

HOMING PIGEONS

(Part-B)



Other WWII Signal missions included the homing pigeon program, which proved particularly useful in places like the Pacific jungles where it was difficult to string wire. Many hero pigeons served valiantly during the battles, often receiving wounds but still delivering their messages. In addition to sending messages, the Signal Corps retained responsibility for the Army's signal security and intelligence activity.

The Army's pigeon program, which began in 1917 under the orders of General John Pershing, was headquartered at Fort Monmouth under the Signal Corps from 1919 until its discontinuation in 1957.

New and revolutionary techniques were used to establish the Monmouth birds as the outstanding studs in America. By the outset of WWII, the Fort Monmouth pigeoneers had perfected techniques for training two-way pigeons. The first test was conducted in May 1941. Twenty birds completed the approximately 28-mile roundtrip from Fort Monmouth to Freehold in half an hour.

These efforts paid off during WWII. The Pigeon Center at Fort Monmouth had a monthly emergency breeding capacity of 1,000 birds. This represented about one-quarter of the Army's anticipated requirement. American pigeon fanciers voluntarily supplied approximately 40,000 racing pigeons to the Signal Corps without compensation. These comprised the bulk of the 54,000 birds that the Signal Corps furnished to the armed services during WWII. The Signal Corps used its authority under the Affiliated Plan of 1940 to recruit civilian specialists into the Army to fulfill specialized requirements such as pigeon experts.

They proved valuable in sending information gathered in action behind enemy lines. In the Southwest Pacific area, pigeon communication proved effective with small ships and in jungle and mountainous terrain.

A member of the 26th Signal Company on Guadalcanal was a homing pigeon named Blackie Halligan. I have no idea where the name came from.

Blackie Halligan, an Army homing pigeon who served in the Pacific theater during WWII. In 1942 Blackie was stationed in Guadalcanal in a unit near a place known as the Catcher's Mitt because so many bombs fell there. He flew messages back to his headquarters from outposts as far as 125 miles away.

One day, he returned to his loft with a message from a patrol of the 164th Infantry Division giving the location of some 300 Japanese troops. Blackie was very late; the journey to headquarters should have taken just 20 minutes. Blackie was shot down by Japanese fire.



Five hours later, the maimed and bloody bird managed to complete its trip bearing the important message. He delivered the message even though part of his neck and chest had been blown away. When given a drink, water dribbled out of his chest, and he stumbled dizzily when placed on his feet. It took numerous stitches to close his wounds.

Blackie Halligan Makes Last Flight in Pacific

by our STAFF CORRESPONDENT, ANTONY WHITLOCK

MANILA, Oct. 2.-One of America's most famous solo fliers of the Pacific campaign has left the Philippines for home. He Is Blackie Halligan, whose outfit the 5544th Detachment was one of the earliest to arrive in Australia.

Halligan's most brilliant feat was made at Guadalcanal, when, after being severely wounded, flew back with important despatches from a forward unit. For this, he was personally awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and Purple Heart by General Patch.

Although he made no more combat missions, Halligan stayed on with the detachment and gave advice and encouragement to many younger fliers. He occasionally made routine flights. On one of these, he was attacked and injured. After that, he was permanently grounded.

Now in Luzon, Halligan found that his service points, apart from those due to him as a father, totaled 105 - well past the number needed for his return to the United States.

Halligan plans to stay in the Army after his return home and spend the rest of his days among his many children and Madame Murphy and other females.

Blackie Halligan, by the way, is a Carrier Pigeon.

Appearing in The Sidney Morning Herald on October 3, 1945:



On July 5, 1960, a Pigeon Memorial was dedicated at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey as part of the Signal Corps' 100th Anniversary Celebration. The pigeon on the top of the memorial fountain was modeled on "G.I. Joe," one of the greatest military pigeons in history. The plaque read, "A Memorial to Homing Pigeons in Combat: Courage, Loyalty, Endurance."

The 132nd Infantry was ordered to occupy Mt. Austen. The attack started on December 17 after G-2 reports had estimated the enemy forces as small. The 3rd Battalion moved a short way into the jungle at a shoulder of the hill where they were held up by machine gun fire and dug in for the night. While continuing the attack the morning of the 18th, the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. William C. Wright, was killed. There was a heavy firefight, and the enemy resistance was found to be too strong for one battalion, so the 1st Battalion was ordered to envelop the enemy's east flank on the right. The Jap defense was stubborn, and both battalions were pinned down. The supply problem was a critical one, entirely by hand carriers, until the Engineers, by magnificent efforts, constructed a jeep road across the ridges to the hill. The 2nd Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. George W. Ferry, swung to the south in a flanking movement and cleared the northern and eastern slopes on January 2. General Sebree took command Jan 10.

The work of the artillery in this operation was considered highly instrumental in its eventual success. The terrain was very rugged, virtually solid jungle. During the rapid envelopment by the 2nd Battalion, the troops were guided for direction by smoke shells as the most practical way of keeping direction. The firing had to be entirely by forward observers, and with the peculiar disposition of the friendly troops, the firing officers were often in the position of drawing fire toward themselves. The 105 mm howitzer with a high angle of fire proved a superior weapon in this kind of fighting.



105 mm Howitzer

Seven counterattacks were repulsed on Hill 27, and on January 9, the 25th Division moved in to relieve. The 35th Infantry¹ executed a flanking movement and, assisted by the 3rd Battalion, 182, bottled up the famous Oka Regiment, which had dug in on the northwestern slope of Mt. Austen. This regiment was wiped out. With the successful finish of this phase of the action, the Japs lost all observation on Henderson Field.

The XIV Army Corps immediately undertook the push westward with Kokumbona as the objective. The movement was successful and rapid. The 3rd Battalion, 182, and the Combat Reconnaissance Troop were attached to the 25th Division, which made the main effort around the Japanese south flank.

On January 18th, David contracted Yellow Fever. It is caused by infected mosquitoes that transmit the viral disease to people. Symptoms range from mild symptoms like body aches and fever to severe symptoms like organ failure and Yellow Jaundice. It can be fatal. There's no cure or treatment for yellow fever. I presume he was forced to recover on Guadalcanal.

I had Malaria, which has similar symptoms, except a different parasitic-carrying mosquito causes it. I was treated with a compound of Quinine. My type of Malaria has been recurring around April and May over several years to a lesser degree. The pain of the body aches is excruciating.

Note: Every November when I was a child, David would come down with what he said was Malaria. Maybe the Army diagnosed him wrong, or he had both diseases?

The Composite Division, commanded by General DeCarra, USMC, consisting of the 182nd Infantry, less the 3rd Battalion, the 6th Marines and the 147th Infantry, attacked generally along the beach. Kokumbona was reached January 25, At this time General Patch on the spot ordered all-out pursuit of the enemy.

General Sebree took command of the sector on February 1. It was decided to land troops by boat in the rear of the enemy and drive east to join the main body. The 2nd Battalion, 132nd, plus a heavy weapons company and a battery of 75 mm howitzers under the command of Col. Alexander George, was landed at Verahue. The main force consisted of the 161st Infantry, 47th Infantry, and the 6th Marine Regiment. These units were directly supported by the entire light artillery of the Americal Division. The last organized resistance was encountered by the 147th Infantry at the Bonegi River. The meeting of the two forces took place at Tenaro Village southeast of Cape Esperance at the Tenamba River on the afternoon of February 8. The Golden Spike was driven by the 2nd Battalion of the 182nd Infantry

¹ ***I would serve with the 2/35th Infantry in 1970 in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam.***

and the 161st Infantry. This ended all organized Japanese resistance to U. S. Forces on the island of Guadalcanal.

On Feb 14th, planes from Henderson Field began bombing Bougainville. 24 hours per day. Bougainville was about 400 miles to the Northwest.

With the termination of combat, troops of the division returned to bivouacs following in general the old Perimeter Defense. The malaria rate was rising and orders were issued to stress the rehabilitation of personnel. It was a time of respite for all concerned. Camp areas were improved and made more comfortable. The strenuous physical side of training was suspended. All defense requirements, however, were maintained.

It was a pleasant, brief let-down in spite of conditions. Japanese bombing was considerably lighter after combat ended. It was no longer a night-shattering process. Now and then, planes came over and dropped a few bombs in the vicinity of the airfields, but the nicknamed Washing Machine Charley of the weeks before had lost his sting. Curiously enough, all the bombers to attack the island had become singularized to the one name.



Mitsubishi G4M Bomber, Typical of the Plane Charlie Flew

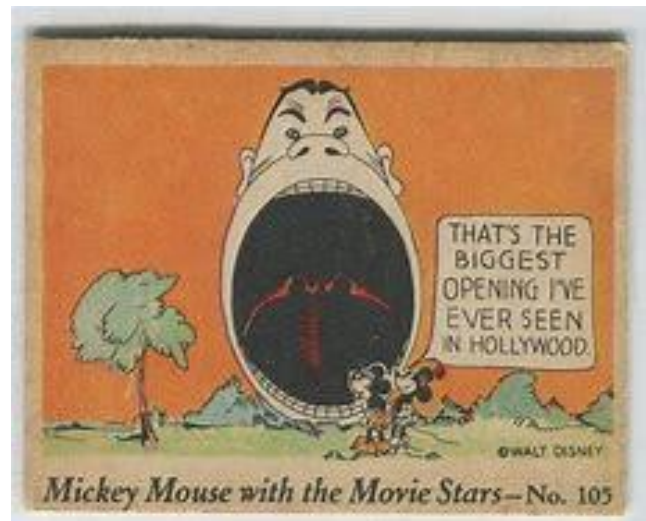
The Japanese pilots made sure the engines were out of synchronization. The engine vibration would wake most people, and the readiness alert for potential bombs or combat would keep the soldiers awake for the rest of the night.

There were approximately 145 condition reds during the stay of the division. In not all of these cases did planes actually succeed in getting over the island.

One of the lighter spots of this period was the arrival of the movie star, Joe E. Brown² accompanied by General Sebree. He toured the island entertaining all units wherever located. No day was ever too hot nor was any trail too rough for them. He was made an honorary member of the division April 21, 1943, during a later visit.



Joey Brown on Guadalcanal



Hollywood Poster

On February 23rd, there was a rumor that the 37th Division in Fiji was supposed to relieve the Americal on Guadalcanal, and the Americal would go to Fiji.

On the 28th, the 26th Signal Company begins to pack for the move.

On Mar 1st, the first echelon of the Signal Company leaves for Fiji about 1000 miles to the Southeast.

On Mar 9th, forty-four Torpedo planes left to mine in Bougainville.

On the same day, the Americal Division holds a Memorial Service at the Military Cemetery for those who lost their lives on Guadalcanal.

² ***My father mentioned that he personally met him. He was a fearless guy.***



MEMORIAL SERVICE

FOR

OUR HONORED DEAD

INVOCATION

*Chaplain Rothschild
Division Headquarters*

NEARER MY GOD TO THEE

*The Band
101st Medical Regt.*

MILITARY REQUIEM MASS

*Chaplain Dunford
Division Chaplain*

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

*Chaplain Franklin
182d Infantry*

ROLL CALL

*Lieutenant Ballinger
Special Services*

TAPS & VOLLEYS

Bugler & Firing Platoon

BENEDICTION

*Chaplain Hoppe
Division Artillery*

NATIONAL ANTHEM

*The Band
101st Medical Regt.*

OFFICER IN CHARGE

*Chaplain Flaherty
101st Medical Regt.*



GUADALCANAL MILITARY CEMETERY

9 MARCH, 1943



Guadalcanal US Cemetery

NAVJMED H-4
(1944)

DENTAL RECORD
(To be filled in by the dental officer)

DO NOT REMOVE FROM HEALTH RECORD

Berwanger 250176
George Michael Joseph
(Last name) (First name) (Middle name)
Born: Place *Balboa, Galapagos* Date *1-7-18*

INSTRUCTIONS
See Chapter 14, Section VI, Paragraphs 2311-2319, inclusive, Manual of the Medical Department, U. S. Navy.

RECORD OF FIRST DENTAL EXAMINATION

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32

REMARKS:

Height - 74"
Weight - 168
Color of hair - Black
Race - White
Marks - None

11-27-41
(Date and signature of examining dental officer)

RECORD OF SUBSEQUENT DENTAL OPERATIONS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32

15-58072-2

As with Vietnam, you received a dental exam before you shipped out. I thought it was for possible dental work and asked if I could get my impacted wisdom teeth extracted. The dentist or technician chuckled and said that the exam was only for body identification if you got killed in Vietnam. Graves Registration checks your dental record with your body so that you get shipped back to the correct address. He said they would fix my teeth if I lived through my tour.

The form on the left was basically the same as the one used in WWII and Korea. Why waste a perfectly good form?

I signed up for the wisdom teeth extraction at the end of my tour. My friend went in the day before, and I told him I would meet him for beers. He was having the same extraction.

When I arrived, I could not find him. I asked the office where he was, and they said that during the extraction, his jaw was broken, and he was flown to a hospital ship off the coast to recover. Needless to say, I missed my appointment and went home with my wisdom teeth. I thought i was a “wise” move.

On the plane to Vietnam, I was seated next to a young forlorn soldier. I said, I know how you feel; I’m heading into the infantry also. He said he wished he was so lucky. What are you going to do? He said he was also drafted but assigned to Graves Registration, where he would prepare bodies for shipment home. I counted my blessings.

On March 24th, the second and last echelon of the company left for Fiji on board the transport ship William Penn for the 1,000-mile trip. They arrived in Lautoka, Fiji, on the 29th. Lautoka is about 150 miles from the capital, Suva. The 26th’s camp is in Vunayasi, 2 miles south of the town of Nadi or 12 miles South of Lautoka.

The total casualties of the division during combat were 72 officers and 1,152 enlisted men. Of this number, 40 officers and 263 men were killed in action. Three officers and 28 men died of wounds; wounded who recovered, 28 officers, 850 men. There were eight enlisted men listed as missing in action.

In its baptism of fire the Americal Division had conducted itself creditably. Three of its ranking officers, Major General Patch, Brigadier General Sebree and Colonel Moore were awarded Distinguished Service Medals. General Sebree was awarded the Silver Star April 16, 1943.

Units of the division were cited by letter by the First Marine Division, dated April 30, 1943, for the Presidential Unit Citation. The division was also recipient of "Citation from Commanding General, XIV Corps, for outstanding performance of duty on Guadalcanal, October 13 to January 4." There was a second citation for the period Jan. 10, 1943 to Feb. 9, 1943.

Decorations of personnel, presented or recommended as of June 30, 1943 were; Legion of Merit, 242; Distinguished Service Cross, 25; Soldier's Medal, 13; Silver Star, 145; Purple Heart, 879. Total presented, including the three Distinguished Service Medals previously mentioned, 1104; Total pending, 204. Awards in these categories are not complete.

Preparations were made for the 37th Division to take over the mission of the Americal. All heavy equipment was to be taken over by them. The first echelon to leave, the 164th Infantry Combat Team with some elements of engineers, signal

and medical embarked for Fiji, March 1, 1943. This echelon arrived at Suva March 5th. The 182nd Combat Team left the island March 25 and arrived in the Lautoka area March 29. The last of the division cleared Guadalcanal April 6 and it was not too soon because the heaviest Japanese air attack in months came at dusk that day, just as the ships were moving into the roadstead. An estimated 100 planes came in. How they missed the convoy is a mystery, but several ships were hit off Lunga Beach as the ack ack and the bombs boomed a dramatic good-bye to the Americal Division. This group disembarked in the Western Sector of Fiji, April 10.

The mission in Fiji was defense of the Western Sector and preparation for combat elsewhere. The 164th Infantry was deployed for the defense of the beach in the vicinity of Suva. The remainder of the division was dispersed from the so-called Brenner Pass to Singatoka with the 132nd to the north of Nandi and the 182nd to the south. The defense was organized in phase lines with a final defensive line set up to hold the Nandi Airport and adjacent installations.



While in Fiji, and without a Malaria threat, the army decided to take the men off Atabrine, which was a preventative against getting Malaria. Side effects at the time could be sterilization. Once off the drug, the soldiers began

contracting Malaria. It turned out that Atabrine suppressed the disease but did not prevent it. In 1942, one soldier could contract the disease up to four times.



In Vietnam, we took two pills to prevent catching the disease. During that time, many in our company experienced mysterious fevers, which resulted in the soldier being immersed in a tub of ice water to control the fever. Chills accompanied the fever.

I never contracted Malaria in Vietnam. Once I got off the preventive pills, one year later, I contracted a severe case. I was able to control it with a derivative of Quinine—a couple of times I was hospitalized.

It was not pleasant, but eventually, I could time it and take the pills

before going into a severe condition. It eventually faded away to just a minor fever and chills.

Aside from a pandemic, Malaria is the number one killer of people on the planet. The number two killer is Dysentery, which I had the pleasure of contracting in Cambodia in 1970.

Both diseases are waterborne, so I am passionate about clean water. In the U.S., we take our water for granted.



While David was in Fiji, he and his company group captured a sea turtle, either a green hawksbill, leatherback, loggerhead, or olive ridley. They begin laying their eggs from October to April and can be caught easily. Since David was an expert in cleaning Snapping Turtles from Lowe's Pond in Oxford, MA, they butchered and cooked the turtle. The result was not very tasty, and the meat was tough.



Green Turtle

One of the souvenirs he brought back from the island was some Fiji money, which he kept in my Mother's cedar chest and his dress uniform. The penny was about the size of a US penny and had a hole in the middle.



Major General John R. Hodge, formerly Asst. Division Commander of the 25th Division, took command of the Americal Division May 29, 1943. Col. Crump Garvin took command of the 164th Infantry. Lt. Col. Gavan became acting Chief of Staff.

Training was highly organized with daily firing by the artillery under control of Division Artillery, commanded by Brigadier General Woodward. The infantry had intensive rifle and jungle squad training.

There was considerable concern at the rapid rise of the malaria rate in the division with the stopping of suppressive treatment. Special experts made a study of the problem. Many units found themselves practically crippled at times, and training during May and June was seriously disrupted. It was decided to continue operations without regard for the incidence of malaria, with medical authorities keeping close watch of the situation hoping to learn new treatments which might benefit other units in malarial zones. Once again the Americal Division found itself in a try-out spot in World War II.

**Prepared by Major Lincoln W. Stoddard,
Special Service Officer,
Americal Division.**

The following links will give the reader a better feeling for Guadalcanal. I also included the song, Southern Cross. The symbol of the Americal.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGoiSFjOBR4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bw9gLjEGJrw>