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## America's National Guardsmen in the South Pacific and Forming the Americal: Globalizing State Militias in a Time of Crisis

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# AMERICAL JOURNAL

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## 75TH ANNIVERSARY

UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

### America's National Guardsmen in the South Pacific and Forming the Americal: Globalizing State Militias in a Time of Crisis

Roger R. Thompson ©

#### Introducing Walter Walt, Dale Friend, and Peggy Hammer

Walter W. Walt, Jr. (1916-2006) served in the Americal Division from the moment it was activated on New Caledonia in May 1942. Selected in October 1941, and inducted into active service on 17 November, Walt was in training in Virginia as Task Force 6814 was forming in mid-January 1942. A Californian, he was assigned to the Massachusetts National Guard's 101st Medical Regiment, Company I. His regiment's commanding officer, Dale Friend (1907-2003) was born in Iowa and graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1935. Peggy Hammer volunteered to serve in the Army Nurse Corps.

Task Force 6814 embarked from New York in late January 1942. Walt, Friend, and Hammer were shipmates on board the convoy's *Santa Elena*. Task Force 6814 reached Australia in late February, and landed at New Caledonia on 12 March 1942. Other National Guard units in the task force included the 182nd Infantry Regiment (Massachusetts), the 132nd Infantry Regiment (Illinois) and, joining Task Force 6814 in April, the 164th Infantry Regiment (North Dakota).

This is the third in a series of *Americal Journal* articles about Task Force 6814 and the Americal Division in the first eighteen months of World War II.

#### Alone in the South Pacific on the Eve of the Battle of Midway

The American men and women of Task Force 6814 occupying the French colony of New Caledonia in late May 1942 did not know they were almost alone in the South Pacific. With Admiral Halsey's *USS Enterprise* now steaming north to Pearl Harbor to join the *USS Yorktown* and the *USS Hornet*, Admiral Nimitz would soon be able to concentrate three of his aircraft carriers off the island of Midway to thwart an anticipated Japanese invasion. For the first time since February 1942, when the *USS Lexington* protected the Task Force 6814 convoy as it approached Australia after its five-week journey from the Brooklyn Navy Yard, no aircraft carrier patrolled the waters near the Coral Sea that separated New Caledonia from the Japanese forces to the north at Rabaul in New Britain.

Besides losing the protection of naval aviators, who had performed heroically against Japanese fighters and bombers in February, March, and April, the secret protection provided by the Navy's signals intelligence detachments on aircraft carriers was lost as well. These detachments had monitored the communications of Japanese aircraft flying out of Rabaul. And it was the work of their signals intelligence colleagues elsewhere on land in the Pacific that convinced Admiral Nimitz to concentrate most of his forces at Midway, the last major island between Tokyo and Honolulu, in early June.

#### Creating the Americal in the South Pacific: A Surprise Ending to an American Saga in Peace and War

General Alexander Patch, Task Force 6814's commanding officer, was now under Nimitz's command. Soon after Admiral Robert Ghormley left New Caledonia after his 19 May 1942 inspection and planning meeting with Patch, word came from the War Department that the recommendation of its Operations Division for a combat division on New Caledonia was approved. The three National Guard infantry regiments from Massachusetts, Illinois, and North Dakota--the core fighting elements of Patch's Task Force 6814--would become the Americal

Division (*America-New Caledonia*), the United States Army's first and only named division organized and trained on foreign territory. This was extraordinary, but the times were desperate.

America's National Defense plan, envisioned back in 1920, had called for the mobilization in times of crisis of Regular Army, National Guard units, and Reserve officers as Army-led divisions. Most of the soldiers would be "inducted" Guardsmen, called to national service by the President. No longer commanded by their state governors, National Guard units still retained their regional identity. While selected National Guard units would meet, for the first six months, the immediate threat always envisioned as one to the Western Hemisphere (including the American possessions of Panama, Hawaii, and Alaska), the rest of Regular Army, National Guard, and Reserve officers (and non-commissioned officers) would serve as a cadre to train new volunteers and conscripted troops.

No one imagined trying to train an entire division in the South Pacific; War Department planners in early January 1942 had called for an infantry division to be sent to New Caledonia, but no existing division was ready for embarkation. These dilemmas, ultimately, would be addressed with the activation of the Americal Division on 27 May 1942.



**Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, hero of the Battle of Midway.**





**General George Catlett Marshall, General of the Army.**

But this is a complicated story. General Patch, General George Marshall, the Army's Chief of Staff, and the commanding general of the US Army's recently-organized Army Ground Forces (AGF), General Lesley McNair, were ready and practiced in the hard work and art of turning citizens into soldiers in general, and were acquainted with the National Guard units now on New Caledonia in particular. General Marshall, earlier in his career, had worked closely with the Massachusetts National Guard in Boston and the Illinois National Guard in Chicago. And just before his return to Washington, DC, in 1938 he completed a tour of duty (1936-38) at Washington State's Vancouver Barracks, located on the Columbia River across from Portland, Oregon.

From that post he became acquainted with Washington State's National Guard, but Vancouver Barracks also allowed Marshall to supervise another group of young Americans. He was responsible for thousands of young American men from many parts of America, including Boston, working at Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps in the Pacific Northwest. Established in 1933 by the new Roosevelt Administration in the depths of the Great Depression, the US Army was the only government entity capable of managing a program as massive as the CCC.

General Marshall had looked into the eyes of the youth of Depression-era America. He saw the promise of Guardsmen and CCC men alike; he helped them

realize it. In 1939-40, especially after the fall of France in May 1940, Marshall knew there was not enough time to fill out and train the ranks of the US Army with volunteers. He needed hundreds of thousands of young Americans in uniform immediately. Time was short. General Marshall had a powerful and like-minded ally in President Roosevelt. Both men knew, with their CCC experiences, that peacetime selection and training of millions of Americans could be managed. But not until August and September 1940 did Marshall finally get the Congressional approval and funding he needed to induct National Guard units into the Regular Army, and begin registering sixteen million American male citizens and aliens between the ages of 18 and 35 for possible selection and induction into the armed forces.

This mobilization began with a remarkable grass-roots effort. Sixteen million Americans registered at their neighborhood precincts for Selective Training and Service on 16 October 1940. Their registration cards were forwarded to over 6,500 local selective service boards, each made up of three members recommended by their state governor and appointed by the President. Doctors and dentists donated their time and labor for conducting initial physical examinations. And when almost half of the first year's two-million-strong call-up was found unfit for service, doctors and dentists restored 200,000 of them to health and fitness, with their fees covered by the federal government. With guidance and leadership from Washington, America was standing up. As the newly-inducted National Guardsmen from Illinois and North Dakota made their way to the still-unfinished Camp Claiborne in Louisiana for training in early 1941, the first groups of the two million men selected by their local boards began to appear for physicals and possible induction into the armed services. From this growing pool would come the men necessary to fill out the ranks of Army divisions across America. In the first year after "Registration Day," both the Regular Army and National Guard, roughly 500,000 soldiers strong divided about equally, would be joined by over 600,000 selectees.

In President Roosevelt's radio address persuading Americans that this first peacetime mobilization was democratic and very American, he praised the sixteen million men who had registered on 16 October 1940. That evening he told them they were "reviving the three-hundred-year-old custom of the muster" for national defense. The men of Massachusetts' 182nd Infantry Regiment might have thought President Roosevelt was talking about them, for their state militia unit traced its origins to 1636 when the Massachusetts Bay Colony organized a "trained band" (trainband) to defend the colony against the Pequot Indian threat. That local tradition, updated to the twentieth century, underwent another transformation in Roosevelt's mind.



**President Roosevelt in his first "Fireside Chat" of the war, December 9, 1941.**

Seven months later, on 27 May 1941, when President Roosevelt again addressed the American people by radio, he reminded listeners that in modern war you can't hold your fire until you see the "whites" of their eyes. Reminding his listeners of the apocryphal story from the 1775 Battle of Bunker Hill fought by state militias from all of New England, Roosevelt predicted: "Our Bunker Hill of tomorrow may be several thousand miles from Boston." He was off by several more thousands of miles.

President Roosevelt did not know this in May 1941, but the Bunker Hills for the men of the 182nd Infantry Regiment would be on New Caledonia, Efate and Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, and for an especially hardy band of five volunteers who faced unknown dangers like their trainband forbears of 1636, even the Santa Cruz Islands to the north. The Japanese were just five hundred miles away, at Tulagi and Guadalcanal in the southern Solomon Islands, from the Santa Cruz volunteers, who were posted to assist the Australian-led network of "coast-watchers" headquartered to the south at Efate keeping track of enemy ships and planes throughout the Coral Sea. Black Americans helped build Efate's airfield; their work continued on Espiritu Santo. Those Black American citizens, too, were part of this three-hundred-year-old American saga, for the inhabitants of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were already using African slave labor in the New World. Now, in the South Pacific, Blacks and whites would fight and labor as citizen-soldiers.

It would be a remarkable global moment in the South Pacific with deep and meaningful connections, however complicated, to the vision and reality of America. Three years after Roosevelt evoked Bunker Hill, one of their earlier battles, the 182nd Infantry Regiment would go on parade in the northern Solomon Islands under the American flag as they commemorated the 169th

anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill. It was a long arc indeed. But as General Marshall would say again and again, the idea of America, however powerful, was rooted, fundamentally, in family and community and their American values; what was true in 1636 was still true in 1941. This is why, he argued, American men would fight and die in defense of home and heart.

As the war continued, this National Guard presence would become a smaller percentage of America's fighting forces. America's National Guardsmen had fulfilled the task outlined in mobilization plans--defend the homeland while the ranks could be filled and trained--but the fundamental importance of family, community, and state would also characterize many of the millions more who continued their national and global missions in 1942-45.

Let us return, for a moment, to the start of this twentieth-century chapter of an American saga. The stories of three young Americans in uniform--three in a million-plus by the end of 1941--help us imagine this moment. Dale Friend, Peggy Hammer, and Walter Walt--all of whom were shipmates on the *Santa Elena* as it traversed the Pacific with six other ships carrying Task Force 6814--were part of this story.

Dr. Friend was already in the Massachusetts National Guard in late 1939 when its commander put out a call in the *New England Journal of Medicine* for fourteen doctors to fill vacant positions in the 101st Medical Regiment. Dr. Friend was then a battalion surgeon in the 182nd Infantry Regiment, but when the Massachusetts National Guard was inducted into national service in early 1941, Dr. Friend was leading Company G of the 101st Medical Regiment. He was soon promoted to major and given command of the 101st's Third Battalion. Peggy Hammer was training to be a civilian nurse in 1939 as the world crisis deepened.

Responding to President Roosevelt's declaration of a National Emergency, Hammer volunteered to become an Army nurse. Eventually she would receive orders to report to Camp Edwards on Cape Cod on 1 March 1941, where Dr. Friend was already training his men. Major Friend and Second Lieutenant Hammer would be waiting at Camp Edwards for Private Walter Walt in the middle of January 1942 as one of the Army's newest soldiers--only seven weeks a private--made his way north from Camp Lee in Virginia. General Marshall, General McNair, and General Patch had been preparing these three, and more than one million more, for this moment.

### **A Spectacle for the Nation: The Army Maneuvers of 1941**

Like National Guard units elsewhere, recent inductees began filling Army ranks too.

By the summer of 1941, America's soldiers numbered more than one million. It was time for the great military





**General McNair (left) and General Marshall (right) assess the “Situation Map” of the Louisiana Maneuvers, 26 September 1941, Camp Polk, Louisiana. The Second Army (Red) faced the Third Army (Blue) to the south. The Illinois 132nd Regiment “fought” with General Lear’s Second Army; North Dakota’s 164th Regiment was on the side of General Krueger’s Third Army. Marshall’s mantra for the 1940-1941 – time is of the essence – framework was clear for all to see.**

maneuvers of 1941. By the end of the year, almost 85% of the US Army had participated in Louisiana (including Illinois’ 132nd and North Dakota’s 164th), the Carolinas (including Massachusetts’ 182nd and the 101st Medical Regiment), and in other parts of America; these Divisional, Corps, and Army-level maneuvers included some of the largest concentrations of soldiers that the US had seen since the Civil War.

There were, of course, important military lessons to be learned and General Lesley McNair, the “Educator of the Army,” was keen to see how infantry and artillery units and all their supporting services, including medical units, functioned in mock-battle conditions. McNair’s Washington headquarters staff planned, observed, and critiqued the Louisiana and Carolina maneuvers in particular. But General Marshall flew across the country to take in all the action; this was also a major public relations and morale operation. He made sure American newspapermen and radio broadcasters had access to the troops and their leaders.

He wanted American voters and taxpayers, who had finally given him the money he needed in the fall of 1940, to see the fruits of their investment.

But he also wanted to foster the tie between the hot, tired, and hungry selectee, National Guardsman inductee, or volunteer, and his family and community. Marshall was convinced his citizen-soldiers would flourish, as he put it, in this “great experiment in democracy and citizenship.” The Army would train, clothe, house, feed, and heal its soldiers, but the soldiers’ hometowns, informed through mass media, letters, telegrams, and phone calls, would sustain and inspire.

General Marshall realized his vision in the summer and fall of 1941, but only a razor-thin majority in the House of Representatives in August 1941 extended the service obligations of the first selectees and National Guard inductees from a year to eighteen months as the Army’s numbers approached two million. This meant he could not let up on his public-relations blitz.

### **Training, Training, Training: From Citizens to Soldiers**

We do not know if Walter Walt was paying attention to the Congressional debates going on across the country in the summer of 1941, but we know that his Local Board No. 259 in Los Angeles did not wait long after the crucial Congressional votes. The President’s “Order to Report for Induction,” dated 20 October 1941, notified the twenty-five-year-old Walt that he had “now been selected for training and service in the Army.” He was directed to appear at 7:00 AM at the board’s headquarters at 1225 West Manchester. His Local Board arranged transportation to the Army’s Reception Center at Fort MacArthur in nearby San Pedro.

By the end of that fateful day, 17 November 1941, Walt had passed his Army physical and become one of America’s newest inductees. There were twenty-one Replacement Training Centers across America now receiving America’s citizen-soldiers for the newly-created thirteen-week “basic training” course. (The America’s General Patch had commanded the South Carolina Replacement Training Center.) It is unlikely that Walt had even begun training when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. We do know that by December he was stationed at Camp Lee, Virginia, the site of a Medical Replacement Training Center. And soon after President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill agreed at the White House meeting of 12 January 1942 that about 20,000 troops would be sent to the South Pacific, Walter Walt was on his way to join Dr. Friend, Nurse Hammer, and the 101st Medical Regiment.

Out of the vast tapestry of America’s stupendous mobilization efforts of 1940-41, a half dozen or so were drawn out and stretched all the way to New Caledonia.



**North Dakotas National Guard Company D of the 164th Infantry Regiment marches past the reviewing stand at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, 2 July 1941. Two month later the 164th will “fight” with General Krueger’s Third Army (Blue) in the Louisiana Maneuvers.**

The infantry regiments of Illinois (132nd) and North Dakota (164th) were ordered from Camp Claiborne where they had been training (including the Louisiana Maneuvers) for a year; the 182nd and the 101st Medical Regiment (both of which had been in the Carolina Maneuvers) were pulled from Massachusetts; these National Guard units were joined by hospital units staffed by doctors from the Officers’ Reserve Corps. Hospital units from Cleveland and Philadelphia were hastily activated and soon heading to the New York Port of Embarkation for their journey to the South Pacific. These medical professionals would join the 11,000-plus medical officers already on duty for the US Army.

And yet, when Dr. Friend wrote in his journal on 8 March 1942, awaiting engine repairs to the *Ericsson* before the final passage from Australia to New Caledonia, he knew his men needed more training and more equipment. Dr. Friend, who had been named the commanding officer of the entire 101st Medical Regiment when Task Force 6814 was being formed in January 1942, realized that the new concept of the Regimental Combat Team, which he had practiced with the 101st’s 3rd Battalion in the Carolina Maneuvers of 1941, one that required close cooperation between small front-line infantry units and medical teams, needed much work. And he knew the stakes were high.

His colleagues from Cleveland’s Western University Hospital had been left behind in Australia, where they were invited to take over the Royal Melbourne Hospital for their planned 1,000-bed 4th General Hospital. On New Caledonia, the 52nd Evacuation Hospital, a planned 750-bed unit brought to the South

Pacific doctors and nurses from Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia. The smaller 109th Station Hospital was slated for 250 beds on New Caledonia. These medical personnel, too, needed training. Other medical personnel, including Dr. Friend’s men, would be on or near the front lines, wherever these might be.

As soon as he arrived on New Caledonia in March 1942, Dr. Friend asked for and received permission from General Patch to arm and train all of the soldiers in his medical regiment to handle and fire the World War I-vintage 1903 Springfield rifle. In the second issue of the *Latrinogram*, the 101st Medical Regiment’s newsletter first published just after the Americal Division was activated, we learn that Walter Walt, now the twenty-six-year-old inductee from Los Angeles, tied Major Davis (19 of 20) in the marksmanship competition held earlier in May 1942. We also learn in the first issue, in the same “Caledonia Capers” section, that Dr. Friend had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He would celebrate that achievement with fellow officers of the 182nd Infantry Regiment, the fighting arm of the Regimental Combat Team.

With Japan’s devastating losses at Midway in early June, the men and women of the Army’s newest division, the Americal, could turn from defense to offense. General Patch and the newly-promoted Lieutenant Colonel Friend, like generals McNair and Marshall in Washington, were committed to the idea that morale, one of the keys to victory on the battlefield, was predicated in part on training and small-unit leadership. General McNair had to delegate to General Patch training responsibilities on New Caledonia, but in the network of Replacement Training Centers across the United States, basic training continued. Advanced training followed. After twelve intense months, fully manned, trained, and equipped divisions would be ready for combat. By the end of the war, General McNair’s Army Ground Forces would put into action overseas eighty-nine infantry divisions; only the Americal Division was activated and trained abroad.

### **Morale and War in the South Pacific: Globalizing General Marshall’s Vision for America’s Citizen-Soldiers**

And yet there was more. General Marshall’s focus on morale, and the mosaic that was America, is symbolized by one of the earliest US Army Signal Corps photographs from New Caledonia: the polyglot cadre of censors screening the letters sent by citizens and aliens in the Americal. This photograph was taken on 19 June 1942. The three censors from Massachusetts could handle Italian, French, German, and Portuguese; the three from the Midwest (Chicago, Minneapolis, and St. Paul) censored letters in Russian, Polish, and French. Each of the three National Guard infantry regiments on New Caledonia had detached men for



