

2nd Prize Winner 13-15 age group

Jackson Westbrook--13 years old--South Carolina

---

Guadalcanal

The warm rain fell steadily on Rex Warren's head, cascading off his helmet, falling past his shoulders and onto the deck. In his hometown, New York, the crowded streets were likely laden with powdery snow, Men in overcoats crunching through the dirty substance. Women in fur coats stuffing their gloved hands into their pockets as children hurled snowballs on the corners. In contrast, here aboard a ship in the South Pacific, sweat mixed with rain on the faces of the armed and uniformed soldiers. The humid air was around 90 degrees, and the strange, lush islands swarmed with wildlife. Rex thought back. The temperature rarely fell below 75, even in August, the coldest month. He shouldn't have thought of August. Now it all came rushing back, like one of the violent typhoons which raged across these waters. Rex squeezed his eyes shut. The Battle of Savo Island, on August 8-9, was the most detrimental United States Navy loss in history. Even now, in November 1942 it was fresh in the minds of the survivors, traumatizing.

Following Savo Island came the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. Though he did not take part in this US victory, word reached him that the Americans prevailed after being attacked persistently through the night of August 24. For a blissful six weeks following, no major battles took place—perhaps it was ending! War over? Impossible! But the idea was certainly a pleasant one. Perhaps.....

Alas, on October 26, the much larger Battle of Santa Cruz began. The American fleet, led by Vice Admiral William 'Bull' Halsey, consisted of heavy cruisers, light cruisers, an aircraft carrier called the USS Enterprise, destroyers, including the USS Porter, a battleship, and a carrier

called the USS Hornet. Against this formidable lineup was Japanese Vice Admiral Nagumo Chūichi's fleet of about the same size, including the fleet carriers Shokaku and Zuikaku, both of which participated in the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The battle began north of Guadalcanal and resulted in a tactical victory for Japan. The Porter and Hornet were sunk, and the Enterprise was damaged. For the Japanese, however, nearly 100 aircraft were shot down or were forced to retire—the Japanese were consequently forced to retreat. In the wake of these battles, Rex was confident he knew war. He was also confident it couldn't get worse. He was wrong.

### *36 hours later, Battle of Guadalcanal*

Rex was terrified. It was just after midnight, November 13. Japanese and American forces clashed in intense combat, floating on the placid ocean. Guns roared into the night. Despite this, Rear Admirals Daniel Callaghan and Norman Scott showed no signs of backing down. The Americans had intercepted a fleet of Japanese destroyers and heavy and light cruisers headed for Henderson Field, an important American military installation on the island of Guadalcanal. Planes flew overhead, and the sea puckered as millions of deadly bullets raked the surface. Rex struggled to stay calm. Do it, fire, he told himself, for your country! Rex's hands shook as he aimed. Fired.

Simple—It was all very simple. Just take a life. Pick 'em off. Another down. And yet... those people are just as human as anyone! Rex felt guilt sweep over him. *I'm a killer*. Granted; war was unavoidable in this tormented world, and death was inevitable. Nevertheless, it was wrong to just blast people—*people*—to bits. Rex shuddered and squeezed his eyes shut as he reloaded. He had to fire again. For one nation under God, for his President, for freedom. Rex took aim—the boat reared suddenly in a ball of flame. The Japanese struck the U.S. vessel! As

the deck tilted, Rex pitched forward, his head smacking hard on the metal floor, knocking him unconscious.

As Rex lay inert on the deck, his body flopping and rolling with the undulations of the sea, Admiral Callaghan and his men fought with true American spirit and indefatigable courage even as the vessel descended into the Stygian waters. If Rex were awake to see, he would witness hundreds of Americans, Republican, Democrat, Christian, Muslim, Atheist, Hindu, rich, poor, a variety of colors and beliefs working as a unit for one purpose—to preserve the culture and the magic of the American Dream.

Rex came to. Where was he? What was he doing? Gunshots enkindled a fresh wave of fear as he jerked to his feet and groped for a handhold in the midnight dark. The deck slanted dangerously as he paused to grasp his bearings. Then he saw it—another ship looming from the mist and smoke. The white flag—the red sun—this was a Japanese ship. Bells rang in his throbbing head. Rex began screaming about the ship to anyone who would pass his message along as he fought frantically towards Admiral Callaghan. As he struggled, a hand fell on his shoulder. “Scott’s shot,” a voice said, “and so’s Callaghan. We have no orders. It’s pure chaos.”

The ship rolled and tossed. If anyone noticed the Japanese destroyer, nothing could be done about it now—the deck pitched to a near vertical point. A fellow soldier, Marcus, slid down the deck, past Rex, under the railing, and into the water with a dull splash. Instinctually, Rex tied a rope to a pole and dove after him. Marcus’ life was invaluable. If Rex failed to rescue this man, how many would this affect in the future? A single seemingly unimportant human’s life or death had the potential to affect so many events and lives—Rex hit the water with a soft splash. The water hugged his body like a warm blanket, comforting against the battle that raged a few feet away. The waves bobbed Rex up, down, up, down. Marcus swam with strong strokes to Rex and

grabbed the rope. As he began to haul himself up the stern, hand over hand, the ship was annihilated by massive explosion. Rex and Marcus were blown for what seemed like a whole mile as the ship rolled and slid quickly into the water, decks aflame, steam and smoke rising into the dark November night. The fight seemingly paused as the tip of the stern sank below the surface. Then someone hit play and the guns roared to life again, performing their evil deeds unemotionally, just submitting to, obeying their master. Was it the gun that was evil? Or the gunman? Guns could be used as a tool or a necessary amenity or a lethal weapon. Key word—used. Could be *used*. The gun wasn't the one making the decision, but the gunman—and if the gunman has evil intentions, is he evil? To him, his intentions are perfectly righteous—maybe—and he's fighting for what he believes is right. Maybe no one is evil. Indeed, the Japanese certainly seemed evil, attacking plotting, killing innocent Americans—but that was war—the Americans were doing the same to the Japanese. Of this one thing became clear—nothing is clear—it was all just a fog of right and wrong, one belief versus another, all conflicting, contrasting.....

Rex and Marcus floated idly in the tropical waters. The battle was long over, and the morning was approaching. Hours, days, years—he wasn't sure how long it had been—he didn't care either. His focus was on the large American cruiser sailing nearby. The boat was here to pick up other survivors stranded in the water. Survivors like Rex and Marcus. Someone onboard heard his yell; the ship began to turn. Rescue was a possibility again. Rex was going home.

EPILOGUE-----  
-----

On May 8, 1945, the war ended with Germany's surrender on V-E Day, also known as Victory Europe Day. News reached the U.S later that year, and on September 2, V-J, or Victory Japan Day, Japan signed formal surrender documents on the USS Missouri. America was still suffering from the effects of war, but celebration was everywhere! Peace! Glorious peace! Though the Battle of Guadalcanal was a terrible event, it taught the United States a crucial lesson for the remainder of WWII and through the present day. The lesson? America must be bold and make sacrifices. If Admirals Callaghan and Scott had not pursued the ships headed for Henderson Air Force Base, Guadalcanal would not have happened. The Japanese likely would have gained control of the base, a necessary point in their plan to help Hitler conquer the world. During the battle, planning was a key part of the operation. The organizers had to look to the future in order to plan for the now. It was a rigorous process, but the brilliant minds of America's great leaders prevailed. No surprise.

**THIS MEMORIAL HAS BEEN ERECTED BY THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
IN HUMBLE TRIBUTE TO ITS SONS AND ALLIES  
WHO PAID THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE  
FOR THE LIBERATION OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS**

**1942-1943--** Inscription on the Guadalcanal Memorial, Honiara, Solomon Islands



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

<https://www.abmc.gov/>

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/solomon-islands-campaign-guadalcanal>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Guadalcanal>

[https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Battle\\_of\\_Guadalcanal](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Battle_of_Guadalcanal)

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/the-guadalcanal-campaign/>

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/americans-secure-guadalcanal>

The Solomon Islands Campaign: Guadalcanal | New Orleans <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles>

<https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/12/10/guadalcanal-1942-1943-a-critical-turning-point-in-the-pacific-and-window-to-multi-domain-operations>

<https://theconversation.com/a-world-war-ii-battle-holds-key-lessons-for-modern-warfare-117572>

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/world\\_war\\_ii/battle\\_of\\_guadalcanal.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/world_war_ii/battle_of_guadalcanal.php)

<https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-two/the-pacific-war-1941-to-1945/the-battle-of-guadalcanal/>

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/battle-guadalcanal>

<https://www.businessinsider.com/7-things-you-didnt-know-about-the-battle-of-guadalcanal-2018-8>

<https://history.army.mil/brochures/72-8/72-8.htm>

[https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/npswapa/extcontent/usmc/pcn-190-003117-00/sec1.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/npswapa/extcontent/usmc/pcn-190-003117-00/sec1.htm)

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/end-world-war-ii-1945>

*Neptune's Inferno*, Hornfisher, James D. published 2011

*Guadalcanal*, Hoyt, Edwin Palmer, published 1999