



The Boldest Plan is the Best: The Combat History of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion during WWII

Jim Travis Broumley

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In the fall of 1941, as the United States Army scrambled to prepare for the war they knew was coming, a new kind of soldier was training with a new way of getting to the battlefield – the paratrooper. As fate would have it, the fourth battalion of parachute infantry to be activated would be the first to deploy to England and the first to jump into combat, while their more celebrated airborne brothers were still training in the States. This independent airborne unit was designated the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, nicknamed the Geronimos. The paratroopers of the 509th PIB were also known as “gingerbread men” for the figure on the unit patch they wore. Lieutenant Colonel Edson Raff, the first combat commander of the Geronimos, believed that in military operations “the boldest plan is the best.” That philosophy was demonstrated over and over again by the 509th PIB on the battlefields of World War II. Read the riveting true story of the first American paratroopers to jump into combat during the invasion of North Africa. Follow these same men as they parachute behind enemy lines in Italy, hold the line against a German onslaught at Anzio, and parachute into southern France. Stay with them until their last fight, during the Battle of the Bulge, where only 55 men walked away. Little has been written about the gingerbread men in WWII. Now the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion’s combat chronicle is available in one source. In “The Boldest Plan is the Best,” author Jim Broumley has skillfully crafted a narrative of the beginnings of American airborne and the first paratroopers to go into combat. The exploits of this “bastard battalion” are brought to life with the voices of the veterans themselves, seventy photographs, and seventeen original maps. Enough background on WWII is provided for the enjoyment of a general audience, but readers of military history will also relish this story of an often overlooked unit of elite American paratroopers.

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