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Bloody Tarawa: The 2d Marine Division, November 20-23, 1943

Eric Hammel

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On the morning of Saturday, November 20, 1943, the 2d Marine Division undertook the first modern amphibious assault against a well-defended beachhead. The objective was tiny Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, and the going was supposed to be easy—a target already ""pounded into coral dust"" by a massive naval and air bombardment. But what the Marines discovered was an island garrison alive and well, the Japanese defenses intact and manned by foes who would rather die than surrender. The battle that followed—three full days of terror during which more than 3,000 died to ""secure"" an island half the size of New York's Central Park—is fully told in words and pictures in this dramatic book. Building on the updated text of their 76 Hours: The Invasion of Tarawa, the authors use more than 250 photos and combat drawings from the U.S. Navy and Marine archives and private collections to reveal the graphic horror of warfare at its worst. Their book follows every terrifying step as the Marines, failed by the invasion's planners, are forced to wade more than 500 yards through fire-swept, knee-deep water, reaching land only to face what many historians agree was the best, most concentrated defenses American troops encountered in the entire Pacific War. The result is an immortal story of certainty shattered and courage recovered against overwhelming odds, of victory culled from near-defeat, and its terrible cost.

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