



Evans Carlson, Marine Raider

By Duane Schultz

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Reviewed by

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Few Marine leaders have engendered as much historical scholarship and debate as Marine Corps Brigadier General Evans Carlson. Duane Schultz, a prolific military history author, retells the story of Carlson, focusing on the Makin Island Raid and the Long Patrol on Guadalcanal. The work is easy to read and relatively short but it is far from complete, lacking crucial placement of Carlson's achievements in the wider context of Marine Corps operations during World War II, and is avowedly pro-Carlson. It is this personalization that, unfortunately, reduces the value of the book for scholars and practitioners alike.

The book's 19 chapters cover Carlson's early life and military career, quickly working towards the climactic operations at Makin and the Long Patrol, concluding with a brief epilogue covering Carlson's life after 1943 until his death in 1947. Using a variety of secondary sources, Schultz pulls together a portrait of Carlson as a willful, unorthodox thinker, commander, and leader who impacted how selected groups of Marines brought the fight to the Japanese during the early days of World War II.

The bulk of the work focuses on the famed Makin Island Raid (17-18 August 1942). Carlson led approximately 200 Marine Raiders on an attack on the Japanese garrison at Makin Island, debarking from submarines to raid the island in an attempt to distract Japanese forces from American landings at Tulagi and Guadalcanal. After initial encounters with the small Japanese garrison, Carlson and the majority of the Raiders were able to return to the waiting submarines and return to a jubilant reception in Pearl Harbor. Ultimately, though the raid was a successful test of Raider tactics, it accomplished little despite being feted in honors and press upon the Raiders' return.

The second largest section, covering the Long Patrol on Guadalcanal (6 November - 4 December 1942), is the book's best written section and most valuable to modern tacticians. Schultz clearly writes the story of the 2nd Raider Battalion's month-long patrol in the Japanese rear areas, focusing on the unpredictability of jungle warfare and the fortitude of the Marines. While combat with the Japanese was fierce, the jungle with its inherent diseases and hardships took a higher toll on the Raiders. At the end of the patrol, the Raiders were unofficially declared unfit for combat and given a rest for almost a year, during which time Carlson was relieved of command and transferred stateside.

Schultz is openly pro-Carlson in his writing. The result is an unbalanced assessment of Carlson as a commander or the impact of the Raiders on the Marine Corps or the war as a whole. This bias is particularly evident in the analysis of Makin, specifically with regards to Carlson's command presence and decision making. Two key issues on Makin arose. The first was Carlson's indecisiveness when confronting the Japanese. The second comes from the

revelations of Major General Oscar F. Peatross in his 1992 article in *Leatherneck Magazine*, where it was revealed that a surrender proposal was prepared on 18 August 1942 by Carlson and other Raider leaders. While Schultz addresses the surrender proposal in about 10 pages, he glosses over the larger allegations that Carlson froze in command.

Overall, *Evans Carlson, Marine Raider* is an easy-to-read biography of limited scope of a complex and divisive Marine leader often seen as one of the fathers of American special operations forces. The chapters on the Long Patrol are of value to those looking to understand jungle warfare, operations behind enemy lines, and leadership in austere combat conditions. They serve useful as primers or survey texts leading to other, deeper narratives and analyses. Unfortunately, the lack of balance when presenting Carlson as a leader on Makin or in the larger scope of the Marine Corps during World War II limits the book's value.