





While a group of battle-hardened Japanese soldiers fought against Filipino-and-American soldiers in The Philippines, during the first part of 1942, other battle-hardened Japanese troops were simultaneously fighting against Australians in Papua (also known as <u>New Guinea</u>).

Key places for those Papuan battles occurred along, or near, a difficult piece of jungle terrain known as the Kokoda Track (or, Kokoda Trail) stretching from Port Moresby to the other side of the Owen Stanley Mountain Range.



In the intelligence-gathering phase about New Guinea, before war erupted in the Pacific during 1941, a key Japanese military man—Major Toyofuku Tetsuo—made a personal trip to the island. He concluded there were no good roads between Port Moresby and the other side of the Owen Stanley Range.

Specifically, he determined that a route known as the "Kokoda Track" (also referred to as the "Kokoda Trail") was not, in any way, a place for vehicles to travel north to/from Port Moresby.

What was the significance of such a scouting report? If the Japanese were to control Papua—in that country's effort to isolate Australia and have a base of operations from which to defend their recent conquests of other Pacific islands—much work would be required to make the Kokoda Track usable by invading, then occupying, Japanese troops.



The government of Australia, in a commemorative series of articles about "The War in Papua," separates fact from rumor on whether Japanese military leaders realized that vehicles could not travel along the Kokoda Track before the Imperial Army invaded the South-Pacific island:

It is one of the persistent myths of the Kokoda story that the Japanese believed that the Kokoda track was a vehicular road and statements to this effect can be found in the diaries of some Japanese soldiers. These men were not of sufficiently high rank to have access to Toyofuku's report and were simply repeating the gossip that is customary in military units when a new operation is about to begin.

Toyofuku's report, completed seven months before the Japanese attack on Papua, contained an accurate list of the location and length of all roads in Papua at the time.

The report also contained intelligence on Papua gathered by the Japanese consulate in Sydney. Of particular importance were maps, made by Australian explorers, of the various tracks over the Owen Stanley Range. These maps and the information gained on Toyofuku's trip to Port Moresby were the key sources of intelligence used by Major General Horii Tomotaro in planning the July 1942 [[apanese]] invasion of Papua.

For Australia, attempting to drive the Japanese out of Papua was roughly equivalent to the ancient Spartans attempting to drive the Persians out of Greece (at the <u>Battle of Thermopylae</u>). Australians viewed Japanese control of Papua as an existential threat to the well-being of Australia. In short, it was a place to take a stand against Japan's growing power in the Pacific.



Fighting in Papua, along the Kokoda Track, meant fighting in the jungle. Fighting in the jungle is always difficult since it includes impassable trails, insect-borne diseases, rain, mud and a host of other difficulties.

When the Australians and Japanese fought along the Kokoda Track (Kokoda Trail) during the summer of 1942, both sides had to <u>endure jungle conditions</u>. Did those conditions favor either side?

The attacker, who is manoeuvring, often cannot find his way and becomes lost. His sub-units cannot see each other so cannot easily coordinate fire and movement.

The defender, who is in his fighting pit, cannot direct his fire on targets hidden by thick foliage. His weapons, which in other circumstances can fire accurately for hundreds of metres, are much less useful when he can only see 20 metres.

If the jungle is also mountainous with frequent mist and heavy rain, as it was on the Kokoda track, these problems are compounded as all movement is greatly slowed and visibility further restricted.

The Japanese, it is said, were trained jungle fighters. This is not so, rather their advantage was that their doctrine and training stressed the importance of night fighting while the Australians in 1942 did not train to fight at night. Both sides were strangers to the jungle but the Japanese, owing to their night fighting training, found their feet first.

The image, at the top of this page, provides a view of the Japanese as they make their way along the Kokoda Track. Shovels were their weapons against nature, just as guns were their weapons against the Australians.

As some Japanese troops were battling against Australians at Papua, other Japanese fighters were battling Americans at Guadalcanal. At the end of September, 1942—when the Japanese fighters were around 40 kilometers from Papua's Port Moresby—they began to retreat:

The reason for the retreat was that Guadalcanal was going badly for them and Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo deemed it wise not to stick their neck out too far in Papua until the Guadalcanal problem was resolved.

They did not however abandon hope of making another attack on Port Moresby in the future, so they only retreated as far as the Templeton's Crossing - Eora region. There the Australians attacked and defeated them in October 1942. The Japanese fell back to Oivi-Gorari but in November were again defeated, this time decisively.

The remnant of the Nankai Shitai now had no choice but to retreat to Sanananda to try to hold their base.

Although Japan had sent battle-hardened troops to Papua, they were ultimately <u>unable to hold the island</u>. When the Australians successfully drove the Imperial forces back to the coast of Papua, with the help of their American Allies, the Japanese had to abandon the island altogether.

Australian troops, with the help of Americans and local Papuans, had protected their country against the threat from Japan. The <u>casualties for both sides</u>, however, were very high.



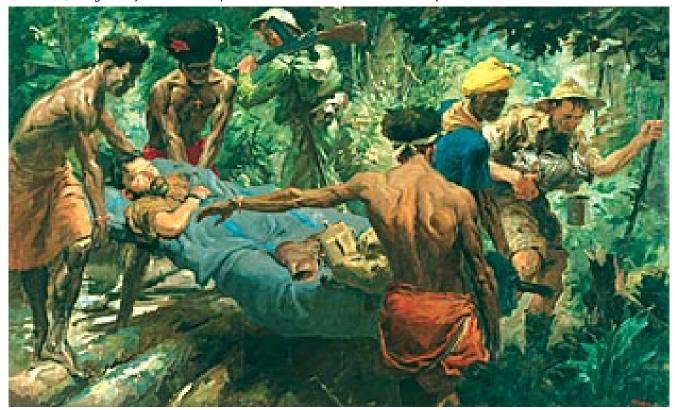
Some of those casualties, including death, occurred because of illness.

In this image, for example, we see a photo by George Silk (a combat photographer for the Australian government) which was taken at Buna, New Guinea, on Christmas Day, 1942. An Australian soldier—Private George "Dick" Whittington—is aided by a Papuan orderly, Raphael Oimbari. Whittington died, from the effects of bush (or "scrub") typhus, in February of 1943.

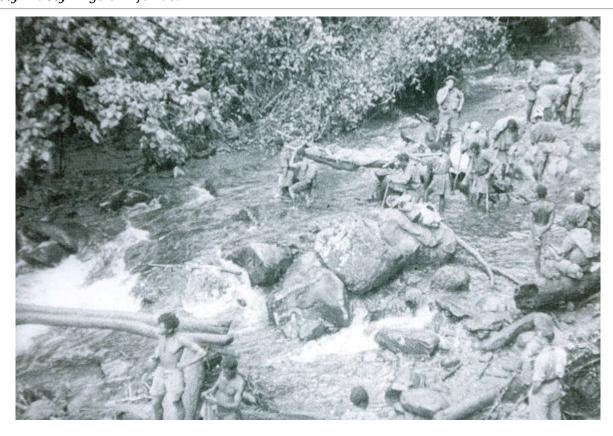


The death toll would have been higher had it not been for the "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels," as the Aussies described the locals who risked much to help the injured soldiers:

They carried stretchers over seemingly impassable barriers, with the patient reasonably comfortable. The care they give to the patient is magnificent. If night finds the stretcher still on the track, they will find a level spot and build a shelter over the patient.



They will make him as comfortable as possible fetch him water and feed him if food is available, regardless of their own needs. They sleep four each side of the stretcher and if the patient moves or requires any attention during the night, this is given instantly. These were the deeds of the "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels" – for us!



Today, the Papuan Campaign remains a very significant event in Australia's history. Credits:

Top image, of Japanese soldiers at the Kokoda Track (a/k/a the Kokoda Trail) online, courtesy U.S. National

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Additional in-text images:

The cross-section view of the Kokoda Track, by artist Viki Sizgoric, and its description, by "The Australian" newspaper, is online via the <u>Pacific War Historical Society</u>.

Map depicting proximity between Australia and Papua (New Guinea), by NormanEinstein; online via Wikimedia Commons. License: <u>CC BY-SA 3.0</u>

The two black-and-white photos, of Papuans aiding wounded soldiers, are vintage postcards from New Guinea. The first depicts an evacuation along the <u>Kokoda Track</u>, while the second depicts stretcher bearers in the Owen Stanleys.

Painting, "Stretcher Bearers in the Owen Stanleys," a 1947 painting by Captain William Dargie.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Japanese-and-Australian-Soldiers-at-the-Kokoda-Trail
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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Japanese-and-Australian-Soldiers-at-the-Kokoda-Trail

Media Stream



<u>Distance Between Australia and New Guinea</u>

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Kokoda Trail

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Kokoda Trail Cutaway

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<u>Bush Typhus Victim by George Silk</u> View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/



Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels Help Aussie Soldiers

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Kokoda Track Stretcher Bearers

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Kokoda Bearers at Owen Stanley Mtns
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Japanese and Australian Soldiers at the Kokoda Trail View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/