



Kokoda and Beyond: Papua and New Guinea 1942-1945

One-Day Conference Saturday 16 April 2016
Pompey Elliott Memorial Hall, 403 Camberwell Road, Melbourne

Keynote Speaker – Dr Adrian Threlfall
author of *Jungle Warriors*

Register at www.mhvh.org.au



The Proceedings of the Conference held at the Pompey Elliott Memorial Hall, Camberwell RSL, Victoria on 16 April 2016

In early 1942 the Japanese set their sights on capturing Papua and New Guinea.

A series of defensive battles at Milne Bay and along the Kokoda Track, as well as the naval victories in the Coral Sea and at Midway Island put the Japanese on the back foot.

Then followed a series of Allied offensive operations that drove the Japanese back and provided the springboard for General Douglas MacArthur's successful advance into the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines.

This one day conference examines this critical period of Australia's military history. This conference will include fresh analysis and insights from a highly informed and relevant range of historians and veterans.

Conference sponsors:



The Kokoda Campaign: Japan's Second Attempt to Capture Port Moresby

By James Bowen, Graduate historian and consultant to the Battle for Australia
Commemoration National Council



Returning from the Battle of Isurava, soldiers of the 39th Australian Infantry Battalion trudge through deep mud on the hellish Kokoda Track. In heavy fighting under appalling conditions, these heroes have played a vital role at Kokoda, Deniki, and Isurava in blunting the momentum of the Japanese advance towards Australia. From right to left: Warrant Officer 2 R. Marsh, Privates G. Palmer, J. Manol, J. Tonkins, A. Forrester, and Gallipoli veteran Staff Sergeant J. Long.....AWM 013288.

Why the Kokoda Campaign is part of the Battle for Australia 1942

Because the Kokoda Campaign is a very important part of the Battle for Australia 1942, it may be helpful for me to mention why Australians commemorate a Battle for Australia Day every year.

In 2008, the Australian Government implemented formal national observance of "Battle for Australia Day" on the first Wednesday of every September. Some Australian historians reject observance of Battle for Australia Day because they claim that nothing happened in 1942 that justifies the description Battle for Australia. One reason advanced for this denial is a claim that the Japanese did not invade Australia in 1942 and did not ever intend to invade Australia. International law and historical fact prove this denial lacks substance. Japan invaded sovereign Australian territory when Japanese troops landed on the beaches of Australian Papua on 21 July 1942. The Territory of New Guinea was a League of Nations Mandate administered by Australia in 1942, but Papua was sovereign Australian territory in 1942 and the whole of the Kokoda Campaign was fought on Australian soil to oust the Japanese from Papua. We cannot dismiss this apparent intransigence by a few historians as irrational because it appears that they do not understand international law. I speak with some

knowledge of the legal position of Australian Papua in 1942 because I was Assistant Secretary for Law in Port Moresby in 1966 when it was the capital of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

Another argument sometimes put forward to deny a Battle for Australia occurred in 1942 cannot be so readily excused as justified by ignorance. This argument would have it that the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Kokoda Campaign, and the Guadalcanal Campaign were not implemented as part of a hostile Japanese master plan directed against Australia in 1942. This argument is comprehensively demolished by the 102-volume official Japanese history of the Pacific War "Senshi Soshō" (War History Series) which states very clearly that these hostile campaigns directed against Australia were initiated as features of a Japanese strategy called the FS Operation, and that this operation was intended to bring Australia to Japan's heel by intensified blockade and bombing without the need for invasion of the mainland.

Finally, it has been suggested that the invasion of Australia's Papua was only a "technical" invasion of Australia because it was not an invasion of the mainland and can therefore be discounted as being an invasion of Australia. This bizarre argument is again demolished by international law. When the first Japanese soldier set foot on Papuan soil, it was an act of war committed against Australia. The murder of Australian missionary Sisters at Gona by Japanese soldiers was a war crime justiciable by Australian courts because it occurred on what was Australian soil in 1942.

Because Japanese occupation of Papua was a major feature of the FS Operation, it is necessary to understand Japan's hostile plans for Australia in 1942 to appreciate why the Japanese made two failed attempts to capture Port Moresby in that year.

Historians who deny that there was a Battle for Australia in 1942 appear to be ignorant of the concept and scope of the Battle for Australia. When originally conceived as a subject for commemoration in 1997 by the Victorian RSL, the term "Battle for Australia" was intended to describe the clash of Japanese and American strategic war aims with Australia as their focus that produced a series of great battles in 1942 across the northern approaches to Australia, including the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Kokoda Campaign, and the Guadalcanal Campaign.

In this context, the Battle for Australia is to be viewed as a lengthy and bloody struggle to prevent the Japanese achieving their strategic Pacific War aims of controlling Australia by intensive blockade, and preventing the United States aiding Australia and using Australia as a base for launching a counter-offensive against the Japanese military advance. This Japanese strategy for isolating and controlling Australia bore the code reference FS Operation, and is covered in detail in chapters 3 and 4 of the official Japanese history of the Pacific War Senshi Soshō which has been translated into English and published by the Australian War Memorial. This concept and scope of a Battle for Australia did not include invasion of the Australian mainland because the Japanese had abandoned planning to invade the Australian mainland in early March 1942 because of implacable Army opposition.

On 13 March 1942, Japan's military high command formally resolved to extend Japan's southern defensive perimeter from Port Moresby in the Australian Territory of Papua to Fiji and Samoa in the South Pacific for the purpose of isolating Australia from the United States. This hostile strategy bore the code reference FS Operation and it was to be carried out as a

matter of high strategic priority under the overall direction of Vice Admiral Inoue Shigeyoshi from his headquarters at Rabaul. Once completely isolated from the United States, the Japanese military leaders believed that Australia could be pressured into surrender to Japan by blockade and intense psychological pressures, including an intensified military onslaught against cities and towns on the Australian mainland by Japan's powerful aircraft carriers. Senshi Sosho at pages 30-31, pages 66-77. Before bombardment into submission to Japan, Australia would be offered survival if it agreed to adopt neutrality in the Pacific War, and later political incorporation into Japan's Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. (Senshi Sosho at pages 80-81)

Port Moresby was to be the anchor for FS Operation and the first Japanese attempt to capture Port Moresby was defeated in the Battle of the Coral Sea (7-8 May 1942).

With the loss of four of its best aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway (4-6 June 1942), the next attempt by Japan to capture Port Moresby would be an overland attack by the Japanese Army directed from Rabaul.

Academic criticism of the strategic significance of Kokoda for Australia in 1942

The Kokoda Campaign began on 21 July 1942 when Japanese troops landed on sovereign Australian soil at Gona and Buna on the northern coast of Papua. The purpose of a Japanese army landing at Gona and Buna was to establish a beachhead to support a crossing of the Kokoda Track for the purpose of capturing Port Moresby. The official Japanese history of the Kokoda Campaign Senshi Sosho makes the point very clearly that Milne Bay was part of the Kokoda Campaign. When captured by the Japanese, it was intended that Japanese aircraft launched from Milne Bay would support Major General Horii's capture of Port Moresby when his army emerged from the Owen Stanley Range. After heavy fighting, the Japanese advance was stopped by Australian soldiers at Ioribaiwa - only 65 kilometres from Port Moresby. The depleted, exhausted, and starving Japanese army retreated to its heavily fortified beachheads at Gona and Buna. The Battle of the Beachheads - Buna, Gona, and Sanananda - marked the end of the Kokoda Campaign when the Japanese were evicted from Australian soil on 22 January 1943. The Japanese were still struggling to survive on Guadalcanal but the last of some 10,652 starving and disease-ridden Japanese survivors had been withdrawn from Guadalcanal by sea on 7 February 1943. The end of the Kokoda and Guadalcanal Campaigns effectively marked the end of Japanese military aggression in the South Pacific and the adoption by Japan of a defensive posture until the end of the Pacific War.

Our very appropriate concentration on the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings in 1915, and the continuing anniversaries of other important events in World War I, may have caused some of us to be less aware that 2017 will mark the 75th anniversary of the Kokoda Campaign. I was reminded of the impending 75th anniversary of Kokoda by this conference, and my mind was drawn back to some very unpleasant and wholly untrue public comments that tarnished that anniversary for Australia's surviving Kokoda Diggers. I believe that we have strong grounds to be concerned about what young Australians are going to be told about Kokoda in 2017. Kokoda is facing the charge of a rewrite brigade. Unfortunately, at this moment, that charge includes heavyweights like the Australian Army and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Like many older Australians, I have always believed that Kokoda was a magnificent achievement marked by extraordinary heroism on the part of Australian soldiers in the face of overwhelming odds; but that is not the message that is now being promoted through an official Australian Army publication and the Department of Veterans' Affairs Kokoda website. I do not suggest that this is a deliberate distortion of our military history. I believe that much of the problem may lie in ignorance of what really happened in the Kokoda Campaign.

I will give some examples of this distortion of Australian military history, and I will show how these distortions are untrue by reference to highly authoritative historical source material.

On 6 September 2012, the Australian War Memorial launched what was described as a major international conference with the title "Kokoda: beyond the legend" to mark the "70th anniversary of the Kokoda and Papuan campaigns in 1942".



Australian War Memorial Kokoda Conference 2012

I am always very wary of a title such as "Kokoda: beyond the legend" with reference to our military history, whether it refers to the Anzacs at Gallipoli or the Kokoda Campaign, because my Oxford dictionary defines "legend" as including "myth" and "popular but unfounded belief". So we tend to speak of "King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table" as being the stuff of legend.

Two of the speakers at this conference need to be mentioned. They are Professor David Horner and Dr Peter Williams. The title of the paper by Dr Williams was "The strength of the forces engaged on the Kokoda Trail". Dr Williams claimed that the Australians were not facing overwhelming Japanese troop numbers in the bloody fighting that took place between the Japanese landings at Gona/Buna and the halting of the Japanese drive towards Port Moresby at Ioribaiwa on the Kokoda Track. Having reached this conclusion, Dr Williams, is quoted as saying: "this calls into question the prevailing favourable assessment of the Australian performance during their retreat." Dr Williams was drawing from his book

published by the Australian Army "The Kokoda Campaign 1942 - Myth and Reality" (2012). I will come back to that book because it makes a number of very controversial claims, and some of these claims have been uncritically adopted on the Kokoda website of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The title of the paper by Professor Horner was "Kokoda and its place in Australian history", and it would garner a great deal of public controversy. In the Herald Sun newspaper of 7 September 2012, the experienced defence reporter Ian McPhedran provided us with a glimpse of what was coming from this conference in an article with the provocative title "Historians claim Kokoda campaign has been blown out of proportion". McPhedran continued:

"Military historians have attacked the "excessive mythology" surrounding the Kokoda campaign in New Guinea during World War II. During a conference to mark the 70th anniversary of Kokoda at the Australian War Memorial yesterday, eminent historians Prof David Horner and Ashley Ekins questioned whether or not the campaign deserved such status....They pointed to Japanese documents that show an invasion of Australia had been ruled out in March 1942."

It appears that Professor Horner felt obliged to respond to criticism of what he said at the conference "Kokoda -beyond the legend". In the Herald Sun of 22 October 2012, Simon Black attributed the following to Professor Horner (see article below):



"A prominent military historian has cast doubt on the legend of the Kokoda Track,

questioning the significance of the WWII campaign in a move that has outraged veterans. In what is viewed by Kokoda Diggers as a stinging insult, Professor of defence history David Horner said it was a myth that the Japanese were going to invade Australia, adding the nation had developed a tendency to exaggerate the significance of military battles due to the reverence in which Gallipoli was held.

'It's all the Anzacs' fault,' Prof Horner said. 'Gallipoli was one of our most significant military campaigns (and now) everybody wants to be an Anzac. Everybody wants a medal. Everybody wants to be recognised ... every child gets a prize. If you fought in a battle, it has to be a battle that was really important. Whatever you do has to be given more credit and be seen as being more significant.'

Defending the statements, made during his speech as part of a two-day celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign at the Australian War Memorial last month, Prof Horner.....(also) questioned whether Australian troops were as outnumbered as previously thought.

I find it difficult to avoid a conclusion that Professor Horner failed to appreciate that the capture of Port Moresby became Japan's highest strategic priority in the South West Pacific after the Battle of Midway.

Why did the Japanese initiate the Kokoda Campaign by invading Australia's Papua in 1942?

Before they talk publicly about the Kokoda Campaign, and why the Japanese felt a compelling need to invade Australia's Papua in 1942, historians need to read carefully the history of Japan's Pacific War strategy in 1942. It is set out in great detail, including references to the actual text of relevant Japanese military documents, in Japan's official 102-volume history of the Pacific War called "Senshi Soshō" (trans. "War History Series"). The authoritative status of Senshi Soshō is well established. Two internationally recognised distinguished historians and Japan scholars, the late Professor Henry Frei (Tsukuba Women's University, Japan) and Emeritus Professor John J. Stephan (University of Hawaii), have repeatedly drawn on Senshi Soshō to support material in their published Pacific War military histories.

The relevant chapters bearing on Japan's hostile plans for Australia in 1942 have been translated into English and were published by the Australian War Memorial in 2007 under the title "Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific". The publication is particularly valuable because it covers planning by Japan's Imperial General Headquarters to deal with what Japan's Army General Staff viewed as "the Australia problem" by implementing a strategy bearing the code reference FS Operation (Senshi Soshō at page 81). The translation includes detailed coverage of the military operations that were intended to oust Australia completely from Australia-owned Papua and the Australia-administered New Guinea Mandate. An added bonus for serious military historians are numerous direct quotes from relevant Great Army and Great Navy Orders and Instructions issued by Imperial General Headquarters which detail Japan's hostile plans for Australia in 1942. At a lower level, we can view the text of orders and instructions issued by the 17th Army at Rabaul which had responsibility for invading Papua and capturing Port Moresby. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the Australian translation simply as "Senshi Soshō".

I cannot understand why Professor Horner appears to have failed to appreciate that the decision to abandon any planning to invade the Australian mainland "in March 1942" was replaced by an equally sinister plan bearing the code reference FS Operation at an Imperial Liaison Conference held in Tokyo on 11 March 1942. At that conference, the Navy General Staff and Navy Ministry agreed to their proposed limited invasion of the Australian mainland being deferred in favour of the FS Operation (the abbreviation refers to Fiji and Samoa). The FS Operation envisaged severing Australia's lifeline to the United States. As early as 6 January 1942, Emperor Hirohito had been briefed by his Army Chief of Staff General Sugiyama on a proposal to blockade Australia by means of an FS Operation. (Senshi Soshō page 70). Once completely isolated from the United States, and any American military assistance, the Japanese military leaders believed that Australia could be pressured into surrender to Japan by blockade and intense psychological pressures, including an intensified military onslaught against cities and towns on the Australian mainland by Japan's powerful aircraft carriers. See Professor Frei's "Japan's Southward Advance and Australia" (1991) at page 172 and Senshi Soshō at pages 30-31, pages 66-77. Before bombardment into submission to Japan, Australia would be offered survival if it agreed to adopt neutrality in the Pacific War, and later political incorporation into Japan's Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. (Senshi Soshō at pages 80-81)

A key feature of the FS Operation involved capture of Port Moresby as an *anchor* for a chain of Japanese bases stretching across the Pacific as far as Fiji and Samoa. Port Moresby is located on the southern coast of what was Australia-owned Papua in 1942. Ownership of Papua had been passed by Britain to Australia in 1906. It follows that when Japanese troops landed on the beaches of Papua on 21 July 1942 they were invading a territory that was part of Australia and the whole of the Kokoda Campaign was fought on Australian soil. I am mystified by the apparent failure of Professor Horner to appreciate that the decision to capture Port Moresby was taken by Imperial General Headquarters on 29 January 1942 and was not affected in any way by the decision in March not to invade the Australian mainland.



Vice Admiral Inoue Shigeyoshi - architect of Japan's FS Operation against Australia

The FS Operation was to be carried out as a matter of high strategic priority under the overall direction of Vice Admiral Inoue Shigeyoshi who could fairly be described as one of the fathers of the FS Operation. Inoue was one of Japan's better strategic thinkers, and

commander of the 4th Fleet, or South Seas Force, based at Truk in Japan's Caroline Islands League Mandate. Before Pearl Harbour, Inoue foresaw that Australia would almost certainly become the springboard for an American counter-offensive against the Japanese-held Marshall and Caroline island groups which included the large Japanese naval base at Truk. This major naval base was only 1,120 kilometres (700 miles) from Rabaul on the island of New Britain in the Australian-administered New Guinea Mandate. In Australian-American hands, Rabaul could be used by American B-17 heavy bombers to reach and bomb Truk. Inoue was authorised by Imperial General Headquarters to capture the islands of New Britain and New Ireland in Australia's New Guinea Mandate in the First Operational Stage centred on Pearl Harbor, and he did so with support from the Japanese Army's Nankai Shitai (South Seas Force) which stormed ashore at Rabaul on 23 January 1942. Once removed from Australian control, the Japanese intended that Rabaul would become their major base in the South-West Pacific.

Almost immediately following the capture of Rabaul, the Royal Australian Air Force began to bomb Japanese shipping and installations at Rabaul from airstrips at Port Moresby, Lae, and Salamaua. In addition to this compelling reason for swift Japanese action against Port Moresby, Lae, and Salamaua, Inoue added three additional compelling reasons. Australia's Port Moresby has a fine harbour, a complex of military airstrips, moderate rainfall, and was intended to be the anchor for the FS Operation to isolate Australia from the United States. Japanese forward air and naval bases located at Port Moresby and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands chain would enable Japan to strike deeply into the Australian mainland and far out into the South Pacific to sever the lines of communication between Australia and the United States. Japanese occupation of Port Moresby and Guadalcanal would make it far more difficult for the United States and Australia to mount counter-offensives through New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Inoue's third argument was that Port Moresby was situated on the southern coast of Papua, and separated from the Australian mainland by a 500 kilometre (300 mile) stretch of the Coral Sea. The capture and occupation of Port Moresby by the Japanese would deny the Allies a forward base from which to launch air attacks on Japan's newly acquired military base at Rabaul. The capture of Port Moresby by the Japanese would also place a large stretch of Coral Sea between Allied bombers on the Australian mainland and a wholly Japanese-occupied island of New Guinea.

On 29 January 1942, Japan's Imperial General Headquarters ordered the Commander in Chief of Japan's Combined Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, to capture Lae, Salamaua, and Port Moresby on the New Guinea mainland, and Tulagi Island in the British Solomon Islands chain. Senshi Sosho records the text of that order:

"Army–Navy Central Agreement Concerning Operations in British New Guinea (which means Papua although it was no longer British-owned) and the Solomon Islands : 2. Operational policy: The army and navy will cooperate after the completion of the invasions of Lae and Salamaua *to invade Port Moresby*. (at pages 30-31, and my emphasis)

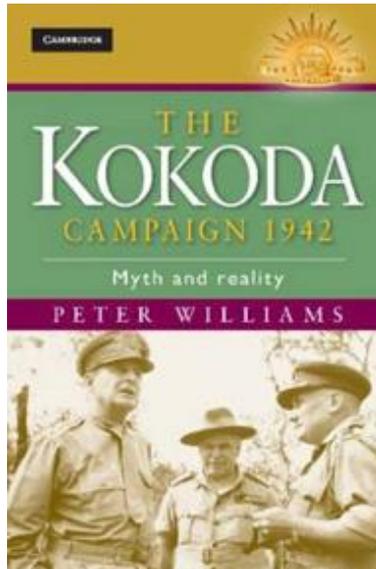
Lae and Salamaua were captured on 8 March 1942, but Japan's first attempt to capture Port Moresby by seaborne invasion was frustrated in the Battle of the Coral Sea (7-8 May 1942) which was an important strategic victory for the United States and Australia.

After Japan lost its four most powerful aircraft carriers in the crucial Battle of Midway (4-6 June 1942), the capture of Port Moresby became Japan's highest strategic priority in the South West Pacific. Senshi Sosho devotes all of chapter 4 to confirming the very high priority

accorded to capturing Port Moresby.

Dr Peter Williams diminishes the Kokoda achievement and heroism in his book published by the Australian Army.

Simon Black reports that "Prof Horner....questioned whether Australian troops were as outnumbered as previously thought", and I suspect that this comment can be traced to the paper delivered by Dr Peter Williams and his book mentioned below.



The Kokoda Campaign 1942 - Myth and reality" (2012) - written by Dr Peter Williams and published by the Australian Army

Dr Williams makes a number of very controversial claims in his book that I feel unjustifiably diminish the achievement and heroism of Australian soldiers whose fighting spirit and sacrifices ground a powerful Japanese army to a halt and retreat on the Kokoda Track when the Japanese were only 65 kilometres from Port Moresby. I will mention now five of the most controversial claims about the Kokoda Campaign made by Dr Williams, and I will show by reference to the Japanese official history Sensh Soshu that these claims are untrue.

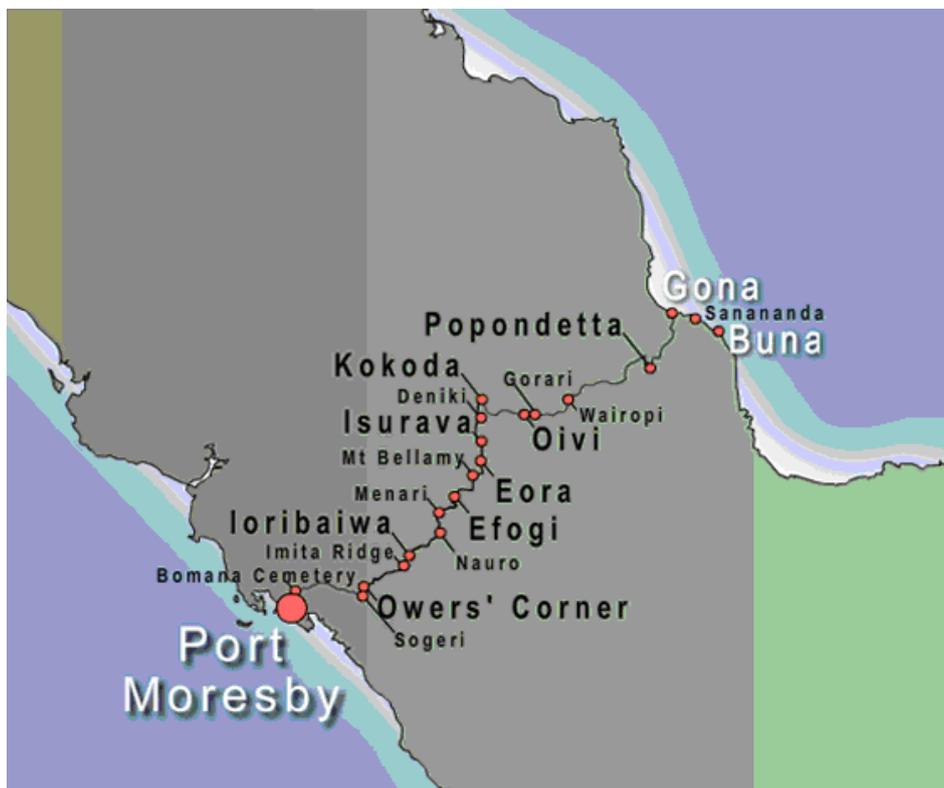
The claim by Dr Williams that Port Moresby was not the primary Japanese objective in Papua

(1) According to Dr Williams, Port Moresby was not the primary objective of the Japanese army fighting its way along the Kokoda Track towards Port Moresby, or as he puts it in his book: "Port Moresby was a highly desirable, but not essential, part of the (Japanese) plan." (at page 10).

We know as an historical fact that the Japanese were engaged in fierce fighting with the Australians along the Kokoda Track with the avowed intention of capturing Port Moresby. Throughout chapters 2 to 5 of the Senshi Soshu translation (2007, AWM) there are repeated references to capture of Port Moresby being the primary objective of the Japanese landings in Papua in July 1942, and these references are sourced in quoted text from primary sources to the highest levels of Japan's Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo and Japan's 17th Army

in Rabaul. Dr Williams could offer no credible historical evidence in his book to support this extraordinary claim because there is no such evidence to support it. I find it difficult to understand the purpose of this unsupported claim unless it was intended to diminish the achievement of the Australians who fought the Japanese to a standstill on the Kokoda Track.

The claim by Dr Williams that the Australians "were rarely outnumbered by the enemy" on the drive towards Port Moresby



The Kokoda Track begins at Ower's Corner at the southern end and extends for 96 kilometres to Kokoda.

(2) "In truth, during the Japanese advance, the Australians were rarely outnumbered by their enemy" (at page 1).

Dr Peter Williams suggests that the "myth" of superior Japanese numbers during the Japanese advance towards Port Moresby has been used to disguise the truth that the Japanese troops were "qualitatively superior to the Australians" in the Kokoda fighting (at page 2). I found these claims to be especially offensive because they lack any sound historical foundation. To support these clearly unsupported claims, Dr Williams makes particular reference to the fall of Oivi on 26 August 1942, the first defence and fall of Kokoda government station and airstrip to the Japanese on 29 July 1942, and the major Battle of Isurava (26-30 August 1942) to diminish the heroism of Australian soldiers by suggesting that numbers were roughly equal on both sides in these actions.

From the time of the Japanese landings at Gona and Buna on 21 July 1942, a series of actions were fought between the Japanese and the Australian defenders. The map shows three places where significant actions took place that contradict the claims by Peter Williams. Those

places are Oivi, Kokoda, and Isurava. Oivi is located about 16 kilometres east of Kokoda and it plays an important role in demolishing the claim of rough equality of numbers.

The fall of Oivi to the Japanese on 26 July 1942 and the claim by Dr Williams that the Australians were not outnumbered by the Japanese

The small village of Oivi is located on a plateau only two hours' march east of Kokoda. The commander of the militia 39th Battalion at Kokoda, Lieutenant Colonel Owen, had ordered Oivi to be held at all costs unless the small Australian force risked being surrounded and cut off. If that happened, the Australians were to fall back to Kokoda. The Australian force at Oivi comprised two and a half platoons and a handful of both Papuan Infantry Battalion and native police - possibly 90-100 men.

Australians, including military historians, had believed for over 70 years that the small Australian force defending Oivi on 26 July 1942 and Kokoda on 28/29 July 1942 was overcome by a full Japanese battalion equipped with much more powerful weapons. Not so, says Dr Peter Williams who claims in his book that the lightly armed small Australian force defending the Oivi plateau in a fierce action on the late afternoon and night of 26 July 1942 was facing only one Japanese rifle company (the Ogawa Company - comprising about 130 men) instead of the full 1/144th Tsukamoto Battalion (numbering between 500-700 men) with its artillery, mortars, and heavy machine guns.

Dr Williams tells us that the main force of the 1/144th Tsukamoto Battalion was not present at Oivi on 26 July or Kokoda on 29 July 1942 because it was still back at the Gona/Buna beachheads during these two actions (at pages 49-50 and 53). How does Williams support this astonishing claim? He purports to support it with the following claim:

"..it was Ogawa's advance guard, about 230 men, that did all the fighting against the Papuans and Australians up to and including the first Kokoda engagement on 29 July 1942". (at pages 49-50)

For me, the extraordinary aspect of this very controversial claim is that Dr Williams offers no historical evidence to support it. It follows that the claim lacks any historical worth and I will show that it is squarely contradicted by the Japanese official history *Senshi Soshō*. Dr Williams goes on to claim:

"...Tsukamoto, with the main body of the 1/144th (Battalion), was still on the coast a hundred kilometres away and did not pass through Oivi until 6 August." (at page 53)

This claim purports to be supported by reference to a translated Japanese document that is an appendix "F" to the 39th Battalion War Diary. But important dates mentioned in this translated Japanese document are clearly wrong, as anyone with any depth of knowledge of the Kokoda Campaign should know. The document wrongly states that Oivi was captured on 6 August 1942 and that Second Kokoda fell to the Japanese on 14 August 1942. Oivi actually fell to the Japanese on 26 July 1942 and Second Kokoda on 10 August 1942. There can be no doubt about these dates, so the reference to this flawed document by Dr Williams is effectively worthless. As I will demonstrate, this second controversial claim is also squarely contradicted by *Senshi Soshō*.

In assessing how many Japanese the Australians were facing at Oivi, a short description of the battle drawn from the Australian official history is useful. The Japanese launched repeated human wave attacks on the small Australian force at Oivi from 3.00 pm on 26 July 1942. The pressure from these Japanese attacks forced the Australians into a tight perimeter defence about 46 metres (50 yards) in diameter with the Japanese reaching to within a few yards of the perimeter before they were killed. As dusk was falling, the Japanese had accumulated sufficient numbers to encircle completely the Australian defensive perimeter, and the Australians were taking heavy machine-gun and mortar fire from all around their perimeter. Having regard to the number of Japanese already killed or wounded in human wave attacks, it appears highly unlikely that only 130 Japanese (the number suggested by Peter Williams) could apply such pressure for so long around a defensive perimeter that, applying mathematics and military common sense, was probably between 110 and 137 metres (120 and 150 yards) in length. The Australian commander Major Watson felt that his force was heavily outnumbered because the Japanese were pressing the Australians so closely despite their heavy losses and were bringing fire to bear on his men from an estimated twenty light machine-guns. If Major Watson's estimate of twenty Japanese light machine-guns is correct, it is highly probable that the Australians were surrounded at Oivi by a force much larger than a 130-man Ogawa Company because a standard Japanese Type B Rifle Company is normally equipped with only 9 light machine-guns.

At 10.15 pm, the Australians were saved from annihilation by a remarkable Papuan policeman Lance Corporal Sanopa. Shielded by heavy rain, forest, and darkness, Sanopa led the Australians out of encirclement along a creek bed. A heavy concentration of Japanese on the Kokoda side of Oivi had blocked the track, and the Australian survivors were obliged to bypass Kokoda and stumble through dense bush to Deniki further up the track.

The description of the battle at Oivi, and its aftermath, suggest very strongly that more than 130 Japanese were involved and the Japanese official history Senshi Soshi squarely contradicts Dr Williams by asserting that the full 1/144th Tsukamoto Battalion was present for the battle at Oivi on 26 July. The following extract from the translated chapters of Senshi Soshi effectively demolishes the claim by Dr Williams that the Australians were fighting only the 130-man Ogawa Company at Oivi and first Kokoda:

"The (Ogawa) unit then advanced to the high ground at Oivi approximately 16 kilometres to the east of Kokoda, where they were joined by the main strength of the advance party on 26 July (1942)". See: "Senshi Soshi" at pages 106-107 (AWM).

When Senshi Soshi refers to the "main strength" of the advance party joining the Ogawa Company on 26 July 1942 at Oivi, it means that the rest of the 1/144th Tsukamoto Battalion, i.e. three rifle companies, an HQ company, and heavy weapon support units, joined the Ogawa Company at Oivi on 26 July. It follows irresistibly from the Japanese account that a small force of Australians was facing a full Japanese battalion (between 500-700 men) at Oivi and in the first defence of Kokoda, and not merely the Ogawa Company. The Australians were equipped only with light weapons. The Japanese had heavy machine-guns and light artillery.

The first defence of Kokoda on 29 July 1942 and the claim by Dr Williams that the Australians were not outnumbered by the Japanese

The next major action took place at the Kokoda government station on 28/29 July 1942. Dr Williams claims again that the lightly armed small Australian 39th Battalion force (about 100-110 men, including small numbers of Papuan Infantry Battalion soldiers and native police) defending the Kokoda plateau in a famous action on the night of 28/29 July was facing only the Japanese Ogawa rifle company (130 men) instead of the full 1/144th Tsukamoto Battalion.

The Australian militia soldiers and Papuans were dug in around the three open sides of the plateau* which rose steeply from the valley floor. The Japanese attack began at about 2.00 am on 29 July when the Japanese began to lay down heavy machine-gun and mortar fire on the Kokoda plateau. By 3.30 am the Japanese had swarmed over all three open sides of the Kokoda plateau and were overwhelming the Australian defenders. The survivors withdrew up the Track to Deniki. * The fourth side was mostly closed off by a dense rubber plantation.

One probably needs to be an armchair historian even to imagine that only 130 Japanese soldiers could manage the steep 22 metre (72 feet) climb up the plateau sides, through dense bush growth and under Australian fire, and then swarm over all three open sides of the Kokoda plateau (total length about 600 yards) to overwhelm quickly the prepared Australian defences. Having regard to the Japanese already killed and wounded in human wave attacks at Oivi, Peter Williams is very unlikely to have 130 Japanese surviving to assault the defended Kokoda plateau.

However, another extract from the Senshi Soshō translation squarely refutes the claim by Peter Williams of near equality of Australian and Japanese numbers in the first defence of Kokoda on 28/29 July 1942. Senshi Soshō states at pages 135-136:

"As mentioned previously, the 1st Battalion of the 144th Infantry Regiment (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tsukamoto Hatsuo) was attached to the Yokoyama Advance Party, *and occupied Kokoda on the morning of 29 July (1942)*. The battalion was ordered to secure the line of the Owen Stanley Range in preparation for a continued advance." (The emphasis is mine)

The Kokoda government station fell to the Japanese on the morning of 29 July 1942. So the official Japanese history is declaring unequivocally that Tsukamoto's full battalion took part in the first defence and fall of Kokoda on 29 July. The unsupportable claim by Williams of near equality of numbers in the first defence of Kokoda on 29 July 1942 diminishes unjustly the heroism of the Australian defenders who were fighting a much larger and more powerful Japanese force.

Unfortunately, despite being contradicted by the official Japanese history Senshi Soshō, the Department of Veterans' Affairs has seen fit to adopt on its Kokoda website the historically unsupportable claim by Peter Williams that the Australians defending the Kokoda plateau on 29 July 1942 faced only one Japanese company (about 130 men):

"Owen...placed (his men) in an arc around the northern end of the plateau on which the Kokoda administration buildings stood. His opponent was Captain Ogawa, commander of

No. 1 Company of the first battalion of 144 Regiment."*

* from the Kokoda web chapter "A fighting retreat".

The Battle of Isurava (26-30 August 1942) and the claim by Dr Williams of equality of Australian and Japanese numbers

The Battle of Isurava took place on a high northernmost ridge of the Owen Stanley Range between 26-30 August 1942 and wrecked any hope that the Japanese entertained of capturing Port Moresby's vital airfields by 4 September 1942. The account of the Battle of Isurava by Peter Williams in his book rejects the widely accepted concept of a gallant defence by heavily outnumbered Australians facing a veteran Japanese army equipped with much greater firepower, and I will demonstrate why the following claims about Isurava by Peter Williams lack any sound historical foundation.

3."..there were no more Japanese engaged (at Isurava) than there were Australians so the battle, although a fascinating one, was not a wonderful defensive stand against overwhelming numbers as it has been depicted" (at page 82).

The official Australian history of the Kokoda Campaign and Senshi Sosho both make it very clear to anyone who has a reasonable command of the English language that there were two separate battles taking place on the northernmost ridge of the Owen Stanleys between 26 and 30 August 1942. The wide dispersal of the four Australian battalions makes the claim by Williams that there was equality of Japanese and Australian numbers at Isurava completely unsupportable.

During five days of fighting at and near Isurava, Major General Horii Tomitaro could call on five veteran infantry assault battalions with supporting heavy weapon units (Senshi Sosho at pages 132-140). Four of these veteran battalions were fresh. The Japanese force was called the Nankai Shitai (South Seas Force) and combined the 144th and 41st Infantry Regiments. Horii could support his invasion of Australian soil with powerful weapons that the Australian battalions did not have, namely, light artillery and heavy machine-guns.

The Australians could muster only four battalions at Isurava and Alola to oppose the Japanese advance. On the morning of 26 August 1942, the militia 39th Battalion was on its own and dug in at Isurava, but after a month of fighting the Japanese the militia soldiers were heavily depleted in numbers, starving, and exhausted. The militia 53rd Battalion was at Alola but it was composed of green recruits untrained for any form of battle.

By nightfall on 25 August 1942, Major General Horii had deployed three Japanese battalions of the Nankai Shitai 144th Infantry Regiment for his attack on the Australian 39th Battalion at Isurava early on the following day. Horii kept the 2nd Kowai Battalion of the 41st Infantry Regiment (Senshi Sosho grants this reserve battalion 755 men at page 134) at Deniki as a reserve behind his three forward battalions. An expert Kokoda trek leader has told me that the fresh Japanese 2/41st Kowai Battalion soldiers at Deniki should have been able to reach Isurava within 3-4 hours if required. So on the night of 25 August, we have four veteran Japanese battalions poised to assault one exhausted, starving, and depleted Australian 39th Battalion at Isurava on the following day. A fifth veteran Japanese Battalion, the 3/41st Tomita Battalion, left the coastal beachheads on 21 August to join the main strength of the

Nankai Shitai at Isurava (Senshi Sosho at page 132). This battalion's duties were to act as a rearguard and supervise movement of supplies to the front at Isurava. Dr Williams claims without supporting reference (at page 65) that the 3/41st Tomita Battalion was not in Papua at this time but he is contradicted by Senshi Sosho (at page 132).

It follows that at dawn on the morning of 26 August 1942, 400 Australian militia 39th Battalion soldiers were now facing at least 2,000 veteran Japanese assault troops (Senshi Sosho at page 134), and the Japanese attack at Isurava was timed to coincide with an amphibious attack on the Allied airbase at Milne Bay which was the second prong of the Japanese attack on Port Moresby.

Major General Horie launched his attack on the 39th Battalion lines at dawn on 26 August 1942, and this is confirmed by the Japanese official history Senshi Sosho:

"The (Japanese) attack began at dawn on 26 August with the main force of the 1st Battalion" (at page 138).

The fact that the Japanese attack at Isurava commenced on the morning of 26 August 1942 and continued throughout that day is also confirmed in the pages of the 39th Battalion War Diary.

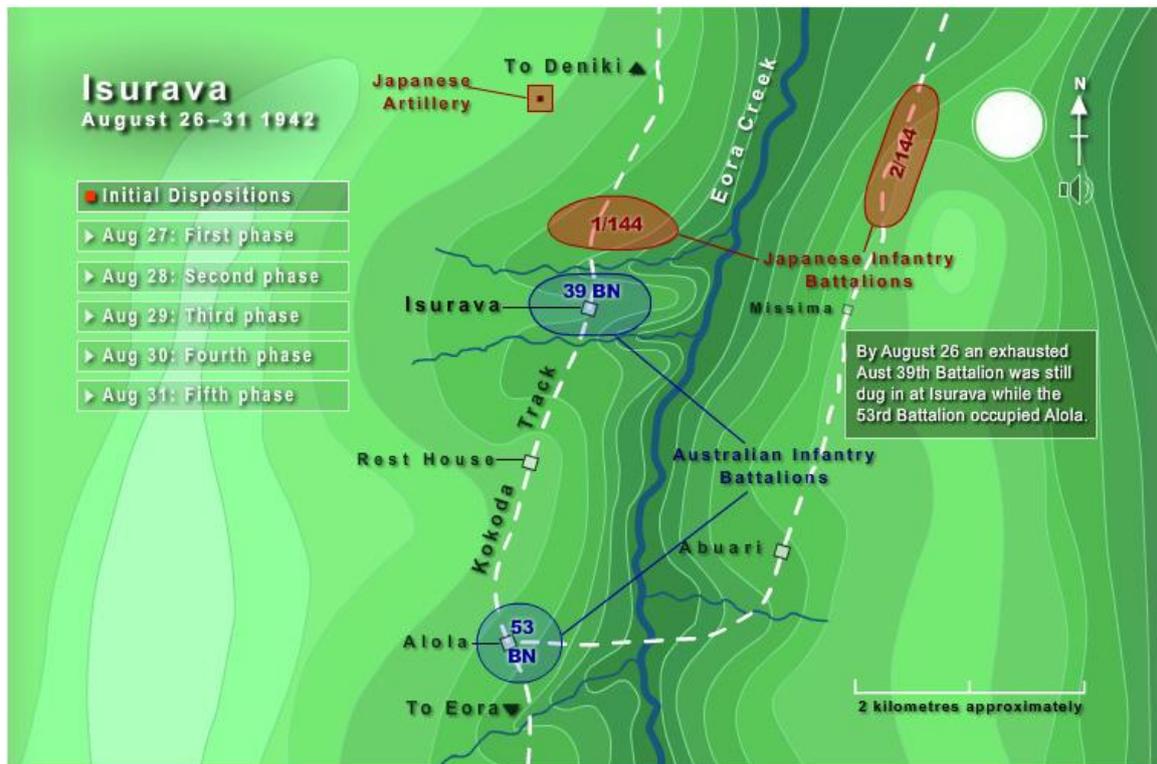
The Department of Veterans' Affairs has produced animated maps depicting each day of the Battle of Isurava on its Kokoda website. The department states that these animated maps were produced by Dr Peter Williams, and they give us a very different account of what happened at Isurava on 26 August and which battalions were present at Isurava on that date. According to Dr Williams, nothing happened at Isurava on 26 August, or as he states in his book:

"(Horie's) plan was to make a major attack late on 27th August, then finish off the Australians the next day" (at page 70).

No historical evidence is produced by Dr Williams to support his version of 26 August at Isurava.

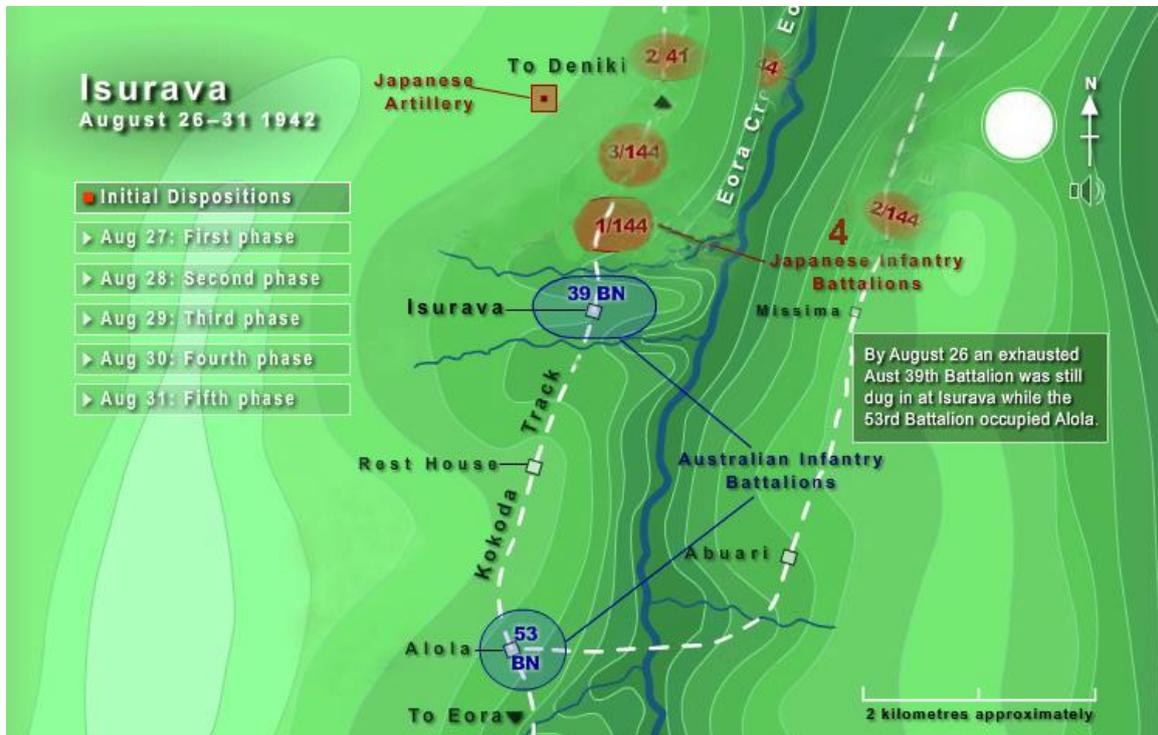
The first depiction by Dr Williams of the Battle of Isurava on the Veterans' Affairs website (below) purports to show Isurava on 26 August 1942. No military action is shown as happening on this map, and it appears designed to support Dr Williams' very controversial claims that there was no Japanese attack on the 39th Battalion beginning at dawn on 26 August and that numbers on both sides were roughly equal. So the Department of Veterans Affairs appears to be suggesting to Australians that the 39th Battalion War Diary is wrong and that the Japanese do not know their own military history. When the Japanese official history of the Battle of Isurava, i.e. Senshi Sosho, and the Australian 39th Battalion War Diary agree, I feel that there are very sound grounds for accepting their account of Isurava over that of Dr Williams and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Depiction of the Battle of Isurava on 26 August 1942 by Veterans' Affairs and Dr Peter Williams



Apart from indicating that no military action occurred at Isurava on 26 August 1942, which is untrue, this depiction of the first day of the Battle of Isurava does not give a true picture of the disposition of the Japanese and Australian forces and numbers involved on either side on 26 August 1942. Two Japanese battalions have gone missing from this depiction. One battalion missing from the map above is the 3/144th Kuwada Battalion which was immediately behind the 1/144th Tsukamoto Battalion at Isurava on 26 August and ordered by Colonel Kusunose Masao to engage the 39th Battalion at 1.00 pm (Senshi Sosho at page 138). The other missing battalion is the reserve 2nd Kowai Battalion of the 41st Regiment which was only 3-4 hours march down the Track from Isurava at Deniki. This incorrect depiction of Japanese troop dispositions at and near Isurava on 26 August appears to be intended by Dr Williams to support his claim that "...there were no more Japanese engaged (at Isurava) than there were Australians". The number of Japanese battalions at or near Isurava on 26 August is correctly shown below.

How the respective Japanese and Australian forces should be correctly shown at Isurava on 26 August 1942



The 39th Battalion barely held the swarms of Japanese that began to attack their lines on the morning of 26 August 1942 under cover of artillery, mortar, and heavy machine-gun fire. They were to be relieved by the AIF 2/14th Battalion when it began to arrive at Isurava during the afternoon of 26 August, but the situation for the Australians at Isurava was so desperate that the exhausted militia troops were obliged to remain as a reserve behind the 2/14th. None of this is shown by Veterans Affairs' in its very misleading first Isurava map. So we have at Isurava on 26 August one fit Australian AIF 2/14th Battalion and one exhausted, starving, and depleted reserve militia 39th Battalion facing three veteran Japanese assault battalions and one reserve Japanese 3/41st Tomita Battalion which was strung out along the Track between Isurava and Kokoda (Senshi Soshu at pages 132-140). The Australians were lightly armed. The Japanese were equipped with artillery, mortars, and heavy machine-guns. The evidence is clear that the Australians at Isurava village were heavily outnumbered and lacked the firepower available to the Japanese, but Peter Williams does not want to acknowledge this.

The other two Australian battalions were two hours' hard march away at Alola and deployed to defend the rugged and densely forested Alola-Missima-Kaile track against the advance of the 2/144th Horie Battalion. One of those Australian battalions at Alola, the militia 53rd Battalion, comprised raw recruits who should never have been sent into battle against crack Japanese assault troops of the 2/144th Horie Battalion because they had no combat training. They faced swift annihilation by the Japanese and were quickly withdrawn by the Australian commander Brigadier Potts from any form of combat. This left two fit Australian AIF battalions and one totally exhausted militia 39th Battalion to face five veteran Japanese

battalions. Unless the Japanese fail to know their own military history, Senshi Soshō destroys the claim by Peter Williams of equality of numbers at Isurava.

For the sake of completeness, it is relevant to note on the issue of comparative Japanese and Australian numbers during the Japanese drive towards Port Moresby that there would be more heavy fighting on the Kokoda Track immediately south of Efogi at Brigade Hill and the adjoining Mission Ridge. Here, the Australian 2/14th, 2/16th, and 2/27 Battalions were flanked and almost annihilated on 8 September by the Japanese who had five battalions of the 144th and 41st Regiments and still possessed much heavier firepower than the Australians in the form of light artillery, heavy machine-guns, and mortars. On this occasion, there could be no doubt that the Australians were heavily outnumbered and outgunned by the Japanese.

Dr Williams: "Isurava was a defeat with very few redeeming features."

Peter Williams makes another very surprising claim in his Isurava chapter:

4. "Far from being Australia's....Thermopylae, Isurava was a defeat with very few redeeming features" (at page 62).

Dr Williams appears unwilling to acknowledge that if the depleted militia 39th Battalion had not stood fast at Isurava despite starvation and battle exhaustion, and held the Japanese until fresh AIF troops from the 2/14th Battalion arrived to relieve them on the afternoon of 26 August, there is a very real possibility that the five veteran heavily armed Japanese assault battalions could have acquired the momentum necessary to push the two poorly supplied and lightly armed Australian AIF battalions strung out on the Kokoda Track back across the Owen Stanleys to the Sogeri plateau by 2 or 3 September 1942. The Japanese had shown their mastery of the art of flanking and encirclement of an enemy in Malaya. The Sogeri plateau overlooks Port Moresby and would have provided an easy one day's march (35 kilometres) for Japanese soldiers to reach the vital Port Moresby Ward and Jackson airstrips. The crucial role played by the 39th Battalion in blocking the Japanese advance until reinforced by the AIF 2/14th Battalion is mentioned by the 39th Battalion's commander at Isurava Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Honner in the Australian Army documentary "Kokoda - The Bloody Track" * because the Australian AIF 2/14th and 2/16 Battalions were lightly armed and only receiving very limited supplies while strung out along the Kokoda Track. Ralph Honner states very firmly in that documentary his belief that the consequences for Australia would have been grave if the 39th Battalion had not held at Isurava until relieved by the 2/14th Battalion. If the Nankai Shitai had reached and taken control of the Port Moresby airstrips before 4 September 1942, as intended by the Japanese, the whole course of the war for Australia would have changed for the worse. * available on DVD from the Australian War Memorial.

The Battle of Isurava also played an important role in destroying the Nankai Shitai, including the attached 41st Regiment, as powerful fighting forces. See table below. Peter Williams does not acknowledge that the Japanese Nankai Shitai soldiers left their beachheads at Gona/Buna with only 12 days supply of food in their packs. The 19th Army commander at Rabaul expected the Nankai Shitai to reach Port Moresby before 4 September 1942 using that food supply in their packs and by supplementing it, if necessary, by stealing food from native gardens on the Kokoda Track. It was normal practice for the Imperial Japanese Army to expect its troops to live off the land as they advanced, but the Kokoda Track villagers had removed all food from the Japanese line of advance.

The main force of the Nankai Shitai (four battalions) moved off from the coast to Kokoda between 19-21 August 1942. Twelve days after leaving the beachheads at Gona/Buna, and thanks to the Australian defence of Isurava over five days, the Japanese had only occupied Isurava on the northernmost ridge of the Owen Stanleys by 30 August. Their food supply was running low but they were able to find some abandoned Australian food at Isurava. They were hoping to find more food supplies abandoned by the retreating Australians along the Kokoda Track and to raid native food gardens but they failed to find these essential food resources. Very little food was reaching the Japanese troops in air drops. By the time the Japanese reached Ioribaiwa, they were exhausted and starving and their supply lines were in chaos. They could not go further without food and troop reinforcements. These were denied by 17th Army, and the Nankai Shitai was forced to face defeat and retreat to the beachheads.

When the survivors of the Nankai Shitai, including the 41st Regiment, ended their retreat at Buna, this powerful army had been destroyed as a fighting force by fighting, starvation, and exhaustion. Major Koiwai Misuo, commander of the 2/41st Koiwai Battalion, records in his memoirs that the Nankai Shitai troops were so exhausted in November 1942, and in such pitiful condition, that he ordered men of his 2/41st Battalion to abandon their weapons (Senshi Soshō at page 173). Many of the survivors of the Nankai Shitai were observed to be naked or in rags and in near skeletal condition from starvation when they reached Buna.* No men of the original Nankai Shitai or 41st Regiment were fit to fight in the bloody fighting for the Japanese beachheads, and the Battle of Isurava had contributed significantly to wiping out two veteran Japanese assault regiments that might otherwise have contributed significantly to the bloody defence of the Japanese beachheads at Buna, Gona, and Sanananda. As a result, much of the fighting force at the Japanese beachheads was comprised of engineers, garrison troops, and support units rather than veteran assault troops; but they were able to fight the Australians and Americans from expertly hardened defences contrived by Japanese engineers.* "The Path of Infinite Sorrow -The Japanese on the Kokoda Track" by Collie & Marutani (2009).

Dr Williams: "...the delay imposed (by Isurava) was of small importance."

Not content with denying the historical significance of Isurava, Dr Peter Williams also wrote:

5. "...the delay imposed (by Isurava) was of small importance for....Seventeenth Army had already decided to postpone the Nankai Shitai's attack on Port Moresby." (at page 62)

Peter Williams is wrong again. The Battle of Isurava ended on 30 August 1942, and the Japanese 17th Army did not decide to halt the drive by Major General Horii across the Owen Stanleys until 14 September. If Major General Horii's advance towards Port Moresby had not been blunted by a determined Australian defence of Isurava and followed by a fighting withdrawal along the Kokoda Track, it is very likely that the Japanese could have reached Port Moresby's airstrips by 4 September.

The final decision to halt the drive towards Port Moresby and retreat to the beachheads was not taken until 14 September 1942 when the Japanese had reached Ioribaiwai (Senshi Soshō at page 158). By this stage, the Nankai Shitai was heavily depleted from fighting the Australians and the Japanese troops were starving, exhausted, and carrying many sick and

wounded. The Nankai Shitai at Ioribaiwa had no hope of reaching Port Moresby without substantial reinforcement and supply of food. This would be denied by Japan's high command. Isurava had contributed significantly to the hopeless Japanese situation at Ioribaiwa. "Senshi Soshō" points out that the decision to halt the Port Moresby offensive on 14 September 1942 coincided with the total defeat of the Kawaguchi Detachment on Guadalcanal (op.cit.).

Conclusion

After close examination of the Australian and Japanese official histories, and vain attempts to find historical evidence supporting any of the controversial claims made by Peter Williams in his Kokoda book, I have formed the view that much of this book consists of unsupportable claims based upon inadequate and/or selective research, distortions of what really happened following the Japanese landings and on the Kokoda Track, obscure references that are very difficult to check, references that are often ambiguous, and failure to address authoritative historical sources that contradict the author. It appears to me that Peter Williams either did not read the official Japanese history Senshi Soshō or chose to ignore its content because it supports the traditional view that Kokoda was a magnificent achievement marked by extraordinary heroism by Australian soldiers in the face of overwhelming odds.

As a graduate historian, a former Australian army officer, and a person who has been studying the Japanese invasion of Papua for over twenty years, I find it very disappointing that this PhD thesis appears not to have been submitted to a person with expert knowledge of the Kokoda Campaign for checking of historical accuracy. It appears to me that the Australian Army is saddled permanently with a deeply flawed treatment of Kokoda in book form. The Department of Veterans' Affairs is in the more fortunate position of being able to quietly drop the Peter Williams version of Kokoda from its website before 2017.

Author's note:

References in this paper to the Japanese official history of the Pacific War with the title "Senshi Soshō" are to the chapters bearing on Japan's hostile plans for Australia in 1942 which have been translated into English and published by the Australian War Memorial in 2007 under the title "Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific". These chapters can be downloaded in PDF format from the Australian War Memorial website.

DETAILS OF JAPANESE 144TH & 41ST REGIMENT CASUALTIES

The losses for the South Seas Force were compiled by the No. 1 Demobilisation Bureau as follows:

South Seas Force personnel table

| Unit | Mobilised in Japan | Reinforcements | Killed in action or lost | Survivors |
|--|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| 55th Infantry Group headquarters | 180 | 155 | 253 | 82 |
| 144th Infantry Regiment | 3,500 | 1,150 | 3,264 | 1,386 |
| 55th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Company | 130 | 30 | 130 | 30 |
| 55th Mountain Artillery Regiment, 1st Battalion | 900 | 257 | 905 | 252 |
| 55th Engineer Regiment, 1st Company | 300 | 50 | 310 | 40 |
| 55th Supply and Transport Regiment, 2nd Company | 145 | 30 | 140 | 35 |
| 55th Division Medical Unit (one-third strength) | 220 | 80 | 250 | 50 |
| 55th Division Disease Prevention and Water Supply Unit (part strength) | 50 | 10 | 45 | 15 |
| 55th Division Veterinary Workshop (part strength) | 21 | 5 | 20 | 6 |
| 55th Division 1st Field Hospital | 140 | 30 | 115 | 55 |
| Total | 5,586 | 1,797 | 5,432 | 1,951 |

The 41st Infantry Regiment assembled in Rabaul by mid-June 1943. The regiment was removed from the order of battle of the 18th Army by "Great army order no. 834" on 2 September. The regiment was returned to Korea and placed under the command of the Demobilisation Duty Officer.

According to the memoir of Koiwai Mitsuo, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, the regiment lost over two thousand men and approximately three hundred casualties were evacuated. There were barely two hundred survivors when the regiment arrived in Rabaul. The commander of the regiment, Colonel Yazawa Kiyomi, died on active service after the evacuation from the Mambare River.

The South Seas Force assembled in Rabaul by late April. The force was removed from the order of battle of the 18th Army by an order dated 17 June ("Great army order no. 804"). This order dissolved the formation, and returned units to the order of battle of the 55th Division, at that time in Burma.

Senshi Sosho at page 210