

CHAPTER 11: Proposal for a Kokoda Day Proclamation

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The Spirit of Kokoda

On 3 November 1942, the depleted ranks of two Australian brigades paraded before their commander, General Vasey, as the Australian flag was raised on the Kokoda plateau. It was the culminating point of one of the most desperate campaigns fought in some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet. Wartime journalist Osmar White was witness to the conditions. He wrote:

‘The pain of effort, the biting sweat, the hunger, the cheerless shivering nights were made dim by exhaustion’s merciful drug . . . surely no war was ever fought under worse conditions than these. Surely no war has ever demanded more of a man in fortitude. Even Gallipoli or Crete or the desert’.

White certainly didn’t mean to demean Gallipoli, Crete or the desert – he was simply trying to put the conditions they had to endure into perspective.

There have been occasions when some of us had to trek into the night in heavy rain on the trail. We can only imagine how it would have been if there had been no campsite. No *boss* kuk. No fires. No tents. And certainly no refunds!

But we can’t imagine how we would have felt if we had then been told to team up with a mate and go to the perimeter to lie doggo in wet mud for the next two hours until another tired mate crawled out to give you a break.

In the meantime your body is starving. It’s racked with malaria and shivering uncontrollably. Your blisters are infected. You have to try and control your dysentery. You’re shit scared. Dog tired. Your nerves are on edge as you listen intently for the give-way sound of a broken twig. You have to strain your eyes in the pitch black of the jungle to detect movement amongst the shadows. You know you’re outgunned and out-numbered but you can’t give up because the boys from the 2nd AIF are on their way to back you up.

As the flag is raised on the plateau there is a conspicuous silence among the troops.

Their thoughts are with their mates that didn't make it. More than 600 who now rested in shallow graves along the trail. Little did they know that hundreds more from the ranks assembled in front of the flag would be dead within the next month or so because worse was yet to come in the battles of the beachheads at Buna, Gona and Sanananda.

There is no doubt that General Vasey realised the historical significance of the day and the symbolism enshrined in the raising of the flag on the Kokoda plateau on the 3rd November 1942.

We now know that the advantage had passed from the Japanese to the Australians after the heroic battle for Isurava in late August – but our frontline troops were not aware of this fact at the time. All they knew was that they had to continue to fight with rifle, grenade, bayonet and fist until they had nothing left in their bodies or their magazines. They had to cover their wounded mates who couldn't go any further and urge them not to give up.

Lieutenant Doug McLean remembers their plight:

“The Japs were in deep dugouts protected with thick logs at ground level separated by other logs just to allow the weapons to protrude . . . providing a field of fire for the one hundred and eighty degrees facing the scrub. Now our troops as they attacked were hit in the lower leg and body . . . and I later found some of my boys lying against enemy positions with unexploded grenades in their hands. They were riddled with wounds but struggled as they died to get to the enemy . . . if ever blokes had earned a decoration . . . one lad was shot twice in the same action . . . flesh wounds . . . ‘Sir’, he said crying, ‘Every time I move some bastard shoots me!’ . . . he was only eighteen.”

Another war correspondent, Chester Wilmot, witnessed the desperation.

‘They must be going through hell on this track’ he wrote – ‘especially those with leg wounds. Some have been hit in the foot and they can't even get a boot on, but they're walking back over root and rock and through mud in bare feet, protected only by their bandages. Here's a steep pinch and a wounded digger's trying to climb it. You need both hands and both feet, but he's been hit in the arm and thigh. Two of his cobbers are helping him along. One goes ahead, hauling himself up by root and branch. The wounded digger clings to the belt of the man in front with his good hand, while his other cobbler gets underneath and pushes him up. I say to this fellow he ought to be a stretcher case, but he replies “I can get along. There's blokes here lots worse than me and if we don't walk they'll never get out.”

Private Laurie Howson of the 39th battalion wrote:

‘The days go on. You're trying to survive, shirt torn, arse out of your pants, whiskers a mile long, hungry and a continuous line of stretchers with wounded carried by ‘Fuzzy-Wuzzies’ doing a marvellous job. Some days you carry your boots because there's no skin on your feet. But when I look around at some of the others hell! They look crook! Then I have seen the time when you dig a number of holes in the ground and bury your dead. Nothing would be said, but you think ‘maybe It'll be my turn next’.

Captain Katekar, of the 2/27th Battalion recalls one of the epic battles for survival after they had been forced off Mission Ridge and into the jungle where they struggled without food, medicine or support for almost two weeks:

‘The wounded, God only knows, were in purgatory, hungry and in great pain. Some of our natives began to desert, meaning that our men had to replace them as bearers. ‘Doc’ Viner-Smith allowed the maggots to remain on the wound in order to eat the rotting flesh and so prevent gangrene. That night we were still short of Nauro. I found it a great mental strain and so did the Commander and other officers, with that great responsibility of not only saving our wounded but of saving ourselves from starvation.”

Those of us who have trekked in their footsteps cannot begin to imagine the hardship and the desperation they endured. But what we do know is that out of the adversity they suffered and conquered, bonds of mateship grew stronger with each passing year. Observers refer to the invisible force of mateship as ‘esprit de corps’.

Australia's official war historian, Dudley McCarthy saw it within the 39th Battalion and tried to define it.

'Although possessing no permanent site, having neither roof nor walls, nor unchanging form, it yet becomes home for those who serve in it' wrote McCarthy. 'Away from it, each of its members can revert to being homeless individuals, lost uncertain, without proper identity. Because of this it calls to life in a man, rounded into fullness through shared battle, suffering and death, each other will always feel some sense of brotherhood for each other man of his battalion. Through this thing the strong lift the weak to efforts and achievements beyond their own strength and their conscious wills, and the dependence of the weak gives greater strength and endurance to the strong. For every individual human part of this battalion who is killed, this thing changes something in those who survive and calls to life something new that never was there before.'

General Douglas MacArthur referred to it in an inspirational speech to a graduating class of Westpoint officer cadets in 1942:

'You are the leaven which binds together the entire fabric of our national system of defence' he thundered. 'From your ranks come the great captains who hold the nation's destiny in their hands the moment the war tocsin sounds. The Long Grey Line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise from their white crosses thundering those magic words: "Duty – Honour – Country."

Close bonds were also forged with a race of people our diggers hardly knew – the Papuan war carriers who were cashiered into service by a desperate administration to support our effort. They had little understanding of the war and were placed at the end of the food-chain in the provision of essential necessities. Some 56,000 were indentured into service with 10,000 supporting the Kokoda campaign. They had few clothes, no shoes, no blankets, no shelter and virtually no food to sustain them. On their return journey back across the trail they came across sick and wounded diggers who could go no further and were destined to die a lonely death in an unmarked grave.

History records that they cut stretchers out of the bush, hoisted the diggers on their shoulders and achieved the impossible by carrying them over the mountains and back to safety.

Captain 'Blue Steward, Regimental Officer, 2/16th Battalion:

'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 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.

'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.

I can attest to Captain Steward's observations I've been carried off the trail twice over the past 26 years by their grandsons – once when I was unconscious after falling into a gorge at Eora Creek and the other when I was blinded by an acanthamoeba parasite and had to be carried to a helipad for evacuation from Templeton's Crossing. Both were superhuman efforts and on both occasions I could feel the compassion they had for me as a patient – and I could feel their strength as they waded across thundering white-water crossings and up razorback ridges. I was totally dependent on them and I recall thinking *'I've got to do more to help them when I get better'*. These experiences and those thoughts have been my primary motivation ever since.

At the end of the war the political leaders who failed us in the lead up to war in Europe and the Pacific committed two shameless acts. The first was to remove the gallant 39th Battalion from the Order of Battle and disband it. The second was to send the civilian wartime carriers back to their villages without any recognition – no medals, no certificates, no Roll of Honour – not even a *'thank you'* note!

I am pleased to say that the 39th eventually restored to the ORBAT a couple of years ago at the urging of my former army commander and later Governor General of Australia, Major-General Mike Jeffrey.

Unfortunately the service of the PNG carriers is yet to be formally recognised.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of them lay in lonely, unmarked graves across the Owen Stanley Ranges.

Their identities are unknown. There is no record of their service. There is no spiritual resting place or cenotaph for their families, friends and kinfolk to gather round each year to commemorate their sacrifice.

There is no research into who they were. Where they came from. How they died. Or where?

It is clear to those who have been involved with the Kokoda Trail for some time that past Governments have expressed no desire to do anything about this shameful neglect.

Why don't the wartime carriers have their own cenotaph in the form of a Spirit Haus at Bomana – there's plenty of room. Imagine how many people would visit if such a haus was guarded by traditional warriors from each Province on a rotational basis.

Imagine how many Papua New Guineans would attend the annual Anzac Dawn Service at Bomana if students were engaged to do a 'fuzzy-wuzzy angel re-enactment' out of the darkness between the rows of granite headstones to the solemn beat of traditional kundu drums.

These forms of inclusive remembrance do not cost any money – all they need to make them happen is political leadership.

We have provided some of that leadership by calling for the proclamation of a 'Kokoda Day' dedicated to the legacy of the fuzzy-wuzzy angels. We have established Network Kokoda as a Not-for-Profit company to ensure the military heritage of the Kokoda Trail is protected, honoured and interpreted for future generations and to support the economic and social development of the Koiari and Orokaiva villagers along the trail.

We chose the 3rd November because it was the day our troops raised the flag on the Kokoda plateau.

This would never have happened if our allied naval forces had not stopped the Japanese invasion fleet in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942 and defeated them in the Battle of Midway a month later. It would not have been raised if our air forces had not taken to the skies against all the odds to harass Japanese zeros bomb their landing ships in Rabaul, Bougainville and off the northern beaches. It would not have happened if our coast-watchers and commandos had not harassed the enemy and passed on vital intelligence. It would not have happened if our American allies had not spilt so much blood at Guadalcanal.

Kokoda Day will ensure their sacrifice is never forgotten and will be a source of inspiration for future generations of young leaders from both countries. It will provide a vital link in the chain of remembrance. A link referred to by Sergeant Stan Bryant in an address he gave at the Cenotaph more than 20 years ago where he said:

'I say to all you people were today' he said. 'To you who are responsible for governing this country, to all you who hold positions of leadership in the community, to all Australians. It is from the men we honour today that you inherited this land.

'These were the men who helped build this nation. They were the ones associated with the building of our harbours and our bridges. They sealed the roads across the black soil planes, and they built the railways across Australia. Then they fought off the Japanese invasion so that you could inherit this country.

'You now have the fruits of our labours. The cities and the harbours and the plains are yours. We few survivors are aged and can only look on with pride and wish you success in the future.

'But we do charge you, to accept the responsibility of your inheritance and nourish and guard them with care.

'And remember always, the men of the Eighth Australian Division and the two ships who stood between the Japanese invasion and Australia. They paid the price of your future. Only they know the real cost.

'And remember - remember - we solemnly promised God that we would never forget!

Former NSW Premier Bob Carr paid a wonderful tribute to our veterans in a letter he wrote to me:

'The Kokoda Trail isn't just a place where our salvation was won - though we should remember and document and treasure every inch of it. Kokoda's now part of the Australian Dreaming, a sacred site.

'More than that the Men of Kokoda are among the greatest of heroes in a land that rightly canonizes few heroes. And as time slowly steals the survivors from our midst, it's hard to resist thinking that Australians in the not too distant future will look back with almost disbelief at the giants who lived in those days'.

PNG Civilian Wartime Carriers

Civilian carriers who supported Australian troops during the war against Japan in Papua and New Guinea from 1942-45 have never been officially recognized.

They remain the forgotten heroes of the war

According to our official history of the war in the Pacific by Dudley McCarthy, the Australian New Guinea Army Unit (ANGAU) was authorised by the Australian government to provide for:

*'the conscription of whatever native labour might be required by the Services.'*¹

Rates of pay were to be determined and the Senior Military Officer or District Officer was empowered:

'to have the natives so employed to enter into a contract with the Australian Government.'

It has been estimated that some 10,000 PNG nationals served as carriers in support of the Australians during the Kokoda campaign in 1942.

A further 42,000 are estimated to have been indentured to support Australian troops in the Milne Bay and the Buna/Gona campaigns. They were paid 10 shillings per month.

According to wartime journalist, Osmar Whiteⁱⁱ:

'ANGAU contrived a maximum mobilization and use of native labour. At the critical period, its method of conscription was even more arbitrary than German recruiting in the early days. In some villages every able-bodied male over the approximate age of sixteen years was rounded up, transported to the clearing centres, and thence drafted to whatever type of work had priority in the immediate emergency. Brutal disciplinary measures had often to be taken in the field; but when the first and worst crises of invasion were surmounted, ANGAU did what it could to conserve the life and health of its native levies and to maintain the viability of native communities depleted of 40 or 50 per cent of their able-bodied men. Under military rule, the labourers' health was more carefully considered and their diet in general better than under private employers before the war. ANGAU was fully aware of the value of native labour and co-operation to the Allied effort.

What is not understood by many is that male villagers indentured for work as carriers faced two potential enemies – the invading Japanese, and traditional clans whose customary land was foreign to them.

During the period 1944 to 1957 approximately 2 million pounds was paid by the Australian Government in compensation for property damage to PNG nationals by the Australian Government. In 1975 PNG gained independence and the PNG Government assumed all legal obligations for compensation of its veteran community.

Unfortunately, PNG Carriers were excluded from benefits under legislation for compensation of PNG nationals who served in the Defence Force. In 1980 they were also deemed to be ineligible for the PNG War Gratuity Scheme for ex-Servicemen.

In 1981 the Australian Government paid \$3.25 million to the PNG Government under the Defence (PNG) Retirement Act as a final payment for compensation for Carriers. In 1986 the PNG Government introduced payments of

PNGK1,000 for each surviving Carrier. The payments ceased in 1989 and many Carriers claim to have not received any money.

During the 50th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign the issue of payment and compensation for many of the Carriers who claim they were never paid was raised with the Keating Government.

On 21 April 1992 The Australian newspaper reported that returned servicemen in PNG had called on the Australian Government to pay hundreds of local war veterans who helped Australian troops during the Kokoda campaign. According to the report:

“The President of the PNG Returned Services League, Mr Wally Lussick, said Australia had sent about \$3.5 million to PNG to help compensate local war veterans in the early 1980s, but much of the money had gone to the wrong people and a large group of carriers missed out.

“Mr Lussick said much of the money went to those press-ganged into being carriers for the Japanese and many people who took no part in the war received payments.

“The visit to PNG later this week by the Prime Minister, Mr Keating, for Anzac Day services to mark the 50th anniversary of the Kokoda battles would provide a good opportunity for Australia to make a commitment to the surviving carriers, he said.”

In the PNG Post-Courier of 24 April 1992, the Prime Minister of PNG, Sir Rabbie Namaliu called on Australia ‘to help compensate WW2 carriers and stretcher bearers’. He raised the issue with Prime Minister Paul Keating at the time. According to the Post-Courier:

“Most of the carriers and ex-servicemen received compensation payments from Australia in the mid-1980s, but many legitimate veterans from the Southern Kokoda Trail near Port Moresby, missed out.

“PNG authorities estimate up to 200 surviving carriers are still waiting for some kind of payment from Australia for their wartime labour and service.

“Mr Namaliu said the Government was considering making an approach to Australia to identify and pay those carriers who have gone unrewarded for half a century.”

On 5 May 1992 the Bulletin with Newsweek reported:

“Keating says compensation cases will be dealt with on their merits and all worthy claims examined; but no concrete sum for individuals has been discussed. The difficulty of maintaining a list of the original carriers is underlined by how few speak English. Family members of dead carriers are calling for posthumous compensation – after all, they took part in a battle that Keating described this week “as more important to Australians than any other battlefield in Europe or Africa.”

Whilst Prime Minister Keating was genuine in his desire to resolve the issue it was never followed up and the matter has since languished.

Kokoda Day

Whilst Remembrance Day commemorates the service of PNG servicemen, who served under the auspices of the Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU), and those who sacrificed their lives in action during the Pacific War and the Bougainville crisis, Kokoda Day is dedicated to the service of the civilian wartime carriers.

Kokoda Day is not a national holiday - it is a day of commemoration which includes: a morning service in schools throughout Papua New Guinea (thus providing an opportunity to educate students on the significance of the service and sacrifices of their forefathers);

- a flag raising re-enactment at Kokoda;
- A showcase of Orokaiva culture on the Kokoda plateau; and
- An official commemorative service at Remembrance Park in Port Moresby.

Why 3 November?

The Kokoda campaign began with an attack on the Australian 39th Militia Battalion on 29 July 1942. The campaign lasted three months as the Australians were pushed back to last line of defence on Imita Ridge. The Australians rallied at this point and pushed the Japanese back across the trail. Kokoda was recaptured on 2nd November 1942 and the Australian flag was raised at a service the following morning.

The flag raising ceremony symbolised the turning of the tide in the Pacific War. It also symbolises the service and sacrifice made by indentured civilian carriers in all campaigns throughout PNG.

This victory would not have been possible without the vital support of these carriers across the trail. In addition to their contribution to the war effort hundreds of Australian soldiers owe their lives to the selfless sacrifice of the civilian carriers who guided and carried them to safety over inhospitable jungle terrain in the most adverse circumstances.

Australia was unprepared for the war in the Pacific in 1942. Our faith in ‘great and powerful friends’ coming to our aid in the event of Japan entering the war was shattered with the sinking of HMAS Prince of Wales and HMAS Repulse near Singapore on 10 December 1941, and the secret deal struck by UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill and American President Franklin Roosevelt for American aid to be directed to the European theatre of operations at the expense of the South West Pacific.

The defence of Australia and its mandated territory of New Guinea was dependent on untrained militia forces and a small band of New Guinea Rifles as our experienced AIF units were returning from Europe to meet the new threat.

Resources were so scarce in New Guinea that young males were forcibly recruited to support the war effort. Many of these men, from remote mountain villages, had no idea of the war and were conscripted against their will. They were told that men from Japan were the enemy. For many of these men other villagers living in remote tribal lands were also considered ‘enemy’. One can only imagine the fear and uncertainty they felt as they were forcibly marched away from their families and clans.

They were designated as ‘carriers’ but were to become known as ‘fuzzy-wuzzy angels’ because of their selfless sacrifice in assisting wounded and sick diggers during the various campaigns.

They carried vital war supplies on their bare shoulders in endless lines over hostile and inhospitable terrain. Modern day trekkers are in awe of their efforts. Without this vital link in the chain of our war effort Japan would have been successful in their conquest of New Guinea.

Today, 79 years after the Pacific War, they are the only link in the chain not to have received any official recognition. Many claim they were not properly paid. None were ever issued with a medal. No day has been set aside to commemorate their service or sacrifice.

Remembrance Day commemorates Papua New Guinean servicemen who sacrificed their lives in World War 11 and Bougainville. It occurs on 23 July which commemorates the day in 1942 when the Papuan Infantry Battalion first fought against Japanese soldiers near the Kumusi River in Oro Province. Remembrance Day is a public holiday.

In 2008 Governor-General Paulias Matane paid tribute to these soldiers and added:

"Also we must remember those who provided intelligence reports, coastwatchers and the fuzzy wuzzy angels. All these fallen heroes contributed in a significant way to the strategic defence of our land then and today."

The official proclamation of ‘Kokoda Day’ will ensure that the deeds of the civilian wartime carriers on PNG are more than an afterthought at traditional commemorative services on Anzac Day and Remembrance Day in PNG

PNG Wartime Tourism

"Kokoda is almost the complete adventure experience for Australian baby-boomers and young adventurers. It requires physical stamina and mental tenacity. The wartime history evokes strong emotions. The unconditional care and support of local PNG guides and villagers is humbling. The environment is rugged, remote and pristine."

Wartime tourism is unique because it unites people who were once divided. It provides an avenue for the establishment of empathetic relationships between trekkers and tourists of various nationalities and subsistence villagers who are the guardians of sites sacred to Australia, the United States and Japan.

The potential of the Kokoda trekking industry and the benefits that will accrue to local villagers along the trail is currently limited by the lack of a professional management authority supported by appropriate legislation. The potential of a wartime tourism industry is currently limited by the lack of an effective strategy and an inappropriate organisational structure.

If we procrastinate and allow land sacred to our shared wartime heritage to be lost to alternative economic opportunities in PNG (mining, forestry, farming) subsequent generations will never forgive us. If we allow the management to continue as it has over the past decade the only growth industry will be conflict management.

But if we use the lessons we have learned since the 50th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign that put 'Kokoda' on the radar we will be limited only by the imagination of current and future generations who seek to walk in the footsteps of our Kokoda veterans.

The most relevant guide to the potential of a wartime tourism industry in PNG is the continued growth in the number of Australians making the pilgrimage to Gallipoli and battlefields in Europe together with increasing interest in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Each year up to 9,000 Australians visit the Dawn Service at Anzac Cove. Thousands more visit it at other times of the year. It is now becoming a pilgrimage for more than a million Turkish people also visiting Gallipoli each year.

It is worth noting that PNG is closer, safer, cheaper and more significant to current and future generations of Australians because 'at Gallipoli we fought for Britain and lost – at Kokoda we fought for Australia and won!'

In 2017 1.2 million people visited the Australian War Memorial – this included 145,927 school children. Media coverage extended to 24.4 million people on Anzac Day – 38,000 attended the Dawn Service. Their website recorded 5.6 million visits and they have 100,000 followers on Facebook.

Two of the key objectives we wished to achieve when we proposed the establishment of a management authority for the Kokoda Trail in 2002 were:

- To establish 'Kokoda' as a model for a sustainable wartime tourism industry in PNG; and
- To ensure villagers along the trail received shared benefits from the emerging Kokoda trekking industry.

Papua New Guinea has the potential to be a world class 'adventure-tourism' destination but it has to address negative perceptions in regard to safety and reliability - particularly after the 'Black Cat Track' murders; the assault and rape of a female American trekker on the Kokoda Trail; and ongoing threats to close the trail. This will require a focused investment in national marketing and support for the development of niche adventures such as wartime pilgrimages, eco-trekking, white-water rafting, caving, diving, surfing, game-fishing, bird-watching, and culture.

People who participate in these niche adventure activities are generally more aware of the sensitivities of culture and environment and do not expect 5-star accommodation and service. They are also more tolerant of 'surprises' that are often experienced in the 'land of the unexpected'.

Recent interest in wartime tourism indicates that it has significant potential as a niche industry for PNG tourism. This is evident in the rapid increase in the number of trekkers since the 50th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign in 1992.

'Kokoda' is almost the complete adventure experience for Australian baby-boomers and young adventurers. It requires physical stamina and mental tenacity. The wartime history evokes strong emotions. The unconditional care and support of local PNG guides and villagers is humbling. The environment is rugged, remote and pristine. The battles fought along the trail have become folklore in Australia – a place of pilgrimage like Gallipoli, Villers-Bretonneux, Sandakan, Passchendaele .

Beyond Kokoda are wartime adventures in Rabaul, Milne Bay, Buna, Gona, Salamaua, Nadzab, Lae, Finchafen, the Finisterre Ranges, Death Valley, Shaggy Ridge, Madang and Wewak. These are not only different battlesites – they

are inhabited by different cultures with different traditions that create a smorgasbord of opportunity for wartime tourism.

The opportunity is not restricted to trekkers. It has the capacity for wartime cruises to Port Moresby, Milne Bay, Lae, Madang, Wewak, Aitape, Manus, Rabaul, Bougainville and the Solomon's. Imagine an Anzac Dawn Service at Owers Corner; a showcase of PNG culture along Ela Beach; a 'Beating-of-the-Retreat' at Bomana War Cemetery followed by a 7-day Pacific War Cruise to each of the significant coastal/island battlesites.

The most important challenge for PNG is to develop a sustainable model that can be applied to each area. The development of the Kokoda trekking industry provides a timely opportunity for a case study as the basis for developing a successful model for wartime tourism.

Tourism Benefits for Kokoda (Oro Province)

The proclamation of Kokoda Day would provide an incentive for Australians to travel to Papua New Guinea for the commemoration services.

Following is a monthly comparison of Australians trekking Kokoda in July and November since 2008:

| YEAR | JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER |
|------|------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|
| 2008 | 1368 | 802 | 765 | 412 | 83 |
| 2009 | 1017 | 507 | 733 | 305 | 107 |
| 2010 | 662 | 450 | 509 | 310 | 103 |
| 2011 | 671 | 356 | 354 | 339 | 128 |
| 2012 | 770 | 532 | 631 | 480 | 176 |

The proclamation of Kokoda Day will provide an incentive for all Australians with an interest in our military heritage to travel to Papua New Guinea for the commemoration services.

The proclamation would effectively extend the trekking season into November by providing an incentive for Australians to visit PNG. There are many Australians who are not physically able to trek Kokoda however they would visit the village if there was a strong reason for them to do so.

Commemorative activities would not be limited to a single day in Kokoda. It could include short treks up to the Isurava Memorial, across to Abuari and down the Eastern side of the range which was defended by the 53rd Militia Battalion. It would also provide them with an opportunity to extend their stay and visit Tufi Resort and the beachheads at Buna and Gona thus bringing increased tourism benefits to this region.

In addition to the re-enactment of the raising of the flag Kokoda Day would provide an opportunity for local clans to showcase their Orokaiva culture with sing-sings, traditional dances, markets and craft displays.

In Port Moresby a service could be held at Remembrance Park in the morning and a beating of the retreat at Bomana War Cemetery in the evening.

Digger Tributes

In a report on the medical aspects of the fighting withdrawal in the face of overwhelming Japanese forces after the Battle for Isurava was lost, Colonel Kingsley Norris, Assistant Director Medical Services with the 7th Division praised the work of the Australian medics. 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, splintered by a banana leaf, walked for six days ...'

Captain 'Blue Steward, Regimental Officer, 2/16th Battalion:

“... 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 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.

Laurie Howson, 39th Battalion:

“The days go on. You are trying to survive, shirt torn, arse out of your pants, whiskers a mile long, hungry and a continuous line of stretchers with wounded carried by ‘Fuzzy-Wuzzies’ doing a marvellous job. Some days you carry your boots because there’s no skin on your feet. But when I look around at some of the others – hell! They look crook! Then I have seen the time when you dig a number of holes in the ground and bury your dead. Nothing would be said, but you think ‘maybe it will be my turn next.’”

Help us to help them – Plan an Event

- Kokoda Day Dinner
- Donate
- Plan an Event
- Enter a fun run

EVENTS

Plan your own fundraising event to honour the legacy of the PNG ‘fuzzy-wuzzy angels’ by tagging onto an existing event such as a community fun-run or organising a fundraising dinner with friends, fellow trekkers, or your local RSL.

You can click here to check the [National Fun Run Calendar](#)

Local schools could also be asked to join by hosting a short commemorative service at morning assembly on the 3rd November and inviting students to bring a gold coin each for a ‘fuzzy-wuzzy angel’.

You can also seek support from your friends on social media to join you in a fundraising appeal to the day. Checkout out ‘Kokoda Day Facebook Page’ at

Organise a Kokoda 20-Mile Route March (32 km)



39th Battalion Route March at Sogeri in preparation for the Kokoda Campaign

Route marches have their origins in the Roman Army. According to Vegetius, during the four-month initial training of a Roman legionary, loaded marches were taught before recruits ever handled a weapon. Recruits were required to complete 20 Roman miles (29.62 km or 18.405 modern miles) with 20.5 kg at a regular military marching pacy.

As part of the pre-selection process for the French Foreign Legion recruits were required to ‘speed march’ for 30 kilometres (19 miles) in under 4 hours in full combat gear, including boots, carrying assault rifle, helmet, two full canteens of water and 22 kilograms (49 lb) load.

20-mile route marches in combat gear are a regular feature of recruit training in the Australian Army.

Today, route marches are an exercise where individuals with differing physical and mental attributes mutually support each other through the redistribution of weight on the move if somebody is struggling, and quiet encouragement within the group. Successful completion of the march inevitably contributes to an improvement in team discipline, physical fitness, mental toughness, and unit morale.

Our Kokoda 20-Mile Route Marches allow for teams to decide on the format that suits them best. They can choose to carry backpacks and march in disciplined formations or just get together and organise a hike in their local areas. We suggest local organisers list the details of each march as an event on our website and charge an entry fee of \$20 and challenge each person to raise a further \$20 per kilometre.

[Kokoda Day Dinner Series](#)

[Organise a Fundraising Dinner](#)

[Organise a Kokoda Reunion](#)

[Pull up a Chair for Digger](#)



Raising of the Australian flag on the Kokoda Plateau – 3 November 1942

ⁱ Australia in the War 1939-1945, p116

ⁱⁱ Parliament of a Thousand Tribes, The Cataclysm. P.129-130