



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Betty Little

## Robert Addison and Gerry West

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**Award:** Honoring Our Veterans

**Year:** 2013

Out of 900 original World War II U.S. Marine Raiders - the first American "shock troops" to engage the Japanese in island fighting in the Pacific - two reside in the 45th Senate District.

Gerry West grew up in Fort Anne and, in 1940, enlisted in the Marine Corps following high school. Robert Addison of Queensbury joined the Marine Corps shortly after Pearl Harbor. Together both men would serve in the First Marine Raider Battalion, or Edson's Raiders.

Schooled by Marine veterans, specially selected young men became a lightly armed, highly mobile commando units (Raiders) that could conduct operations in the sub equatorial jungle, the vanguard for larger troop landings to follow.

Seven months after Pearl Harbor, the Marines landed in combat. Addison was trained as a mortar man and West was a demolitions expert and tapped as a machine-gunner in the critical battles at Guadalcanal, where the Japanese were developing an airfield to support their attack on Australia. The holding of the high ground overlooking the airstrip was critical to US success at Guadalcanal. Col. Edson sensed the Japanese would attack there. He was right.

Outnumbered five to one, for two nights the Raiders held on against shelling by sea and Imperial Japanese troops. The battle has become legendary in Marine Corps history. On September 14th, 1942, first light at Guadalcanal revealed over a thousand Japanese dead on the ridge.

West recalls: "Most of us just refer to it as Bloody Ridge. We had 50% casualties that night... two men in our battalion received the Congressional Medal of Honor and there were thirteen Navy Crosses awarded to men in our battalion just for that one battle, which is unheard of."

Only a handful of the original Marine Raiders are left. Addison and West survived to return home, marry, and raise children. Seventy one years later, their friendship endures.