

Corporate captains shun Kokoda Trail

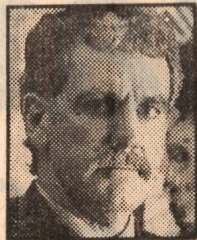
By MALCOLM BROWN

"Thank you for inviting us to participate, but unfortunately we are unable to send a representative," was a fairly common response to Major Charlie Lynn's invitation to corporate Australia to participate in the Kokoda Remembrance Trek, the 50th anniversary walk along the Kokoda Trail.

One company sent a form letter, stating: "Dear Sir/Madam, I am in receipt of your letter requesting a donation. I very much regret that only very limited funds have been allocated for such requests."

Major Lynn, retired Regular Army officer and event director for Kokoda Epic Pty Ltd, and a driving force behind moves to commemorate this decisive battle of World War II, was "a bit disappointed".

He had sent out 1,500 letters to corporations throughout Australia and



Major Lynn



Mr Webster

gone to 88 Australian cities asking each organisation to send a representative.

The plan was that the corporations should fund their representatives to go on the expedition, which would leave Australia on April 15, start on the trail on April 17, and finish at the Bomano war cemetery outside Port Moresby on April 24, the eve of Anzac Day.

It would be a physical challenge, Mr

Lynn agreed, and certainly different from the air-conditioned environment of corporate executives, but a sure-fire way of getting the message across as to what was achieved in the darkest days of World War II.

The result? About 100 letters declining the invitation, or writing it off as another appeal for money. There was just one corporate representative prepared to go.

That was Mr Ian Webster, chief executive of Universal Press Pty Ltd, which owns UBD.

There was one other positive response, from Mrs Jessica Denehey, of Melbourne, but she was the sister of a corporate managing director. She wanted to go because her father had fought on the Kokoda Trail. So she was not representing corporate Australia.

And not one positive response from civic Australia.

Mr Webster, 39, said yesterday that he was in training for the trek, jogging daily, but "staggered" to discover that he was the only corporate representative going.

"I am going because it is high time we got out of this recession mode and got a bit of adventure back into life.

"It will give a few physical challenges one is not confronted with in normal life.

"It will give a chance for a bit of reflection on the Anzacs and the sacrifices people made in the war."

Mr Webster's father was a soldier serving in air supply in New Guinea, part of whose job was to resupply troops on the Kokoda Trail.

Major Lynn attributed the poor response to apathy and a lack of knowledge of the importance of Kokoda. A group of about 10 will do the 100-kilometre trek.