

## ACTION ON GUADALCANAL (Part A)<sup>1</sup>

*Please note that all bold italics in this narrative are my additions. I also corrected spelling and punctuation along the way. Several maps, pictures, and stories from other sources are included, which I will list at the end of all the sections—some sections I just copied and pasted into the text.*

*The stories my father told me after I came home from Vietnam in 1971 prompted me to do more intensive research on our father's role in WWII in the Pacific. We would exchange stories of our time in the field over a beer.*

*One story I never forgot was that of a lone Japanese Pilot who came over every night to bomb the Henderson Field area. The plane's engine ran rough and was easily identifiable by the noise—it sounded like a broken washing machine. They called him "Washing Machine Charlie" or "Maytag Charlie."*

*At the same time, I ran across a typed diary of a person in his unit, the 26th Signal Company. His name is A. Davis Jr. He even wrote a poem about Charlie. His diary is 18 pages long and covers November 20, 1942, to March 29, 1943.*

*After reading the diary, I remembered other stories, so I included the diary in a later section.*

*I dispersed some of my experiences into his story since I experienced similar experiences in the tropics. The jungles are beautiful but deadly.*

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<sup>1</sup> Guadalcanal was first charted by Westerners during the Spanish expedition of [Álvaro de Mendaña](#) in 1568. The name comes from the village of [Guadalcanal](#), in the province of [Seville](#), in [Andalusia](#), Spain, birthplace of Pedro de Ortega Valencia, a member of Mendaña's expedition.










According to the army records, David was drafted in September 1941 and would have entered the service as a lowly Private/Specialist. After three months of training at Ft. Monmouth, NJ, he was promoted to T/3 Automotive Mechanic, which would be a Staff Sergeant. Since he worked for Harr Ford for six years, he was a skilled mechanic. The army was short on skilled people, and he was probably promoted by skipping several ranks because of his experience.

He remained in that rank until October 1944 in Bougainville, when he was promoted to T/Sgt and Motor Transport NC at Grade 2 under the new ranking system. At that point, he became responsible for the motor pool containing 60 vehicles and 60 drivers. His duties included assigning drivers to vehicles, creating work lists, and making requisitions for materials needed by the drivers and mechanics. He also trained drivers and mechanics and directed the overall operation of the motor pool. There is a back story to his promotion in Bougainville that I will relay later.

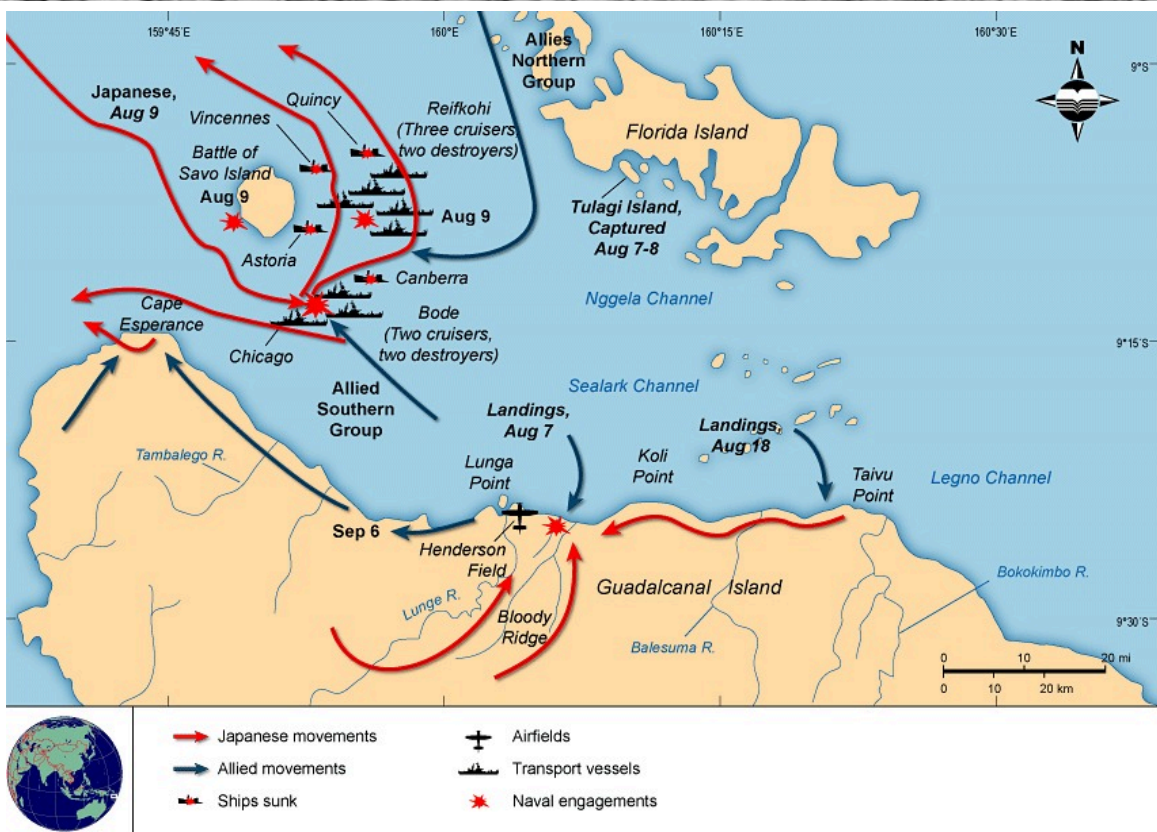
1920–1942 [\[ edit \]](#)

Grade 1	Grade 2		Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7
							No Insignia
Master Sergeant	First Sergeant	Technical Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	Sergeant	Corporal	Private First Class/Specialist	Private/Specialist
M/Sgt.	1st Sgt.	T/Sgt.	S/Sgt.	Sgt.	Cpl.	Pfc.	Pvt.

1943–1948 [\[ edit \]](#)

1st Grade		2nd Grade	3rd Grade		4th Grade		5th Grade		6th Grade	7th Grade
										No Insignia
Master Sergeant	First Sergeant	Technical Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	Technician Third Grade	Sergeant	Technician Fourth Grade	Corporal	Technician Fifth Grade	Private First Class	Private
M/Sgt.	1st Sgt.	T/Sgt.	S/Sgt.	T/3	Sgt.	T/4	Cpl.	T/5	Pfc.	Pvt.

The Marines landed first and established the beachhead in August. The Americal joined the Marines and relieved them to complete the battle.







The first echelon of the Americal Division landed on Guadalcanal on October 13. It was the 164th Infantry Combat Team. They were subjected almost immediately to bombing attacks, and Henderson Field was shelled by Japanese battleships the first night. Their 14-inch shells caused many casualties. The defense plan initially called for a perimeter defense bounded on the east by the Tenaru River and by the Matanikau River on the west. This area included the airfields and adjacent installations. The Japanese attacked Henderson Field directly for the last time on October 23 and were defeated with the loss of practically a whole regiment. The work of the 164th in this operation was praised by Major General Vandegrift, USMC.

The next move in the island strategy was an offensive launched on November 1 west of the Matanikau River with Kokumbona as the objective. This action had advanced three miles by November 11 when information that there were concentrations of enemy transports in the Northern Solomon Area caused the withdrawal of troops to the Perimeter Defense positions to prepare to meet this threat. The East Sector, from the Tenaru to the Lunga River, was commanded by Brigadier General Rupertus, USMC; the West Sector, from the Lunga to the Matanikau, was commanded by Brigadier General Sebree. His troops were the 164th and 182nd Infantry and the 8th Marines.



The furious sea and air battle of Savo Island on November 12 changed this situation at Guadalcanal. The destruction of a Jap convoy of 12 vessels by U.S. Naval forces on the 14th and 15th practically concluded this phase of the battle for the island. At daylight on the 15th of November, the last four Japanese transports were beached between Tassafaronga Point and Doom Cove, destined to make fine registration points for artillery action to come.



*USS Juneau*



***On November 13, 1942, five Sullivan brothers from Waterloo, Iowa. George, Francis, Joseph, Madison, and Albert – died when the light cruiser USS Juneau was torpedoed and sank off Guadalcanal during World War II. It remains the greatest combat-related loss of life by a single family in American military history.***

<https://www.americanheritage.com/honoring-incredible-sacrifice-sullivan-family>

When the results of the naval action were established, the offensive to the west again was ordered with the objective of establishing a bridgehead west of the river. The morning of November 18th the 2nd Battalion, 182nd Infantry, crossed the Matanikau River and went into position in the East Sector. A patrol of the 8th Marines covering this move encountered a strong Japanese force some 1500 yards west of Point Cruz. The Marines were forced to withdraw and took positions on the high ground running south from the base of Point Cruz. It became apparent that more troops would be needed to secure the point, and the 164th Infantry was ordered up to attack at daylight, November 21, south of the positions held by the 1st Battalion, 182. The attack was made, and after severe fighting, a line was established a short distance west of Point Cruz.

The going was difficult, and it became obvious that further advance would be too costly. The 8th Marines made a feint attack on November 23 but could show little progress after an entire day of hard fighting. It was decided to stabilize and

consolidate the positions pending the arrival of the remainder of the Americal Division. Nightly counterattacks were repulsed during this period, with heavy losses for the enemy. The lines remained substantially unchanged until the Corps attack in January.

General Patch took command of the island on Dec. 6th, when the First Marine Division Headquarters was withdrawn. Elements of the XIV Corps arrived, but during most of the action, the Americal Division staff functioned in a dual capacity. At this time, word was received that the 25th Division and the 6th Marines were en route.

***On December 4, the 26th Signal Company, including David Cazeault, left New Caledonia aboard the USS President Adams. Their next stop will be Guadalcanal on December 8.***



**USS President Adams (AP-38/APA-19)** was a *President Jackson*-class attack transport of the United States Navy, named for Founding Father John Adams and his son, John Quincy Adams, the second and sixth Presidents of the United States.

Plans were formulated for continued offensive action. These plans required the securing of Mt. Austen (Hill 27), the high ground east of the Matanikau, giving observations on Henderson Field, driving the Japs beyond Kokumbona, and blocking the cross-island trail from Kokumbona to Beaufort Bay.





AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P01672.010

*According to the Davis Diary, the 26th Signal Company landed near Henderson Field on December 8, 1942. From what I could gather, their encampment is between the airfield and the Lunga River.*

*This photo shows part of the Lunga River encampment in 1942*



*The battle for the island occurred during the rainy season (October to April), during which it rained up to 15 days per month. Most of the island was covered by rainforest. Although the temperatures were mild, being wet was always uncomfortable and cold.*

*The main disease a soldier was exposed to in wet conditions is jungle rot or tropical ulcers, which could attack any part of the body. In WWI, it was called Trench Foot.*

*We had the same problem during monsoons in Vietnam. One one mission it rained for 20 days without stopping. Jungle Rot was big problem for us.*

***The moisture also allowed yellow fever and malaria-carrying mosquitoes to breed. Malaria and yellow fever have symptoms similar to the flu but are more deadly.***

***Although most of the wildlife in the area was not dangerous, the Lunga River contained Saltwater Crocodiles, and the Rainforest contained giant Centipedes with excruciating stings. The only deadly snake was the Guppy Viper. As in Vietnam, all wildlife would clear the area when the action began.***



***For a better idea of the conditions on the island, see:***  
<https://www.americanheritage.com/short-walk-guadalcanal>

***Although there were saltwater crocodiles in Vietnam, the real danger was snakes. Our sergeant used to say there are 21 snake species in the country, of which 20 are fatally poisonous. The non-poisonous one is the Python, which will squeeze you to death and then devour you whole. We did run into several snakes in Vietnam, including a male and female King Cobra and several Vipers, and we were once stalked by a hungry reticulated Python about 20 feet long.***





**Python**



**Cobras**

*There were wild Water Buffalo, bears, deer, Orangutans, and Tigers. One night, we were stalked by a Tiger. From a distance, I only observed deer about the size of a German shepherd.*



**Typical Roads in Guadalcanal during the rainy season**



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*Throughout the campaign, the Signal Company was responsible for running communications wire to the various infantry units in the field. Although there were some wireless radios, most of the communications were overland through the mud and jungle.*



***Army troops were supported by Signal Corps installations and operators from the earliest days of the war with a limited variety of equipment and the meager teams and units that accompanied the first task forces in those areas of the world. They would have to maintain communications with the Air Force, Navy, Marines, and all the support units. Miles of commo wire had to be run and maintained when destroyed by the enemy or elements.***



***Commo Wire on Palm Tree Telephone Poles***



***A Typical Commo Truck***



***Running Wire using a Jeep (also called a Peep)***



***As a Signal Corps Motor Pool member, David's role was to keep the equipment running. When called upon, he would also retrieve disabled vehicles or act as a driver.***



*When the going got tough, and no vehicle could lay the commo wire, the reliable GI would mount the reels on his body and walk them to the units.*

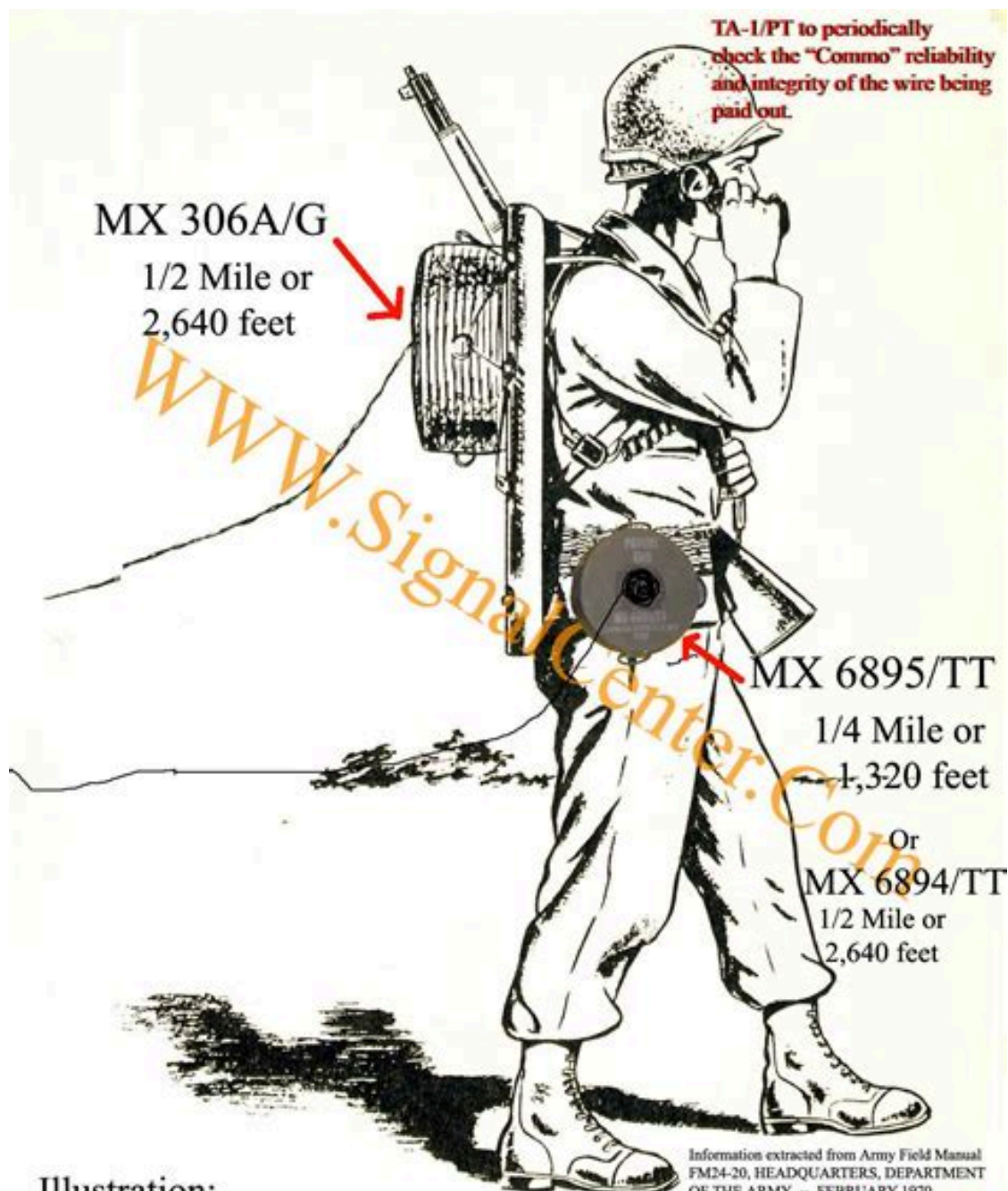


Illustration:

Paying out field wire, using Wire Dispenser

MX 306A/G on a packboard OR a MX 6895/TT on  
the waist Pistol Belt MX 6894/TT

Information extracted from Army Field Manual  
FM24-20, HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT  
OF THE ARMY -- FEBRUARY 1970

Partially revised by author of [www.SignalCenter.Com](http://www.SignalCenter.Com)