

Honouring the sacrifices on Kokoda Trail



Final touches at Isurava to the Kokoda Trail memorial which John Howard will open today.

By NEIL WILSON

PRIME Minister John Howard today will unveil the nation's first major memorial to the Kokoda Trail Diggers in a remote jungle pilgrimage with PNG's newly elected Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare.

Political overhauls and the Mtago volcano crisis in West New Britain, which has seen 6000 people flee their homes, could not enter the two leaders marking a shared heritage.

PNG veterans and 10 World War II Diggers are expected to be among more than 100 guests flown to the rugged Isurava battlesite.

Australian designer Michael Pender has supervised construction of the \$700,000 memorial over the past 11 weeks.

Most helicopters he has seen

KOKODA



60 YEARS ON

It is where 35 local labourers toiled with pick, shovel and crowbar for the past 11 weeks to build a monument to cataclysmic events for them, which some old workers

There were buckles and boots.

"We had to sweep it with metal detectors," Mr Pender said.

"It's a battlesite, the place is filled with metal, there's a big hole cut in the mountainside just filled with mortars, grenades, shells," he said.

"There are at least four unexploded mortars under the big rock where Bruce Kingsbury won his VC — they'll be removed before the PM arrives."

The site, reclaimed by the jungle, was only confirmed as the genuine Isurava battlesite by a group of 2/14th Battalion veterans who came back in 2000.

"A token marker would not have done them justice," Mr Pender said. "We wanted to bring to life the enormity of the task these Australians faced, its monumental nature."