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Peacekeepers At War: Beirut 1983-The Marine Commander Tells His Story

PEACEKEEPERS AT WAR

*Beirut 1983—
The Marine Commander
Tells His Story*

Col. Timothy J. Geraghty, USMC (Ret.)



Synopsis

On October 23, 1983, nearly simultaneous suicide truck bombings killed 241 U.S. peacekeepers in their barracks at the Beirut International Airport (BIA) and 58 French paratroopers at their headquarters two miles north of BIA. In this long-awaited book, the Marine Corps commander of the U.S. Multi-National Peacekeeping Force that was destroyed by terrorists in Lebanon tells his story for the first time. Together, these suicide bombings comprised the largest nonnuclear explosion ever recorded and are now recognized as a seminal event leading to the current war on terrorism. Such acts of war revealed a new, highly effective tactic, which complemented the terrorist's strategic goals—the withdrawal of the peacekeepers and Western influence from Lebanon and a change in U.S. policy. *Peacekeepers at War* lays out, in detail, a sequence of events leading up to the suicide truck bombings from which one can extrapolate the rationale, motives, and perpetrators behind it. Geraghty argues that the absence of any retribution against the perpetrators emboldened the terrorists to assume they could attack Americans and Western interests with impunity. This led to kidnappings, torture, and the murders of Americans and other Westerners. *Peacekeepers at War* will be of interest to general readers who want to learn more about this seminal event and its effects on the current global war on terrorism.

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Customer Reviews

The 1983 experience of the U.S. Marines in Beirut brings to mind an 1852 experience of the Royal Marines aboard HMS Birkenhead when that ship was sinking and lacked adequate lifeboats for all aboard. In an effort to assure the safe debarkation of other passengers, the contingent of Royal Marines gave up their own claims to life preserving equipment and, instead, stood at attention on the topmost deck as the passengers were saved and the ship went down. It was a well-known story in the mid-19th century and is memorialized in Rudyard Kiplings' words, "To stand and be still to the Birkenhead drill is a damn tough bullet to chew." In 1983, the 24th Marine Amphibious Unit was placed by the department of state in an indefensible position at the Beirut Airport in the hope that their presence would somehow help bring to an end the brutal warfare that was tearing Lebanon to pieces. The plan blew up in their faces. Colonel Timothy J. Geraghty was the commanding officer of the Marine Amphibious Unit. His story is well written and highly readable. It is written in a summary fashion that avoids getting bogged down in detail. The book contains 214 pages of text, plus appendices. The first two-thirds of the book cover the bombing and the investigative hearings that followed it. Thereafter, Colonel Geraghty discusses what he believes are the lessons learned from the tragedy; and he presents a primer of the individuals, groups and political activists in the Middle East. This book is significant in that it adds another level to the story of the Beirut suicide bombing. Previous accounts did not present the commander's assessment of the situation, nor did they cover the communications between the field commander, the pentagon, the state department, and the president.

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