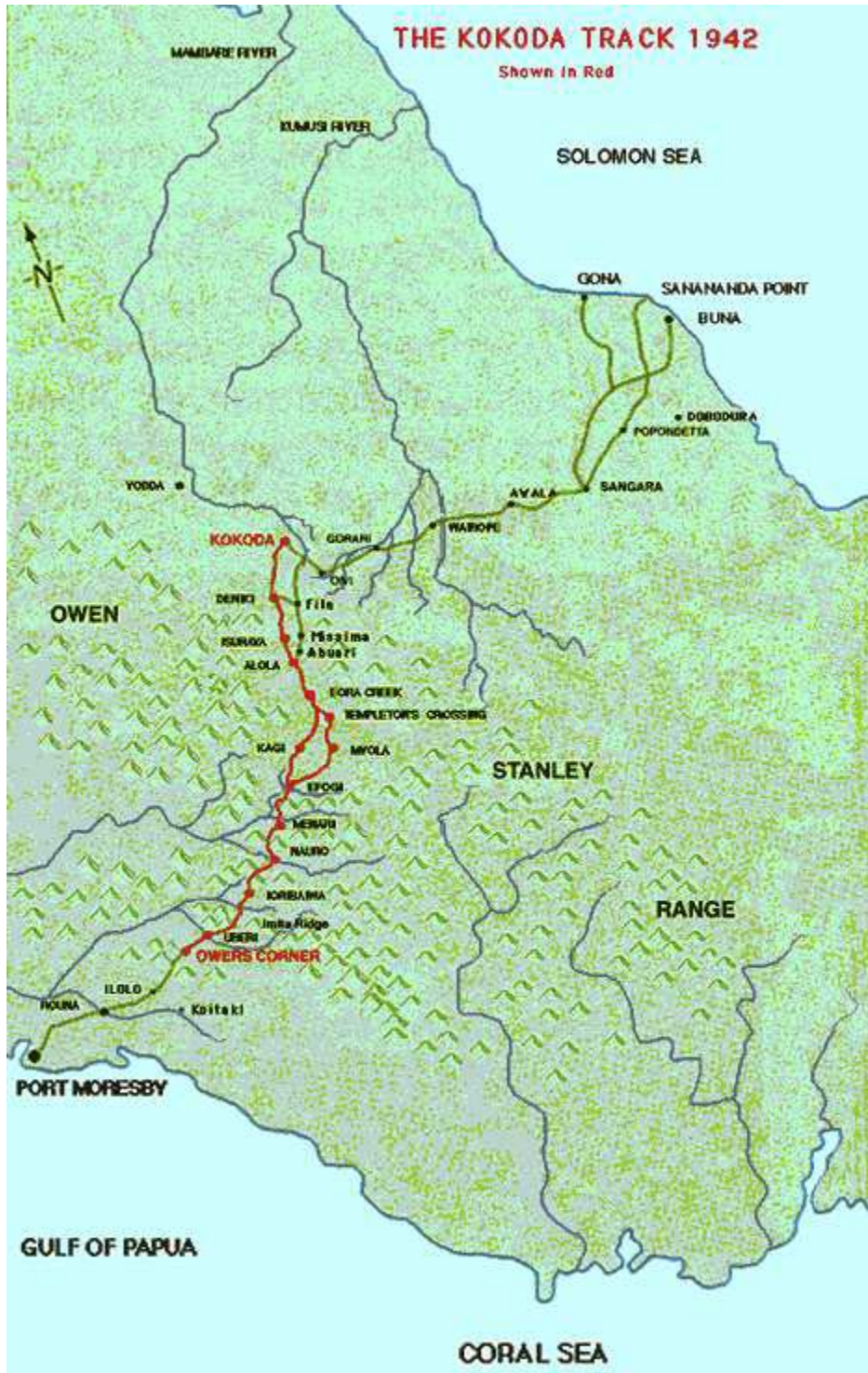


Kokoda Track - Historical Overview



In mid-1942, the Japanese attempted to extend their control over the island of New Guinea. The aim of the campaign was to capture Port Moresby on the Southern Coast of New Guinea, expelling Allied forces from the island and setting up bases only 300 miles from Australia, ultimately cutting the lines of communication between Australia and the United States. The initial attempt at this was a naval invasion, but the Battle of Coral Sea (7-8MAY42), turned back this thrust. The next attempt was an overland attack from the Northern coast. The Japanese Army had a string of unbroken successes during the first six months of the war, they expected no less in their overland march to Port Moresby, New Guinea. However, between the Northern and Southern Coasts lay the inhospitable Owen Stanley mountain range (possibly the worst terrain for military operations on Earth) defended by some initially inexperienced Australian defenders, who were to get some very tough "on the job" training.

Lieutenant General Hyakutake landed a Japanese Army advance force variously estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000 troops near the village of Gona on the north coast of the Australian Territory of Papua on 21 July 1942, representing the first invasion of Australian territory. The immediate aims of this advance force were to secure the coastal strip between Gona and the nearby village of Buna, reconnoiter the area between Gona and the Australian administrative post at Kokoda, seize Kokoda, and assess the practicability of using the Kokoda Track as a route for Japanese troops to capture Port Moresby. If the overland route was deemed practicable, a much larger Japanese force would quickly follow led by Major General Tomitaro Horii, Commander of the elite South Seas Detachment.

Australian missionaries, government officials, and planters were rounded up over next couple days, and ceremonially beheaded, one by one, on the beach at Buna.

This invasion was initially not viewed as a serious threat by the Allies. "The track is impossible for mechanized transport, and so it seems unlikely that the Japs can hope to attempt any overland invasion of Moresby by pushing southward through the mountains." is a quote from an Australian war correspondent. General Morris, in charge of the Australian forces at Port Moresby (as well as General MacArthur and General Blamey in Australia), also thought it improbable that an overland attack was the reason for the landing. He believed they were there to set up an airbase. However, they were wrong.

The advancing force included a large number of Japanese Army construction engineers under the command of Colonel Yosuke Yokoyama. If the Kokoda route to Port Moresby was practicable, his task was to construct access routes, light bridges and supply depots for the movement of a large body of Japanese troops towards Port Moresby.

In addition to the engineers, the advance force also included a battalion of troops from the 144th Regiment of Japan's elite South Seas Detachment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Tsukamoto and a company of elite Japanese marines of the 5th Sasebo Naval Landing Force. These combat troops were all battle-hardened veterans of jungle warfare in South-East Asia. They were trained to live and fight in the jungle, to blend with it, and to move quietly and efficiently through it without need for roads or tracks. Their task was to deal with any Australian troops who might be met on the route to Kokoda, or at Kokoda. Unlike the militia troops of the 39th Battalion whom they would soon face, these Japanese combat troops were heavily armed. They were equipped not only with small arms, but also with heavy machineguns and mortars.

This campaign simulates the battles between the advancing Japanese and the delaying Australian forces.

Scenarios in the campaign

[Scenario 01-Action at Gorari](#)

[Scenario 02-Action at Kokoda](#)

[Scenario 03-Once More Into The Breach](#)

[Scenario 04-300 Australians](#)

[Scenario 05-Australia's Thermopylae](#)

[Scenario 06-Eora Creek](#)

[Scenario 07-Brigade Hill](#)

[Scenario 08-Ioribaiwa Ridge](#)

[Scenario 09-Templeton's Crossing](#)

[Scenario 10-Eora Creek - on the flip side](#)

Credits:

The historical information above is taken from the following references:

Island Fighting - WWII Time Life Books series, 1978.

The Readers Digest Illustrated History of World War II - The World At Arms series, 1989.

[Into Hell's Mouth](#)

[Battle for Australia](#)

Talonsoft's Rising Sun

Wargaming the New Guinea Campaign, 1942-1945 Part One: The Kokoda Track - Miniature Wargames, issue no. 233, October 2002. Kokoda - Paul Ham, 2004

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

[http://www.kokodawalkway.com.au/interviews.html - Oral Histories collected from Kokoda Veterans](http://www.kokodawalkway.com.au/interviews.html)