



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.mhhv.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:



Understanding the Kokoda Battles

by Neil Sharkey, Exhibitions Curator, Shrine of Remembrance

- Exhibitions provide an alternative means to inform a general audience about an historical topic (for example the Kokoda campaign) and engage with individuals who might not otherwise read on that topic. Such exhibitions, targeted to an audience with little prior knowledge of that topic, constitute an instance of public education but can also serve a commemorative function.
- Exhibitions provide an alternative for people, already engaged in a topic, to share that knowledge with others.
- Exhibitions, because of their physical presence, can make an emotional impact on visitors that a book may not. Communicating a topic via an exhibition will of course draw heavily from historical works but exhibitions are a unique form of expression, encapsulating different disciplines – historical interpretation, eyewitness accounts and primary documentation, objects, photography, art, multimedia.
- Exhibitions generally cannot impart the same level of detail as a serious history but can inspire curiosity in a topic that ideally will encourage further study. A well-made exhibition should leave a visitor with a greater appreciation of a topic than they began with, even if they already know that topic well.
- I am by no means a Kokoda expert but have developed a permanent exhibit devoted to the Papua and New Guinea campaigns. I have also developed two temporary exhibitions *Kokoda, Milne Bay and the Beachheads: Australians in New Guinea 1942 – 43* and *War on our doorstep: Australians in New Guinea 1943 – 45*. I would like to share some of the highlights of those exhibitions and some of the insights I gained developing them.
- Many individuals attending the *Kokoda and Beyond: Papua and New Guinea 1942-1945* conference are particularly knowledgeable on the topic of Kokoda and the other New Guinea campaigns. They have interest, established networks and access to display objects, photographs and stories. I would also like to share some of the principles of exhibition development that may encourage those here today to develop their own exhibitions, thereby helping to further disseminate understanding of the events of the Kokoda and later New Guinea campaigns in the wider community.

Principles of exhibition development

1. Identify audiences, explore networks, engage partners, motivate visitors

- Seek funding (e.g. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Council, etc.)
- Contact community groups that have a stake in the subject of your exhibition (e.g. 39th and 2/14th Battalion and No. 75 and 76 Squadron associations, etc.)
- Contact experts in the field (e.g. historians, museums curators, collectors, etc.)
- Link exhibition to significant anniversaries (Battles of Coral Sea, Isurava, Milne Bay, Bismarck Sea, Huon Peninsula, etc.)
- Organise public programs during the exhibitions run (curator's tours, public lectures, book launches, etc.)
- Utilise modern media forms (e.g. internet – webpages, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Engage the media (e.g. *The Herald Sun*, ABC radio, Channel 7, etc.)

2. Define parameters, focus content

- Define exhibition scope (e.g. Battle of Isurava, Kokoda campaign, Papuan campaigns 1942, New Guinea campaigns 1942 – 45, etc.)
- Assuming you have a curator on what other resources can you draw? These considerations will help you define exhibition scope.

For example:

- Are you able to source original memorabilia, photographs, ephemera, art from veterans, collectors, institutions, etc.?
- Do you have access to the necessary infrastructure – exhibition space, display cases, lighting, hanging system, modular walls, etc.
- Will you have assistance and time?
- Do you have contractors who will be able to provide what you cannot in-house?

3. 'Curate' – make decisions

- What is the essence of the story? (e.g. What are the central narrative elements of the Kokoda campaign? What are its unique aspects? What objects, images, etc. will draw out these themes?)
- Don't overload visitors with information – less is more. Decide, after careful research and consideration, what information gets left in and what gets left out. Don't introduce a story point unless you are prepared to provide adequate context and explanation.
- Keep captions and didactic panels short. Use simple direct language.

Remember:

- People are standing in an area surrounded by interesting things.

- Visitors are different ages, with varying levels of education.
- Visitors don't need to know everything about a topic, only enough to understand what is on display.

4. Layer information

- Present information in a hierarchical manner with various didactic tiers. All didactic panels in a particular tier should look similar and have a comparable number of words.

For example:

- Tier one panels, measuring 500 x 300 mm, portrait orientation, one column, two photographs with 300 words max, could carry the main narrative thread of the exhibition.
- Tier two panels, measuring 300 x 300 mm, one column, 150 words max, could recount a case study or provide background on a related theme.
- Tier three panels, measuring 400 x 200 mm, with a landscape orientation, two columns, 200 words max and a photograph, could feature biographies.
- Tier four panels, measuring 150 x 150 mm, with 75 words max could serve as captions for images and display objects.

These examples are by no means proscriptive. The nature of the exhibition will inform the nature and structure of the interpretative text and its hierarchy.

5. Inspire curiosity

- Use a wide range of immersive storytelling techniques to engage visitors. Tap into their emotional responses to the exhibits.
- In addition to didactic narratives, display objects, images, etc.

Consider incorporating:

- Eyewitness accounts and testimony.
- Artistic responses.
- Display cases built around a particular theme.
- Theatrical techniques and lighting.
- Audio-visual material or multimedia.