

**Narrative History
of
Task Force 6814
Americal Division
Jan. 23, 1942 to June
30, 1943**

Americal Division in
WW II



PREFACE

On September 9th, 1941, a month before his 22nd birthday (October 20, 1919), my father, David Cazeault would be inducted into the US Army after being drafted. He was working as a Mechanic for Harr Ford in Worcester, MA, when he was drafted. He lived with his parents on Huguenot Road in Oxford. His induction occurred in Springfield, MA.

On September 24, 1969 (28 years later), his son Richard was inducted into the Army and went to Fort Dix, NJ, about 30 miles southwest of Fort Monmouth. A week later, he traveled to Fort Campbell, KY, for his Basic Training. In December, he arrived at Fort Gordon, GA, for his Airborne Infantry Training.

After completing his Airborne Training, he was sent home for a two-week leave and left for Fort Lewis, WA, on March 5th. He left McCord AFB on March 9th and arrived in Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, on the 11th.

Upon entering the US Army, he was assigned to Fort Monmouth¹, NJ, for training from October 1941 to January 1942. On January 23, he boarded a ship of Task Force 6814 bound for the Pacific Theater.

At first, they thought they were heading to the Philippines to reinforce General McArthur. This proved not to be the case.

David was a member of the **26th Signal Company** and stayed with the same unit until he went home in August 1945. The unit would become part of the new Americal Division, which was formed in New Caledonia and named by a member of the **26th Signal Company**. David is an original member of the Division.

¹ Many of America's most important weapons systems were developed or refined at Fort Monmouth during this period, and then manufactured according to U.S. Army Signal Corps specifications. While many different technologies and systems were part of the Signal Corps effort, those that are considered by many to have had the biggest impact on World War II were in the related fields of radio and radar.

The Fort is located less than 10 miles north of Asbury Park.

“The US Army Signal Corps Units WW2 played a crucial role in the success of World War II. The Signal Corps provided communication services and equipment to all military branches, ensuring messages were delivered quickly and accurately. These units performed vital functions such as transmitting orders, coordinating movements, gathering intelligence, and directing artillery fire and air support.”

David has access to all sorts of information. They also used pigeons to carry messages.

INTRODUCTION

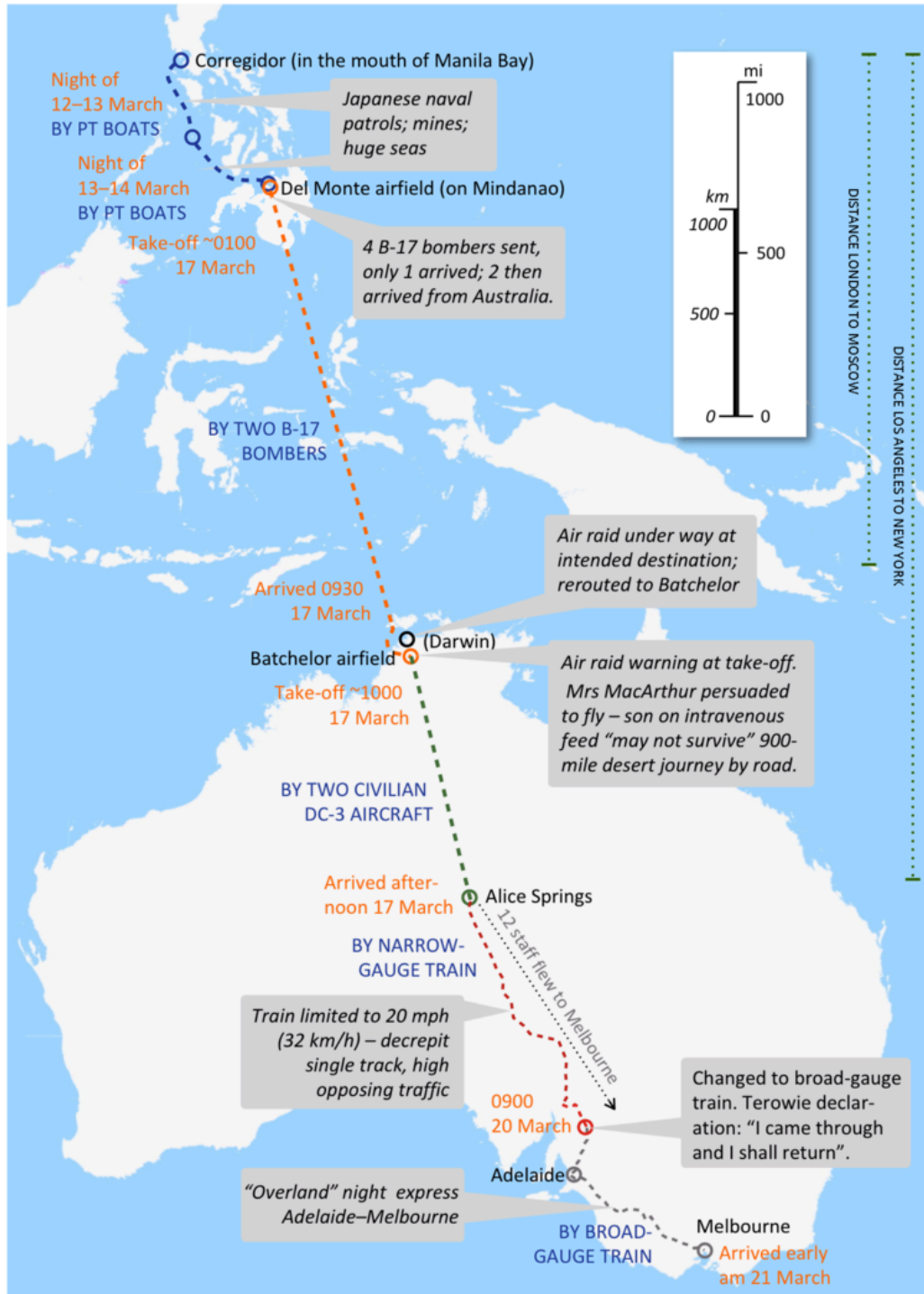
Unlike Europe, America already had significant forces in the Pacific theater, and they were engaged in battle with the Japanese – but it was going very poorly. The Japanese began their invasion of the Philippines just hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and within a month, American forces were penned in on the Bataan Peninsula and the island fortress of Corregidor, and the American Asiatic Fleet, along with Dutch and Commonwealth allies, was being battered across the Southwest Pacific.

In early March 1942, General MacArthur was ordered to Australia and escaped by PT Boat.



By May, 87,000 American and Filipino troops would be forced to surrender, and half the Asiatic Fleet was sunk.

THE 4400-MILE (7000 KM) EVACUATION FROM THE PHILIPPINES OF GENERAL MACARTHUR, HIS FAMILY & STAFF, 12–21 MARCH 1942



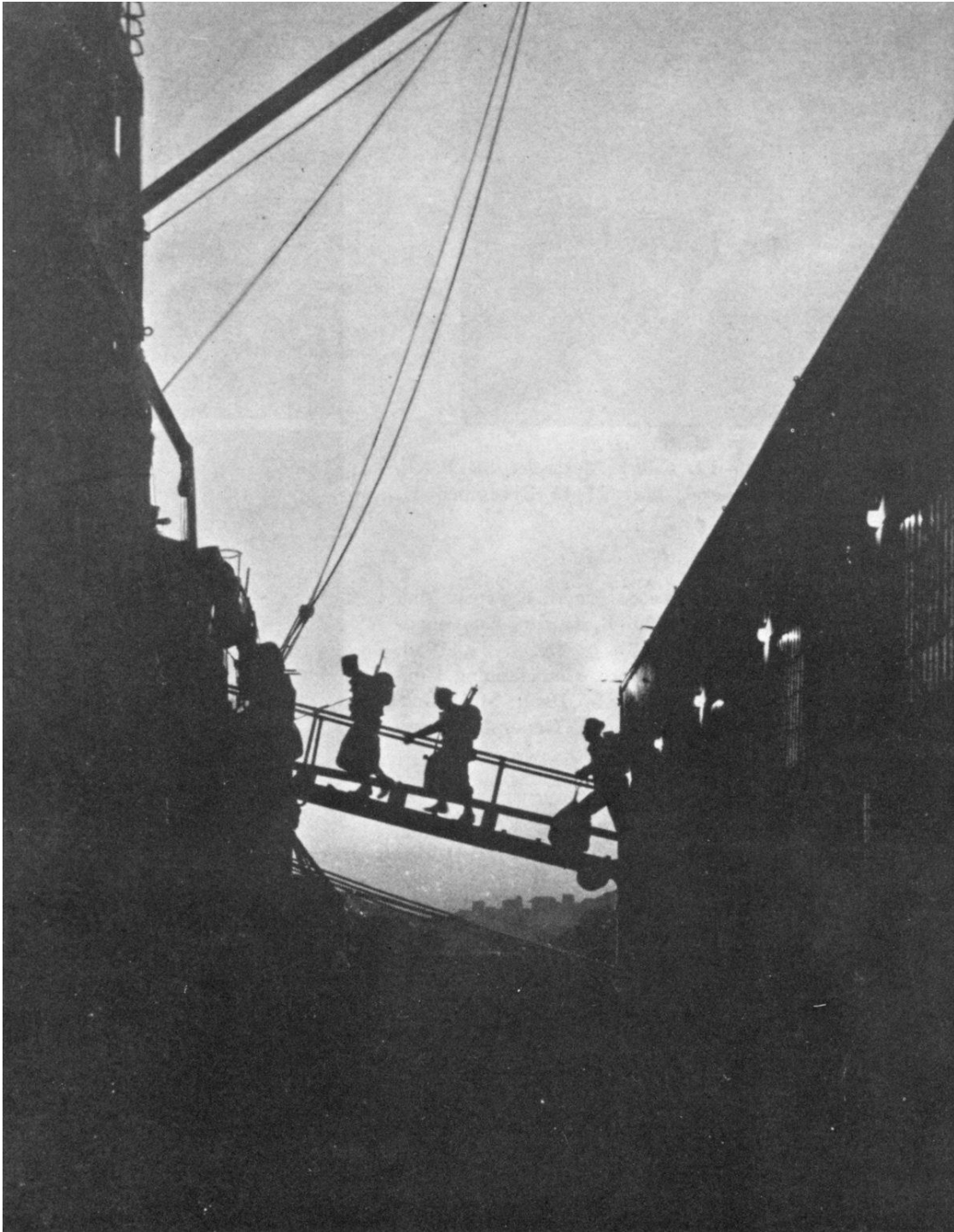
Map: © OpenStreetMap contributors 2020. Licensed CC BY-SA 2.0: Other artwork public domain:

Sources: *The fall of the Philippines* (Morton 1953) pp. 355–360; *Reports of Gen. MacArthur* (U.S. Dept of the Army writers 1953) pp. 28–29; *Australian railwayman* (Fitch 2006) p. 176. Distances from: *The Ghan* (Fuller 1st ed, 1975), South Australian Railways working timetables, Google Earth®.

But the Allies had a plan. As early as 1939, the Americans and British had discussed occupying islands that could block the Japanese from moving against Australia and New Zealand, including Tonga, Fiji, and the French colony of New Caledonia. After the fall of France, the island's government declared their loyalty to the Vichy puppet regime, but a Free French administration quickly replaced this. After lengthy negotiations, they agreed to allow American forces to occupy the island and build bases. Now, they just had to get them there.

At the same time, the Army was undergoing a major reorganization that complicated matters. Previously, divisions were "square," meaning each consisted of four regiments; instead, they would become "triangle" divisions of only three, leaving a lot of "surplus" regiments without a division assignment. Though there was no full division yet ready to go into combat, there were plenty of pieces swept up to form **Task Force 6814**, assigned to take New Caledonia. Not yet a formal division, two of its main components were the **182nd Regiment, detached from the famed 23rd "Yankee" Infantry Division**, and the 132nd, once part of the 33rd Infantry Division (its third regiment, the 164th, was the corner removed from the 34th "Red Bull" Division before they shipped off to Belfast, but they would not depart for the Pacific until March).

The plan to combine these regiments and many other smaller units was only **finalized on January 14**. Soldiers had to be brought to New York from over a dozen states, including Massachusetts, North Carolina, Alabama, and Texas. While the San Francisco Port of Embarkation may have been a more logical choice for a Pacific operation, the proximity of units, equipment, and ships, as well as the capacity of the port, made New York the only option. Some units were moved to the staging area at Indiantown Gap, PA, awaiting transport, but there wasn't enough space for all of them; the 810th Engineer Battalion, an all-black unit (along with the 811th, these would be the first black troops deployed in the war), was forced to bivouac aboard the USS America. At the same time, it was being worked on at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.



Bording at Pier 90 in Manhattan in January 1942

This operation would be much larger than Magnet's, which moved only 4,000 troops into its first component. But there wasn't time to move this unit pieces; the French were growing impatient with American inaction, unaware that the top-secret operation was underway, and feared the

Japanese were preparing to invade. So, nearly 17,000 troops and their equipment had to be loaded as quickly as possible, and it did not all go smoothly. The cargo was loaded haphazardly and often separately from the units that needed it. One artillery battalion feared they had left without actual artillery, only to discover that it had been loaded onto a different ship upon arrival. Due to this disorganization, and partly out of fear that the Japanese could capture New Caledonia before they arrived, it was decided to make a pit stop in Melbourne, Australia, to reorganize rather than head straight to the target.

Seven transports – nearly all the available troopships on the east coast – had to be hastily assembled, the largest being the converted passenger liner USS *Argentina*, which was joined by *Cristobal*, *JW McAndrew*, *John Ericsson*, *Santa Elena*, *Santa Rosa*, and *Thomas H. Barry*. While most were loaded at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, some took on troops at Pier 90 on Manhattan's West Side. Loading started on January 19 and would take four days to complete. Some troops boarded their transports this early and were stuck in port for up to three days, while others did not embark until late on January 22.

Finally, convoy BT.200 got underway well after midnight on January 23. It was cold, damp, and dark as the 20,000 officers, nurses, and enlisted men began to leave. They were soon joined by heavy cruisers, destroyers, blimps, and land-based patrol planes. They began lifeboat drills and settled into a routine not long after leaving.

The journey was long but largely uneventful. Though German submarines were prowling the Atlantic coast, only one unconfirmed U-boat contact was made, and the convoy arrived safely in Panama on January 31 for a brief stopover. Several newsletters were published aboard the ships during the journey, including the **Twin-Ocean Gazette** on *Argentina*, and being aboard a former cruise liner did provide certain perks, such as a still-functioning swimming pool on the top deck, where they celebrated the crossing of the Equator with a ceremony for King Neptune. But the five-week journey was tedious, and the facilities were sorely lacking. By the end of the voyage, soldiers were limited to just one canteen of fresh water per day, with no water for showers, and dysentery had broken out. Melbourne was a welcome sight when they arrived on February 26 after 35 days at sea.



Crossing the Equator on the Argentina, February 5, 1942

But the journey was not over yet. After a week of rest and reloading in Australia, the convoy was underway again for the six-day journey to **Noumea, New Caledonia**, where they arrived on **March 12**, 48 days after leaving New York. Now, they could get to work building bases and airfields. (On March 21, MacArthur arrived in Melbourne.) However, the division still did not have a name for the jumbled assemblage of units. After its third infantry regiment, the 164th arrived in April, the division was finally at its full complement, and it was christened “Americal” (**AMER**icans in New **CA**ledonia), formally activated as the 23rd Infantry Division on May 27 and adopting the **Southern Cross Constellation** as its insignia.

While New Caledonia was not a battlefield, it would not be long before Americal was sent to the front lines. In August, the Navy and Marines invaded Guadalcanal, a key island in the Solomon chain, and the Americal (23rd Division) reinforced them in October and remained mired in the bloody struggle until March.

In the weeks following Pearl Harbor, the US Army was small and disorganized, the Navy outgunned and undermanned, and both lacked the ships and sailors to move forces into the fight far from American shores effectively. The New York Port of Embarkation was not the well-oiled operation it would soon become. Yet somehow, **Task Force 6814** made it across two oceans and was pieced together into a coherent fighting force, one that became highly decorated fighting across the Southwest Pacific until the close of the war.

