from southeast to northwest between the equator and ten degrees south. They are hot, covered with rain forest and jungle, and infested with tropical diseases, the worst of which is malaria. Before the war, a number of companies had opened up plantations on the coast for the growing of coconuts, and the preparation of copra. As you know copra is processed for coconut oil, which is an ingredient of many of the soaps you Yanks use. Other than the plantation owners and government personnel, there were a number of missionaries in the various islands. He turned and looked at the map and directed his words to it rather than to us. It was an out-of-the-way place these islands of no great importance to the Crown, of minor importance economically, of no importance politically. He turned back to us. That is, until the Japanese came. Now we seem suddenly to have become one of the strategic prizes of the war. Somebody raised a hand. Why has the fighting stayed in such a small area? a voice queried. A good question, McGregor replied. There is little flat land in these islands. The Jap was quick to notice that the small plain where Henderson Field is located now would be ideal for an airfield.

The war up to this point has involved seizing the airfield and protecting it from the enemy. And as I understand it, pushing the Jap farther up the coast, and away from Henderson, will be your mission. Another hand was raised and another question. What about the natives? Most of them are short, dark, and not very good-looking, he said with a twinkle in his eye. Laughter. They have been under pressure by the enemy to cooperate with them, but most have gone to bush and are loyal to the Allies. At this point the XO intervened. In the next few days we'll try to get you as much information as we can. Captain McGregor will be sailing with us, and you'll have lots of opportunities to talk to him. Somebody hollered, Attention! We stood. The XO and the British captain disappeared behind the map. Somebody hollered, Dismissed! We shuffled out of the smoky brightness of the wardroom into the warm, humid darkness. The Roll Call Up to this point in the narrative we have identified only the time and place of an action that was to change all of our lives, for better or worse. Only a few of the players have been identified who were to play out an epic drama of heroism, cowardice, brilliance, and stupidity in an environment and against a foe unique in our military history. We shall concern ourselves with the regiment, my regiment. Numbering 3,000 men, it is small enough to have allowed for interaction between many of its members. It is large enough to have engaged in a variety of actions and to have exhibited all the positive and negative aspects of a military organization subjected to the rigors of war in the Pacific. Of all the groups to which men belong family, church, lodge, friends at work none is more difficult to describe in terms of how men relate to each other than the military. A man joins a unit, and almost immediately he establishes a relationship with one or two others.

In a day or so he will be on speaking terms with his superiors and his peers. The relationship with subordinates, if any, is handled in a more gingerly manner. The object is to give the best possible impression to those you command, and this usually involves finding out as much as you can about them while maintaining an appropriate social distance. A man in uniform is no different from any other man. Some make quick friendships with a few, others with many. Some make no friends and remain aloof from intimate conversation or group activities. In the regiment we divided into two natural groupings, the state group and the outsiders. The regiment had been part of a National Guard division in the States; but after Pearl Harbor, the regiment had been sent to the Pacific and found itself part of a Regular Army division on Oahu. The field-grade officers, from the regiment commander to the majors in battalions, were from the state group, as were most of the company commanders. Most of the junior officers, lieutenants like myself, were fresh from the various service schools in the United States. We had little in common with each other, coming from everywhere in the forty-eight, except our common heritage of having attended the infantry or artillery school. We had joined the regiment in September, had some weeks to train our platoons, some more weeks to load up our supplies and equipment, and then set sail in December. To be in a National Guard regiment in an active army division was to be second best. The professionals, or West Pointers, who dominated all the other division units, could hardly be enthusiastic about having a third of their ground-pounders represented by a force that they held in polite low esteem. Now that we were going into combat we would be watched like hawks, subject to intense scrutiny by generals and staff officers, examined in a strong light like that of a jeweler looking at a diamond and prepared to find a flaw. For the professionals, war was their cup of tea; it is

what they were there for, their *raison d'être*. It was the main chance, the golden opportunity to test their mettle and move into the stream of quick promotions that accompanies combat. I had been a National Guardsman before the war and had left my regiment in California to attend infantry school. I should have felt at home joining another Guard unit, but such was not the case. I was as much of an outsider in the regiment as the regiment was in the division. I had hopes that all this would change, but I knew if it did that it would be a long time in the future.

From the Hardcover edition.

Présentation de l'auteur
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Floyd W. Radike
Brigadier General, U.S. Army (Ret.)

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