



The Bloody Beachheads: The Battles Of Gona, Buna and Sanananda

As the battle for Guadalcanal dragged on the Japanese advance on the Kokoda Track culminated and they were ordered to 'advance to the rear'. Two delaying defensive positions at Eora Creek and Oivi-Gorari imposed a toll on the Australians' pursuit but allowed time for the Japanese to complete a labyrinth of bunkers and trenches around the Papuan beach head villages of Gona, Buna and Sanananda.

The Battle for the Beachheads, as it became known, saw an estimated 9,000 Japanese troops in well-prepared positions defend to the death the territory they had occupied for the last six months. MacArthur ordered that the positions be destroyed and over the next two months, Australian and US Army troops battled not only the resolute Japanese but swampy terrain, kunai grass, oppressive heat, heavy rain, sickness and disease to complete this difficult and brutal task.

The Battle of the Beachheads was the bloodiest of all the Papuan campaigns. The resolve and tenacity of the Japanese defenders were, to Allied perceptions, unprecedented to the point of being "fanatical", and had not previously been encountered. It was to mark the conduct of further battles throughout the remainder of the war. Securing victory at the Battle for the Beachheads cost Australia 1,261 dead and 2,210 wounded, and the Americans 734 dead and 2,037 wounded.

What was the Japanese plan? Who controlled the sea and the sky? How did the Allies mass force onto the northern coast of Papua? Was the order to destroy the Japanese positions necessary? How well did the Australian and American forces cooperate in fighting the battle? Were Allied forces pushed beyond their capability? How much did tanks help to break the stalemate? What are the legacies of this little-known chapter of military history?

Please join a group of well-qualified speakers as we examine these and other questions in a one-day conference – *The Bloody Beachheads: The Battles of Gona, Buna and Sanananda* – on **Saturday 12 November 2022**. The ticket price includes morning and afternoon tea as well as lunch.

Conference Sponsors:



CONFERENCE PROGRAM – 12 NOVEMBER 2022

8.30 – 9.00 am **Registration**

9.00 – 9.02 am **Welcome - Colonel Marcus Fielding (Retd)**, Conference Chair and President MHHV.

SESSION ONE | SHAPING THE BATTLESPACE

9.03 – 9.45 am **Paper: The Japanese Battle Plan in Papua**
Dr Peter Williams, author of many books including *Japan's Pacific War*, *The Battle of Anzac Ridge*, *Kokoda for Dummies* and *The Kokoda Campaign 1942, Myth and Reality*.

9.50 – 10.30 am **Paper: The Air and Sea Battle over Papua**
Dr Liam Kane, Since being awarded his PhD in 2020, Liam has published on topics ranging from military justice and policing to air force intelligence. He is currently writing a book about air force cooperation in the Pacific war.

10.30 – 10.55 am Morning Tea

SESSION TWO | THE LAND BATTLE

Session Chair: **Lieutenant Colonel Michael Buckridge (Retd)**, Vice-President MHHV.

11.00 – 12.30 pm **Paper: The Land Battle for the Beachheads**
Phillip Bradley, author of many books including *Hell's Battlefield*, *D-Day New Guinea*, *Wau 1942-43*, *Salamaua 1943*, and *The Battle for Shaggy Ridge*.

12.30 - 1.10 pm Lunch

SESSION THREE | ANALYSIS

Session Chair: **Professor Peter Edwards, AM**, Vice-Patron MHHV.

1.15 – 2.00 pm **Paper: Australia-US Cooperation in Papua**
James Brien, PhD Candidate, Australian National University.

2.05 – 2.50 pm **Paper: The Health and Medical Challenges of Fighting in Papua**
Dr Ian Howie-Willis, OAM, KtSJ, author of many books including *VD: The Australian Army's experience of sexually transmitted diseases during the twentieth century*; *An unending war: The Australian Army's struggle against malaria 1885–2015*; *A medical emergency: Major General 'Ginger' Burston and the Army Medical Service in World War II*; and *Postern, gateway to New Guinea: Recapturing Lae from the Japanese in 1943* [currently in press].'

2.50 - 3.20 pm Afternoon Tea

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SESSION FOUR | LEGACIES

Session Chair: Dr Andrew Kilsby, MHHV.

3.25 – 4.05 pm **Paper: Recovering Australia's War Dead**
Major Scott Heiman, former case officer Unrecovered War Casualties - Army.

4.10 – 4.45 pm **Paper: Remembering the Beachhead Battles**
Mr David Howell, Kokoda Historical.

4.45 – 4.50 pm **Close - Major General Jim Barry, AM, MBE, RFD, ED (Retd)**, Patron MHHV.

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