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978-1-107-01594-4 - The Kokoda Campaign 1942: Myth and Reality

Peter Williams

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THE KOKODA CAMPAIGN 1942

Myth and reality

The fighting on the Kokoda Track in World War II is second only to Gallipoli in the Australian national consciousness. The Kokoda campaign of 1942 has taken on mythical status in Australian military history. According to the legend, Australian soldiers were vastly outnumbered by the Japanese, who suffered great losses in battle and as a result of the harsh conditions of the Kokoda Track.

In this important book, Peter Williams seeks to dispel the Kokoda myth. Using extensive research and Japanese sources, he explains what really happened on the Kokoda Track in 1942. Unlike most other books written from an Australian perspective, *The Kokoda Campaign 1942: Myth and reality* focuses on the strategies, tactics and battle plans of the Japanese and shows that the Australians were in fact rarely outnumbered.

For the first time, this book combines narrative with careful analysis to present an undistorted picture of the events of the campaign. It is a must-read for anyone who is interested in the truth of the Kokoda campaign of 1942.

Peter Williams is a researcher for the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal and is a military historian for the Darwin Military Museum.

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I dedicate this book to my children,
Catherine and Michael Williams

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
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KEY TO MILITARY SYMBOLS

	Unit headquarters
	Infantry
	Artillery
	Engineer
	Imperial japanese Navy troops
(+)	Unit reinforced
(-)	Part of unit detached
•••	Platoon equivalent
I	Company equivalent
II	Battalion equivalent
III	Regiment equivalent
X	Brigade equivalent
XX	Division
	Area in a state of defence

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

Names are written in their correct order. Australian and American names have the family name last, Japanese names have the family name first.

The country now called Papua New Guinea was in 1942 divided into two. The northern half was New Guinea and the southern half was Papua. When referring to the whole of what is now Papua New Guinea the term ‘New Guinea’ has been used.

Villages in Papua are often not where they were in 1942. For this reason it is useful to refer in the text to a village’s wartime or postwar location.

Buna is the word Australians use to describe the 18-kilometre strip of Papuan coast between Gona and Cape Endiader, where the Japanese landed, developed their base for the advance along the Kokoda Track, and made their last stand in January 1943. But as Giruwa, near Sanananda, was the command, administrative and supply centre of the Japanese base, it has been used instead when referring to the base in general.

‘Nankai Shitai’ (South Seas Detachment) has been used to include all IJA and IJN forces in the Giruwa–Owen Stanley Range area. Strictly speaking, the air flotilla and a number of small IJN units were not under army command, so were not part of the Nankai Shitai.

After the war for official purposes the fighting in Papua 1942–43 was divided into three parts: the battles of Kokoda, Buna–Gona and Milne Bay. This book concerns the Battle of Kokoda, but the term ‘Kokoda campaign’ has been used instead.

The six Japanese infantry battalions in the Nankai Shitai were in two regiments, the 144th and 41st. The battalions were numbered 1/144th, 2/144th, 3/144th, 1/41st, 2/41st and 3/41st. Other infantry battalions in the text with a prefix 2/ are Second Australian Imperial Force battalions. Other Australian infantry battalions without the prefix 2/ are militia battalions.

GLOSSARY

AAF	Allied Air Force
adj	adjutant
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AJRP	Australia–Japan Research Project
AMF	Australian Military Force
ANGAU	Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit
ATIS	Allied Translator and Interpreter Service
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BCC	bridge construction company
Bde	brigade
Bn	battalion
BnHQ	battalion headquarters
<i>butai</i>	Japanese military unit
C in C	commander in chief
CIB	Commonwealth Investigation Branch
Coy	company
<i>daitai</i>	Japanese battalion-size unit
DCC	division cavalry company
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
ER	engineer regiment
FAAAB	field anti-aircraft artillery battalion
<i>go</i>	unit of measurement for rice; 1840 grams
HMG	heavy machine-gun
IER	independent engineer regiment
IGS	Imperial General Staff
IHQ	Imperial Headquarters
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJAHQ	Imperial Japanese Army Headquarters
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
IJNHQ	Imperial Japanese Navy Headquarters
IMTB	independent motor transport battalion

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IO	Intelligence officer
LOCH	line of communication hospital
MAR	mountain artillery regiment
MFHQ	Maroubra Force Headquarters
MMG	medium machine-gun
MPC	military police company
MO	Japanese plan to attack Port Moresby
NAA	National Archives of Australia
Nankai Shitai	South Seas Detachment
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NGF	New Guinea Force
NGVR	New Guinea Volunteer Rifles
NIDS	National Institute of Defense Studies
NLA	National Library of Australia
NP	Naval Pioneers
NSHQ	Nankai Shitai Headquarters
PCB	Patient Collecting Butai; a field ambulance
PIB	Papuan Infantry Battalion
QF	Quick Firing (gun)
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAE	Royal Australian Engineers
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAP	Regimental Aid Post
<i>rentai</i>	regiment
RGC	regimental gun company
RHQ	regimental headquarters
RN	Royal Navy
RPC	Royal Papuan Constabulary
RSC	Regimental Signals Company
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
SDC	sea duty company
SER	shipping engineer regiment
<i>sho</i>	unit of measurement for rice; 1.4 kg
SNLP	Special Naval Landing Party
Stanley Shitai	(Owen) Stanley (Range) Detachment
SWPA	South West Pacific Area
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USN	United States Navy

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