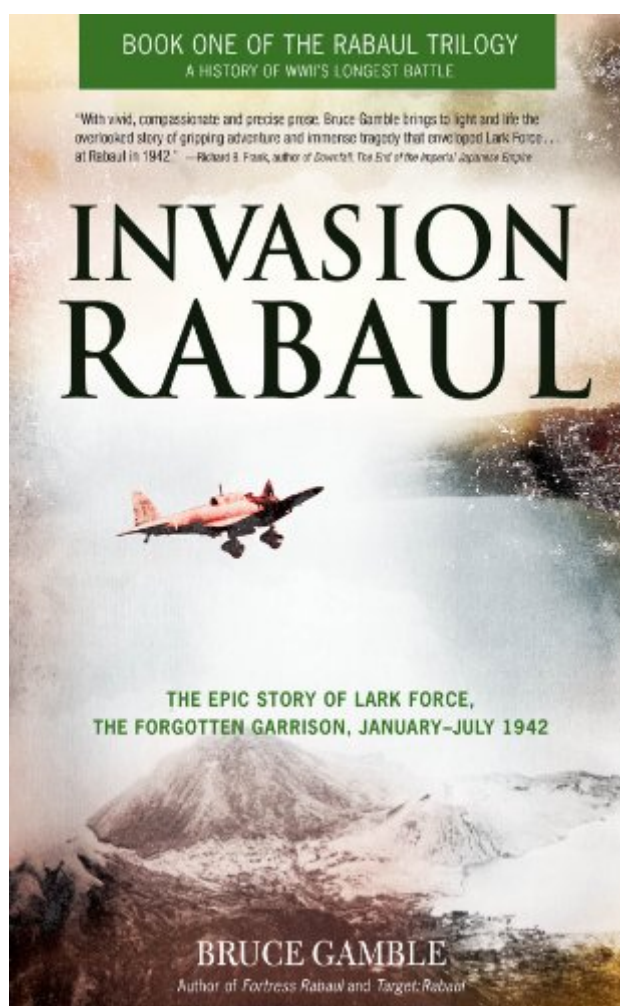


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# Invasion Rabaul: The Epic Story Of Lark Force, The Forgotten Garrison, January - July 1942



## Synopsis

The riveting first book in Bruce Gamble's critically acclaimed Rabaul trilogy, originally published in hardcover as *Darkest Hour*, which chronicles the longest battle of World War II. January 23, 1942, New Britain. It was 2:30 a.m., the darkest hour of the day and, for the tiny Australian garrison sent to defend this Southwest Pacific island, soon to be the darkest hour of the war. Lark Force, comprising 1,500 soldiers and six nurses, faced a vastly superior Japanese amphibious unit poised to overrun Rabaul, capital of Australia's mandated territories. *Invasion Rabaul*, the first book in military historian Bruce Gamble's critically acclaimed Rabaul trilogy, is a gut-wrenching account of courage and sacrifice, folly and disaster, as seen through the eyes of the defenders who survived the Japanese assault. Gamble's gripping narrative follows key individuals—soldiers and junior officers, an American citizen and an Army nurse among them—who were driven into the jungle, prey to the unforgiving environment and a cruel enemy that massacred its prisoners. The dramatic stories of the Lark Force survivors, told here in full for the first time, are among the most inspiring of the Pacific War—and they lay a triumphant foundation for one of today's most highly praised military nonfiction trilogies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the early hours of January 23, 1942, a large Japanese force sat poised to attack Rabaul. Standing in their way were the 1,500 Australian soldiers of Lark Force. In what was soon to become known as Australia's darkest hour in World War II, the Japanese swarmed ashore and overran the small garrison. Many were captured, but others managed to flee into the jungle. Over the next several months, these survivors tried in vain to stay one step ahead of the Japanese. Some managed to evade capture, others were rescued, but most were eventually rounded up by the Japanese. Seen as sacrificial by the Australian government, the men of Lark Force were basically on their own from the time they reached Rabaul. The Australian government refused to reinforce the garrison, and when the Japanese landed, they refused to pull them out. These men were on their own, with no hope of assistance. The contemptible acts of the garrison commander only made things worse. Ultimately, many of the Lark Force POWs perished when a Japanese freighter they were on was torpedoed by an American submarine. Author Bruce Gamble has written a magnificent history about one of World War II's longest battles. The battle for Rabaul raged from early 1942 up until the Japanese surrender in August, 1945. Gamble's trilogy covers each aspect of this historical campaign, from the Japanese invasion to the numerous bombings by the Allies, until the Japanese were left to "wither on the vine". Lark Force's story is inspiring, and the acts of heroism against nearly impossible odds shows the character of these fighting men. I highly recommend "Invasion Rabaul" along with Gamble's other books "Fortress Rabaul" and "Target Rabaul". This trilogy does a fine job of describing one of World War II's most pivotal battles.

I am reviewing the trilogy vice any individual book, as the three books are about the Rabaul campaign. The books are reasonably informative, but due to far too much redundant prose between books and the awful maps I had to knock a star each. Book 1 is not so much about the air campaign, but the destruction of Lark Force and how the Aussie's were captured and murdered over the course of the war. Book 2 is the most interesting, as the Allies struggle mightily to scrape together enough air power to do battle with Fortress Rabaul. Book 3 is less interesting, as Rabaul is bypassed and basically the campaign is one-sided as Allied material superiority becomes overwhelming. Expect at least 10% of each book to be duplicative of one of the other books in the trilogy. I believe any trilogy should be tied together as part of the story arc, but not nearly to the degree that this author chose.

It's hard to imagine that in 1941 the Australian government would send a tiny military force of 1,500 soldiers and 6 nurses to this remote island base in "hopes" of deterring the Japanese from invading

Australia if war was to break out. The author Bruce Gamble's research shows that besides sending this token force without adequate modern weapons and supplies the government had already documented how these men and women will be sacrificed should that invasion occur. He researched documents showing the government coldly discussed, among themselves, how they did not have the transportation to either reinforce or evacuate them, before they were sent. Bruce tells this tragic story from the viewpoint of those individual citizens, soldiers and nurses that did manage to somehow survive three and a half years of starvation and deprivation. That story of survival, by the author, documents the disturbing details of the barbarity perpetrated on their own soldiers and then how that inhumane treatment was amplified towards those people that the Japanese dominated. The author describes the personality quirks of Rabaul's Australian military leader and how his conflicting decisions led to possibly hundreds more Australians dieing in the jungle after the Japanese invaded in late January 1941. That struggle to escape and evade by individuals and groups accounts for about two thirds of this detailed book. Invasion Rabaul hooked this reader into reading book two "Fortress Raul" of this Trilogy! Joe (MaxPI) Maxwell

I thought this was an excellent book about WWII and the fighting in Rabaul. I was shocked at the barbaric ways of the Japanese and their treating of prisoners--whether natives, military, or missionary. Also, the cover-ups to keep people from knowing what really happened to the ship Montevideo Maru, carrying POWs, seemed so unnecessary. Also, I was surprised that the troops that were sent to Rabaul from Australia were just forgotten--no means to really rescue them. The efforts these men made to get off the island was beyond my imagination. I have decided to read the other two books in the trilogy. Gamble has done a lot of good research in compiling this history of a time in the South Seas during WWII. My only suggestions would be more maps and photos. I liked to see where the men were going, and many towns/bays/plantations/areas were not on the included maps. I would also have liked pictures of the terrain they were covering--mountains, jungle, coral--as they tried to escape the Japanese. I have read other books like this where there is a list of the people in the back stating if they survived and what they did after the war or, in the case of the Japanese, if they were ever punished for the slaughter of so many of those on New Britain. That would have been nice.

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