New Guinea campaign

The Kokoda Track campaign or Kokoda Trail campaign was part of the Pacific War of World War II. The campaign consisted of a series of battles fought between July and November 1942 between Japanese and Allied—primarily Australian—forces in what was then the Australian territory of Papua. Following a landing near Gona, on the north coast of New Guinea, on the night of 21/22 July, Japanese forces attempted to advance south overland through the mountains of the Owen Stanley Range to seize Port Moresby as part of a strategy of isolating Australia from the United States.

Initially only limited Australian forces were available to oppose them, and after making rapid progress the Japanese South Seas Force under Major General Tomitaro Horii clashed with under strength Australian forces from the Papuan Infantry Battalion and the Australian 39th Battalion on 23 July at Awala, forcing them back to Kokoda. Following a confused night battle on 28/29 July, the Australians were again forced to withdraw. The Australians attempted to recapture Kokoda on 8 August without success which resulted in heavy casualties on both sides, and the 39th Battalion was subsequently forced back to Deniki.

A number of Japanese attacks were subsequently fought off by the Australian Militia over the following week, yet by 14 August they began to withdraw over the Owen Stanley Range, down the Kokoda Track towards Isurava.

The Japanese failed to press their assault, however, and the next 10 days proved to be a respite for the Australians. Reinforcements, including the 53rd Battalion and the headquarters of the 30th Brigade under the commander of Brigadier Selwyn Porter, arrived to bolster the Australian forces, while the 21st Brigade under Brigadier Arnold Potts also arrived at Isurava by 23 August. The Australians faced significant supply issues despite the modest size of their forces, and the 39th Battalion was subsequently withdrawn to ease the logistic burden.
The Japanese advance resumed on 26 August, forcing Potts to mount a series of delaying actions as the 21st Brigade successively fell back, first to Eora Creek on 30 August, Templeton’s Crossing on 2 September, and Efogi three days later on 5 September. However, the Japanese were now increasingly hampered by supply problems of their own as they became overextended, while the Australian defence also became better organised. Regardless, the effectiveness of the Australian units was increasingly reduced through exhaustion and sickness from operating in the harsh terrain.

On 10 September, Potts handed over command to Porter, who was subsequently forced to withdraw to Ioribaiwa. The Japanese unsuccessfully mounted a further attack the following day, as they began to run out of momentum against the Australians who began to receive further reinforcements, including brigades from the experienced Australian 7th Division under the command of Major General Arthur Allen. The 25th Brigade under Brigadier Kenneth Eather took over the forward area on 14 September. Heavy fighting continued around Ioribaiwa for the next week, however, and the Australians were again forced to withdraw on 17 September, this time to Imita Ridge, in sight of Port Moresby itself.

Having outrun his supply lines and following the reverses suffered by the Japanese at Guadalcanal, Horii was now ordered on to the defensive, marking the limit of the Japanese advance southwards. The Japanese subsequently began to withdraw on 24 September to establish a defensive position on the north coast, but they were followed by the Australians under Eather who recaptured Kokoda on 2 November. Further fighting continued into November and December as the Australian and United States forces assaulted the Japanese beachheads, in what later became known as the Battle of Buna–Gona.

Background

Strategic context

Japanese attacks along the Malay Barrier 23 December 1941 – 21 February 1942.

After the fall of Singapore, the Australian government and many Australians feared that Japan would invade the Australian mainland. Australia was ill-prepared to counter such an attack as the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) lacked modern aircraft and the Royal Australian
**Navy** (RAN) was too small and unbalanced to counter the **Imperial Japanese Navy**. Additionally, the Army, although large, contained many inexperienced units and lacked mobility.[3]

In response to this threat, most of the **Second Australian Imperial Force** (2nd AIF) was brought back from the Middle East and the Government appealed to the United States for assistance. British Prime Minister **Winston Churchill** attempted to divert the 6th and 7th Divisions to **Burma** while they were en-route to Australia, but the Australian Prime Minister, **John Curtin**, refused to authorise this movement. As a compromise, two brigades of the 6th Division disembarked at **Ceylon** and formed part of the island's garrison until they returned to Australia in August 1942.[4]

The perceived threat of invasion led to a major expansion of the Australian military. By mid-1942, the Army had a strength of ten infantry divisions, **three armoured divisions** and hundreds of other units.[5] The RAAF and RAN were also greatly expanded, though it took years for these services to build up to their peak strengths.[6]

Meanwhile, as part of their general strategy in the Pacific, the Japanese sought to capture **Port Moresby** and prevent the Allies from using Australia as a base of operations. The port could have given them a base from which they could strike at north and eastern Australia, including its vital Melbourne–Sydney–Brisbane coastal area, Australia's most densely populated and industrialized area. The Japanese could have also controlled a major route between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and cut off the Australians from American supply ships.[7]

The Japanese military **considered invading Australia** in early 1942 but decided against doing so in February that year.[8] While such an invasion was debated by the Japanese **Imperial General Headquarters**, it was judged to be beyond the Japanese military's capabilities and no planning or other preparations were undertaken.[9] Instead, in March 1942 the Japanese military adopted a strategy of isolating Australia from the United States by capturing **Port Moresby** in New Guinea and the **Solomon Islands, Fiji, Samoa** and **New Caledonia**.[10] The first attempt to capture Port Moresby by seaborne amphibious invasion was thwarted by the **Battle of the Coral Sea** in May 1942.

A month later, most of the Japanese **carrier** fleet was destroyed in the **Battle of Midway**, further reducing the possibility of major **amphibious operations** in the south Pacific. The Japanese now resolved to mount an overland assault across the **Owen Stanley Range** to capture Port Moresby, which might have succeeded against virtually no resistance, had it been mounted in February.[11][page needed]

![MacArthur with Blamey and Prime Minister Curtin in March 1942](image-url)
Looking for ways to counter the Japanese advance into the South Pacific, the Supreme Allied Commander in the South West Pacific Area—**General Douglas MacArthur**—decided to build up Allied forces in New Guinea as a prelude to an offensive against the main Japanese base at **Rabaul**. Aware that an enemy landing at Buna could threaten Kokoda and then Port Moresby, MacArthur asked his commander of Allied Land Forces—**General Sir Thomas Blamey**—for details of how he proposed to defend Buna and Kokoda.

In turn, Blamey ordered **Major General Basil Morris**—the commander of **New Guinea Force**—to secure the area and prepare to oppose an enemy advance. Morris created a force to defend Kokoda called **Maroubra Force**, and he ordered the 100-strong 'B' Company of the Australian **39th Battalion** to travel overland along the track to the village of Kokoda. Once there, 'B' Company was to secure the airstrip at Kokoda, in preparation for an Allied build-up along the Papuan north coast.

The unit was ordered to leave on 26 June but did not depart until 7 July. The rest of the 39th Battalion stayed on the near side of the Owen Stanley range, improving communications. As the **Militia company** was securing its positions, news reached them of Japanese landings on the north coast of New Guinea.

**Geography**

*Main articles: Kokoda Track and Etymology: "Kokoda Track" or "Kokoda Trail"?

The **Kokoda Track** itself is a single-file track starting just outside **Port Moresby** on the **Coral Sea** and (depending on definition) runs 60–100 km (37–62 mi) through the **Owen Stanley Ranges** to **Kokoda** and the coastal lowlands beyond by the **Solomon Sea**.
The track crosses some of the most rugged and isolated terrain in the world, reaches 2,250 m (7,380 ft) at Mount Bellamy, and combines hot humid days with intensely cold nights, torrential rainfall and endemic tropical diseases such as malaria.

The track is passable only on foot, and as the campaign developed this had extreme repercussions for logistics, the size of forces deployed and the type of warfare that could be conducted.[14]

Before World War II, paths in many remote areas of New Guinea were commonly referred to as tracks. However, although the name Kokoda Trail is more consistent with U.S. English usage rather than Australian English, the term is used in official Australian Army battle honours. As a result, since the war there has been some debate over which term is correct. The Australian Macquarie Dictionary states that while both terms are in use, Kokoda Track "appears to be the more popular of the two".[15] In 1972, the national government of Papua New Guinea established a Place Names Commission.

"On 12th October 1972, they formally gave notice they intended to assign the name 'Kokoda Trail' to the section of the old mail route not accessible to motor vehicles, that is, the 'walking path' from Ower's Corner on the Sogeri Plateau to Kokoda. There was much debate but the name 'Kokoda Trail' was selected."[16]

Yet, in 2002, the Australian War Memorial published an article in their official magazine Wartime[17] which advised:

There has been considerable debate about whether the difficult path that crossed the Owen Stanley Range should be called "Kokoda Trail" or the 'Kokoda Track'. Both terms have been in common use since the war. 'Trail' is probably of American origin but has been used in many Australian history books, including the official history, and was adopted by the Australian Army as an official 'battle honour'. 'Track' comes from the language of the Australian bush. It too is commonly used by veterans, and is used in some volumes of Australia's official war history."[18]

Thus both terms are correct, but 'trail' appears to be more widely used. The memorial has adopted the term 'trail' as it is favoured by a majority of veterans and the Battles Nomenclature Committee, because it appears on the battle honours of units which served in Papua in 1942.[notes 1][18][19]

Prelude

Japanese landings and initial assault

The Japanese, having already captured much of the northern part of New Guinea earlier that year, landed on the north east coast of Papua on 21 July 1942, and established beachheads at Buna, Gona and Sanananda.[20] The first Australian Army unit to make contact with the Japanese on mainland New Guinea was a platoon from the Papuan Infantry Battalion (PIB), made up of indigenous soldiers, under an Australian officer, Lieutenant John
On 22 July, Chalk reported the arrival of the Japanese by sending a runner to his immediate superior. He received a handwritten note later that day, stating simply: "You will engage the enemy." That night, Chalk and his 40-strong unit ambushed Japanese forces from a hill overlooking the Gona-Sangara road, before retreating into the jungle.

Japanese attempts to build up the force at Buna also had to get past the Allied air forces. One transport got through on 25 July, but another on 29 July was sunk, although most of the troops got ashore. A third was forced to return to Rabaul. Another convoy had to turn back on 31 July.

However, bad weather and Japanese A6M Zero fighters allowed a convoy under Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa to get through on 14 August and land some 3,000 Japanese, Korean, and Formosan troops of the 14th and 15th Naval Construction Units. On 17 August, the 5th Sasebo Special Naval Landing Force, and elements of the 144th Regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hatsuo Tsukamoto, and the 55th Mountain Artillery, the 47th Anti Aircraft Artillery and the 55th Cavalry arrived under the overall command of engineer Colonel Yosuke Yokoyama.

On 21 August, two battalions of the 41st Regiment arrived. Yokoyama ordered Tsukamoto to seize the airstrip at Kokoda, and to conduct a reconnaissance-in-force along the Kokoda Track. Encountering the Australian troops deployed near Kokoda, Tsukamoto deployed his infantry and marines for an attack, and quickly moved inland.

Battle

First Battle of Kokoda

The first clash occurred at Awala on 23 July, when a small force from the PIB under the command of Major William Thornton Watson made contact with the Japanese. After being forced back, Watson's force withdrew across the Kumusi River, destroying the footbridge that spanned it as they went. When 'B' Company's commander, Captain Sam Templeton received news of the landings, he quickly sent a platoon forward to reinforce Watson and they began engaging the Japanese from the far side of the river. As hundreds of Japanese marines began crossing the river under a barrage of mortar and machine gun fire, the Australians were forced to withdraw.

However, they fell back only a few miles to a point where Templeton—now commanding a force of some 60 men drawn from 11 and 12 Platoons and some soldiers from the PIB—set up an ambush with two Lewis guns for a force of about 500 Japanese that were advancing along the banks of the Gorari Creek, before moving back to Kokoda to brief the 39th Battalion's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel William Owen, who had flown in to take command of 'B' Company in order to personally direct their defence.

The following day, the ambush was sprung and 15 Japanese were killed or wounded. However, outnumbered, the Australians were unable to stem the advance and they were forced back towards the high ground at Oivi where they attempted to make a stand.
Several hours apart on the morning of 26 July two transport planes landed 32 additional troops of the 39th Battalion which were sent to reinforce the two platoons at Oivi. This first plane arrived around 15:00, just as the Japanese troops attacked the 75 militiamen and handful of local PIB troops now defending Oivi. Despite repeated frontal and flank attacks over the next six hours the Japanese failed to break through. By 17:00, the remaining reinforcements had not yet arrived and Templeton moved down the track to warn them that they might encounter Japanese troops between them and his position. Unknown to Templeton the Japanese had already surrounded his troops and he was believed to have been killed when he ran into them.

Watson then assumed command. As the track to Kokoda was now cut off, Lance Corporal Sanopa of the PIB led the Australian and Papuan troops, under the cover of darkness, to Deniki by means of a creek below Oivi. At Deniki, the men joined up with Owen and the rest of ‘B’ Company and on the morning of 27 July, Owen—with the remnants of the Militia company and a handful of troops of the PIB, who had had little food or rest for the previous three days and knowing he would be facing some 500 Japanese marines—decided to attempt a defence of the Kokoda airstrip and hope that reinforcements would arrive in time to support him.

Leaving around 40 troops at Deniki, he took the remaining 77 and was deployed in Kokoda by midday on 28 July. Owen then contacted Port Moresby by radio to request reinforcements. Shortly afterward, two Douglas transports arrived overhead, carrying reinforcements from the 39th Battalion; however, after circling the airfield, they eventually returned to Port Moresby without landing.

At 02:00 on 29 July, the Japanese launched an attack on the airfield, pouring down intense machine gun and mortar fire on the Australian position before launching an assault. Close quarters hand to hand fighting ensued, and after Owen received a fatal wound, Watson took command. Only after his position was completely overrun did he give the order to his troops to withdraw to Deniki. The Kokoda airstrip was captured by the Japanese who—having achieved their objective and having suffered considerable losses—did not pursue the Australians.
Although the defenders were poorly trained, outnumbered and under-resourced, the resistance was such that, according to captured documents, the Japanese believed they had defeated a force more than 1,200 strong when, in fact, they were facing only 77 Australian troops.\[32\] Next to establishing the strength of the defending forces, and with the strategically vital supply base and airstrip at Kokoda within his grasp, Tsukamoto deemed the track to be practicable for a full-scale overland assault against Port Moresby. The 10,000-strong Imperial Japanese Army South Seas Force—consisting of troops from the 20th and 51st Divisions of the 18th Army[^33] commanded by Major General Tomitaro Horii[^34] based at Rabaul—was tasked with the capture of Port Moresby.\[35\]

**Australian reinforcements**

The loss of the airstrip at Kokoda forced the Australian commanders to send the other companies of the 39th Battalion plus the rest of the Militia's 30th Brigade—the 49th and 53rd Battalions—over the Track, rather than reinforcing Kokoda by air. Only two transport aircraft were available at Port Moresby with each capable of carrying reinforcements of only 20 soldiers on each trip. These reinforcements would be untrained members of the Militia only. This information was withheld from Major Allan Cameron—the brigade major of 30th Brigade, who temporarily took command of Maroubra Force on 4 August[^36]—who was ordered to retake the airfield from superior forces to allow the reinforcement. Supplies, which had previously been flown in to Kokoda by the United States Army Air Force, would now have to be air dropped. Wounded soldiers would now have to be carried out by Papuan porters[^37] who were nicknamed fuzzy-wuzzy angels by the Australian soldiers[^21].

By the first week in August, all the reinforcements had arrived in Deniki. The Australian force at Deniki now consisted of 33 officers and 443 other ranks of the 39th Battalion; eight Australians and 35 native troops of the PIB; and two officers and 12 native members of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) for a total of 533 troops.\[^4\] Cameron, who believed the 'B' Company survivors' failure to hold Oivi and Kokoda against the Japanese troops indicated a lack of fighting spirit, had them sent back up the track to Eora Creek.\[^36\]

The 18th Brigade was ordered to Milne Bay while the 21st and 25th Brigades would go to Port Moresby. As Magic decryption of Japanese communications had confirmed that Japan had no intention of invading Australia, Blamey and MacArthur initially decided to hold the 7th Division in Port Moresby as reserves and only commit Militia battalions to the fighting on the Track.

The 21st Brigade—commanded by Brigadier Arnold Potts—was the first to arrive at Port Moresby, and consisted of the 2/14th, 2/16th, and 2/27th Battalions. The 2/14th immediately began moving north along the Track to reinforce Marouba Force, while the 2/16th followed two days later. The 2/27th Battalion was tasked for the Kokoda Track, but following the Japanese landings at Milne Bay, the 2/27th was held in Port Moresby as the divisional reserve.

Air operations

Since Port Moresby was the only port supporting operations in Papua, its defence was critical to the campaign. The air defences consisted of P-39 and P-40 fighters. RAAF radar could not provide sufficient warning of Japanese attacks, so reliance was placed on coastwatchers and spotters in the hills until an American radar unit arrived in September with better equipment. Japanese bombers were often escorted by fighters which came in at 30,000 ft (9,100 m)—too high to be intercepted by the P-39s and P-40s—giving the Japanese an altitude advantage in air combat.

The cost to the Allied fighters was high. By June, 20–25 P-39s had been lost in air combat, while three more had been destroyed on the ground and eight had been destroyed in landings by accident. The Australian and American anti-aircraft gunners of the Composite Anti-Aircraft Defences played a crucial part. The gunners got a lot of practice; Port Moresby suffered its 78th raid on 17 August 1942. A gradual improvement in their numbers and skill forced the Japanese bombers up to higher altitude, where they were less accurate, and then, in August, to raiding by night.

Although RAAF PBY Catalinas and Lockheed Hudsons were based at Port Moresby, because of the Japanese air attacks long range bombers like B-17s, B-25s, and B-26s could not be safely based there and were instead staged through from bases in Australia. This resulted in considerable fatigue for the air crews. Due to USAAF doctrine and a lack of long-range escorts, long range bomber raids on targets like Rabaul went in unescorted and suffered heavy losses, prompting severe criticism of Lieutenant General George Brett by war correspondents for misusing his forces.

However, fighters did provide cover for the transports, and for bombers when their targets were within range. Aircraft based at Port Moresby and Milne Bay fought to prevent the Japanese from basing aircraft at Buna, and attempted to prevent the Japanese reinforcement of the Buna area. As the Japanese ground forces pressed toward Port Moresby, the Allied Air Forces struck supply points along the Kokoda Track. Japanese makeshift bridges were attacked by P-40s with 500 lb (230 kg) bombs.
Battles along the Track

Second Battle of Kokoda

On the arrival of the 39th Battalion, Cameron decided to retake Kokoda, a three-hour march from Deniki. This risky attack against unknown enemy forces later found to number 1,000 was carried out using three companies of the 39th Battalion attacking along different tracks. Between 06:30 and 08:00 on 8 August, the three companies left Deniki separately. Only Captain Noel Symington's 'A' Company succeeded in reaching Kokoda and successfully re-took the village, finding it very lightly defended. 'D' Company ran into enemy troops which resulted in heavy fighting continuing throughout the day with the Japanese continually reinforcing their position.

As nightfall approached 'D' Company began a fighting withdrawal which lasted two days. 'C' Company was ambushed by a large Japanese force and pinned down. After their commanding officer was killed, the company repeatedly attempted to withdraw under heavy fire during the day but were unable to do so until night fell. Upon reaching Deniki, their pursuers continued the attack on Cameron and his troops for several hours before withdrawing towards Kokoda.

At 10:00 on the following day, two Papuan policemen arrived at Deniki to advise Cameron that they had occupied Kokoda the previous day and he was awaiting reinforcements and supplies. Cameron contacted Port Moresby and was told that the reinforcements would not be available until the following day due to poor weather conditions.

Having repulsed 'C' and 'D' Companies, Lieutenant Colonel Tsukamoto now concentrated his troops against 'A' Company. From late morning on 9 August, the Japanese repeatedly attacked Captain Symington's force at Kokoda and the battles continued into the night when the Japanese were able to infiltrate the Australian perimeter under cover of darkness. Hand to hand fighting continued until the next morning. An attempt to reinforce 'A' Company using troops from the 49th Battalion failed when the aircrew were unable to establish that the airstrip was in friendly hands.
By late afternoon, the Australians had consumed all of their food and had very little ammunition left. As such, at around 19:00, Symington ordered a fighting withdrawal to the west of the Kokoda plateau and then at first light made for Deniki. Unable to break through the Japanese lines while carrying their wounded they entered the village of Naro, sending a villager to Deniki for help where Warrant Officer Wilkinson volunteered to lead a small patrol of native troops to Naro. Wilkinson reached Naro and led the men of 'A' Company past the Japanese to Isurava, rejoining the rest of the 39th Battalion on 13 August.

**Battle of Isurava**

On 26 August, Horii moved the first of his disembarking troops forward, a body of some 2,500 soldiers, against the 39th Battalion—now under Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Honner, who had assumed command on 16 August—and elements of the 49th and 53rd Battalions, some 400-strong. The Japanese force made contact with the outer positions of Maroubra Force and began frontal attacks against the dug-in defenders with the aid of a mountain gun and mortars manhandled up the Track. Japanese reconnaissance had revealed a parallel track bypassing Isurava, defended by the Australian 53rd Battalion. The 2/14th Battalion had been dispatched from Myola the previous day with orders to relieve the 39th, and a company reached their position at Isurava in the middle of the afternoon on 26 August, while others deployed to Alola and Templeton's Crossing.

Nevertheless, the 39th were forced to stay on as several times the Japanese threatened to break through the perimeter. Potts, who had taken command of Maroubra Force, realising that Horii had launched a major attack, decided to deploy the 2/14th at Isurava, using the 39th to screen their movement, while bringing up the 2/16th to Myola where it would be held in reserve. By the time the 2/14th Battalion had deployed, the Japanese were still able to field a force some 5,000 strong.

Japanese tactics were little-changed from the campaign through Malaya—pin the enemy in place with frontal attacks while feeling for the flanks, with a view to cutting off enemy forces from the rear. However, Horii was on a strict timetable; any delays in finding the Australian flank meant the gradual debilitation of his force from disease and starvation. As a result, Maroubra Force endured four days of violent attacks from aggressive, well-trained and well led Japanese troops.
As dawn broke on 27 August, the Australians defending Isurava were subjected to heavy mortar and mountain gun fire as the Japanese launched a number of probes against the 39th Battalion's lines. As the morning progressed, the probes began to penetrate the 39th's defences; however, the deployment of the 2/14th Battalion restored the situation and by nightfall the Australian perimeter had been re-established. The situation on the right flank, where the 53rd Battalion was guarding the alternate track, was critical, however.

A Japanese force was sent to open this route, and met with success. Infiltrating the 53rd's perimeter, the Japanese managed to achieve a break-in and rolled up the Australians' positions, killing a number of the battalion's senior officers, including its commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Ward. As a result of this loss, communications between the companies broke down rendering co-ordinated action impossible and 53rd gave ground, retreating to the Track junction behind Isurava. Although the Japanese failed to exploit the situation, the way to Alola was open to them and as a result Potts was forced to bring up the 2/16th Battalion to plug the gap.

On 28 August, the fighting continued along the front of the Australian position and on both flanks. The Japanese commander—realising that the Australians had brought up reinforcements—decided to commit the two battalions he had been holding back in reserve. The following day, the Japanese attacked with the equivalent of six battalions; in possession of the ridges that dominated the Australian position from both sides of the valley in which it sat, the Japanese were able to lay down considerable volumes of mortar and machine gun fire in support of their assaults. Unable to respond with similar firepower, the Australian perimeter began to shrink, and it was during this stage of the fighting that Private Bruce Kingsbury of the 2/14th made a unique individual contribution to the campaign and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross as a result. His citation read, in part:

Private Kingsbury, who was one of the few survivors of a platoon which had been overrun ... immediately volunteered to join a different platoon which had been ordered to counterattack. He rushed forward, firing the Bren gun from his hip through terrific machine-gun fire, and succeeded in clearing a path through the enemy. Continuing to sweep enemy positions with his fire, and inflicting an extremely high number of casualties upon them, Private Kingsbury was then seen to fall to the ground, shot dead by the bullet from a sniper hiding in the wood.

Eyewitnesses said that Kingsbury's actions had a profound effect on the Japanese, halting their momentum. However, as Australian casualties mounted and ammunition ran low, the Japanese came close to making a breakthrough on the alternate track. Horii had now deployed several companies on the flanks and near the rear of the 2/14th and 39th Battalions, threatening the Australian positions with encirclement. Outnumbered, Maroubra Force withdrew towards Nauro and Menari. Potts relieved the exhausted 39th and 53rd Battalions; they were ordered to make their way back to Port Moresby. The 53rd—whose performance during the fighting had come to be seen in less than favourable light—was reduced to being used for reinforcements and work parties; however, the 39th subsequently returned to the battle when the forward troops were under pressure.
Tropical diseases in general—and malaria in particular—took a devastating toll in this campaign, outnumbering combat casualties by ten to one. While the Australian Army had encountered malaria in the Middle East, few doctors with the Militia had seen the disease before. The need for a strict anti-malaria program was not fully understood, and many men wore shorts and short-sleeved shirts after dark. Others failed to take their quinine, which was still the major drug in use, not having yet been supplanted by atebrin. Many officers saw this as a medical rather than a disciplinary issue, and did not compel their men to take their medicine. Moreover, anti-malarial supplies of all kinds were in short supply.\[62\]

**Isurava to Brigade Hill**

No suitable defensive terrain existed between Isurava and a feature known as Mission Ridge, which was south of Nauro and Myola. As a result, Brigadier Potts and Maroubra Force retreated back through Menari, mounting small delaying actions where possible, reaching Eora Creek on 30 August, Templeton's Crossing on 2 September and then Efogi on 5 September.\[24\]

Retreating soldiers, Papuan porters and wounded immediately flooded the Track, causing it to become a sea of mud in parts. However, no wounded were left behind—Japanese patrols routinely mutilated and executed any wounded found; sometimes using the corpses as bait to draw Australian soldiers into ambushes—overall 750 wounded were carried to safety.

Colonel Kingsley Norris in the 7th Division Medical Services report noted that the difficulty of providing stretchers which each required eight bearers meant those wounded who were able to stagger were treated with "absolute ruthlessness" and not provided with stretchers. In one case, a casualty with a fractured patella with a 2 in (51 mm) gap between the two halves walked for six days and some with worse injuries volunteered to walk to free a stretcher for the more seriously wounded.\[63\]

Notable was the bravery of the Australian field doctors; among them Captain Dr. Allan Edward McGuinness, of the 2/2nd Battalion, was awarded the Military Cross in December 1943\[64\] for "[c]ourage and unselfish devotion at Saputa and Eora Creek".
It was at Saputa on 27 November 1943 that seven Japanese "Zeros" bombed a clearly marked Australian field hospital, killing 25 men, including two doctors. The withdrawal back to Efogi presented more problems for the Australians. To the east, at Myola, a large dry lake bed was being used as a supply dump. Potts' decision to fall back meant that there was every chance that this important drop zone might be lost. The supply situation had become critical, indeed because food and supplies had been slow to arrive, the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions had been forced to wait several days until enough supplies arrived for them to carry out their orders, time which allowed the Japanese to concentrate their forces.

Nevertheless, Allied air drop techniques and assets had been steadily improving throughout the campaign and Allen, under significant pressure from Blamey and MacArthur, asked Potts when offensive actions would be resumed now that air-drops were ensuring a regular, albeit sparse, flow of supplies. Potts in turn requested the 2/27th Battalion as reinforcements. In view of the situation at Milne Bay, MacArthur withheld this force until the situation at Milne Bay was clearer.

Allen then ordered Potts to hold Myola as a forward supply base and to gather sufficient supplies for an offensive against the Japanese advance. But Potts was in an indefensible position; threatened with an outflanking manoeuvre through a loop of the Track and with insufficient terrain near Myola suitable for a set-piece defence, he retreated through Myola, destroying the supply base behind him.

**Battle of Brigade Hill**

Maroubra Force withdrew to the next defensible strong point on the Track, a feature known as Mission Ridge. Following the containment of the Japanese at Milne Bay, Allen finally released the 2/27th Battalion from the divisional reserve at Port Moresby. After advancing along the Track from Port Moresby, the 2/27th finally joined Maroubra Force at Kagi on 4 September where they took over a quantity of automatic weapons from the 39th Battalion which was being withdrawn. Moving onto Mission Ridge, the 2/27th was joined on 6 September by the 2/14th and the 2/16th Battalions, thus allowing Brigadier Potts to finally commit his entire brigade to the battle.

Taking up positions on a hilltop straddling the Track, which later became known as "Brigate Hill", Maroubra Force awaited the Japanese advance. Unknown to the Allies, the Japanese managed to land reinforcements on the northern coast and on 8 September, a force of around 1,000 Japanese launched an attack on the Australian positions at Mission Ridge. The attack began with frontal attacks, which fell upon the Australian leading elements, although these were beaten off with stubborn defence.

The Japanese then launched a strong flank attack, with a force of around 5,000 men, aimed at cutting off the lead elements from the rest of Maroubra Force. The flank attack cut the Australian force in two, separating the brigade headquarters staff from the three battalions. With his headquarters about to be overrun, Brigadier Potts and the rear elements of Maroubra Force were forced to retreat back along the Track to the village of Menari.
Now surrounded, the 2/14th and 2/16th acted on previously given orders and at mid afternoon, formed a line and advanced, initially at walking pace, towards the Japanese in an attempt to break through and connect with headquarters; 88 men died in the largely unsuccessful action. Meanwhile the 2/27th—carrying numerous stretcher cases—left the track in an orderly manner attempting to rejoin Australian lines. The Japanese pursued them but a rearguard action by ‘B’ and ‘D’ Companies of the 2/27th caused them to break contact. [notes 5]

The remnants of the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions managed to re-unite with Brigadier Potts and 21st Brigade headquarters at Menari, but the 2/27th Battalion was unable to reach Menari before the rest of the brigade was again forced to retreat by the advancing Japanese. The 2/27th—along with wounded from the other battalions—were forced to follow paths parallel to the main Track, eventually rejoined the main Australian force at Jawarere,[71] then making their way back to Ioribaiwa, and thence to Imita Ridge.

Elements of the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions accompanying Potts later managed to regroup as a composite battalion for the defence of Imita Ridge,[71] but the 2/27th, feared lost, only managed to rejoin a fortnight later, after the Japanese retreat began, having made a difficult trek over the mountains to Jawarere 15 mi (24 km) east of Ilolo. [69]

The defeat of the 21st Brigade at Brigade Hill finally ended Maroubra Force’s defence of the Kokoda Track as a cohesive fighting unit, and was a decisive victory for the Japanese. The defeat was one of many factors leading later to the infamous “running rabbits” incident at base camp at Koitaki. On 8 September, Rowell informed Blamey that he had decided to relieve Potts. Rowell ordered Potts to immediately report to Port Moresby “for consultations”, replacing him as Maroubra Force commander with Brigadier Selwyn Porter on 10 September.[71]
The series of defeats had a depressing effect back in Australia. On 30 August, MacArthur radioed Washington that unless action was taken, New Guinea Force would be overwhelmed. General George Vasey wrote that "GHQ is like a bloody barometer in a cyclone—up and down every two minutes". MacArthur informed General George Marshall that "the Australians have proven themselves unable to match the enemy in jungle fighting. Aggressive leadership is lacking." MacArthur, concerned about the situation, wanted Blamey to go up to New Guinea and "energise" the situation by assuming personal control.[72]

Blamey had an "appallingly negative public image" with Australian troops commonly referring to him as "that bastard" and sometimes even openly booing and taunting him. Cabinet Minister Jack Beasley commented in Parliament: "Moresby is going to fall. Send Blamey up there and let him fall with it." Prime Minister John Curtin ordered Blamey up to Port Moresby to take personal command of New Guinea Force, which he did on 23 September.[72][74] Rowell remained in command of I Corps, but saw this as a supersession. Blamey soon concluded that he could not work with Rowell, and relieved him of his command on 28 September, replacing him with Lieutenant General Edmund Herring.[75]

Ioribaiwa and Imita Ridge

An Australian soldier inspects Japanese artillery rounds abandoned at Ioribaiwa. These rounds had been carried the length of the track by Japanese soldiers.

As the Australians fell back toward Ioribaiwa, they began bringing up reinforcements from Port Moresby. The Militia 3rd Battalion had set off on 5 September and the following day the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion joined it, while the 2/6th Independent Company—under the command of Major Harry Harcourt—was dispatched to Laloki and began patrolling along the Goldie River toward Ioribaiwa.[71]

In addition to this, the Honner Force—consisting of militiamen from the 39th Battalion and reinforcements from the 2/6th Independent Company—was formed under the command of Ralph Honner with orders to attack Japanese supply lines between Nauro and Menari.[71]

On 11 September, the first reinforcements from Port Moresby arrived and took up position on Ioribaiwa Ridge to the right of composite battalion, while the 2/6th Independent Company began patrolling operations on the left.
For the next two days, the Japanese heavily shelled and mortared the Australians, while infantry probed for weak spots in the position against which an assault could be launched.[76] Before the assault could come, however, on the night of 13/14 September, the 25th Brigade—consisting of the 2/25th, 2/31st and 2/33rd Battalions—arrived to relieve the remnants of the 21st Brigade.

Fresh from training in Australia and under the command of Brigadier Ken Eather,[77] they took up positions at Ioribaiwa. Shortly afterward, however, as the Japanese launched their attack, Eather made the decision to withdraw to what he felt was a more defensible position at Imita Ridge, 40 km (25 mi) from Port Moresby.[73] As the 25th Brigade, along with the 3rd and 2/1st Pioneer Battalions dug-in, the remnants of the 21st Brigade moved back and by 20 September the Australians had established a strong position on the ridge.[78]

The following day, they were joined by a battery of 25 pounders from the 14th Field Regiment, which had been brought up the Track,[79] and they began patrolling operations in order to hold off the Japanese while they prepared to launch their own counter-offensive.[80]

Upon reaching Ioribaiwa, the lead Japanese elements began to celebrate—from their vantage point on the hills around Ioribaiwa, the Japanese soldiers could see the lights of Port Moresby and the Coral Sea beyond.[81] However, they made no concerted attempt to advance on Eather's position at Imita Ridge.[80] Instead, Horii ordered his troops to dig in on the ridge line at Ioribaiwa. All reinforcements were being diverted to Guadalcanal[81] and his long supply line had broken down.

The meagre supplies captured from the Australians were insufficient for a new offensive. The foodstuffs taken from the former Australian supply dump at Myola had been contaminated by the Australians,[82] and Horii believed that his troops were so hungry and physically weak that they would barely be able to defend the positions they held already, let alone continue the advance.[83]

Japanese withdrawal

Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi's attack on 14 September to retake Guadalcanal was unsuccessful. In an unequal battle, Kawaguchi's forces lost about 850 killed, while the American marines lost 104.[83] When the news reached Imperial General Headquarters in Japan, they decided in an emergency session that they could not support fronts on both New Guinea and Guadalcanal.

They concluded that Guadalcanal and its airfield was essential to securing Japanese operations in the South Pacific, and Lieutenant General Harukichi Hyakutake decided that he only had sufficient troops and materiel to defeat the Allied forces on Guadalcanal. Hyakutake prepared to send more troops to Guadalcanal in another attempt to recapture Henderson Field. With the concurrence of the Japanese command staff, he ordered General Horii to withdraw troops on New Guinea, who were within 48 km (30 mi) of Port Moresby, to the Buna–Gona beachheads until the issue at Guadalcanal was decided.[84]
While Rowell felt he could contain the Japanese with the extra troops, MacArthur was anxious to flank the Japanese. He asked his staff to plan a flanking manoeuvre that would push the Japanese off the mountains more quickly. Since the 32nd Division in Australia had to move to another camp in any event, MacArthur issued orders for them to move to New Guinea. Brigadier General Hanford MacNider—in charge of the G-4 (Logistics) unit in MacArthur's headquarters group—learned when he arrived in Port Moresby that the previously chosen flanking route across the peninsula to Wairopi proposed by headquarters staff was not practical. It crossed the Australians' rear area and a region where the soldiers could be cut off by the Japanese.

It was also so mountainous that the only way they could receive supplies would be by air. An alternative route was then considered: an 85 mi (137 km) trail, from Port Moresby along the coast to Kapa Kapa, thence inland via Kalikodobu, Arapara, Laruni, to Jaure. From Jaure other minor trails would lead the soldiers to Wairopi and Buna. The total distance over the mountains to the Japanese positions was over 130 miles (209 km), and most of the trail was barely a goat path.

Beginning on 14 October, 1,250 men from the 32nd Division—members of the 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry Regiment, 114th Engineer Battalion, and 19th Portable Hospital, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Henry A. Geerds—left Karekodobu on foot. The men departed Karekodobu—nicknamed "Kalamazoo" by the GIs who had a hard time pronouncing the local name—were accompanied by several hundred natives. So rough was the journey ahead that they became the only Americans to cross the extremely rugged 10,000 ft (3,000 m) Owen Stanley Mountains on foot. The first troops reached Jaure on 25 October 1942. Captain Boice, scouting ahead, had reached this village on 4 October. They began to depart from Jaure on 28 October and reached the Natunga area on 2 November. They spent more than a week drawing rations, helmets, boots, and other equipment before pushing on to Gora and Bofu, which they reached on 12 November. On 20 November 1942, after 42 days of crossing extraordinarily difficult terrain, including hogback, razor-sharp ridges, dense jungle, and mountainous high-altitude passes, and without having encountered a single enemy, 'E' Company was the first unit to reach Soputa at the front.

By the time the 2nd Battalion emerged from the jungle, the 32nd Division's 1/126th, the 128th which had been flown overland to Wanigela, and the Australian 2/10th Battalion had already engaged the Japanese. Tropical diseases and exhaustion had taken a severe toll on the 2/126th, which had lost a significant part of its strength before it first engaged the Japanese in the subsequent Battle of Buna–Gona.
Allied logistics

A U.S. C-47 transport plane dropping supplies to the Australian 25th Brigade near Nauro Village in October 1942

MacArthur visited Blamey in Port Moresby on 4 October 1942 and the two agreed to establish a Combined Operations Service Command (COSC) to co-ordinate logistical activities in Papua-New Guinea. To command it, MacArthur appointed Brigadier General Dwight Johns, the deputy commander of USASOS in SWPA, an expert on airbase construction. He was given an Australian deputy, Brigadier Victor Secombe, who had directed the rehabilitation of the port of Tobruk in 1941. All Australian and American logistical units were placed under COSC, which also controlled a fleet of small craft and luggers.

The development of the bases at Port Moresby and Milne Bay was now well advanced, and supplies were being built up. At Port Moresby, a T-shaped wharf was constructed on Tatana Island and linked to the mainland by a causeway. Opened in early October, it more than doubled the capacity of the port, allowing it to handle several large ships at a time when previously it had been able to handle only one.

A forward supply dump was also established at Myola, in a dry lake bed. It was a "massive yellow brown oasis in a green desert" allowing supply drops by United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) "biscuit bombers". The USAAF had two transport squadrons in the theatre, the 21st and 22nd Troop Carrier Squadrons, formed in Australia in April 1942. They operated a collection of acquired aircraft, including C-39, C-47, C-53, DC-2, DC-3, DC-5 and Lockheed 14.

Many of the pilots were civilians and losses were high. Four of the 32 available transports were lost in August 1942. Myola has been described as "one of the great mysteries of the Papuan campaign". Potts had been told that 40,000 rations had been stored at Myola prior to 17 August and that there was no need for his troops to carry rations and on hearing this he ordered his men to pack five days' rations. Upon arrival, however, Potts found only 5,000 rations. Rowell maintained that the missing rations “fell outside the target area” and in his autobiography he stated that the claim that "the rations were never dropped at all or that the explanation lay in faulty work by an inexperienced staff" was "preposterous", noting that "all through the New Guinea Campaign cargo dropping remained notoriously unreliable".
On 21 August, a patrol discovered a second, much larger, dry lake bed at Myola. The two lake beds came to be called Myola 1 and 2 but at this time maps showed and air crew expected only one. It seems likely that drops were made at the wrong one. Rowell pressed Blamey to ask for additional drops but lacking aircraft MacArthur told Blamey “air supply must necessarily be considered an emergency rather than a normal means of supply” and that he was to find other ways to meet his needs—meaning native carriers. As such, Potts would have to make do with the scheduled drops. Due to a shortage of parachutes, all the supplies had to be “free-dropped”—dropped without parachutes. Packaging at this time was primitive and inadequate, even for normal handling under New Guinea conditions, and woefully inadequate for being dropped from a plane, so the rate of breakages was high. Tactics for dropping had not been developed and the recovery rate was correspondingly small.

**Australian counter-offensive**

In early October, as it became clear that the Japanese were withdrawing north towards coast, the Australians began operations to pursue them. With two Australian brigades committed to this—the 25th and the newly arrived 16th, which had been detached from the 6th Division—the 7th Division’s commander—“Tubby” Allen—took operational command on the Kokoda Track.

Among the Allied high command, however, there was a concern about the lack of forward momentum and so on 20 October Allen ordered the 16th Brigade—made up of the 2/1st, 2/2nd and 2/3rd Battalions, with the Militia 3rd Battalion in reserve—under the command of Brigadier John Lloyd to take over responsibility for the forward area from the 25th Brigade in an attempt to reinvigorate the advance.

The 25th, however, remained in the area and throughout October each brigade in turn kept contact with the withdrawing Japanese who fought delaying actions as determined as those of the Australians. The Japanese established a number of heavily defended positions, notably at Templeton’s Crossing and Eora Creek which slowed the Australians’ advance and resulted in heavy casualties.
Unsatisfied with the speed of his advance, Lieutenant General Edmund Herring relieved Allen of command on 28 October, and replaced him with Major General George Vasey, previously of the 6th Division. On 2 November, Kokoda was re-taken without opposition by a patrol from the 25th Brigade.[106][107] By 13 November, the 16th and 25th Brigades had crossed the Kumusi River at Wairopi,[108] after which they were able to link up with American forces on 16 November.[109]

Aftermath

Strengths and casualties

A total of 13,500 Japanese were ultimately landed in Papua for the fighting during the campaign.[35] Of these, about 6,000 or two regiments, were directly involved in the "forward areas" along the Track.[110][111] Against this, the Allies assembled approximately 30,000 troops in Port Moresby, although at any one time no more than one infantry brigade, or approximately 3,500 troops, were involved in the fighting for most of the campaign.[112]

Casualties amongst the Australians between 22 July and 16 November 1942 were 39 officers and 586 men killed and a further 64 officers and 991 men wounded, for a total of 625 killed and 1,055 wounded. Non-battle, or sickness, casualties are not accurately recorded but are stated to have been about two to three times the battle casualty figure.[109][113] The exact number of Japanese casualties is not known. It is believed that of the 6,000 troops, or five infantry battalions, that were committed to the fighting, that up to 75% became casualties, being either killed, wounded or becoming ill.[113] Of the 13,500 that began the campaign, following the withdrawal only about 5,000 reached Buna in late November 1942.[114]

The "running rabbits" incident

On 22 October, after the relief of the 21st Brigade by the 25th Brigade, Blamey visited the remnants of Maroubra Force at Koitaki camp, near Port Moresby. While Rowell had allowed Potts to return to his brigade, Herring was unfamiliar with Potts and preferred to work with officers he knew.

Blamey relieved Potts of his command, replacing him with Brigadier Ivan Dougherty, an officer he knew from when Blamey commanded the Northern Territory Force. Blamey cited Potts' failure to hold back the Japanese, despite commanding "superior forces" and, despite explicit orders to the contrary, Potts' failure to launch an offensive to re-take Kokoda. Blamey explained that Prime Minister John Curtin had told him to say that failures like Kokoda would not be tolerated.[115]

Shortly after relieving Potts, Blamey addressed the men of the 21st Brigade on a parade ground. The men of the Maroubra Force expected congratulations for their efforts in holding back the Japanese. However, instead of praising them, Blamey told the brigade that they had been "beaten" by inferior forces, and that "no soldier should be afraid to die". "Remember," Blamey was reported as saying, "it's the rabbit who runs who gets shot, not the man holding the gun."[115] There was a wave of murmurs and restlessness among the soldiers.
Officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) managed to quiet the soldiers and many later said that Blamey was lucky to escape with his life. Later that day, during a march-past parade, many disobeyed the "eyes right" order. In a later letter to his wife, an enraged Brigadier Potts swore to "fry his [Blamey's] soul in the afterlife" over this incident. According to witnesses, when Blamey subsequently visited Australian wounded in the camp hospital, inmates nibbled lettuce, while wrinkling their noses and whispering "run, rabbit, run" (the chorus of a popular song during the war). Dougherty commanded the 21st Brigade until the end of the war, while Potts went to command the 23rd Brigade.

Japanese war crimes

Main article: Japanese war crimes

As the Japanese withdrew, it was found that many of the enemy had died of malnutrition with evidence that some Japanese had been reduced to eating wood, grass, roots and other inedible material. Australian soldiers were also confronted with evidence of cannibalism. Dead and wounded Australian and Japanese soldiers who had been left behind in the Australian retreat from Templeton's Crossing were stripped of flesh. In 1987, a Japanese documentary Yuki Yuki te Shengun contained interviews with Japanese soldiers who confessed to cannibalism on New Guinea.

Soldiers testified that the Japanese had not run short of rations having uncovered rice dumps and significant amounts of tinned food. During the Tokyo War Crimes trial that was held after the war, however, there was not enough evidence to bring formal charges with regards to the claims of cannibalism; nevertheless, some Japanese soldiers were tried and convicted in Australian-run military courts held in New Guinea.

The Japanese were also responsible for the execution of two female missionaries, May Hayman and Mavis Parkinson, during the campaign. Shortly after the Japanese landing at Buna on 21 July 1942, the two women fled the mission with a priest. During their escape, they were aided by locals and a small group of Australian soldiers for a number of months; however, after the other members of their party were killed in an ambush in August they were handed in to the Japanese. Upon capture they were interrogated for information by members of the Kempeitai, before being bayonetted and buried in a shallow grave. In February 1943, following the conclusion of the campaign, the grave was discovered, the two bodies recovered and moved to Sangara mission.

Subsequent events

The Japanese commander—Horii—disappeared, presumed drowned, while withdrawing with his troops across the Kumusi River, toward the beachheads. When the fierce current of the river swept away a horse on which he was riding, Horii opted to float down the Kumusi River in a canoe with other senior officers, in order to quickly get back to Buna and organise the beachhead defences. The canoe was floated down to the river mouth, but Horii and his staff were swept out to sea in a freak squall.
None were ever seen again.\[129\] Meanwhile, several grisly discoveries by advancing Australian troops starkly illustrated the logistical nightmare of the Track—Japanese corpses were often found with no sign of external trauma, having died from malnutrition, typhoid and dysentery, and several corpses of Australian soldiers were found to have had body parts removed, a result of Japanese soldiers engaging in cannibalism.\[notes 7\][126]

After the strategic debate between the Imperial Japanese Army and Imperial Japanese Navy had been settled in late February with a decision to isolate rather than invade Australia, the Army continued to maintain its view that invading Australia was impractical, but agreed to extend Japan's strategic perimeter and cut Australia off from the US by invading Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia in the so-called Operation FS.\[127\] As such the Japanese attempt to capture Port Moresby in New Guinea by advancing along the Kokoda Track and landing at Milne Bay between July and September 1942 had therefore aimed to capture the town to complete Japan's defensive perimeter in the region.

Once secured, Port Moresby was to have been used as a base from which Japanese aircraft could dominate the Torres Strait and Coral Sea, and not to support an invasion of Australia.\[128\] The FS Operation was not implemented, however, due to Japan's defeats in the Battle of the Coral Sea and Battle of Midway and was cancelled on 11 July 1942.\[129\] While these battles ended the threat to Australia, the Australian government continued to warn that an invasion was possible until mid-1943.\[9\]

Meanwhile, the Japanese withdrew within their formidable defences around the Buna–Gona beachheads, reinforced by fresh units from Rabaul. A joint Australian–United States Army operation was launched to crush the Japanese beachheads, in what later became known as the Battle of Buna–Gona. Following the conclusion of the action at Buna and Gona, about 30 remaining members of the 39th Battalion were airlifted out of the front line and in March 1943 they were withdrawn back to Australia where it was disbanded in July 1943.\[61\] Allied operations against Japanese forces in New Guinea, including Operation Cartwheel and the Salamaua–Lae campaign, continued into 1945.\[130\]

**Significance of the Kokoda Track campaign**

While the Gallipoli Campaign of World War I was Australia's first military test as a new nation, the fighting during the Kokoda campaign represents the first time in the nation's history that its security was directly threatened. Although it has since become accepted that an invasion of Australia was not possible, or even planned by the Japanese, at the time there was a very real belief within Australia that this was possible and as such the Kokoda campaign has come to be viewed by some—albeit perhaps erroneously—as the battle that "saved Australia".\[131\]

As a result, within the collective Australian psyche, the campaign and particularly the role of the 39th Battalion, has become a key part of modern notions of the Anzac legend,\[132\] indeed, the Battle of Isurava has been described as "Australia's Thermopylae".\[133\]
Nevertheless, the Allied campaign was hampered by the poor intelligence available, which included antiquated maps, unfamiliarity with the terrain, and limited aerial photography. Senior military commanders including MacArthur and Blamey were unaware of the extraordinarily difficult terrain and the extreme conditions in which the battles would be fought and orders given to the commanders were sometimes unrealistic given the conditions on the ground. In the end though, the strategy used against the Japanese in Papua—widely criticised at the time—led to an eventual, though costly, victory.

The campaign also served to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the individual soldiers and the lower level commanders. The American and Australian armies would take steps to improve individual and unit training and medical and logistic infrastructure would also be greatly improved, with an increased focus upon airpower to solve the supply problem.

Notes

Footnotes

1. ^ The Australian War Memorial states: that the terms "Kokoda Trail" and "Kokoda Track" have been used interchangeably since the Second World War and the former was adopted by the Battles Nomenclature Committee as the official British Commonwealth battle honour in October 1957.

2. ^ Japanese wartime documents translated in 2010 revealed that Templeton had been wounded and captured alive. During interrogation, he "revealed" to the Japanese OIC that 80,000 Australian troops had landed at Port Moresby and would be advancing up the track. In fact, there were less than 1,000 troops available to defend Port Moresby and the documents indicate that Templeton's claim may have been responsible for the unexplained slowing down of the early Japanese advance. Researchers located the Japanese soldier who had buried Templeton who explained that Templeton was killed after he laughed at the OIC who then stabbed him through the stomach with a sword. Now aged in his 90s, the soldier described the place of burial and later personally led researchers to the spot described.

3. ^ There is a discrepancy amongst the sources about the reasons behind why the American pilots did not land. Keogh states that they were ordered to return to base by Morris, who was unable to determine whether the Australians still held Kokoda, see Keogh 1965, p. 176. Brune, however, states that the pilots were not ordered to return to Port Moresby, but in fact refused to land due to fears that the Japanese would attack before they could take off again.

4. According to eyewitnesses on one of the planes, the pilot repeatedly refused Lieutenant Lovell's demand that they land and that they could clearly see Australians clearing barricades from the airfield, indicating that the 39th Battalion still held the airfield, see Brune 2003, pp. 102–103.

5. ^ The troops were woefully short of supplies. None had waterproof ground sheets and the 533 troops had only 70 blankets between them. Few had a change a clothes or shoes
and their uniforms were khaki desert camouflage unsuitable for the jungle and the extreme rain and cold of the track. The minimum weight carried by each man was 18 kilograms (40 lb) plus their rifles. With other battalion equipment passed around in rotation, the burden for each man could reach as much as 27 kilograms (60 lb).

6. "That was a tremendous operation, a wonderful action by B Company. They had to buy time...and the way they did it they counter-attacked against the Japs. The Japs were so shocked they broke contact...They had the impetus and they were hot on our heels. We were withdrawing with our wounded...And the 'B' Company was given this job to stop them. Instead of just standing there and firing at them they counter-attacked and that must have shocked them considerably." — Captain Harry Katekar, adjutant 2/27th Battalion, see Brune 2003, pp. 208–209.

7. Logistics was a major problem during the Kokoda campaign. Free dropping consisted of a plane flying as low and slow as possible to the ground at heights of often less than 20 feet (6.1 m) to reduce breakages. Firearms, ammunition and food were wrapped in blankets before dropping. Only two transport aircraft were available at any one time for the track itself. Native bearers were also used to transport food, with each able to carry enough food for one man for 13 days, a bearer would consume most of this load in transit leaving an average of five days rations per bearer reaching the troops and the bearer then required to live off the land for his return.

8. In September 1942 Japanese daily rations had consisted of 800 grams of rice and tinned meat, however, by December this had fallen to 50 grams. Happell 2008, p. 78. In the book "The Bone Man of Kokoda", Japanese survivor Kokichi Nishimura recounts weighing 73 kg (160 lb) at the beginning of the campaign but only 28 kg (62 lb) by the time he was evacuated in June 1943.

Citations

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57. McCarthy 1959, pp. 200–211.
63. "Brief Account of the activities of the 7th Australian Division – Medical Services during Six Months Campaign in Papua". AWM 481/12/13: 54. 1943.
71. Keogh 1965, p. 211.
75. Thompson 2008, p. 357.
85. ^ Milner 1957, p. 91.
86. ^ Milner 1957, p. 92.
87. ^ Milner 1957, p. 94.
88. ^ a b Milner 1957.
89. ^ Milner 1957, p. 95.
90. ^ a b Milner 1957, p. 115.
95. ^ a b c Milner 1957, p. 103.
96. ^ Watson 1944, p. 27.
106. ^ Keogh 1965, p. 239.
109. ^ a b c d McCarthy 1959, p. 335.
113. ^ a b Coulthard-Clark 1998, p. 223.
115. ^ a b c d Brune 2003, pp. 257–258.
118. ^ Happell 2008, p. 79.
References


Further reading


External links

- The Kokoda Track (Department of Veterans’ Affairs website)
- The Kokoda Track Foundation
- The Kokoda Memorial Foundation
- ANZAC Day commemoration Committee – The Kokoda Track
- Wartime Sketch Map
- Bomana War Cemetery Roll Call
- ABC(Australian) report – Historical Find

Coordinates: 8°52'39.95"S 147°44'14.99"E

Categories:
- Conflicts in 1942
- 1942 in Papua New Guinea
- Battles and operations of World War II involving Australia
- Battles and operations of World War II involving the United States
- South West Pacific theatre of World War II
- Japanese war crimes
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- Papua New Guinea in World War II