



RECOGNITION AT LAST . . . Australian soldiers and prime minister John Howard pay tribute to the diggers who fought at Isurava 60 years ago.

Honour at last to Kokoda diggers

By KAREN SMITH

AFTER 11 years of campaigning for the battle on the Kokoda track to be formally recognised, Camden-based MLC Charlie Lynn saw his dream realised last month.

On August 14 prime minister John Howard, Mr Lynn and 10 Kokoda veterans gathered at Isurava to remember those who fought and died while trying to hold off the advancing Japanese forces 60 years ago.

Then on August 17 the first Kokoda Memorial AFL football match was staged in honour of the young men who fought against impossible odds and won.

Mr Lynn said he was excited and proud to see one of Australia's greatest battles finally receive the recognition it deserved.

"There were 60 diggers at the football game and 10 diggers went to Isurava," Mr Lynn said.

"They now feel like they've been

accorded their proper place in history."

In 1942 Australian troops not only trekked across the steep 120km track, but they were subjected to constant fire from the Japanese who were threatening mainland Australia.

The Australian's average age was 19, it was their first time in battle and they were often outnumbered 10 to one.

Yet they managed to hold back the Japanese who were forced to retreat eventually.

Mr Lynn said the Kokoda track was regarded as one of the toughest tracks in the world because of the savage nature of the terrain. He served in the Vietnam war and was fascinated by the Kokoda story.

"When I walked the track in 1991 I found there wasn't a single memorial along the track and I got very angry about it and decided to do something about it," Mr Lynn said.

"My aim has always been to create an awareness of it.

"Kokoda is about ordinary people coming together to do extraordinary things in the face of adversity."

Mr Lynn said the track would now become a self sustaining, eco-tourism destination in partnership with the Australian and Papua New Guinean governments which will provide the chance for young Australians to walk in the footsteps of the diggers.

He said support for the project intensified as the 60th anniversary came closer.

"I knew they would be looking at the track on the 60th anniversary and I knew it had to happen while the diggers were still alive, and we've achieved that," Mr Lynn said.

"Kokoda is an Australian thing and it crosses all boundaries. Both sides of politics have been very supportive."