



# Unlikely Warrior

*Lee Mandel*

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A brilliant student, orator, and debater, Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn was an outspoken social activist and frequent lecturer on political topics during the 1930s. Despite his passionate support of pacifism, Gittelsohn voluntarily joined the navy when the United States entered World War II, becoming the first Jewish chaplain assigned to the United States Marine Corps. Gittelsohn's remarkable story, told here from his surviving notes, chronicles the evolution of his crisis of conscience and gives an insider's view into the Battle of Iwo Jima. Author Lee Mandel's research provides an unprecedented look at how the US Navy took clergymen of all religions and molded them into a highly effective support force for America's fighting forces.

Mandel traces the Gittelsohn family from their emigration from Russia through Roland's ordination and his excursions into the political and Zionist movements that shaped the 1930s. Delving into Gittelsohn's pivotal decision to join the armed forces as a chaplain and his experiences in battle, Mandel details the behind-the-scenes anti-Semitic power struggles that almost prevented what was to become one of the most famous oratories in military history. At the dedication of the Fifth Marine Division Cemetery, Gittelsohn delivered a eulogy known as "The Purest Democracy" and often referred to as the "Gettysburg Address of WWII." In this dramatic narrative, Mandel draws from many historical sources, including Gittelsohn's 1988 autobiography, extensive personal papers, and the rabbi's unpublished war memoir—including his analysis of why pacifism failed—to present a complete picture of this unusual man.

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