

# The Kokoda Campaign

From Kokoda Spirit <http://www.kokodaspirit.com/writing-history/kokoda-campaign-trail-world-war-2.htm>

The Kokoda Track is a narrow, jungle-enclosed pathway across the Owen Stanley Range over the roof of Papua. It climbs from the hills north of Port Moresby through small settlements such as Uberi, Kagi, Efogi and Isurava to a height of over 2,200 metres.

Towering over the range west of Isurava is Mount Victoria, 4,073 metres, a summit regularly hidden by grey rain clouds. Beyond Isurava, the track falls away through Deniki down the northern slopes of the range to the little village of Kokoda, and then on through gentler foothills down to the banks of the swift-flowing Kumusi River. Before World War 2, few people used the track. Europeans wanting to cross the damp, rain soaked mountains did so by plane and the only travellers along this isolated footway were government patrol officers and local villagers. Distances on the track were measured not in kilometres, but in the days it took to travel through the rugged terrain from place to place, up and down one precipitous slope after another.

For the Australian soldiers sent to serve in the Owen Stanleys in 1942, the surroundings were a shock.

## THE BEGINNING

War came to the Kokoda Track in July 1942. During the night of 21-22 July, a Japanese invasion force from Rabaul, New Britain, began landing at Gona Mission on the north Papuan coast. This was Major General Horii's 'South Seas Force', whose instructions were to take Port Moresby, if feasible, by a thrust across the mountains. Another Japanese force would land later at Milne Bay at the eastern tip of Papua to secure aircraft landing grounds and to prepare for an assault on Port Moresby from along the south Papuan coast.

As the Japanese pressed inland from Gona, they were opposed by soldiers of the Papuan Infantry Battalion and a company of militiamen of the 39th Battalion. Indeed, for the first month after the Gona landings the young Victorians of the 39th were virtually the only Australian force resisting the enemy drive towards the Owen Stanleys.

## KOKODA 1

During this period the Australians moved back to Kokoda village, which fell after a sharp engagement on 29 July. Lieutenant Colonel William Owen, the commanding officer of the 39th Battalion, was killed.

On 8 August 1942, the 39th temporarily retook Kokoda but were again driven out back to Deniki. By now the Japanese had landed their main force and were preparing for a full-scale assault towards Port Moresby.

## ISURAVA

The 39th withdrew into the mountains to Isurava where they went into fresh defensive positions. It was at Isurava that the battalion met its new commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Honner. Honner, an experienced soldier, quickly summed up their condition after a month of jungle warfare:

***Physically the pathetically young warriors of the 39th were in poor shape. Worn out by strenuous fighting and exhausting movement, and weakened by lack of food and sleep and shelter, many had literally come to a standstill. Practically every day torrential rain fell***

***all through the afternoon and night, cascading into their cheerless weapons pits and soaking the clothes they wore - the only ones they had. In these they shivered through the long chill vigil of the lonely nights when they were required to stand awake and alert but still and silent.***

Honner arrived at Isurava on 16 August 1942 as the Japanese were beginning to probe his forward positions. At that point, any determined enemy assault would probably have overrun Honner's weary battalion. A second battalion, the 53rd, had trekked from Port Moresby and Honner sent it towards Abuari to protect a side-track over which the Japanese could also advance. Coming up the Kokoda Track in the second half of August were reinforcements in the shape of the 21st Brigade, Australian Imperial Force. Forward elements of the brigade's lead battalion - the 2/14th - began reaching Isurava on 26 August. As these hardened soldiers, veterans of the fighting in the Middle East made their way through the mountains they had begun to understand just how much the 39th had endured on this toughest of battle fronts. Of their first day's march, an officer wrote:

***Gradually men dropped out utterly exhausted - just couldn't go on. You'd come to a group of men and say 'Come on! We must go on.' But it was physically impossible to move - many were lying down and had been sick ... many made several trips up the last slope helping others. We began to see some of the tremendous effort the troops were going to make to help the lesser ones in. Found many of the battalion [at Ioribaiwa] lying exhausted, some ate, others lay and were sick, others just lay. Some tried to eat but couldn't.***

It was the intention of the 2/14th to relieve the tired 39th Battalion, but before the whole of the 2/14th could take up positions at Isurava, the Japanese struck. The brunt of the opening attack fell on E Company of the 39th and a breakthrough was only prevented by desperate close-quarters fighting:

***Through the widening breach poured another flood of the attackers to swirl around the remainder of the right platoon from the rear. They were met with Bren gun and Tommy gun, with bayonet and grenade; but still they came, to close with the buffet of fist and boot and rifle-butt, the steel of clashing helmets and of straining, strangling fingers.***

That day the 39th held and prevented a disastrous collapse of the Australian front while the remainder of the 2/14th came up to support them. At Isurava, and throughout the Kokoda Track battle, the Australians were up against a brave and determined enemy to whom Dudley McCarthy, the official historian, paid this tribute:

***They were brave and strong of purpose. They were trained and experienced in this type of warfare. They were hard and enduring.*** To face this threat would require equal strength of purpose, hardness and endurance.

Japanese attacks resumed at Isurava on 28 August but they failed to break the 2/14th's lines, now established in front of the 39th Battalion. On the next day, persistent enemy thrusts were met with dogged resistance requiring counter-attack after counter-attack. About midday, it looked as if a breakthrough might occur. To meet this threat, different groups of men charged back at the Japanese and, as this assault developed, one man was seen to lead - Private Bruce Kingsbury, 2/14th Battalion:

#### **PRIVATE BRUCE KINGSBURY**

***[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 on them, Private Kingsbury was then seen to fall to the ground shot dead by a bullet from a sniper.***

For his outstanding courage and his key role in restoring the Australian position, Bruce Kingsbury was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, the first of the war in Papua New Guinea.

By the evening of 29 August, however, the 2/14th were in a bad way and withdrawal became inevitable. At night, covered by the 2/16th Battalion, the 2/14th and 39th Battalions moved back about two kilometres to Isurava Rest House. Throughout 29 August, the 2/16th and elements of the 53rd Battalion had held off a Japanese advance along the Abuari side-track to the right of the Isurava position. Had the enemy broken through here, the 2/14th and 39th would have been prevented from any possibility of retreat. Intense enemy pressure on 30 August forced a further withdrawal towards Eora Creek. As the Australians fell back, over 172 men of the 2/14th were cut off, including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Key.

## **FIGHTING WITHDRAWAL**

There now commenced what has become the best known period of the Battle of the Kokoda Track - the Australian fighting withdrawal between 30 August and 20 September to Imita Ridge. It was marked by a number of features: Intense rearguard actions designed to slow the Japanese; the fortitude of the wounded; the vital contribution of the Papua New Guinean stretcher bearers and supply carriers under the control of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU); and the desperate stories of large parties cut off along the track.

It was in the evacuation of the wounded from Isurava that the work of the local stretcher-bearers came to the fore. With bare feet and a surer grip on water-covered rocks and inclines than Australians, the Papua New Guineans, eight men to a bearer party, toiled back down the track with their seriously injured charges. Captain Henry 'Blue' Steward, the Regimental Medical Officer of the 2/16th Battalion wrote:

***... They never forgot their patients, carrying them as gently as they could, avoiding the jolts and jars of the many ups and downs. The last stretcher was carried out by the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] boys, two volunteers, Padre Fred and myself. Till then we never knew the effort needed, nor fully appreciated the work the carriers were doing. Their bare, splayed feet gave them a better grip than our cleated boots could claim on the slippery rocks and mud.***

***Some of the bearers disliked the tight, flat canvas surfaces of the regulation army stretchers, off which a man might slide or be tipped. They felt safer with the deeper beds of their own bush made stretchers - two blankets doubled round two long poles cut from the jungle. Each time we watched them hoist the stretchers from the ground to their shoulders for another stint, we saw their strong leg, arm and back muscles rippling under their glossy black skins. Manly and dignified, they felt proud of their responsibility to the wounded, and rarely faltered. When they laid their charges down for the night they sought level ground on which to build a rough shelter of light poles and leaves. With four men each side of a stretcher, they took it in turns to sleep and to watch, giving each wounded man whatever food, drink or comfort there might be.***

In a report on the medical aspects of this period of the Kokoda campaign, Colonel Kingsley Norris, Assistant Director Medical Services, 7th Division, praised the work of all the Australian Army Medical Corps units. No living casualty, claimed Norris, was abandoned to the enemy and overall 750 wounded and sick were shepherded down the track to safety. Norris was also full of praise for the 'walking wounded'. They had, in Norris' words, to be treated with 'absolute ruthlessness' and not provided with stretchers:

***Those alone who were quite unable to struggle or stagger along were carried. There was practically never a complaint nor any resentment ... One casualty with a two inch gap in a fractured patella, splinted by a banana leaf, walked for six days ...***

Others who suffered greatly during this phase of the campaign were the various groups cut off by the Japanese advance. Forced to take to the jungle, they had little food and were often burdened by wounded. At one point a whole battalion, the 2/27th, became completely cut off and spent virtually two weeks trekking through often trackless country until they emerged at Jawarere, well to the east of Ilolo where the Kokoda Track began. Two men who distinguished themselves during this ordeal were Privates J H Burns and A F Zanker. As Lieutenant Colonel G D T Cooper, commanding officer of the 2/27th, pressed on to get help, Burns and Zanker looked after the wounded in a jungle clearing. Burns described one of their worst days, 23 September:

***The sun was fiercer than ever and it took a lot out of the lads. Corporal Williams [one of the badly wounded] spent a terrible night and when Zanker and I washed the lads we decided to put him on a new stretcher and put the fresh dressings on his wounds. It was a terrific job but we succeeded in the end. Both Zanker and I had a couple of blackouts during it. We had now used two of our last three dressings ... Diarrhoea broke out during the day and we were lifting the poor lads for the next twenty-four hours without respite.***

Corporal Leonard Williams died on 24 September. On 2 October the little party was found by patrols and they reached hospital in Port Moresby on 7 October, almost a month after they had gone into the jungle.

As the 21st Brigade withdrew through Eora Creek, Templeton's Crossing and Myola, the Japanese followed hard after them. Between 30 August and 6 September, the 2/14th and the 2/16th fell back as far as Efogi where they encountered the advance parties of the 2/27th Battalion.

#### **BRIGADE HILL-MISSION RIDGE**

The 2/27th now mounted a defensive screen at Mission Ridge just south of Efogi. From here, throughout the night of 6-7 September, they watched as a procession of lights moved down the track between Myola and Efogi. The Japanese were getting themselves into position for an attack that came just before dawn on 8 September. All day long the Japanese charged the Australian frontal positions with determination but were beaten back by an equally determined defence. So severe was the fighting that Captain C A W Sims' company on that day used up its entire supply of grenades and ammunition as well as the whole battalion ammunition reserve.

While Sims' position was being subjected to this frontal assault, other Japanese soldiers infiltrated around the 2/27 Battalion's positions. They moved well to the Australian rear where elements of the 2/16th were guarding brigade headquarters. Soon the headquarters was under attack and forced to move back. Private Bert Ward, 2/27th Battalion, admired the Japanese soldiers' endurance and capacity to carry out these skilful flanking movements:

***I must admit to some degree of amazement as to how active they were, to be able to keep going. We were flat, absolutely flat out! Physically exhausted! And so they must have been! Still, when they encircled us at Efogi in an area like that... You'd have to be a qualified mountain goat to be able to do physically what they did.***

Effectively, the enemy had now cut the track between headquarters and the forward Australian positions. On the afternoon of 8 September the 2/14th tried to break out through the Japanese positions to get back down the track. Captain Claude Nye, 2/14th and Captain Frank Sublet, 2/16th led a charge in which Nye was eventually killed. Although a few men broke through, the Japanese positions held and the Australian battalions had to find another way round the Japanese through the jungle to Menari.

As they moved off the track, the enemy pursued them vigorously but was successfully driven off in a rearguard action by B and D companies of the 2/27th. Captain Harry Katekar, 2/27th Battalion, realised that the gallantry of these two companies had saved them all:

***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.***

The 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions made it into Menari just as the Japanese began to shell the area but the 2/27th was too far behind and, being forced to turn back, began its long trek through the mountains to Jawawere.

## **IORIBAIWA**

From Menari the Australians withdrew back to Ioribaiwa where the battalions of the fresh 25th Brigade - 2/25th, 2/31st and 2/33rd - along with the 3rd Battalion took over the defence. By 17 September, the tired battalions of the 21st Brigade had been pulled back.

## **IMITA RIDGE**

After further Japanese pressure, the Australians withdrew to Imita Ridge where the 25th Brigade, the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion and the 3rd Battalion took up their defensive positions. From Imita Ridge there was to be no more withdrawal. This was made clear in a message from Lieutenant General Sydney Rowell, commander, New Guinea Force, to Major General Arthur Allen, commander 7th Division, AIF:

***However many troops the enemy has they must all have walked from Buna. We are how so far back that any further withdrawal is out of the question and Eather (commander, 25th Brigade) must fight it out at all costs.***

## **THE TURNING POINT**

Just as Rowell suggested, General Horii's men arrived at Ioribaiwa in an exhausted but nonetheless elated state of mind. From that ridge they could see the searchlights of their prize, Port Moresby. But they were now a long way from their north coast base and their lines of supply and communication, under attack by Allied aircraft, stretched back over the wearying and rugged Kokoda Track. They also faced fresh Australian troops and the likelihood that more were on the way. Moreover, the Japanese force which had landed at Milne Bay in late August had met defeat and Japanese on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands were also experiencing difficulties against the Americans. Rather than allow Horii's men to risk themselves in what might prove an impossible task - the taking of Port Moresby - the Japanese high command ordered them to withdraw. Seizo Okada, a war correspondent from a Tokyo newspaper, was with Horii and his commanders when the news to pull back was received:

***On a thin straw mat in the tent the elderly commander was sitting solemnly upright on his heels, his face emaciated, his grey hair reflecting the dim light of a candle that stood on the inner lid of a ration can. Lieut-Colonel Tanaka, his staff officer, sat face to face with him also on a mat. Two lonely shadows were cast on the dirty wet canvas...there was a strong body of opinion among the hot-blooded battalion commanders advocating a desperate single-handed thrust into Port Moresby. But Staff-Officer Tanaka remained cool, and reasoned with them saying that it was a suicidal action even if everything went well except the supply of food, which was in a hopeless condition.***

Between 21 and 24 September, the guns of the 14th Field Regiment at Owers' Corner bombarded the Japanese. Australian patrols probed the area around Imita ridge and some men were killed. However, when a planned attack went in at Ioribaiwa on 28 September 1942, there was no opposition. The Japanese were gone.

## THE FINAL PHASE

The final phase of the Battle of Kokoda Track lasted from 28 September to 15-16 November. For the Australians it was a period of pursuit of their enemies back over the Owen Stanleys. At Templeton's Crossing (12-17 October), Eora Creek (21-29 October) and Oivi-Gojari (5-11 November), Japanese rearguards mounted stubborn delaying defences. These were not small actions but drawn out and costly affairs which drew in the bulk of the Australian forces committed to the advance - the 25th Brigade, the 16th Brigade (2/1st, 2/2nd and 2/3rd Battalions) and the 3rd Battalion. Supporting units included the 2/4th, 2/6th and 14th Field Ambulances and 2/5th and 2/6th field companies, Royal Australian Engineers. The Japanese purpose was to buy time for the bulk of their men to escape back to the north coast. During this withdrawal the Japanese soldiers went through an ordeal every bit as gruelling as the Australians had faced in the earlier phase of the battle. War correspondent, Seizo Okada, wrote:

***At Mount Isurava which stood at the northern end of the path across the Owen Stanley Range the narrow path was congested with stretchers carrying the wounded soldiers back to the field hospital on the coast. There were so many of them that they had been delayed here since the wholesale retreat began. Some of them were on makeshift stretchers, each made of two wooden poles with a blanket or tent-cloth tied to them with vines and carried by four men. They made slow and laborious progress, constantly held up by steep slopes. The soldiers on them, some lying on their backs, emitted groans of pain at every bump. In some cases, the blood from the wounds was dropping through the canvas or blanket on to the ground. Some looked all but dead, unable even to give out a groan.***

As the Australian battalions moved back across the Owen Stanleys they realised once again how reliant they were on the Papua New Guineans. Supply was the most critical element of the whole Kokoda campaign for everything eaten or fired at the enemy had to be carried long distances to supply dumps along the track. Air dropping was carried out by the so-called 'biscuit-bombers', United States Army Air Forces Douglas transport aircraft, but much material was lost in the bush or was damaged on impact.

Despite these losses, these air drops were an essential supplementary source of supply during the Australian advance of October and November 1942.

However, much of the food and equipment essential to waging this war along a remote and mountainous pathway had to be carried forward either by the troops themselves or by the local carriers, who were recruited in large numbers from their families and villages. When working with the forward battalions the carriers, brought along the medical gear, signals equipment, as well the heavy weapons and ammunition. This was an arduous task. Australian war correspondent Osmar White described the condition of the carriers after a long day's march:

***Lions of exhausted carriers were squatting...eating muddy rice of muddy banana leaves. Their woolly hair was plastered with rain and much. Their eyes were rolling and bloodshot with the strain of long carrying. Some of them were still panting.***

The 3rd Battalion led the way back up the Kokoda Track. As they moved on through Nauro, they saw much evidence of the swift Japanese withdrawal. Bodies and equipment lay everywhere and many of the enemy had died of malnutrition and disease. Indeed, it was realised that some Japanese had been reduced to eating wood, grass, roots and other inedible material.

By 12 October, elements of the 2/33rd and 2/31st Battalions were converging on Templeton's Crossing. Higher command thought this rather slow progress against a weakened and outnumbered enemy force, but nobody back in Australia, or among those senior commanders who had ever ventured to the beginning of the Kokoda Track, had any idea of the difficulty of supply in the high Owen Stanleys.

## TEMPLETON'S CROSSING

At Templeton's Crossing, the Japanese mounted their first serious defensive action. It took the men of the 2/33rd, 2/25th, 2/31st and 3rd Battalions virtually a week of hard fighting to force the Japanese out of their positions before the advance could proceed. In this high area, the track ran along narrow, bamboo-lined ridges and the Japanese had made many carefully concealed weapons pits. Each of these had to be individually captured before further forward movement was possible. The official history described how this had to be done:

***They (the 3rd Battalion) had first to dispose of a machine gun and Tongs (Sergeant Bede Tongs) did it. He crawled up to a fire lane, under fire, and tossed a grenade which lobbed right in the pit. The two Japs in the pit were blown clean out and sprawled one on top of the other - dead. That started the ball rolling. The men got excited and began yelling and whooping.***

After the Japanese were pushed back at Templeton's Crossing, the 16th Brigade battalions relieved the men of the 25th Brigade. On their way through the mountains, these veterans gained a sense of what the struggle along the Kokoda Track had cost. The war diarist of the 16th Brigade recorded:

***Along the route were skeletons, picked clean by ants and other insects, and in the dark recesses of the forest came to our nostrils the stench of the dead, hastily buried, or perhaps not buried at all.*** The 16th Brigade took over the advance beyond Templeton's Crossing in an area of deep ravines along Eora Creek. Here the track crossed steep ridges hemmed in by jungle making its way over what the official Australian historian described as 'the torn side of the mountain'. In this rugged country, the Australians fought their way forward until they reached an area just to the north of the village of Eora Creek, regarded as the best position of the whole Kokoda Track from which to mount a defence. Here the Japanese were well dug in and waiting:

## EORA CREEK

***The Japanese had the good sense to establish this forest fort (Eora Creek) on the only water to be found on the ridge. Consequently, for the four days before support arrived, the men of the company (Captain J M Gall's company, 2/3rd Battalion) had to catch rainwater in their gas capes and drink water from the roots of the 'water tree'. Their only food was dehydrated emergency ration, eaten dry and cold. Every time one of the patrols from the company located one of the outlying Japanese machine gun posts, scouts were killed or wounded. Then the post would be outflanked and overrun with Brens, Tommy guns, and grenades, but each night the attacking parties had to withdraw to defensive positions and in the darkness the Japanese would re-establish the posts or put out others. The Japanese snipers were alert and good shots.***

As at Templeton's Crossing, enemy resistance at Eora Creek was intense. Attack and counter-attack led to many casualties on both sides. To the front of their fortress the enemy had managed to tie down forward elements of the 2/1st and 2/2nd Battalions. Eventually, the 2/3rd Battalion and one company of the 2/2nd Battalion worked their way on to high ground above the main Japanese position. From there, on the late afternoon of 28 October, the Australians swept down the hill on the right flank of the Japanese fortress and broke through:

***We sailed into them firing from the hip ... the forward scouts were knocked out, but the men went on steadily advancing from tree to tree until we were right through their outlying posts and into the central position. Suddenly the Japanese began to run out. They dropped their weapons and stumbled through the thick bush down the slope.***

With the enemy defences at Eora Creek broken, the way lay open across the mountains, past Isurava and back down to Kokoda village.

## **KOKODA 2**

On 2 November, a patrol from the 2/31st Battalion entered Kokoda and found it to be abandoned. On 3 November, Major General George Vasey, commander, 7th Division, hoisted the Australian flag once again over Kokoda. Soon the airstrip was open, supplies could be flown in and wounded men could be evacuated quickly. The significance of Kokoda, wrote the official historian:

***... Lay only in its name which would identify in history the evil track which passed across the Papuan mountains from the sea to the sea.***

### **OIVI and GOIARI**

One last hurdle faced the Australians along the Kokoda Track - the Japanese defences between the settlements of Oivi and Goiari. Here bitter fighting against well-developed positions again held up the advance. By 9-10 November the Australian battalions had encircled the area and the Japanese defenders were trapped. On 11 November, the Japanese finally broke and tried to make their way through the jungle to the Kumusi River.

Some managed to cross in two boats while others, including General Horii himself, attempted to raft down the river to the coast. Many were drowned, including Horii, and others were shot by snipers from Papuan Infantry Battalion patrols.

On 13 November, Australian patrols reached the Kumusi where the famous Wairopi Bridge lay in ruins. The 2/5th Field Company Engineers repaired a wrecked Japanese boat and, attaching it to a block and tackle, ferried a company of the 2/33rd Battalion to the far bank, where a small bridgehead was established. Allied aircraft dropped steel rope and tools and the engineers soon rigged up two flying foxes and two small suspension bridges, made from rope and logs. By 17 November, the battalions of the 16th and 25th Brigades were across the river.

### **THE END OF THE BATTLE OF KOKODA**

With the Australian crossing of the Kumusi River, the Battle of the Kokoda Track came to an end.

### **THE BATTLE OF THE BEACH HEADS**

The Japanese withdrew to the invasion points and Australian and American soldiers now faced a terrible struggle to capture the enemy strongholds on the north coast at Buna, Gona and Sanananda. Only with the fall of Sanananda, in late January 1943, was the Japanese threat to Papua over. With this defeat ended the threat that Japanese aircraft flying from locations such as Port Moresby might have posed to civilian and military targets along the Queensland and Northern Territory coasts.

### **OVERVIEW/SUMMARY**

Between 21 July and 16 November 1942, Australia lost over 600 killed or died of wounds during the battle of the Kokoda Track. A further 1,000 were wounded. Some of the dead were buried along the track or in graveyards at places like Efogi and Kokoda. After the war all the graves of those killed in Papua were brought into the Bomana War Cemetery near Port Moresby.

Private Bruce Kingsbury VC, 2/14th Battalion, lies buried there, as does Lieutenant Roy Mackay, 2/31st Battalion, of Campsie, NSW, killed in action on 11 November during the last engagements on Kokoda at Oivi and Goiari. The names of those missing in action were recorded on the Port Moresby Memorial at Bomana and among them is Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Key, commanding officer of the 2/14th Battalion, who was executed in enemy hands around 10 September 1942.

## THE KOKODA SPIRIT

Since World War 2, many people have written about the Kokoda campaign, a campaign now seen as perhaps second only to Gallipoli in its significance to Australian history. In a way the original Anzacs were never able to do, hundreds of veterans of the Kokoda Track have, in oral histories and video interviews, told their personal stories of the hardships and the sacrifice of those who died there. And like Gallipoli, the story that has most gripped the popular imagination is that of the endurance of wounded men and the care given to them by mates, medical personnel and stretcher bearers. It is no coincidence that the largest war painting commissioned by the Australian Government about Kokoda was William Dargie's Stretcher bearers in the Owen Stanleys. It shows Papua New Guineans tending a wounded Australian as they carry him along the Kokoda Track.

What words then, can sum up such an important national experience? Immediately after the war Colonel Kingsley Norris wrote an article about the war in Papua New Guinea. His narrative ranged over all the major campaigns from 1942 to 1945 but he captured what for him had been the essence of Kokoda in these words:

*The courage and cheerfulness of these casualties were wonderful - sometimes almost incredible ... That no known live casualty was abandoned ... is a magnificent tribute to the fitness and fortitude of these men. Time and rain and the jungle will obliterate this little native pad; but for evermore will live the memory of weary men who have passed this way.*

## Army Organisation:

In the Pacific War the army was structured along the following lines although it should be remembered that during the Kokoda campaign units were under strength to due manpower problems, wounds and the ravages of disease:

- **Division:** The highest level combat unit in the army structure. It is commanded by a Major General and comprised 14,000 men.
- **Brigade:** 3 Brigades form an a Division. Each one commanded by a Brigadier and comprised 3,300 men.
- **Battalion:** 3 Battalions form a Brigade. Each on commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel and comprised 850 men.
- **Company:** 5 Companies form a Battalion. Each one commanded by a Captain and comprised 140 men.
- **Platoon:** 3 Platoon form a Company. Each one commanded by a Lieutenant and comprised 39 men.
- **Section:** 3 Sections form a Platoon. Each one commanded by a Corporal.