

THE KOKODA TRAIL – Gona’s Gone!

For further information leading up to this scenario, see the campaign overview, and the preludes to the ten previous scenarios.

At the battle of Eora Creek, the Australians met some of their stiffest resistance to date. The creek was very fast moving and would be difficult to cross. There were two log bridges with Japanese prepared positions overlooking them. On 22 October the 1st battalion of the 16th Brigade began their attack. Two companies were to precede the attack by crossing further upstream to get above the Japanese and attack as the rest of Colonel Cullen’s 2/1 battalion attacked across the bridges. The flanking move did not go well as one of the two companies became completely lost and did not take part, and only one platoon of the other reached the start point. With only 17 men Captain Sanderson attacked a clearing where a number of Japanese were eating. The Japanese counterattacked and surrounded Sanderson’s men. Only four escaped.

In the early morning hours Colonel Cullen made a reconnaissance and found that the Japanese covering the bridges were either asleep or gone. Taking advantage of this he ordered his troops across, and most had made it across before bullets started raking the second bridge from the now awake Japanese. Once across, confusion ensued, and the Australian companies that made it across took different routes. One went to the right and found themselves hemmed in by the roaring rapids of the creek and the steep precipice. The other went straight up the track, and found themselves pinned at the base of the precipice. For a week they were stuck here having to have supplies brought up by runners.

During this time the mortar men providing supporting fires had their own problems. Both three inch and two inch mortar rounds had begun to explode in the tubes. On one occasion six men were killed when a two inch round blew up. The rounds were being primed when dropped by air at Myola, and no one had bothered to warn the crews.

The Japanese were in a strong position on top of the precipice, and Major General Horii had ordered up reinforcements from the 41st Regiment to help bolster his position. Here the Japanese wounded had started their long trek back to the beaches, and were provided the time to make it by the fighting. The Japanese bunkers and fighting holes extended out from a central point about 300 yards across on top of the precipice.

Colonel Cullen had been requesting since the beginning that the rest of the Brigade should attack from the ridge on the West side of the creek. Finally, on the 28th the 3rd Battalion was moved across the creek and attacked in three columns. Approximately 600 Australians descended on the Japanese from the West and drove them out of their precipice positions. 69 Japanese bodies were found in the defenses. The Australians had suffered over 290 casualties nearly evenly split between killed and wounded.

The Japanese did not die to a man in their dug in positions. They ran as fast as they could to the Kumusi River without even stopping at Kokoda to put up any fight for the airstrip. For some unknown reason Major General Horii took up positions with the river to his back at Oivi – Gorari. For the first time the Australians were out of the dense jungle and steep mountains of the Owen Stanleys and took advantage of it by deploying 2 Brigades, nearly 7 battalions, in an encirclement to destroy Major General Horii’s South Seas Detachment. The Japanese were split in half by the pincer movements, and with the fast flowing Kumusi River behind them, had nowhere to escape. The South Seas Detachment was decimated. Over 580 Japanese dead were counted, and those that did survive had to discard their weapons to get across the river. During this retreat, General Horii was one of many that drowned trying to reach the defenses at Gona.

After getting across the river, the Australians were elated to be out of the mountains with the Japanese fleeing before them. The 25th Brigade took the lead again and arrived along the coastal plains in mid-November. Bombing from the air and long range artillery attempted to soften up the defenders in the Gona area. Unfortunately, no reconnaissance was made, and no coordination of the attack was planned, and when what was left of the 25th Brigade attacked it was cut to ribbons as they ran across the open fields of cut down kunai and into the teeth of the Japanese defenses. The feeling of elation quickly turned to a realization that the enemy

wasn't beaten and wasn't as weak as intelligence had said. Attack after attack was sent in across the open ground and coconut groves only to be repelled each time. Finally, the 25th Brigade had to be relieved, but by whom? The Americans fighting at Buna, further down the beach, had made a poor showing. They were untrained, undisciplined, and poorly led National Guard troops, who had no business being in one of the most unforgiving regions in the world. After taking months of abuse from MacArthur about the Australians "not fighting" along the Kokoda Trail, General Blamey was able to stick it back to MacArthur. The Australians were suspicious that the Americans were not serious about the battle for New Guinea when they sent in these troops. When asked if they wanted a fresh American regiment to relieve the 25th Brigade, Blamey said no, he would use the remnants of the 21st Brigade, he knew they would at least fight.

The 21st would fight bravely, and die bravely, as the tactics did not change. Frontal charges across open ground produced repulse after repulse. Within 5 days of fighting the 21st Brigade lost 340 out of 800 men (note 800 men is typically battalion strength). The 16th and 27th battalions had to be combined they were so few in number. It was getting tight as to whether Gona was going to fall or be sidestepped so more troops could be used on the other two Japanese positions along the Papuan coast. There was only one "fresh" force left and that was the 39th Militia Battalion, led by Lt. Col. Ralph Honner. Just as the 21st Brigade had arrived to relieve the 39th at Isuruva, now the 39th would come to their relief, and the final chapter of the fight for Gona and the battles for the Kokoda Trail begin.

Credits:

Kokoda – Paul Ham, 2004

Those Ragged Bloody Heroes – From the Kokoda Trail to Gona Beach 1942 – Peter Brune, 1991.

A Bastard of a Place – The Australians in Papua – Peter Brune, 2003

http://www.awm.gov.au/units/event_296.asp - Australian War Memorial site.

<http://www.kokodawalkway.com.au/interviews.html> - Oral Histories collected from Kokoda Veterans

Scenario Specifics:

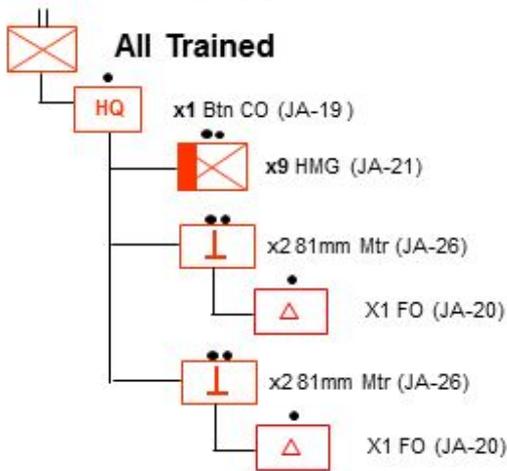
The game lasts 14 turns.

Australians move first.



Elements South Seas Detachment Gona Defenses Col. Tsume Yamamoto

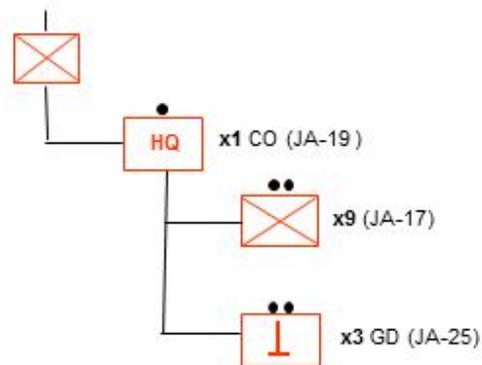
Command Maneuver Element



25% = 4; 50% = 8; 75% = 12

Elements 144th Rgt.

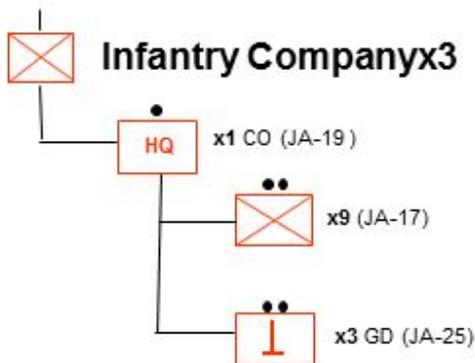
All Raw



25% = 4; 50% = 7; 75% = 10

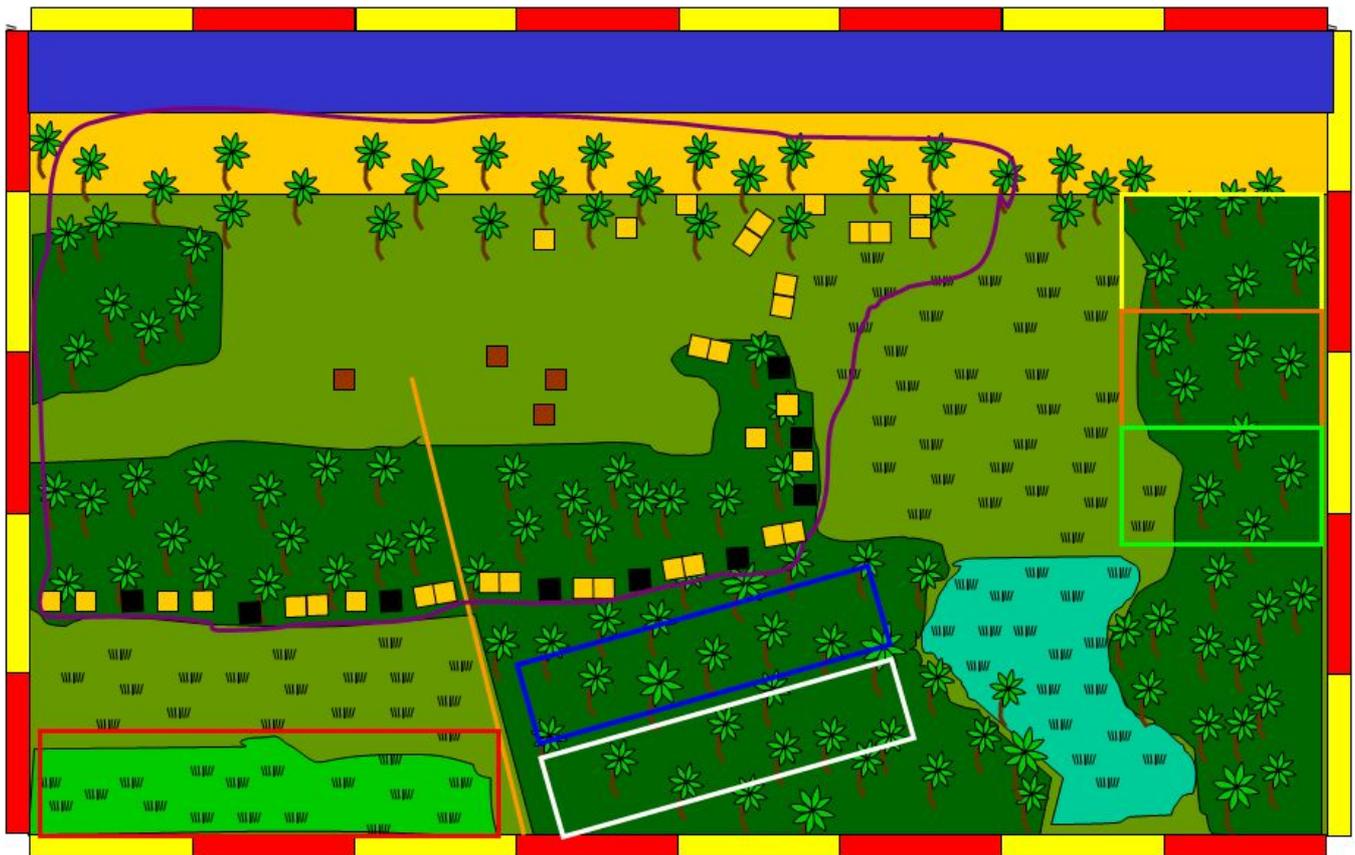
Elements 41st Rgt.

All Trained



25% = 4; 50% = 7; 75% = 10

The



- | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------|
| Dug in position | Jungle | Burnt or cut down Kunai Grass | Kokoda Trail | Village | ↑ N |
| Coconut Grove | Kunai Grass | Open | Swamp | Log bunker | |

The Japanese deploy first as they wish within their deployment area (purple line). Any Japanese not in Dug in positions or bunkers may be placed in improved positions.

Japanese have up 1 spotting in front of defensive line in the jungle opposite the Australian blue deployment area because they had cleared jungle debris down to ankle level.

The Japanese can use the MG grazing rules (see below) for their HMGs setup in improved or dug in positions.

Terrain & Defenses:

Dug in Positions: Per rules.

Improved positions: Per rules. (Note that in soft cover, they do not give an additional -1 modifier in shooting. They do affect the spotting table however, so that even when shooting the enemy must be no more than 1" away to spot). Note that if the Japanese move, even if when hidden, they lose the improved position.

Log Bunker: Treat as Log Pillbox. A Japanese unit receiving a 'Panic' result in a bunker becomes disordered, but does not retreat (essentially the same result as Fall Back, disordered and holds position).

Jungle: Soft cover; dense terrain; troops 3/4 move.

Coconut Grove: Treat as Orchard.

Track: no road bonus, but negate terrain effects. Troops on the trail count as being in sparse/edge (unless in open), no cover.

Kunai grass: no cover; dense terrain; 3/4 move all; level 1 terrain (i.e. cannot be seen over).

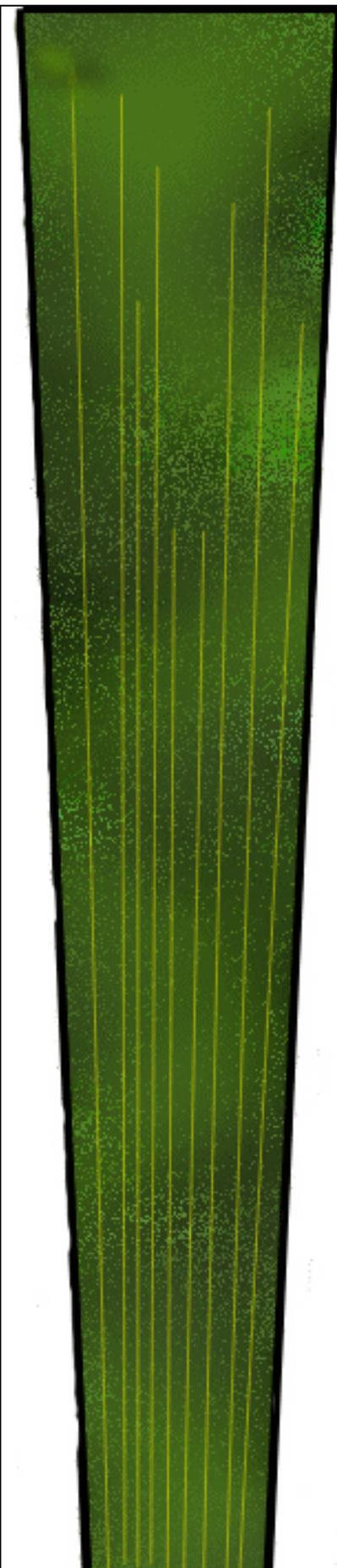
Burnt Kunai grass: Treat as Open.

Swamp: Impassable

MG Grazing rules

In 15mm scale, the MG Grazing template is a trapezoid 10" long. It is 1 infantry base wide at the bottom (where the MG is) and 2 infantry bases wide at the top.

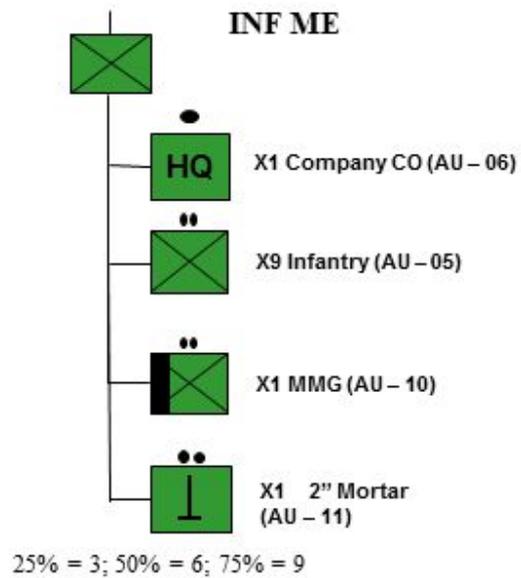
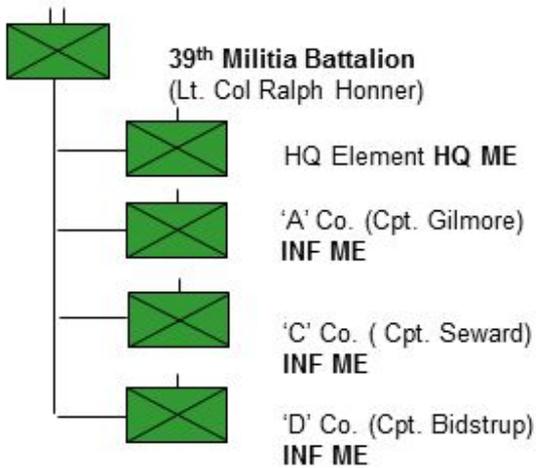
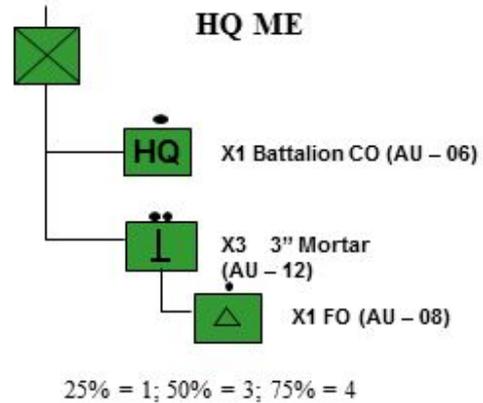
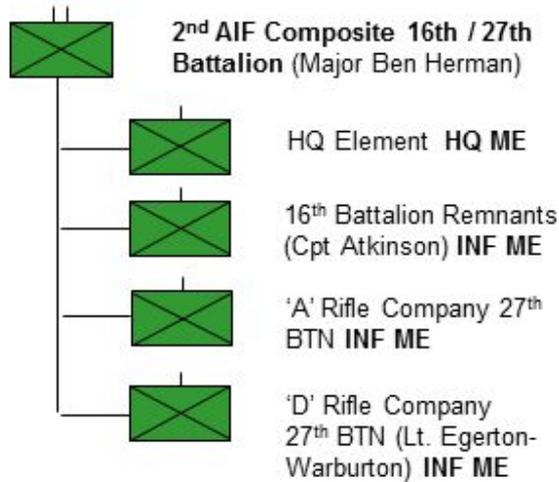
- Only Japanese HMG units may use grazing fire.
- To use grazing fire, the machinegun must be emplaced in an improved position, a bunker, or dug-in.
- The template can be placed so that it is anywhere in the 180 degree forward facing of the MG.
- The effect of the template does not extend to the rear of the front line of the firing unit.
- The template can be placed in offensive, defensive, or during opportunity fire against any target that lies to the front of the MG unit within 10". It also may be placed at the beginning of the enemy maneuver phase instead of defensive fire even if even if no targets are available. Once placed, it remains in place until the end of the current player turn and may not be moved.
- The effect of the template does not pass through dense area terrain. It will effect units on the edge of dense area terrain, but not deep or behind it.
- All units, enemy and friendly, which have an aiming point within the template are attacked with an additional -1 modifier. The effect of the template is similar to that of an artillery interdiction fire (p.43). If a unit moves into or through the template, it is immediately attacked.

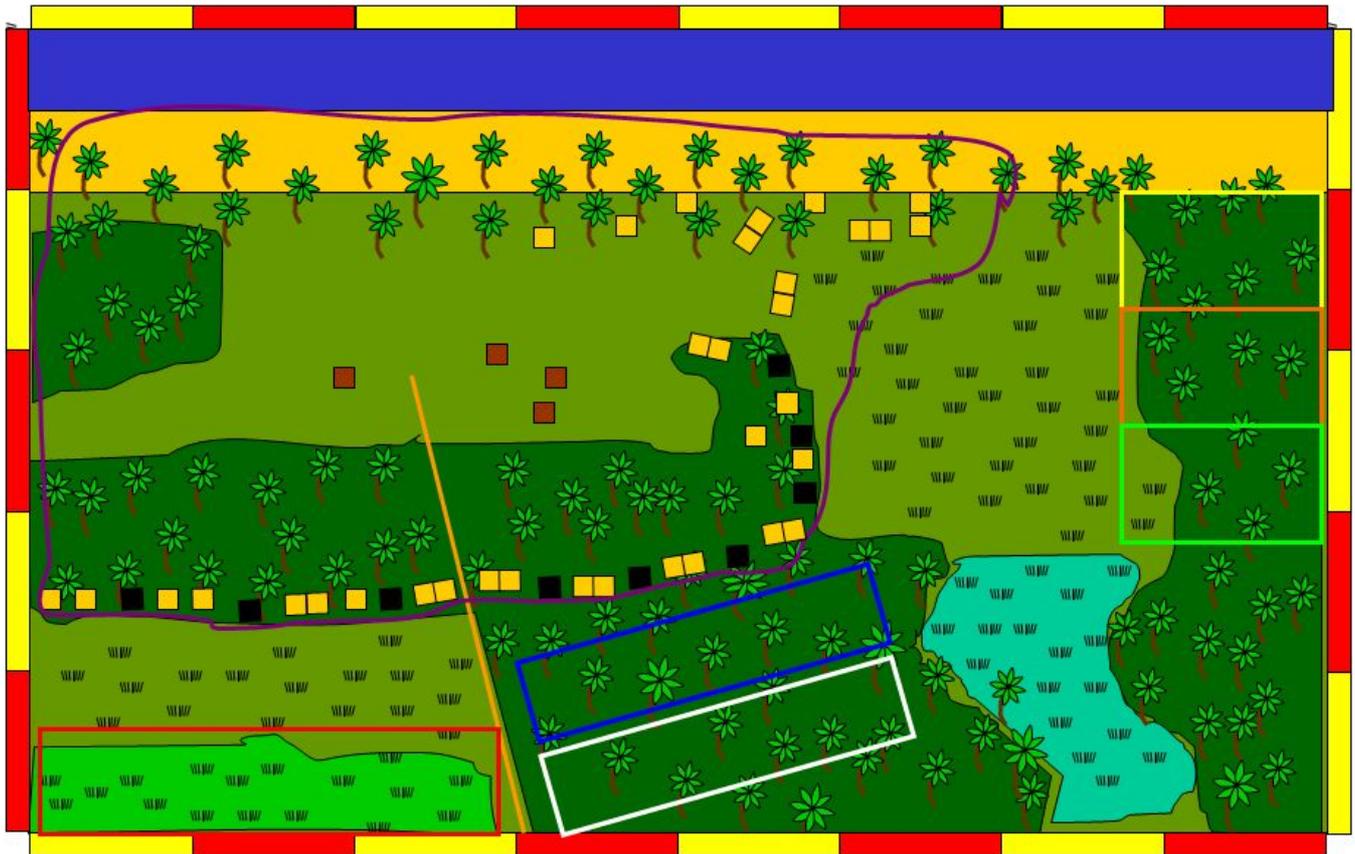




Australian Forces

(All Experienced)





After the Japanese deploy, the Australians then deploy and move first to start the game.

The **39th Btn.** deploys in the south.

'C' Company deploys west of the track in the Red deployment area.

'A' Company deploys east of the track in the jungle within one move of the Japanese positions in the Blue deployment area.

'D' Company deploys in support of 'A' Company in the White deployment area. (As an alternative to facilitate game play, 'A' & 'D' Companies can come in side by side).

HQ deploys on the south edge of the board along/straddling the track. Mortars may start the game emplaced.

The FO can be placed with any ME.

The **Composite Btn.** Deploys to the east in the designated deployment areas.

'A' Company 27th deploys in the yellow area.

'D' Company 27th deploys in the orange area.

16th remnants deploys in the green area.

HQ deploys in either the orange or green areas. Mortars may start the game emplaced.

Each Australian mortar battery has 1 smoke mission (small templates).

First Turn Fire Mission

At the beginning of the game, the Australians have a planned Fire Support shelling mission by 25lb. It is placed automatically at the first Call for Fire phase along the Japanese positions opposite the Blue deployment area, which is the starting position of 'A' company of the 39th Btn. (or 'A' & 'D' if deploying side by side). While the effect of the mission on Japanese troops not in entrenchments is the normal 25lb shelling (0 vs T,G,sV), the fuses were delayed to explode after 2' of penetration, so add an extra +1 vs. all Japanese in dug in positions and bunkers. This mission will cover the frontage opposite the Blue deployment area with large templates, originating from the South (bottom) of the map. Even though the arrival of the Australian mission is automatic, the Australians must roll to see if a danger close results. On an 8,9, or 10 on a d10, danger close occurs, and a second line of templates with an effect of -1 is placed. Note that as the Australian 'A' company must set up within 1 move of the Japanese positions, a danger close will effect their front line if it occurs. If 'D' company is set up in line with 'A' company instead of behind, they will be effected as well, so the Australians must balance the extra force up front against the possibility of having more troops caught in a danger close. Note that this close positioning and the possible danger close simulates the fact that historically the actual assault began 1 minute before the bombardment ended.

Terrain & Defenses:

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Improved positions: Per rules. (Note that in soft cover, they do not give an additional -1 modifier in shooting. They do affect the spotting table however, so that even when shooting the enemy must be no more than 1" away to spot). Note that if the Japanese move, even if when hidden, they lose the improved position.

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Burnt Kunai grass: Treat as Open.

Swamp: Impassable

Victory Conditions:

Victory is based on a point differential.

+50 points more than the enemy is a Minor Victory.

+75 points more than the enemy is a Major Victory.

Points:

+3 per stand knocked out

+10 per Village section controlled.

All sections start Japanese controlled. Control is then determined by the last side to occupy it.

Japanese receive:

+10 per log bunker held west of the track

+20 per log bunker held east of the track

+5 per dug in position held east of the track

Australians receive:

+10 per log bunker held east of the track

+20 per log bunker held west of the track

+5 per dug in position held west of the track

Wrap up of Gona's Gone and the Kokoda Trail campaign.

The 39th Battalion was deployed to the south of Gona with essentially two approaches to the village. The first one was no better than what the 25th and 21st brigades had to deal with from the East. It was between the Gona creek and the trail running North that led into the village. It was across low kunai grass right into the teeth of the Japanese defenses in this area with the last 60 yards across open ground as the Japanese had cut down the grass. The second approach was on the other side of the trail, and was a covered approach through the jungle all the way into the village. It was fairly obvious that this was the best approach into the enemy defenses, and Lt. Col. Honner could not understand how this had been overlooked while the 25th and 21st Brigades were attacking. As it turns out, he was to find out first hand how this battle was being handled.

On December 5th, Honner received orders to attack, but only across the kunai right into the teeth of the Japanese. He protested, but not vigorously enough. D company, led by Captain Bidstrup was to lead the attack, and were allotted 3-inch mortar barrage a daylight, and a smoke barrage just as the attack was to go in. It was a disaster. The Japanese were in camouflaged log bunkers vs. Diggers attacking across open ground. The result... 12 killed and 46 wounded. At the same time, another vain attack was made from the coconut groves in the east by the 21st brigade that again was easily repulsed.

The next day, orders came down for another attack across both sections. This again meant that D company was going to get slaughtered. This time, though, luck was on Lt. Col. Honner's side. Prior to the attack, friendly air dropped bombs short of their target. Though they landed harmlessly to the rear, it gave Honner an excuse to call off the attack for that day, and to propose a new attack to only go through the covered approach.

The next attack was again ordered to be across all three fronts, the uncovered, and covered approaches from the south, and the coconut belt from the east. For once, though, the commander on the spot was able to have input into the attack. Honner was given time to do reconnaissance, and plan his attack (within his orders). One of the biggest issues was that the Japanese could wait out the artillery bombardments, then man their positions before the Australians could cover the ground. With experiences he witnessed in Libya, he arranged the timetable to be such that his men would advance into the enemy positions as the friendly artillery bombardment had a minute left. He also arranged that the fuses on the shells would not detonate until they had buried themselves 18" – 24" into the ground. This would allow them to penetrate the roofs of the bunkers they landed on, or at least shake up the occupants long enough for his men to get among them. Though not wanting to disobey orders, but also not wanting to see another company cut up going across the open ground, Honner ordered C company, who was to perform that attack across the kunai grass, to just put on a show, and fire into the positions, but not to attack, and once A and D companies had broken through, C company was to cross the trail, and follow them to maintain the impetus for the attack through the jungle.

The attack went off as planned. The ground was soggy, and with the delayed fuses the men had no issue getting amongst the Japanese, shooting them as they still had their hands over their ears from the explosions. 'A' Company took out post after post. By the time night fell, the 39th Battalion had captured the center of the Japanese positions all the way to the Mission school. Unfortunately, the attack by the 21st Brigade went as usual, and was ground to a halt. It was over now for the Japanese at Gona, and they knew it. That night, those that could, made a break for Sanananda, not many made it. Most tried along the beach, and were cut down by 21st Brigade. Over a hundred Japanese bodies were found along the beach and coconut belt the next day.

On December 9th, the Australians moved in to the Gona beach, and finished off the last defenders that were too feeble to make the escape attempt, but continued to fight on. There was no mercy. Gona beach left a lasting, and sickening impression on the Diggers. Over 640 Japanese bodies were initially buried, though more were found in the following days. The stench of rotting corpses, bloated bodies, and maggot filled orifices are not easily forgotten. Even the Japanese in the final days resorted to wearing their gas masks as the Allied bombardments turned up the rotting corpses of the fallen dead.

Lt. Col. Ralph Honner sent a two word message back to Brigade HQ... "Gona's Gone!"

Though Gona fits in the telling of the Kokoda Trail campaign, it is actually one of the three "Battles of the Beaches". The fights for Sanananda and Buna would claim many more Australian, and American lives before they were through.

Brigadier General Arnold Potts' 21st Brigade crossed the Owen Stanley's in mid-August with over 1,800 men. They left Gona, after taking in their walking wounded, with 183. They would be reconstituted after leave in Australia, and perform well in future campaigns.

The 39th Militia Battalion would not be allowed to do the same. They were disbanded in July 1943. They did some brief fighting at Sanananda, where they were finally relieved, and marched back to the Dobodura air strip for evacuation. In rags, suffering from malnutrition, and malaria ridden they proudly marched in parade ground formation across the air field. Upon passing some well fed on-lookers, who called out "What mob is this?" they shouted back "This is no mob! This is the 39th!"