

**THE KOKODA CAMPAIGN,
JULY- NOVEMBER 1942, AN ANALYSIS**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, Charles Darwin University.**

July 2008

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own investigations and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

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Peter Damian Williams

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge those who have aided me with this thesis. I thank my supervisor, Professor Alan Powell of Charles Darwin University, Dr. Steven Bullard of the Australia Japan Research Project, the staffs of the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia and the National Library of Australia.

Frank Taylor guided me across the Owen Stanley Range and freely shared his knowledge of the campaign.

My research in Japan would not have been possible without the help of Dr. Shindo Hiroyuki and Major General Yoshinaga Hayashi of the National Institute of Defence Studies in Tokyo.

Sato Go, Sato Yukiko, Marutani Hajime, Yoshida Haruki, Akaboshi Yayoi and Nakagawa Naoko are to be thanked for their efforts arranging my visits to Japan, translating documents and locating Japanese veterans.

Major Horie Masao, who fought the Australians for two years in New Guinea, gave freely of his time, his private papers and his hospitality.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Samantha, the pillar of support on which this thesis rests.

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ABSTRACT

With the exception of a few scholars who are familiar with the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service (ATIS) collection, Japanese sources for the Kokoda campaign have not been closely examined by Australian researchers. These sources point towards a number of problems with Australian published accounts. Foremost, the Japanese did not outnumber the Australians and Papuans very often in their advance and when they did they did not outnumber them by much. In the subsequent Japanese retreat the Australians significantly outnumbered the Japanese.

The second most important factor to emerge from Japanese sources is that the Japanese postponed their attack on Port Moresby in August 1942 and the plan was never revived. The Nankai Shitai's advance into the Owen Stanley Range became more in the nature of a feint to distract Allied attention and resources away from Guadalcanal, the decisive battle of the war in the south west Pacific.

The explanations offered in previous work for the various Australian defeats and victories in the Kokoda campaign have been based on an assumption the Japanese were always more numerous than they were and these works have not understood that the Japanese advance was not an attempt to take Port Moresby. As such their explanations for why the campaign turned out as it did are likely to fall short of a balanced account. Other reasons commonly given for Japanese failure concern poor intelligence, malaria and allied air interdiction of their supply line. None of these are satisfactory. It is rather that two other previously ignored factors are of more importance in understanding the course of events in the Owen Stanley Range from July to November 1942; the large number of artillery pieces the Japanese brought into the mountains and the unusually heavy rain of September 1942 which washed away their supply line. This thesis argues that in light of the above considerable revision is needed in current Australian accounts of the Kokoda campaign.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The six Japanese infantry battalions in the Nankai Shitai were in two regiments, 144 and 41. The three battalions in each regiment were numbered 1/144, 2/144, 3/144, 1/41, 2/41 and 3/41. All other infantry battalions in the text with a prefix 2/ are second Australian Imperial Force battalions. All other infantry battalions without the prefix 2/ are Australian militia battalions.

ABBREVIATIONS AND OTHER TERMS

AAF	Allied Air Force
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AJRP	Australia-Japan Research Project
AMF	Australian Military Force
AMWP	army mobile wireless platoon
ANGAU	Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit.
ATIS	Allied Translator and Interpreter Service
BCC	bridge construction company
Bde	brigade
Bia	battalion artillery
Bn	battalion
BnHQ	battalion headquarters
Butai	generic term for a military unit
CC	construction company
Chutai	company
CIB	Commonwealth Investigation Branch
C in C	commander in chief
Coy	company
Daitai	battalion
DFH	divisional field hospital
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
ER	engineer regiment
FA	field ambulance

FRP	fixed radio platoon
FS	the Fiji/Samoa operation
FAAAB	field anti aircraft artillery battalion
FH	field hospital
GHQ	General Headquarters
Go	unit of measurement for rice, 140 grams.
Hikojo Daitai	airfield battalion
IHQ	Imperial Headquarters
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
IJNHQ	Imperial Japanese Navy Headquarters
IJAHQ	Imperial Japanese Army Headquarters
IMTB	independent motor transport battalion
IWP	independent wireless platoon
ITP	independent telegraph platoon
IER	independent engineer regiment
IC	independent company
ICC	independent communications company
LDC	land duty company
LHQ	Allied Land Forces Headquarters
LOCH	line of communication hospital
MAR	mountain artillery regiment
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MFHQ	Maroubra Force Headquarters
MPC	military police company
MO	the Port Moresby operation
NAA	National Archives of Australia
Nankai Shitai	South Seas detachment
NGF	New Guinea Force
NGVR	New Guinea Volunteer Rifles
NIDS	National Institute of Defence Studies
NLA	National Library of Australia
NP	naval pioneers

NSHQ	Nankai Shitai Headquarters
PCB	patient collecting butai, a field ambulance
PIB	Papuan Infantry Battalion
Ra	mountain artillery
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAE	Royal Australian Engineers
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
Ria	regimental artillery
Rentai	regiment
RN	Royal Navy
RPC	Royal Papuan Constabulary
RHQ	regimental headquarters
Stanley shitai	(Owen) Stanley (Range) detachment
Shotai	platoon
SNLP	Special Naval Landing Party
SDC	sea duty company
SER	shipping engineer regiment
SWPA	South West Pacific Area
TR	transport regiment
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USN	United States Navy

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PART ONE- PRE CAMPAIGN CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER ONE, INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER TWO, JAPANESE STRATEGY IN PAPUA.

CHAPTER THREE, JAPANESE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN PAPUA.

CHAPTER FOUR, THE NANKAI SHITAI ORDER OF BATTLE.

CHAPTER ONE.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses the question: when Japanese sources are consulted, what problems arise for the traditional Australian account of the Kokoda campaign from July to mid November of 1942?

The campaign is rapidly catching up with Gallipoli in popularity in Australia, as reflected in the number of books on it that have appeared in the past twenty years. As the events of 1915 pass into distant memory, it is possible it may come to rival Gallipoli as the iconic Australian military experience. While there are many positive aspects to this there is also an imbalance in Australian accounts of the campaign arising from a neglect of Japanese sources. Errors in the Kokoda story have had a tendency to be repeated until they take up the outward appearance of fact while other aspects of the campaign, often arising from wartime propaganda, have never been subject to investigation. An example of the former, the most distorting error of all and the centerpiece of the traditional Australian account, is the serious overestimation of the number of Japanese who took part in the actions and engagements of the campaign.¹

A central fact of land warfare in the Pacific against the Japanese is that it took a great superiority in numbers to defeat them. While the technical advantages of the Allies in eventually overwhelming the Japanese with many more and better aircraft, ships, tanks and artillery is known, it is not always appreciated that a large superiority in infantry was also required. Between 1941 and 1945, and when the Japanese had equal or superior numbers engaged, they rarely lost a battle. When they had inferior numbers, at least in the first ten months of the war, they were still often able to win. The Kokoda campaign fits this pattern.

¹ Three examples are Brune, P. *A Bastard of a Place, the Australians in Papua*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2004, pp. 99 and 131; Ham, P. *Kokoda*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 2004, p. 163, and McAulay, L. *Blood and Iron, The Battle for Kokoda 1942*, Arrow, Sydney, 1992, p. 413.

The evidence from Japanese sources shows that from July to mid September 1942 the Australians along the Kokoda track were rarely outnumbered by their enemy. Where they were outnumbered it was not by a huge margin. While Australia's 39 Battalion and the Papuans faced superior numbers in the July clashes, it was never as many as two to one. The forces engaged at Deniki were close to even. With the exception of the first Eora-Templetons engagement, the Australians fought the Japanese at about one to one until Ioribaiwa in September, where the Australians outnumbered the Japanese by close to two to one. From that point onwards, the Australians had a marked superiority in the number of men in action.

Any assessment of a military victory or defeat must take account of the numbers on either side. A defeat when greatly outnumbered is quite a different thing from a defeat suffered when the enemy had no numerical superiority. It might not be too much to say most of the issues of the campaign ought to be reappraised if it can be shown that the Japanese engaged in the Owen Stanleys were many fewer than has been believed. This word *engaged* holds a clue, because the overall Japanese numbers participating in the campaign have tended to be underestimated while the numbers the Japanese actually committed to battle has been overestimated. About 20,000 Japanese, two or three thousand more than previously thought, served in Papua on the Kokoda front. It is also said this force, the Nankai Shitai or South Seas Detachment, included "a well balanced fighting force of 10,000 men".² There has been a general and untested assumption in popular history that the mass of these 10,000 men went over the mountains and fought against the Australians. The official account reduces this to about 5000 but even this is too many. It will be seen that the commander of the Nankai Shitai was forbidden by his superiors at 17th Army in Rabaul from sending his main force into the mountains.³ Hence

² McCarthy D. *South-west Pacific area – first year, Kokoda to Wau*, series 1 (Army), Vol. V, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, pp. 144-146. See also Scott G. *The Knights of Kokoda*, Horowitz publications, Melbourne, 1963, p. 47.

³ It is strange that none have drawn attention to the highly unlikely proportion of support versus fighting personnel supposedly among the Japanese while being aware that there were, in August 1942, 40,000 Australians and Americans in New Guinea but, of these, only 20 per cent were fighting troops. Still, the Japanese force, the Nankai Shitai, was very strong in fighting personnel and 6,000 could be considered to fit into this category as against about 14,000 support personnel.

the number which advanced towards Port Moresby was, at its greatest strength, about 3,000 fighting men.

An intriguing aspect of Japanese fighting strength was that it was known in Australia to be low at the time but this knowledge has since somehow been forgotten. By the end of the campaign, senior allied officers had seen intelligence reports apprising them of the correct strength of the Nankai Shitai. The theatre commander, General Douglas MacArthur, convinced of the accuracy of this intelligence, concluded that the Australians were performing poorly on the Kokoda track.⁴ This assessment of Australian infantry was not restricted to the Americans in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) command, it can also be seen at higher levels.

On 15 September, in the minutes of the United States War Council, the President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was recorded expressing concern that only 4,000 Japanese had gone into the Owen Stanleys yet they were nearly to Port Moresby.⁵ On 21 October, when the number of Japanese in the mountains was assessed at 3,000, he said that the Owen Stanley campaign, given the low numbers of Japanese involved, had been mishandled by the Australians. In September 1942 American newspapers printed articles saying that the reason the Japanese were able to make such large counterattacks on Guadalcanal was because the Australians in Papua were offering light resistance. The argument was that if the Australians made more effort in Papua then more Japanese troops would have to have been sent there instead.⁶ Mention that the Japanese numbers had been initially overestimated also appeared in the newspapers in Australia. Sydney's

⁴ Milner S. *The United States Army in WWII, the War in the Pacific, Victory in Papua*, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, 1957, p. 91.

⁵ AWM 54 577/7/32, documents and notes used in writing Volume 5 of the Australian Official History, *South-west Pacific area- first year*. See notes on United States of America war council meetings, npn.

⁶ AWM 123 270, Lt-General Sir Sydney Rowell, report on operations, attached documents, newspaper cuttings and intelligence summaries, a Department of External Affairs cablegram sent on 22/9/42 written by Dixon (Australian representative to the Pacific War Council) to Shedden (secretary of the Department of Defence) said US newspapers were suggesting the Japanese can make a big effort on Guadalcanal because of the light resistance of the Australians in New Guinea.

Daily Telegraph of 8 October, 1942, reported that “Correspondents cautiously suggest that the Japanese were weaker in the Owen Stanleys area than we thought...”⁷

In Kokoda, in 1967, 39 Battalion held a reunion. There, Bert Kienzle, a famous identity of the campaign, spoke of “10,000 experienced and highly trained soldiers plus 3,000 naval personnel against the Australians.”⁸ These numbers, rather than the much lesser numbers appearing in Australian Military Forces (AMF) documents in 1942, have been accepted as the correct ones. A recent historian has claimed that the Australians were outnumbered ten to one at Kokoda and by between six to one and three to one at Isurava.⁹ The current Army History Unit website has 100 Australians pitted against 2,000 Japanese at first Kokoda.¹⁰ The legend of Japanese numerical superiority has continued unaltered for the more than 40 years since Keinzle spoke.

What may have occurred in post war Australian historiography has something to do with the saying that the victors write the history. This is true as far as it goes but much of what the victor later writes might not be accurate as it can arise out of his own wartime propaganda. The defeated too has wartime propaganda but this is swept away post war as it is immediately seen for what it usually is – falsehood. The victor’s propaganda is not subject to the same rigorous post war reassessment and has a chance to seep into post war accounts and, over time, become entrenched there. Two examples of Australian wartime propaganda that are still widely read are Johnston’s *New Guinea Diary* and White’s *Green Armour*, published in 1943 and 1945 respectively.¹¹ Both stress the great numerical superiority of the Japanese in Papua. They are entirely justifiable as wartime morale boosters and it is not suggested that these works have no merit but, rather, that

⁷ AWM 123 270, Lt-General Sir Sydney Rowell, report on operations, attached documents, newspaper cuttings and intelligence summaries, see attached newspaper clipping.

⁸ AWM PRO 0297, papers of Lt A. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, items 13-15.

⁹ Ham, P. *Kokoda*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 2004, p. 45.

¹⁰ <<http://www.defence.gov.au/ARMY/ahu/HISTORY/Battles/Kokoda.htm>>

¹¹ Johnston, G. *War Diary 1942*, Collins, Sydney, 1984 and White, O. *Green Armour*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1945.

they continue to contribute to errors in the traditional Australian version of the Kokoda story.

Australian neglect of Japanese sources has led to several other misunderstandings about the Kokoda campaign. These concern Japanese strategy, intelligence and supply as well as medical issues. While Australian strategy in 1942 has been comprehensively dealt with by Professor David Horner, there has been little work done from the Japanese perspective.¹² Now a wider range of Japanese accounts and official papers can be accessed, some new assessments of Japanese strategy can be proposed. The strategic factor which most influenced the strength of Japanese forces in the Owen Stanley Range was Guadalcanal. When, in mid August, it was apparent that the American invasion of that island would be a serious problem for the Japanese, Lt-General Hyakutake Harukichi, commander of 17th Army, ordered Major-General Horii Tomitaro, commander of the Nankai Shitai, to halt his attack on Port Moresby and keep the major part of his force on the northern side of the Owen Stanley Range. That Horii was never released from this restriction constitutes the single most important strategic influence upon the course of events along the Kokoda track.

The chapter on Japanese strategy in this thesis is followed by an attempt to calculate a reasonably accurate order of battle, including unit strengths, for the Nankai Shitai. This has not been attempted before. Lists of units which supposedly went to Papua have appeared here and there but they are inaccurate and none has included the strengths of the Japanese units as they arrived in Papua. It is clearly vital, to support the position that the Japanese in the mountains were relatively few in number, to establish just how many men in each unit went to Papua.

¹² Horner, D. *Crisis of Command, Australian Generalship and the Japanese threat 1941-1943*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978, and *High Command, Australia's Struggle for an Independent War Strategy, 1939-45*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1992.

A summary of the Australian command issues of 1942 appears in Horner's paper, *High Command and the Kokoda Campaign*, delivered at the Army History Conference of 2002, <<http://www.awm.gov.au/events/conference/2002/horner.asp>>

In the Australian account of Kokoda it is also sometimes said that Japanese intelligence on the theatre of war was poor. A commonly used example is that the Japanese believed there was a motorable road from Buna to Port Moresby via Kokoda.¹³ It is true one can find the odd ignorant statement of this kind in Japanese diaries or official documents but these are rare, often written while the writer was still in Japan or the Phillipines en route to New Guinea, and they do not at all reflect the mainstream of Japanese intelligence on the route over the mountains. Eastern New Guinea had been under investigation by the Japanese since 1931. By 1938 some interest in the route over the mountains from Giruwa to Port Moresby can be found in Japanese documents. In March 1941, Major Toyofuku Tetsuo, later the senior intelligence officer of the Nankai Shitai, visited Port Moresby incognito and serious intelligence studies of the route over the mountains commenced in January 1942. By the time the campaign was launched, Japanese military intelligence about the line of advance over the mountains was at least satisfactory.

What is not necessary in this thesis is to retell the story of the fighting in detail from the Australian perspective. The experience of the Australian infantry, of individuals, sections, platoons and companies, has been well studied. These accounts are usually accompanied by some explanation of tactics, strategy and command from the Australian side. In contrast, Japanese orders of battle, their commander's plan, the manoeuvres of their formations on the battlefield and some analysis of these, is usually missing from Australian accounts of Kokoda. There are partial exceptions such as Raymond Paull's *Retreat from Kokoda* or Lex McAulay's *Blood and Iron* but it remains true that analysis of the Japanese evidence of the fighting is a serious gap in Australian accounts.¹⁴ Here there has been an attempt to give an overview of the actions and engagements along the Kokoda track primarily from the Japanese perspective. Attention has been drawn to any new interpretation of events which Japanese sources may suggest. Notable among these are the several occasions when the Japanese made serious tactical errors without which

¹³ McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, p. 20.

¹⁴ Paull R. *Retreat from Kokoda, The Australian Campaign in New Guinea 1942*. William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1982. Sublet's account occasionally also offers insights from the Japanese perspective. Sublet, Lt Colonel F, *Kokoda to the Sea, A History of the 1942 Campaign in Papua*. Slouch Hat Publications, McCrae, 2000.

the outcome of the first part of the mountain campaign would have been far worse for the Australians.

It will have been noted that the word ‘battle’ has not so far been used other than in a general sense. There is little agreement about how a battle is defined. In official Commonwealth nomenclature, the whole campaign under scrutiny here was the Battle of Kokoda, while the various clashes, depending on their size, were termed actions or engagements. What is called the Papuan Campaign is, excluding Milne Bay, divided into the Battle of Kokoda and the Battle of Buna-Gona. The term ‘Battle of Kokoda’ would cause confusion in what follows so that term has not been used. Rather, the period under discussion has been referred to as the Kokoda campaign or, when speaking more broadly, the Papuan campaign. Otherwise, the framework of the ‘Official Names of the Battles, Actions and Engagements fought by the Land Forces of the Commonwealth’ has been followed.¹⁵ This document states that while no crystal clear definition of the words ‘battle’, ‘action’ or ‘engagement’ can be arrived at, the considerations used in classifying an encounter are its magnitude, the size of the forces, intensity of fighting, strategic or tactical importance and public sentiment.¹⁶ The larger of the clashes discussed here are termed actions, the smaller, engagements. The fighting along the Kokoda track is dealt with under the following headings:

Actions

Isurava	15-30 August 1942
Ioribawa	10-28 September 1942
Eora-Templetons II	8-30 October 1942
Oivi-Gorari	4-13 November 1942 ¹⁷

¹⁵ AWM R 940 541, b3360, The official names of the battles actions and engagements fought by the land forces of the Commonwealth.

¹⁶ AWM R 940 541, b3360, The official names of the battles actions and engagements fought by the land forces of the Commonwealth, pp. 6-7.

¹⁷ The action of Oivi-Gorari was not fought in the Owen Stanley mountains but is included in this thesis because it is generally regarded as the concluding event of the mountain campaign.

Engagements

Kokoda-Deniki	25 July-14 August 1942
Eora-Templetons I	31 August -5 September 1942
Efogi	6-9 September 1942

One of the engagements on this list has sometimes slipped past unnoticed by modern writers in Japan and Australia. The Japanese call it 'second Isurava' when they refer to it at all. However, this event, the Australian rearguard engagement after Isurava from 31 August to 5 September, also called first Eora-Templetons, has several interesting features which make it worthwhile rescuing from obscurity.

In determining how many were engaged on both sides and what were the casualties, three problems arise. The first is to work out who was actually there on each occasion. For the Japanese this difficulty can be anticipated but there are also problems establishing which Australian units, especially of the order of field companies, field ambulance detachments, signals detachments and elements of the Papuan Infantry Battalion (PIB), were present. The second problem is to define just who, of those in the general vicinity, were engaged in the fighting. This does not mean just those who fired their weapons for they also are engaged who only stand and transmit. Signallers, medical staff and headquarters administrative personnel are considered to be engaged if their formation was engaged, that is, close enough to the enemy that at least some part of the unit delivered fire or came under fire.

The third problem is that Japanese sources cannot always provide the correct number of wounded whereas, almost always, reasonably accurate numbers of those killed in battle can be had. For this reason, the method followed (when numbers of wounded are not available) is to assume a ratio of killed to wounded. The proportion of one Australian killed to two wounded was used by AMF statisticians at the time.¹⁸ This can be further refined. In the Australian retreat it was closer to two killed to three wounded while during

¹⁸ AWM 54 519/6/58, General Sir Thomas Blamey, report on operations, Appendix D medical, p. 5.

the Australian advance it was in excess of one killed to two wounded. The Australian estimate for the Japanese was one killed to 1.65 wounded.¹⁹ For the Japanese too this can be divided into the period of the Australian retreat, when Japanese casualties were one killed to one and three quarters wounded, and the Australian advance when the Japanese ratio altered to about one killed to one wounded. These are the ratios used here to estimate Japanese wounded when the available evidence is partial, uncertain or absent. The Japanese records that are available indicate these ratios are fairly accurate for the actions and engagements discussed in this thesis though it must be remembered such estimates may not be of value in the case of small skirmishes where the killed to wounded ratio may vary considerably.

One Australian author has accused the Japanese of “creative accounting” in their estimates of the number of enemy they fought and the number of casualties they inflicted.²⁰ This is a fair criticism. The Japanese often overestimated the number of their enemy and the number of casualties they inflicted. What is missing from Australian studies, however, is a comparative checking of the claims of both sides. It will be seen that the Australians were equally guilty of fabricating impressive but exaggerated numbers of enemy present and enemy killed.

Japanese sources tell quite a different story about Japanese supply on the Kokoda track to the one that is familiar in Australia. There is a widespread but false idea that the Japanese conducted the Kokoda campaign on a shoestring, expecting to get from Giruwa to Port Moresby in two weeks carrying virtually all their requirements on the backs of their infantry.²¹ On the contrary, the Nankai Shitai was, by Japanese standards, initially a well supplied force though after two months in Papua it did run into severe supply shortages.

¹⁹ AWM 54 12/4/1, AMF estimate of Japanese casualties, npn.

²⁰ McAulay L. *Blood and Iron*, p. 72.

²¹ The Japanese referred to their base on the Papuan coast as Giruwa. This has been used in this thesis as it is more accurate than the term Buna which is usually used in Australia. The Japanese base area extended from Gona to Buna but Giruwa, near Sanananda, contained its strongest defences as well as being its centre of command, supply and administration.

While this has been seen as one of the prime causes of their failure in the campaign there has been little study of it done in Australia or in Japan.²² Japanese sources suggest that their supply problems in the mountain campaign, as distinct from later events on the coast at Giruwa, have been overstated.

Linked to Japanese supply is the issue of allied air interdiction of the Japanese supply line. The Allied air supply effort over the Owen Stanley Range has received a lot of attention but the concurrent interdiction of Japanese supply lines from the air needs examination. Its adverse effect on Japanese supply appears to have been small, certainly a lot smaller than a period of unusually heavy rainfall in September 1942 which, in effect, washed away the Japanese supply line.

A tactical factor which may help to account for the early Japanese successes and later prolonged defence is their artillery. Australian accounts make mention of a few Japanese mortars and a mountain gun but there is little appreciation that the Nankai Shitai carried sixteen artillery pieces to Papua, most of which were 70mm and 75mm guns – a powerful addition to their strength that probably had a major influence on the fighting. Australian accounts mistranslate the Japanese term for their 70mm battalion gun, the ‘gun-mortar’ as ‘mortar’. There were not, in fact, any Japanese medium or heavy mortars, as distinct from the ubiquitous short range light ‘knee mortar’, in action in the Owen Stanleys.

The final problem with the traditional Australian version of the Kokoda campaign that is dealt with here is a belief that Japanese medical arrangements were poor and sickness was much worse in their force than among the Australians. Like the supply problem this in part this arose from wartime publicity. Much was made in Australia of the terrible circumstances the Japanese found themselves in at the disastrous end of the Papuan campaign around Giruwa in January 1943. However, the Japanese came to Papua better

²² AWM MSS 701, items 1 and 2, Robinson, A. ‘Problems of supply encountered by the Australian and Japanese forces on the Kokoda trail and the question of morale’. Also of value is Richmond, K. *Japanese Forces in New Guinea During World War II, a primer in logistics*. privately printed, 2003.

prepared in this field than the Australians and in the fighting in the mountains up to November 1942 it was the Australians who lost more men to sickness than the Japanese.

Having outlined the issues with which this thesis is concerned it is now appropriate to turn to a discussion of sources. It should first be pointed out that general Japanese accounts of the Kokoda campaign are as likely to be in error as those by Australian authors. Two examples are S. Ienaga *The Pacific War 1931-45, A Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in WWII*, and K. Tanaka *Operations of the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces in Papua New Guinea During WWII*.²³ It may be that as these and similar texts are available in English translation they have also contributed to a misunderstanding in Australia about the numbers of Japanese actually fighting in the Owen Stanleys in 1942 for they too repeat the error of assuming the main body of the Nankai Shitai participated in the fighting in the Owen Stanley Range.

The Japanese sources used in this thesis come from Japanese archives, libraries, regimental collections and the private collections of Japanese New Guinea veterans interviewed by the author. The Japanese equivalent of the Australian War Memorial (AWM) collection in Canberra is the the National Institute of Defense Studies (NIDS). NIDS is a military history archive in Tokyo which holds the most comprehensive collection of primary sources and is the nation's official collection of military documents. The Japanese are in general proud of their military achievements and there are now a large number of interesting research projects underway at NIDS. Their WWII research is evenly divided between the army and the navy. Prominent topics for current research are Pacific naval battles and the strategic bombing campaign against Japan. Next, in order of interest, comes the war in China. The Guadalcanal campaign is, surprisingly, not very far up the list and the war in New Guinea is somewhere at the bottom. As far as is known no research at NIDS is currently being done on the Nankai Shitai.

²³ Ienaga, S. *The Pacific War 1931-45, A Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in WWII*, Pantheon, New York, 1978. Tanaka, K. *Operations of the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces in Papua New Guinea During WWII*, Japan Papua New Guinea Goodwill Society, Tokyo, 1980.

The relevant NIDS documents may be divided into two parts: collections of unit records and more general theatre and campaign records. Some unit records have been collected but not reorganised post war. Those that have been reorganised, often by unit veterans, are in the main simple collations of unit documents with little or no narrative or analysis included. For this topic those of 144 Regiment, 41 Regiment, and 55 Mountain Artillery Regiment are of outstanding importance.²⁴ One type of unit record which can sometimes be found at NIDS that has no Australian counterpart is a company history. There are several there for infantry, signals and artillery companies which fought in the Kokoda campaign.²⁵

In Tokyo there are two other locations of importance: the Yasukuni Shrine and the National Diet Library. The Kaiko Bunkyo, an archive attached to the Yasukuni Shrine to the war dead, houses a large collection of books written on the war by Japanese, many of whose authors were veterans. It has no Australian equivalent in that the collection is devoted just to Japanese accounts whether technical, analytical or reminiscent.²⁶ The East New Guinea Comrades Association, which has its office at the Yasukuni Shrine, is also an important point of reference to contact veterans associations. These meet annually in the cities where the regiments were raised.

²⁴ NIDS, 301.9.S, *Hohei dai 41 Rentai Nyuginiasen senkyo hokoku* (Battle records of 41 Regiment's battles in New Guinea).

NIDS 302. 9.S, *Hiho to Tomoni-Sanpohei dai 55 Rentai senshi* (With Fire – the war history of 55 Mountain Artillery Regiment).

Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment) Compiled and published by the editorial board of 144 regimental association, Kochi, Shikoku 1986. Also NIDS 302.9.H.

All Japanese to English translations have been done by Yoshida Haruki of the AJRP and Nakagawa Naoko, a translator for the Tokyo Police Department.

²⁵ For example, the *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Tsushin Chutai Shi Hensan Iinkai* is a unit history of the signals company of 144 Regiment. *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Tsushin Chutai Shi Hensan Iinkai* (History of the 144 Regiment Signals Company). Compilation Committee History of the Signals company of 144 Infantry Regiment. Also NIDS 302. 9. I.

²⁶ Of some value is the *Mainichi Shinbun* collection of Japanese photographs of the war. This newspaper sent forth a large number of reporters and photographers to all theatres of war. Some of these men found their way to New Guinea. The photographic collection allows the researcher to verify details of Japanese equipment, supplies and weapons.

The two which concern us are 144 Regiment and 41 Regiment. The first was from Shikoku and its depot was in Kochi city. The region is wholly mountainous, at least as rugged if not as tree covered as the Owen Stanleys. Japanese veterans even now will comment that the men of Shikoku excelled in mountain operations. The most useful item in the regimental collection in Kochi is a detailed account of the regiment's participation in the war from 1941 to 1945 and a list of the regimental dead.²⁷

The other infantry regiment which participated in the Kokoda Campaign was 41 Regiment from Fukuyama near Hiroshima. There is tension amounting to bitterness between the survivors of the two regiments. The veterans of 144 accuse those of 41 of letting them down on a number of occasions in the Owen Stanleys. This issue is addressed in the main body of the thesis. Unfortunately, veterans of 41 Regiment, citing an old Japanese proverb that defeated soldiers should not talk about their battles, will neither allow access to their collection nor speak on the topic.

Another source of evidence obtained in Japan arises from the author's twenty four year association with that country which began with three years working there from 1984. Fourteen interviews with Japanese veterans have been recorded since then and some of these men have allowed copies to be made of documents and maps from their own collections.

The National Diet Library (NDL) in Tokyo bears comparison with the Australian National Library. It holds a complete collection of the eighty year old magazine *Maru*. This magazine is devoted to Japanese military history since the Meiji era and contains more than a thousand personal accounts of Japanese soldiers, sailors and airmen who served in WWII.²⁸

²⁷ NIDS 302.9. H. *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki*. (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment)

²⁸ See bibliography for a list of the *Maru* magazine articles used in this thesis.

The remaining Japanese sources for the Kokoda campaign can be found in Australia. By far the most important primary source in Australia is the Allied Translation and Interpreter Section (ATIS) collection in the AWM. Second is the AJRP collection and third the Japanese monographs in the Australian National Library (ANL). After NIDS, the ATIS collection is the second most valuable of all sources listed here. The importance of the AWM's ATIS collection is recognised at NIDS which has, via the AJRP, obtained copies of some ATIS documents to fill gaps in its own records.

ATIS was set up in September 1942 with a view to gaining intelligence advantages by obtaining and translating Japanese documents and interrogating prisoners. Only a small proportion of all documents obtained were deemed worthy of translation. Even so, the incomplete AWM collection of ATIS translations has over 100,000 pages in 55 volumes. Perhaps five per cent of this relates directly to the Kokoda Campaign.²⁹ In some key issues in this thesis it was found the ATIS collection was the only surviving source of information on Japanese unit strengths and casualties. In addition, ATIS has a large number of translated Japanese personal diaries. Those of senior non commissioned officers or commissioned officers frequently show a daily account of the strength of their unit and well as casualties to sickness and battle.

The AJRP has, since 1997, provided access to Japanese records for Australians as well as introducing Japanese scholars to Australian military history collections. In terms of advice for a research trip to Japan it must be the first port of call for any Australian student of the war against Japan. There is an online database of translated Japanese accounts, documents and research by Japanese scholars. There are also essays on the Australian and Japanese collections relating mainly to the war in New Guinea and the AJRP has translated a number of original Japanese documents from AWM 82.

The Japanese monographs are held at the NLA. These are a collection of accounts commissioned by the United States War Department (USWD) and written by ex Imperial

²⁹ Accessibility to the ATIS collection has been considerably improved by the cataloguing work of Lex MacAulay.

Japanese Navy (IJN) and Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) officers.³⁰ There are fifteen which relate in some way to the Papuan campaign. Their reliability varies as they were not always composed by those with intimate knowledge of the events they describe. The War Investigation Branch (WIB) of the Imperial Japanese Army headquarters (IJAHQ), under American direction, collected documents and private papers where it could not interview senior officers who participated in the campaign under study. Two especially useful ones, numbers 33 and 37, were written by Lt Colonel Sadashima Noriyuki who was a staff officer in Rabaul with 17th Army in 1942.³¹ At the other end of the scale, some of the monographs were written ten years after the war from memory with no documentary support. The ANL also holds a small collection of Japanese books, some of which relate to the 1942 campaign.

The main secondary Japanese source used in this thesis is the *Senshi Soshō*, the Japanese official history. In 1955 NIDS took over the collection of the Office of War Studies and from 1966 to 1980 published the Japanese official history of WWII in 102 volumes. This series, the *Senshi Soshō*, is neither an official history in the traditional style nor in the Australian style. The modern western style of military history originated in the post Napoleonic era, Napier's history of the Peninsula War being a fine example of the genre.³² A WWII form of this can be seen in the United States Official History Series. The focus is on the higher levels of war emphasising command and strategy at the expense of front line accounts. In contrast in Australia what might be called the Charles Bean style places more emphasis on the front-line infantry experience but without neglecting the strategic aspects of war.

The *Senshi Soshō* is neither fish nor fowl. Its authors, ex senior officers of the IJN and IJA were not trained historians and the lack of an investigative approach is immediately

³⁰ The Japanese monographs, a collection of interviews with IJA and IJN officers, are at NLA, mfm 1383.

³¹ NLA, mfm 1383, nos.33 and 37.

³² Napier, Major-General Sir W. *History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France from the year 1807 to the year 1814*, Frederick Warne and Co. London., 1856..

noticeable.³³ The *Senshi Soshō* is really little more than a collection of documents and recollections arranged in order to narrate the events. It suffers from gaps in primary documentation, occasioned either by, as in the case of the Nankai Shitai, the entire destruction of the force with attendant loss of documents in January 1943, or the ‘great incineration’ of documents begun in Japan just before the end of the war and continued for a period after its conclusion.

This event was designed to destroy evidence that otherwise might be used in war crimes trials but much that was irrelevant to those trials was also destroyed. As a consequence, some parts of the *Senshi Soshō* were written from nothing but recollections of surviving officers twenty or thirty years after the event. Even this was a problem. While the majority of Australian commanders, junior and senior, were available to post war researchers, the same cannot be said for the Nankai Shitai as 80 per cent of its members did not survive the war. As an example of the gaps in the *Senshi Soshō* it skates so lightly over the fighting at Efogi in early September 1942 that it is not at all clear from the text that an important engagement occurred there.³⁴ For the reasons mentioned here we should not then consider the *Senshi Soshō* to be as reliable a source as the Australian and American official histories.

That said, the *Senshi Soshō* does contain verbatim copies of a large number of important documents relevant to the campaign and these, in this thesis, are accorded a high level of credibility. NIDS staff describe the *Senshi Soshō* as an accurate but disjointed account and this is probably a fair assessment. Fortunately for Australian students, Dr. Steven Bullard of the Australia Japan Research Project (AJRP) has recently translated the part of the *Senshi Soshō* concerned with events in Papua up to the end of the fighting in January 1943.³⁵

³³ Discussion with Dr. Steven Bullard, AJRP, 20/4/07.

³⁴ Bullard S. (trans) *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns, 1942-43*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 2007, p. 165.

³⁵ For brevity in the text both the original *Senshi Soshō* and Bullard’s translation are referred to as the *Senshi Soshō* but which is being quoted is stated in the footnote.

Foremost among English language primary sources available in Australia is the collection of the AWM. As has been pointed out, the Australian WWII collection does not suffer from the numerous gaps of the Japanese records. In general, the AMF war diaries are of a high standard and extremely useful to the researcher and the post campaign narratives, intelligence and research reports often contain valuable analysis which is not observable to the same degree in comparable Japanese documents.

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) holds documents relating to prewar Japanese espionage in Australia and New Guinea which are an important source for an assessment of pre-Kokoda campaign Japanese intelligence efforts in eastern New Guinea. The ANL map room contains a collection of Australian explorers' maps of Papua. The importance of these maps is they, in their various pre-ANL locations, were very probably a source of Japanese intelligence about the Kokoda track. It is certain that some maps made by Australian explorers of New Guinea were obtained by Japanese agents in Australia before the war. It is less certain precisely which maps these were.

An incomplete version of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) is held in the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) library.³⁶ At war's end the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) began a project to assess bomb damage in the two strategic air offensives in Europe and against Japan. The USSBS grew into much more than this and its 33,000 pages contain useful research papers on a wide range of aspects of the Pacific War. The survey also contains a collection of interviews with Japanese officers including several 17th Army and IJN 4th Fleet officers who were involved in the 1942 campaign in the SWPA.

Australian secondary sources can be divided into four parts: official and unit histories; personal accounts; post war analytical works and post war popular narratives. Something has already been said of the official history, which remains a readable and reasonably accurate work. All the infantry battalions which participated in this campaign have had a

³⁶ Military Analysis Division , *The effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, United States War Department, April 1947.

unit history published. There are also histories of some of the other units, pioneer battalions, Royal Australian Engineer (RAE) field companies and the like. Australian unit histories do not much resemble the Japanese ones as the former prefer a coherent narrative to an assembly of unit documents. Even so, the Australian ones vary widely in quality and usefulness. Those of 2/3 and 2/31 Battalions are hardly of any value while those of 2/27 and 2/33 and 2/1 Battalions repay close reading with a great deal of accurate detail and insightful comment.³⁷

Personal accounts of senior officers such as those of Lt General Sir Sydney Rowell and Colonel Frank Kingsley-Norris do not usually relish controversy (with the exception of Rowell's account of his differences with Blamey) and are inclined to skip over many of the complexities of the great issues of the campaign.³⁸ Of post-war analytical works there are very few – a gap which the present thesis in part hopes to fill. There are a handful of Australian masters or doctoral theses which discuss aspects from the Japanese side. Robinson's and Richmond's analyses of Japanese supply problems in New Guinea is useful and John Moreman's work on Australian supply enables some comparison to be made with Japanese supply problems. The only other thesis which examines a Japanese aspect of the campaign is Linda Zeitz's MA thesis 'No half hearted soldiers'.³⁹ Zeitz examined the Japanese experience of defeat in New Guinea. Currently valuable research

³⁷ Clift, K. *War Dance, The Story of the 2/3 Australian Infantry Battalion*, 2/3 Battalion Association, Kingsgrove, 1980.

Burns, J. *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War*, 2/27 Ex-Servicemen's Association, Adelaide, 1960.

Laffin, J. *Forever Forward. The story of the 2/31 Infantry Battalion, 2nd AIF 1940-45*, 2/31 Australian infantry battalion association, NSW branch, Sydney, 1994.

Crooks, W. *The Foolsoldiers; The Story of the 2/33 Infantry Battalion AIF in the war of 1939-45*, Printcraft, Sydney 1971.

Giveney, E. *The First at War; the Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-45*, Association of First Infantry Battalions, Earlwood, 1987.

³⁸ Rowell, Lt General Sir S. *Full Circle*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1974.

Kingsley-Norris, F. *No memory for pain, an autobiography*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1970.

³⁹ Zeitz, L. 'No half hearted soldiers, the Japanese army's experience in the south west Pacific', MA thesis, University of NSW, 1992.

Moreman J. A Triumph of Improvisation. Australian Army operational logistics and the campaign in Papua, July 1942 to January 1943, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2000.

AWM MSS 701, items 1 and 2, Robinson, A. Problems of supply encountered by the Australian and Japanese forces on the Kokoda trail and the question of morale.

is being done by Bryce Fraser and Adrian Threlfall on Australian combat effectiveness in the 1942 campaign and their theses will contain some comparative assessment of the Japanese. John Moremon has also done some work in this field, as has Garth Pratten.⁴⁰

In *Armed and Ready* Andrew Ross has a chapter titled 'Australian Combat Power and the Japanese' in which he compared the fighting strength of Australian and Japanese divisions by looking at weapons and supply.⁴¹ In an article for the *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* in 1992 George Raudzens quantitatively assessed the effects of air power in the Owen Stanley Campaign.⁴² Very rarely a Japanese account appears in translation in an Australian Journal. Moda's 'From the other side – Success then death on the Kokoda Track' in *Australian Military History*, is one of a handful.⁴³

American postwar analytical work is more abundant than that of Australia. Two United States authors have dealt thematically with the problems of land warfare in the Pacific in WW II and both frequently refer to New Guinea. They are Eric Bergerud in *Touched with Fire* and Rafael Steinberg in *Island Fighting*.⁴⁴ In Britain and the United States the analysis of battles has become popular in armed forces and national security think tanks as it may offer a way to predict battle outcomes. Its formulae are also applied to military history in the USA but in Australia this has not so far been attempted.

⁴⁰ Pratten, G. *Two Seconds: the Australian Militia Experience, 1941-1945*, Canberra, privately published, 1995. Moremon, J, 'Most deadly jungle fighters?' Australian infantry in Malaya and Papua, 1941-43, BA (Hons) University of New England, 1992.

⁴¹ Ross, A. *Armed and ready, the industrial development and defence of Australia 1900-1945*, Turton and Armstrong, Sydney, 1995.

⁴² Raudzens G. Testing the airpower expectations of the Kokoda campaign, July to September 1942, *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no 21, October 1992. Further sources may be found Hank Nelson's report on historical sources for the war in New Guinea. <<http://ajrp.awm.gov.au/ajrp/AJRP2.nsf/437f72f8ac>>.

⁴³ Moda, H. From the other side – Success then death on the Kokoda Track, *Australian Military History* no. 3, October-November 1994, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Bergerud E. *Touched with Fire, The land warfare in the South Pacific*, Penguin, New York, 1996 and Bergerud, E. *Fire in the Sky, The Air War in the South Pacific*, Westview Press, Boulder, 2000.

Modern Australian accounts are concerned more with colour than precision. An exemplar of this kind of popular narrative must be Peter Fitzsimon's *Kokoda*.⁴⁵ Lex McAulay, Peter Brune and Paul Ham have made more serious attempts at the genre. While serving the purpose of placing the campaign squarely in the popular consciousness, these works suffer from a lack of Japanese sources. The one sided nature of much of this work is easily observed in the battle maps therein. Typically, Australian units down to company size are correctly located while whole Japanese regiments warrant only an arrow pointing menacingly at the Australian positions.⁴⁶

Fitzsimons, McAulay, Brune, Ham, and to a lesser extent Paull and McCarthy, repeat the traditional Australian account: that the Japanese had superior numbers, that Allied senior commanders were out of touch while the ordinary soldiers saved Port Moresby, that Japanese intelligence, supply and medical arrangements were all poor. It is striking that the earlier works, Paull and the Australian official history – the United States official history could also be added – are less inclined to contain the errors that have here been grouped as 'the traditional Australian account'. While all still overestimate the numbers of Japanese engaged in the Kokoda track actions and engagements, Paull, McCarthy and Milner do so to a smaller extent.

The later, more popular writers, have re packaged the campaign. Now Maroubra Force and 7th Australian Division are presented as the saviours of Australia and Ham concludes that "Allied victory in Papua had little to do with Blamey and MacArthur and everything to do with the prodigious abilities and courage of a few outstanding officers, and the dogged loyalty and bravery of their men."⁴⁷ It is this later, less rigorous and more nationalistic version of the campaign, that has become the traditional version.

⁴⁵ Fitzsimons, P. *Kokoda*, Hodder, Sydney, 2004.

⁴⁶ It is not implied the authors mentioned have made no use at all of Japanese sources rather that they have made small use of them. Raymond Paull and Lex McAulay have made large use of the ATIS collection only.

⁴⁷ Ham. *Kokoda*, p. 523.

In conclusion, there exists a gap in Australian historiography regarding the Kokoda campaign. It is that a wide range of Japanese sources have not been closely examined. As a result there seem to be a number of important errors and omissions in Australian writing on the topic. Moreover these errors are increasing rather than decreasing with the passage of time resulting in a lack of balance in our understanding of the campaign. In the following, the evidence pointing towards a more even, and hopefully more accurate view, is presented.

CHAPTER TWO.
JAPANESE STRATEGY IN PAPUA.

CHAPTER TWO - JAPANESE STRATEGY IN PAPUA

Allied strategy in the South West Pacific has been the subject of a number of studies in the United States and in Australia. It is not proposed here to deal with it, other than where necessary as a counterpoise to that which has been much less closely examined – Japanese strategy. The consequence of the lack of detailed study within Australia on Japanese strategy in 1942 is that four important features of it have either gone unnoticed or are misunderstood. These are:

1) A Defensive Strategy

Japanese strategy in the ‘southern area’ was arguably defensive from March 1942 when an invasion of Australia was briefly considered and rejected. Japanese strategy was definitely defensive from June after their naval defeat at Midway. The strategic objective in the SWPA became to seize a line that could be defended. The advance on Port Moresby was an attempt to seize an important link in this defensive line. Thus the move of the Nankai Shitai into the Owen Stanley Range, while tactically and operationally offensive in nature, was a defensive measure strategically. The Japanese were aware a counteroffensive was in the wind and correctly believed it would come via the Coral Sea, though they thought it would advance from Papua on the sea’s western shore. They did not anticipate there were two counteroffensives planned, one via Papua and one via Guadalcanal. When the Americans landed on Guadalcanal in early August, it contributed to the decision of the Japanese 17th Army to halt the advance of the Nankai Shitai towards Port Moresby and retain the major part of that formation in a defensive posture north of the Owen Stanley Range. This defensive stance of the Japanese became permanent and no order ever came to Horii to allow him to return to the offensive and attack Port Moresby.

2) The Preferred Option

In Australia the over-the-mountain attempt to take Port Moresby is seen as an alternative approach adopted by the Japanese after the failure of their seaward attempt at the battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942. In fact the landward option was always the preferred one, especially by those who would carry it out, the Nankai Shitai. In mid April a carrier division unexpectedly became available to support the operation so a seaward option, via the Coral Sea, suddenly came to the fore. It was attempted, abandoned and then planning returned to the preferred option.

3) Forestalling the Allies

The advance over the Owen Stanley Range was a part of a Japanese plan to forestall an Allied offensive by occupying all important sites in eastern New Guinea regardless of whether the assault on Port Moresby went ahead. As such it had a more solid strategic foundation than appears in Australian writing where it has sometimes been presented as an opportunistic rapid and under-resourced dash for Port Moresby.¹

4) Strategy Under Stress

Nine distinct 'chapters' in Japanese strategic thinking about the mountain campaign in the Owen Stanleys can be distinguished in the period from January 1942 to November 1942. Such a large number of changes in such a short period is by itself an indicator of a strategy under stress.² The primary cause of stress was Guadalcanal. The influence of events in Guadalcanal on those in Papua was much stronger than the reverse and greater

¹ Raymond Paull is one who makes the error of supposing the plan to attack Port Moresby was rapid and underresourced. Paull R. *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 90.

² It could be argued that these nine shifts in Japanese planning are in some cases better described as operational, not strategic, changes. There is something in this as the strategic aim, to take Port Moresby if at all possible at some point in 1942, did not change until November when it was abandoned. It is rather the method and emphasis which altered. However, as it does not seem profitable to argue in each case which were truly strategic and which were operational factors and which were borderline cases. The line between the two not always being crystal clear, the solution adopted has been to use the term strategy.

than has been realised. Its greatest influence was, in effect, to cancel the Port Moresby plan (operation MO) before it was properly underway.

To better understand the Japanese strategic thinking that led to mountain warfare in the Owen Stanley Range it will be useful, before proceeding to the four points above, to review the factors shaping the war in the Pacific. The Pacific War was firstly an air war, secondly a sea war and, last, a land war. Regardless of victories on land, armies on Pacific islands starved if denied supply coming by sea. Supply could not come regularly over the surface of the sea unless the air above it was denied to the enemy.

In 1942, carrier-borne air power was too weak to perform this role. Carriers could and did briefly dash within land based aircraft range for a surprise strike then withdraw, but they would lose any extended contest with land based air power.³ We don't find actual examples of carriers being sunk within medium bomber range of land in this period because the relative superiority of land based versus seabased airpower was well understood by the admirals of both sides: at the Coral Sea, the IJN fleet, while doing battle with the USN, took care never to come within medium bomber range of Port Moresby, weak as was its air strength in May 1942. At Midway, where IJN carriers were risked within range of land based air power, the first Japanese priority was to surprise and quickly destroy the American land based aircraft. Only then could a naval battle, if one eventuated, be considered. It was this otherwise sensible prioritising that caused the Japanese plan to come unstuck as they had not finished knocking out American land based air assets before the aircraft launched by USN carriers showed up. The carrier battles of Eastern Solomons and Santa Cruz were similarly and purposely fought outside American land based medium bomber range.⁴

³ It was the ability of medium bombers to hit shipping that both sides feared, thus it is medium bomber range we are primarily concerned with here. The USAAF heavy bomber, the B-17, proved to be hopeless at hitting ships at sea though they could hit ships in port.

⁴ During the Guadalcanal campaign Japanese cruisers and battleships engaged in bombarding Henderson Field were periodically attacked by land based aircraft when they failed to get beyond range by daylight.

A consequence of this relationship between land based air power and carrier based air power was that the side which owned and could maintain and defend well placed airfields, on land, which could project their power out to sea, would win any campaign in the end. The Pacific war is well understood if one begins by seeing it as primarily a contest for the ownership of suitable locations for land based airpower.⁵ For the Japanese this relationship did not alter in the course of the war as the IJN never had enough carrier borne aircraft to risk staying long within the range of enemy land based bombers. For the Americans it did alter as their carrier based air strength increased to become more powerful than ever decreasing Japanese land based air strength.

Off Leyte in the Philippines in October of 1944 the United States Navy (USN) had eighteen carriers carrying 1500 aircraft. This fleet was easily able to swat Japanese land based air attacks while it destroyed Japanese airfields. From then until the end of the war USN carriers had the ability to cruise for an extended period off the enemy coast within range of land based air attack, something unthinkable for both sides in 1942.

Both the Guadalcanal and Papuan Campaigns are suitable illustrations of the argument that strongly projected land based air power was the major determinant in shaping the outcome of the campaigns fought in the Pacific, at least until late 1944. In both cases, the Allies held airbases from which their airpower was eventually, in early 1943, projected so strongly the Japanese could neither reinforce nor resupply their soldiers and so they gave up the contest and attempted evacuation. In Guadalcanal, this was successful, in Papua not so. Our topic is limited to the first half of the Papuan campaign before these strategic fruits had matured, so the above serves more as an introduction to what strategic considerations determined that the Japanese would launch a land campaign over the Owen Stanley Range than as an explanation for its later failure.

Prior to the campaign, the Japanese had noted Allied airfields and identified potential airfield sites. An IJN research paper mentioned eastern New Guinea as an outlying but

⁵ This position, that Pacific strategy was governed by land based air power, is developed in Eric Hammel's book: Hammel E. *Aces against Japan*. Pocketbooks, New York, 1992, p. 26.

necessary acquisition in November 1940.⁶ The suitability for an airbase of the plains about Buna was also discussed in an IJA document in November 1941.⁷ It should be said here that flattish, dry land with a nearby harbour, or at least an anchorage, were the prerequisites for a large airfield complex and these were not easily found in the south Pacific with the exception of Australia.

Islands tended to be mountainous, and the lowlands prone to flooding. Coral reefs severely limited the number of harbours and anchorages and land communications were poor. Moreover, a square kilometre of suitable land was needed for each runway of an airfield complex, its dispersal area, repair facilities, fuel farm, accommodation and storage space. Basic inland strips like Kokoda and Wau could be used by small air units but could not become large concerns. This was because an air base consumed huge amounts of fuel, bombs and spare parts, not to mention the supply requirements of the 20 to 40 men who worked on the ground to keep each aircraft flying. While, in theory, the necessities might be flown in, in practice that would require more than all of the air transport assets available to either side in 1942. The Dobodura-Buna complex of airfields built by the Allies in 1943 illustrates the point. Such a large establishment, with six runways and a capacity to handle several hundred aircraft per day, could only be supplied from the sea and could not have been maintained very far from it.

If it is granted that strategy in the south Pacific in 1942 was determined by taking airfields or airfield sites, then there were very few to take. In March 1942, the Japanese, having identified Guadalcanal and Buin on Bougainville as potential airfield sites, began looking for others in the intervening 800 kilometre long Solomon Island chain. By August they still had not found even one other suitable site. Across the Coral Sea in

⁶ Toyoda, Y. and Nelson, H. (eds) *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea, Memories and Realities*, Rikkyo University Centre for Asian area studies, Tokyo, 2006, p. 175.

⁷ AWM 55/3/6/817, item 7. General Adachi's report, 29/12/41, p. 1. The Allies also were well aware of the potential of the Buna area. See AWM 66 2/5/1, HQAAF SWPA intelligence summary no. 28 to 25/8/42, p. 7. "Country within a radius of approx 10m to the n and w of Dobodura was well known as the most suitable area for construction of landing sites. This is all kunai country and landing strips can be prepared in a few days by merely burning off the kunai grass and removing tussocks."

Papua there were in 1942 just four important locations, that is, places with an airfield or the potential to develop one. They were Port Moresby, by far the most important, then Milne Bay, Buna and Kokoda.⁸

Returning now to the four points affecting Japanese strategy, the defensive nature of the Japanese attempt to take Port Moresby was explained in a postwar interview by IJN chief of operations (1940-1943) Rear Admiral Tomioka Sadatoshi.⁹ He began by outlining the origin of the IJNs interest in Rabaul. Fleet bases were vulnerable to air attack and from Rabaul the Allies could bomb Truk, the major Japanese naval base outside of the homeland. Rabaul had to be taken to secure Truk.¹⁰ Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku (C in C of the combined fleet) had, before the war, expressed this same opinion of the relationship between Rabaul and Truk.¹¹ When, in early 1942 (after the occupation of Rabaul), the Japanese began to realise there would be an Allied counteroffensive in the south west Pacific, two things became clear. First, Rabaul was well placed to serve as an IJN fleet base against any Allied counteroffensive in the Coral Sea where, as Tomioka also stated, "...we envisioned enemy naval operations would occur".¹² Second, in the new strategic circumstances, the strategic relationship between Rabaul and Port Moresby was similar to that which had existed between Truk and Rabaul.

⁸ There was an abandoned air strip at Yodda west of Kokoda and another at Wanigela but neither side expressed any interest in using either in the early stages of the campaign. Samarai was also known to be a potential site and airfields at Goodenough, Woodlark Islands were later developed.

⁹ AWM 55 17/7, statement of Rear Admiral Tomioka Sadatoshi, Chief of Operations, Naval General Staff, Oct 1940-Jan 43, npn.

¹⁰ Boeicho Boei Kenshujo Senshishitsu (ed). *Senshi Soshō: Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun sakusen <1> Poto Moresubi-Gashima shoko sakusen (War history series; South Pacific Area army operations (volume 1), Port Moresby-Guadalcanal first campaigns)*, Tokyo Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1968, p. 225. Here the influence of the ranges of the various types of aircraft operating from Rabaul and Port Moresby on strategy is explained.

¹¹ Toyoda and Nelson, *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea, Memories and Realities*, p. 176.

¹² AWM 55 17/7, Statement of Rear Admiral Tomioka Sadatoshi, chief of operations, IJN General Staff. Oct 1940-Jan 43, npn.

One of the most 'air minded' of the Japanese admirals, Vice Admiral Inoue Shigeyoshi, commander of 4th Fleet, expressed the view that Rabaul was not a viable fleet base if the fleet at anchor could be regularly bombed from Port Moresby and if the Allies built an airbase at Guadalcanal the same problem would arise. For this reason, Port Moresby and the potential airfield site at Guadalcanal had to be secured.¹³ Rabaul was also suitable for development as a large air base. Eventually it had four runways and reconnaissance aircraft from there could fly as far as north east Australia. Other IJN considerations were that ownership of Port Moresby created an option to ferry aircraft from the Dutch East Indies by a short route directly along the front line to Guadalcanal. Later, Milne Bay was included in the plan as a link in this chain of proposed air bases on the outer defensive line.¹⁴

By the end of January 1942, the new thinking at Imperial Headquarters (IHQ) resulted in an order for 4th Fleet and the Nankai Shitai to invade Port Moresby "if at all possible".¹⁵ Initially the IJA did not respond as enthusiastically as the IJN. Colonel Hattori Takushiro, chief of operations of the Imperial General Staff, (IGS), related after the war that the army was not initially concerned about Rabaul or Port Moresby. Their interest was Asia and their policy was to send troops south only as the navy requested. In early 1942, the Nankai Shitai was the only army combat unit of brigade size in the south Pacific.¹⁶ However, from February 1942, allied air attacks on Rabaul from Port Moresby increased in intensity. This convinced the army to agree to act with the navy against Port Moresby where Japanese air reconnaissance noted that the two airfields were being increased to

¹³ Frank, R. *Guadalcanal, The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle*, Penguin Books, New York, 1992, p 22

¹⁴ A final consideration was if the Japanese were to go ahead with the FS operation, taking Fiji, Samoa and New Caledonia, then it was all the more important the southern flank of this operation be protected by taking Port Moresby.

¹⁵ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 56.

¹⁶ AWM 55 17/7, translation of interview with Hattori Takushiro, ex colonel and chief of operations section, General Staff, July 41-December 1942, npn.

four.¹⁷ They also agreed with the IJN that a counterattack was likely to come via eastern New Guinea. Army Chief of Staff Sugiyama Hajime wrote on 11 July 1942, before any counterattack had occurred, that “We must hold the fronts in eastern New Guinea and Rabaul to the end. If they fall, not only will the Pacific Ocean be in peril, but it will allow the western advance of MacArthur’s counterattack through New Guinea and herald the fall of our dominion in the southern area”.¹⁸

The threat from growing Allied air strength, which had brought the army’s opinion into line with the navy, was a serious one. It was thought the allies had 400 combat aircraft operational in New Guinea and north eastern Australia.¹⁹ This number was roughly correct for the region and there were about 250 operational aircraft in the Allied Air Force (AAF) alone operating from North Queensland and Port Moresby. This number greatly increased in the course of the campaign and to it must be added USN carrier borne aircraft and those later based on Guadalcanal. No IJA aircraft were present in the area until November. From February to November, IJN operational land based air strength fluctuated between 50 and 100 aircraft, so the Japanese were heavily outnumbered in the air for the entire period.²⁰ Rear Admiral Kanazawa, commander of 8th Base Force of 4th fleet in Rabaul, noted in his diary in March, well before Papua or Guadalcanal, that there were already “conspicuous signs of defeat in the air war”.²¹

¹⁷ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 54.

¹⁸ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 151. The authors of *Senshi Soshō* reasonably conclude that: “The appearance of allied air strength on mainland Australia and at Port Moresby, and the intensity in activity of the US task force, gave rise to conditions whereby Japanese army and navy commanders in the region were forced to adopt a measured attitude towards the invasion of Port Moresby”. For the Allied perspective on air strength see McCarthy, *South west Pacific-first year*, p. 140.

¹⁹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 57.

²⁰ For Japanese aircraft strengths see ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 120, p 48 and no. 122 p 4. While there were rarely less than 130 aircraft in 1, 5 and 6 air groups only two thirds would be operational at any one time. See also Yoyoda and Nelson, *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea, Memories and Realities*, p 224.

²¹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 56.

The Italian foreign minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, was one who was informed of the new Japanese policy in the southern area. On 15 March he entered in his diary that “In a conference the Japanese have defined their plans... An extension of the conflict towards Australia where there is evidence the Americans and the British are preparing a counterattack”.²² This confidence in the location of the counterattack was misplaced.²³ Postwar accounts by IJN senior officers admit that the Japanese had not considered there might be two Allied counteroffensives, not one.²⁴ The IJN’s distribution of its submarines is one measure of the IJN’s confidence that Australia would be the base for the Allied counterattack. Eleven submarines were available in the region. Six submarines of 21 Submarine Division based in Rabaul were deployed down the east coast of Australia where in August they sank seven ships and damaged another six.²⁵ This left just five boats to patrol the remainder of the south west Pacific area. Only two of these boats were anywhere near Guadalcanal when the Americans landed there.

The strategic context of the Kokoda campaign was, as such, a defensive one from the Japanese perspective. One Japanese historian has described Port Moresby as a desired link in ‘the outer perimeter plan’.²⁶ After a successful offensive into the region, it was decided Rabaul would become a major fleet and air base from which to hold off an Allied counteroffensive. To properly secure this base a number of important outlying positions had to be taken. The whole of eastern New Guinea was to be occupied and ‘if possible’ Port Moresby as well. As this plan got underway, and while the Japanese were in

²² Ciano, G. *Ciano’s Diary 1937-1943*, Phoenix Pres, London, 2002, p. 502.

²³ For sources of Japanese intelligence about Allied counteroffensive intentions see Mathews, T. *Shadows Dancing, Japanese espionage against the west 1939-1945*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1993, pp. 90-91, and AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, file of Yazawa butai orders, p. 59.

²⁴ NLA, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 37 p 18, “during the latter part of September intelligence reports stated that a new force of considerable strength seemed to be planning to land somewhere in east New Guinea area”.

²⁵ NLA mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 111, p. 20.

²⁶ Hayashi, S. *Taiheiyo senso rikusen gaishi*, (The Japanese army in the Pacific war), Kodansha, Tokyo, 1951, p. 51.

transition from the offensive to the defensive, the first of two Allied counteroffensives, that at Guadalcanal, began.

The second of our four points about Japanese strategy is that the overland option to take Port Moresby was the preferred option. The first IJA document that discusses what to do about Papua appeared in November 1941. It was written by General Lt General Adachi Hatazo who later commanded 18th Army in New Guinea. Its recommendation was that Salamaua should be taken, then there should be an advance down the coast “to the plains about Buna” which could also provide a suitable air base.²⁷

From January 1942, when serious staff work on a Port Moresby plan began, three options were considered in army-navy discussions.²⁸ One of these may be dismissed easily as it was not long entertained: This was to land in the Giruwa area then transfer to barges and move along the coast to Port Moresby at night, via Samarai Island, in five short hops. Some work was still being done on this plan up to April but it was decided that the coral reef running along the southern coast of New Guinea from Port Moresby to Milne Bay would make in-shore navigation too risky. The second plan was to land on the north coast of Papua, either at Giruwa or at the mouth of the Mambare River, then advance via Kokoda to Port Moresby. The third plan was a direct amphibious assault from transports on to the beaches of Port Moresby. This was the plan which resulted in the battle of the Coral Sea. The main reason this plan was less favoured was that it could not be done without fleet carrier support and it was well known in the IJN that, with other projects in mind (Ceylon and Midway), Yamamoto was reluctant to part with carriers for southern operations.²⁹

²⁷ AWM 55, 3/6/817 item 7. General Adachi’s report, 29/12/41, p. 1.

²⁸ The *Senshi Soshō* presents the landward approach to Port Moresby as if it was a new option but in chapter two, especially p. 57, it states this was not the case. Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area*, p. 57 and p. 112.

²⁹ Toyoda and Nelson, *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea, Memories and Realities*, p. 180.

Both 4th Fleet and Nankai Shitai senior officers favoured the Owen Stanley plan. Their opposition to the seaward plan was this: the Jomard Passage, 650 kilometres from Port Moresby, one of several options to round the eastern tip of New Guinea, was assessed to be the best sea route from Rabaul to Port Moresby. But, “the convoy [would be] forced to conduct this operation across the sea, all the while susceptible to attack from allied air bases at Townsville and Cooktown. If the Jomard Passage was navigated during the evening and the convoy maintained a constant 20 kilometres an hour, then it would be exposed in the Coral Sea during the following day for about 12 hours. An expectation of success was only possible once air and sea superiority was secured in the Coral Sea”.³⁰

It was not a fear of aircraft from Port Moresby so much as from north Queensland that influenced Japanese strategy regarding an invasion of Port Moresby. That this was the vital factor is reinforced by the alternate plan to land in Papua at Giruwa. Giruwa is just 200 kilometres by air from Port Moresby, well within the range of all types of allied aircraft. However, the Japanese were aware that Port Moresby held few aircraft permanently. Japanese air attacks on it ensured the major part of the AAF was kept safely out of range in north Queensland. Elements were flown forward, refuelled at Port Moresby then attacked Japanese bases. They then returned to Port Moresby, refuelled and then returned to Queensland.

This method lessened the chance of the aircraft being caught on the ground by the enemy. It also lessened, by a factor of about four, the number of sorties that could be flown and was precisely what the Japanese planned to do once they captured Port Moresby – maintain fighters there but stage bombers through there for raids on Queensland.³¹ Japanese thinking was that an amphibious landing at Giruwa, a point 200 kilometres north east of Port Moresby, could only come under very limited allied air attack (and would receive more air cover from Lae, Gasmata and Rabaul) but any point south east of

³⁰ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 57.

³¹ Evans, D. (ed)., *The Japanese Navy in WWII in the words of former Japanese naval officers*, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, 1986, p. 216.

Port Moresby in the Coral Sea would face the full weight of the AAF, operating from its permanent bases in far north Queensland.

In March two events further inclined 4th Fleet and the Nankai Shitai towards the Owen Stanley plan. On 9 March IJN aerial reconnaissance discovered there was a new allied air base on Horn Island at the northern tip of Queensland. The Horn Island strip, 1200 metres long, enabled both medium and heavy bombers to strike from there along the whole of the southern coast of New Guinea east of Port Moresby to the Jomard Passage thus increasing the Allies' ability to attack a convoy bound for Port Moresby. Several raids were made on this base but another new base further south at Iron Range was not discovered.

The second event occurred in late March, when one battalion of the Nankai Shitai participated in the invasion of Lae and Salamaua, during which several transports were sunk and over 100 personnel from the army and the navy were killed by air attack from two USN carriers. On 20 March Horii wrote: "When considering the experience of the Salamaua-Lae operation, particularly the appearance of the enemy navy's carrier task force, I believe it will be very difficult to assign protection for the transport convoy by land based air units, and to protect the airbase establishments and the landing point after embarkation".³²

Then, moving on to discuss land based air opposition, Horii recommended both a parachute drop on Port Moresby airfields in advance of a landing to disrupt their air operations and more anti-aircraft artillery for the transport fleet. He also stated the escort carrier *Shoho* was insufficient naval based air cover and wanted double the land based air support before the seaward option could be considered. Horii then consulted his battalion commanders. Two of three of them supported the land option even if only some of the troops could be got over the mountains "rather than risking them all should the convoy be

³² Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 58.

sunk in the Coral Sea”.³³ A view has been expressed that Horii was dubious about the Owen Stanley plan but it has not been made clear that his misgivings about a seaward route were even stronger.³⁴ Going over the mountains was, in his view, the lesser of two evils.

In the reorganisation following the IJN’s April carrier strike on Ceylon, 4th Fleet was offered, for a Port Moresby operation, the large fleet carrier *Kaga* in addition to the small *Shoho*. Nonetheless, 4th Fleet’s commander, Vice Admiral Inoue, was not satisfied and asked for the 5th Carrier Division, the *Zuikaku* and the *Shokaku*. This was agreed to by IHQ so, from mid April, planning suddenly switched to a direct seaward approach to Port Moresby. It should be noted the carrier division was not tasked with direct cover of the transports. We have seen that fleet carriers were not risked in this way in the early part of the war. The *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku* were to lurk east of the Solomon Islands and do battle with enemy carriers should any appear. If none did, they would dart within range at night and launch raids on the air bases in north Queensland on the day the transports were exposed to air attack from there. They would then withdraw beyond range before they were found and attacked by land based aircraft.³⁵

The Battle of the Coral Sea need not be described here but its peculiar outcome, a drawn game, is relevant to the campaign in the Owen Stanley Range. Had the Japanese been victorious, Port Moresby would probably have been in Japanese hands following a seaborne invasion and there would have been no need for a campaign over the mountains, though there would still have been large bases developed at Buna and Milne Bay and a smaller base at Kokoda. Had the Coral Sea battle been a defeat resulting in the loss of the fleet carriers then it is more than likely that the plan to take Port Moresby would have been dropped. What actually occurred was finely balanced. It was still possible for the

³³ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p 59.

³⁴ Ham , *Kokoda*, p. 144, footnote.

³⁵ The *Shoho*, an escort carrier providing close support for the transports at the Coral Sea battle, was to be risked within the range of land based medium bombers but this same risk would not usually have been run with the fleet carriers.

Japanese to muster enough land based air cover to protect an invasion of the north coast of Papua which was too far from Queensland for all but the AAF four engined heavy bombers which were rapidly becoming renowned for their inability to hit ships at sea.³⁶

Officially, the rejection of a seaward approach to Port Moresby did not occur until 7 June when an army-navy agreement postponed both it and the FS operation to take Fiji and Samoa. From this point, IHQ implied that there was no longer a need to conduct research on any large operation involving a seaward approach to Port Moresby.³⁷ The 17th Army, when it took over planning of the operation in June, seems to have studied only one option, though it was still in doubt if the landing would be at the mouth of the Mambare River or at Giruwa.³⁸ A final illustration that a landward approach over the mountains to Port Moresby, together with an operation to take Milne Bay, was seen in Rabaul as the long term realistic option is that while orders were issued that the Nankai Shitai should prepare itself for a landing on a coral coast (which applies to Giruwa as much as Port Moresby) no exercise was conducted. What was often done was that soldiers were loaded with heavy packs full of volcanic dust to march up and down Rabaul's volcanoes in order to assess what weight of pack could be carried over a mountain range.³⁹

The third of our four points about Japanese strategy is the myth that the Nankai Shitai was to make a rapid, risky and under resourced dash over the mountains. In the chapter on supply it is pointed out that the advance of the Nankai Shitai into the Owen Stanley Range cannot be considered under resourced but here we will look at strategic considerations which also undercut this view. What tends to be forgotten is that the

³⁶ The Japanese tell a story of a B17 bombing and sinking a Japanese destroyer in the Solomons in early 1943. This was thought by them to be the first time a B17 had actually hit a ship so far in the war. The destroyer captain is reputed to have said that even B17s eventually had to hit something sometime.

³⁷ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 100-101.

³⁸ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 109.

³⁹ See AWM 54 423/4/41, Combat Intelligence Centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific Fleet, part 8, item 1167, translation of OKI group [17th army] order 'A' no. 10 of 18 June, and order C no. 15, dated 14 July.

operation along the Kokoda track, whether it was intended to be done quickly or at more measured pace, was part of, as stated in Great Navy Instruction 47 and Great Army Instruction 596, a larger plan to forestall an Allied offensive via New Guinea by taking all “key locations in British New Guinea.”⁴⁰ Rear Admiral Ugaki Matome (IJN chief of staff) ordered that “8th Fleet will co operate with the 17th Army in operations in the south-east area to quickly subjugate eastern New Guinea, including Port Moresby.”⁴¹ It was envisaged that Lae, Salamaua, Wau, Giruwa, Kokoda and Samarai would be occupied and “if at all possible”, Port Moresby too.⁴² All of these had airfields or potential airfield sites.

Of the approximately 25,000 men landed in eastern New Guinea in 1942 (including Giruwa, Milne Bay, Lae and Salamaua) to occupy and construct bases in these places it was thought no more than 5,000 might be used for an attack on Port Moresby over the Owen Stanley Range should one occur. A permanent base for 10,000 men at Giruwa and a permanent airfield at Buna and another at Kokoda were part of the plan, whether or not the mountain campaign occurred and whether or not it was to be a quick thrust or a slower advance. The senior officers of the 4th Fleet in Rabaul thought advanced air bases in Papua a necessity even if the attack on Port Moresby over the mountains did not go ahead at all.⁴³ In October, when it was plain to the Japanese the postponed Port Moresby attack might never be made, thousands still laboured to build a motorable road between Kokoda and Giruwa because if Port Moresby did not fall a significant base at Kokoda would have been all the more important to the Japanese.

The order of battle of the Nankai Shitai further reminds us that the Papuan operation was a serious long term plan to occupy eastern New Guinea regardless of whether or not the

⁴⁰ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p.151.

⁴² Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 56.

⁴³ AWM 55 3/ 4 no. 449, Papers attached to Yokoyama operational order no. 1, 20/7/42, sheet number 9.

MO operation went ahead. Seventeenth Army's 18 July order to commence operations against Port Moresby ordered three quarters of all the engineers in the 'southern area' - and the only bridging company there - to go to Papua to build bases and maintain and improve communications.⁴⁴ When, later, the decision was taken that Guadalcanal would be the main focus of attack and Port Moresby would have to wait, none of these engineer units was withdrawn.

In light of the foregoing the oft repeated idea that Horii's men were given fifteen days food and expected to be in Port Moresby by the time it ran out looks naïve and simplistic.⁴⁵ The advance on Port Moresby should rather be seen in its strategic context, as a large and complex operation with the subjugation of eastern New Guinea as its objective. The advance on Port Moresby was to be a part of this but not an essential part. If operation MO did not in the end go ahead the Japanese still planned to occupy as much of eastern New Guinea as they could.

Point four concerns the nine changes in Japanese strategic thinking about Papua in the period from January to November 1942. We have already dealt with three of them. The first began in January when the conquest of eastern New Guinea, including Port Moresby, began to be seriously studied and preliminary steps were taken in March with the occupation of Lae and Salamaua. Secondly, in April, the favoured Port Moresby option, a landing on the north coast of Papua, was shelved and the Coral Sea option was attempted and failed. The third change was a return to the landward plan. The Yokoyama advanced force was sent off to Papua with instructions to investigate the practicality of an advance over the Owen Stanley Range.

On the very day Yokoyama landed it was decided to go ahead without Yokoyama's appreciation and send the main force of the Nankai Shitai to Papua. This, the beginning of the forth phase, marks the entry into the story of Colonel Tsuji Masanobu, an IHQ

⁴⁴ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 120.

⁴⁵ Brune, *A Bastard of a place*, p. 210.

liaison officer attached to 17th Army for two key periods during the Kokoda campaign. It is said that he, speaking on behalf of IHQ, gave the go ahead to Hyakutake before IHQ had actually decided to launch an attack on Port Moresby.⁴⁶ The propriety and consequence of this act is often a part of the discussion when Japanese veterans talk about the campaign. In the relationship between higher and lower headquarters in the IJA and the IJN, it was common for the senior command to advise the junior command unofficially of orders that, once the bureaucratic wheel had turned, would later be officially issued. Examples of this can be frequently seen in the *Senshi Soshō*.⁴⁷

It may be Tsuji's apparent overstepping of the mark was no more than a case in point. On 14 July, the day before Tsuji arrived in Rabaul to, without permission, give the go ahead for the Port Moresby operation, Horii issued operational order number 85 to Yokoyama.⁴⁸ This order directed that 166 tons of food and fodder be transported to Kokoda by the end of August. Adding to this the 15-20 days supplies intended to be carried by Yokoyama force itself this represents well over three months food and fodder for the force Yokoyama intended to take to Kokoda.⁴⁹ This appears to be far too large a stockpile in an advanced location exposed to possible enemy attack unless it was already unofficially understood by all that the MO operation would soon commence.

Whether or not Tsuji exceeded his brief, the fourth change in Japanese strategy, especially the end of this phase, is by far the most important to an understanding of the nature of the Kokoda campaign so it must be examined in detail. Some analysis of events

⁴⁶ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 118.

⁴⁷ For instance, Great Army Order no. 596 was sent unofficially from IJAHQ on 28 January 1942 and again officially five days later. Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 116-117.

⁴⁹ On Japanese ration scales for New Guinea one ton of food fed 1600 men for one day. As only 900 men were to go forward to Kokoda in July the 86 tons of food would feed them for at least three months when the food they were carrying is added. Doubtless an amount of ammunition was also to be stockpiled at Kokoda but this is not mentioned in the document.

at Milne Bay and Guadalcanal is also required here. The period of the fourth change ran from 18 July, when Horii was officially informed to proceed, to 16 August, when Horii was probably unofficially informed his march on Port Moresby would be postponed. The official order for postponement arrived on 28 August. This period, whether it was four or six weeks, was the only time the Japanese entertained the idea of a quick dash over the mountains to Port Moresby. The 17th Army order of 18 July to Horii stated “The Nankai detachment will land quickly in the vicinity of Buna, advance rapidly along the Buna-Kokoda road and will capture MO [Port Moresby] and the nearby airfields”.⁵⁰ Australian students of the campaign have focused on this order, assuming it to be the order governing Horii’s actions in the Owen Stanley Range. What has not been properly understood is that the order which replaced it, even while the action of Isurava was underway, and forbade Horii from marching on Port Moresby, is in fact the key to an understanding of Japanese conduct in the campaign. Before examining this latter order it will be useful to examine the reasons the attack on Port Moresby was postponed.

According to Rabaul-based officers in a post war interview, the Port Moresby attack was postponed when surprisingly strong Australian opposition was encountered at Kokoda in the period 8-10 August, known as the second Kokoda engagement.⁵¹ Another Japanese source says the change was prompted by the poorer than expected condition of the track from Giruwa to Kokoda.⁵² It might be thought that the American invasion of Guadalcanal was a more likely cause of postponement but this is not quite right either. What appears to have occurred is that, at the same moment a delay to the MO operation as a result of stronger than expected Australian opposition was being discussed, new intelligence

⁵⁰ AWM 54 423/4/41, Combat Intelligence Centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific Fleet, part 8, item 1167, translation of OKI group [17th army] order ‘A’ no. 10 of 18 June.

⁵¹ This is mentioned both in AWM 54, 423/6/8, questionnaire for Kato, chief of staff 8th Area Army, and others in Rabaul soon after war end, pp. 2-4 and in AWM, 67 11/29, Gavin Long papers, interview with Japanese officers, General Adachi, Lt Colonel Tanaka, Lt Colonel Ota, Lt General Kato and IJN Captain Sanagi, p. 2.

⁵² NLA, mfm 1383 Japanese monograph no. 37, p. 17.

arrived indicating that the American landing at Guadalcanal was more significant than first thought.

When on 7 August 17th Army first learned of an American landing on Guadalcanal and Tulagi, the main force of the Nankai Shitai was about to board their ships in Rabaul. There was an option to delay their departure but it was not taken and it has been thought this suggests the Japanese initial reaction to Guadalcanal was complacent.⁵³ The Japanese did, however, have some grounds, in the first few days after the American landing, for thinking Guadalcanal was either a raid or a small scale operation such that the airfield the Japanese had built there could easily be recaptured when convenient. It should be remembered that the Japanese were convinced the Allied counter offensive would come from Australia via New Guinea. With this predisposition it was reasonable they might consider that Guadalcanal could well be a feint to draw attention away from New Guinea.⁵⁴ Early reconnaissance suggested the American force might be small and that it may only be a raid.⁵⁵ Perhaps the brief raid by a marine raider battalion at Makin Island around this time lent weight to this possibility.⁵⁶

There are several reasons why this interpretation of events is also unsatisfactory. First, Colonel Ichiki Kiyono, who commanded the initial IJA response to the American landing, was told enemy numbers at Guadalcanal were unknown and may be large. If they were, he should not attack but rather take up a position near the airfield and await

⁵³ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 153.

⁵⁴ Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics*, USSBS, p. 174. Interview with Lt Gen Shuichi Miyazaki, Deputy chief of staff of the Imperial general staff, earlier chief of staff, 17th Army, arrived at Rabaul 6/10/42. He stated "When the United States landed in Guadalcanal we didn't know if it was big or small... but even in this area the enemy was able to launch a counteroffensive".

⁵⁵ AWM 54 423/4/41 pt 15, Combat intelligence centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific Fleet, pt 10, p 13. A 17th Army intelligence report of 14 August said that the American landing at Guadalcanal seemed to be unexpectedly small. On 15 August another report stated "it is not known how many of the enemy landed in the Solomon area but since the landing their activity has not been all that vigorous" [and] "the enemy may be withdrawing from Guadalcanal to Tulagi".

⁵⁶ Franks, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 142-143.

reinforcements.⁵⁷ Ichiki did not heed these words of caution and launched an attack. The Ichiki detachment was annihilated on the Tenaru River on 21 August.

The second reason the criticism that the Japanese did not react swiftly to Guadalcanal seems false concerns the failure of the Midway operation. The 5,800 men of the Kawaguchi detachment were to land at Midway but, after the naval defeat there, the detachment had been at Truk.⁵⁸ It was the obvious, indeed the only large reserve available then for the south Pacific. Since July, Kawaguchi had been told his force would be brought forward to Papua for use at Giruwa and Samarai/Milne Bay. However, on 10 August, before Ichiki had even landed on Guadalcanal, Kawaguchi's detachment began to leave Truk bound for Rabaul and Kawaguchi was now advised he would probably land at Guadalcanal. Also on 11 August, Admiral Kondo's 2nd Fleet, with three carriers, was detached from the combined fleet and ordered to cover a major operation in the Solomons.

Within several days of the American landing IHQ had responded by sending its only large IJA reserve in the region and all the carriers immediately available to Guadalcanal. It would seem then that the Japanese did react with celerity and this had consequences for Papua. The day that Kawaguchi received his orders to go south to Guadalcanal must also be the day it was clear to 17th Army that there was now no reserve in the south Pacific, no reinforcement for Papua and no large force available to take Milne Bay on which Horii's attack on Port Moresby depended. Any new army reserve, or any reinforcement for Papua, would have to come from the Philippines or the Dutch East Indies so there had to be a delay of at least several weeks until it could arrive. It is probable then that a discussion arose at 17th Army about postponing the attack on Port Moresby on or before 10 August but within days, perhaps even hours, new intelligence confirmed that Guadalcanal was of far greater importance than had previously been thought.

⁵⁷ Franks, *Guadalcanal*, p. 145.

⁵⁸ Hara, T. *Japanese Destroyer Captain*, Ballantyne, New York, 1961, p. 105.

With the decision to commit Kawaguchi's force, the only available reserve, it was decided to postpone Horii's march on Port Moresby for a month or six weeks.⁵⁹ That even a four or six week delay might be a too optimistic an assessment was underlined by the failure of Kawaguchi's first attempt to land on Guadalcanal. Kondo's 2nd Fleet with the fleet carriers *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku* provided cover for Kawaguchi's landing. They encountered American carriers at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons on 24-25 August 1942 and lost one of Kawaguchi's transports, one light carrier and one destroyer against negligible USN losses. As a result, Kawaguchi's first attempt to land on Guadalcanal was abandoned.

Hyakutake was told by IHQ that Guadalcanal was now his first priority and that Kawaguchi's force must try again to land there. On or before 16 August Horii was probably informed that as a consequence the MO operation would be postponed. On that day, 17th Army decided that shipping was required to deliver 1,000 extra bridge and road maintenance personnel to Papua and that, as a result, one infantry battalion of 41 Regiment would have to be left behind in Rabaul.⁶⁰ This is a good indicator that Hyakutake had decided on a change of plan in Papua. It hardly seems likely, if the 'quick dash to Port Moresby' plan was still in effect, that fighting troops going to Papua would at this moment suddenly be replaced by labouring personnel. Horii, who was himself boarding his ship at Rabaul that day, was presumably aware of this turn of events though he was not officially advised that the MO operation was postponed until twelve days later.⁶¹ By then bad news from Milne Bay and Guadalcanal confirmed the wisdom of the postponement.

The taking of Milne Bay was also deemed a prerequisite for an assault on Port Moresby. Earlier, 17th Army had considered the island of Samarai, near Milne Bay, as a suitable

⁵⁹ NLA, Japanese monograph no. 37, p. 17.

⁶⁰ Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 69. Milner's information came from post war interviews with campaign participants.

⁶¹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 157.

location for an air base and intended to take it with an operation launched by the navy from Giruwa.⁶² From Samarai, air cover could be provided for the Nankai Shitai's attack on Port Moresby. It was also planned that, simultaneous to the arrival of the Nankai Shitai at Port Moresby, one battalion of infantry would be delivered there by sea directly from Milne Bay. This landing was to be made with destroyers fast enough to dash from Milne Bay to Port Moresby overnight thus avoiding air attack from north Queensland.

On 7 August it was discovered the Allies were building an airbase at Milne Bay. The staff of 17th Army were of the opinion that unless this new airfield at Milne Bay was taken, the shipping for the Nankai Shitai across the Coral Sea from Rabaul would be threatened by air attack. Consequently, the plan was changed to capture Milne Bay instead of Samarai and to launch the amphibious operation against Port Moresby from there.⁶³ Then, on the night of 8/9 August, in response to an American landing of as yet unknown strength at Guadalcanal, Vice Admiral Mikawa Gunichi sortied there and sank the Allied cruiser squadron off Savo Island. This decided Rabaul that now was a good time to act regarding Milne Bay as without cruiser cover the USN carriers were unlikely to venture into the Coral Sea.⁶⁴

The Milne Bay attack was promptly launched but by the last few days of August the entire situation appeared much less promising. It was apparent by then, in Rabaul, that the amphibious operation to take Milne Bay had failed, that Ichiki had been defeated on Guadalcanal and that Kawaguchi had failed in his attempt to land his force on Guadalcanal. It seems then that it was a combination of the second engagement at Kokoda, Milne Bay and Guadalcanal that determined Hyakutake to postpone the attack on Port Moresby.

⁶² AWM 54 423/4/41, Combat Intelligence Centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific Fleet , part 8, item 1167, translation of OKI group [17th army] order 'A' no 10 of 18 July.

⁶³ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p 156.

⁶⁴ NLA, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 98, p8. IHQ, as this account by IJN officers states, decided to issue navy staff directive no 115 to go ahead with the MO operations as favourable conditions had arisen at Guadalcanal.

The fifth phase of Japanese strategic thinking regarding the Nankai Shitai began with Horii's new instructions, issued on 28 August, to "advance to the southern slopes of the Owen Stanley Range and destroy the enemy troops there. Use one section of your strength to secure the front but amass your main strength on the north side of the range in preparation for future operations."⁶⁵ It is this document, rather than the earlier injunction to rapidly advance to Port Moresby, that provides the more accurate description of the movements of the Nankai Shitai for the remainder of the Kokoda campaign. Not until late September, when Horii was ordered to retreat, was it altered. In other words, from the end of August to the end of September Horii was instructed to halt well short of Port Moresby *and* to keep the major part of his force north of the Owen Stanley Range.

When Horii received the new order he was in the midst of the action at Isurava. His deployment thereafter shows that he obeyed the new order, leaving all but one battalion of 41 Regiment well in the rear along with the majority, both combat and non combat formations, of the Nankai Shitai. He advanced to the south side of the Owen Stanley Range with his other infantry regiment and supporting units. In so doing, he marched towards Port Moresby with 3000 men, nowhere near enough troops to make an attack on it as the Japanese were aware it contained in excess of 20,000 troops by August.⁶⁶

Presumably it was apparent to Horii, 17th Army and IHQ that unless things improved markedly at Guadalcanal, the Port Moresby operation might not be rescued from its official postponement in late August. Though this is arguable, what is certain is that the MO operation could not be 'on' again at short notice. To call forward the rest of his strength would entail Horii leaving Giruwa ungarrisoned. Even supposing that risk was

⁶⁵ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p.157.

⁶⁶ Japanese information about the Allies in Port Moresby can be found in the following: AWM 55 5/3, intelligence report Oki shudan HQ, no 37, 23/9/42, p 88. "The resident attaché for Chunking in Australia made the following report on the 17th. At Moresby they increased the Australian army by 2500. Two thousand natives are doing trans work in the mountainous region".

AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, no. 32, p. 85.

AWM 55 3/165, extracts from the diary of Lt Morimoto Yoshiyuki.npn.

AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p. 38.

AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, intelligence record no. 32, p. 92.

taken, at least two weeks must elapse before 41 Regiment could have been assembled at the front line in the mountains. Double this time would be needed if a replacement garrison for Giruwa was to be found and transported there. In September nothing was available as all fighting troops were being channelled through Rabaul to Guadalcanal so it seems likely 17th Army did its sums and realised Port Moresby was off for some time to come.

The chief of Army General Staff approved Hyakutake's decision to limit Horii stating; "The offensive against Port Moresby, seen in the light of conditions in the Guadalcanal region of the Pacific, was judged to require adequate preparations and a strengthening of troops numbers... Consequently I must approve the appropriate restriction of the advance of the South Seas force to the south side of the Owen Stanley Range."⁶⁷ IHQ concurred and, on 31 August, decided Guadalcanal was now "the principal operational area" and issued a directive confirming the postponement of the Port Moresby attack.⁶⁸

Thus restricted, Horii did not have permission to attack Port Moresby until so ordered by 17th Army. It is vital to an understanding of the campaign to realise that from the time Horii received these new orders, while he was fighting the action at Isurava, to the end of the campaign, this permission was never given to him. Nor was he permitted to even gather his main force on the south side of the Owen Stanley Range so as to be ready should permission be granted. On the contrary, when he captured Ioribawa on 15 September he was accused of having "gone beyond the strategic line indicated by 17th Army and [of having] dangerously extended [his] supply lines".⁶⁹ This accusation was hot gossip in the Nankai Shitai at the time, where it was widely believed to have caused

⁶⁷ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 157.

⁶⁸ ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 98, p.8, "In view of the situation in Guadalcanal area IHQ on 31 August decided to make Guadalcanal the principal operational area of the south east area and issued IHQ navy staff section directive no 127 ordering postponement of the Port Moresby invasion operation."

⁶⁹ ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 37, p 18.

conflict between Horii and his chief of staff Lt Colonel Tanaka Kengoro.⁷⁰ Japanese historians who have taken a stance against Horii's generalship see his advance as far as Ioribaiwa as the first of a series of missteps on his part that brought the Nankai Shitai undone.⁷¹

While we are concerned with Japanese strategic thinking it is of interest to note that Allied Land Forces Headquarters (LHQ) and SWP HQ have been criticised for failing to realise that the Japanese landing at Giruwa necessarily indicated an attack over the mountains to Port Moresby would soon follow.⁷² MacArthur thought the Japanese might be interested only in the airfield potential of Buna. When on 21 August it was known the Japanese were indeed building an airfield there MacArthur believed they needed to go no further forward than the crest of the Owen Stanley Range to protect their airfield from landward attack.⁷³

We have seen that MacArthur's reading of the situation was not so far wrong. A Japanese decision to attempt an advance on Port Moresby was taken on 18 July and, three weeks later (as the main body of the Nankai Shitai was embarking for Papua) postponement of the Owen Stanley advance was under discussion and an informal decision may even have been made then. Even if it was not, by 28 August the decision was official and Horii was ordered to go no further than the crest of the range and to leave the main body of his fighting troops north of that point.

Phase five of Japanese planning was stated in directive number 127, issued from IHQ to the IJN at the end of August. It confirmed that the MO operation would be suspended on

⁷⁰ AWM 55 6/4, interrogation report no 157. Pte Tanaka Sueyo heard gossip that Horii had been criticised both by officers and men for pushing on in the Owen Stanley Range. It was said that Tanaka and others strongly advised Horii against going further forward and recommended an early retreat back to the coast. Horii ignored all the advice and was blamed for the heavy losses of the Nankai Shitai.

⁷¹ Record of interview with author, Dr. Shindo Hiroyuki of NIDS, 6/3/2005.

⁷² Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 80.

⁷³ Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 70.

attaining the Owen Stanley Range then resumed “after the development of Guadalcanal operations”.⁷⁴ It was now thought this should be by November: “We shall endeavour to capture Port Moresby by the end of November at the latest. After the capture of Guadalcanal, the army, co operating with the navy, will quickly move to the key positions of eastern New Guinea and hasten preparations for the Port Moresby campaign”.⁷⁵ In other words further delay in capturing Port Moresby had been accepted. Hyakutake thought it would be mid November before the advance recommenced.⁷⁶ It all now depended upon clearing up the Guadalcanal problem then redeploying forces from there to Papua.⁷⁷

In mid September, discussion about retaking Milne Bay also disappears from the Japanese record. So, if the advance on Port Moresby was to resume it would now be without a simultaneous landing from the sea originating from Milne Bay – a move that had earlier been seen as indispensable to success at Port Moresby.

An additional consequence of Guadalcanal for the Nankai Shitai came on 1 September when it was decided to withdraw all IJN air assets from Papua to the battle at Guadalcanal. By mid September, when the Tainan Air Group was completely withdrawn from Lae, there were almost no Japanese aircraft based in New Guinea. Apart from a very few small air raids on Port Moresby launched from Rabaul, fighter cover provided

⁷⁴ NLA Japanese monograph no. 98, p. 8. IHQ navy staff section directive no 127.

⁷⁵ AWM 54 423/4/156, SWPA captured documents no. 43, item two. No date is given but it must have been issued in the last few of days of August.

⁷⁶ AWM 54 423/4/130, Allied land forces SWP area, documents captured on Guadalcanal, item 2, 17th Army HQ: “we shall endeavour to complete the capture of PM by the end of November at the latest... in preparation for the Port Moresby operation first the operational group in the Buna area will be strengthened then press the advance towards Port Moresby with all possible haste. A detachment will carry out a landing operation at Rabi [Milne Bay] ...[then] as quickly as possible a powerful detachment with a mechanised unit will carry out an opposed landing in the sector east of Port Moresby. Against Port Moresby a combined land sea and air attack will be prepared and with full strength capture Port Moresby at one blow.”

⁷⁷ Post war American scholars have not followed the lead of their official history which stresses the close relationship between the two campaigns. American writers on Guadalcanal sometimes completely ignore Papua just as Australian writers sometimes ignore Guadalcanal. In Japan military historians see this as an oddity. There, Papua and Guadalcanal are seen as part of one campaign run by one army, the 17th in Rabaul.

for supply convoys to Giruwa and for the evacuation of Milne Bay, and several air drops of supplies late in the campaign, there was no Japanese air activity over Papua until late November.

The most important consequence of the loss of air assets for the Nankai Shitai was that the Japanese air supply plan would not now go ahead. Hyakutake and Inoue had planned to land supplies at Kokoda strip and airdrop supplies in the Owen Stanley Range in much the same way that the Australians were to do. The first message sent after the capture of Kokoda announced to Rabaul that they had “Captured airfield on 29th. Width 50m, length 750m, plenty of room for expansion”.⁷⁸ IJA aircraft had used air drops in China and the Dutch East Indies and had on hand parachutes suitable for dropping food and ammunition from aircraft. There was an air transport squadron in Rabaul trained in such techniques but with the loss of fighter cover over Papua (because air assets were diverted to Guadalcanal) the transports could not be risked.⁷⁹

The second effect of the switch of Japanese air assets to the Solomons was that AAF medium bombers and fighter/bombers were not, except occasionally over the Giruwa anchorage, interrupted in their work up to November 1942. They could, and did, strafe and bomb Japanese troops and supplies at will. Fortunately for the Japanese, as will be seen in another chapter, this was not very effective.

By this fifth phase of strategic influences on the Nankai Shitai, its attack on Port Moresby had been halted and it had lost both its promised reinforcements and its air support with consequences detrimental to its supply plan. A sixth phase began in mid September just as Ioribaiwa ridge, from which the searchlights of Port Moresby can be seen at night, fell to the Japanese. The Australians had fallen back to Imita Ridge but Horii had no intention of attacking them there. When the postponement order was recinded, if that happened, he planned for 144 Regiment to pin the Australians at Imita while 41 Regiment, most of

⁷⁸ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p. 48.

⁷⁹ Japanese transport aircraft, called ‘Topsy’ in Allied nomenclature, did visit Buna several times to pick up air crew after the plan to maintain a fighter group there was abandoned.

which would have to be brought up from the rear, would march around the flank of the Australians and take Port Moresby's airfields via either the Goldie or the Brown Rivers.⁸⁰ A version of this plan was issued on 14 September but two days later all had changed. On 16 September Horii received an order from 17th Army to halt his advance. He would have realised there was now no prospect of an early attack on Port Moresby as the regiment slated for this attack, the 41st, was at the same time ordered to return to the Giruwa base. Again, events at Guadalcanal were the cause. Kawaguchi's detachment had landed successfully on its second attempt but been badly defeated in its attack on Henderson field. This was known at Rabaul on 15 September but was suspected before this. There was quite a gathering of senior army and navy officers at Rabaul occasioned by Kawaguchi's offensive and the mood was not optimistic. Admiral Ugaki wrote in his diary on 13 September that in his view Guadalcanal was already irretrievably lost.⁸¹

Whether or not Hyakutake held the same view as Ugaki, the order he sent to Horii – to send 41 Regiment back to Giruwa - was sent on the evening of 14 September *before* the failure of Kawaguchi's attack was confirmed. It may be that it was sent, not because of Guadalcanal but rather because of an intelligence coup by the Japanese. Unfortunately not much can be known for sure but it rather appears the 17th Army intercepted enemy signals relating to a projected attack north along the Papuan north coast from Milne Bay to Wanigela, Pongani and eventually to Giruwa. It seems Hyakutake feared an allied amphibious landing in Horii's rear which is why 41 Regiment was to rush there to protect it.

One Japanese version of events is that “during the latter part of September intelligence reports stated that a new force of considerable strength seemed to be planning to land

⁸⁰ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 33, p. 22, 14/9/42, from chief of staff to Cmdr 41 Regt, “... while it is still undecided what use will be made of your Tai in the capture of Moresby you will kindly take note of the following as constituting a plan of the operations...”

⁸¹ Ugaki, M. *Fading Victory, the diary of Admiral Ugaki*, Penguin, New York, 1988, p. 215. See also Frank, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 252-253.

somewhere in the east New Guinea area.”⁸² Just what these signals were is unclear but they were said to have emanated from New Caledonia where the USN had a fleet base.⁸³ Throughout the campaign, 17th Army Intelligence monitored Australian broadcasts and received reports, via Tokyo, from the Chinese and Spanish consulates in Australia. If they were aware of Labor leader ‘Billy’ Hughes’ statement of 24 September it can only have encouraged their expectation of a planned Allied landing near Giruwa. Hughes advocated a “flank move on the Japanese supply line... well behind their forward forces in the Owen Stanleys”.⁸⁴

In July General George Kenney, commanding the AAF, had proposed a coastal advance to Giruwa. In August, American engineers at Milne Bay had investigated the possibility of using an old airstrip at Wanigela. MacArthur gave the go ahead for Kenney’s idea in late August and, by 11 September, MacArthur’s plan for an advance up the coast, by air and sea, was ready.⁸⁵ On 25 September Blamey flew to Milne Bay to discuss details of this plan with Major General Cyril Clowes. Somehow along the way the Japanese got wind of this plan. What they got wrong was that it was not a direct landing at Giruwa but rather a more cautious advance along the coast to there. The Japanese were also wrong in thinking it was about to occur. It did not start until 11 October.

Until early September, the betting in Tokyo was that, while they had been wrong in supposing the Allied counteroffensive would come via New Guinea, Guadalcanal *was* the

⁸² NLA Japanese monograph no. 37, p 18.

⁸³ The Japanese official account is that signals intelligence came from New Caledonia from which was surmised the allies were about to make a new move in eastern New Guinea or possibly the Solomons. Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 184.

⁸⁴ Nankai Shitai intelligence reports often make reference to Australian radio broadcasts. See AWM 123 270, Lt-General Sir Sydney Rowell, report on operations, attached documents, newspaper cuttings and intelligence summaries. Advisory war council minute, 24 /9/42, re Daily Telegraph article of 24/9/42.

⁸⁵ Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 92. At the same time the coastal advance was given the go ahead the plan to march overland to Wairopi was rejected. See also Gailey, H. *MacArthur Strikes Back, Decision at Buna, 1942-43*, Presidio, Novato, 2000 pp.110-112 for an American account of the planning of the coastal advance.

counteroffensive and the Allies did not have sufficient resources for more than one.⁸⁶ At some time before 12 September the prevailing opinion was overthrown by the intelligence referred to above and IJN Captain Tomita Yoshinobu, who commanded Giruwa base, was advised he may well have to face an allied amphibious landing. On the night of 13 September he advised Hyakutake that such a landing had occurred.⁸⁷ The following day this was found to be an error. The rumour that the Allies were about to land near Giruwa, probably by sea and also with paratroopers, swept through the Nankai Shitai right up to the front line at Ioribaiwa. One infantryman there entered in his diary on 13 September that “a runner reported that the Americans had landed at Basabua beach. It’s the place we landed”.⁸⁸ Not everyone in the Nankai Shitai was taken in by the rumour, but from mid September it is reasonable to say it was widely expected that the allies might land at Giruwa at any time.⁸⁹

On 16 September, then, the Nankai Shitai was halted at Ioribaiwa and the elements of 41 Regiment not already at Giruwa were returning there. A week later, the seventh of our nine plan changes occurred when Horii was told to withdraw: “The commander of the South Seas Force will assemble his main strength in the Isurava and Kokoda areas and secure these as a base for future offensives. In addition the defences in the Buna area will be strengthened”.⁹⁰ Reinforcements for 17th Army were ordered from the Kwantung Army in Korea, the first time major forces had been taken from operations in Asia to assist those in the south Pacific. The Emperor was advised that, after a new offensive took back Guadalcanal (in November) then “with these reinforcements [from

⁸⁶ Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics*, USSBS, p. 174.

⁸⁷ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 29, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, intelligence record of 15/9/42, p. 88.

⁸⁸ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 14, p. 5.

⁸⁹ There were also Japanese diarists who did not believe the rumor. One joked about the non appearance of the ‘great Australian east coast paratroops’ at Giruwa. See AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 33, file of Yazawa Butai documents, p. 29. See also Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 183.

⁹⁰ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 185.

Guadalcanal] the 17th Army will have the strength to decisively carry out its operational responsibilities in the New Guinea area.”⁹¹

Along with reinforcements, a change in organisation was decided upon in September but was not complete until November. It was to give 17th Army sole responsibility for Guadalcanal, bring into being a new 18th Army for New Guinea and place a new ‘area army’, the 8th, in Rabaul to supervise both of them. This change may reflect command and control difficulties hampering 17th Army, in that it was not capable of adequately conducting two separate campaigns in disparate geographical locations.

A Japanese army more resembled an Australian corps, so the changes in command arrangements can also be seen as a normal measure recognising that Guadalcanal was now the most serious problem confronting the Japanese in late 1942 and that, as a consequence, large reserves must be committed to win it. With a plan to have, in effect, two corps, one each in Papua and Guadalcanal, it was appropriate to place a new army command over them. There were two consequences for Papua following this change. First, of more than 15,000 fighting troops sent to reinforce 17th Army from mid September to the end of October, almost all went to Guadalcanal. The second consequence was a noticeable loss of interest in Papua by those in Rabaul. There is more to say about this but, for now, it is enough to point out that on 10 October Hyakutake, the commander of 17th Army, arrived on Guadalcanal to take over there in line with the new command plan. Until 18 November when 18th Army took over in New Guinea, Hyakutake ran Papua from Guadalcanal, leaving his chief of staff Tanaka to mind the shop in Rabaul.⁹²

Horii liberally interpreted his new orders, the seventh phase of the nine to be discussed. Instead of standing at Isurava as instructed he held a line at Templeton’s Crossing, well

⁹¹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 187-188.

⁹² Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 206-208.

forward of Isurava. Not too much should be made of this. Army commanders give operational commanders broad directives as to whether to advance or withdraw and to what approximate line but understand, or should understand, that tactical factors ought determine precisely where the new position is taken up. The intent of Hyakutake's order was that Horii should hold a blocking position within the Owen Stanley Range from which a future advance might be made. Isurava was too close to the northern edge of the mountains to do this. It was too easy for an enemy in the vicinity of Isurava to find a flanking track into the Japanese rear in the Mambare River valley.

For the month of October, the Nankai Shitai held its blocking position, relinquishing it on the arrival of orders to retire to the Kumusi River. These orders, the eighth change of plan, were issued on 26 October and coincided with the final Australian attack on Horii's Eora creek position.⁹³

This retreat, the beginning of the eighth phase, lasted for two weeks until the total defeat of the Nankai Shitai at Oivi-Gorari in November. During this period there was still an expectation that a victory at Guadalcanal should enable the Nankai Shitai to be reinforced and once again advance into the mountains towards Port Moresby.⁹⁴ Admiral Ugaki had given up hope of winning Guadalcanal in August but this does not seem to have been the prevailing view. Horii was instructed to fall back as far as the Kumusi River. That it was only as far as Kumusi – and not all the way back to the coast – is evidence that the idea of heading south once again had not been abandoned. That occurred two weeks later and marks the ninth phase of Japanese policy on the MO operation. Just as the Nankai Shitai was being soundly beaten at Oivi-Gorari the decision to abandon the MO operation was belatedly taken.

⁹³ NLA, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 37, p. 19 "In view of these factors and the grave situation on Guadalcanal the commander of 17th Army recognised it was necessary to revise the operational mission of the South Seas detachment. He ordered the detachment to withdraw from its present front line and assemble its main force in the Isurava-Kokoda sector. In addition it was to strengthen the defensive position in the Buna sector, the key staging area for future operations".

⁹⁴ At the time a Japanese cause for optimism at Guadalcanal was they wrongly believed they had sunk two USN fleet carriers at the battle of Santa Cruz on the night of 26/27 October. See Frank, *Guadalcanal*, p 490.

Hyakutake's opinion, absorbed as he was by the fighting at Guadalcanal, was conspicuously absent from the vigorous discussion which resulted in the decision to abandon the operation. Tsuji, who had returned to 17th Army as its IHQ liaison officer, told Lt General Hattori Takuhiro on 3 November that Guadalcanal was lost and the main effort should be switched to Papua.⁹⁵ Tsuji's view did not prevail. A stronger current in Rabaul, recommending abandonment of a Port Moresby attack and led by the new 17th Army chief of staff Major General Akisaburo Futami, was more persuasive to IHQ. In response to requests to consider a future course, Colonel Nishimura Susumu of the army ministry in Tokyo, wrote a paper entitled "Is it essential to take Port Moresby?" The thrust of his argument was that shipping demands would be too great to continue with that operation.⁹⁶ By this time, Major Iwakoshi had flown in to Rabaul from IHQ to explain that, in addition to a shortage of shipping, no air reinforcements were forthcoming.⁹⁷ This seems to have brought Tsuji around to, as far as we know, the majority view. A week after he told Hattori that Guadalcanal must be abandoned in favour of Papua he wrote that "as a result [of no new air assets being forthcoming] we hold absolutely no hope for success in the Port Moresby Campaign."⁹⁸

By 15 November the results of what is now known as the first and second battles of Guadalcanal were understood in Rabaul and Tokyo. These naval and air clashes resulted in the defeat of the IJN and the destruction of the major part of the transports containing the army reinforcements from China and supplies for 'starvation island' as the Japanese soldiers now called Guadalcanal. This underlined the decision that had been made. If Guadalcanal was to be persevered with, then nothing could be done at the same time in Papua. This position was formalised on 18 November by orders from Tokyo for the new

⁹⁵ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, p. 534.

⁹⁶ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 199.

⁹⁷ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 199.

⁹⁸ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 199.

8th Area Army that it would do no more in Papua than hold Giruwa base area while prosecuting the offensive on Guadalcanal.⁹⁹ Within weeks, the strategic argument would shift to whether or not Giruwa should be abandoned.

In conclusion, two important points emerge from examining Japanese strategy. First is that Guadalcanal determined Papua, not the other way around. Secondly, the way the former determined the latter was to keep Horii on a short lead. From the time of Isurava permission to march to Port Moresby was withheld. As the Japanese investment in Guadalcanal showed ever increasing losses, so Horii's orders regarding Port Moresby were further limited, as were his reinforcements.

Eventually, as a result of Kawaguchi's defeat, Horii was ordered to withdraw. A point of interest is what did not appear to influence Japanese strategy in Papua. While much is made of Nankai Shitai supply shortages there is no mention of it being so bad as to have any effect on decisionmaking up to November 1942. The retreat from Ioribaiwa, said General Tanaka, had nothing to do with supply and was seen as hopefully a temporary measure.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, the ever rising strength of allied troops in Port Moresby seemed not, after August, to be an item of concern. It was thought in Rabaul that there were about 5,000 Australians and Americans in Port Moresby in May and June rising to 10,000 in August and 20,000 in September-October.¹⁰¹ These were underestimates but were still far too many for the portion of the Nankai Shitai on the south side of the range to handle.

Major Horie Masao has studied the Kokoda campaign and argued that 17th Army was aware postponing the Port Moresby attack might well be followed by its abandonment. If so, then a small force in the vicinity of Ioribaiwa became a strategic asset by posing a

⁹⁹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁰ AWM MSS 701, item 2, questions addressed to General Kengoro Tanaka, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p 68.

threat to Port Moresby.¹⁰² The threat was that, at any time, the Japanese force in the mountains might be reinforced and advance on Port Moresby so the Allies had to keep a large force there to defend it. It was an economical use of Japanese troops, given that they were already in Papua and could not easily be moved, and because Port Moresby was so valuable to the allies a very large force must be kept in defence, large enough to guarantee that it would not fall. By mid September, after the Nankai Shitai's victory at Ioribawa, There were 2000 Japanese combat troops in the mountains forward of Menari posing a notional threat to the 25,000 men, soon to rise to 35,000, in Port Moresby defending against this threat and not available for operations elsewhere. Of course, not all these men had to be there to ensure the safety of Port Moresby but this numerical imbalance demonstrated that, far from marching into a strategic dead end, a relatively small Japanese force in the mountains overlooking Port Moresby was rendering a valuable service by keeping a far larger Allied force in place. MacArthur recognised the problem. He insisted that the coastal advance could only go ahead when he was sure there were enough troops in Port Moresby to ensure its safety.¹⁰³ Seen in this light the advance towards Port Moresby became, not entirely by design, a strategic feint to draw Allied attention and resources from the decisive battle being fought at Guadalcanal.

¹⁰² Major Horie Masao, record of interview with author, 24/3/2005. Major Horie served in New Guinea in 1943-1945 on the staff of General Adachi.

¹⁰³ Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 92.

CHAPTER THREE.

JAPANESE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN PAPUA.

CHAPTER 3 - JAPANESE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN PAPUA

It has been argued that Japanese military Intelligence regarding Papua and the overland route to Port Moresby was poor.¹ This chapter will, confining the investigation to intelligence gathered before the campaign, examine this belief to determine what the Japanese did know about the Giruwa to Port Moresby via Kokoda route and how they knew it.

The prevailing opinion that, when they began the campaign, the Japanese knew little about their proposed theatre of operations in Papua may not have been widely held at the time. There was some speculation in Australia as to what the Japanese knew and how they had learned it, but in 1942 no definite position emerged as to whether the Japanese were well informed or otherwise before they entered Papua.

As far as Raymond Paull's book *Retreat from Kokoda* and McCarthy's volume *South-west Pacific area-first year* can stand for the opinion in Australia in the 1950s, Japanese intelligence concerning the Kokoda track was still not an item of interest as nothing much is proffered either way in these works.² Keogh's 1965 *South West Pacific 1941-45* similarly has little to say on the topic but around the same time another less academic volume, *Knights of Kokoda*, introduced the idea that "The Japanese knew even less about the geography of the Kokoda trail [than did the Australians]".³ *Knights of Kokoda* does seem to be the first post war work which expressed a view that has since gained acceptance.

¹ A typical example would be Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 99.

² McCarthy in *South-West Pacific Area-first year*, does make one general comment to the effect that the Japanese did not know very much about New Guinea, p. 144.

³ Scott, *Knights of Kokoda*, p. 18. Keogh, Colonel E. *South west Pacific, 1914-1945*, Grayflower, Melbourne, 1965.

The Australian state and Commonwealth Investigation Branches (CIB) had noted Japanese interest in Australia, New Guinea, Timor and the Netherland East Indies since the 1920s. Suspicious vessels, it was said, with no commercial purpose, were lurking in Australian and New Guinea waterways, measuring the depth of water, coming ashore and purchasing maps and charts.

The impression of the Directorate of Naval Intelligence (DNI) at the time was this was all inflated and of no significance. They were probably correct for not until 1931 did Japan embark upon a comprehensive and expensive program of intelligence gathering.⁴ That year the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), in conjunction with the IJA and the IJN, began an intelligence operation in what they called the 'southern area' which was bounded by the equator in the north, India in the west, Australia in the south and Hawaii in the east.⁵

At this time New Guinea was not of prime interest compared to more immediate and obvious targets on which work was done much earlier. The first IJA report on Guam was completed in 1932, but none was produced on eastern New Guinea until March of 1941. One part of the MFA's intelligence gathering operation involved interviewing Japanese citizens who had previously lived in Australia and elsewhere in the south Pacific. They were questioned in Tokyo at IJNHQ.⁶ In the southern area, the IJN and IJA sent officers on information gathering missions, often in the guise of employees of research and business enterprises established or subsidised by the MFA.

Espionage was conducted in Dutch New Guinea under the cover of botanical research and we shall see later a case where it appears also to have occurred in British New

⁴ Mathews M. *Shadows Dancing, Japanese Espionage against the West, 1939-1945*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 44.

⁵ See ch. 2 of Mathews, *Shadows Dancing*, for a general account of the pre war Japanese intelligence gathering operation in the southern area.

⁶ Cook. H and T, *Japan at War. An Oral History*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 55.

Guinea, as the Japanese named the eastern half of the island.⁷ By the mid thirties in Timor and in the Netherlands East Indies there were forty Japanese companies with more than one thousand Japanese citizens working in them.⁸ An air service, often employing pilots of the IJN, maintained a link from the region to Japan. In Rabaul and at Guadalcanal, resident Japanese were known to have passed on intelligence to their homeland.⁹

In the late 1930s a change of attitude can be observed in Australian intelligence organisations. That, in 1937, the *Caroline Maru* had visited eastern New Guinea five times for no obvious commercial reason was now enough to make the DNI and the CIB sit up and take notice. In 1938 the Defence Department notified the Prime Minister's Department that the Japanese were taking a keen interest in the Australian mandate of New Guinea. "A recent report states that a Japanese naval officer travelled to Rabaul in a Japanese vessel as a passenger but landed dressed as a member of the crew and whilst on shore carried out reconnaissance."¹⁰

A later report, speaking of this period, noted that "prior to the war the Japanese had organised, along the lines of the general pattern elsewhere, a number of agents and spies throughout Australia. The consulate must have passed back a vast amount of information... and numerous special agents were sent to Australia to obtain information. One of these, a major in the army, made a complete tour of the country, noting down all the information of value to Japan. Others arrived in the guise of 'trade missions' etc and contacted local Japanese in the various states."¹¹

⁷ Mathews, *Shadows Dancing*, p. 47.

⁸ NAA A 981/4, Jap 18, 5 pt. 1 and p. 13.

⁹ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 153-154.

¹⁰ AWM 54 423/6/1, Japanese preparations for war and plans for Australia, p. 11.

¹¹ AWM 54 423/6/1, Japanese preparations for war and plans for Australia, p. 220. This paper seems to have been written in 1944.

In Papua there was an Australian effort to keep Japanese influence to a minimum. By 1940 there were, officially at least, no Japanese at all living there and the only Japanese company operating there was the Nanyo Kokatsu Kaisha.¹² This company had Japanese government contracts for the construction of piers, oil tanks and defensive works at Palau and also operated in Dutch New Guinea. It maintained air links to Japan and also employed pilots on secondment from the IJN.

An Australian report of 27 February 1941 on Japanese activities in New Guinea confirmed that the company was working with the MFA and was strongly suspected of intelligence activities on behalf of the IJN. The report concluded that “there is also evidence that the Japanese are [now] giving attention to the whole island of New Guinea”.¹³ The Netherlands government was sufficiently concerned about spies within the Nanyo Kokatsu that it seized company records and informed Harold Walsh, the British consul general in Batavia, that a Japanese document claimed the work being done around Palau was for a “future southward march to New Guinea”.¹⁴

Japanese trade with New Guinea was stepped up and the rapid rise of Japanese imports, mainly into Port Moresby in 1940-41, can be observed in data which appeared in the Papua New Guinea annual report of 1940-41.¹⁵ The Japanese ‘trade offensive’ in turn provided more opportunities for intelligence gathering.¹⁶

Major Toyofuku Tetsuo of the IJA, who wrote the army’s intelligence report on Papua, was one of several IJA officers who took the opportunity to visit Port Moresby, in March 1941. Toyofuku’s visit is the earliest date we have for a specific Japanese interest in the

¹² Commonwealth of Australia, *Territory of Papua Annual Report, 1940-1941*, the Government printer for the state of Victoria, 1941, p. 30.

¹³ NAA A 518/1, FI 112/1, Japanese activities in New Guinea, p. 3.

¹⁴ NAA A 518/1, FI 112/1, Japanese activities in New Guinea, p. 3.

¹⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Territory of Papua Annual Report, 1940-41*, p. 31.

¹⁶ For a general account of the Japanese trade offensive see Chamberlain, W, *Japan over Asia*, Duckworth, London, 1938, Chapter eight.

Kokoda track. He was later the senior intelligence officer of the Nankai Shitai and was wounded at Isurava. In Rabaul he told Captain Kanemoto of 17th Army that “When I disguised myself as a second-class pilot of a freighter which anchored in Port Moresby, I definitely saw a road stretching north. But the road does not lead to Giruwa and Buna over the Owen-Stanley range.”¹⁷

Toyofuku’s report on British New Guinea, compiled after his trip there, accurately provides the length and location of all motorable roads in Papua.¹⁸ Of the roads, about Port Moresby, Milne Bay and Giruwa, Toyufuku wrote: “It is recognised that these roads only connect the villages in the vicinity of the coast.”¹⁹ Possibly in response to this report in December 1941, General Adachi, while writing a paper about a possible advance from Salamaua to Buna, requested more information about the state of routes over the Owen Stanleys.²⁰

Naturally, the senior officers of the Nankai Shitai were familiar with Toyofuku’s and Adachi’s reports. Captain Kanemoto, when he returned from a reconnaissance flight along the Kokoda track in June 1942, was questioned by Horii. Kanemoto wrote that “The commander did not think that motorable roads were running over the Stanley range at an altitude of 3,000 metres. He only wanted to know how far inland automobiles could go.”²¹

¹⁷ Kanemoto, R. *Nyuginia senki, Taiheiyō Senki (Account of the New Guinea campaign, Pacific War)*, Kawade Shobo, Tokyo, 1968, p. 92.

¹⁸ AWM 54 423/4/41, pt 15, Combat intelligence centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific Fleet, report compiled by Major Tetsuo Toyufuku in March 1941, “Military data on British owned New Guinea”, captured Jan/Feb 1943. The report refers to another titled “Military report on British owned New Guinea”. This was published by the IJA General Staff in September 1940. The report writer also held a copy of volume two of the New Guinea sailing directory and adapted Kreigsmarine charts numbered 854, 857, 859 and 878.

¹⁹ AWM 54 423/4/41, Combat Intelligence Centre, South Pacific Force of the United States Pacific Fleet, translations of captured Japanese documents, pt. 15, item 539, p. 19.

²⁰ AWM 55/3/6/817, item 7, General Adachi’s report, 29/12/41.

²¹ Kanemoto, *Nyuginia senki, Taiheiyō Senki (Account of the New Guinea campaign, Pacific War)*, p. 97.

The supposed Japanese belief that there was a motorable road over the mountains has been used to illustrate their lack of intelligence preparation. It is possible to find a few comments like the following one in Japanese diaries: “It is thought there is a poor motor road between Kokoda and Port Moresby”.²² This represents ignorance on the part of smaller cogs in the military wheel. The senior officers had access to formal military intelligence reports, written over a year earlier, which apprised them of the truth. In fact the term ‘road’ means nothing, documents on both sides freely use the words road, track or trail interchangeably and on both sides there can be found a few people who at some point really thought there was a motorable road over the Owen Stanley Range.²³

Pre campaign Allied signals and reports display the same lack of knowledge about the track that appears in low level Japanese diaries and official documents. This is surprising given that the Australians had sent a number of ANGAU and PIB parties across the mountains from February 1942. Moreover, old New Guinea hands such as Bert Keinzle, Lester Lock and Harold Jesser had all walked the track. Lock had lived at Efogi and Keinzle lived at Kokoda. The track was also used by the police and the mail service since 1904.²⁴

We have seen that Major Toyofuku was not the only Japanese investigating eastern New Guinea by sea. The trading vessels *Caroline Maru* (with the president of the Nanyo Boyeki Kaisha aboard on one trip) and *Takachiho Maru* also frequently visited in the period 1938 to 1941.²⁵ On another visit by the same vessel three English speaking Japanese, (named only as Kobayashi O, Iida H, and Yashi, N) visited Salamaua. They traveled inland to the goldfields in the Wau-Bulolo area. They hired an aircraft, took

²² AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, file of Yazawa Butai orders, p. 63.

²³ A Japanese example is in AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p. 48 and p. 63. An Allied example is AWM 54 577/6/4, 7 Australian Division messages and signals dealing with Maroubra Force operations, Kokoda, June to October 1942, signals of 1/7/42 and 25/6/42 to HQNGF from LHQ, Melbourne.

²⁴ See Prof. Hank Nelson’s article at <http://niusleta.kokodatreks.com/documents/KokodaTrackorTrail.doc>.

²⁵ NAA A 816/1, 19/304/188, Japanese interests in Papua and New Guinea and Japanese citizens resident in Australian New Guinea in 1939.

photos from the air of the Wau airstrip and wanted to buy maps though whether they managed to do so was not recorded.²⁶ They were also observed taking grass samples. This was a standard procedure that had been used in China to see if suitable local forage was available for the largely horse-reliant Japanese army.²⁷

On the same trip the three Japanese visited Rabaul, making an excursion to Nordup beach which was used as a landing point for 2/144 Battalion in January 1942. Afterwards they sailed along the coast from Salamaua to Milne Bay recording information on the depth of water at suitable anchorages and checking the location of coral reefs against their charts. It is not known if they visited the Basabua anchorage, later used for the Nankai Shitai landing. If not on this cruise then on some other prewar investigation was recorded the information that appeared on Japanese maps of the coast from Salamaua to Milne Bay. On a 17th Army map made a month before the Milne Bay landing there is a note that at night it is difficult to see the islands in Milne Bay from the east. One of the islands was reported to “be discernable from seven kilometres east.”²⁸ On another map Basabua was noted as a suitable anchorage.²⁹ It was also recorded on the map that there was an Australian wireless station nearby at Buna.

In September 1940, the IJN’s report on ‘British owned New Guinea’ was produced by the IJN general staff.³⁰ Being more interested in hydrographic matters, the IJN had obtained Kriegsmarine charts which had their origins in old Imperial German Navy charts. An Australian naval officer who had seen the charts judged that they were better than the

²⁶ NAA A 816/1, 19/304/188, Japanese interests in Papua and New Guinea and Japanese citizens resident in Australian New Guinea in 1939.

²⁷ Record of interview with author, Capt. Nakamura Kokichi, 66 Infantry Regiment veteran, Tokyo, 6/3/04.

²⁸ AWM 54 423/4/130, Allied land forces SWP area, documents captured on Guadalcanal, item 2. This 17th Army map of Milne Bay was captured on 31/8/42 but was printed before the landing.

²⁹ NAA A 816/1,19/304/188, Japanese interests in Papua and New Guinea and Japanese citizens resident in Australian New Guinea in 1939.

³⁰ AWM 54 423/4/41, Combat intelligence centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific Fleet, pt. 15, report compiled by Major Tetsuo Toyufuku in March 1941, “Military data on British owned New Guinea”,

Royal Navy (RN) charts used by the RAN.³¹ The IJA also had RN charts but seemed to have preferred the Kriegsmarine ones.³² These hydrographic charts, in German with Japanese additions, were used by the Japanese to land at Lae, Salamaua and Basabua.³³ While the Port Moresby chart is a comprehensive piece of work the others lacked many details. In an effort to improve the charts in January of 1941 there was an IJN intelligence gathering trip made along the coast of New Guinea from Lae to Milne Bay. A Japanese naval officer travelled incognito on this vessel. He wrote that he “was in a position to see many small islands which I could not have visited in a warship [and] it was by this means I was able to survey the work of my compatriots”.³⁴

Also in September 1940, the IJA set up the Taiwan Army Research Station. It was as a coordinating body for its southern area intelligence activities. In six months the task was to assemble intelligence in the area from Malaya through New Guinea to the Solomons. Colonel Tsuji Masanobu, who ran the station, also supervised studies into the medical difficulties of tropical warfare. He later served as IHQ liaison to 17th Army and was wounded while landing at Basabua anchorage.

Apart from Kriegsmarine charts, another German source of intelligence for the Japanese about New Guinea opened up with the success of the Nazi Party in the German elections of 1933. While Germany had not had a colony in New Guinea since 1914 there were still many Germans living there. A large proportion of these were involved in the Lutheran Church and were thought to wield a great deal of influence over the New Guineans, an item of concern to the Australian CIB. The CIB had also noted Germans taking aerial

³¹ AWM 54 423/4/41, Combat intelligence centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific Fleet, pt. 15.

³² Admiralty commissioned charts were however used by the IJA at Guadalcanal. See Franks, *Guadalcanal* p. 339, footnote no. 2.

³³ Basabua was the first landing site of the Japanese but they soon shifted landings to close to Giruwa where the village of Sanananda now stands.

³⁴ NAA A981, Jap 31, p. 12.

photographs of British New Guinea and were aware that German maps of the area were supplied to the Japanese.³⁵

The contacts between Japanese sailors and German citizens in the region were also noted with concern by the CIB. It was later discovered that the Nankai Shitai brought German speaking officers to Rabaul, presumably to work with the likes of Peter Matthies. Matthies, a half German and half New Guinean, who was not taken to Australia in the roundup of German citizens at the start of the European war. The CIB thought Matthies to be a part of an extensive network of German and Chinese spies in Rabaul. It is known that he helped the Japanese to recruit labourers in Rabaul for the Port Moresby operation though he may not have gone along to Papua with them.³⁶

It would be fair to conclude from what has been examined so far that, to January 1942, the Japanese intelligence effort regarding an overland route to Port Moresby was uneven though not unimportant. The north coast had been investigated for suitable landing sites and Basabua noted as one of these. Port Moresby had been visited several times by incognito military officers. Maps had been obtained in Australia and Port Moresby. There is no record of the Japanese having a source of intelligence within Papua as they did in the Dutch East Indies, Timor, Rabaul and the Solomons, or that the Kokoda track was ever examined on foot.

In late January 1942 the intelligence effort stepped up as a result of orders from IHQ to Nankai Shitai and 4th Fleet that, after taking Rabaul, they should examine possible land invasion routes to Port Moresby. As has been explained in the strategy chapter, the preferred route was through Kokoda. A series of studies of eastern Papua was ordered. Sources of food, the rainfall, roads and bridges were among the topics to be examined and the results were impressive in their details. In March 1942, a summary of intelligence

³⁵ AWM 55 16/2, inventory no. 2, maps, and AWM 54 883/4/12, pro German activity in east New Guinea, p. 8.

³⁶ AWM 54 883/4/12, a brief outline of the work of German missionaries, evidence of pro-German and pro-Nazi activities, p.8 and p. 15 and AWM 54 423/9/27, file of correspondence in connection with the Japanese occupation of Dutch and Australian New Guinea, p. 10.

gathered about eastern New Guinea advised that “on an average two pigs are raised by each family in a village... they are small and thin, average weight 30kg... wild pigs are found all over the mountains but it is difficult to catch them.”³⁷ The summary also provided information on local fruit and vegetables, an estimate of the numbers of eggs that might be found in a village and the types of fish in the streams.³⁸

The topic of maps is especially relevant here as the maps collected by the Japanese since the late 1930s had now to be re-examined and printed for the new campaign. Captain Geoffrey Vernon, the well known New Guinea identity and doctor to Maroubra Force, asked himself in his diary during the campaign where the Japanese had obtained their maps. “From Kagi towards Kokoda there are many tracks. I know of three which cross the range at different places. Enemy captured maps show at least four. Where their information comes from is a mystery”.³⁹ Part of the answer to Dr Vernon’s question is most probably that New Guinea maps used by the Japanese were purchased in Australia.

It was noted by the RAN and the CIB that - in the two years prior to the outbreak of war - a few Japanese residents and visitors, of whom there were about 3000 in Australia at this time, were purchasing maps of New Guinea in Sydney.⁴⁰ Apart from commercial but very general 1:300,000 maps of the Territory of Papua which could be purchased in Australia the only detailed maps of eastern New Guinea in the late 1930s and early 1940s were those made by explorers and patrol officers. A number were obtained by the Japanese.

³⁷ AWM 55 5/14, enemy publications, Japanese summary of provisions available in Papua, March 1942. p. 6.

³⁸ AWM 55 5/14, enemy publications, no. 162, rainfall charts, pp. 4-5.

³⁹ AWM 54 253/5/8, pt 1, Captain G.H.Vernon, war diary, July-November 1942 see typed notes in the back of the diary.

⁴⁰ See NAA C443/P1, item J 423, regarding Japanese citizens purchasing maps of New Guinea in Sydney.

In June 1942 Prince Takeda of the IHQ staff gave “an English explorer’s map” to 17th Army staff prior to their leaving Japan to go to Rabaul.⁴¹ As the Japanese frequently referred to Australians as British or English the name signifies little and it is more than likely Prince Takeda’s map was one by the explorers Ernest Chinnery, Cyril Jackson or Wilfred Beaver. These three had mapped parts of British New Guinea in the period from 1913 to 1930.

The Chinnery, Jackson and Beaver maps were available in Australia in a number of archives including the Parliamentary Library, the NSW State Archives and private collections. They frequently appeared in the Papuan Annual Report which could be obtained in Australian state public libraries. Copies of the maps the Japanese probably used can now be seen in the National Library of Australia map room. Two of Jackson’s maps appearing in the 1916-1917 Papuan Annual Report show useful detail of the routes from Buna via Kokoda to Port Moresby.⁴²

An unusual feature that appears on both IJA 41 Regiment’s maps and one of Chinnery’s maps is the line of a track from the Kumusi River to Ioma. The Japanese map is marked ‘August’ but no year is mentioned. All tracks on the map are marked in meandering fashion except this one which is a straight line. It is also in the wrong place. A feature of Chinnery’s map of the same area is just the same straight line, with the same wrong location, in among other more precisely located tracks - as if Chinnery had been told of this track but had not been there himself.⁴³ A note on what may be the Japanese version

⁴¹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 110.

⁴² A good example of the useful information and maps contained in the Papuan annual report is that of 1913-1914. There is a map of the Central and Kumusi divisions by W. Beaver and E. Chinnery in appendix 3 between pages 160 and 161. It shows rivers, villages and tribes but no tracks. After page 189 in appendix 12 there is a sketch map of a patrol route from Kokoda to the Vetapu valley by C. Jackson. It shows mountains and tracks in particular the ‘Buna road’ and the ‘Port Moresby Road.’ The 1916-1917 volume also has photographs of the terrain in the Kokoda region and on p. 76 a map showing alternate routes to Port Moresby from the north.

⁴³ The Chinnery collection map no 37 in the NAA map room collection closely resembles a few features of a map in Yazawa Regiment map file map p. 32. From the ANL map room a good idea can be obtained of the maps available before 1942. It contains New Guinea maps from the Queensland surveyors office, the Port Moresby land office, HEC Robinson Pty Ltd, a Reichsmarine map and German hydrographic charts of

of the Chinnery map states that this track did not appear to be there as aerial reconnaissance had failed to locate it.

The question of whether or not Japanese maps were of acceptable quality is central to an assessment of the quality of Japanese intelligence of the Kokoda route prior to the campaign. The problem, though, is that while it can be seen what maps were easily obtainable by the Japanese in Australia it is not possible to prove that all that was available was used.

It might just be coincidence that the 41 Regiment map and the Chinnery map closely resemble one another in the Ioma track detail but we can be reasonably sure of three things. A comparison of maps made by the Japanese prior to their landing in Papua and those that can be seen in the Chinnery collection will show striking similarities. Second, that the Japanese must have made much use of Australian explorers' maps if only because, apart from a few Dutch maps, there were no other sources of detailed maps of the mountains of Papua. Third, that maps of the crossings of the Owen Stanley Range, from whatever source, were being produced in large numbers by 17th Army Survey Section in Rabaul as early as May 1942.

Japanese intelligence gatherers in Australia were also interested in books. Just before the Pacific war began a bookshop owner in Canberra supplied to the CIB a list of books purchased or requested by a Japanese.⁴⁴ There is no way of knowing if this was a perfectly innocent purchase or not. However one book, that was definitely used by 17th Army cartographers, was an account of several months spent in the Eora Creek-Kokoda-Buna area by Evelyn Cheesman entitled *Two Roads of Papua*.⁴⁵ A Japanese map of the Kokoda-Buna area lists Cheesman's account as its source of details. Cheesman was an

1908, see G 8161.P6.1913. In the Chinnery collection the relevant maps are numbers 12, 16, 22, 24, 34 and 37. Map 18 shows the principal areas where different types of food were grown. It is also interesting to note that the Japanese maps use Chinnery's name for Nauro. He called it Wamai.

⁴⁴ NAA A981/1, item Jap 101, pt. 3.

⁴⁵ Cheesman, L. E, *Two roads of Papua*, Jarrolds, London, 1935.

entymologist who had spent many years in the south Pacific. She desired to use her detailed knowledge of New Guinea to aid the Allied war effort. Among other endeavours she gave lectures on New Guinea in London in early 1943.⁴⁶

Evelyn Cheesman probably never realised she was of even greater help to her enemies. Over half of Cheesman's book concerns her several months based at Kokoda in 1933. During this time she took two trips along the Kokoda track to just north of Templeton's Crossing. She also made two trips to Buna. She confirmed that "the road crosses Papua from coast to coast, starting at Port Moresby, passing through Kokoda and finishing at Buna."⁴⁷ She stated that there are airfields at Yodda and Kokoda. Her sentence "roads are unusually good about Kokoda compared with some parts of the territory." is repeated word for word on the Japanese map.⁴⁸

The trip from Kokoda to Buna, 68 miles according to Cheesman, was described in daily stages and she also mentioned that ships call fortnightly at Buna anchorage.⁴⁹ Wairopi was identified as a particularly fertile area with renowned taro gardens and sweet potato was said to be plentiful around Kokoda.⁵⁰ This would have been of special interest to the Japanese who planned to live off the land as much as possible. Cheesman also described the locations of government administration, patrol officers and armed police.⁵¹ She complained that decent maps of Papua were unobtainable in London and her own were purchased in the land office in Port Moresby - another place that Japanese sailors, including Major Toyufuku, had visited to obtain maps.⁵²

⁴⁶ Cheesman, L. E, New Guinea, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. CI no. 3, Mar 1943, The Royal Geographical Society.

⁴⁷ Cheesman, *Two roads of Papua*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Cheesman, *Two roads of Papua*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ Cheesman, *Two roads of Papua*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ Cheesman, *Two roads of Papua*, p. 100.

⁵¹ Cheesman, *Two roads of Papua*, p. 55. Here Cheesman records that, while she was in Papua, Japanese fishermen were reported to be taking soundings along the coast.

⁵² Cheesman, *Two roads of Papua*, p. 55 and p. 30.

Cheesman's contribution to Japanese knowledge of the landward approaches to Port Moresby pales before that of Josef Anton Hofstetter who provided the Japanese with a great deal of information derived from personal experience. On 2 February 1942 preliminary orders for an invasion of Port Moresby were issued by IHQ.⁵³ A consequence of this order was an instruction to interview all locals with knowledge of the region. None proved to be of more value than Hofstetter. His name, as the sole source of information, appears on half a dozen different Japanese maps of the Wau-Buna-Kokoda-Port Moresby area and the information he provided reveals his extensive knowledge of the region gained as a result of twenty years living in Papua.

Hofstetter was a Swiss, a national of a neutral country, so he had escaped the Australian roundup of Germans in New Guinea though for reasons not explained another Swiss, Emil Glaus, was deported from New Guinea in 1940 or 1941. Hofstetter's family was originally from Bavaria. Hofstetter was born in St Gallen, Switzerland on 10 April 1895. Nothing of him is known from then until he came to Australia in 1914 and told customs officials he had just spent a year in Fiji. He worked his way north from Sydney to the Torres Strait islands, changing jobs frequently as his alien registration forms attest. While in far north Queensland in October 1918 he volunteered to join the AIF.⁵⁴ He was rejected on medical grounds. In the early twenties he went to New Guinea where at various times he worked at Port Moresby, Yodda, the Waria River, Wau and Bulolo.⁵⁵

He was working on the Bulolo Gold Dredging Company dredge when, in January 1942 the call came for all able bodied men to either enlist in the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles or be sent south to Australia. According to the men he worked with, Hofstetter went bush instead and, in March, when the Japanese landed in Lae, he joined them. What he did in

⁵³ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ NAA AI 1921/21091, Joseph Anthony Hofstetter, naturalisation papers.

⁵⁵ Telephone interviews with author, Tom Lega and Carlo Cavalieri, 22 August 2006-20 November 2006. Both men knew and worked with Hofstetter. Apart from Lega and Cavalieri there is no other evidence that Hofstetter ever actually visited Buna but it is hard to see how Hofstetter can have given the details of the Buna area which are credited to him on Japanese maps, if he had not been there.

the interim is unknown. Carlo Cavalieri, another Swiss who worked with Hofstetter, at Bulolo, believed Hofstetter had some connection with Hans Schmidt Burgk, the NSDAP (Nazi) party leader in the Wau-Bulolo area.⁵⁶

ANGAU became interested in Hofstetter as he was, by early 1943, known to be helping the Japanese make maps and advising them of routes of advance. A scribbled note in Gavin Long's papers for the Australian official history stated that Hofstetter was thought to be the white man observed leading the Japanese advance on Wau in February 1943.⁵⁷

Those who knew him told ANGAU that Hofstetter's knowledge of the mining areas of the eastern coast of New Guinea was second to none. One of these, John Murphy, said "he knows the Waria [River] backwards".⁵⁸ Connecting recent descriptions of those who knew Hofstetter with NGF wartime intelligence records there can be little doubt he was indeed the man who aided the Japanese attack on Mubo and Lae. What has not been known until now is his connection with the earlier Kokoda campaign.

Tom Lega and Carlo Cavalieri, who worked with Hofstetter in the Bulolo Gold Dredging Company, stated that Hofstetter had worked for a period in the Yodda goldfield in the late thirties.⁵⁹ To get to Yodda he would have either come by sea to Buna then up the

⁵⁶ There are no records, among those kept in Australia of German activities in New Guinea, of Hofstetter's connection with Hans Schmidt Burgk, the NSDAP party leader in the Wau-Bulolo area in 1936. In Queensland the CIB also investigated Karl Reber, a German-Swiss who ran a German newspaper in the twenties. He was described by the CIB as "thoroughly disloyal" in 1923, See NAA C 1822/16, pt. 1. No person named Hofstetter is named in the investigation. See also AWM 54 13/5/5, COIC, appreciation of 26/3/42, Japanese activities in relation to the goldfields of New Guinea in conjunction with attempted occupation of Port Moresby, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁷ AWM 67 10/59, Gavin Long papers. There is a loose note scribbled by Long saying only this: "We must be sure it was Joseph Hoffstetter. Does territories know? Supposed to have worked with the Japs in Salamaua in 1942, see p. 64". The mention of the white man working with the Japanese during the Wau campaign is on p. 63 (not 64) of McCarthy's *South-west Pacific area- first year*.

⁵⁸ AWM 54 587/7/20, report on the Japanese attack on Mubo, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹ Tom Lega, in a telephone interview with the author, said he worked with Hofstetter on the dredge crew at Bulolo Gold Dredging Ltd. The description he gave of Hofstetter's appearance corresponds to that of official documents (interview Nov 20, 2006). Lega's account is that, on 22 January 1942, the call came for all to gather at Wau either to join NGVR or leave for Port Moresby. Hofstetter instead disappeared and was

track to Yodda or come by air and landed at Kokoda.⁶⁰ His connection with the Kokoda campaign is provided by notes on Japanese maps, which often mention the source of information. He is sometimes named, though it is misspelled Hoffstetter, and at other times referred to as “the Swiss informant” or “the Swiss miner... [who] until last year had been a gold miner at Wau and Bulolo for about six years.”⁶¹

On another map it states “According to the statement of a Swiss in summarising the Mambare-Kokoda trail you can reach X [Moresby] by following the bank of the river from the river mouth by way of Tomoyaropa [Wiaropi], Kokoda, crossing a 2200m mountain SE of Mt. Service though the line is being patrolled. Then going downstream to the Laloki river.” The Kokoda track is described, incorrectly, as having been constructed about four years previously when establishing the Yodda gold mines. “It is 4 or 5 foot wide and can be travelled in 8 to 10 days”. The date the map was printed was 2 July 1942.⁶² One of the marginal notes on another Japanese Kokoda track map made on 13 July 1942 stated that “Since this road is a reconstructed native path the journey from Kokoda to Moresby by horse would take 8-10 days.”⁶³

There is no mention that this piece of information concerning horses on the track came from Hofstetter but is of interest nonetheless. Those who know the track doubt that the Japanese could have taken pack horses along it but in fact they did. In the 1930s, horses were able to navigate the track from the north at least as far as Efogi and it appears this was known to the Japanese. The remains of horses brought by the Japanese were found at

said to have gone to Lae. Carlo Cavalieri, a Swiss from Wau who joined the NGVR, also remembers Hofstetter and confirmed Lega’s account in a series of telephone interviews.

⁶⁰ Professor Hank Nelson of ANU (interview and email 17/8/06) has said that the miners flying through from/to Port Moresby from/to Yodda/Wau often took time off to look around at Kokoda for a day or so. This may be how Hofstetter came to know something of the area.

⁶¹ The maps with Hofstetter’s name on them are at AWM 54 423/4/106, pt. 2, folio of maps.

⁶² AWM 54 423/4/106 pt. 2, folio of maps. There is some confusion in the text between the Mambare and Kumusi rivers. These names may have been mistranslated.

⁶³ AWM 54 /423/4/106, pt. 2, folio of maps.

Efogi by the Australians.⁶⁴ The Nankai Shitai engineers had built a track usable by horses along the east of Eora gorge to Eora village, where a veterinary detachment was stationed, and yet another Japanese map indicates that horses were brought forward to the front line at Ioribaiwa in September.⁶⁵ The Australians, in contrast, did not believe it could be done and did not try to use pack horses (from the southern end) forward of Imita.

Returning to Hofstetter, an Australian post-Kokoda campaign report on another two Hofstetter maps noted that the Wau-Nadzab map “carries a description of rivers (width, depth, rate of flow, composition of river bed), information on roads and trails (suitability for motor traffic, horse, foot, etc) details of size of airfields, bridges, anti British natives etc. From the description it appears that all particulars have been supplied by Hoffstetter and there is no indication that any of the information has been obtained by recce.”⁶⁶ Of the other map it stated “same as above but covers Lae, Buna, Moresby, Popondetta. Undated. Scale 1:100,000.”⁶⁷ These maps each have about forty notes written on them detailing the information outlined above. The impression the notes give is that Hoffstetter was familiar with the Mambare and Kumusi rivers, with Buna, Kokoda and Yodda but he had not actually walked across the Kokoda track. Lega and Cavalieri said none of the miners would ever have considered doing that.

Aware of Hofstetter’s contribution to Japanese intelligence in the Wau-Salamaua campaign, but not at Kokoda, ANGAU and the Australian CIB tried to locate him at the end of the war. It was thought he had fled to Japan. Another line of inquiry confused him with a German national of Finschhafen who they believed had also helped the Japanese. Somehow they had not come across an ATIS item translated in 1944. It was a captured document stating “Josef Anton Hofstetter, a Swiss, was killed in action on February 6,

⁶⁴ Lester Lock, record of telephone interview with author, 9/11/06.

⁶⁵ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 24, map facing page 26. The map notes, for example, “steep passage for pack horses” on the slope leading down from the Maguli Range just north of Ioribaiwa.

⁶⁶ AWM 54 423/4/99, analysis of the Hoffstetter maps, p. 3.

⁶⁷ AWM 54 423/4/99, analysis of the Hoffstetter maps, p. 3.

1943 by enemy automatic rifle fire one kilometre northwest of Wau stock farm.”⁶⁸ The writer, Hofstetter’s Japanese superior, noted that Hofstetter had officer status in the Japanese army, that he made excellent maps and was a good guide.

What, then, was the quality of the maps produced as a result of the various forms of intelligence gathering outlined thus far? As far as the standard of an army’s intelligence operation can be judged by the maps it produces, it is possible to assess Japanese maps of early 1942 by comparing them to Australian maps made at the same time. It is first necessary to explain just what a militarily useful map might be.

Looking at the maps actually used in the campaign from July to November 1942 the largest was a 1:1,000,000 map of Papua sold by HEC Robertson in Sydney in the 1930s. Copies of this were found in Japanese hands, though it was of hardly any military use. The other commonly used scales were 1:500,000, 1:250,000, 1:100,000, 1:63,000 and 1:33,000. The three general rules of a map’s military utility are: the smaller the scale the more useful the map.⁶⁹ Small scale maps will have more topographic details. Second, maps with accurate grids are much better than ones without and, third, the same goes for maps with contour lines, preferably with heights marked on them. Of course it is easy to produce a simple enlargement of several map squares, for example producing a 1:50,000 map from a 1:300,000 scale map. However this alone does not make for a better map as any errors will simply be magnified.

The point to keep in mind is that, by the military standards of both sides in New Guinea in 1942, anything more than 1:300,000 may not be very useful and 1:100,000 can be quite acceptable if accompanied by a passably accurate grid and contour lines. Colonel

⁶⁸ The CIB file on Hofstetter was handed over at some point to ASIO who reported to the author in 2007 that it has now been destroyed. The Japanese report of Hofstetter’s death (here spelled Hofstadter) is in AWM 55 1/22, bulletin no. 1137, p. 3. It is a captured document dated 30 April 1943 and translated a year later.

⁶⁹ This explanation on military maps is drawn from: War office, *The Complete guide to military map reading*, Gale and Polden, Aldershot, 1939, esp. chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Tsuji thought that the maps for the southern operations were poor compared with the excellent 1:100,000 IJA maps of eastern Russia.⁷⁰

Starting with the Australians, the best maps made by either side and used in the campaign were produced by 2 Australian Field Survey Section NGF in Port Moresby. They were issued in October 1942, just in time to be used in the culminating battle of the Kokoda campaign at Oivi-Gorari in November. They had a scale of 1:63,360 or one inch to the mile, a grid of one square to a thousand yards and reasonably accurate contour lines but with no heights marked. With these maps soldiers less often became lost, were better able to report their own position to their superiors, and to carefully call in air strikes against the enemy. There is no doubt that these maps were superior to anything the Japanese had and by late October these gave the Australians a significant advantage. The question is, though, how useful were the maps both sides had prior to this.

According to a history of the Royal Australian Survey Corps there were, at the start of the campaign, “practically no maps of military value for either the Australian Territory of Papua or the former German colony of New Guinea”.⁷¹ The first Australian unit to cross the mountains, 39 Battalion, was very poorly prepared. They had a list of the villages in the order that they should be encountered and crude maps of 1:300,000 scale.⁷² The maps used by 21 Brigade which followed in August were not much better, Potts having fruitlessly searched Port Moresby for decent maps.⁷³

The best that could be found was one made up from maps collected by PIB Captain Harold Jesser. Jesser made his first trip over the track from 19 February. He collected

⁷⁰ Tsuji, *Singapore 1941-1942*, p. 33.

⁷¹ Coulthard-Clark C. *Australia's Military Map Makers, the Royal Australian Survey Corps, 1915-1996*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000 pp. 88-90. The 2nd Australian Field Survey Section first went up the track on 15 August, 1942, the day after the Deniki engagement. Surveying for map making in the midst of the campaign was found to be impractical thus delaying the production of good quality maps.

⁷² Ham, *Kokoda*, p. 55 and p. 130.

⁷³ Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 23.

plantation maps up to Sogeri and made his own map thereafter.⁷⁴ The 21 Brigade war diary observed on 16 August that one aerial photograph and “one inaccurate map” were all that was available.⁷⁵ One battalion intelligence section took a ‘trace map’ just of the track, two aerial photographs and a blank grid map to fill in as they advanced.⁷⁶ Another battalion, 2/14, had a 1:500,000 map and also made their own sketch maps as they went along.⁷⁷ The last battalion of the brigade to enter the mountains, 2/27, was just a little better off. They had a 1:70,000 map but with useless five mile grid squares and no countour lines.⁷⁸

In September 25 Brigade advanced into the Owen Stanley Range. For use from Ioribaiwa to Kagi they had a map that was an improvement on what has been seen so far.⁷⁹ In August, Australian surveyors in Port Moresby adapted a map made in the Dutch East Indies - the same source as some Japanese maps. It was one inch to a mile scale (1:63,360) with a one thousand yard grid and it had contour lines. Once the brigade advanced off the north side of this map they returned to another map of the low standard that 21 Brigade had used in August. Its scale was two inches to the mile with no practical grid, no countour lines and it was very inaccurate. On it a brigade staff member has crossed out the location of Templetons crossing and written it in again at the correct position. An account of a patrol commented that the map was in parts “absolutely unreliable”.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁴ Harold Jesser interview by son Peter Jesser in 1997, p.5, copy in author’s collection.

⁷⁵ AWM 52 8/2/ 21, 21 Brigade war diary, 16/8/42.

⁷⁶ AWM 52 8/2/21/17, 21 Brigade report on operations.

⁷⁷ McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, p. 107.

⁷⁸ AWM 52 8/3/27, 2/27 Battalion war diary, appendix A. A point to be wary of is that some maps which appear in the appendices of unit war dairies were not those used at the time but, rather, were made afterwards. A case in point is a map which has appeared in a recent book which gives a better impression of the maps used than it should. It is a detailed 1:20,000 map with a good grid and reasonable contours which illustrates 2/27’s engagement at Efogi but this in no way reflects the accuracy of the maps used at the time. The map is in James, *Field guide to the Kokoda track*, p. 222. The map was drawn by a 2/27 Battalion officer after the Efogi engagement to show dispositions and movements during the engagement.

⁷⁹ AWM 52 8/2/25, 25 Brigade war diary, September-October 1942. See map appendix.

⁸⁰ AWM 52 8/2/25, 25 Brigade war diary, patrol report of 29/9/42 .

next brigade to arrive, 16 Brigade in October, had nothing better with which to fight the second Templetons-Eora action but at the very end of October, in time for the reoccupation of Kokoda and the action at Oivi-Gorari the much better 1:63,360 maps mentioned above were in general use.⁸¹

Japanese maps can be divided into two types: Those produced before additional information from prisoners and captured maps could be processed and those made after. The first Australian prisoners were taken in late July and the Deniki engagement on 14 August was the first time the Japanese had access to Australian maps though it will be apparent from the foregoing some of these were not especially useful. It would be reasonable then to assume that any maps made prior to early August were based entirely on pre-campaign intelligence.

An IJA 41 Regiment staff report advised on 17 August that “During this operation there will be no printed precision maps, therefore map information must be gathered from the Yazawa intelligence report and the attached maps of this report.”⁸² No Japanese maps produced before the end of August have any useful grid or countours. They often have ‘form lines’ which do give an indication of the countryside but these are much inferior to contours. One of the Hofstetter maps is typical of those with which the Japanese landed in Papua. Note 38 on the map stated it was drawn from two sources, a 1:50,000 Australian Territory of Papua map (such as also appeared in the annual Papuan reports) and Kriegsmarine maps 857, 859 and 816.⁸³ The Hofstetter map does not have a grid, nor does it have contours. What it does have that makes it better than the early period Australian maps is Hofstetter’s notes on terrain features.

⁸¹ AWM 52 9/2/4, general staff intelligence HQ NGF, September 1942. The intelligence summary of 21/9/42 stated that “decent maps now available for issue one inch to one mile over most of fighting area.” This is not correct. AWM 52 9/2/4 general staff intelligence, HQ NGF sitrep 193, p.1 of 4/10/42 shows that while a one inch Kagi area map was in general use by then the fighting had moved well off to the north.

⁸² AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, Oki (Yazawa) staff report 17/8/42.

⁸³ AWM 54 /423/4/106, pt. 2, folio of maps.

A second advantage the Nankai Shitai had was maps produced after aerial reconnaissance. Captain Kanemoto went along on one reconnaissance flight and reported that the track from the coast to Kokoda was easily seen but after that it seemed to disappear into the jungle.⁸⁴ A dozen such flights, some from the new seaplane base at Lae, were made before the campaign began. Major Koiwai, commander of IJA 2/41 Battalion came ashore with a sheaf of aerial photographs and the maps made from them.⁸⁵ Those of the Eora gorge south of Kokoda were good enough that when the mist lifted he looked up the valley and was easily able to establish his location and that of Isurava village.⁸⁶ Five of these 1:50,000 maps have recently been obtained by the NLA.⁸⁷ They are by far the best quality maps available to either side in August but still lack a practical grid or contours.

There are other glimpses that the Japanese may have had better maps than the examples that have survived to find their way into archives. On 10 July, a Japanese medium bomber crashed near Port Moresby. Among the maps it contained was a 1937 map of New Guinea and a June 1941 1:500,000 map of eastern New Guinea.⁸⁸ Another more interesting map is mentioned in the Australian report on the Japanese maps but is not present in the AWM folder. It was said to be one of a series of an eighteen map set of eastern New Guinea suggesting they may have been between 1:100,000 and 1:50,000 scale. It could be the map referred to in another Australian report of a 1:50,000 scale map, made on 30 May 1942 and taken from a crashed Japanese aircraft.

Japanese maps of Port Moresby and surrounds are much more detailed than those of the Kokoda track. They are often gridded, contoured and accurate. Much of this detail came

⁸⁴ Kanamoto, *Nyuginia senki, Taiheiyō Senki (Account of the New Guinea campaign, Pacific War)*, pp. 92-93.

⁸⁵ AWM 54 253/4/11, diary of IJN Flight Sergeant Nemoto Kumesaka, p. 25.

⁸⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 80.

⁸⁷ These maps arrived at ANL map room in May 2008 and have not yet been catalogued. The five maps at NLA show the area from Giruwa, via the Kumusi River, to Kokoda.

⁸⁸ AWM 54 423/4/73, folder of maps and documents from a crashed bomber near Port Moresby, p. 1. See also AWM 54 423/4/41, maps captured in Salamaua raid, 28/6/42.

from aerial reconnaissance from early in 1942. One map noted that a feature was “seen from a/c [aircraft] over the northern aerodrome 1/5/42.” There are some features unlikely to have been observed by aircrew. Among these are “troops stationed here - less than 50 men... BP warehouse... navy officers’ mess... army barracks... club and hotel.”⁸⁹ Unusually, there is no mention where this information comes from but two likely sources are Toyufuku or Hofstetter. On a Japanese map of Wau, where it is stated that Hofstetter is the source, similar details down to the location of the butcher’s shop, are listed.⁹⁰ It is known Hofstetter passed through Port Moresby several times and he may have been able to give the same kind of information for Port Moresby that he gave for Wau.

A comparison between Japanese and Australian maps suggests that, up to mid August, Japanese maps of the area of operations were superior, though not greatly so. By the time of the Japanese retreat in late September this had changed. Japanese maps do not greatly improve as a result of access to Australian captives and captured maps whereas Australian maps did improve significantly. By early November the Australians had an important advantage in mapping and it may be this was a factor in their decisive victory at Oivi-Gorari. In this action, it is true, one Australian battalion became lost for a full day but this must be set against the Japanese performance. It will be seen in the Oivi-Gorari chapter that the Japanese response to the Australian flanking attack via Baribe was limited by confusion as to which tracks led where. Veterans of the Nankai Shitai were curious enough about this to try to sort it out on one of their post war trips to New Guinea to collect the remains of their dead. In 1967 they established that their maps of November 1942 had led them to mistake Gorari for Ilimo throughout the fighting.

There are a number of Intelligence issues in this campaign that await investigation. For instance, the usefulness of Allied signals Intelligence interception, then in its infancy, and the remarkably valuable and timely Intelligence offered to the Japanese if they were

⁸⁹ AWM 54 423/4/106, pt 2, folio of maps, map GX 1696 dated 14/7/42.

⁹⁰ AWM 54 423/4/106, pt 2, folio of maps.

listening into Chester Wilmot's informative 1942 broadcasts.⁹¹ Nankai Shitai intelligence bulletins sometimes mention Australian radio broadcasts, as well as the Chinese and Spanish consulates in Australia, as a source of their information.⁹²

Remarkably, the Japanese do seem to have launched a campaign with the intent of crossing the Owen Stanley Range without, as far as is known, actually interviewing anyone who had walked the Kokoda track. It is intriguing that they do appear to have been aware of the extremely difficult conditions along the track. A question military Intelligence officers seek to answer is how good is the 'going' on the proposed route of advance. This term refers to the effects of terrain, climate, river crossings, rainfall and other factors that will govern how easily the army will be able to cross the ground. A point that suggests the Japanese had a good understanding of the difficulties of the Kokoda track is their decision, taken before any of the force had landed in Papua, to leave behind in Rabaul eight of their twelve heaviest guns, those of the mountain artillery. In contrast, the mountain artillery battalion that went to Guadalcanal, where the fighting was to be mainly on better ground, took all of its guns. It would be of great interest to know the source of the information for this decision.

⁹¹ Regarding Allied signals intercepts: Mention can be seen in official records to 'most secret sources' which may be this. See for example AWM 54 577/6/3, message to 7 Australian Division and 32 United States Division, 18/7/42.

Regarding Japanese use of Australian domestic sources of intelligence: On 5/10/42 the Sydney Morning Herald related that the advancing Australians had just reached Efogi with the main body some distance behind. (AWM 123 270, Rowell's report and attached documents and intelligence summaries, war cabinet minute and attached newspaper clipping). As the Japanese had, in their retreat, broken contact with the Australians this information was of value to them. It may also have been reported on Australian radio because, a few days later, Japanese intelligence reports stated that "according to enemy broadcasts from Australia on 5 October enemy occupied Efogi 80m north of Moresby"(AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 42, Nankai Shitai Intelligence report no 21).

Regarding Chester Wilmot's broadcasts: In mid July, at the time the Japanese had lost communication with the Yokoyama Force advanced guard and did not know where it was, Chester Wilmot told them its location in his broadcasts from 4QG in Brisbane. Blamey said to him that "we should give thousands of pounds to have someone in your position in Japan trying to undermine the C-in-C there." (MacDonald, *Chester Wilmot Reports*, pp. 278-280 and 388).

⁹² AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, intelligence record no. 37, p. 97. On 23 September "the resident attaché for Chunking in Australia made the following report on the 17th. On Guadalcanal there are 11,000 and on Tulagi over 7,000 American marines. At Moresby they increased the Australian army by 2,500. Two thousand natives are doing transport work in the mountainous region." The Spanish consul general in Australia was also believed to be sending information to the Japanese. See Mathews, *Shadows Dancing* p. 92 and pp. 218-219.

Building on a long term interest in Intelligence gathering in the south west Pacific, the Japanese did obtain a great deal of useful information on eastern Papua in the late 1930s. While the evidence is not strong enough to show a very special Japanese focus in the Basabua landing site at that time, the mouth of the Mambare river being of equal interest, it does make clear that the IJN made considerable efforts to apprise itself of the hydrographical details of the coast from Lae to Milne Bay with a view to making landings there. By 1940, a narrowing of interest can be discerned and intelligence work was done on potential landing sites on the coast about Giruwa, on conditions in the Papuan interior and on Port Moresby itself. By early 1942 Japanese Intelligence studies specifically on the Kokoda route were underway and Hofstetter was their prime informant.

Some other conclusions in this area must be tentative, even speculative, for the evidence does not allow anything more concrete. The probable sources of Japanese maps has been pointed out, though it is not possible to prove that they were the ones used. It is one thing to show that Japanese Intelligence gathering in Australia about New Guinea included the purchasing or copying of maps but it is another to show what was obtained, or that what was obtained was actually used.

It can be said, though, that whatever their source, Japanese maps of the Kokoda track were, as Dr. Vernon observed, initially better than those available to the Australians. This is a normal state of affairs. One of the advantages the attacker has over the defender is he has the initiative. Among other things, this usually allows him to determine where the attack will take place while the defender can only guess at this. The relationship between the initiative and military Intelligence is that the attacker will presumably have more time to assemble intelligence than the defender, assuming he has beforehand decided where to go and that nothing interrupts him. The attacker can focus his investigation on the planned axis of advance while the defender has to consider a range of possible enemy approaches. On the face of it then, there was a reasonable chance that as the Kokoda campaign opened Japanese military Intelligence on Papua would be better than that of the Australians though this is not the same thing as saying it was very good.

If the Japanese did have the edge in Intelligence terms at the start of the Kokoda campaign, then what might be the consequences of this for our understanding of the outcome of the campaign? A point argued by John Keegan in his book *Military Intelligence* could have an application here.⁹³ Keegan concluded that while superior Intelligence has contributed to some great victories there are many more cases where the army with greatly superior numbers and poor Intelligence triumphed. He believes superior military intelligence is over-rated as a reason for victory which, more often, goes to the combatant with the superior numbers. If Keegan's argument is sound then it may be that the Japanese Intelligence advantage at the start of the campaign was of relatively minor importance in determining the form the campaign was to take.

⁹³ Keegan, J. *Intelligence in war, knowledge of the enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2003, see concluding chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE NANKAI SHITAI ORDER OF BATTLE.

CHAPTER 4 – THE NANKAI SHITAI ORDER OF BATTLE

All of the actions and engagements of the Australian retreat in the Owen Stanley Range, and to a lesser extent the later Australian advance, appear in a quite different light from the way they are usually presented if, as is apparent from Japanese records, the Australians were not significantly outnumbered.

A necessary starting point to establish this is the Nankai Shitai order of battle. There are a number of lists of the several dozen Japanese units, small and large, that were in Papua on the Kokoda front at one time or another. The best of these, those of the *Senshi Soshō* and the AJRP, neither give unit strengths nor are they very accurate. Both derive from Japanese lists of units present in Rabaul, the Philippines, Malaya or the Netherlands East Indies, and who were to go to Papua.¹ Not all of them did go and other units were sent which do not appear on these lists. Further complications are that some units, while they went to Papua, did not send their entire complement. Other units sent small detachments while the main body remained elsewhere and others again sent their entire complement but only in numerous small parties.

That some units of the Nankai Shitai were under army and some under navy command adds to the problem as the two tended to maintain records of their own orders of battle without any mention of the other. Non-combat units were often loaned back and forth between army and navy commands. The Nankai Shitai itself was, until May 20 1942, a separate body directly under the command of IHQ. Then came a change. Owing to a decision to extend operations in the southern area a new army command was created, the first since the Pacific War began. This was 17th Army, charged with operations in eastern New Guinea, the Solomons and as far south as Fiji and east to Samoa. The details of the composition of the Nankai Shitai changed frequently and this did not alter when it came under the wing of 17th Army. After the landing in Papua, the many and rapid changes of

¹ One such list is in Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua*, pp. 120-121.

plan that we have seen occurred in 1942 also resulted in many and frequent changes in the order of battle.

What has not been attempted so far is, so to speak, to work from the other end of the problem. The names of units actually present in Papua can be seen from lists of prescriptions written by medical officers at 67 Line of Communication Hospital (67 LOCH) in Giruwa and Kokoda.² This unit, too, has been thought to have sent half its strength to Papua and half to Guadalcanal but the evidence suggests that almost its full strength was in Papua and the 67 LOCH detachment sent to Guadalcanal was just fifteen men.³

Where the official or actual strengths of a unit is not available in the NIDS archive it, or at least a rough approximation of it, can sometimes be found in ATIS translations of diaries or POW interrogations. There are still problems with small units like 55 Division's cavalry company. This company came to Papua dismounted in its alternative anti-tank role. Its normal strength would be 130 men but, as with many of the units in the Japanese order of battle, a reduced detachment was sent. It seems to have been 83 strong. The unit virtually disappears from Japanese records after Isurava to reappear defending Buna in late November.

Another approach, where little data from Papua has survived owing to the destruction of the Nankai Shitai in early 1943, is to compare Papuan orders of battle with those from Guadalcanal which are similar in some respects. Both campaigns were directed by 17th Army in Rabaul, the headquarters of which advanced to Guadalcanal in October 1942. More Japanese records survived the Guadalcanal experience as there was, in February of 1943, a more or less orderly evacuation. While the following is still short of complete accuracy it is at least a more accurate list of the strength and composition of the Nankai Shitai than has thus far been achieved. Fortunately, our main concern, fighting units and

² The lists of prescriptions is at AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 24, p. 7.

³ Franks, *Guadalcanal* p. 635, also Bullard S. The great enemy of humanity, malaria and the Japanese medical corps in Papua, *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol 39, no 2, 2004, pp. 203-220.

their strength, can be identified with greater precision than can some of the smaller supporting units whose details remain unclear. In one or two cases ‘unknown’ might be a better descriptor.

The infantry battalions of the Nankai Shitai constituted the majority, about two thirds, of the fighting force with which we will be primarily concerned. So, it will be best to begin with them by looking at each in detail in order to demonstrate how the Japanese formations in New Guinea came to be so much under strength. A suitable starting point happens also to be the one which arrived in Papua first and was the weakest in strength, the first battalion of 144 Infantry Regiment.

The first battalion (1/144) of the three battalions of 144 Regiment of 55 Division, which provided most of the fighting troops for the Nankai Shitai, left Shikoku, Japan on 25 November 1941 to invade Guam. It was under the command of Lt. Colonel Tsukamoto Hatsuo.⁴ He was later selected to take over 144 Regiment when Colonel Kusunose, the original regimental commander, left Papua owing to illness. In November 1941 the battalion was at the strength given below.

1/144 INFANTRY BATTALION	
Battalion Headquarters	7 Officers, 30 men.
Battalion Train	110 all ranks.
Gun Platoon	1 Officer, 54 men.
<u>Machine Gun Company</u>	
Company Headquarters	4 Officers, 129 men.
Two Machine Gun Platoons, each with	1 Officer, 13 men.
Ammunition Platoon	1 Officer, 45 men.
<u>Three Rifle Companies, each with</u>	
Company Headquarters	1 Officer, 22 men.
Three Rifle Platoons, each with	
Platoon Headquarters	4 Officers, 177 men.
Grenade Discharger Squad	1 Officer, 18 men
Three Rifle Squads, each with	
Total Strength of 878 all ranks. ⁵	1 Officer, 1 man
	13 men
	13 men

⁴ AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 42, Nankai Shitai intelligence report no 21. p.3.

⁵ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, August/September 1942, captured documents in appendix E. See also http://www.bayonetstrength.150m.com/Japanese/japanese_infantry_battalion.htm

By mid 1942, Australian studies of the order of battle of this battalion come up with close to this figure, 884, as the battalion strength at the start of the Pacific War.⁶ However, eight months after it left Japan, in July 1942, the battalion arrived in Papua to participate in the Kokoda campaign with 586 men - 292 men less than it left Japan with.⁷ By the end of the Kokoda campaign the AMF was aware it had overestimated Japanese battalion strengths and had revised 1/144 strength at the start of the campaign down to the 586 men given here.⁸

How 1/144 became so reduced in numbers requires some explanation. The 878 men in the table above represents neither a normal Japanese order of battle for an infantry battalion nor the order of battle the Australians believed it had in mid 1942. It was not normal because the Japanese had, in a sense, no normal battalion format. The Australians had a 'desert type' battalion which, in mid 1942, they made smaller and lighter for jungle war. Of 1,068 men in 39 Battalion in Port Moresby for example, just half of them were selected to form the 'jungle type' battalion to go up the track into battle. AIF battalions were also reduced to 580 men.

The Japanese took this approach much further, having six types of battalion, each of which was frequently further adjusted by, for example, adding extra battalion guns or by taking them away.⁹ A battalion could be as large as 1,431 men or as small as 750 depending on circumstances. In the southern area of operations they tended toward the

⁶ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, August/September 1942, captured documents in appendix E.

⁷ NIDS 302.9.H. *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment) p. 44.

⁸ AWM 123 609, Review of the Papuan campaign, attachment, estimate of Japanese casualties, pp. 31-33. This document gives the strengths of Japanese infantry battalions as they were assessed by the AMF at the end of the Kokoda campaign.

⁹ For examples of flexible Japanese orders of battle see Daugherty L. *Fighting Techniques of a Japanese Infantryman 1941-45: Training, Techniques and Weapons*, Spellmount, Staplehurst, 2002, pp. 44-45 and Rottman G. *Japanese Army in World War II, Conquest of the Pacific 1941-42*, Osprey, Oxford, 2005, pp. 25-34. See also http://www.bayonetstrength.150m.com/Japanese/japanese_infantry_battalion.htm

smaller and around 750 men was considered the desirable size.¹⁰ Most of the battalions that left from Rabaul for Guadalcanal were trimmed down to close to this figure.¹¹

The flexibility of Japanese organisation can also be observed above battalion level and is somewhat reminiscent of the German idea of a *kampfgruppe* – a force put together with the particular task in mind rather than from a standard organisation. The Australians came across a version of this in the purpose-built ‘Jock columns’ used by Commonwealth armies in North Africa. The Nankai Shitai was just such a purpose built force. By 1944, the Americans had identified four different kinds of Japanese divisions. The Nankai Shitai was classified as a ‘special division’, that is, a light division built around two regiments of infantry instead of the more usual three.¹²

Stepping back down to battalion level, the adjustment made to 1/144 as it left Japan was the reduction of its machine gun company to two platoons, as shown above, reducing machine gun company strength by 44 men. The Japanese were unique in this respect. Other armies of WWII tended, if any change was made, to increase the number of machine guns and sub machine guns among the infantry. The Australians in Papua, for instance, where possible doubled the number of both light machine guns and submachine guns in their infantry battalions from September 1942. The IJA, which had no submachine guns at this time, in order to increase the size of the army, often found it necessary to decrease the numbers of medium machine guns in its infantry battalions.¹³

¹⁰ NIDS, 301.9.S, *Hohei dai 41 Rentai Nyuginiasen senkyo hokoku* (Battle records of 41 Regiment in New Guinea), p. 12.

¹¹ AWM 54 423/4/67, translation of captured documents, 17th Army document captured at Guadalcanal, npn. The captured document shows the same arrangement observable for Papua: the battalion train was left behind and each battalion was slimmed down to about 750 men. AWM 54 423/4/67, translation of captured documents, item 24343 concerning personnel selected to stay behind in Rabaul. See also Franks, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 631-636.

¹² War Department, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1944, p. 18.

¹³ Daugherty, *Fighting Techniques of a Japanese Infantryman*, p. 45.

The allied pre-campaign estimates for a Japanese battalion's original size in Papua in 1942 hovered around the 1,027 mark, though some estimates were lower, and a minimum of 2,716 for a regiment to a maximum of 3,397.¹⁴ One Australian study gave 791 as the strength of a Japanese infantry battalion.¹⁵ As a consequence, even though the battalion train was missed in this calculation, the size of a Japanese infantry regiment was overestimated. In fact, depending on the theatre of war or the mission, it could be as large as 3,854 but 144 Regiment at 'jungle' strength was 2,300 strong.¹⁶ It is a very natural assumption to make that the enemy are at full strength. The Japanese also continually overestimated enemy infantry battalion size. The Australian battalions of 580 in Papua were invariably accorded a strength of 1,000 men by the Japanese.

While 1/144 is one of the easier infantry battalions to determine the strength of, there are still a number of gaps in the record where we can only deduce numbers present from regimental records. In the invasion of Guam in December 1941, for example, 144 Regiment took 31 casualties. The first battalion was in action but its proportion of casualties within the regimental total is unknown. During its occupation of the island, the regiment suffered further losses to disease but this number is also unknown.

In January 1942, the regiment invaded Rabaul where it took a further 16 killed and 49 wounded.¹⁷ How many men 1/144 had already lost is unknown but its number one company invaded Rabaul with 144 men, 37 men below establishment.¹⁸ With the exception of the abortive Port Moresby invasion attempt in May, known as the battle of the Coral Sea, when the regiment went to sea for a week, 1/144 Battalion was in Rabaul

¹⁴ AWM 123 270, Lt General Sir Sydney Rowell, report on operations, attached documents, newspaper cuttings and intelligence summaries, Advanced Headquarters Allied Land Forces weekly intelligence summary no. 16. See also War department, *Order of battle of the Japanese Army Dec 42*, Military intelligence service, Washington, 1942, end pocket chart.

¹⁵ AWM 54 722/4/11, captured documents, organisation and equipment.

¹⁶ Daugherty, *Fighting Techniques of a Japanese Infantryman*, p. 43.

¹⁷ NIDS 302.9.H. *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment) p. 44.

¹⁸ AWM 54 423/4/158, SWPA enemy publications, p. 22.

from the end of January to the middle of July when it sailed to Papua with the Yokoyama advanced force of the Nankai Shitai. On the fall of Rabaul allied air raids began. Up to 5 February the Nankai Shitai lost five killed and 19 wounded as a result of air attacks.¹⁹ During this time the Japanese in Rabaul suffered severely with malaria and it was noted that 1/144 suffered worst of all owing to the unhealthy location of their camp and their pursuit of Australians into a highly malarial area south west of Rabaul.²⁰ Later, according to a regimental signaller, many in 1/144 also came down with dengue fever.²¹ Again in May there was another outbreak of malaria in Rabaul, most likely a further episode of it for the men who had contracted malaria on their arrival in January.²²

The number of wounded who recovered or remained sick is not known so the battalion's effective strength at this time is uncertain. In June, 9 Company of 3/144 was already reduced to 156 men of whom, on 13 June, twenty-four were in hospital.²³ By an unspecified date in June the whole regiment was short 184 other ranks. These men were killed in action, wounded and not recovered, presently sick or had already been returned to Japan for reasons not mentioned.²⁴ On 5 April four Nankai Shitai men were returned to Japan and another five on 26 May.²⁵

Another infantry company was down to 150 men in mid July and another to 153 men at the start of August.²⁶ If this is representative of the whole regiment then average battalion

¹⁹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 47-48.

²⁰ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 33.

²¹ AWM 55 3/7, current translations no. 77, pp. 25-26.

²² AWM 54 253/4/11, diary of IJN Flt Sgt Nemoto Kumesaka, p. 23.

²³ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 75, p. 1.

²⁴ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 41, p. 1.

²⁵ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 38, pp. 1-2.

²⁶ AWM 54 722/4/11, captured documents, organisation and equipment and AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications, no. 38, file of Nankai Shitai orders 13/5/42 to 10/7/42, p. 10.

strength was, by battle and disease, already probably reduced to about 710. As it is noted in several documents that 1/144 suffered worst of all from sickness it is reasonable to assume the strength of 1/144 was below this number. The wasting away of units in unhealthy climates even when not engaged with the enemy was a problem for both sides. The Australian 49 Battalion, after several months in Port Moresby, sometimes bombed from the air but otherwise having seen no action, on 26 July 1942 had 678 men on parade, 127 in hospital and was short of establishment by more than 70 men.²⁷

Another curious aspect of the Japanese system was that little attention was paid to replacements. Replacements, as distinct from reinforcements which are complete new units arriving at the battlefield, are individuals who are sent in batches to a front line unit to replace those wounded in battle or debilitated by disease. The theoretical basis is that the fighting power of a unit can be maintained at a higher level for a longer period if it receives regular replacements. The Australians usually adhered to this system but not in the Papuan campaign when, owing to supply problems which limited the number of men who could be maintained in the front line, it was thought better to rather pull out entire worn units and replace them with entire fresh ones.

The Japanese approach resembled that of the Soviet Union's army in WWII. This was not to waste resources on maintaining at home a large replacement system of depots or training battalions (as the Australians and most western armies did). Rather, it was to only replace men on occasion when it caused little inconvenience to the more important tasks of raising new units – a task which is especially vital when expanding an army at the start of a new war. Western armies view this as a dangerously short sighted solution to the problem but in Japan it was considered appropriate sometimes to simply abandon units, ceasing to send replacements and supplies, if the situation called for it. One commentator has said that the Japanese replacement system made the Russians, who were notoriously callous in the management of their army, appear benevolent by comparison.²⁸

²⁷ AWM 52 8/ 3/88, 49 Battalion war diary, 18/7/42.

²⁸ http://www.bayonetstrength.150m.com/Japanese/japanese_infantry_battalion.htm

In our case, not one of the battalion sized formations of the Nankai Shitai received any replacements from its regimental training battalion until November of 1942 by which time 144 Regiment had been on active service for eleven months. Finally, on 9 November 280 men arrived in Rabaul as replacements for 144 Regiment's three battalions.²⁹ By that time the regiment required more than 1,000 replacements. By way of contrast, there are few cases of an Australian infantry battalion on active service during World War II going for more than four months without receiving an intake of replacements.

In July and early August detailed preparations were underway in 144 Regiment for the new campaign in Papua. All battalions of the regiment were instructed to weed out the weak and unfit to leave behind. The third battalion held a parade for this purpose on 1 August.³⁰ Again it is not known exactly how many unfit there were in 1/144, which had its sick parade several weeks earlier, but evidence from other companies of the regiment suggest from five to fifteen men per company were left behind. In 5 Company of 2/144 14 men were left in Rabaul and in 4 Company of 2/144 13 were left behind.³¹ Company commander Lt. Noda Hidetaka noted that there were two schools of thought: "Many commanders like to take into battle with them as many of their men as possible but I myself incline to leave behind any of those who are not really fit. Can it be I am not sufficiently ruthless?"³² When the Rabaul hospital was bombed in October there were 27 patients from the regiment present of whom 19 were killed.³³ That many men from the regiment were left behind in Rabaul is shown by the regiment's casualty list which

²⁹ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 15.

³⁰ AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of 2nd Lt. Noda Hidetaka, p. 1.

³¹ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 15, company record of 5 Company 2/144, p.21. See also AWM 54 722/4/11, captured documents, organisation and equipment of Japanese infantry in 1942, Lt Okazaki Masao's record of no. 4 Company, 2/144.

³² AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of 2nd Lt Noda Hidetaka, p. 2.

³³ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 15.

located four percent of all regimental deaths in Rabaul from July to November 1942, the period when the regiment was engaged in the fighting in the Owen Stanley Range.³⁴

In addition it was decided to 'lighten' the battalions in view of the rough terrain over which the advance would take place. Battalion trains, with their wagons, were left in Rabaul though some of the men were attached to the three battalion headquarters. Deducting the battalion train from an estimated 710 men in 1/144 battalion at the start of August and assuming thirty or so more unfit men would bring us close to the 586 men with which we can be sure 1/144 landed in Papua on 18 July 1942.³⁵ One of the battalion's companies, number three, was just 135 men strong on arrival at Basabua. The officer in charge of drawing company rations stated this was the number of rations needed on the day of the landing.³⁶

The first battalion of 144 Regiment was about 150 men weaker than the other two battalions of the regiment. Probably this difference is accounted for by 1/144's great losses to malaria and dengue fever. The 2/144 battalion went through the Guam and Rabaul fighting but, while the rest of the regiment remained in Rabaul, in March it participated in the occupation of Lae and Salamaua. There was no fighting on land but a surprise strike by USN carrier borne aircraft hit the Japanese invasion fleet just off the New Guinea coast. In this 2/144 lost nine killed and 24 wounded.³⁷ While the battalion's total strength is uncertain at this time its 4 Company was 13 men below strength on 2 August owing to "illness and other reasons."³⁸

³⁴ NIDS 302.9.H. *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), appendix listing regimental war dead, pp. 625-726. Some of the dead at Rabaul presumably were wounded previously evacuated from Giruwa.

³⁵ AWM 123 609, review of the Papuan campaign, estimate of Japanese casualties, pp. 31-33

³⁶ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, July-September, 1942, Appendix G. Extract from diary of Lt Ogawa.npn.

³⁷ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campigns*, pp. 47-48. The attacking carriers, *Lexington* and *Yorktown*, were positioned south west of Port Moresby, making this carrier air strike the only one in WWII to take place across a large island.

³⁸ AWM 54 722/4/11, captured documents, organisation and equipment of Japanese infantry companies.

A note on the distribution of life boats and lifejackets on board the *Ryoyo Maru* as it sailed to Papua with 2/144 on board shows 4 Company took along 168 men, 16 below establishment. The same document shows that another company of the battalion was down to either 150 or 163 men – two parts of the document contradict each other on this point. Yet another unnamed infantry company of the regiment landed with 153 men. This company took along 141 rifles including spares, 9 light machine guns and one sword for the company commander.³⁹

The addition of ‘battalion train’ men to battalion headquarters raised the headquarters numbers of 2/144 to 79 men. The machine gun company was at near full tropical establishment of 130 men and the battalion gun platoon had 71 men.⁴⁰ These figures, drawn from the plan for lifeboat and raft distribution, are supported by another document which shows the number of men in 2/144 Battalion who actually boarded the *Ryoyo Maru* in Rabaul.

2/144 Establishment on the Ryoyo Maru	
Battalion Headquarters	79
4 Company	168
5 Company	-
6 Company	163
Machine Gun Company	130
Gun Platoon	71 ⁴¹

The figure for 5 Company is not clear but if its strength was midway between that of 4 and 6 Companies then the battalion sailed for Papua with 776 men.⁴² This is just six men more than a post campaign Australian army estimate drawn from captured documents.⁴³

³⁹ AWM 54 722/4/11, captured documents, extract from diary of Lt Hamada Masahide.

⁴⁰ AWM 55 3/4, current translations no. 42, captured documents of *Ryoyo Maru* and *Kaazura maru*. Lifeboat and raft distribution, p 6.

⁴¹ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 9, p 4. The sheet for 2/144 Battalion was dated 16/8/42.

⁴² AWM 55 3/4, current translations no 42, captured documents of *Ryoyo Maru* and *Kaazura Maru*. Lifeboat and raft distribution, p. 7.

⁴³ AWM 123 270, Lt General Sir Sydney Rowell, report on operations, attached documents, newspaper cuttings and intelligence summaries. Review of Papuan campaign, attachment including Advanced

Less is known about the pre-campaign losses of the third battalion of 144 Regiment, 3/144. There is, though, a detailed history of the battalion assembled by its members after the war from battle reports written during the fighting. It records precise numbers for each company for each phase of the Kokoda campaign. For the battalion's first fight, Isurava, the battalion total was 738 men but this was really the number that arrived in New Guinea rather than the number actually present for reasons which become apparent in the Isurava chapter.⁴⁴ Again, this is close to the number arrived at by Australian post campaign estimates.⁴⁵

Other units of 144 Infantry Regiment can be dealt with quickly, mainly from IJN shipping records. The administrative part of the regimental headquarters arrived in New Guinea 73 strong.⁴⁶ Directly under its command was the Regimental Gun Company with 110 men and the Regimental Signals Company with 122 or 131 men.⁴⁷ While it is not clear which of these was the company strength on arrival in Papua it is recorded that five men were then in hospital in Rabaul, eight more were unfit and left behind and four had already returned to Japan.⁴⁸ The total strength of 144 Regiment as it went in to action in Papua was then close to 2,270 though one Japanese document states it was 2,226.⁴⁹ This figure is 800 to 400 less than early campaign Australian estimates.

Headquarters Allied Land Forces, weekly intelligence summary no 16. Information from captured documents showed that 1/144 had 586 men and had lost 441 KIA or WIA to 2/11/42. 2/144 and 3/144 together had lost 1185 KIA or WIA to 2/11/42. It was estimated this left 356 men in total so each battalion would have begun the campaign with about 770 men.

⁴⁴ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshō, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p 26.

⁴⁵ AWM 123 270, review of Papuan campaign, attachment including Advanced Headquarters Allied Land Forces, weekly intelligence summary no 16.

⁴⁶ AWM 55 3/4, current translations no. 42, p. 7.

⁴⁷ AWM 55/1/1, bulletin no. 9, p. 4, dated 16/8/42 and AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 4, p. 40.

⁴⁸ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 4, p. 40 and 55 3/1 current translations no. 5, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁹ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 5, p. 40. This document is unclear. It might be giving the total for 144 Regiment as 2,526 men which is 300 more than the actual strength.

The other infantry element of the Nankai Shitai was 41 Infantry Regiment. This regiment's three battalions had served since 1937 in China where it specialised in amphibious assaults. It was about 2,800 strong when it participated in the invasion of Malaya in December 1941. There, one battalion engaged the enemy at Jitra and the whole regiment fought against Australians at Gemas though they were not involved in the well known Australian ambush there. The 41 Regiment again engaged the Australians, and put its speciality of amphibious operations to good use, when it landed on Singapore Island in February of 1942. Exact casualties for the regiment in the Malaya campaign are unknown but were light. Next the regiment went to the Phillipines where it suffered "considerable" casualties in May of 1942.⁵⁰ Seven officers were killed but no other statement of the number of casualties has been located.

The regiment was organised with four smaller infantry companies per battalion instead of the three infantry companies per battalion of 144 Regiment. Otherwise it was similar to 144 in overall size, about 750 men per battalion by the time it arrived in Papua. Like 144 regiment it had had no replacements since November 1941. Coming by sea from Davao it was in Rabaul just a few days so suffered little from the medical problems attendant upon a stay there. The unfit, 103 men, were left in Rabaul and the regiment went to Papua with 2396 men.⁵¹

The second infantry battalion of 41 Regiment (2/41) landed in Papua 755 strong but the other two battalions of the regiment were much smaller as large numbers were withdrawn to make up a 'temporary supply force' for supply carrying purposes. One of the Japanese responses to meeting serious Australian resistance at Kokoda and deciding to postpone the attack on Port Moresby was to form an additional transportation unit. With a longer campaign in the mountains now in the offing, more transport personnel would be required. The first and third battalions of 41 Regiment thus arrived in Papua with 343 and 420 men. In total 700 men, drawn from all units within the regiment, were detached for various

⁵⁰ AWM, 55 1/1, bulletin no. 53, p 2.

⁵¹ NIDS, 301.9.S, *Hohei dai 41 Rentai Nyuginiasen senkyo hokoku* (Battle records of 41 Regiment in New Guinea), p. 12.

transport tasks.⁵² There was some resentment when this occurred. One officer wrote: “It was a pity that the soldiers of the regiment with great wartime careers became transport soldiers similar to military labourers, however temporarily, and were assigned to duty in the rear, carrying rice instead of guns.”⁵³

It seems probable then that, prior to men being sent to the transport unit, 1/41 and 3/41 had respectively 700 and 690 men. Not until late October were the men detached for transport duty returned to their battalions. This is, however, not very important for a calculation of the numbers engaged in the fighting in the mountains as neither 1/41 nor 3/41 (with the exception of 12 Company) participated in any major encounters until the last one at Oivi-Gorari in November 1942.⁵⁴ The following table of 41 Regiment’s strength, its detachments and its weapons on arrival in Papua was made by Major Koiwai Mitsuo, battalion commander of 2/41.⁵⁵

Formation and Equipment of 41 Regiment

The Commander of the Regiment:	Colonel Yazawa Kiyomi
The Commander of the 1st Battalion:	Major Miyamoto Kikumatsu
Headquarters of the Battalion :	58 men
The 1st Company :	45 men / 5 light machine guns / 4 mortars
The 2nd Company :	45men / 2 light machine guns / 2 mortars
The 3rd Company :	37 men / 2 light machine guns / 2 mortars
The 4th Company :	50 men / 3 light machine guns / 3 mortars
The 1st Machine Gun Company :	67 men /4 heavy machine guns
The Battalion Gun Troop :	41 men / 1 gun
Total Personnel:	343 men

⁵² NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshō, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 13-18 gives 800 detached from 41 Regiment for supply tasks but this seems too high.

⁵³ Koiwai M. *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea) Nihon Shuppan Kyōdo, Tokyo, 1953, p 63.

⁵⁴ 1/41 and 3/41 did patrol along the coast and 1/41 was briefly in the Yodda Valley. During these activities they had a few clashes with the Papuan Infantry Battalion and 2/6 Independent Commando patrols.

⁵⁵ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 61.

The Commander of the 2nd Battalion : Major Koiwai Mitsuo	
The 5th, 6th , 7th, and 8th Companies in full war-time formation.	
The Machine Gun Company has 6 machine guns and the Battalion Gun Troop has just 1 gun.	
Total personnel:	755 men

The Commander of the 3rd Battalion : Major Kobayashi Asao (transferred)	
Major Murase Gohei [commanded after Kobayashi]	
Headquarters of the battalion :	48 men
The 9th Company :	41 men / 2 light machine guns
The 10th Company :	117 men / 6 light machine guns / 3 mortars
The 11th Company :	38 men / 1 light machine guns / 1 mortars
The 12th Company :	125 men / 9 light machine guns / 9 mortars
The 2nd Machine Gun Company :	39 men / 3 [heavy] machine guns
The Regimental Gun Troop :	26 men / 1 gun
Total personnel :	424 men

The Regimental Gun Company :	88 men including the commander
1 Type 41 mountain gun / 60 rounds of ammunition	
The Rapid-fire gun Company :	55 men including the commander
1 Type 94 37 mm gun / 150 rounds of ammunition	
The Signals Company :	109 men including the commander
6 telephone sets / 8 Type 5 wireless telegraph sets /	
8 Type 6 telegraph sets	

Koiwai's list does not contain the regimental headquarters which had 58 men giving a total of 1,773 men of 41 Regiment not serving with the transport unit. Another Japanese source gives the total as 1,784.⁵⁶

The fighting units of the Nankai Shitai that remain to be dealt with are Nankai Shitai headquarters (NSHQ), 55 Division cavalry company, the mountain artillery, the Special Naval Landing Parties (SNLP), combat engineers and an anti aircraft battalion. The

⁵⁶ NIDS, Nanto, Solomon Bisumarruku, 130, Nankai Shitai Efogi minamigawa ni okeru sento (Battles of the Nankai Shitai south of Efogi), npn.

NSHQ, in effect a detachment of 55th Division headquarters, had 104 men and 55 Division cavalry company seems to have had 83 men, though this number is not certain.⁵⁷

The main body of two combat engineer regiments and detachments from several other engineering units served in the Kokoda campaign. Japanese engineer regiments, one battalion strong, could be as large as 1,020 men with three field companies, each of 290 men, one stores company of 100 and a headquarters of 50.⁵⁸ 15 Independent Engineer Regiment (15 IER), which came to Papua with the Yokoyama advanced force, left one company in Rabaul and brought approximately 600 men.⁵⁹ The other major engineer unit, 55 Engineer Regiment (55 ER), which arrived with the main force in August, brought 800 men.⁶⁰ Number 3 Company and an additional platoon of 10 Independent Engineer Regiment (10 IER), a platoon of 4 Independent Engineer Regiment (4 IER), a company of 55 Shipping Engineer regiment (55 SER), 300 men, and number 1 Bridge Construction Company (1 BCC), drawn from 9 Infantry Division, were also present with around 700 men in total.⁶¹ An example of units not mentioned on pre or early campaign orders of battle yet which found their way to Papua is number 3 Company of 51 ER. On 5 October 259 men of this unit were present in the Giruwa area but no record of their arrival has

⁵⁷ AWM 55/1/1, bulletin no. 9, p. 4.

⁵⁸ AWM 55 3/6, current translations no.72, p. 23.

⁵⁹ AWM 55 6/3, interrogation report no 87. Pte Kato Kumio, 15 IER, p.4.

⁶⁰ AWM 123 609, review of Papuan campaign, estimate of Japanese casualties.

⁶¹ These strengths are drawn from the following:

NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshō, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), pp. 11-12

NIDS 302. 9.S, *Hiho to Tomoni-Sanpohei dai 55 Rentai senshi* (With Fire - The war history of 55 mountain artillery regiment). pp. 20-21.

Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 244.

AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 44, pp.13-21.

Military intelligence service, *Order of battle of the Japanese Army, December 1942*, p. 301. The 1943 American handbook on the Japanese army states that an element of 4 IED was also present in Papua: War Department, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1943, p 61.

been located. The total number of uniformed IJA and IJN engineers which served in the Kokoda Campaign was then in the vicinity of 2,360 men.⁶²

One battalion strong, 55 Mountain Artillery Regiment (55MAR), possessed nine 75mm mountain guns which were light man-portable howitzers. There were three pieces to a company. Understanding that the terrain would be abominable, the battalion left behind all but four guns. One of these was taken into the mountains by each of the three gun companies and one was left in reserve at Giruwa. Number 1 Company, with Yokoyama's force, had 121 men and, like the infantry battalions, the mountain artillery battalion was reduced in strength.⁶³ Three gun companies each with an ammunition platoon, and a small battalion headquarters, probably amounted to about 420 men out of a full strength of 600. This is the same 'tropical' strength brought to New Guinea by 20 Mountain Artillery Battalion when it came to Papua in December 1942 and close to the strength of 10 Mountain Artillery Regiment when it arrived on Guadalcanal.⁶⁴ Diaries and other unofficial sources provide some support that 55 MAR was probably 420 strong but might have been as large as 500 men.⁶⁵

A Japanese SNLP corresponds roughly to a WWII era reinforced United States Marine battalion. For a given task an SNLP could be from 1,000 to close to 2,000 strong. No full strength SNLP served on the Kokoda front, but elements of 5 Yokosuka SNLP and 5 Sasebo SNLP were stationed at Giruwa at times during the campaign. As was often the case, the SNLP were tasked with guarding the IJN's Giruwa base and none of the men participated in the mountain campaign.⁶⁶ They patrolled the coast by land and sea,

⁶² AWM 55 3/6, current translations no. 65, p. 39.

⁶³ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 6, p. 17.

⁶⁴ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, p. 633.

⁶⁵ AWM 123 609, review of Papuan campaign, estimate of Japanese casualties. This estimate gives 600 men for the mountain artillery battalion's strength. In AWM 55 6/1 interrogation report no 10, Pte. Yamamoto Taro said the mountain artillery battalion had 500 men and three guns, p. 3.

⁶⁶ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin number 17, Yokosuka SNLP dairy. p. 1-2. This unit arrived at Giruwa on 18/9/42 and did not leave.

occasionally clashing with the PIB, as far north as the mouth of the Mambare River and as far south as Oro Bay.⁶⁷

One company of 5 Sasebo SNLP, 236 men, landed with the Yokoyama force and formed the initial garrison of Giruwa base.⁶⁸ Another company came with the main force in mid August. Leaving behind two platoons this force left Giruwa to participate in the Milne Bay landing but was stranded on Goodenough Island.⁶⁹ The two platoons left behind, 110 men, stayed at Giruwa until they were destroyed in battle in January 1943. On 18 September 280 men, a company of 5 Yokosuka SNLP under Captain Yasuda Yoshiatsu, arrived at Giruwa to strengthen the garrison.⁷⁰ They also remained there until the end.⁷¹

Two out of three companies of 47 Field Anti Aircraft Artillery Battalion (47 FAAAB) served at Giruwa. As an FAAA company had 150 men and the force included a headquarters and an ammunition company there were probably 400 men of the unit present though again it is difficult to be sure. It does appear one company was 138 strong when sent to Papua.⁷² The remainder of the unit arrived in bits and pieces. Ninety came on the *Teiyo Maru* and 36 men on another ship on 16 August.⁷³ As was the case with one quarter of all Japanese units in Papua in 1942 the 47 FAAAB was split between 17th

⁶⁷ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area -first year*, p. 139 notes an SNLP patrol of 100 men was at Ambasi at the end of July.

⁶⁸ The ATIS documents which give the details of the SNLP in Papua are AWM 55 3/5, current translations no. 62 and AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 96 p. 1.

⁶⁹ Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p 288. Brune and others erroneously place the SNLP with the advance to Kokoda. See also AWM 3drl 8027, diary of Yamamoto Kiyoshi, medical officer of 5 Yokosuka SNLP, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Further details of the SNLP are in AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 17, pp. 1-2 and McAulay, and *Blood and Iron*, p. 230. In AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 40, p 2 the 5 Yokosuka SNLP detachment was said to be 200 strong.

⁷¹ Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 100. In Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 183, this unit is said to have been 290 strong.

⁷² AWM 55 1/3, bulletin no. 20, p. 1.

⁷³ Details of 47 FAAAB can be found in AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 25, p. 1 and AWM 55/1/1, bulletin no. 9, p. 4. Here it states there were 150 men in one anti aircraft artillery company. Elsewhere in AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 44, 90 men are recorded but this may only be the arrival of a detachment of the company.

Army's two major concerns, Papua and Guadalcanal. Numbers one and two companies served in Papua while number three company served on Guadalcanal.⁷⁴

The largest civilian type of unit (but army and navy administered) in the Nankai Shitai was the pioneers. Here this serves as a generic term for a usually unarmed labour force, with or without specialised training, which performed a wide variety of tasks, mainly unloading and transporting supplies, improving and maintaining the supply line and building installations including the Buna airfield for 25th IJN air flotilla. While the official strengths of these units is easy to obtain there are a number of cases where the whole unit was not sent to Giruwa. When it arrived there it may have been split up among other units or later portions of it were sent back to Rabaul or to Lae. The available information on 15 Naval Pioneers (15NP), composed of Korean and Taiwanese labourers and given below, is a fair illustration of the general difficulty of establishing their strength at any given time:

15 Naval Pioneers

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 21 July | A detachment of 500 of 15 Naval Pioneers (15 NP), the Takasago Taiwanese, already in Rabaul, was sent with Yokoyama Force to Papua. |
| 28 July | The main body of 15 NP arrived in Rabaul with 1,118 men less the Takasago detachment. |
| 6 August | Possibly some were detached as 15 NP had 932 men present for duty this day. |
| 9 August | 600 more labourers arrived in Rabaul and were temporarily attached to 15 NP. These men appear to have gone to Giruwa with the unit as an undated order later in August from Major General Horii instructed the unit |

⁷⁴ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, p. 633.

- commander to allocate 800 men to building the base at Giruwa, 600 to transport food for the army and 300 to transport food for the navy.⁷⁵
- 14 August 100 men of the Takasago Taiwanese volunteers, who made up a half of the original unit, were detached to army command.
- 16 August The unit commander of 15 NP and 402 men were sent to Giruwa.
- 17 August 31 men were detached to Buna.
- 20 August 23 men were detached elsewhere in the base area and came under the command of another unnamed labor unit. On the same day another 95 men were transferred to army command.
- 25 August 250 men were detached for road maintenance at Sambo.
- 2 September 95 men were returned to Rabaul
- 19 September Of 1,085 men of the original unit who served at some time in Papua just 226 were still under 15 NP command in the Giruwa area.
- 23 September 410 men were serving with the unit and 26 were detached. The Takasago 'battalion' of the unit was now operating independently carrying supplies in the mountains.⁷⁶

The other naval pioneer unit, 14 NP, arrived with 600 of its normal compliment of 1,083 men. The rest were sent to Lae.⁷⁷ Of those who went to Giruwa 210 were withdrawn to

⁷⁵ NIDS 392.18B. 9245, Senshi gyousho, nanto houmen kaigun sakusen (War history records, navy operations in south eastern area), pp. 408-409.

⁷⁶ This information for 15 Naval Pioneers comes from the following documents:
 NIDS gohoku zenpan 78, Nanto homen chijo butai no heiryoku oyobi hensei ni kansuru shiryō (Strength and composition of Japanese ground forces, south eastern area, 1941-1944.), pp. 10-11.
 AWM 55 6/4, interrogation report no. 152, p. 3.
 AWM 55 2/1, spot report no. 15, p. 1.
 AWM 55 1/3, bulletin no. 20, p. 1.
 AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 51, p. 4.
 AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 66, p. 1.

⁷⁷ The strength of the naval pioneer units in Papua were about the same as those sent to Guadalcanal. See NIDS 392. 18B 9245, Senshi gyousho, nanto houmen kaigun sakusen (War history records, navy operations in south eastern area), pp. 408-409.
 Toyoda and Nelson, *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea, Memories and Realities*, p. 218.
 AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 11, p. 1.
 AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 51, p.4.
 AWM 54 423/4/41, combat intelligence centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific fleet, pt 14, translation of report of the chief surgeon of 8th fleet HQ for September 1942.

Rabaul on 4 November.⁷⁸ There is some evidence 11 NP, whose main body was sent to Guadalcanal to build an airstrip, may have sent a small detachment of unknown size to Giruwa but this has not been included here.⁷⁹ Distinct from the large labor units were small uniformed army labor units who specialised in supply and construction tasks for both the IJN and the IJA. As near as can be ascertained they consisted of the following:

Supply and Construction Units	
106 Land Duty Company	370 men ⁸⁰
105 Sea Duty Company	176
120 Land Duty Company	475 ⁸¹
40 Sea Duty Company	250
55 Transport Regiment, no. 2 Company	145
61 Construction Company	150

While not pioneers it would be as well to include here the motor transport company as a part of the labour force of the Nankai Shitai which was mainly devoted to the transport of supply. The Sakigawa Butai of 212 Independent Motor Transport Battalion (212 IMTB) was one company strong and was later reinforced by another. Normally a Japanese motor transport company, of which there were three to a battalion, had three truck companies, each with a theoretical strength of 50 vehicles and 130 men.⁸²

Shipping records confirm Sakigawa Butai brought to Papua at least 72 trucks, mostly six wheeled Toyotas, and about 300 men. This was probably two truck companies, a

McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, p. 69.
 AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 51, p. 2.
 AWM 55 1/3, bulletin no. 20, p. 1.
 McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 145.

⁷⁸ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 51, p. 2 records the withdrawal of a detachment of 14 NP to Rabaul.

⁷⁹ War Department, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, 1944, p. 61.

⁸⁰ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 9. The details of land duty companies come from AWM 67 11/29, Gavin Long papers, captured map. See also AWM 55/1/1, bulletin no. 9, p. 4 and AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 21, pp.24-32.

⁸¹ AWM 55 6/3, interrogation report no. 152 and AWM 55 2/1 spot report no. 15.

⁸² Rottman, *Japanese Army in World War II*, p. 33.

maintenance company and a small headquarters. Later arrivals included Ford and Chevrolet trucks captured on Guam, a few staff cars and one armoured car which, once it arrived, disappeared from the historical record. It can be ascertained that after the arrival of one company of Sakigawa Butai a further 28 trucks and eight cars arrived in August aboard the *Teiyo Maru* and one other unnamed ship. The total number of vehicles landed was not more than 100.⁸³

It is usually stated that 1,200 men from eastern New Britain, the 'Rabaul carriers' were brought to Giruwa.⁸⁴ This, however, is the number that arrived with Colonel Yokoyama's advanced detachment in July. The next month another 800 arrived. These were split among Japanese units and each infantry battalion had about 100 of them attached to it. Another two or three hundred Orokaiva men, mainly from the Giruwa vicinity, were also employed as carriers, guides and scouts.⁸⁵

In all, for the variety of labouring requirements the Nankai Shitai had available about 6,300 men by late September 1942. If the temporary transport unit, drawn from 41 Regiment infantry is added the number becomes 7,000.⁸⁶ Perhaps the most unusual feature of the Nankai Shitai labour and transport arrangements is its lack of a transport regiment. Its parent division had gone to Burma when the Nankai Shitai went to the south Pacific and the transport regiment of the division had gone with it. This said, the proportion of labourers and engineers in the Nankai Shitai was high, approaching half of the total force. This is easily twice the proportion of those kinds of units sent to Guadalcanal, which may in turn suggest a higher level of awareness (on the part of 17th

⁸³ AWM 55 2/1, spot report no. 62.

⁸⁴ Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 45.

⁸⁵ There can be no certainty about this number but Professor Hank Nelson of ANU is of the opinion this is a reasonable estimate. Email to author, 3/10/07.

⁸⁶ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 183.

Army) of the supply and transport problems in Papua than that with which they are usually credited.⁸⁷

Poor medical arrangements is another popular claim about alleged Japanese unpreparedness for the Owen Stanley Campaign. This question is dealt with in another chapter but for our purposes here it is remarkable to note that the most common Japanese divisional order of battle contains a larger percentage of medical personal, 1,157 men, than did any Australian division in New Guinea in 1942. It has been noted that Japanese divisions varied greatly in their composition and it is probable they did not always maintain as large a number of medical personnel as stated in the order of battle. However, this was not the case with the Nankai Shitai, a formation in which seven per cent of all personnel were medical personnel.

There were nine medical units in the Nankai Shitai: Two field ambulances, though that is not the term used by the Japanese, a field hospital, a line of communication hospital, a civilian hospital for labourers and four hygiene and water purification units. These were often, just as were the Australians in this campaign, split into smaller detachments to meet temporary needs. Their strength was as follows:

Medical Units	
67 Line of Communication Hospital	230 staff
55 Division Field Hospital	140
55 Division medical detachment, including sanitary and dental sections	220
Patient Collecting Butai composed of 53 and 54 CCS	155
Water and Hygiene Butai composed of 17, 24, 55 and 150 platoons	230
Umeda Civilian Hospital	110

The total number of medical personnel was 1,090.⁸⁸ This was 78 men below the standard number for a Japanese division.

⁸⁷ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 631-636. Less than one quarter of the Japanese who served on Guadalcanal fit into the labor/engineer category.

⁸⁸ For medical, water and hygiene units see the following:
War Department, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, 1944, pp. 60-61.

Each battalion, regimental and divisional headquarters contains communications personnel who have been included in figures given thus far. As it was realised that communications between the Owen Stanley Range, the Giruwa base and Rabaul would be difficult, additional communications units were added to the force. For example, 17th Army attached a section of its own signals unit to the force headquarters of the Nankai Shitai.

Small signals units are the most difficult of all to establish the strength of and it is not possible to be confident about some of the units and their strengths given below. Where unit strength can be reasonably estimated it is sometimes achieved by comparing unit strength in Papua with that in Guadalcanal. A comparison shows that, for example, 88 Independent Communications Company, (88 ICC) with an order of battle strength of 180 men, sent 147 to Guadalcanal.⁸⁹ The strength of the detachment sent to Papua is stated to be a single platoon and we can conclude from this it may well have been the remaining 33 men of the company.

Less usefully, there is no record of 7 Independent Wireless Platoon (7 IWP) and 8 Independent Telegraph Platoon (8 ITP) being sent to Papua at all yet four men from these two units were treated for illness by 67 LOCH in Giruwa in September.⁹⁰ These detachments must have been very small to leave no record so it has been assumed here that they were probably both of section size. While the following signals units were present, the numbers of personnel present should be treated with caution.

War Department, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, July 1943, end pocket chart of Japanese divisional order of battle.

AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 14, p. 2.

AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 47, p. 2.

Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 244.

AWM 55/1/1, bulletin no. 9, p. 4.

AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 25, p. 1.

AWM 55 3/4 current translations no. 44, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, p. 634.

⁹⁰AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24. Records of 67 LOCH, PCB records for September. See p 32 and p.62.

SIGNALS FORMATIONS IN THE KOKODA CAMPAIGN AREA	
45 Permanent Wireless Platoon	25
44 Permanent Wireless Platoon	25
88 Independent Wireless Company, one platoon	33
55 Divison Signals Company, detachment	30
17 Army Mobile Wireless Station, signals section	18
5 Shipping Signals platoon	18
37 Fixed Radio Platoon	26
33 Fixed Radio Platoon	24
7 Independent Wireless Platoon, one section	15
8 Independent Telegraph Platoon, one section	15 ⁹¹

This gives 246 communications personnel outside of those in infantry regiments and force headquarters. One reason to believe it is probably about right is that it is the same proportion of comparable communications personnel, about one and a half percent of the total force, that was sent to Guadalcanal by 17th Army.⁹²

A strange omission from all lists of Nankai Shitai strength is the personnel of a detachment from 25 IJN Air Flotilla who were at Buna airstrip from the end of July.⁹³ The strip operated one Chutai, 16 fighter aircraft, for a week until most were destroyed by Allied air attack and the strip was rendered inoperable by bombing. The ground unit, two companies of a Hikojo Daitai, an airfield battalion, were maintained there in the hope the field could become operational again.⁹⁴ However, in September the major air effort was switched to Guadalcanal and it was determined the Buna airfield was too prone to flooding, so evacuation of aircrew and ground personnel began. The last of these men left

⁹¹ Communications unit information comes from Military intelligence service, *Order of battle of the Japanese Army, December 1942*, p. 330. See also pocket charts at end of book.

⁹² Frank, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 634-636. On Guadalcanal there were 467 communications personnel (outside of those organic to fighting units) of 29,000 men landed to 20/11/42.

⁹³ The term *Nankai Shitai* has been used to include all forces in the Giruwa-Owen Stanley area. Strictly speaking, the air flotilla and a number of other small IJN units were not under army command so were not part of the Nankai Shitai.

⁹⁴ Record of interview with Lt Tsunoda Kazuo, 3/6/04. Tsunoda was a pilot of 32 Air Flotilla attached to the Tainan Air Group for operations at Buna.

at the end of October. A 25th Air Flotilla record shows the two companies had 357 men.⁹⁵

The remaining small units or detachments in the Nankai Shitai were a veterinary detachment, a military police detachment and an anchorage command. The veterinary detachment was not the full veterinary company normal for a division and reflects the half normal divisional allocation of horses to the Nankai Shitai. Its strength was about 90 men. They had the care of 2,630 horses throughout the campaign.⁹⁶ The military police, the Kempei Tai, had a platoon of 30 at Giruwa from 6 Military Police Company (6 MPC) based at Rabaul.⁹⁷ There were a few other military police attached to maintain discipline among the civilian labourers but no record of their number has been found. The anchorage command, an IJN unit, had a staff of 37 and administered the unloading and storage of supplies at Giruwa base.

The total number of men who landed in Papua with the Nankai Shitai up to the end of the mountain campaign is, in Australia, usually stated to be between 13,000 and 13,500.⁹⁸ The *Senshi Soshō* gives 8,000 army and 3,430 naval personnel to 2 September by which time the transport of all units that it was originally intended to send was complete.⁹⁹ In Milner's volume of the United States official history there appears a very similar estimate for the same period. It should be pointed out these numbers exclude Rabaul carriers and Orokaivas. These estimates are probably correct up to early September but thereafter more troops arrived so the accepted total, 13,500, would seem to be too small.

⁹⁵ Written record in the collection of Lt Tsunoda Kazuo.

⁹⁶ Giveney E. *The First at War; the Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-45*, Association of First Infantry Battalions, Earlwood, 1987, p 285. Here the author states the Japanese had 2,630 horses and mules. This information comes from captured documents.

⁹⁷ Military Intelligence Service, *Order of battle of the Japanese Army, December 1942*, p. 348. See also AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 47, p. 2.

Zeitiz L. explains the function of the Kempie Tai in *No half hearted soldiers-the Japanese army's experience of defeat in the south-west Pacific 1942-1945*. MA thesis, University of New South Wales, p. 187.

⁹⁸ Ham, *Kokoda*, p. 146 and Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 99.

⁹⁹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 157.

An Australian intelligence estimate drawn from captured documents totalled 14,900 enemy arrivals at Giruwa to 14 December.¹⁰⁰ This may be more than 4,000 short of the mark because, counting arrivals after 2 September, the assessment in this chapter shows a maximum of 16,690 men arrived in Papua via Giruwa under the Japanese flag up to 1 November. Another 800 landed on 2 November but they played no part in the mountain campaign and have not been included in our calculations for the period under study.

If those who spent less than a month at Giruwa (like the main force of 5 Sasebo SNLP and part of 25 Air Flotilla) are removed, and a further deduction is made for the smaller units of whose strength there is some doubt, then it is safe to say that the Nankai Shitai, up to November 1942, was a force of 16,000 men. Its peak strength was not reached until late September, and from this there are casualties to deduct as well as well as sick and others withdrawn to Rabaul. It is likely that at no time was the Nankai Shitai larger than 15,000, or 17,000 if labourers from New Britain and Papua are included.¹⁰¹ The health and battle casualties of the Nankai Shitai are discussed elsewhere but for now it can be said that from the middle of August to the middle of October the Nankai Shitai probably had 14,000 men present for duty at any given time.

That the total strength of the Nankai Shitai in the period under study was in excess of 13500 also receives support from Lt Colonel Tanaka, the Nankai Shitai chief of staff. On 3 October he calculated that there were 10,000 men in the vicinity of Giruwa, a day when we can be sure the main body of the infantry, as well as several thousand engineers and labourers, were many kilometres away deployed from the Kumusi to Kokoda to Eora in the mountains.¹⁰² Another post war Japanese account estimated that 18,000 men served in

¹⁰⁰ AWM 66 2/3/1, Allied Air Force operational survey no. 1, p 7.

¹⁰¹ For Japanese evacuations from Giruwa see AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, record of 67 LOCH, p. 1, p. 37, p. 46 and p. 87. In October there was one evacuation of 395 men to Rabaul. On 17/9/42 and 20/9/42, 198 patients were sent to Rabaul and 582 persons are recorded as having left for Rabaul on 1/11/42. There were other small numbers of departures. A reasonable estimate to 1/11/42 is that 1,300 men left Giruwa by sea sick, wounded or transferred to other units.

¹⁰² Onda S. *Tobu New Guinea Sen*, (The Advance to New Guinea), Kodansha Bunko, Tokyo, 1988 p 142.

Papua exclusive of Milne Bay, a number that has been adopted by the Australian Official History. If our earlier calculation of 16,690 arrivals to 1 November is correct and we add the 2700 men who arrived from 2 November to the close of the campaign in January 1943, then it appears the total number of Japanese who served in Papua, exclusive of Milne Bay, was close to 20,000.¹⁰³

It has also been stated that within the Nankai Shitai was “a well balanced force including 10,000 fighting troops”.¹⁰⁴ The numbers given here indicate the figure was not that large. Including the 623 trained infantry from 41 Regiment who served as carriers for most of the campaign, the total number of fighting troops cannot have been greater than 7300. Even this number is too large, because we should deduct the 400 SNLP personnel who were not present for long and never left the coast. It is true this could be partly counterbalanced by including the field ambulance and other front line medical personnel who, while not actually participating in any combat, were, like signallers, considered to be fighting troops when the distinction is made between those who serve near the front line and those who don't. Around 7,000 is a reasonable estimate of Nankai Shitai fighting strength though, as will be seen, prior to the action at Oivi-Gorari only half of these men participated in any fighting in the Owen Stanley Range.

Postwar students of the campaign have tended to inflate the size of the Japanese infantry battalions. This can only be done if the evidence provided by NGF intelligence as early as November 1942 is ignored. The following list is drawn from a document which was produced by NGF that month, though a couple of notes were added in early December as more information came to light. While the numbers were not accurate in every case it

¹⁰³ For other estimates of the total Japanese strength that served in Papua, all of which are lower than estimated here, see:

Dull P. *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy 1941-1945*, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, 1978, pp. 179-180.

Keogh Colonel E. *The South West Pacific 1941-45*, p. 280.

McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 531.

¹⁰⁴ Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 99 and McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 146.

shows clearly enough that it was known the Japanese infantry battalions arrived in Papua considerably under strength.¹⁰⁵

UNIT	Jan 3, 1942	Original [on landing in Papua]
1/144 Battalion	884	500 est.

2/144 Battalion	
Bn HQ	91
4 Company	168
5 Company	165
6 Company	162
Machine Gun Company	137
Gun Platoon	72
Total	795

3/144 Battalion	
Bn HQ	94
7 Company	144
8 Company	152
9 Company	154
Machine Gun Company	132
Gun Platoon	68
Total	776

41 Regiment HQ	100
2/41 Battalion	
Bn HQ	90
5 Company	110
6 Company	110
7 Company	110
8 Company	110
Machine Gun Company	130
Gun Platoon	70
Total	730

The very high proportion of fighting troops to non fighting troops that the Australian official history and others give is reduced, in part, when we factor in the low strength of the infantry battalions. Even without such a detailed examination of the order of battle of

¹⁰⁵ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, August-September, captured documents in appendix E.

the Nankai Shitai, a proportion of three quarters of a force being fighting troops should cause suspicion.

In military parlance, a 'divisional slice' is the proportion of soldiers in an army who serve in its fighting divisions as opposed to those who constitute its supporting units.¹⁰⁶ It is in some ways a misnomer, as not all fighting troops were organised into divisions. However, the main point is to distinguish between those who fought the enemy in some capacity and those who enabled the fighting to occur by providing logistical and administrative support but did not fight themselves.

In one WWII study it was remarked that just one quarter of the Americans in their army were actually in its divisions and that in the early war in north Africa the Australians had a proportion of half and half. They were unable to maintain this in the Pacific and soon came to more closely resemble the American proportion. The frugal Japanese were able to maintain a half of their men in the fighting forces in the year of our study but even they had to reduce this later in the war. Such were the supply problems of the Owen Stanley Range that they were not able to approach this proportion in Papua. The Australians and Americans in contrast had 60,712 men in New Guinea on 6 October 1942. Of these one quarter could be considered fighting troops.

The Nankai Shitai is then best visualised as a light division, also known as a special division, and this is what Japanese documents often call it, with a stronger than usual proportion of engineering and labouring support.¹⁰⁷ At most forty per cent of the force could be termed the fighting force, and sixty per cent the supporting force, if combat engineers are considered part of the fighting force. If we look a little closer at the infantry who did the lion's share of the fighting in Papua then, including all infantry regiment personnel, the Japanese committed close to 4,660 infantrymen to the campaign (though one third of these did not enter the mountains) between July and mid November 1942.

¹⁰⁶ Dunnigan and Nofi. *The Pacific War Encyclopedia*, pp. 396-397.

¹⁰⁷ War Department, *Handbook on Japanese Military Forces*, 1944, p. 18.

The Australians, including all infantry brigade (the Australian equivalent of the Japanese regiment) personnel, placed almost twice this number, close to 9,000 infantrymen, in harm's way along the Kokoda track.

THE KOKODA CAMPAIGN, JULY- NOVEMBER 1942, AN ANALYSIS

PART TWO-THE ENGAGEMENTS AND ACTIONS OF THE KOKODA CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER FIVE, THE NANKAI SHITAI LANDING AND KOKODA-DENIKI.

CHAPTER SIX, ISURAVA.

CHAPTER SEVEN, EORA-TEMPLETONS 1.

CHAPTER EIGHT, EFOGI.

CHAPTER NINE, IORIBAIWA.

CHAPTER TEN, EORA-TEMPLETONS 2.

CHAPTER ELEVEN, OIVI-GORARI.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE NANKAI SHITAI LANDING AND KOKODA-DENIKI.

CHAPTER 5 - KOKODA-DENIKI, 25 JULY TO 14 AUGUST, 1942

Colonel Yokoyama Yosuke's advanced party of the Nankai Shitai sailed to Basabua, Papua, in two convoys, each of two transports and an escort. They disembarked on 21 July and 29 July at the cost of one vessel, the *Ayatozan Maru*, which was sunk by Allied air attack after it had unloaded most of its cargo. Yokoyama's own list, written a few days before departure from Rabaul, of units which came under his command appears in Yokoyama operational order number one. Yokoyama did not list the strengths of the units, which are derived from the sources used in the previous chapter.

ORDER OF BATTLE - YOKOYAMA FORCE

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Strength</u>
1/144 Infantry Battalion	586
55 Mountain Artillery, 1 Company	121
47 Anti Aircraft Artillery, 2 Company	200
15 Naval Pioneers	500
55 Division Field Hospital, half strength	120
55 Division Signals Company, detachment	40
120 Land Duties Company, one platoon	50
17 Army Mobile Wireless Station, one section	18
45 Permanent Wireless Station	22
55 Division medical detachment- one platoon field ambulance, one platoon stretcher bearers, two platoons water and hygiene	140
Supply carriers recruited in Rabaul	1200
Sakigawa Motor Truck Company	120
(Not on Yokoyama's list but included in the force)	
15 Independent Engineer Regiment, less one company	600
Yokoyama Force HQ including 144 Regiment signals detachment	51
37 IJN Anchorage Command .	44
5 Sasebo SNLP	236
Less casualties to aerial bombs on Ayatozan Maru	9 approx.
Total Arrivals	4022¹

¹ The unit strengths are drawn from the following sources.

AWM 55 2/1, Spot Report no 11. Yokoyama operational order number one, 16/7/42.

Boeicho Boei Kenshujo Senshishitsu, Senshi Soshō:Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun sakusen, v1, Poto Moresubi-Gashima shoko sakusen (War history series; South Pacific Area army operations, Volume 1, Port Moresby-Guadalcanal first campaigns), p. 200.

AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 266, p. 17.

This force had five tasks:

- 1) prepare for the arrival of the IJN units tasked with building an air strip at Buna. The first priority was to dig a well near the strip and clear the ground.²
- 2) establish a base at Giruwa including a hospital, jetty, buildings for administration and storage.
- 3) establish and maintain a supply line to Kokoda where the forward supply dump was to be placed.
- 4) investigate other supply route options, especially the Mambare and Kumusi Rivers.
- 5) drive any enemy back into the mountains and advance as far as the southern side of the Owen Stanley Range crest.³

The fifth task was to be carried out by Tsukamoto's first battalion of 144 Regiment, the mountain gun company and small detachments of signallers, engineers, Rabaul carriers and medical staff. This force totalled 900 men.⁴

The landing at Basabua was unopposed, the Australians manning the Buna wireless station having fled as soon as they learned of the Japanese presence. In typically bold Japanese fashion reminiscent of the landing on the coast of Malaya in December 1941, the first company of 1/144 under Captain Ogawa was loaded into trucks which were

AWM 54 577/7/2, report on operations in New Guinea, information gained on the enemy. This document lists 5 Company of 2/144 as present with Yokoyama's force but this is incorrect.

AWM 55 3/5 current translations no. 62, pp.13-27.

AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 4, p. 40.

AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 4, pp. 24-25.

AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary. Captured documents in September 1942 appendix.

Other captured documents in this battalion war diary appendix give the following Japanese strengths:

45 Permanent Wireless Platoon 27.

7 Independent Wireless Platoon 27.

all water purification units 171.

total 'black coolies' 1200

² NIDS 392.18B, 9245, Senshi Gyousho Nanto houmen Kaigun sakusen, (War History records, navy operations in south eastern area) pp. 408-409.

AWM 55 3/ 4 449, papers attached to Yokoyama operational order no. 1, 20/7/1942. sheet number 9.

³ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua campaigns*, pp. 116-117.

⁴ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment. p.4.

disembarked by 1630 on 21 July. Ogawa took along bicycles and a detachment, probably a platoon, of the battalion gun company, a platoon of the battalion's machine gun company and one engineer platoon carrying rubber boats for river crossings. The engineers were to make an assessment of the work required along the route to Kokoda.⁵ As soon as Ogawa had completed his first task, clearing the road as far as Kokoda, the main body would begin transporting supplies to build a dump there. It was 36 hours before any other part of Yokoyama's force left the Giruwa area and the main body of 1/144, which seems to have arrived in the second convoy, did not leave Giruwa until late on 29 July.

Ogawa also took a few Orokaiva locals as guides. These men did good service as scouts and spies for the Japanese. One Japanese wrote on 23 July, two days after landing, that "the natives along the coast are friendly towards us and a few may be employed".⁶ The Orokaiva men were observed by Australians to be scouting ahead of the Japanese advance and had warned the Japanese that there were 60 Australians at Papaki.⁷ It was one of these scouts who wounded Captain Harold Jesser of the PIB on 9 August.⁸

Ogawa's company of 1/144 was 135 strong at this time so this advanced guard, the force which engaged the Australians and the PIB several times for the next week as it advanced towards Kokoda, was about 240 men. The advance was rapid as the road was found to be

⁵ Milner S. *The War in the Pacific*, p. 62 states 1/144 and one company of engineers and the regimental signals detachment totalled 900 men. On p. 65 it is also said that not all of Yokoyama detachment's fighting strength was well forward until 13 August. The Sakigawa motor transport company which took forward Ogawa's company to Sambo, arrived on 21 July at 1630. See 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 1, p 11.

⁶ AWM 55 12/6, 23/7/1942. Twenty two Orokaiva were hanged by the Australians after the campaign for their activities in support of the Japanese. See James B. *The Kokoda Track, An Historical Guide to the Lost Battlefields*, Kokoda Press, Lane Cove, 2006, p. 41, and Hank Nelson, 'The Swinging index' *Journal of Papua History*, vol 13, pts. 3-4 and http://www.thenational.com.pg/101707/WEEKENDER_7.htm The War in Papua – The executions at Higaturu by John Fowke.

⁷ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, file of Yazawa Butai orders, p. 4.6

⁸ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, see the first week of August for several references to Orokaiva scouts helping the Japanese.

usable by motor vehicles as far as Sambo.⁹ The next day a dozen of Ogawa's men appeared at the front gate of the Sangara Mission while Captain Tom Grahamslaw and Lt John Chalk of the PIB were taking breakfast. They fled out the back door so this cannot truly be considered the first encounter of the campaign. That occurred near Awala the following day, 23 July, when 38 men of the PIB under Major W. Watson, fired on the advancing Japanese, then retired. As described by Daera Ganiga, a private of the PIB, each man fired eight or nine rounds until Major Watson told them to 'run for our lives'.¹⁰ The skirmish went on long enough for the Japanese to deploy and open fire with their 70mm battalion gun.¹¹ There is some dispute as to whether or not 11 Platoon of 39 Battalion, then a kilometre west of the PIB, also engaged the Japanese that day. Japanese sources suggest they did as two short fights, one with 30 'militiamen' then one with '100 Australians', were recorded by them.¹²

The Australians demolished the bridge at Wairopi and on 24 July in the mid afternoon fire was briefly exchanged across the Kumusi River. No casualties resulted on either side. Captain Jesser observed the Japanese engineers crossing in rubber boats.¹³ The Australians and Papuans, by now 100 strong, had fallen back to just east of Gorari where on 25 July they ambushed the Japanese scouts, then again retired. Fifteen Japanese casualties were claimed by the Australians. Here Japanese records do not give the wounded but do show two men from 1 Company 1/144 were killed in action at Gorari on this day.¹⁴ They were the first fatal Japanese battle casualties in the land campaign in Papua.

⁹ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 4.

¹⁰ Robinson N. Villagers at War, some Papua New Guinea experiences in WWII. *Pacific research monograph no 2*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1979, pp. 201-203.

¹¹ Austin, V, *Kokoda and Beyond. The Story of the 39th Battalion, 1941-1943*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1988, p. 87.

¹² This is discussed in James, *The Kokoda Track, An Historical Guide to the Lost Battlefields*, pp. 407-408, and AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment the War History of 144, p. 5.

¹³ AWM 54 577/6/4, 7th Australian Division, messages dealing with Maroubra Force, p. 4.

¹⁴ NIDS 302.9.H, *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), attached list of 144 regiment war dead.

OIVI

The next place the Australians and Papuans stood was Oivi. Up to Oivi the Australian policy was, as Captain Sam Templeton told one of his platoon commanders, “no do or die stunts”.¹⁵ On 25 July Lt Colonel William Owen, the battalion commander, overruled Templeton, instructing him that he would, at Oivi, ‘hold at all costs unless surrounded’.¹⁶ One hundred and forty five defenders had assembled by this time.¹⁷ Since the Japanese landing there had been a concerted effort to mass the 300 men of the PIB, the Royal Papuan Constabulary (RPC) and 39 Battalion available north of the Owen Stanleys as far as the Waria River and east of Kokoda. Here at Oivi 60 men of the PIB and RPC and 90 Australians, mainly B Company of 39 Battalion, assembled.¹⁸ The defenders deployed across the track, less nine men who were with Captain Jesser watching a parallel track to the south which was to feature in the fighting here in November 1942. The Japanese attack, which included the engineer platoon, almost encircled the defenders who fought on until the evening then escaped to Deniki.¹⁹

During the fight, Captain Templeton disappeared and there has been some controversy as to what happened to him. Japanese records make it plain he was wounded, captured, interrogated and executed. One thing that stands out in Japanese accounts is how large was the number of Australians, wounded or otherwise, who were captured in the course of the campaign. This naturally occurred frequently during the Australian retreat and

¹⁵ Brune P. *Those Ragged Bloody Heroes: From the Kokoda Trail to Gona Beach 1942*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1991. p. 40.

¹⁶ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, 25/7/42.

¹⁷ AWM 52 8/4/4, Papuan Infantry Battalion war diary, 21/7/42.

¹⁸ For details of location and numbers of PIB in July and August 1942 see AWM 52 8/4/4, PIB war diary for 21/7/42 and AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary for 26/7/42. For mention of 39 Battalion deserters see 39 Battalion war diary and PIB war diary for 30/7/42. Thirty one men from D company, 39 Battalion under Lt. MacClean came by air to Kokoda.

¹⁹ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no 28, file of Yazawa Butai orders, p. 50.

infrequently during the advance. Post-campaign Australian battle casualty studies led to the determination that 54 men's deaths could be presumed up to 25 September. Seven more deaths were presumed during the later Australian advance.²⁰ Japanese records list a larger number of captured Australians. It is in the vicinity of 110 men but it is difficult to be sure as several accounts may refer to the same event. It would appear that a number who were listed in Australia as killed in action were in fact captured, perhaps wounded, and then killed.

Between 25 July and 15 August, 18 men of 39 Battalion are listed as 'death presumed'. In the same period Japanese accounts report eleven Australians were captured.²¹ There is reason to believe the Japanese accounts are correct as there is usually some mention of what information the prisoner gave when questioned. The general pattern was that about half of these men were already wounded, and all, though this is not stated, were soon executed. If they were officers they were interrogated in greater detail then executed several days later. Postwar Australian studies of prisoners of war in the hands of the Japanese confirm that no Australian soldier captured by the Japanese in Papua survived the war in their hands. At the first Oivi engagement Australian records state that the death of two other ranks there was 'presumed'. Several Japanese records show that, along with Templeton, one other Australian was captured so one of these men whose death was presumed was not killed in action but was rather captured and executed.

At the first Kokoda engagement, Australian records show two killed and five whose deaths were presumed. A Japanese record states five prisoners were taken in the Kokoda engagement. If that is correct then all the Australians listed as 'death presumed' for first Kokoda were in fact captured then killed.²² Papuans too were executed by the Japanese

²⁰ AWM 54 171/2/48, battle casualties, Owen Stanley campaign, Kokoda to Imita pp. 1-2 and AWM 54 171/2/47, battle Casualties, Owen Stanley campaign, Imita to Wairopi, pp. 1-2.

²¹ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 13, p. 25 for mention of the capture and interrogation of prisoners. See also AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no 28, file of Yazawa Butai orders p. 50.

²² AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p 50. This captured document notes that at Kokoda the Australians were commanded by Colonel Owen and that there were twenty enemy dead and five prisoners were captured.

but records are vague. This harsh treatment of prisoners, whether soldiers or inhabitants, on the part of the invaders was not a state of affairs peculiar to Papua. In Rabaul a platoon of 2/144 had killed 160 Australian POWs. In the Malayan campaign which ended in February 1942 the records of 41 Regiment, which was later to arrive in Papua, listed 572 people killed, mostly civilians, for “opposing Japanese troops” or being, “suspected spies, in possession of stolen goods, enemy sympathisers, communists or teachers.”²³

FIRST KOKODA

After Oivi the scene of activity moved to an area around Kokoda within which the front was to stabilise for two weeks. The area is triangular and bounded by Kokoda to the north west, a track junction near the village of Pirivi to the north east and the village of Deniki in the south on the main track to Port Moresby. Each side of this triangle was bordered by a track about seven kilometres long. The reasons the Japanese advance was halted in this area until 14 August are both geographical and military. It is important to dwell momentarily on the details here as this period of the campaign brought about both a change in Japanese plans and set the scene for the action at Isurava in late August.

The most important feature within the Kokoda-Pirivi-Deniki triangle was the airstrip west of the steep-sided and flat-topped ridge on which sat Kokoda government station. Whoever held the strip could fly in reinforcements and supplies while denying the same to the enemy. The Japanese planned to use the Kokoda strip for air supply as the Australians later did but the loss of all air assets to the Guadalcanal campaign prevented this. As the only practical landing ground between Port Moresby and Buna, in the long run whoever held it was likely to win the mountain campaign. Small forces cannot defend large locations like airfields. What can be done is to occupy a terrain feature nearby that overlooks the airstrip. This at least will prevent the enemy using it. The obvious feature to occupy at Kokoda was the ridge overlooking the strip on which Kokoda government

²³ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication no 28, Yazawa Regiment interrogation reports from Malaya, 8/3/42. See p. 18 for table of persons executed.

station stood. An old rubber plantation partly obscured the field of fire in the direction of the strip but it remained the best spot to make a stand.

Deniki, the southern point of the triangle, is of importance as the entrance to the mountain range and because of its proximity to and spectacular view of Kokoda. While there are other tracks from the Mambare valley leading south into the mountains the one via Deniki is the best and easiest and no force holding Kokoda can be comfortable while all that they do is observed from Deniki. The northeast angle of the triangle is the track junction near Pirivi. Coming from the coast and turning left at Pirivi one may take a short cut to Deniki, avoiding Kokoda. It makes Kokoda strip, vital though it is, hard to hold from either direction as an enemy can easily use this track to slip behind any force placed in Kokoda which does not also hold the track junction in its own rear. Owen ran this risk during his stand at Kokoda, leaving only a few men to hold Deniki. Ten days later when Lt. Colonel Alan Cameron attacked from Deniki towards Kokoda he also sent a force to threaten the Japanese rear at Pirivi.

These, then, were the considerations which decided Lt Colonel Owen, after he realised the mistake of abandoning Kokoda, to rush back there from Deniki and dig in on the flat topped ridge. The first Kokoda engagement has entered Australian folklore, where it serves as a prototype for the fighting that followed. The story runs that, outnumbered ten to one, with their commander mortally wounded, the Australians held out at Kokoda and when they could not hold any more, stole away in the misty morning.²⁴

The evidence from Japanese sources strongly suggests this account is in one aspect misleading. A recent account of the Kokoda engagement states an instance in the fight when “400 of Tsukamoto’s 900 strong force charged up the short steep slope.”²⁵ This could only be true if the main body of Tsukamoto’s battalion had caught up with the advanced guard, Ogawa’s company. The Japanese official history, the *Senshi Soshō*,

²⁴ Ham, *Kokoda*, pp. 49-53.

²⁵ Ham, *Kokoda*, p. 49.

states that they caught up at Awala but this cannot be correct as the main force of the battalion only left the coast, 100 kilometres away, the day before.²⁶ There is more than sufficient other evidence, perhaps not available to those who wrote *Senshi Sosho* forty years ago, that the main body had not caught up and that the Australians faced only Ogawa's force of less than twice their own number.

On 23 July it was reported to 17th Army in Rabaul that Ogawa's advanced guard had pushed on so fast that all contact with them had been lost by the main body at Giruwa. Another unidentified small element of Yokoyama's force had left Giruwa 36 hours after Ogawa but it had more and heavier equipment to carry than Ogawa's troops and it had not used trucks for the first 40 kilometres as had Ogawa.²⁷ The night of the first Kokoda engagement this element was still 16 kilometres behind Ogawa camping at "Oivi spur". A 144 Regiment signaller with this group complained that progress had been slow, the axle on his two wheeled cart had broken, crossing the Kumusi had been a problem and it had taken six days to get from the coast to the west side of the Kumusi which was still 50 kilometres from Kokoda.²⁸ Three weeks later, when the route was much improved, two battalions of the main force of Nankai Shitai did manage to move from the coast to Kokoda in a six day forced march but this seems to have been the best that could be done by large bodies of infantry so it is to be expected that Yokoyama's main body took longer.

Most unfortunately, the 1 Company records for July of 1942 are missing from the 144 Regiment records.²⁹ The evidence that Ogawa's company of 1/144 fought the first Kokoda engagement unaided comes from diary accounts of Japanese who belonged to the company. An officer who belonged to Ogawa's company but for some reason marched to

²⁶AWM PRO 0297, papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment. p. 5.

²⁷ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, file of Yazawa butai orders, p. 46.

²⁸ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment. p. 5. See also 55 3/2, current translations no. 21, p. 17, diary of a 144 Regiment signaller with Yokoyama Force. He set up the communications with the battalion gun when it later bombarded Deniki.

²⁹ NIDS, Nanto Higashi Nyuginia 282, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Dai 1 Chutai jinchi nisshi, (War diary for 144 Regiment 1st Company). The record begins after August, 1942.

Kokoda later with the main body of the battalion, leaving Giruwa on 1 August, wrote that he had heard “our advanced force” has been engaged with the enemy in the Kokoda area. He went on to say that the battalion “captured” Oivi on 6 August - ten days after Ogawa’s company had fought there.³⁰

A second diarist of Ogawa’s company, Pte Watanabe Toshi, noted that the company was out on its own up front and “feeling lonely”.³¹ He misdates this entry 21 July, the day of the landing. He probably meant 31 July as he goes on to write about the fight the company has just been in at Kokoda. He wrote that the company lost nine killed and 18 wounded. This was three quarters of the total Japanese loss for the fight. The other casualties were engineers. It would be hard to believe that in a hard fought, albeit small and short encounter, no other part of the battalion, if present, suffered any loss.

A third writer of 144 Regiment, an officer of 3 Company, also records passing through Oivi on 6 August, a week after the fight. The fourth piece of evidence comes from a lecture given in Japan by Major Toyufuku soon after he returned after being wounded at Isurava. He described the first engagement at Kokoda as a one company night attack so it would seem reasonably safe to conclude that 1 Company, with its small attachments mentioned earlier, constituted the sole force which attacked the Australians and Papuans at Kokoda on the night of 28/29 July 1942.³² Deducting for casualties thus far Ogawa had no more than 200 men.

The number of defenders of Kokoda is usually stated to be 77 or 81. These figures come from statements by 39 Battalion men and appear to refer only to the battalion.³³ They are

³⁰ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary July-September. Translated documents in appendix C and F. See appendix F, pt. 2.

³¹ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no 4, p. 5, diary of Watanabe Toshio of no. 1 Company of 1/144. He notes also that his company has suffered the heaviest casualties of all.

³² NIDS nanto zenpan 168, Nankai Shitai shireibu Toyufuku shosa kowa (lecture of Major Toyufuku,headquarters,Nankai Shitai), p. 21.

³³ See Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 25 and Austin, *To Kokoda and Beyond, The story of the 39th Battalion 1941-1943*, p. 95.

not in accord with several specific mentions of the strength of the Australians and Papuans, now known as Maroubra Force, in the battalion war diary and messages it sent to New Guinea Force (NGF) in Port Moresby. In the war diary it is stated that 72 men returned to Deniki after the fight and that a further twenty men were then still missing.³⁴

A message to NGF from Maroubra Force on 2 August related there were now 12 missing believed killed and 27 missing believed deserted - all on the night of Kokoda. So it appears 39 Battalion assembled 116 men at Kokoda, 77 from B Company, a small battalion headquarters and the rest, who had just flown into Kokoda strip, from D Company.³⁵ There were in addition 20 PIB, four men from ANGAU, up to nine RPC including the famous Corporal Sanopa, and four signallers from 30 Brigade HQ.³⁶ It is normal after a fight that there will be errors in accounting, and it is possible not all the RPC were present, so there may have been a few less than 116 men of 39 Battalion present but it still seems a minimum of 130 Australians and Papuans defended Kokoda against about 200 Japanese.

From the Australian side, the story of the fight has often been told. The Australians were deployed in a horseshoe shaped line, around the end of the ridge. The Japanese attacked, mainly from the north, at 0230. By 0320, with Owen fatally wounded, the order to withdraw was given. At this point the battalion war diary records that artillery and mortar

³⁴ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary 29/7/42 – 2/8/42. The diary notes that from the first Japanese attack to the decision to withdraw was 50 minutes.

³⁵ AWM 54 171/2/20 Maroubra Force battle casualties and messages 1942. A signal to NGF on 2/8/42 stated there were 12 missing believed killed, 27 missing believed deserted, 5 wounded and 12 returned sick. Also in B Company casualty returns as a result of the fighting from 24/7/42 to 29/7/42 it is stated seven were evacuated sick and '27 missing believed deserted'.

³⁶ AWM 67 2/17, Gavin Long papers. A note by Long on the fighting says 20 PIB were at Kokoda and eight at Deniki. That nine RPC were present prior to the engagement, with Lt Grahamslaw, is in McCarthy, *South west Pacific area-first year*, p. 124. Grahamslaw's Corporal Sanopa was present, but it is possible Grahamslaw and the rest of his force was not. The evidence from Long's notes and the 39 Battalion war diary would seem to indicate Long erred on p. 127 of his volume of the official history where he stated the total allied force was 80 strong.

fire disrupted the rearward movement and “our line then broke completely” which would seem to be when the desertions occurred.³⁷

From the Japanese perspective the most interesting feature of the engagement is Captain Ogawa’s decision to attack Kokoda before the main body of the battalion arrived. It was the right decision for several reasons and not only because his attack was successful, though it cost him his own life. The battalion orders were to “quickly capture the position of Kokoda and the strategical line of the Owen Stanley Range.”³⁸ The job of an advanced guard in a rapid advance is to facilitate the advance of the main body. This is done by attacking any enemy encountered, driving off the smaller bodies and pinning any larger force. An additional consideration for Ogawa was he probably saw the arrival of Australian aircraft bringing reinforcements to Kokoda strip. A delay to reinforce the Japanese side would also allow the enemy to reinforce. In fact the arrival of one company of 49 Battalion from Port Moresby by air on 29 July was forestalled by Ogawa’s attack.³⁹ Ninety three men of D Company 49 Battalion were, early on the morning of 29 July, sitting by the runway at Seven Mile at Port Moresby. The Australian plan was to send a company a day by air to Kokoda if possible. It has been argued that one extra company would not have made much difference against a Japanese reinforced battalion and that may be so.⁴⁰ Against the one Japanese company that was actually present, it may well have made a significant difference.

³⁷ AWM 54 253/5/8, pt. 1, Capt Vernon’s war diary July-Nov 42. On p 17, Vernon noted a ‘big mortar’ firing on them at Kokoda 28/29 July. This was actually a 70mm light howitzer but the mistaken identification appears in most Australian records throughout the campaign and, as is discussed in the chapter on Japanese artillery, has continued since the war.

³⁸ AWM 55 3/4 , spot report no. 45, Yokoyama operational order no 2, 22/7/42, pp 50-51.

³⁹ AWM 54 577/7/29, NGF reports on Maroubra operations, Kokoda, 21/7/42- 4/8/42, pt. 21, appendix A, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Moreman, J. A Triumph of Improvisation. Australian Army Operational Logistics and the Campaign in Papua, July 1942 to January 1943, PhD thesis, ADFA, 2000, p. 133.

SECOND KOKODA

After the first Kokoda engagement, the Australians retreated to Deniki. For a week, the Japanese infantry company held Kokoda, awaiting the arrival of the main body of the battalion. They scouted the Australian position and sent patrols up the Yodda Valley and into Hydrographers Range. A full company of 15 IER, probably the force which left the coast 36 hours after Ogawa, was now also present. Their main task was improving the line of communications from Oivi to Kokoda.

The main body of the engineer regiment did not immediately come up to Kokoda. It concentrated on the most urgent task of all - improving and maintaining the motor road from Giruwa to Sambo. By mid August 15 IER, along with 55 ER, was building the seventeen major and many more minor permanent bridges needed to upgrade the road from the sea to Kokoda.⁴¹ Japanese combat engineers played very little part in the fighting in the Kokoda campaign. The reason was that the task of building, maintaining and repairing (after floods) a 100 kilometres supply line from Giruwa to Kokoda occupied three quarters of all Japanese engineers present. By the end of October they had made 60 kilometres of motorable road from the sea to the Kumusi River and beyond that a serviceable packhorse track.⁴² Only three engineer companies ever entered the Owen Stanley Range.

Parties of 15 Naval Pioneers also arrived in the Kokoda area soon after it was taken. They began storing supplies at a dump at Kokoda. Sgt Everson of 39 Battalion, while looking for an ambush site along the Oivi-Kokoda track on 6 August, saw 63 of these men

⁴¹ There are now seventeen major bridges along the road from Kokoda to Sanananda. While the route has changed a little it is probable the Japanese engineers had close to this many major bridges to build and maintain in 1942. An Australian engineer officer, Lt Colonel John Raike, commanding officer of 22 Construction Regiment, believes the task of maintaining such a large number of bridges in such a hostile environment with the number of engineers the Japanese had was, in the long run, beyond Japanese capabilities. Lt Colonel J. Raike, emails and interview 4/11/2007.

⁴² Corporal Kato Kumio, a POW from 15 IER told his captors his job was solely road repair and that he never went beyond Kokoda. See AWM 55 6/3, interrogation report no 87, p 1.

carrying supplies towards Kokoda.⁴³ The single mountain gun of the Yokoyama detachment had not arrived and the 55 Division medical detachment was still at the Kumusi crossing on 8 August, the day the second Kokoda engagement commenced.⁴⁴ The Australian official history's estimate, that the Japanese forward strength was 1500 by 8 August, may be correct if it refers to all Japanese forward of the Giruwa base.⁴⁵ The Japanese force engaged at second Kokoda itself was considerably smaller.

The full strength of 1/144 was not assembled at Kokoda until 7 August which is the main reason there was no Japanese advance south from Kokoda from the first engagement until then. With this force, Tsukamoto advanced up the main Kokoda-Deniki track on 8 August with a view to a full battalion attack on Deniki.⁴⁶ This did not occur as he bumped into Australians advancing in the other direction. On the same day Tsukamoto advanced on Deniki, Maroubra Force under Cameron, its new commander, launched a counterattack to recapture Kokoda.

By this time, Tsukamoto's battalion had taken 63 casualties and had lost, as far as we know, none to sickness though there may have been a few. There are no general Japanese records of illness for this period and there is no mention of it in Japanese diaries until mid August. What evidence is available suggests there was very little problem until then. The only clue is an end of July record stating 110 men had been lost to all causes to that point.⁴⁷ As about 80 casualties can be accounted for in other ways perhaps 30 Japanese had fallen ill in the two weeks since the landing.

⁴³ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary 6/8/42. Sgt Everson reported seeing '58 Japanese and 5 natives'. He probably mistook Taiwanese for Japanese.

⁴⁴ McAulay L. *Blood and Iron*, p. 78.

⁴⁵ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, pp. 144-146.

⁴⁶ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 6.

⁴⁷ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 26. Nankai Shitai report of 31/7/42, p. 6.

Deducting casualties thus far from the strength with which 1/144 arrived in Papua Tsukamoto had about 522 men. Two platoons of the engineer company of 15 IER, one at Kokoda and one near Pirivi, totalling 120 men, became involved in the fight so must be added to the total. Adding also the usual small signals and medical detachments attached to Tsukamoto's battalion, he had about 660 men in action. There were also some armed Orokaiva scouts with the Japanese but the number is unknown.

Students of the campaign have often followed Raymond Paull's count of Maroubra Force as having on 8 August 480 men all ranks including 8 PIB and 8 ANGAU.⁴⁸ This is too few as all infantry companies, plus the machine gun company (serving as riflemen) and the HQ Company had arrived. In addition, the PIB contingent had grown to 43 men.⁴⁹ Some Papuans had returned after having gone bush at Oivi or Kokoda, others had come in response to orders from Major Watson. In addition there were 12 men of 14 Field Ambulance, the previously mentioned 30 Brigade signallers, 14 RPC under Grahamslaw and a 'small group', probably the eight given by Paull, from ANGAU and a smaller Maroubra Force headquarters of five men.⁵⁰ With the 464 men of 39 Battalion, Cameron's total force was 550.⁵¹ B Company, which Cameron thought should be disbanded due to its poor behaviour at Kokoda, was sent back to Eora. Also unengaged was Cameron's reserve, the fresh E Company. Neither B nor E companies played any part in second Kokoda so the force available to Cameron was 430 men or thereabouts.⁵²

Cameron's plan was to re occupy Kokoda government station in battalion strength. If that could be done, supply and reinforcement would recommence from Kokoda strip. He sent

⁴⁸ Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 71.

⁴⁹ AWM 52 8/4/4, PIB war diary, 21/7/42- 30/7/42.

⁵⁰ Powell A. *The Third Force, ANGAU's New Guinea War, 1942-46*, Oxford, Melbourne, 2003. pp. 47-49.

⁵¹ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, pp. 130-131. See also Austin, *To Kokoda and beyond*, p. 109. Deductions for casualties were calculated from AWM 54 171/2/48, Australian Imperial Forces Battle Casualties, Owen Stanley campaign, Kokoda to Imita.

⁵² Further details of forces present are in McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, p. 132, and Powell *The Third Force, ANGAU's New Guinea War, 1942-4*, pp. 47-49.

three infantry companies by various routes. One company and his battalion headquarters went directly down the main track towards Kokoda. These bumped straight into Tsukamoto's battalion coming the other way. A second company took a side track to Kokoda out to Cameron's right and a third went to the far Australian right, to the Kokoda-Oivi track junction near Pirivi, the top right corner of the triangle of tracks, to prevent Japanese reinforcements arriving at Kokoda.

Considering each company in turn (and working from the Australian right flank) Captain M. Bidstrup's D Company, with 21 PIB attached, encountered two platoons of Japanese engineers of 15 IER on the Oivi-Kokoda track.⁵³ The engineers, alerted by Bidstrup's encounter with Japanese scouts, were engaged in bridge construction from Kokoda east along the track. One platoon of engineers attacked Bidstrup from his left, from the direction of Kokoda, and the other came from Oivi. D Company fought with them all day, killing six and wounding sixteen.⁵⁴ On dark Bidstrup withdrew to Deniki.

In the Australian centre, A Company, under Captain N. Symington, approached Kokoda station by an unguarded track between the one to Deniki and the one to Oivi. They saw from a distance a platoon of Japanese who did not stay to fight but headed off in the direction of Pirivi.⁵⁵ Judging by the timing and the fact no men from 1/144 were present in Kokoda this can only have been the platoon of Japanese engineers who an hour later engaged the left flank of Bidstrup's force. Unmolested by any other Japanese, A Company dug in at Kokoda government station.

It has been commented that it was strange that A Company "found themselves in undisputed possession of Kokoda".⁵⁶ It is indeed curious that the airstrip was not closely

⁵³ AWM 52 8/4/4, PIB war diary, 8/8/42.

⁵⁴ The evidence for the clash between Bidstrup's company and the Japanese engineers comes from three sources: McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, p. 80, McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, pp. 133-134 and AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28 file of Yazawa Butai orders, pp. 50-51. This last source gives the wrong date, 8 September instead of 8 August.

⁵⁶ McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, p. 76.

watched to ensure no enemy could land there. It appears the Japanese engineer platoon sighted by A Company had already placed obstacles on the strip but this is only half the story. The reason the Japanese did not defend the Kokoda administration area is they did not regard it as Kokoda proper. To them 'Kokoda' meant Kokoda village then more than a kilometer to the east of the government station on the plateau. The Australians, then and now, think of Kokoda as the government station on the plateau. The Japanese preferred Kokoda village because, surrounded by jungle, it offered more cover from aerial observation. It was here they planned to build up a dump of stores for the mountain crossing to come.

The Australians had no idea of the Kokoda village supply dump. The first Japanese carriers set out with loads from Giruwa on 26 July so probably arrived there on 2 August. These were Taiwanese Takasago volunteers who formed a battalion of 15 NP which had landed with Yokoyama. By the time the Australians retook Kokoda there is reason to believe several tons of supplies had accumulated in the Japanese dump. While it is understandable that Cameron focused the Australian attack on securing the high ground by the airstrip, the dump was also a valuable prize and its destruction would have set back the Japanese supply buildup. Something could have been done by air attack but no one on the Allied side knew of the dump. There were half a dozen Allied air attacks in early August, usually by two or four US fighter bombers, all of which were seen by Australian observers at Deniki to have, as instructed, concentrated their attacks on the buildings at Kokoda station on the plateau.

The leftmost of the Australian three pronged attack on Kokoda station consisted of Captain A. Deane's C Company followed by 39 Battalion HQ. It advanced down the main track from Deniki to Kokoda. A Japanese patrol from 2 Company of 1/144 was encountered more than a kilometre from Deniki. It was driven back another 400 metres until C Company encountered something more substantial.⁵⁷ This was the whole of 1/144 Battalion, massed and about to commence its advance towards Deniki. Tsukamoto,

⁵⁷ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 21, pp. 15-23.

unsure what this unexpected meeting portended, sparred with the Australians through to the afternoon when the latter withdrew to Deniki. Tsukamoto followed up. It was the evening of 8 August before he learned Kokoda had been retaken by the Australians.

Tsukamoto decided to send just one infantry company back to retake Kokoda so presumably he still felt the main task, attacking Deniki, was not compromised, only delayed, by the encounter with C Company. He chose to send 1 Company. This was his weakest company but presumably it was selected because it had already taken Kokoda once and knew the ground well. A platoon of Tsukamoto's machine gun company and his single battalion 70mm gun went along with it. Tsukamoto appears to have believed there was just one Australian platoon in Kokoda. As things turned out his one company proved inadequate to solve the problem. Lt Hirano, who was present, explained the company's failure. He wrote that a dark night and heavy rain resulted in an uncoordinated, unsuccessful attack.⁵⁸

The following day, 9 August, short of ammunition and food and having heard nothing from the battalion commander, A Company successfully evacuated Kokoda and headed south through the jungle. Two days later they emerged on the main track behind Deniki. By then Maroubra Force was back where it began, holding Deniki, and Tsukamoto was able to continue with his delayed plan to attack Deniki with his whole battalion.

The second Kokoda engagement is the most interesting fight so far. Two battalion commanders, each far from support, were engaged in a battle of manoeuvre unlike any other in the campaign. Military forces can spend a lot of time stationary facing each other, scouting the other's position and preparing their next move. Usually both sides recognize that one is in a better position than the other. That one will think of itself as the attacker while the other plans to defend. It is rare, as occurred at second Kokoda, for both to decide on the offensive and even rarer that both attempted it on the same day. Tsukamoto's reputation among veterans is high and he later was selected to take over the

⁵⁸ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, pp. 2-3.

regiment. He commanded all Japanese forces present at Eora II. Here, though, Tsukamoto seems to have been wrongfooted by Cameron's completely unexpected attack.

DENIKI

Cameron had 460 men engaged at second Kokoda. Maroubra Force suffered 38 battle casualties and a handful of sick men had been sent away. E Company had been in reserve at Isurava and was now brought forward to the Deniki position. The depleted A and B companies replaced it as the reserve. This left Cameron with C, D and E companies, HQ Company the RPC, ANGAU, PIB and the other minor detachments. Warrant Officer J. Wilkinson of ANGAU thought there were now 15 or 16 PIB present.⁵⁹ The reinforcement which E Company provided more than counterbalanced casualties and the withdrawal into reserve of two weak companies so that Cameron's overall fighting strength increased. Excluding A Company placed at Isurava and B Company at Eora Cameron's engaged strength at the Deniki engagement was close to 470 while his opponent's engaged strength had decreased. No Japanese engineers were present. Tsukamoto attacked Deniki only with 1/144 which by now had been reduced to around 450 men.

For the first time the Australians and Papuans probably just outnumbered their enemy. From this point in the campaign there were only a few occasions where the Japanese had superior numbers and where they did it was usually not a great superiority. Of course, none of the participants had, at the time, the slightest idea about enemy numbers for reasons it may be useful to outline here. In deciding to attack on 8 August Cameron broadly estimated there were from 300 to 500 Japanese in the vicinity when he was in fact considerably outnumbered. Then, later, he decided to retreat at Deniki on 14 August "because we were considerably outnumbered" when in fact he probably outnumbered his enemy.⁶⁰ A more extreme example of the difficulty of estimating enemy strength in close

⁵⁹ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific, first year*, p. 137 and AWM 67 2/15, Gavin Long's October 1943 interview with WO J.O. Wilkinson of ANGAU, p 1.

⁶⁰ AWM 54 577/7/29, summary of operations, New Guinea, Kokoda-Ioribaiwa 21 July-3 October 42, pp. 2-3. See also AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary 14/8/42.

terrain comes from Japanese accounts. Some of them believed that there were many hundreds, possibly a thousand Australians, holding Kokoda on the night of 28/29 July.

In the Owen Stanley Range, the thickness of foliage is not as great as at sea level. It is usually possible to see twenty metres and frequently fifty metres. Patches of open ground, or less often an advantageous high observation point, allow a view of a kilometre or two to the opposite ridge, perhaps once or twice a day along the track. Typically, an observer there could focus on an open patch on the opposite ridge through which the track passes. Only in this way could any notion be formed of the enemy's numbers.

Visibility is, in the Owen Stanleys, insufficient to have any overall idea of the strength of an enemy who does not wish to be seen. Consequently it was not possible to form accurate estimates of enemy strength from observation alone. The point might be further illustrated by what veterans have to say. As a rule of thumb, a third of all Australian veterans of the campaign from front line units report that they never saw a live Japanese. The rest had only one or two glimpses of one or two enemy. It is a rare veteran who ever saw a full section, much less a platoon of Japanese – and lived to tell the tale. Japanese veterans make the same observation about the Australians and *both* sides were equally convinced that the scarcity of enemy sightings was in large part accounted for by the enemy's wonderful skill at camouflage.⁶¹ It is almost axiomatic that in jungle war, even when closely engaged with the enemy, the two sides usually do not see each other and that most fire is directed at where the enemy are thought to be.

On 12 August Tsukamoto restarted his attack on Deniki which had been held up by Cameron's attack of 8 August. The main body of 1/144 had never left the Deniki area, waiting only until the problems at Pirivi and Kokoda had been cleared up. The battalion gun had closed on Deniki late on 8 Aug and began a bombardment of the Australians.⁶²

⁶¹ The author has interviewed 40 Australian and four Japanese veterans of the campaign and 80 Australian and ten Japanese veterans of other campaigns in New Guinea. All veterans interviewed had front line experience. A very small number of these claim to have ever seen the enemy in large numbers and the majority view is that in the jungle it is not possible to estimate the number of the enemy.

⁶² AWM 54 481/12/68, 14 Australian Field Ambulance in Papua, p. 1.

The Japanese scouted the Australian position on 13 August, by which time 1 Company had returned. With the support of the battalion gun, the Japanese battalion then made a two company attack. Now reduced to half strength, 1 Company was held in reserve. The Japanese attack progressed slowly and by days end little ground was gained. Tsukamoto regrouped and attacked again the next day, 14 August but it seems that by the time the Japanese swept into the Australian position the Australians were gone. Something like this must have occurred as there were no casualties recorded for the Australians on 14 August nor were there any Japanese fatalities. This is the first of several occurrences in the campaign where evidence from both sides can create an impression there was serious fighting but closer examination reveals that little or no fighting occurred. What actually happened on the morning of 14 August was that Cameron decided to withdraw and the Australians departed just before the Japanese attack was launched.⁶³

Maroubra Force's rearward movement to Isurava seems also to have been hasty and ill organised for suddenly, at Deniki, Japanese diaries, messages and Intelligence reports are full of information about the capture of 100,000 rounds of ammunition, maps, food and blankets.⁶⁴ One Japanese account claimed that the captured maps showed all the possible avenues of approach to Port Moresby.

DISCUSSION

Several observations may now be made about the first four weeks of the campaign. The first is that the numbers engaged have been overestimated for the Japanese and underestimated for the Australians and Papuans. Australian writing praises the efforts of Papuans who carried sick and wounded over the track to Port Moresby but understates the contribution of the Papuans to the fighting which, in turn, tends to make the total number of the Australian/Papuan force present appear smaller. It was a mainly Papuan

⁶³ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 13, p. 25.

⁶⁴ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p. 56.

force which first engaged the Japanese at Awala. Almost half the men who stood at Oivi were standing in their own country as were a tenth of those at first and second Kokoda and Deniki.

Of broader importance is the impact of Cameron's counterattack into Kokoda administration area on 8 August. We have seen in chapter two on Japanese strategy that unanticipated and strong enemy opposition in Papua, that is Cameron's counter attack, contributed to a rethink in Japanese planning. It seems reasonable to suggest the Maroubra Force counterattack from 8-10 August 1942 had an effect out of all proportion to the size of the force engaged. Until this time 17th Army's plan was to quickly thrust over the mountains to Port Moresby. After second Kokoda the plan was postponed, never to be reactivated.

CASUALTIES

The most reliable sources for Japanese casualties record only the dead. There are, however, sufficient corroborative sources, which are sometimes inaccurate but do cover this part of the campaign well enough, that we can be reasonably confident the casualties suffered by the Yokoyama advanced force to 15 August were as follows:

JAPANESE CASUALTIES - all from 1/144 unless otherwise mentioned.

25 July, Gorari	2 killed, about 6 wounded
26 July, Oivi	4 killed, about 10 wounded
28 July, 1 st Kokoda	9 killed and 18 wounded from 1/144 and 3 killed and 8 wounded from 15 ER. ⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Japanese casualties are drawn from the following sources:
NIDS 302.9.H *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of the 144th Infantry Regiment), list of war dead. pp. 625-726. This one hundred and one page list shows the name, birthplace, place of death and day of death of all 5000 men who died while on active service with the regiment. As it is organised by name,

2 August	3 killed, a patrol encounter with unspecified number wounded.
5 August	1 Orokaiva Japanese scout killed.
7 August	1 killed.
8 August, 2 nd Kokoda	6 killed from 1/144; 6 killed, 16 wounded from 15 ER. ⁶⁶
9 August, 2 nd Kokoda	2 killed, 18 wounded. ⁶⁷
10 August, 2 nd Kokoda	6 killed, 10 wounded. ⁶⁸
12 August	1 killed.
13 August, Deniki	2 killed.
15 August	3 killed 1 wounded. ⁶⁹

Two other 1/144 men were killed in action along the Giruwa-Kokoda track sometime between July 24 and July 31 but it cannot be established where or when. Total known battle casualties on land for the Yokoyama force from the landing to 15 August were 36 killed and 58 wounded.

The figures here closely accord with a Japanese statement of casualties on land to 31 July for 144 Regiment which gives 18 killed and 45 wounded.⁷⁰ One general Japanese account

the casualties for each battle are scattered across the entire document in every case. This is the reason page numbers are not given here.

Azuma Shigetoshi list of 144 regiment casualties, p. 1. Azuma was the Captain commanding 144 Regimental Signals Company. He compiled a list of regimental casualties in 1986. A copy of the list was given to the present writer by a veteran of the regiment.

AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 23, diary of Lt Hirano, p. 1.

AWM 55 3/1, current translations no 4, diary of Pte. Watanabe Toshio, 1 Company 1/144. pp. 5-6

AWM 55 5/3/28, Yazawa butai intelligence report 10/8/42 states there were 18 killed and 54 wounded but this unit was then in the Phillipines and the report has mistaken casualties for the engagement for casualties so far for the campaign.

⁶⁶ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, file of Yazawa butai orders, p. 50.

⁶⁷ AWM 55 3/1, 1174, p. 25.

⁶⁸ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary July-September. Appendix A, copy of a Japanese diary entry 11/8/42.

⁶⁹ Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 85.

⁷⁰ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication no 28, p. 44. Japanese losses up to 31/7/42 are given here as 18 dead and 45 wounded.

states 21 men were killed at first Kokoda alone.⁷¹ There is no support elsewhere in Japanese records for this figure and much that contradicts it. Captain Azuma Shigetoshi, in command of 144 Regimental Signals Company, compiled a list of regimental battle casualties in 1986. Azuma shows 39, as opposed to the 41 in the table above, killed in action from 144 Regiment to 15 August.⁷² The total number of wounded is not so clear.⁷³ An end of July report gave 110 total casualties so far in the MO operation. This included sick and non battle injuries. At least two men were sent straight back to Rabaul on the ship they arrived on as they injured themselves while unloading supplies. The end of month report also includes a probable nine wounded from the aerial bombing of the *Ayatozan Maru*.⁷⁴

There remain, in the above table, three occasions when we know nothing of Japanese wounded. As this kind of problem crops up every now and again on the Japanese side a calculation to estimate Japanese wounded was explained in the introductory chapter. It was that in the Japanese advance their ratio of killed to wounded was one to one and three quarters. Extrapolating from what we know, to what we don't know, the 49 Japanese killed in action to 15 August would probably be accompanied by around 85 wounded. This is in accord with the table above which shows evidence for 86 wounded in the period though there may have been a few more. Australian and Papuan casualties for the same period were 42 killed in action, death in action presumed, or died of wounds. Another 34 were wounded in action.⁷⁵ These figures do not include six members of ANGAU killed in the Giruwa area by the SNLP at about this time.⁷⁶

⁷¹ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p 5.

⁷² Azuma Shigetoshi list of 144 Regiment casualties, p 1.

⁷³ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 28, file of Yazawa Butai orders pp 48 -49.

⁷⁴ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 26, Nankai Shitai report of 31/7/42, p. 6.

⁷⁵ AWM 54 171/2/48, battle casualties, Owen Stanley campaign, Kokoda to Imita pp. 1-4.

⁷⁶ For ANGAU members killed behind enemy lines see James *Kokoda Track*, p. 481 and Powell, *The Third Force* pp. 40-42.

A feature of the reporting of battles is a normal tendency to exaggerate the damage inflicted on the enemy. The Japanese, for instance, claimed to have killed 300 Australians in battle at Rabaul in January 1942.⁷⁷ The actual number was 22. At first Kokoda they claimed 20 enemy killed in action whereas only two Australians fit this category.⁷⁸ Similarly all Australian claims for the period add up to around 1,000 Japanese battle casualties, eight times the actual figure and possibly more Japanese than were present in the valley of the Mambare River at the time.

The general problem in accepting claims of casualties inflicted can be further illustrated by an example for which we have accurate casualty figures for both sides, D company's fight at second Kokoda. Australian claims vary between 500 and 330 casualties inflicted for the whole engagement.⁷⁹ The D Company fight on 8 August at the track junction near Pirivi was initially thought to have inflicted 182 of these which it was said were counted.⁸⁰ This was reduced in 39 Battalion war diary to "40 or 50 killed and 50 wounded".⁸¹ We can be reasonably sure Japanese casualties for this encounter were, as shown in the table above, six killed and 16 wounded. We should then be suspicious of descriptions like this one from Johnston's book *War Diary 1942*, of Japanese attacking at first Kokoda: "The first wave fell, ripped to pieces by Australian mortars and machine guns. The second wave climbed over the bodies of the fallen... as fast as the Japanese were killed others scrambled over the plateau to take their place."⁸² Johnson's account may easily be excused at the time as wartime propaganda but more than sixty years later it still contributes to the mistaken idea that the Japanese suffered huge casualties in the Oivi-Kokoda-Deniki fighting.

⁷⁷ NIDS 302.9.H *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of the 144th Infantry Regiment), p. 44.

⁷⁸ AWM 55 3/1, 1174, Nankai Shitai intelligence reports, p. 24. See also AWM 54 171/2/48, Australian Imperial Force battle casualties, Kokoda to Imita, p.1.

⁷⁹ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, appendix E. AMW 54 577/7/29, pt. 19, 39 Battalion report on operations in Kokoda area July/August, 1942, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁰ AWM 54 577/7/29, pt. 19, 39 Battalion report on operations Kokoda area, July/August, pp. 3-4.

⁸¹ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, 8/8/42. See also Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 75.

⁸² Johnston, *War Diary 1942*, pp. 134-5. Johnston was not present at 1st Kokoda.

Even so there was a cumulative effect from the 125 men lost to the Nankai Shitai's 1/144 Battalion in the first three weeks of fighting. This was almost one quarter of the number the battalion had landed with and now the battalion was down to just over half the number that had left Japan eight months previously. There is usually a direct connection between the casualties a unit suffers and its morale. There appears in Lt Noda Hidetaka's diary at this time a comment that 1/144 had, as the Japanese expression goes, 'lost its fighting spirit.' "I hear that three officers of the number one daitai [battalion] have been killed and one wounded. The strength of this daitai is certainly becoming low." Noda, who was a member of 3/144, then makes the connection between casualties and morale. "I don't know whether it is because the number one battalion has had so many casualties but all ranks of commanders seem to have lost some of their offensive spirit."⁸³ This battalion was observed to perform below par at Isurava and was afterwards relegated to transport duties, carrying wounded and supplies. It did not again engage the Australians for two months until the action of second Eora at the end of October.

The Australians and Papuans also had their morale problems. In October 1943 Gavin Long, the Australian official historian, interviewed Warrant Officer J. Wilkinson of ANGAU. He had been present for the first months fighting. He told Long that the "PIB went into action, fired one shot and ran, then [later] B Company [39 Battalion] did the same."⁸⁴ When Cameron took over 39 Battalion he believed B Company was so ineffective it should be disbanded. By 2 August one third of the then strength of the company were listed as "missing believed deserted". That there were morale problems in 1/144 and its opponent Maroubra Force is apparent but is not possible to make any quantitative comparative judgment on the morale of the two sides at this point in the campaign, nor generally. It is easy enough to find evidence from the Australian side but there are only a few Japanese mentions of poor morale. Like the issue of what exactly

⁸³ AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of a Japanese officer, probably Lt. Noda Hidetaka of 3/144, p. 17.

⁸⁴ AWM 67 2/15, Gavin Long papers. Interview with WO J.O. Wilkinson of ANGAU, October 1943.

happened to the hundred or so Australians captured in the campaign, Japanese documents, both official and private, are in general silent on this topic.

CHAPTER SIX.

ISURAVA.

CHAPTER SIX- ISURAVA, 15-30 AUGUST, 1942

Far from being, as has been said, Australia's Agincourt or Thermopylae, Isurava was a defeat with few redeeming features.¹ It is claimed in Australian studies that a vastly outnumbered Australian force inflicted many more casualties upon an enemy than it received and held them to a standstill for four vital days, upsetting their timetable and causing them to later run out of food. Apart from the fact that the Australians did inflict more casualties than they received there is hardly any truth in this.

It is generally accepted that the Japanese had a numerical superiority that was at very least three to one and may have been from four to six to one.² It is common to describe the Australian problem at Isurava as "like trying to stem a tidal wave" but the numbers engaged on either side at Isurava were close to equal and it may even be that the Australians marginally outnumbered the Japanese.³ The Japanese took almost twice the casualties that they inflicted but the delay imposed on them was of small importance as we now know that 17th Army had decided the Nankai Shitai's attack on Port Moresby was postponed. A problem caused by delay was in any case counterbalanced by the two weeks worth of food the Japanese captured in the Australian supply dumps at Alola and Eora Creek.⁴

¹ Isurava was compared to Agincourt in Fitzsimons *Kokoda*, p. 283 and to Thermopylae by Ralph Honner in the Sydney Morning Herald, 3 August 2002.

² Brune wrote that the Australians at Isurava were outnumbered four or five to one in Brune *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 135. Peter Doornan wrote that the Australians were outnumbered by six to one in Doornan, P. *The Silent Men, Syria to Kokoda and on to Gona*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, Sydney, 1999, p. 114. See also Ham P. *Kokoda*, p. 163 where the ratio was said to be three to one or four to one.

³ Edgar, B. *Warrior of Kokoda: A biography of Brigadier Arthur Potts*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999, p. 145.

⁴ See chapter 12 on Japanese supply.

FORCES ENGAGED

By late 27 August, all the forces of both sides were assembled. From this point, Maroubra Force is properly referred to as an Australian force as the portion of Papuans engaged was very small. There were four Australian infantry battalions, Maroubra Force headquarters (MFHQ), detachments of ANGAU, the PIB, armed New Guinea police and a medical team drawn from 2/6 Field Ambulance and 14 Field Ambulance. The numbers present appear in the following table.⁵

AUSTRALIAN AND ALLIED FORCES AT ISURAVA		
2/14	Infantry Battalion	542
2/16	Infantry Battalion	590
39	Infantry Battalion	410
53	Infantry Battalion	550
Maroubra Force HQ inc. guard platoon, 21 Bde HQ, detachment of 30 Bde HQ, and K Section, 7 Australian Division signals.		122 ⁶
Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit detachment		4
Papuan Infantry Battalion		20 ⁷
Papuan Armed Police		14
2/6 Field Ambulance detachment		22
14 Field Ambulance detachment		18 ⁸
Total		2292

⁵ There is little doubt about 2/14 and 2/16 Battalion strengths as there is general agreement in all sources. See AWM 52 8/2/21, 21 Brigade war diary, 2/14 war diary at AWM 52 8/3/14, 2/16 war diary at AWM 52 8/3/16 and also Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, pp. 103-104.

Records for 39 and 53 Battalion strengths are less reliable. On 3/8/42 39 Battalion had 480 all ranks in Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda* p. 138. On 6/8/42 39 Battalion had 464 men and 409 on 18 August in McAuley *Blood and Iron* p. 70. Around 400 is the generally accepted strength of the battalion at the start of Isurava as in Paull p. 85. A problem for all this is that messages which were sent from Maroubra Force at the time gave 39 Battalion 561 men on 29 July after which to 16 August it had 77 battle and non battle casualties. This would mean there were 486 present on 16 August and it does not seem likely it can have lost 86 men over the next eight days. In this chapter it is estimated to have had 410 men as Isurava began but it was possibly stronger.

On 7/8/42 53 Battalion had 571 men and 562 on 17/6/42 plus ten attached to the battalion including an armourer and a chaplain. MFHQ strength is given in 21 Brigade war diary and Paull pp. 103-104. The Papuan Infantry Battalion had 43 men present on 6 August and 40 on 18 August, Paull, p.85 and Byrnes G. *Green Shadows: A war history of the Papuan Infantry Battalion*, private publication, 1989, pp. 10-14. Fourteen RPC were present. The detachment from 2/6 Field Ambulance was 32 strong on leaving Port Moresby and set up four or five two man aid posts along the track so 22 or 24 were present at Isurava. See McCarthy, *South-west Pacific-first year*, p. 212

For further information on strengths of minor units see AWM 54 171/2/20 Maroubra Force battle casualties, messages, 1942.

⁶ AWM 54 577/6/4, 7 Australian Division, messages dealing with Maroubra Force, operations Kokoda, June to October 1942. A message of 2/9/42 showed 30 Brigade signals detachment was still present. As it was there in mid August it was presumably also present for Isurava. Also 30 Brigade war diary towards the

The strengths for 21 Brigade must be very close to correct as all the sources are in accord.⁹ The strength of 53 Battalion is less certain. The battalion war diary recorded 846 present all ranks on 25 July, or 65 men short of establishment. A week later there were 833 and on 8 August 840 men.¹⁰ Nothing in the battalion or brigade records mentions a reducing of the battalion to jungle scale as took place with the other battalions but there is evidence from a Maroubra Force document that this did happen.¹¹

On 7 August the battalion was said to have 571 men forward. All companies but E company, which was in the rear party of 393 men, was present and it is known that B Company had 130 men at the end of July. This would indicate company strengths were on a par with 39 Battalion at the time. When B Company arrived at Alola together with an advance party from 53 Battalion HQ there were 171 men present which also indicates the company was still close to full strength.¹² On the other hand, on the way up to Isurava,

end of July shows that the Bde HQ was normally around 63 with a guard platoon of 38. It may well be the combined MFHQ and 21 Bde HQ was in excess of the 122 estimated here.

Another 7 Division message in AWM 54 577/6/4 says effective strength at the end of the fighting on 31/8/42 was 39 Battalion 250, 2/14 Battalion 230 and 2/16 Battalion 450. As 550 men are listed as missing from the strength prior to the fighting and casualties were about 200 some 350 men, most of whom later rejoined, were unaccounted for at this time. Evidence of the presence of 30 Brigade signals at Isurava and Efogi can also be found in AWM 52 1/5/51, NGF General Staff war diary. See also AWM 52 8/21/17, 21 Brigade report, p. 29 and p. 52 regarding the presence of K section of 7 Australian Division signals.

⁷ AWM 52 8/4/4, PIB war diary 15/8/42. The PIB patrolled and defended MFHQ. On 19/8/42 five PIB went with 53 Battalion to Missima. On 29/8/42 at least 20 PIB were present at MFHQ, others having left, carrying stretchers.

⁸ AWM 54 481/12/68, 14 Australian Field Ambulance, Papua, pp. 128-9.

⁹ Support for these numbers can be found in a number of further sources. For example in AWM 54 577 / 7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, it states that 1801 brigade personnel went up the track from Port Moresby exclusive of 2/27 Battalion. As we know the strength of 2/27 Battalion, not at Isurava, this would suggest 1220 Brigade personnel were present at Isurava including BdeHQ as attached to MFHQ. See also Burns J. *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War*, Adelaide, 2/27 Ex-Servicemen's Association, 1960. p. 132, AWM 52 8/21/17, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 52 for presence of K section, and Moremon, J. *A triumph of improvisation, Australian Army operational logistics and the campaign in Papua, July 1942 to January 1943*, Ph.D thesis, ADFA, UNSW, 2000, p. 163.

¹⁰ AWM 52 8/3/91, 55/53 Battalion war diary, 8/8/42.

¹¹ AWM 54 171/2/20, Maroubra Force battle casualties, messages, npn.

¹² Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda* p. 85, and Budden F. *That Mob: The Story of the 55/53rd Australian Infantry Battalion AIF*, Sydney, 1973, p. 64.

53 Battalion lost 37 men assessed as “unfit to travel” or “exhausted” or “collapsed”.¹³ Most were evacuated but some rested then rejoined the unit within a few days. Evidence from prior to the fighting does not make it clear what was the battalion strength in action.

However, working backwards from after Isurava it can be established that a minimum of 550 men of the battalion were present. After Isurava the battalion was judged not to be fit for battle and 358 men were marched back to Port Moresby in a body while 120 were kept at Myola to carry supplies. Adding to this 39 battle casualties and 42 evacuated sick in the course of the fighting, then a fighting strength of 550 at Isurava would seem about right.¹⁴

Turning to the Japanese side, it should first be stated that - outside a few senior members of NGF - Australians and Americans in New Guinea were unaware that interception and decoding of IJA signal traffic (later known as MAGIC) was sometimes providing accurate strengths of Japanese units.¹⁵ SWPA HQ and LHQ knew enough about the size of the Nankai Shitai in August not to be unduly alarmed. By contrast, those not privy to MAGIC were convinced the Japanese were in greatly superior strength. Lt. Colonel Ralph Honner and Lt. Colonel Arthur Key, two battalion commanders at Isurava, stated the Japanese were “definitely in superior numbers”.¹⁶

At Deniki - and forward (south) of that point - on 27 August there were four Japanese infantry battalions, two regimental headquarters, the NSHQ with the cavalry company attached, a company of engineers of 15 IER and a company from the mountain artillery battalion. There was a second company of engineers improving the track north of Deniki

¹³ AWM 54 481/12/17, Report of ADMS visit to Maroubra Force, appendix A, casualties evacuated from Maroubra Force to 12 September, 1942.

¹⁴ AWM 54 171/2/20, Maroubra Force battle casualties, messages, npn.

¹⁵ Drea, E. *MacArthur's Ultra*, University Press of Kansas, Kansas, 1992, ch.2.

¹⁶ AWM 54 577/6/4, 7 Australian Division messages dealing with Maroubra Force operations Kokoda, June to October 1942, npn.

but as they took no part in the battle they have been discounted from the following list. At the strength these units landed at Papua the numbers present would have been as follows:

JAPANESE FORCES IN ISURAVA AREA	
Nankai Shitai HQ including signals, cavalry company, and medical detachments	202 ¹⁷
144 Regiment HQ	73
144 Regiment Signals Company	122
144 Regiment, 3 infantry battalions	2100
41 Regiment including Regimental HQ and one battalion	850
15 Independent Engineer Regiment, one reduced company	120
55 Mountain Artillery Battalion, one reduced company	88
Total	3555

There are three factors, readily apparent from Japanese sources, which reduced the number engaged from the 3555 listed here to about the same number as the Australians had. As the Japanese strength at Isurava has long been accepted to be very greatly superior to that of the Australians it is necessary to go into some detail here to establish why it was not so.

The first deduction from Japanese strength concerns 41 Regiment, which did not fight at Isurava. The Regimental HQ of 41 Regiment did not go further forward than Deniki during the battle and two of its battalions had yet to arrive in Papua. The one battalion it had available, 2/41, by that battalion commander's own account, did not participate: "Our battalion did not shoot a single bullet and no soldier was hurt."¹⁸ The battalion had been brought up to Deniki, six kilometres behind the front line, on 26 August to act as a reserve. Horii hoped to defeat the Australians with the three battalions of 144 Regiment, keeping 2 / 41 fresh for the pursuit.

¹⁷ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication, no. 33, p. 8. See also 55 3/1 current translations no 4, p. 40. This captured document gives the original strength of 144 RHQ as 107 and the Regimental Signals Company as 136. Additional information is in AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 5, pp. 24-25 and AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 17, Nankai Shitai operational order A No. 102 of 24/8/42. 15 IER was instructed to locate itself at Kokoda and devote its main effort to the line of communications.

¹⁸ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 79.

However, on 30 August, at 1300, two hours before Brigadier Arthur Potts, the new commander of Maroubra Force, ordered a withdrawal to Eora creek from the Isurava resthouse position, Horii ordered 2/41 to make a wide sweep up to the heights on the Australian left and cut the track deep in their rear. The Japanese battalion spent the next fifteen hours performing this manoeuvre and emerged on the track a bit north of Isurava rest house early in the morning of 31 August - to discover the Australians had all left the day before.¹⁹

The second factor which reduced the Japanese numbers engaged was that Horii was anxious to attack the Australians before they either again advanced on Kokoda or withdrew further into the mountains. For this reason, the main body of the Nankai Shitai forced marched from Giruwa to Isurava and many men fell out along the way. Some Japanese officers had expressed doubt as to whether or not the men could carry the 40 kilogram loads almost all were burdened with and it seems their fears were justified.

As a result of the exercises carried out in Rabaul, where the men carried heavy loads up and down the volcanic slopes, the medical staff recommended that, given the load, the heat and the steep terrain the troops should walk 40 minutes then rest for 20 minutes in each hour. If this was found too difficult then the march should be conducted with a half hour walking for every half hour resting. This advice was completely ignored in the forced march up from the beaches to Isurava with a consequent loss of personnel who fell out en route and so were not present for the fight.²⁰

The first battalion of 144 Regiment had been in Papua for a month but 2/144 and 3/144 Battalions landed on 19 August and immediately marched 100 kilometres to Kokoda in six days arriving on 24 August. There they rested for a few hours before setting out again. The second battalion went to the east side of the Eora Creek gorge, which divides the

¹⁹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns, 1942-43*, p. 255. The map here, taken from Senshi Soshu, is incorrect as it shows 2/41 Battalion emerging on to main track north of Isurava instead of well south, as the battalion commander's record and 3/144's battle maps confirm.

²⁰ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 38, file of Nankai Shitai orders, 13/5/42-107/42, pp. 14-15.

battlefield into two, while 3/144 went along the main track on the west side towards Isurava. The total distance covered by these two battalions in the seven days between setting out and arriving on the field of battle was 120 kilometres for 3/144 and 130 kilometres for 2/144. Even carrying a more normal weight of 20-25 kilograms, as the Australians did, a rate of 20 kilometres a day was excessive- a post campaign Japanese study suggested that 10 kilometres a day was good going in Papua- and there is no other occasion in the campaign when the troops of either side attempted this. There is no overall figure of how many Japanese were unable to keep up but there is enough evidence to suggest it was probably a large number.

The company records of 5 Company of 2 /144 show that almost one third of the company strength had dropped out due to exhaustion and injury on the march and was not present at Isurava.²¹ Number 5 Company of 2/144 battalion landed in New Guinea with 163 men, 14 below tropical establishment. Two unfit men were immediately sent back to Rabaul. The first two days' march brought them to Sambo where two more were sent back to Giruwa "because of sprains".²² On the next day, 21 August, only 42 men completed the march to Wairopi on time, 117 having fallen behind. A short rest on 22 August enabled some to catch up, bringing company strength to 85. The next day the writer of the record, the company commander, returned to bring up stragglers and managed to assemble 124 men.

On 24 August they reached Kokoda with 131 men. On 25 August they headed off east of the gorge to flank the Australian position and on that day lost four men killed and four wounded in their first contacts with the Australians. There is no diary entry for 26 August and on 27 August two more men were killed and one wounded. On 30 August two men were sent off sick and on 2 September a sergeant leading 27 stragglers rejoined the company bringing company strength up to 150, suggesting they fought the battle at a

²¹ AWM 52 8/2/21, 21 Brigade war diary. See 15/8/42 for details of what the men were to carry. 'Jungle scale' for the brigade's infantry was to be 40lb per man. The 5 Company 2/144 record is in AWM 55 3/1, current translations no.15, p. 15.

²² AWM 55 3/1, current translations no 15, p. 16.

company strength of 122 or 30 per cent below strength. In fact it was worse than this for later the company commander tallied up what had become of his company. He recorded that while the company had 163 on arrival in Papua (14 had been left in Rabaul), only 116 of these participated in the action at Isurava.²³

The company commander of 3 Machine Gun company of 3/144 kept a similar record. He stated that 12 of his men, ten per cent of his company, dropped out during the forced march from Giruwa to Isurava and that this was because the packs were too heavy.²⁴ The company fought Isurava with 112 men. It lost several men there yet its strength had increased to 132 men present at its next fight at Efogi.²⁵ An order of 28 August made reference to the problems encountered on the forced march; “while on the march, some stragglers have thrown away ammunition [and] used clean rice in excess of their ration... those of all ranks who hold authority must exercise the greatest caution, control and supervision.”²⁶ One man from 2/144 who did complete the march from Giruwa to Missima said that one quarter of the men in his company dropped out and that the battalion was “terribly worn out after the march”. There was a plan to attack Missima at day’s end but “there was no more power mentally or physically” so no attack was made.²⁷

A comparison with the Australians might help here. 2/14 Battalion marched 80 kilometres to Isurava in seven days carrying an average of 20 kilograms per man. Only two men fell out. In general, the Australian battalions marching up the track were carefully husbanded, covering short distances each day with the result that few men were lost. By contrast, 2 /144 marched 120 kilometres in six days carrying twice the weight the Australians carried and one quarter of one company and one third of another failed to

²³ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no 15, p. 21

²⁴ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 29, p. 52. See also AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of a Japanese officer, probably Lt. Noda Hidetaka of 3/144, pp. 2-3

²⁵ AWM 55 3/5, current translations no 51, pp. 12-18.

²⁶ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication no 33, Nankia Shitai bulletin, provisional order no. 1, 28/8/42, p. 9.

²⁷ Nishimura Kohkichi, NCO of 2/144, Record of interview with author, Tokyo, 6/3/ 2004.

participate in the action. The Australian 53 militia Battalion marched for six days to Isurava carrying 20 kilogram packs and of the lead company, A Company, only one quarter arrived on time, the bulk of the company arriving twenty-four hours later.²⁸ As this militia battalion was not pushed especially hard the numbers of men falling out suggests it was not as fit as the AIF battalions.

If 4 and 5 Companies of 2/144 losses were representative of the rest of the battalion then the battalion may have been as much as 200 men understrength at Isurava. The case of 3/144 was probably not so bad though the gun platoon, 60 men strong, was so delayed it failed to get to Isurava until the fighting was over.²⁹ The battalion's march was ten kilometres shorter and on a better track for the last day. Some 738 men of the battalion landed in Papua. After deducting the battalion gun platoon it seems a further 120 men may have been absent for the fighting at Isurava. A chart of weapons used and ammunition fired by 3/144 at Isurava shows 7 Company had 115 rifles present, 8 Company 112 and 9 Company 110.³⁰ In a Japanese infantry company only the company commander, platoon commanders and the eighteen men manning the nine light machine guns did not carry rifles. At full tropical strength of 178 an infantry company should have had 150 rifles.³¹ The figures here suggest 3/144 was short of 113 riflemen at Isurava. If this same proportion was absent in the machine gun and headquarters company then, including also the absence of the gun platoon, 3/144 may have had as few as 540 men present at Isurava.

²⁸ AWM 52 8/2/21, 21 Brigade war diary 15/8/42 to 27/8/42. See also AWM 52 8/3/91, 55/53 Battalion war diary for 7/8/42.

²⁹ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), On p. 23 it states the battalion gun did not arrive until 1300 on 31/8/42 and a chart on p. 26 shows the battalion gun did not expend any ammunition at Isurava.

³⁰ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment). The chart on p. 26 gives the figure of 738 men present in Papua but many were not present at Isurava. See also chart no. 2. Also in AWM 55 3/1/110, p. 17 close to the same battalion strength is stated assuming the one company for which there is no number is about the same strength as the others. Another source for Japanese strength at this time is AWM 55 3/1, current translations no.6, p. 17.

³¹ Daugherty, *Fighting techniques of a Japanese infantryman, training techniques and weapons, 1941-1945*, p. 45. See also Rottman, *The Japanese army in WWII, Conquest of the Pacific 1941-42*, p. 30.

The third reason to reduce Japanese numbers is the casualties already suffered by 1/144 which had been campaigning for a month and had had several sharp fights with the Australians and Papuans which have been related in the previous chapter. There it was established the battalion had lost 125 battle casualties up to 15 August. No more men from the battalion were killed until the fighting at Isurava began but a small unspecified number appear to have been wounded.³² If these are allowed to stand in the place of those lightly wounded who had returned to duty then it seems reasonable to deduct the full 125 men from the strength of 1/144 to obtain the number probably engaged at Isurava.

Allowing for the factors detailed above, the strengths of the three battalions of 144 Regiment engaged at Isurava may have been as low as 460, 500 and 540. Factoring in these reduced numbers, and deducting the unengaged 41 Regiment, we arrive at around 2130 armed and uniformed Japanese participants at Isurava against 2292 Australians. On 30 August, the last day of four days close fighting, the gun company of 144 Regiment and one more company of the mountain artillery battalion arrived bringing up the Japanese strength, not counting casualties on either side, to around 2400 men.³³

It may of course be countered that the evidence for reducing Japanese strength is not very strong but there are a few more considerations which support it. Major Horie Masao, a New Guinea veteran who has made a study of the Kokoda campaign, estimated that about one fifth of all Japanese who made the forced march did not rejoin the Nankai Shitai until after Isurava.³⁴ Secondly, there has been no assessment here of the small numbers of Japanese who fell sick nor the probably larger number who fell behind in the forced march from the various headquarters and signals units. One Japanese veteran who was present claims there were quite a few among the headquarters personnel as they had not

³² NIDS 302.9.H. Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki (Battle Records of the 144th Infantry Regiment). The 144 Regiment history's list of regimental deaths shows none at all in the period from 3/8/42 to 15/8/42.

³³ AWM 55 5/3, collection of Nankia Shitai intelligence summaries. No. 15 states that on 31/8/42 the Kusunose regiment's artillery and a mountain gun company arrived at Isurava.

³⁴ Major Horie Masao, veteran of 18th Army, record of interview with author. Tokyo 8/3/2004. Horie has written on the topic of the New Guinea campaigns and has made a study of the 1942 campaign.

been ordered to repeatedly climb the Rabaul volcanoes with heavy packs so were quite unfit when they arrived in Papua.³⁵

If the evidence presented here is insufficient to deduct 400 or so Japanese falling out in the forced march, we are still left with a total Japanese force at the start of Isurava of no more than 2500 men, at best ten percent more than the number of Australians present. In the last few hours of fighting more Japanese artillery arrived adding another 260 men to this figure. The only way to increase this significantly would be to include 2/41, which did no fighting and was at no point within two kilometres of any Australians. On the other hand the estimate of 400 Japanese not present may be too low as headquarters signals and medical personnel who made the march have not been included. If Major Horie's calculation is correct then even more than 400 men might have been absent from the fight. Be that as it may there is enough here to show that the idea the Australians were greatly outnumbered at Isurava no longer has any veracity.

ISURAVA

Captain Frank Sublet of 2/16 Battalion thought Isurava a poor defensive position but does not enlarge upon the point in his book on the campaign. The same view was expressed in the 21 Brigade report and elsewhere.³⁶ Sublet probably had two things in mind: The ridge overlooking Isurava to the north provided the Japanese artillery with an opportunity for direct fire into the Australian position west of the gorge.³⁷ Secondly, there was a track junction at Alola immediately to the rear of the Australians at Isurava on the west side of the gorge. This offered the Japanese an approach into the Australian rear via the track on the east side of the gorge.

³⁵ Imanishi Sadaharu, CSM of 1/144, Record of interview with author, Motoyama, Shikoku, 23/3/2004.

³⁶ AWM 3drl/6643, Blamey's papers, wallet no 29, Chester Wilmot's report, p. 2. See also AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations 15/8/42-20/9/42, p. 3.

³⁷ Direct fire is advantageous because the gunners can see what they are firing at. Observed fire is usually less effective because the gunners rely on an observer to adjust the fall of shot.

Both of these features imposed significant disadvantages on the defenders but none of the succession of commanders of Maroubra Force can really be blamed as their orders from NGF in Port Moresby did not allow much leeway. Cameron originally chose the position after his force was defeated at Deniki on 14 August. He first went back to Isurava rest house but decided a location forward of that, by wartime Isurava village, was better.³⁸

Examining the ground, it is hard to see why he thought this way but it is also true he can have had no idea of the amount of artillery the Japanese would be able to place on the ridge overlooking Isurava to the north.³⁹ All he required was a blocking position on the main track not too far back from Deniki. With a force of less than a full battalion he could not also cover the east side of the gorge, though patrols were sent there to see if the Japanese were interested in that approach.

Lt Colonel Ralph Honner took over Maroubra Force on 17 August, with orders to prevent the Japanese advance and Brigadier Selwyn Porter arrived on 20 August with similar orders, to prevent the Japanese penetrating into the mountains.⁴⁰ Three days later, Brigadier Arnold Potts arrived with most of 21 Brigade, with orders to retake Kokoda. It was not until 29 August that Potts received instructions from NGF that “your original role to capture Kokoda is postponed and you will endeavour to stabilise your position and maintain patrolling initiative.”⁴¹ The point here is the series of orders issued to Maroubra

³⁸ Villages in Papua are rarely where they were in 1942. For this reason it is useful to refer to a village’s wartime or post war location.

³⁹ See 39 Battalion war diary 14/8/42 at AWM 8/3/78. Cameron thought the initial position taken up after Deniki was too far back and “lacked tactical advantages of Isurava area”. On 15/8/42 he examined the track and took up a new position, the one fought over, “astride the main track south of the creek crossing at a point about 200 yards north of the junction of the track into Isurava”. Front Creek provides a steep slope up which the enemy must come but, set against this, the position is obviously overlooked from the ridge to the north. Cameron had come under mountain gun fire at Deniki so he knew the Japanese had artillery.

⁴⁰ AWM 52 8/2/ 30, 30 Brigade war diary, 13/8/42.

⁴¹ AWM 54 577/ 7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations 15/8/42 to 20/9/42, p. 3. Here also it is noted that the Isurava position was not a good one. AWM 54 577/6/4 7 Australian Division, messages dealing with Maroubra Force operations, Kokoda, June to October 1942. On 29/8/42 Allen informed Potts that “your original role to capture Kokoda is postponed and you will endeavour to stabilise your posn and maintain patrolling initiative.” npn.

Force, whether defensive or offensive, still implied that a position as far forward as possible ought to be held. Secondly, the rapid change in command, four different commanders in nine days, together with the knowledge in the cases of Cameron, Honner and Porter, that they would be superseded within days, acted against them instigating a withdrawal to the Isurava resthouse position.

Turning now to command in the Nankai Shitai, Horii personally commanded at Isurava but was not to do so again until Oivi-Gorari in early November. The other actions and engagements of the campaign were fought by regimental size forces so were run by his regimental commanders, Kusunose, then Tsukomoto of 144 Regiment, and Yazawa of 41 Regiment. Horii was unaware that the Australians had been reinforced.⁴² Horii's Isurava plan was to make a major attack late on 27 August then finish off the Australians the next day. It was to be in the form of a double envelopment, the classic form of attack. Apart from 2/144's battalion gun which went across the gorge with its battalion the artillery was to be placed on the ridge north of and overlooking the Australians. From there it could support the attacks of 1/144 and 3/144. The location of the Japanese artillery, one 75mm mountain gun and the battalion gun of 1/144, is given in Japanese maps as on the ridge at 'the dead tree forest.'⁴³ A measure of Horii's keenness to attack was that he did not wait for more artillery. The gun company of 144 Regiment with two 75mm and two 37mm guns, two more mountain guns and the battalion gun of 3/144 had fallen behind in the march. In the event they arrived only in time to participate on the last day.

Horii's plan was for 1/144 to pin the enemy to the front while 2/144 crossed the gorge, went around the Australian right flank and attacked the Australians in their rear at Alola. After giving these two attacks time to develop and hopefully draw in any Australian reserve, 3/144 would swing around the Australian left completing the double

⁴² AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 17. Nankai Shitai operational order A, no 102, 24/8/42.

⁴³ In AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment. This document is a translation by H. Jorgensen, of selections from *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of the 144th Infantry Regiment). On p. 14 it is said that "the mountain gun company, 1st Battalion Gun Company and 2nd Battalion gun company will take the position at the dead tree forest and assist the two battalions attacking". Other evidence shows that 2/144 actually went to the far side of the gorge with its battalion.

envelopment. Nankai Shitai documents reveal that their battle plan went awry.⁴⁴ Not only did the double envelopment fail but an additional two days fighting was needed to dislodge the Australians.

It might be said that the determination of the Australians accounts for one of these two days and Japanese errors accounts for the other. Looking first east of the Eora gorge where 2/144 was to cut into the Australian rear by taking Alola, there has been the view in Australia that this was essentially a diversion but this is incorrect.⁴⁵ Japanese sources make it clear that it was a full blown attempt to get behind the Australians. As one participant put it 2/144 was to “cut off the Australians and annihilate them.”⁴⁶ It failed for three reasons. First, on 26 August 2/144 arrived too exhausted to advance on Missima. Their one achievement on this day was to find a position from which the battalion gun and the machine gun company could fire on the far (western) side of the gorge. These two inflicted casualties on MFHQ and the aid post established by 2/4 Field Ambulance.⁴⁷ The Australians mistook the artillery fire for mortar fire. Chester Wilmot, who was present at MFHQ, wrote that “... they were lobbing 4 inch mortars on us this morning from that ridge on the right... from that same ridge we can hear... a heavy machine gun... they were shooting up Bde HQ with that this morning... they put some in the RAP and the doc [Captain Hogan of 53 Battalion] got hit in both legs...”⁴⁸

The second reason for the failure of 2/144 was that, on 27 August, 53 Battalion put up just enough resistance to limit their advance towards the waterfall. Thirdly, on 28 August, while trying a flanking march, 2/144 became lost and failed to make contact with the

⁴⁴ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, Nankai Shitai operational order A, no 102, 24/8/42, p. 17. Here it is explained that a double envelopment of the Australians was the essence of the Japanese plan. The document also provides further evidence for the late arrival of 3/144 gun platoon and 3 Company of the mountain artillery.

⁴⁵ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 206.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Austin, *To Kokoda and Beyond*, p. 146.

⁴⁷ AWM 52 8/21/17, 21 Brigade report on operations, 26/8/42, p. 29.

⁴⁸ MacDonald, *Chester Wilmot reports*, p. 299.

enemy that day. Students of the campaign will be familiar with the few occasions when Australian battalions became lost in the jungle but it is not generally realised that this also happened to the Japanese several times in the mountains. On 28 August 2/144 completely lost track of their enemy. This setback to Horii's plan, 2/144 losing itself east of the gorge on 28 August, was very fortunate for the Australians.⁴⁹ On 29 August 2/144 found the main track again and struck a major blow towards Abuari from the waterfall area. The Australian 53 Battalion fell apart under this attack and two companies of 2/16 barely managed to stop the Japanese cutting in behind the Australian force on the west side of the Gorge by seizing the track junction at Alola.

In Australian accounts much is made of the poor performance of 53 Battalion, for instance it has been said that one company "appears to have dissolved soon after contact [with the enemy] was made."⁵⁰ Not even the battalion history offers a defence of the battalion's performance.⁵¹ What can be said in 53 Battalion's favour - from the Japanese perspective - was that they appear to have held up 2/144 just long enough. Japanese sources often comment on Australian fighting prowess, usually but not always negatively, but nowhere in the documents examined was there any awareness on the Japanese part of the poor performance of the Australians opposite 2/144 or of any distinction in capacity between the militia battalions and the AIF battalions. The *War History of 144 Regiment* relates that 2/144 were up against Australians who fought stubbornly "with lines changing hands several times" and "little opportunity to make a speedy exploitation of the battle situation."⁵²

⁴⁹ The list of regimental deaths in NIDS 302.9.H. Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki (Battle Records of the 144th Infantry Regiment) shows none at all east of the gorge for 28/8/42. Both sides accounts mention there was little or no fighting there this day.

⁵⁰ AWM 3DRL/6643, Blamey's papers, wallet no 29, Chester Wilmot's report, p. 2. See also McCathy, *South-west Pacific, first year*, pp. 202 and 208.

⁵¹ Budden, *That Mob: The Story of the 55/53rd Australian Infantry Battalion AIF*.

⁵² In AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 8.

West of the gorge 1/144 patrols had been, at the cost of a few wounded, feeling out the Australian position since they first found it on 15 August.⁵³ From then to 25 August they had located the line along front creek and had also found the flanks so that when the artillery observers arrived on the ridge overlooking the Australians they could be given a good idea of where, under the foliage, lay their targets. The action proper on the west side of the gorge began with this artillery shelling 39 Battalion on 26 August.⁵⁴ This was to cover the move of 1/144 as it advanced on a two company front directly south along the track. One infantry company was held in reserve, that which was later committed to act in concert with 9 Company of 3/144.

On 27 August, 3/144 was brought up behind 1/144, arriving in the Japanese rear at 1000hrs.⁵⁵ While the original plan called for 1/144 to pin the Australian front west of the gorge while 3/144 went around the western flank a day later, 9 company of 3/144 was initially committed to the immediate left of 1/144.⁵⁶ It is not clear why this was done as it would decrease the strength of the planned western flanking move. A reasonable explanation is that for an envelopment to work it is first necessary to attack the enemy centre in an effort to make him commit his reserve. Then, when the enveloping attacks appear, that of 2/144 across the gorge and 3/144 on the Australian left, there will be no reserve with which to counter them. It may be that 1/144's pinning attack across front creek was felt by Horii to be lacking vigour, so he put in one company of 3/144 to strengthen it. Japanese accounts assert that some progress was made and 'one corner' of the 2/14th's position at 'lone house' (the Japanese name for Isurava) was taken by 1 Company of 1/144 Battalion.⁵⁷

⁵³ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, diary of Lt. Hirano of 1/144, p.4.

⁵⁴ In AWM 55 3 /4, current translations no. 50, p. 32, contains a number of maps and charts showing the Japanese artillery plan for Isurava.

⁵⁵ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 23.

⁵⁶ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 24.

⁵⁷ In AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 12. See also AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of Lt Noda Hidetaka, p. 1.

On 28 August, the day 2/144 became lost east of the Eora gorge, there was also a lull in Japanese operations on the western side. Horii wrote that this was because “our operations were dependent on the progress of 2/144’s outflanking move”. We have seen 2/144’s advance was unspectacular until 29 August and Horii seems to have decided to give them an extra day. This also caused him to postpone, by a day, the move of 3/144 around the Australian left.

This postponement tells us three things: first, that the Australian force was to have been surrounded and destroyed, not just driven back, and that Horii was willing to wait a day to increase his chance of this occurring. Second, his checkmate move, the attack by 3/144, was to be held off until he could be fairly sure all Australian reserves had been used elsewhere so none would remain to oppose 3/144. Third, he had 2/41 six kilometres north at Deniki. He could have used it, but he wished to keep it fresh for an energetic pursuit of the Australians after 144 Regiment had won the battle. That he did not use this battalion to finish off the fight a day, even two days earlier, suggests he may not have felt so pressed for time as Australian accounts would have it.⁵⁸ The total destruction of Maroubra Force, if that could be achieved by the double envelopment, would open the way for a rapid uncontested advance by his fresh reserve, 2/41 Battalion.

There is a suggestion in the *Senshi Soshō* that part of Horii’s problem was he was not in communication with 2/144 but a signals officer at 144 RHQ recorded that wireless communications were maintained across the valley. On 28 August he mentioned that 2/144 had taken serious casualties, something he could hardly know unless the information came by wireless.⁵⁹ Another officer wrote that “according to the news coming in from 2/144 they are finding the terrain difficult...the result of this present operation depends very largely on the extent to which 2nd Battalion can carry out their task.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ham, *Kokoda*, p. 172.

⁵⁹ AWM 55 3/7, current translations no. 77, diary of Takamura Jiro, a signaller at 144 RHQ, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁰ AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of Lt. Noda Hidetaka, p. 5

On 27 August, 3/144 had been repositioned in preparation for its flanking move. At 0200 on 28 August, leaving 9 Company with 1/144, the rest of 3/144 commenced its march to the high ground on the Australian left. As with 2/144 across the valley, they soon became lost. The two infantry companies became separated in the dark from the machine gun company and the battalion headquarters. Both infantry companies independently bumped into the Australian line. Number 7 Company commander managed to contact his battalion commander and proposed that the flanking move should be wider in order to approach the Australian rear while avoiding contact.⁶¹ The disentanglement from the Australians and the march entirely around the Australian left cost 3/144 the rest of the night. On dawn of 29 August, 7 Company was where it wanted to be and commenced its attack on Natsu - the Japanese name for their objective, which corresponds to the position held by B Company of the Australian 2/14 Battalion. This attack received support from the Japanese artillery on the ridge.⁶²

While 7 Company was engaged, the rest of the battalion was still wandering, lost in the jungle.⁶³ The BnHQ did not arrive until midday and the machine gun company not until 1430, though the machine gun company commander reported a contact with the Australians at 0930.⁶⁴ By 1530 Natsu fell and a counterattack, probably the one led by Lt. Lindsey Mason of 2/14, killed Lt Kamiya, 7 Company's commander, but was repulsed, almost all members of the Australian platoon being either killed or wounded.⁶⁵ This was the end of the day's work for 3/144, which dug in to hold this position as more Australian counterattacks were expected but did not appear.

⁶¹ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 14.

⁶² See AWM 55 3 /4, current translations no. 50, p. 32, NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), pp. 23-24 and Edgar, *Warrior of Kokoda: A biography of Brigadier Arthur Potts*, pp. 143-145.

⁶³ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 24.

⁶⁴ AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 29, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁵ Lt Lindsay Mason, 2/14 Battalion, record of interview with author, New Norfolk, Tasmania, 20/12/04.

The several Australian platoon sized counterattacks from 2/14 Bn here on the Australian left seem to have cooled the ardour of 3/144 and materially contributed to the ease of the later Australian withdrawal.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, 1/144 Battalion, assisted by 9 Company of 3/144, and facing Isurava from the north along the track, briefly broke into the Australian position but was ejected by a counterattack. At day's end the Japanese had made no progress there.

The events of the day west of the gorge were listed by an officer at 144 RHQ. "The red roof and one house positions (Isurava) are stubbornly holding ... [there is] heavy fighting and casualties are increasing. Number 3 Battalion went around the [Japanese] right flank [and] is fighting a difficult battle and casualties are continuing to increase... No I Company captured the red roof position but were nearly wiped out by an enemy counterattack. Captain Takamori and his company are to go and recapture the position. It is an attack of certain death. The enveloping operations have been completed and the enemy has no way of retreating. Their counterattacks are fierce. It is their final struggle."⁶⁷

During the night of 29/30 August, on advice from Lt Colonel Arthur Key of 2/14 Bn that the Australians could not hold on, Potts ordered a withdrawal to the rest house position, one kilometre to the Australian rear. What the Japanese could not know at this point was that they had achieved their aim, with all the Australian reserves now committed. The 39 Battalion war diary noted that the commitment of all reserves occurred at last light on 29 August and was doubtless a key factor in the reasons for the withdrawal. The withdrawal was effected without disruption from the Japanese, who were unaware of it. At 0830 on 30 August, well after the Australians had gone, an order from Horii mentioned that only one of three objectives had been taken and the enemy still held the other two.⁶⁸ Another

⁶⁶ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 15.

⁶⁷ AWM 55 3/7, current translations no. 77, diary of Pte. Takamura Jiro, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁸ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 33, file of Nankai Shitai operational orders, 16/8/42 to 15/10/42. See 0830 order of 30/8/42.

order directed the artillery to support the 1 Company attack on the already abandoned positions around Isurava itself.⁶⁹ Around this time Potts sent a succinct situation report to NGF “enemy aggressive and successful to date”.⁷⁰

On 30 August the formed bodies of Australians to the east of the gorge were two companies of 2/16 and D Company and HQ Company of 53 Battalion. Behind them holding the Eora creek crossing were B and A companies of 53 Battalion. A counterattack was to be mounted by both companies of 2/16 with the assistance of D Company. This assistance did not materialise and the 2/16 attack went in but failed. The Australians maintained a position just south of Abuari until ordered to withdraw in the afternoon.

By dawn of 30 August, the Australians west of Eora Gorge were now deployed at Isurava rest house. Two battalions, 39 and 2/14, blocked the track with two companies of 2/16 just behind them. In the course of the day they came under a strengthened bombardment. Prior to this, only the battalion gun of 1/144 and one mountain gun had been firing on them but now the remainder of the mountain artillery, two more 75mm guns, arrived together with 144s Regimental Gun Company.⁷¹ The battalion gun of 3/144 arrived too late to participate and the gun company of 41 Regiment did not arrive at all. By the afternoon of 30 August there were eight guns firing on the Australians. Six were concentrated at the ‘dead tree forest’, one was east of the gorge with 2/144 and one had gone forward in close support of 1/144.⁷² The main battery was directed to concentrate its

⁶⁹ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no 33, file of Nankai Shitai operational orders, 16/8/42 to 15/10/42, order A, 30/8/42. The order instructs the gun platoon of 1/144 to provide support in the attack on the ‘spring’ and ‘autumn’ positions at Isurava.

⁷⁰ AWM 54 171/2/20, sitrep no. 1, 0700, 30/8/42, npn.

⁷¹ AWM 55 3/5, atis 575, p. 33, diary of a Japanese artilleryman. The sketch map shows which guns were present at Isurava.

⁷² AWM 55 5/3, collection of Nankai Shitai intelligence summaries, no. 15 states that on 31/8/42 the Kusunose regiment’s artillery (144 gun company) and a mountain gun company arrived at Isurava. See also 55 3/4, current translations no. 42, pp. 13-14, Horii operational order A of 29/8/42. The order notes that though ‘natsu’ was taken ‘haru’ and ‘aki’ were still held by the enemy. The order instructs the main body of the artillery to stay in place but some rearrangement was made to support the next day’s attack by 1/144.

fire on 3/144's attack on the rest house position from the high ground to the west. For a while it also fired on the one Australian three inch mortar, the only Australian weapon with the range to harass the Japanese gunners on the ridge.⁷³

Before Horii's order timed 0830 reached them, 3/144 were underway again. "Our mission", said one of the company commanders, "is to deploy to... the south of Isurava, block the enemy's withdrawal, then annihilate them".⁷⁴ With an engineer platoon leading, they cut a track through the jungle along the high ground to the west of the new Australian position at the rest house. This time there was no loss of direction. Having found the Australians, they contacted the guns by field telephone to bring fire onto the Australian position and placed their machine gun company overlooking it.

Possibly the now heavy artillery bombardment falling on the rest house position, together with the machine gun fire from the high ground to the west, contributed to Pott's decision that the rest house could not be held. At 1500 he ordered a withdrawal. The 3/144 Battalion record states the machine gun fire down into the Australians was very effective and contributed materially to what happened next. As the Australians began to withdraw 8 Company attacked down the hill towards them. Number 7 Company, which had done the major part of the work the previous day, was behind in support. The battalion record stated that at first "the enemy panicked and fled at our attack, leaving their wounded behind". Around 1600 there was a counterattack but "7 Company was thrown in and easily dispersed them."

When they arrived "RiA [regimental gun company] (3biA[battalion gun platoon] attached) will select [a] position at the east flank area of present artillery position and will co operate with no 1 Bn."

⁷³ NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment). The map on p. 23 shows the Australian mortar deployed at Isurava rest house. It was fired on by the Japanese artillery whose main task was to support 3/144's Number 8 Company attack on the western flank of the rest house position. There were initially about 10 Australian 2 inch mortars present at Isurava. The Japanese equivalent was the 'knee mortar' of which there were about 27 in action. No Australian 3 inch mortars were present until late on 27/8/42. The 39 Battalion war diary, AWM 52 8/3/78, noted that 2/14 brought up several more two inch and one three inch mortar that day.

⁷⁴ AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 29, p. 53.

It was thought by the Japanese that this had not been a properly organised counterattack but rather was some Australians cut off to the north, by attacking towards the south, were trying to re-establish contact with their fellows.⁷⁵ This point must be kept in mind to make sense of what occurred. While Japanese records do not specifically state this, it is clear from the Australian account that, for a period in the early afternoon, elements of 8 Company were occupying the track to the rear of the Australian position about 300 metres south of the rest house. This was near the position of 2/14 HQ which, most accounts have it, was broken into by these Japanese causing the headquarters to disperse and resulting, eventually, in the capture and killing of the battalion commander Colonel Key.

Linking the Japanese and Australian accounts here it may be possible to explain the strange event of the sudden dispersion of 2/14 HQ Company. The company was formed up along the track, ready to retire to the south when it was threatened by the Japanese 8 Company. Captain Harold Dickenson's C Company was ordered to put in a counterattack to relieve the pressure on the headquarters. It has been believed that as Dickenson's counterattack was underway, the Japanese close by suddenly swept the track with fire, causing 2/14 HQ Company to scatter, most jumping over the side of the track down the precipitous slope to Eora Creek.

Honner, who was present, told a different story to Gavin Long in Melbourne in September 1944. "Key ordered Dickenson, I think, to relieve pressure on the battalion. Actually Dickenson's attack swung in towards [the] track and Key and his HQ were on the track and ... Key thought Dickenson's attack with blood curdling yells was a Jap attack. Suddenly Key went down over the edge of the track to cover. What were Dickenson's orders? ...Dickenson's charge caused [Australian] casualties and caused a stampede among the troops waiting on the track. Some 2/14, as a result, disappeared way across the valley."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion), pp. 17-18.

⁷⁶ AWM 67 2/50, Gavin Long papers, interview with Lt. Colonel R. Honner, Melbourne, 27/9/44. npn.

The 39 Battalion war diary relates the same story: “Captain Dickenson made a charge which carried all before it - not only the enemy but also BHQ and troops waiting on the track to withdraw. Lt. Col. Key, his adj, IO and RSM, disappeared over the side of the hill and the withdrawal was precipitated by the wall of fire coming down through the jungle with C Coy’s charge.”⁷⁷ This version of events would explain why Dickenson, directed to attack roughly westward against 3/144 (but actually heading south) appeared to the Japanese to be an attack of a body of isolated Australians coming down from the north trying to cut their way through to the south.

From the moment 2/14 HQ was dispersed the, until now, reasonably orderly Australian withdrawal from the rest house position became the opposite. In the mid afternoon of 30 August, a situation report from Maroubra Force to NGF related that “enemy penetrated both flanks, 2/14 infiltrated to rear, heavy fighting, 2/14 strongly pressed all sides, 1530 Bde commander decided to withdraw Eora”. Regarding events east of the gorge it stated “A and B Coy [53 battalion] forced back to waterfall. Enemy encircled their rear... Coy broke and scattered... 1600 withdrawal commenced”.⁷⁸

During the entire phase of the Japanese attack on the Isurava resthouse position the Australians there were engaged only with 3/144, less one company, and the Japanese artillery. No Japanese troops from the fighting along front creek had come down the track to assist. When the Australians withdrew from Isurava village to the rest house on the morning of 30 August they did so unknown to their opponents at front creek, 1/144 Battalion and 9 Company of 3/144. At 0730 these two units made an attack on the now abandoned original Australian position at Isurava. No enemy were found except for stragglers. The Japanese advanced south along the main track encountering other dispersed groups of Australians. These must have delayed them considerably for it was not until 0800 of 31 August, after Maroubra Force had left the battlefield, that 9

⁷⁷ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, 30/8/42.

⁷⁸ AWM 54 577/6/4, sitrep in 7 Australian Division messages dealing with Maroubra Force operations, Kokoda, June to October 1942, npn.

Company of 3/144 was able to make its way south to rejoin its parent battalion at the rest house.

After the disarray caused by Dickenson's misdirected attack, the Australian withdrawal by dark had to some degree recovered its order. The men still on the main track passed though a rearguard of two companies of 2/16 blocking the track south of Alola. This rearguard did not withdraw until 0100 on 31 August. Half an hour after this, two kilometres to the north, the leading Japanese troops settled into a position at Isurava rest house. With them, by 1800, was Colonel Yazawa, looking for the battalion of his regiment that had made the wide flanking move to the west designed to cut the track in the Australian rear and trap them.⁷⁹ That lost battalion, 2/41, appeared ten hours later on the track, north of the 144 Regiment troops already at Isurava rest house, towards dawn on 31 August, well after the horse had already bolted via the stable door. The nearest formed bodies of Australians were then three kilometres away to the south near Eora Creek village, which was possibly the closest 2/41 battalion came to the Australians at any time during the action.

CASUALTIES

The Nankai Shitai claimed to have killed 1,000 Australians even before the battle was quite over. A more sober Japanese estimate claimed 300 Australians were left dead on the field.⁸⁰ There is, though, one Japanese map of the Isurava area which appears to show the result of going over the field early in September to locate and count enemy dead. It shows 105 Australian dead, not too far from the actual figure.⁸¹ Australian claims were similarly varied. On 2 September Potts wrote that a conservative estimate was his men had inflicted over 700 casualties. This estimate grew after the war to a claim that 550

⁷⁹ NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 18.

⁸⁰ AWM 55 5/3, interrogation report no. 34, p. 94.

⁸¹ NIDS, Bunko Jiku, 469, Rikugun tsushin no Gaikan, (Overview of Army correspondence), npn.

Japanese were killed and more than 1000 wounded.⁸² Where a number is not given it has become customary to state that the Japanese suffered ‘appalling losses’.⁸³ Nankai Shitai sources show that in truth the Japanese did lose more men than the Australians but nowhere near the numbers given here.

There is no difficulty with determining the number of Australians killed in action over the period 25 to 31 August. The official figure is 99 and unofficial figures are within one or two either side of that.⁸⁴ This includes any whose death occurred near but not on the battlefield or whose death was presumed within the period as well as those who died of wounds within the period. In addition, there were the wounded which, battalion, brigade and post campaign official records agree, was 111.

Though the last day in the period examined here is officially considered part of the next engagement, that of Eora-Templetons 1, casualties for both sides have been included here. This is on the basis that there is a tendency for records of casualties, on both sides, to sometimes record a casualty the day after it occurred. Most commonly this is the day the man’s body was found or the day he is actually recorded as having his wound tended to. In addition, there was still fighting on the original field of battle on 31 August between the Japanese and small lost and left-behind groups of Australians. The 144 RHQ, advancing at midday down the track, blundered into one such group on this day and took nine casualties.⁸⁵ An officer present explained that “Since none of our troops could be observed along the road [I said] it was too early to move forward but the recommendation was rejected. As [I] expected when we reached the ravine [probably that just south of postwar Alola village] Corporal Komatsu and five men were killed and Corporal Yamamoto and two men wounded.”⁸⁶

⁸² Potts figure is repeated in Mc Carthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 219. In Ham, *Kokoda* p. 178, the higher figure is given.

⁸³ Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 146

⁸⁴ James, *Field Guide to the Kokoda Track*, pp. 354-355 and p. 359.

⁸⁵ AWM 55 3/7, current translations no. 77, diary of Pte. Takamura Jiro, p. 26.

⁸⁶ 54 577/7/26, diary of Lt. Noda Hidetaka, 31/8/42, p. 6.

Lindsey Mason was an Australian infantry officer wounded in action at Isurava with 2/14 Battalion. He believed that “we were killing them about one for one” but this is the minority view in Australia both among the veterans and post war historians.⁸⁷ While more Japanese than Australians were killed in the action Japanese records tend to support Mason’s opinion more than any of the exaggerated claims shown above. After the war the 144 Regiment Association compiled a regimental history which contains a list of all 5403 men who died during the war while serving in the regiment. It lists the man’s name, the village he came from, his date of death and the location of his death. There are a number of occasions in the regimental history, typically when a great defeat was suffered, when the date and location of a man’s death is unlikely to be accurate. At Isurava, with the leisure granted list makers by a victory, the record is likely to be sound.

144 REGIMENT LIST OF DEATHS

West of Eora Gorge		East of Eora Gorge	
24/8	0		
25/8	2	25/8	6 at Kaeri
26/8	3	27/8	6 at ‘Muari’, presumably Abuari.
27/8	7	28/8	0 (the day 2/144 became lost)
28/8	16	29/8	10
29/8	48	30/8	8
30/8	14	31/8	1
31/8	9		
Total	99	Total	31

The total given is 130 KIA and assuming a higher proportion of wounded than the Australians, one and three quarters to one, we arrive at total casualty list of some 356. There are three other Japanese casualty sources for Isurava. The Azuma Shigetoshi list has one fewer killed and the 3/144 account states the battalion lost 56 killed and 88 wounded.⁸⁸ Another source for 5 Company of 2/144 on the east side of Eora gorge gives

⁸⁷ Lt. Lindsey Mason, 2/14 Battalion, record of interview with author, New Norfolk, Tasmania, 20/12/ 2004.

⁸⁸ Azuma Shigetoshio list of war dead of 144 Regiment, author’s collection, p. 1, and NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 25.

six killed and 13 wounded in the period from 25 August to 31 August.⁸⁹ As just one platoon of engineers was known to be in the midst of the fight, though two were present, the number of sapper casualties is unlikely to be large and just one member of 15 IER is recorded as wounded in action in this period.⁹⁰ As we have seen, 41 Regiment neither fired a shot nor took a casualty and the artillery concentrated at 'dead tree forest' does not appear to have suffered any loss from the Australian mortar fire. Total Japanese casualties were then probably in the vicinity of 370. It does not seem at all likely that more than 400 Japanese could have been killed or wounded at Isurava.

While this is a severe casualty rate, it is one third or one quarter of what has been claimed. Some Australian postwar scholars have seized upon a translated Japanese diary, by Pte Watanabe Toshio, which laments that the dairists' company was reduced from '170-180 men to 50-60 men.' It has been assumed that this applied to most Japanese infantry companies and that the losses occurred in *one action*, Isurava.⁹¹ In fact, it refers to 1 Company of 1/144. Much has already been said about this company. It left Japan in November 1941 with 184 men but arrived in Papua with 135 men. It fought at Awala, Kumusi crossing, Oivi, first and second Kokoda, Deniki and Isurava. At Isurava it had the misfortune to be on the Japanese left at front creek where it faced, among other trials, the Australian counterattack in which Pte Bruce Kingsbury won his Victoria Cross. No Japanese company had done anywhere near as much fighting and, after the diary extract often quoted, Watanabe goes on to say that his company had lost more men than any other.⁹² Number 1 Company of 1/144 did not lose half its men at Isurava but rather entered the action with about 80 men and lost a further twenty there. Considering this and the overall casualty estimate above a fair conclusion would be that the diary reference has misled some writers on the campaign to conclude that Japanese casualties must have been

⁸⁹ AWM 55 3/1/193, current translations no. 15, p. 17, The 5 Company 2/144 losses were 26/8/42, 1 WIA 26/8/42, 2 KIA, 27/8/42, 4 KIA and 11 WIA, 29/8/42 no loss, 30/8/42 1 WIA.

⁹⁰ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, p.32.

⁹¹ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 9.

⁹² AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 4, p. 5, diary of Pte. Watanabe Toshio of no. 1 Company of 1/144, p. 5.

much heavier than they were. The other companies of 1/144 had fought in the last three fights listed above but, for all the other infantry companies of the Nankai Shitai, Isurava was their first encounter in Papua. The most severe losses at Isurava were suffered by the companies that did the most fighting, those of 3/144 who fought the whole rest house phase of the fighting unaided by any other Japanese infantry. The battalion records stated the company casualties were as follows.

3/144 LOSSES AT ISURAVA	
Battalion HQ	2 KIA, 2 WIA
7 Infantry Company	18 KIA, 18 WIA
8 Infantry Company	15 KIA, 36 WIA
9 Infantry Company	21 KIA, 36 WIA
3 Machine Gun Company	2 KIA, 5 WIA
3 Battalion Gun Platoon	none - not present.
Total 56 KIA and 88 WIA⁹³	

It is worth noting that this table corresponds closely to our estimate of the Japanese killed to wounded ratio of one killed to one and three quarters wounded at this stage of the campaign.

Though Australian estimates of Japanese losses at Isurava have been too high, 370 was still a severe loss. Not until Oivi-Gorari in November did the Japanese again lose so great a proportion of casualties to those they inflicted.

It is also possible, by comparing casualty figures, to say something more about the fighting at Isurava. East of the Eora creek gorge the forces were roughly even in strength and the casualties also roughly even. A half of each of 2/16 Battalion and 53 Battalion faced a reduced Japanese 2/144 Battalion. Both sides lost 31 killed in action and the Japanese failed, over several days fighting, to proceed far beyond Abuari. These casualty figures lend support to the idea that the fighting east of the gorge was indecisive. On the

⁹³ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 25.

west side of the gorge, about Isurava village and rest house, where the fighting decided the outcome of the action, the Japanese suffered more severely, losing 99 dead to 64 Australian dead. In the chapter on Japanese artillery, the possibility that Japanese success west of the gorge was in large part due artillery support is discussed.

DISCUSSION

Japanese sources give a distinct impression of genuine shock at the level of resistance offered by the Australians at Isurava. While the majority of the Nankai Shitai were long service veterans, it is worth considering for a moment their experience of war. The majority of it was against Chinese guerillas, and a stand up fight of any duration against regular Chinese infantry was a rarity according to a 1/144 battalion veteran. This is certainly true of the series of amphibious landings 144 Regiment did along the coast of China in the late 30s.⁹⁴ Possibly only in the landings near Shanghai in 1937 and during the advance from there along the Yangtze to Nanking, had 144 Regiment experienced the kind of determined resistance they faced at Isurava. About a half of the men of the regiment present at Isurava had served in the Yangtze campaign.⁹⁵

From the outbreak of the Pacific war, in December 1941, 144 Regiment had had two easy victories. Soldiers complained that they hardly ever got the chance to fire their weapons in this period as the enemy surrendered easily and quickly.⁹⁶ This was their experience in Guam and Rabaul. In Malaya, 41 Regiment had a succession of victories and when sent to the Philippines were only in action against Philippine guerillas. Consequently, there was probably among the average Nankai Shitai infantryman an expectation of many more easy victories to come. A 41 Regiment man told his commander that he knew how to deal with the Australians from his experience of them in Malaya and was looking forward to a

⁹⁴ Imanishi Sadaharu, CSM 1/144, record of interview with author, Motoyama, Shikoku, 24/3/2004.

⁹⁵ Imanishi Sadaharu, CSM 1/144, record of interview with author, Motoyama, Shikoku, 24/3/2004.

⁹⁶ Nishimura Kohkichi, NCO of 2/144, record of interview with author, Tokyo, 14/3/ 2004.

second bout.⁹⁷ The experience of Isurava turned this thinking on its head. One 144 Regiment diarist wrote afterwards that these fellows at Isurava seemed a different kind of Australian from the ones he had come across in Rabaul.

All this is the background to the Nankai Shitai's failed plan for Isurava. It was based on an expectation of easy success, as had been the case so far. Isurava was still a convincing win but it was expected to be an annihilating win. The 2/144 was supposed to capture the track junction at Alola in the Australian rear. This it failed to do. The 2/41 was supposed to be held out of battle, fresh for the pursuit. It became necessary to bring it forward but it became lost while flanking the Australians and made no contribution at all to the victory.

The third battalion of 144 likewise lost a day trying to turn the Australian left. As far as can be judged, 1/144, flagging as a result of six weeks fighting against 39 Battalion and the PIB, failed to place enough pressure on the Australians along the line of front creek so it had to be reinforced by a company of 3/144. This reduced 3/144's strength for its hook around the Australian left flank on the night of 28/29 August, a hook which started a day late because 2/144 had made no progress on the far side of the gorge.

Another criticism that can be levelled at Horii is that he exhausted and depleted his strength by forced-marching the main body of the Nankai Shitai from Giruwa to Isurava. It is not clear if he did this because he feared another Australian attempt to retake Kokoda. It is more likely he wished to attack the Australians before they withdrew beyond his reach and for this was willing to accept the temporary loss of troops who fell out during the forced march. The same applies to his willingness to begin the attack with just three instead of the ten guns he might have had. The decisive moves of the action which did bring a Japanese victory were the attacks by 7 and 8 Companies of 3/144. On 29 August they broke into the left flank of the Australian first position at Isurava and on 30 August they repeated that manoeuvre by striking down from the heights above the rest house into the innards of 2/14 Battalion.

⁹⁷ Koiwai, Nyuginea Senki, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 80.

The normal Australian explanation for failure at Isurava revolves around enemy superiority of numbers. *Notes on Operations, Isurava Area*, written on 10 September, is typical of the explanations for the defeat that have appeared in print since: “Our troops appear to have been outfought and outmanoeuvred primarily because the enemy had superior numbers.”⁹⁸ This is the concluding comment after mention has been made of the failure of 53 Battalion, uniforms not lending themselves to camouflage and supply difficulties. Of 53 Battalion in general, its poor fighting quality and in particular its early patrol failures, which allowed the Japanese to get into position unobserved, are mentioned. It is also said that supply difficulties delayed 21 Brigade in getting into position in time to repulse the enemy attack.⁹⁹

However all the Australians were present by late on 27 August with the exception of two companies of 2/16 which arrived early the next day. In this same period, the Japanese had just two battalions committed and later an additional company of a third battalion arrived. Thus 27 August was the day when the Japanese were most probably outnumbered by the Australians, which undercuts the view that delayed Australian arrivals contributed to the Australian defeat. The poor performance of 53 Battalion, another explanation for defeat offered, now also seems less important as 2/144 was so exhausted and depleted, that 53 Battalion, with the stiffening of two companies of 2/16, was enough to hold them off for three days.

There is little if any criticism of Potts’ handling of Isurava in post war accounts and that is fair enough.¹⁰⁰ What has remained unseen is Potts’ good fortune in his enemies mishandling of the action. Had 2/144 been as adventurous and aggressive as 3/144 and had they both, as well as 2/41, not become lost in the jungle on several occasions it is

⁹⁸ AWM 54 577/7/5, Notes on operations in Isurava area, 10/9/42, p. 33.

⁹⁹ AWM 54 577/7/5, Notes on operations in Isurava area 10/9/42, p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ See Edgar, B. *Warrior of Kokoda: A biography of Brigadier Arthur Potts*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999, and <<http://www.awm.gov.au/events/conference/2002/gower.asp>> S. Gower, Command in New Guinea, Army History conference, 2002, “Remembering 1942”. Gower reviews the command controversies of 1942 including the dismissal of Potts and Allen.

difficult to see how Potts could have escaped with a less severe defeat than that administered to the Australians at Efogi a week later. At Isurava Horii defeated but failed to destroy Maroubra Force. The feeling among the senior Japanese officers who knew what had really happened there was summed up by one: “We missed a great prize.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle History of New Guinea), p.79.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

EORA-TEMPLETONS 1.

CHAPTER 7, EORA-TEMPLETONS I, 31 AUGUST to 5 SEPTEMBER

Dr. Vernon wrote in his diary that the fighting in early September “seems to have been one of the major clashes in the retreat yet was largely passed over in silence in the Australian press.”¹ This inattention to the fighting in the first few days of September, fighting which officially has the status of an engagement on a par with Efogi, has continued with accounts usually moving quickly from Isurava to Efogi.

The five days of fighting rates one page in the official history and a few lines in the Japanese official account. In part this is because it follows hard upon Isurava and is, to some extent, obscured by it. Japanese refer to this engagement as the second round of Isurava. Raymond Paull’s book *Retreat from Kokoda* is a partial exception as he gives some detail on the fighting on the night of 1/2 September but not thereafter.²

There is, fortunately, sufficient documentation to, as it were, rescue this engagement from obscurity. The Japanese battalion commander concerned has left a full account. There are two documents from the 41 Regiment historical records and a half dozen Japanese diaries in the ATIS collection which relate to the fighting as well as several maps of their deployment. The usual wealth of detail can be found in Australian battalion and brigade war diaries as well as battalion histories.

The period between the end at Isurava and the engagement at Efogi is termed the first Eora-Templeton’s engagement which distinguishes it from the larger and longer action which took place in the same vicinity during the Japanese retreat. The 144 Regiment was hard used at Isurava and Horii had planned to rest it and have 41 Regiment take over the pursuit. Two problems arose here. First 41 Regiment was far from completely assembled. The decision taken by 17th Army in Rabaul to postpone the advance on Port Moresby meant that labourers and bridging specialists rather than infantry would be, in the

¹ AWM 54 253/5/8, pt 1, Captain GH Vernon, war diary, July-November 1942; see typed notes in the back of the diary.

² Paull, *The Retreat from Kokoda*, pp. 170-173.

immediate future, a higher priority than infantry. Elements of 41 Regiment were bumped from their place on the shipping list as a consequence. A total of 623 men were taken from the regiment to form a new temporary supply unit and another 113 were seconded to other transport and road construction units. In all 736 infantrymen were detached from the regiment to supply and transport roles or to the temporary road construction unit.³

As a consequence of this disruption, the whole of 41 Regiment was not all together in one place until it formed up to defend Oivi in early November 1942. Before November, the only elements of the regiment which did any fighting in the mountains were the RHQ, the gun company, 2/41 Battalion and 12 Company of 3/41 Battalion. After the detachments to the temporary supply unit, 1/41 Battalion was reduced to 343 men. It advanced briefly as far as Nauro, then returned to Kokoda. The third battalion of the regiment, 3/41, reduced to 420 men, spent its entire time up to early November guarding the sea approaches to Buna and patrolling the coast.⁴ Its commander, Lt Colonel Tomita Yoshinobu, was responsible for the defence of Buna and for the eastern of the two supply echelons to Kokoda.

The second, lesser problem that arose after Isurava was that the Australians there had put up a more prolonged fight than expected. The single available battalion of 41 Regiment, 2/41, sitting in reserve about Deniki, waiting to take over the advance after the Australians were defeated, was found to be needed in the battle. It was sent on a wide flanking march, became lost and emerged on the main track to find the Australians long gone. While the battalion had lost some of its freshness as a result of a night long march at least it was now well forward, so was in a position to take up the pursuit. On 1 September, joined by other elements of the regiment, it advanced through Alola towards Eora creek village where the Australians were digging in.

³ NIDS Nanto higashi nyuginia 255, Hohei dai 41 Rentai New Guinea senkyo hokoku, (War Records of 41 Infantry Regiment) p 12.

⁴ NIDS Nanto higashi nyuginia 255, Hohei dai 41 Rentai New Guinea senkyo hokoku, (War Records of 41 Infantry Regiment) p 12.

JAPANESE ENGAGED

Yazawa's 41 Regiment had a reduced regimental headquarters and a small regimental gun company with one 75mm mountain gun and one 37mm gun. All of 2/41, and its battalion 70mm gun, was present plus 12 Company from 3/41.⁵ There was also a company of 15 IER and a mountain gun company⁶. This was the force that replaced 144 Regiment and became the pursuit group.

All the battalions in 41 Regiment were 'square' battalions with four infantry companies as opposed to triangular battalions with three infantry companies, as in 144 Regiment. Reduced for tropical operations, a 'square' battalion usually had a battalion headquarters of 60, a gun platoon of 35, four infantry companies each of 140 and a machine gun company of 100, 760 men in all so slightly smaller than that of a tropical triangular battalion. While a company of engineers was attached, only one of its platoons participated in the coming fight; the rest were employed improving the track along the line of advance.

Japanese Engaged at Eora-Templetons 1	
41 Regiment HQ	58
Regimental Signals Company	109
Regimental Gun Company	88
55 Mountain Artillery Regiment, No 2 company	110
3/41 Battalion, No. 12 company	130
2/41 Battalion	755
15 Independent Engineer Regiment, one platoon	55
Total	1,305⁷

⁵ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 33, Yazawa butai documents, p. 20. See also NIDS Nanto higashi nyuginia 255, Hohei dai 41 Rentai New Guinea senkyo hokoku, (War Records of 41 Infantry Regiment) pp. 14-15.

⁶ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 24, p. 3.

⁷ NIDS, Nanto higashi Nyuginia 255, Hohei dai 41 Rentai New Guinea senkyo hokoku, (War Records of 41 Infantry Regiment), p 12.

These were the numbers on arrival in Papua. The regiment had been there now for not quite ten days, so numbers would not have been much diminished by sickness. Of the 2,479 men of the regiment selected to serve in Papua 103 never left Rabaul.⁸ This was because they were in hospital at the time or deemed unfit for the coming hard campaign. About a half of them were from the units listed above, so they were not present in Papua. Number 7 Company of 2/41 was, at this time, twenty men below strength but nothing is known of other company strengths.⁹ For these reasons, then, the actual Japanese force engaged in the first fight at Eora was probably 1,200 strong.

AUSTRALIANS ENGAGED

Seven hundred is a good estimate of the Australians who were engaged at Eora-Templeton's 1. It was the last time in the campaign when the Australians were significantly outnumbered and, at very close to two to one, it was probably the largest ratio by which the Japanese outnumbered the Australians in the entire Papuan campaign. There is some irony that it is the least well know part of the fighting in a campaign where Australians believe the Japanese usually had a great superiority of numbers. Apart from a detachment of 2/4 Field Ambulance and a few PIB, 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions (with one three inch mortar) were on their own serving as a rearguard for the Australian retreat. The MFHQ, 21 BdeHQ and all other units had retired south down the track and took no part in this engagement.

As a series of rearguard actions immediately after a significant defeat, it was natural there was no time to count heads. A few days previously, 2/16 Battalion had arrived at Isurava 590 strong. It had lost forty-four men killed and wounded and some of its men, less than a company, were still making their way back to the track after having been cut off east of Eora creek. This occurred when the Japanese took Alolo, where the track to the east

⁸ NIDS, Nanto higashi Nyuginia 255Hohei dai 41 Rentai New Guinea senkyo hokoku, (War Records of 41 Infantry Regiment), p 12.

⁹ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 25, battle report of no 7 Company, 2/41 Battalion. 1-2/9/42, pp. 11-13.

intersects with the main Kokoda track. Sickness had just begun, mainly dysentery, and another ten or so men per day were being evacuated but it does not seem possible for the battalion assembled at Eora to have been as low as the 400 men Sublet says were present after Isurava.¹⁰ He is certainly not counting Captain Dennis Goldsmith's C Company which marched down the eastern side of the gorge to rejoin at Eora on 1 September. Another estimate done at the time, of 450 present all ranks on 1 September, would be closer to the mark.¹¹

The other Australian infantry battalion, 2/14, was undeniably weaker. It had suffered a serious scattering as a result of the defeat at Isurava. Lt Colonel Keys, the battalion commander together with much of his headquarters company, was lost in the jungle. Other parties of the battalion rejoined over the next few days. The Intelligence officer, Captain Stan Bisset, brought in 13 men on 3 September. 21 Brigade's estimate was there were 230 men of 2/14 present at the start of the Eora 1 engagement. The battalion lost 54 men as battle casualties thereafter, an average of seven a day to sickness and 150 men were still present at the end of Eora 1 so the brigade's estimate was probably correct.¹² There were in addition detachments of signallers from 21 BdeHQ, a small detachment from 14 FA and several men from ANGAU, bringing the total engaged to, most likely about 700.

THE EORA 1 ENGAGEMENT

On the night of 31 August it was known to the Japanese that the Australians had a blocking force on the track in front of Eora Creek. This was composed of 2/14 at first.

¹⁰ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 58.

¹¹ AWM 54 577/7/29, summary of operations, New Guinea, Kokoda-Ioribaiwa 21 July-3 October 1942, p. 4.

¹² AWM 52 8/21/17, 21 Brigade report on operations, part 5 general narrative of events, p. 11. On 4/9/42 the 2/14 battalion had, according to this document, 150 men and 2/16 had 250. AWM 54 577/7/29, summary of operations, New Guinea, Kokoda-Ioribaiwa 21 July-3 October 1942, p4. An estimate of the strengths of these two battalions on 1/9/42 was 450 for 2/16 and 230 for 2/14. AWM 54 171/2/48, Australian Imperial Force battle casualties, Owen Stanley campaign, Kokoda to Imita, 22 July to 25 September. Pp. 1-3.

This battalion then fell back through 2/16 and, at 0700 on 1 September, all the Australians withdrew to a further position on the heights south of, and overlooking, Eora creek crossing. Yazawa, in his first combat in Papua, decided to slip his main infantry force, 2/41 Battalion less one company, around the Australian left on the night of 31 August while pinning it to the front with 6 Company of 2/41 and 12 Company of 3/41. Advancing along the track with Yazawa was also 2/41's battalion's machine gun company. At this point the battalion gun, the Regimental Gun Company and the RHQ were in reserve.

As both sides were yet to learn, even though the very night previous 2/41 Battalion had missed the battle of Isurava by being lost on a flank march, there was every likelihood of going astray in the jungle. This is what happened now. For a second consecutive night 2/41 Battalion wandered lost in the jungle looking for but not finding the Australian flank. The battalion commander, Major Koiwai Mitsuo, who claims to have come up with the plan, described his reasoning thus: "If we attacked them from the front we would end up attacking them from the lower position of a slope, with no cover from enemy fire. Obviously this would result in great losses on our side. Therefore, though it would take time, I decided to go around the forest and attack them from their rear or [the Australian] left flank. I thought we should be able to start attacking them by twilight."¹³

The battalion failed to find the enemy and became lost. Koiwai realised he would spend the entire night in the jungle unless he did something. He turned towards the Australian position to make a shorter flank attack than the wider envelopment originally envisaged, but still could not find the enemy. He finally realised the only thing to do was return on his original compass bearing to his starting point. He emerged with his battalion, doubtless with a strong feeling of déjà vu, back on the track at 0330 on the morning of 1 September, twelve hours after he had left.

¹³ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki* (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 81.

Meanwhile, the rest of the regiment, the pinning force, had skirmished with the Australians at one of the Australian rearguard positions in front of Eora creek. The Australians then withdrew into their main position overlooking the creek crossing and wartime Eora village. Yazawa sent out his scouts to find the limits of the Australian position while, assisted by the engineers, his artillery and medium machine guns set up on the same heights north west of the creek crossing that the Nankai Shitai were to use for the same purpose in the fighting here in October. When ready this group bombarded the Australians on the opposite (southern) heights while Yazawa awaited the flank attack of Koiwai's lost battalion.¹⁴

Later in the day when Koiwai's battalion, now marching along the track, caught up with Yazawa the latter expressed his dissatisfaction. Koiwai left an account of the meeting: "It was natural that the regiment commander got angry. I had delayed the advance of the troops ... by a half-day; my fault was not light". He apologised to Yazawa who said: "You feared such an idle enemy and did not try to attack them from the front. That's why your mission ended up this way".¹⁵

Now that we can examine the positions of both sides it may well be that Koiwai is not completely to blame. The Australian rearguard, then 2/14 Battalion, was on a precipitous ridge south of wartime Alola. It is still fairly open ground just as Koiwai described it. There is a branch of Eora creek running from left to right (from the Australian perspective) in a deep and extremely steep gully on the north side of the Australian ridge. The ground is so difficult it is no wonder Koiwai thought there must be a better way to get at the Australians.

However, within a few hours of Koiwai heading into the bush, out of wireless or field telephone communications on this occasion, the Australians withdrew through successive rearguard positions while Yazawa followed them along the main track. It may well be

¹⁴ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 22, notebook of probationary officer Watanabe Kukuichi of 2/41, p. 11.

¹⁵ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki* (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 83.

Koiwai *did* come near to the left of the original Australian position but, as they had already left, he did not know it. By the time Koiwai emerged from the scrub next morning the Australians were another 1,500 metres further south on the track to Eora.

Suitably chastised, Koiwai brought up his battalion to join the rest of 41 Regiment and a night attack was planned on the Australians now in view, digging in on the heights south of Eora village on the slope from which Damien Parer took his now famous photographs of the village.

In the course of the afternoon of 1 September, the infantry of Yazawa's pursuit group moved into position. Number 7 Company, with a platoon of 6 Company, worked their way across Eora creek, under fire, directly at the Australians. Number 5 Company and the rest of 6 Company crossed the creek further north and slipped around the Australian right flank. Numbers 8 and 12 Company were held in reserve. The plan was to be in a position to attack on dark. Then the Australian front would be fixed by 7 Company while 5 and 6 Companies would envelop the Australian right flank.

With the whole day to prepare, the Japanese attack still got off to a late start around 1800 and continued through the night. There is a tendency to imagine Japanese infantry attacks as massed assaults and Australian post war accounts lay stress on the close range fighting and 'sudden screaming charges'. In fact these were rare events. The typical Australian experience of night fighting in the jungle in this period was not of repelling massed charges but, more commonly, one of sitting in a fighting pit lobbing a grenade every now and again at where the enemy might be, all the time seeing nothing but hearing quite a bit. When questioned on this point, Japanese IJA veteran officers stress two things, first that in their training great emphasis was laid on not squandering their high quality infantry by charging if the object could be accomplished more slowly with fewer casualties. Secondly they point out that, after some fighting, it was very difficult to gather even a section to make a co-ordinated assault in darkness. Major Okamoto Takahisa, who commanded a battalion in New Guinea in 1943, scoffed at the idea of maneuvering whole

battalions at night. “One of the things the 1942 campaign taught us, it is that large formations moving through the jungle in the dark almost always get lost. We learned the lesson and did not do it so much later in the war.”¹⁶

The best that could be done, and what the three infantry companies of 2/41 Battalion were doing at Eora, was to crawl carefully forward in small groups, each under an NCO, attempting to infiltrate the enemy position. By 0400 on 2 September the Japanese infantry in small groups had broken into the Australian position in such a manner. About the same time the Australians began to withdraw.

The commander of 7 Company, Lt. Ono Tetsuo, in his post engagement report, wrote that he had entered the Australian position by 0430 having lost two killed and nine wounded. His men had expended 870 rounds, thrown nine grenades and captured a mortar, a light machine gun, a Thompson submachinegun, 25 rifles and “much clothes and rations.”¹⁷

On the Japanese left flank, 5 and 6 Companies failed to envelop the Australians but there is no detailed record of what transpired there. Whatever it was it was probably more severe than the experience of 7 Company as the total losses to 41 Regiment for the day’s preparations and night attack were 18 killed and 36 or 37 wounded, four fifths of this sustained by 5 and 6 Company.¹⁸

The Australians lost 17 killed and 12 wounded.¹⁹ Seven of those killed were in the category “death presumed”. This, together with the low number of wounded compared to killed, is evidence the fighting at the end was close and that the Australian withdrawal was under considerable pressure.

¹⁶ Major Okamoto Takahisa, 66 Infantry Regiment, record of interview with author, 20/3/2004.

¹⁷ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 25, battle report of 7 Company, 2/41, p 11.

¹⁸ NIDS, Higashi Nyuguinea, 156, Daiichi Nyuginiea sen rentai sento kodo gaiyo hohei dai 41 Rentai (First New Guinea campaign, 41 Regiment), pp. 14-15.

¹⁹ AWM 54 171/2/48, Australian Imperial Force battle casualties, Owen Stanley campaign, Kokoda to Imita, 22 July to 25 September, pp. 1-3.

Contact between the two sides was broken as 2/16 made its withdrawal through 2/14 on the morning of 2 September. They deployed again just over a kilometre south on the track to Templeton's Crossing then 2/14, in its turn, fell back through 2/16. By the evening of 2/3 September, the Australian rearguard were placed as they had been the previous evening with 2/16 in front and 2/14 immediately behind so as to be able to counterattack or deal with Japanese flanking moves.

At daylight on the morning of 2 September the fresh 8 Company advanced and reported that the Australians had gone. "I thought it unusual" wrote Koiwai, "for the hard working Australians to give up a position so quickly, but anyhow it was good news and took a load off my mind. Our loss [his own battalion] since yesterday amounted to 17 dead and 27 wounded. This day we buried the dead in the mountains for the first time since landing. I issued an order to start the pursuit at 7am."²⁰ Number 7 Company, the most tired, was sent to be the regimental flag company which is a Japanese term for a company placed in regimental reserve. Number 5 and 6 Companies rested in place. Number 8 and 12 Companies took up the pursuit.²¹

The Japanese were being cautious. Koiwai's memoir explains that, smarting from his losses the previous night, he expected to find the Australians had not removed themselves far. He sent 12 Company straight up the track and 8 Company through the jungle on his left and placed his MMG company on the knoll the Australians had occupied the night before.²² The track here ran fairly straight along a crest for several hundred metres providing, by Owen Stanley standards, a decent field of fire for machine guns placed to fire directly along it.²³

²⁰ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 100.

²¹ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea) p. 101.

²² Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea) p. 86-87.

²³ It is possible to see, at best, along this crest for 100 metres.

No enemy were encountered. Yazawa showed up and again rebuked Koiwai for advancing slowly when there were no Australians about. “Since yesterday’s failed attack, he had not liked my cautious approach. He seemed to be anxious for a quick victory, but it was not easy to attack the enemy... without knowing their situation. Being too eager for a victory could result in not only delaying the pursuit but increasing our losses. This is the last thing a commander should do.”²⁴

The disagreement between Koiwai and his regimental commander touches on a problem faced by both sides. While a fast pursuit is preferable it also costs more lives. It will be seen how, a month from this time, the Australians faced the same dilemma in their advance. Brigade and divisional commanders were pushing battalion commanders to advance faster than they were while battalion commanders were anxious to avoid casualties.

By day’s end on 2 September, spurred on by Yazawa, Koiwai’s scouts had found the Australians again. Frank Sublet of 2/16 Battalion described it this way: “The Japanese were probing both flanks and in order to avoid what had happened in the last contact, when both flanks were threatened, an immediate withdrawal was decided on. In order to avoid the Japanese, who could already been seen pressing especially hard around the Australian left, Lt. Colonel Caro, 2/16 Battalion commander, decided to retreat via a track looping out to the south east in case the main track in the immediate rear was already cut. Caro’s battalion took the loop track while 2/14, now at Templetons, held the main track.” As it happened, neither encountered the enemy and by midmorning of 3 September both battalions were back on the main track, still with no enemy contact.²⁵

The second part of the Eora-Templeton’s engagement developed at the creek crossing at Templetons on the night of 3/4 September. Again, Yazawa’s plan was to pin the enemy front then put in an attack around the flank. This time it was to be directed at the

²⁴ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 88.

²⁵ Uren M. *A Thousand men at war. The story of the 2/16 Battalion*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1959, pp. 136-143 and Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, pp. 63-64.

Australian left so the flank march would involve a crossing of Eora creek. The approach was made in the afternoon so the deployment for the attack could be made in daylight and the attack itself made as soon as it became dark.

Koiwai's account is again worth following. Not only is it the most detailed account of the engagement on either side but also it is full of insights into Japanese doctrine. On 3 September his thinking was that "after considering all the options I made up my mind to break the stalemate by attacking the enemy tonight..." He had 8 Company in hand but decided they had been worked hard since 1 September and "must be very tired. I could not push that company too much."²⁶

Instead, he wanted to use 7 Company but had to wait until 1700 for them to come up. "I was looking forward to the arrival of 7 Company because of the quality of the command. Lt. Nakao, the company commander, had experience in China and his Warrant Officer, Kaneshige, was also a great fighter with lots of experience."²⁷ While 7 Company deployed on its line of departure on the Japanese right, Koiwai arranged for some artillery support. Yazawa gave his assent and the commander of 2 Mountain Gun Company came to arrange the details with Koiwai.

"Though called a company they had only one gun and I was told that they were allowed to fire no more than ten rounds of shells... Even ten rounds would be enough. My goal was not to destroy the enemy position, but to scare them with this mountain gun. There can be no better strategy than to crush the enemies morale...As the gun was only for bluffing, I wanted to fire it right before the night attack of 7 Company...I assigned it a position and a target after closely observing the enemy position with binoculars. It is usually prohibited to fire an artillery gun for a night attack [but] human psychology in the front line was kind of beyond tactics. My plan was that, after firing shells at the

²⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 91.

²⁷ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 92.

position ... and terrifying the enemy out of their senses, we would charge with bayonets at them with the result they would be in fear of our attack in the darkness of the jungle.”²⁸

The Japanese mountain gunners, having observed their target in daylight, opened up as 7 Company attacked. Both the Japanese frontal and flanking attacks were successful. The front of 2/16 Battalion was penetrated, right through Dickenson’s company and as far as the battalion’s HQ.²⁹ Potts, who was not present but was in communication with the 2/16th, sent NGF a message: “2/16 heavy attack, driven in.”³⁰ This attack, the flank attack, was made by 7 and 5 Company, while 6 and 12 Company attacked the Australian front. Eight Company was held in reserve.

Accounts from both sides stress the fierce nature of the fighting. Sublet described the penetration of his battalion as having been achieved by “300 determined men” and one of them, Warrant Officer Utsumi of 6 Company, reported to his superiors that enemy resistance was ‘strenuous’ and their own casualties considerable.³¹ Lt Araki of 5 Company remarked that the enemy sometimes stood up in their trenches and threw grenades.³²

At 0240 on 4 September, Koiwai had a report that his men had got into the enemy position and were holding their ground.³³ They were told to dig in and expect a dawn counterattack and that, later, 8 Company would advance to join them. Australian accounts mention that some Japanese had cut the track in their rear and had to be ejected but there is no mention of this in any Japanese record. In confused fighting in the jungle a

²⁸ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 92.

²⁹ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 66.

³⁰ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 67.

³¹ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 93.

³² AWM 55 3/165, extracts from diary of Lt. Morimoto Yoshiyuki, probably of no. 8 Company 2/41, npn.

³³ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 98.

unit would often not know where it was and whether a track it was on was the main Kokoda track or some other.

From the Australian perspective it was 7 Company's attack which caused the greatest concern. The 21 Brigade war diary reported that 200 Japanese came across Eora Creek to the north west of 2/16 Battalion and attacked at 1555. At 1725, the battalion reported that its left flank had been driven in and Caro didn't think the position could be held.³⁴ The first engagement at Eora-Templeton's ended when the two Australian battalions were ordered by Caro to withdraw down the southern of the two tracks leading south from Templetons towards Efogi, that via Myola. Again the Australians were able to break away without difficulty.

CASUALTIES

Japanese casualties for the Eora-Templeton's engagement were remarkably heavy, a fact which may have contributed to general criticism in the Nankai Shitai about the quality of 41 Regiment. As a general rule the better quality the officers and the soldiers, the more that is accomplished with the less casualties. A counter to this though, as Koiwai points out, is that if the job is rushed then even high quality troops will take more casualties than they should.

As 144 Regiment did not participate we are without their usually reliable casualty records. The lowest Japanese source states that, for the whole period of fighting from 1 September to the morning of 5 September, the Nankai Shitai lost 40 dead and 53 wounded. Another source obtained by Gavin Long gave 44 dead with 62 wounded.³⁵ A third, Japanese, source lists 43 dead and 53 wounded and a fourth has 45 killed and 62 wounded.³⁶ The

³⁴ AWM 52 8/2/ 21, 21 Brigade war diary, 4/9/42.

³⁵ AWM 67 10/59, Gavin Long papers. A folder of loose sheets containing lists of strengths and casualties. Long does not give a source for these numbers.

³⁶ NIDS, Higashi Nyuguinea, 156, Daiichi Nyuginiea sen rentai sento kodo gaiyo hohei dai 41 rentai (First New Guinea campaign, 41 Regiment), pp. 14-15.

PCB's records assist here as they show 41 men wounded in action were cared for by them from the 41 Regiment for the month of September.³⁷ As this engagement is the only one the regiment was in for the entire month these casualties must have been incurred here.³⁸ The shortfall of wounded, if there is one, can be explained by lightly wounded men who were attended to within their unit by their own medical officer and did not require evacuation. As a rule of thumb about ten per cent of all wounded fall into this category. Alternatively, some reported as wounded may have died afterwards but before they came into the care of the PCB. Taking a middle course among these numbers it seems likely 41 Regiment's casualties for the first Eora-Templeton's engagement were close to 43 killed and 58 wounded. The pattern of Isurava was repeated in that while defeated the Australians did inflict heavier casualties on their enemy than they incurred. The Australian loss was 21 killed and 54 wounded.³⁹

DISCUSSION

On 5 September, Horii ordered that 41 Regiment cease being the pursuit group. A two battalion group of 144 Regiment, under Kusunose, was instructed to take over the task. This had not been the original plan but Horii was highly dissatisfied with the progress 41 Regiment had made. This much is apparent from Nankai Shitai sources but exactly how

³⁷ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, p. 32. The records of 67 LOCH have been thought to be only partial accounts of Japanese wounded and sick treated at Giruwa, thus not so useful in determining overall Japanese casualties. This is true in the sense that only records for September and October are available. However it is apparent by comparing the hospital records with other Japanese sources that they are in fact fairly complete accounts. For example they record, after actions in the mountains where 144 regiment was involved, substantial numbers of that regiments casualties which are usually in accord with the regiments own records. Moreover they do this at a time when none of 144 Regiment was anywhere near Giruwa and when the regiment's casualties had to pass through a number of regimental aid posts and field hospitals, where they might have been tended and recorded, to get to Giruwa. For an example of a comparison between 67 LOCH sources and other Japanese sources see Chapter nine, footnote 53.

³⁸ It is pointed out in Chapter 13 that battle casualties to air attack were very small so while some of these may have been to air attack it was probably very few.

³⁹ AWM 54 171/2/48, Australian Imperial Force battle casualties, Owen Stanley campaign, Kokoda to Imita, 22 July to 25 September. pp 1-2. The number given in this chapter excludes those who were casualties during this period, but not at this engagement, for there were Japanese patrols already searching the flanks who occasionally clashed with Australian parties dispersed as a result of Isurava.

41 Regiment had failed is not clearly stated. Their main error would appear to be neither to have advanced rapidly enough nor to have destroyed the enemy force opposed to them.

From 1 to 5 September Yazawa's 41 Regiment had advanced ten kilometers, or an average of two kilometres a day. To see how unsatisfactory this was it is necessary to look ahead to the period after first Eora-Templetons. When Kusunose's 144 Regiment took over on 5 September progress increased rapidly. Kusunose advanced 40 kilometres in the next eight days, an average of five kilometers a day. Kusunose gave Horii what he wanted, a rapid advance. As importantly, on 8 September, Kusunose's pursuit group defeated and dispersed the Australian force at Efogi.

Kusunose achieved at Efogi what Yazawa had thrice tried and failed to achieve, to pin the enemy to his front and, by putting a force around the flank into their rear, to destroy them. Worse still – not that the Japanese would have been aware at the time – the Yazawa Regiment at Eora-Templetons 1 had a significant superiority of numbers, close to two to one, an advantage which Horii did not have at Isurava nor Kusunose at Efogi.

As was mentioned in the introduction, there is a strong feeling, amounting to bitterness, between the surviving veterans of the two regiments. According to 144 veterans it was the failure of 41 Regiment at first Eora-Templetons that gave rise to a feeling that 41 Regiment was not keeping its end up. Having done, as 144 veterans see it, the hard work at Isurava while 41 Regiment made no contribution to that action, 41 Regiment had only to pursue and destroy an already broken Australian force and this they failed to do. The poor rate of advance of 41 Regiment and the loss of contact with the Australians from the morning of 2 September to the evening of 3 September, even while still advancing slowly, suggests there may be something in this complaint.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

EFOGI.

CHAPTER EIGHT- ENGAGEMENT AT EFOGI, 6-9 SEPTEMBER, 1942

After first Eora-Templetons the Australians abandoned their source of air supply, the dropping zone at Myola Lake, and fell back to Efogi. The engagement at Efogi between Potts and Kusunose was fought because Potts was directed to make a stand here with all of his force. Rowell instructed Potts to “yield no repeat no more ground and regain initiative at earliest possible moment.”¹ Rowell judged that with the addition of the fresh 2/27 Battalion already waiting at Efogi, with 3 Battalion almost at Nauro and 2/1 Pioneer Battalion on Ioribaiwa Ridge, Potts could afford to risk another attempt to stop the Nankai Shitai.

While Rowell passed on, to LHQ in Melbourne, Potts’ claim that he was greatly outnumbered it would seem Rowell and those above him may not have believed Potts. MacArthur was at this time receiving patchy information via the interception and decoding of enemy communications which suggested Japanese numbers were not as high as first thought.² By early September, MacArthur had enough indicators from interception sources to be convinced, correctly, that the Japanese actually advancing along the track *did not* outnumber the Australians. On 7 September he asked LHQ to explain why the Australians were falling back before a force that was not superior in numbers to them.³

An interesting situation was developing in the SWP theatre, involving two conflicting estimates of enemy strength. Those at the top were privy to the intercepted information which indicated lower enemy numbers while those further down the chain of command were responding to the inaccurate intelligence coming in from the front line which stressed higher enemy strength. One source tended to minimise Japanese numbers, the other maximised it. MacArthur’s complaints have not only been dismissed by Australian

¹ AWM 54, 577/6/3, New Guinea Force messages and reports, Rowell to LHQ, 8/9/42.

² Drea E. *MacArthur’s Ultra, Codebreaking and the War against Japan*. Chapter Two. See also AWM 123 270, Rowell’s report on New Guinea operations, p. 5.

³ Milner S. *Victory in Papua*, p. 51.

historians but have also been used to blacken his reputation.⁴ However, the Japanese evidence shows that in fact it was MacArthur, Blamey and Rowell, and not the Australian front line commanders, who were correct in their estimate of the size of the enemy force advancing on Port Moresby.⁵

Ordered to fight a decisive action, Potts selected a good position. Mission Ridge and Brigade Hill form one high and wide feature offering excellent observation in the direction of the Japanese approach where there were frequent large patches of open ground affording opportunities for the air strikes Potts had been requesting. The forward part of the position, Mission Ridge, runs in a north-south line while Brigade Hill, a lower continuation of Mission Ridge, turns more towards the south west so the whole is in a boomerang shape though only on a map can this be readily seen. Its importance will be apparent when the subject of Japanese artillery comes up.

There was rough ground on both flanks. The high ground on the Australian right was so difficult that Kusunose rejected it for a flanking move. His patrols in this area on 6 and 7 September reported the ground was 'too complicated'. These patrols were noted by 2/27 Battalion, giving rise to the idea at 21 Brigade HQ that there was an attempt to turn the Australian right.⁶ It was instead on the Australian left flank, along the low ground along the Fagume River, where the Japanese chose to make their move.

Kusunose was delighted the Australians were making a stand. Horii was extremely disappointed with Yazawa's efforts to catch up with the Australians in the period 1 September to 5 September and had replaced Yazawa Butai with Kusunose Butai as the pursuit group. Kusunose appreciated the importance of the opportunity, one that had been

⁴ McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, pp. 83 and 113.

⁵ MacArthur and Blamey were aware of the origin of 'most secret sources'. Rowell appears not to have been, judging by what he wrote in his autobiography. Rowell, S. *Full Circle*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1974, pp. 114-115.

⁶ AWM 54, 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 12.

missed several times so far, to destroy the Australians. For this reason, and probably also because Horii was unaware the Australians had been reinforced by 2/27 Battalion, Kusunose had permission from Horii to attack quickly with his force alone.

FORCES ENGAGED

As the relative numbers presented here below for Efogi, one to one, are below the ratio usually accepted in previous Australian studies of the campaign it is necessary to describe the whereabouts of the rest of the fighting force of the Nankai Shitai. It has been explained in the previous chapter that after the slow pursuit of 41 Regiment, Kusunose advanced rapidly, leaving the rest of the Nankai Shitai behind. This action, Efogi, was to be Kusunose's affair. Horii and the NSHQ had not advanced with Yazawa Butai during their five days as pursuit group and he was not to arrive at Efogi until after the battle. The Yazawa Butai had rested at Templetons after their period leading the pursuit and began arriving in the vicinity of Efogi just after the engagement ended. Not even the PCB, the Japanese equivalent of a field ambulance, had kept up.⁷

A Nankai Shitai order of 4 September had set up the new arrangement. The pursuit group from 5 September was to be 144 Regiment less 1/144. It would be followed by Yazawa's Regiment, the mountain artillery and 1/144 last of all.⁸ Tsukamoto's 1/144 had arrived with the Yokoyama advanced force seven weeks earlier and had been frequently engaged from then to the last day of August. It has been pointed out that its heavy losses had reduced its morale and for this reason it was not used again in battle until elements of it reinforced Eora Creek in mid October. During the Efogi engagement it was in the vicinity of Myola collecting the Australian air dropped supplies that were still scattered about the jungle there. Another 180 men of 1/144 were detached to carry wounded back to

⁷ The PCB arrived the day after the engagement and began collecting wounded from Brigade Hill on 10/9/42. Record of interview with author, Nishimura Kohkichi, Tokyo, NCO of 2/144, 6/3/2004.

⁸ AWM 55, 5/3, enemy publication no. 33, file of Nankai Shitai operational orders, 16/8/42 to 15/10/42. An order of 4/9/42 stated that the new pursuit force, after 41 Regiment's period at the front, was to be 144 Regiment not including 1/144, p.11.

Kokoda.⁹ A number of diary entries confirm the battalion did not arrive at Efogi until 14 September.¹⁰

Another absent unit was 55 MAR. One company was attached to Yazawa's 41 Regiment. The other two companies came forward a few days later and on 8 September, the decisive day of fighting at Efogi, the regiment was assembled in the vicinity of Templetons crossing.¹¹ The whole force in the mountains forward of Kokoda, including engineers working on the track and those carrying supplies, was about 4000 strong at this point. A force of this size, if all on the track in column at one time, would occupy a distance of at least sixteen kilometres – from Efogi back as far as Eora village.¹² So even if there had been any idea of assembling the whole force for a blow against the Australians at Efogi, a further two days delay would be required until could all have been present. As the Japanese aim was the total destruction, by envelopment, of Maroubra Force, such a delay could not be contemplated. With the Australians standing at Efogi, the Japanese were again offered a chance to destroy them. At any time the Australians might have withdrawn, so Kusunose's desire to attack immediately would appear to have been the correct course of action.

⁹ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, July-September 1942, appendix G, p. 4. A diary entry of Lt Onogawa of 1/144 could be misread to say the battalion was present at Efogi. Instead it refers, not to the battalion's own casualties, but to the casualties the battalion was tasked to carry to the rear. Another Japanese document in the collection in appendix G has been mistranslated to imply 5 Company of 41 Regiment was at Efogi. In fact it refers to 5 Company of 144 Regiment.

¹⁰ AWM, 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, p. 5. Lt. Hirano's diary entry places the battalion gun of 1/144 arriving at Kagi on 14/9/42. It is quite clear from his diary 1/144 had no involvement with the fighting at Efogi.

¹¹ AWM 55, 3/3 current translations no. 33, Yazawa butai documents, p. 22. The orders for 2/41 were to halt at Nauro on 7/9/42 and north of Efogi on 8/9/42. The battalion commanders own account makes it clear the battalion had nothing to do with the engagement at Efogi.

¹² AWM 55, 5/ 1, enemy publications no. 5, p. 18. This Japanese chart lists the desired road space for various sized units. Marching three abreast, 1640 metres of road space was desirable for a battalion and 6480 for a regiment. In the mountains there was almost no chance to march in a wider formation than single file.

Kusunose at this time had his RHQ including the Regimental Gun Company, two infantry battalions, each with their battalion gun platoon.¹³ He had also a platoon of 15 IER. After Isurava, Horii had attached one company of engineers to each of his two infantry regiments. These two companies of engineers were the only ones to do any fighting for the remainder of the campaign in the mountains. This arrangement, ordered on 4 September, had not been completed by the time of Efogi. Just one platoon of the engineers had as yet joined Kusunose. As to the strength of the two infantry battalions we only have precise numbers for 3/144 but the other battalion, 2/144, can be reasonably estimated. Neither had been involved in any fighting since 31 August and sickness had not yet reduced the ranks to any significant degree.

The number present for 3/144 was 589, just five less than the number we would expect to find if the 144 killed and wounded from this battalion at Isurava were deducted from the 738 the battalion records show arrived in New Guinea. While the small numbers of sick and lightly wounded who have rejoined is unknown it is apparent that all who fell out on the forced march from Giruwa to Isurava had by now rejoined. For 2/144 there is a company record showing a rise in strength after Isurava owing to these men catching up to their battalion. Five Company was down to 116 men for Isurava but back up to 127 by the time of Efogi.¹⁴ Allowing for about one hundred casualties in this battalion at Isurava, and the rejoining of all those not present there, there cannot have been more than 650 men of this battalion in action, probably fewer. Adding to this the regimental units and the platoon of engineers we arrive at about 1570 Japanese engaged at Efogi.¹⁵

The significant addition to Maroubra Force in early September was the 2/27 Infantry Battalion, the part of 21 Bde that had been left in reserve at Port Moresby. It had 588, 585

¹³ NIDS Nanto Soromon/ Bismaruku 130, Nankai Shitai Efuogi minamigawa ni okeru sento (South seas force operations to the south of Efogi), p 5. The account and map confirm that only two Japanese battalions were present during the Efogi engagement.

¹⁴ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no.15, diary of commander of 5 Company 2/144, p. 17.

¹⁵ The numbers here are the same as the numbers given for Isurava assuming a ten per cent loss to attrition. RHQ 73, RGC 121, RSC 120, One Platoon 15 Independent Engineer Regiment 50.

or 582 soldiers, depending on the source, as it marched up the track.¹⁶ Two men fell out en route – a mark both of the fitness of the battalion and of a slow advance intended to husband the battalion's strength. In addition there were 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions, the composite company, MFHQ, 21 BdeHQ and 30 BdeHQ, the small detachments of 2/6 FA and 14 FA. The PIB had been withdrawn along with 39 and 53 Battalions. There were Army Service Corps troops and a light aid detachment at Menari but they have not been included. The strength engaged, as near as can be established, was as follows.

MAROUBRA FORCE - EFOGI	
580	2/27 Battalion ¹⁷
350	2/16 Battalion
250	2/14 Battalion
10	ANGAU detachment
12	RPC under Lt T. Grahamslaw ¹⁸
29	2/6 Field Ambulance detachment ¹⁹
110	21 Brigade composite company
135	Maroubra Force HQ inc. 21 Bde HQ, a detachment of 30 Bde HQ and signals, the guard platoon and 7 Division signals detachment. ²⁰
19	14 Field Ambulance detachment. ²¹

The total in action was then close to 1495. While the Australian composite company did not arrive until towards the end of the fighting on 8 September the same late arrival

¹⁶ AWM 52 8/2/21, 21 Brigade war diary. On 27/8/42 it states 2/27 battalion had 582 all ranks. The battalion history for 2/27, Burns J, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at war*, 2/27 infantry battalion ex-servicemen's association, 1960, p. 107 gives 777 men disembarked in Port Moresby and on pages 112- 113 it states 585 went up the track. The mortar, carrier and machine gun platoons were left out, McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, page 220, states 588 men from the battalion went up the track.

¹⁷ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 220.

¹⁸ James, *Field Guide to the Kokoda track*, p. 232.

¹⁹ AWM 54 481/12/68, report on operations 14 Australian field ambulance, pp. 3-6. Here are recorded the arrival of various 14 FA and 2/6 FA detachments in August and September. Ten per cent has been deducted from them for attrition. Neither unit had any combat losses to date.

²⁰ AWM 67, 1/6, Gavin Long papers. Interview with 21 Brigade's Brigade Major G. Lyons, 15/8/1944. Lyons said there were about 70 men from the original brigade headquarters but he was not counting the 30 brigade signallers or 55 men from K section 7 Division signals. See also AWM 52 1/5/51 in the period 5-10/9/42 for mentions of the presence of 7 Division, 30 Brigade and 14 FA and 2/6 FA detachments.

²¹ AWM 52, 1/5/51, New Guinea Force, general staff war dairy, 5-10/9/42. There are references here to the presence of the 14 FA detachment and other minor units.

applies to a Japanese infantry company, number 9 Company of 3/144 which was not present until the same time. While the strength of the small detachments is extremely difficult to determine, and there are doubtless errors of a few men either way here and there, the only debatable numbers for large units above are those for 2/14 and 2/16 which can only be estimated as no official record of their strength was made for 7 September. The lowest estimates are 150 for the former and 250 for the latter but these must be too low for the following reasons:²² At the end of 2 September, returns from 2/14 Battalion counted 244 present.²³ As the battalion had lost just 89 battle casualties and some twenty to sickness from the 542 it had at the start of Isurava it is apparent some two hundred men were separated from it at that time.²⁴ The majority of these rejoined the battalion over the next several days.²⁵

In this same period, from 2 September to 6 September when Efogi began, the battalion lost a further 52 and another twenty or so to illness. It is therefore likely the battalion was at least 250 strong at Efogi. This figure is supported by the battalion strength after the engagement. Captain Phillip Rhoden, now commanding the battalion, counted 200 men of the battalion present at Ioribaiwa ridge several days after Efogi. As the battalion had lost 79 further battle casualties at Efogi and during the retreat over the Maguli Range, and almost certainly more sick, this again suggests a battalion strength of at very least 250 men, probably more, at Efogi.

²² Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 70.

²³ AWM 54 577/6/4, 7 Australian Division messages dealing with Maroubra Force operations, Kokoda, June to October 1942. 2/14 Bn had 244 men on 2 September and 2/16 Bn had 450 at the same time. Deducting about 100 for battle casualties (calculated from AWM 54 171/2/48, Battle Casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Kokoda to Imita p 2.) and sick through to the start of Efogi leaves about 250 men for 2/14 and 350 for 2/16.

²⁴ AWM 54 171/2/48, Battle Casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Kokoda to Imita p 2.

²⁵ Lt S. Bisset's party of fourteen, for instance, found the track again at Myola on 3 September and rejoined the battalion a day later. Stan Bisset, Captain and battalion intelligence officer, 2/14 battalion, record of interview with author, 23/6/04.

At the end of 2 September 2/16 Battalion had 450 men. The battalion had 21 battle casualties from then until the start of Efogi. It had also the normal rate of loss to sickness and also had a few small groups of stragglers rejoining it. An estimate of 350 present for this battalion is a total that errs on the low side. Potts' signal to Port Moresby on 6 September, while not completely clear, would seem to support this estimate. Potts said 2/27 Battalion had four companies, 2/16 had 3 companies and 2/14 two companies. As he is only talking of rifle companies, not headquarter companies (and four rifle companies was a full compliment) he appears to have been saying that 2/16 was at three quarters strength and 2/14 at half strength.²⁶

The total Australian strength, then, was in the vicinity of 1495 against a slightly higher figure (of 1570) for the Japanese so there is no basis for the idea that at Efogi the Australians were outnumbered to any important degree.

EFOGI

Kusunose divided his command into three parts: a heavy weapons group and his two infantry battalions. His plan was to pin the Australian front with one battalion while another executed a wide flanking move around the Australian left (the Japanese right). The heavy weapons group was located so as to support both of these attacks. A knoll with a bamboo grove was selected. It was some 1500 metres from 2/27 Battalion and 3000 metres from the 2/14 and 2/16 position.²⁷ The forementioned boomerang-shaped bend in the Mission Ridge-Brigade Hill feature permitted the Japanese guns placed on the knoll to fire both on 2/27 and (though to a lesser extent) on the Australian position further away on Brigade Hill where 2/16 and 2/14 were. At the bamboo grove were massed the RGC

²⁶ AWM 54 577/6/3, Messages and reports, Potts to Rowell and Rowell to LHQ, 6/8/42.

²⁷ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshō, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 33. It is stated there that there was a plan to outflank the Australians on their right or east but the scouting platoon under Lt Hamaguchi established that the ground was too rough. It was probably Lt Hamaguchi's platoon that persuaded the Australians there would be an attack on this flank.

of 144 Regiment and the two battalion guns of 2/144 and 3/144 giving a total of two 75mm guns, two 70mm guns and two 37mm guns.²⁸

The Japanese scouts clashed with patrols of 2/27 on 6 September forward of Mission Ridge. The following day, as Kusunose's force was assembling to attack, an Allied air strike arrived. Eight Marauders and four Kittyhawks bombed and strafed 144 Regiment, scattering the men and delaying the advance for several hours.²⁹ The effect of this air strike is discussed in detail elsewhere. For now it is sufficient to say that the total casualties suffered by the Japanese engaged with Australian infantry during the entire battle at Efogi do not leave much room for the one hundred casualties said to have been inflicted from the air.

When the Japanese attack finally got underway, 7 Company, one of the two available infantry companies of 3/144, closed with the Australians on Mission Ridge. Then 8 Company was deployed to 7 Company's left and felt its way around the right flank of 2/27 Battalion. This was more in the nature of a turning than a flanking movement and, while elements of 8 Company engaged the 2/27 right rear on the front of the Australian D Company, at no stage was the Australian position here threatened. The task of 3/144 was to pin the Australians frontally, without committing itself to anything likely to bring about high casualties, while locating Australian positions and directing artillery fire on to them. Throughout 7 September the Japanese heavy weapons group was alternatively supporting 3/144 on Mission Ridge and firing upon the Brigade Hill area where 2/144, about to execute its flanking move, was expected to arrive on the morning of 8 September.

²⁸ AWM 53 1/5/51, NGF General staff war diary, attached situation reports. Here it is noted that at Efogi the Japanese were using two quick fire guns and "long range mortars." It is this kind of comment that gave rise to the impression the Japanese had 81 mm mortars. See Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 40 for a map showing the Japanese guns position and targets fired on at Efogi.

²⁹ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 32.

On the night of 7/8 September, having probed for weakness the day before, 3/144 made several platoon size night attacks and took some ground from 2/27. The company commander of 7 Company passed on a recommendation via his battalion commander, agreed to by Kusunose, that the attack not be continued in daylight the next day as the ground was unfavourable. The company commander probably meant that the ground was too open for daylight attacks and that his attacks had to be up steep slopes advantaging the defender.³⁰ At 0430 on 8 September the last 3/144 attack of the night was made.³¹ There was a degree of Japanese caution at this stage, presumably occasioned by the fact that Kusunose had committed all his available infantry and the next nearest force from which a reserve might be built, 2/41 of the Yazawa Regiment, had yet to arrive.

Moving now to look at 2/144's flank march, by dawn on 8 September a message arrived for Kusunose, via the land line which signallers had run out with 2/144, to the effect that the battalion was now in position across the track in the Australian rear. It is probable this line was used to direct artillery fire on B Company of 2/16 Battalion. The battalion history relates that they were "bombarded all day on 6 September" with little effect.³² This seems reasonable as the Japanese cannot have known, from their distant vantage point, precisely where 2/16 battalion was under the jungle foliage they could see atop Brigade Hill. This changed on 8 September because now Japanese observers from 2/144 on Brigade Hill could look north-east into the rear of the Australian position and see, two hundred metres away on the slope leading to Mission Ridge, B Company of 2/16. The battalion history of 2/16 relates that suddenly, on the morning of 8 September, this company was singled out for a short accurate bombardment which killed two men.³³ A reasonable explanation is that the artillery fire, previously ineffective, was now being adjusted from 2/144 Battalion's position. It was a risky tactic because any overshoots

³⁰ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment). pp. 34.

³¹ Burns, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at war*, p. 117.

³² Uren, *A thousand men at war*, p. 146.

³³ Uren, M. *A thousand men at war*, p. 146.

from the artillery might well have landed in 2/144s position (behind the Australians) as a direct line could be drawn from the artillery, through the Australian B Company and into 2/144s position. After a period, the artillery switched its fire back to support 3/144 against 2/27 Battalion. The historian of 2/27 described this as “a deluge of HMG, mortar and mountain gun fire”.³⁴ Here, back on Mission Ridge, two things occurred when both sides heard the news that 2/144 was in the Australian rear. On the Japanese side, 3/144 further eased the pressure they were exerting on the Australians, so much so that the Australian battalion withdrew without the Japanese being aware of it. In the late afternoon of 8 September, led by 7 Company, 3/144 Battalion advanced to find their enemy gone. Early in the evening, with hardly any contact with their enemy, they linked up with 2/144 on Brigade Hill.³⁵

The events which brought about the withdrawal of 2/27 Battalion began with the flank march of the Japanese 2/144 Battalion behind the Australian rear on Brigade Hill. Despite the Japanese artillery support to both, the two fights, on Mission Ridge and Brigade Hill were essentially independent of one another. The day previous, a distinctive tree on Brigade Hill had been pointed out to Major Horie Tomitaro, the battalion commander of 2/144. Kusunose ordered Horie to take up a position by the tree.³⁶ The battalion left the (wartime) Efogi village area in the late afternoon of 7 September and proceeded along the Fagume River, probably to just east of the present location of Enivilogo village then it turned directly uphill to climb the steep slope, in part following a track, towards the knoll. They arrived and deployed on top of Brigade Hill at dawn. There was no contact with the Australians to this point.

This night march of four kilometres in eight hours over unknown terrain could not have been done without help. We have already seen at Isurava and elsewhere the ease with

³⁴ Burns, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at war*, p. 117.

³⁵ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Sosho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 35. The Japanese had the impression that it was their artillery fire that broke the Australian 2/27 Battalion causing its retreat.

³⁶ James, *Field Guide to the Kokoda Track*, p. 247.

which whole Japanese battalions could lose themselves in the jungle overnight. As usual an engineer platoon, the only one engaged at Efogi, led the way. They in turn were guided by local Papuans.³⁷ An older present day resident of Enivilogo said that the track up from the village towards Brigade Hill has been in the same location for many decades and it is possible, if the track was there in 1942, it was the one used by the Japanese.³⁸

This route is not the one normally accepted. Postwar maps tend to show the Japanese 2/144 Battalion making only a slight diversion from the line of the main track over Mission Ridge to Brigade Hill, just enough to pass clear of the left flank of 2/27 Battalion. There are several problems with this. First, maps drawn at the time do not show this. One drawn by a signals sergeant of 2/144, showing where he laid the telephone line out to the battalion, while not a very precise map, indicates a wider flanking move first along the Fagume River then directly uphill.³⁹ A map in the 2/27 war diary shows a similar line of march.⁴⁰

Secondly, a diarist from the machine gun company of 2/144 wrote of crossing very swampy ground – more likely near the river than higher up along the steep western side of the hill.⁴¹ Third, a 25 Brigade map used when they passed through this area a month later shows a track leading from the knoll on Brigade Hill directly down the hill slope to the west towards Hailo village.⁴² The track only goes as far as a stream running south east from the Fagume River. Here is marked a WP or watering point.

³⁷ Nishimura Kohkichi of 2/144 saw the Papuan guides leading his battalion to Brigade Hill. Record of interview with author, Tokyo, 14/3/04.

³⁸ In the company of the author, ex New Guinea patrol officer Steven Daniels, questioned an elder local resident on this point on Brigade Hill 20/8/2006.

³⁹ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 21. This map indicates a very wide flanking move and that the point where the battalion arrived was about 50 metres south of the bare knoll on Brigade Hill.

⁴⁰ AWM 52 8/3/27, 2/27 Battalion war diary, map in appendix B.

⁴¹ AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 29, p. 56. The diarist observed that an engineer platoon led the march.

⁴² AWM 52 8/2/25, 25 Brigade war diary, of September-October 1942, one mile to one inch map in the appendix.

The track and watering point have been added to the map but the additions were made on 28 September – well before 25 Brigade entered the area. So it would appear this was a WP used by 21 Brigade, the last Australians to have been there, and that the information as to the track and WP was provided by them. Whether the track was there before 21 Brigade, or they made it themselves, it would have been directly on the line of march of 2/144 Battalion. One participant from this battalion has stated that the last steep part of the Japanese movement was directly uphill along an already made track.⁴³ The connection between the track to the WP and the track the villager of Enivilogo spoke of may be that the latter connected with the former about half way down the hill slope. There is no sign of the latter track to the WP today.

The fourth reason a wide approach by 2/144 is a more plausible explanation is a ‘short’ flanking move is not only generally unwise but was not normal IJA practice.⁴⁴ It is true 3/144 attempted it at Isurava but that was because the battle plan was falling apart and something quick and decisive had to be tried. At Efogi, not being precisely sure of the Australian position beyond 2/27 Battalion, a short flanking move risked bumping into another Australian battalion which would have left Kusunose with his only two battalions engaged and with no reserve with which to obtain a decision or fend off a counterattack – the same position he found himself in at Ioribiawa a week later. In short, such a move would have all the makings of an indecisive result to the battle. It is more likely that a wide flanking march, such as 2/144 had tried at Isurava and was to try again at Ioribaiwa, was the method used at Efogi.

⁴³ Nishimura Kohkichi. Record of interview with author, Tokyo 14/3/ 2004. “The march up Brigade Hill took a night and a bit. We left before sunset and arrived just as the sun was about to come up. 6 Company led and I was in 5 company just behind. Leading 6 Company was a friendly local native. It was not difficult going along the track system but the last bit was difficult. Towards the end we went up a steep track”. Nishimura’s knowledge of the tracks in the vicinity is very good. He spent decades living in Papua after the war recovering Japanese war dead. He has spent a week at a time camped on Brigade Hill.

⁴⁴ Moving soldiers at night in mountainous terrain, especially if undergrowth is lush, is slow and exhausting. To do so quietly and without guides would increase the difficulty. Jungle terrain, especially given a heavy canopy, means stars are obscured and moonlight of little help for visibility. While Japanese troops had done much more night training than the Australians, it does not seem likely this night movement to a precise spot on Brigade Hill could have been done without local guides.

It was soon apparent to the Australians immediately on both sides of 2/144, (to the south MFHQ and to the north 2/16 Battalion), the Japanese battalion which had blocked the track in the Australian rear on the morning of 8 September, that the track had been cut. The telephone line from MFHQ ceased to work and wireless communications were from then on intermittent.⁴⁵ What was not apparent was the size of the Japanese force that blocked the track. It was first described as an enemy raiding party but when 6 Company of 2/144 advanced towards MFHQ Brigade Major Lyons decided there must be at least two Japanese companies present.⁴⁶ In one of the periods when he did have communications with 2/16 Battalion via wireless, Potts ordered a counterattack from the north. Four weak companies abreast, no more than 300 men drawn from 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions, lined across the ridge on a front of perhaps 150 metres, and assaulted south towards 2/144. This had taken some time to organise and the Japanese had used the time to dig in. The attack did not go in until 1500. Some accounts suggest the attack was in part successful but really the result was complete failure. The Australians probably lost 100 men here. One or two platoons of the Japanese company in the path of the Australian attack, 5 Company, were overrun but only ten Australians, by working around the Japanese flank, got through to MFHQ. The Japanese battalion position was not broken. and only one of its companies came under serious pressure. A later attempt to attack in the other direction was made from MFHQ with the assistance of two platoons of D Company of 2/16 who had originally been deployed with the headquarters. This also failed.

At this point, Potts decided to withdraw. MFHQ followed the track directly to Menari. On the other side of the Japanese blocking battalion, Lt Colonel Caro, of 2/16, also

⁴⁵ MFHQ has been used as a covering term for the force headquarters even though the actual situation was more complex. The HQ personnel referred to themselves as 21 Bde HQ and MFHQ contained elements of 30 BdeHQ as well. In addition 21 Bde HQ at times located and operated apart from MFHQ.

⁴⁶ AWM 52 9/2/4, NGF HQ intelligence summary no. 79. Sitrep of 7/8/42 stated: "enemy raiding party at 0415 penetrated between 2/16 and Bde HQ. Action still in progress. No other contact, two coys of 2/16 clearing track in rear". A later sitrep, 8/8/42 stated "confused fighting reported to midday. Hvy penetration between Bns and Bde HQ located in depth on track. Units fighting to re establish control of track during afternoon".

AWM 67 1/6 Gavin Long papers. Interview with Bde Major of 21 Bde, Major G. Lyon on 15 August 1944, p. 12. Lyon thought the Japanese made a two company attack on brigade headquarters.

decided to pull out. In one of the periods where communications were functioning Potts had told Caro to take over the three infantry battalions and withdraw if the counter attack failed. Two battalions, 2/14 and 2/16, headed east off the ridge that night and their main bodies got to Menari before the Japanese. The third cut off battalion, 2/27, left early the next morning and but was forced by the enemy to take a detour much further east. The battalion marched through the jungle for two weeks before it could regain Australian positions.

On 9 September, in light of 2/144's heavy casualties, 3/144 was directed to take up the pursuit and, with the support from two 37mm guns from the RGC, advanced on Menari, forcing the Australians to hastily evacuate. The Australian retreat continued though Nauro and over the Maguli Range until Ioribawa, where the next stand was made.

CASUALTIES

The casualties for Efogi for 144 Regiment were close to 56 killed in action. There may have been a few more from the engineer platoon attached to 2/144 but as all the engineers of the Nankai Shitai lost only 2 killed and 4 wounded for the month of September they cannot have been many. In general Japanese engineers, while combat trained, were too valuable to often and in large numbers be put into close fighting in the mountains. Such a thing did not occur until the catastrophe at Giruwa in January 1943 forced them to be expended in the role of infantrymen.

The 144 Regimental lists record the battle deaths at Efogi, excluding those from the air attack, as follows.⁴⁷ For 6 September 0, 7 September 11, 8 September 44 and 9 September 1.

⁴⁷ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki (Battle records of the 144th Infantry Regiment) Compiled and published by the editorial Board of 144th Regiment, Kochi, 1986. List of war dead. pp. 625-726.

Of these 56 deaths in battle 3/144 lost ten killed and 45 wounded in their two days in contact with 2/27 Battalion. This figure is supported by the battalion's stated strength as it entered the action at Ioribaiwa a week later. There it had 50 men fewer than at Efogi. Presumably the difference of five men is accounted for by lightly wounded rejoining the ranks.⁴⁸ With a small exception the remainder, 46 dead, were lost in 2/144 battalion's much more serious affair on top of Brigade Hill.⁴⁹

The small exception is accounted for by Australian three inch mortars. Three of these, with a small number of rounds, in one case 35, were airdropped at Myola and carried to Brigade Hill. For the first time the Australians were able to respond effectively to the Japanese long range weapons. The mortars were used to bombard the Japanese heavy weapons group. Australian sources doubt their success partly owing to damp ammunition but it appears they inflicted some casualties on the Japanese.⁵⁰ In 2/27 battalion's history there is an account of an Australian observing a mortar round landing on top of a Japanese officer. This may or may not be true but more tellingly 3/144 records show the battalion gun lost from its crew two killed and one wounded at Efogi. As it was placed along with the rest of the artillery out of range of rifle or light machine gun fire, these casualties were probably caused by Australian mortars.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment). p. 65.

⁴⁹ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment). p. 41.

⁵⁰ Uren, *A thousand men at war*. p 147. The battalion believed their mortar fire was not very effective but a Japanese account in AWM 55 3/1 current translations no. 15, p 21 stated one man was killed and thirteen wounded by this fire in 3/144's machine gun company.

⁵¹ Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment). p. 41. 3MG Coy had 124 men and lost 1k/12w. The gun platoon had 68 men and lost 2k/1w. In AWM 55 3/5, current translations no. 51, p. 21, a 3/144 mmg company diarist recorded the following company casualties for Efogi: 7 Sept 1 KIA and 4 WIA, 8 Sept, 7 WIA only, 9 Sept 1 WIA, 11 Sept 1 WIA.

For 2/144, two Japanese sources give 39 men dead and ‘Major Inoue and 36 men killed’ and ‘some 30 men wounded’.⁵² A 5 Company record states the company, which bore the brunt of the Australian counter attack on brigade Hill, lost 38 dead.⁵³ There is enough here to show 38 dead is very close to correct and it raises an interesting question concerning the deployment of 2/144 on Brigade Hill. A recent book has placed the battalion with 4 and 5 infantry companies facing back towards Mission Ridge, one on each side of the track.⁵⁴ Behind this was Bn HQ with the machine gun company on a knoll in the centre of the position. Furthest south (and facing that way, towards MFHQ) was 6 Company. Now this, if true, would be a deployment unlike any other Japanese deployment in the Papuan campaign. In general, the Japanese deployed their companies along a crest one behind another with each company having all round defence. The gaps between each company were covered by fire interlocked with other nearby companies. An example of this deployment can be seen when this battalion, 2/144, a month later on a narrow crested ridge north of Myola (during the second Eora-Templetons action) was attacked by 2/33 Battalion. In addition there is general agreement that the Japanese deployed on the flatter crest of the ridge – perhaps only 100 metres wide and to a depth of 400 metres. If indeed 4 and 5 Companies were side by side each would cover a width of 50 metres facing the Australians. It is known the Australian counterattack was four companies abreast in a line at least 100 metres long if not 150 metres. It would be very strange if 5 Company on the Japanese right lost most of its strength and ninety per cent of the total battalion casualties while 4 Company on the left was hardly engaged. A more likely explanation is that it was a conventional Japanese deployment with 5 Company closest to 2/16 Battalion. Behind 5 Company was 4 Company, then Bn HQ and the machine gun company then 6 Company, last of all, facing the MFHQ against whom it reported losing six killed and 30 wounded on 8 September.⁵⁵

⁵² NIDS Nanto Soromon/ Bismaruku 130, Nankai Shitai Efuogi minamigawa ni okeru sento (South seas force operations to the south of Efogi), p. 5. See also NIDS 302.9.H, *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), pp.98-99.

⁵³ NIDS Nanto Soromon/ Bismaruku 130, Nankai Shitai Efuogi minamigawa ni okeru sento (South seas force operations to the south of Efogi), p.6.

⁵⁴ James, *Field Guide to the Kokoda track*, p. 231 and 236.

⁵⁵ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 29, p. 56.

Japanese casualties for Efogi can be said with reasonable accuracy to be ten dead for 3/144, just less than 40 dead for 2/144 and no more than ten more dead for the heavy weapons group and the engineers. A total of no more than 60 dead in the fighting on Mission and Brigade Hills is further supported by another Japanese source, Shigetoshi Azuma's list of regimental casualties.⁵⁶ For the period from 6 to 12 September he recorded 73 members of the regiment as having died in action. Allowing for 11 dead (detailed in Chapter 13) to the air attacks of 6 and 7 September and two men lost in a clash in the Maguli Range on 11 September this fits in well with the figure of around 60 dead for the engagement of Efogi. There is no complete list of Japanese wounded but working with a standard figure of one killed to one and three quarters wounded at this stage of the campaign, the total Japanese casualties were likely in the vicinity of 165. Some support for an estimated 105 Japanese wounded at Efogi can be found in the records of 67 LOCH. Nine days after Efogi, about the right period for wounded to be carried down to Kokoda, 84 casualties arrived in one day. As lightly wounded would not have left their unit to go to the 55 Division Field Hospital detachment at Kokoda this suggests an estimate in the vicinity of 100 wounded might not be too far wrong.⁵⁷

Australian casualty record sources are more numerous and vary from 75 killed in action to 101.⁵⁸ The official list, which has proved to be the most reliable, gives 87 killed or died of wounds and 77 wounded between 6 September and 9 September inclusive.⁵⁹ This is in agreement with the figures given in the battalion roll of honour for 2/27 Battalion and close to agreement with the 2/16 and 2/14 battalion accounts.⁶⁰ Of the 87 dead, 31 died on Mission Ridge with 2/27 Battalion and 56 on Brigade Hill. As is usually the case for

⁵⁶ Azuma Shigetoshi, list of 144 Regiment war dead, pp 2-3. A copy of this list is in the author's collection.

⁵⁷ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24. Records of no 67 LOC hospital.

⁵⁸ See Ham, *Kokoda*, p. 238 and James, *Field guide to the Kokoda track*, pp. 257-258.

⁵⁹ AWM 54 171/2/48, Australian Imperial forces battle casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Kokoda to Imita, pp. 1-4.

⁶⁰ Burns, *The brown and blue diamond at war*. The roll of honour for 2/27 on pp. 233-236 shows 31 KIA in period of fighting around Efogi, Uren, *A thousand men at war*, p. 150 states 2/16 lost 19 KIA and one missing believed killed.

both sides, the claims for enemy casualties are much inflated. The Japanese claimed to have counted '320 deserted dead' while the Australians claimed to have killed at least 200 Japanese.⁶¹ The reason for the low proportion of Australian wounded against killed 87 to 77, is likely to be that the Australians withdrew in haste and the Japanese held the ground and tended to their wounded, (the PCB arrived on Brigade Hill on 9 September) while all Australians wounded, and unable to quickly leave the field, were killed by the Japanese.

DISCUSSION

The outstanding feature of this battle is the remarkable success of the Japanese plan compared to their bumbling victory at Isurava. With a force about equal to that of the dug-in Australians they had, in two days fighting, thrown the Australians out of a good position and inflicted as many casualties as they had lost. The Japanese artillery was likely a major contributor to this impressive achievement. In addition, they soon realised they had cut a large part of the defenders off from their line of communications. This force, mainly 2/27 Battalion, took no further part in the fighting in this campaign as it found its way back through the jungle to the east of the track to Australian lines. In effect, the Japanese success at Efogi removed, counting battle casualties and the absent 2/27 Battalion, approaching 700 Australians from their order of battle – a far better outcome than Isurava. In addition, both Japanese diaries and official reports attest that they believed they had broken the enemy's fighting spirit.

It is hard to fault the Japanese success. When A attacks B who is dug in and has chosen his own ground, has some air support and the odds are one to one and B's main force is driven to retreat off his line of communications such that half of it is effectively knocked out of the campaign, and A's losses are no higher than B's, then that is a great victory by any standard. It arose from Kusunose's successful manoeuvre of Horie's battalion around the flank and behind the Australians. The battalion had tried this once at Isurava and

⁶¹ AWM 55 5/3 interrogation report no. 34, p. 94.

failed. It was to try it again at Ioribaiwa where the result was inconclusive, but at Efogi the Japanese movement worked exactly as it was planned.

It would not have proved so except for the Australian deployment. There has been criticism of Potts' arrangements at Efogi and, as his defeat there precipitated his relief from command, it is worth discussing. It is the depth of Pott's position that is usually criticised. It has been held that in deploying his battalions one behind the other with MFHQ to the rear of it all he left a gap which the Japanese penetrated to cut him off from the major part of his command. This criticism is valid, the more so when we consider Potts' awareness that the Japanese would probably try just this move, a thrust into the Australian rear. He had, like all Australian commanders, read the pamphlets outlining typical Japanese tactics used in Malaya and had seen it used against him at Isurava. MFHQ had a guard platoon from 21 Bde HQ as its own defensive force should the enemy make an appearance in the rear of the force but Potts had added to it D Company of 2/16 battalion which also suggests that he expected the enemy may well make an attempt on the Australian rear.

Alternatively it can be argued in Potts' defence that 2/14 and 2/16 were his reserve, so placed as to respond to an expected Japanese move into the Australian rear. Following this line it could be said Potts predicted the probable Japanese move, made appropriate preparations to counterattack it but the counterattack failed. There remain problems, though, with this line of argument. In order to have the dual advantages of good observation of the enemy and a steep slope up which the enemy must attack, Potts' decision to hold the north face of Mission Ridge with a battalion was reasonable, as was the placing of his other two battalions behind it along the track, forming one position. Why then was not MFHQ either to the rear of, but in contact with, these three infantry battalions or, better still, in the middle of them?

Before answering this question we should consider a second criticism, that Potts misused 2/27 Battalion. Rowell, who made this comment, and he implies Blamey agreed with him,

unfortunately does not explain what he meant.⁶² He must at least have meant 2/27 should not have been where it was – up front to face the first Japanese attack. As someone must do the job of holding a block on the track as a firm base around which the reserve (in this case 2/14 and 2/16) might manoeuvre, Rowell seems to be saying it should not have been the fresh 2/27 Battalion. The only other task Rowell can have had in mind for it was to hold it in reserve with a view to a counterattack and use the depleted 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions as the block. This makes a lot of sense.

Given that it was known the Japanese would probably pin the forward-most battalion then throw another force around a flank – and it could not be known which flank or how deep the penetration would be – the best response would have been to hold out a powerful reserve with which to counter the Japanese flank move once it had revealed itself. Potts did not do this. What might have been his reason? Soldiers who have had hard fighting and now find themselves retreating on fresh supporting troops expect to be placed behind them for a rest. However, if the commander was confident their morale was good he might give them the job up front so as to keep his fresh troops as a strong reserve with which to counterattack once the enemy design is revealed. This is just what Honner did during his short period of command of Maroubra Force in the early stages of Isurava. When the fresh 2/14 Battalion arrived he decided to keep the tired 39 Battalion up front and 2/14 in the rear so as to, in his own words, “keep a fresh uncommitted reserve.”⁶³

As we shall see at Ioribawa, Eather took the same solution as Honner. The force retiring from Efogi was placed to hold the enemy to their front while his fresh 25 Brigade made a counterattack. It did not work out as Eather planned but the point here is he had determined he would keep a strong reserve with which to counterattack. Potts, when he assumed command after Honner, faced this same dilemma but came to the opposite conclusion to that of Honner and Eather. A likely reason for his decision was that he

⁶² AWM 67 3/167, Gavin Long papers, pt 2, Rowell’s letter to Gavin Long on draft chapters of the official history in 1957.

⁶³ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, 16/8/42.

doubted the already worn battalions, 2/14 and 2/16, would hold the line and so felt obliged to commit his fresh men to the front line rather than holding them in reserve.⁶⁴ Either Potts was not confident 2/14 and 2/16 could hold the track, so he simply could not afford to put 2/27 in reserve, or it may be he had no intention of risking a counterattack at all. It begins to look as if, having been ordered to make a stand, he did so reluctantly and perhaps with a view to retiring again on 8 September.

Returning now to the criticism that Potts deployed too deeply, thus leaving gaps which the Japanese were able to penetrate, we can see this criticism in a different light. He extended his deployment as far along the track over Mission Ridge and Brigade Hill as he felt able, risking the possibility of penetration as the lesser of two evils, to improve the chance that the whole force could retire along the track as soon as that became necessary. He might have extended a little further than he really wanted because there is a very useful position where he placed D Company of 2/16 in his extreme rear, just south of MFHQ. There the ridge drops away sharply towards post war Menari offering a decent field of fire, by Owen Stanley standards, and an extremely difficult slope for any enemy in the Australian rear to attack up. If D Company had been closer to MFHQ this location could not have been used.

The ‘front line view’, since adopted by Edgar, Ham, Brune and McAulay, was that Potts did a wonderful job and was unfairly dealt with. The view from Port Moresby and Melbourne was that something was either wrong with the soldiers or their commander, given that the Australians had been defeated several times and pushed back 40 kilometres by an enemy force not very superior to them if it was superior at all.⁶⁵ While the troops themselves could not be replaced easily their commander could and it was a far from unusual step for heads to roll after a series of failures. In the light of the discussion above, Rowell’s account, given after the war to Gavin Long, seems to be a believable explanation. After praising the fighting capacity of the brigade he went on to say “21st

⁶⁴ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area- first year*, p. 199.

⁶⁵ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area- first year*, p. 225

Bde had failed to hold the Japanese. We knew the terrain was most difficult and the Japs were very good jungle fighters, but the 21st Bde was sent to stop them and it didn't. The task set Potts was a most difficult one and it may be that many other brigadiers would have done no better. But I do suggest [to replace Potts and to] bring Dougherty from Darwin to command 21st Bde was a very proper course. What appears [in an official history draft] is therefore not quite fair to TAB [Blamey] or me for that matter. Neither of us was looking for anyone's head... but we wanted to make 21st Bde as efficient as possible... it would have been wrong for us to allow ourselves to be influenced by Potts' feelings... there was nothing vindictive about it all".⁶⁶

If it is granted that the complete and fresh 2/27 Battalion, if held in reserve, had a much better chance of ejecting 2/144 from Brigade Hill than the weakened and possibly demoralised 2/14 and 2/16 then Potts was at fault. Potts is excused from blame if he felt he could not do so as he was not confident 2/14 and 2/16 could hold the front line. The blame for defeat at Efogi, if blame should be apportioned, would seem to lie either with the Maroubra Force commander or with the morale of some of his men.

⁶⁶ AWM 67 3/167, Gavin Long papers, pt 2, Rowell's letter to Gavin Long on draft chapters of the official history in 1957.

CHAPTER NINE.

IORIBAIWA.

CHAPTER NINE-IORIBAIWA 10-28 SEPTEMBER, 1942

On 10 September, 1942, Brigadier Selwyn Porter replaced Potts as commander of Maroubra Force. Porter brought reinforcements, 30 Bde HQ and 3 Battalion. The Australian force that had been defeated at Efogi retreated to join Porter. The rearguard under attack as they crossed the Maguli Range, the Australians fell back to a conventional blocking position on Ioribaiwa ridge, where they were to be further reinforced by the fresh 25 Bde. Something more than another defensive stand was to be made at Ioribaiwa. While Porter's force held the blocking position on the track, 25 Bde was to leave the track south of Ioribaiwa and march to outflank the Japanese on both sides, a double envelopment, as Horii had tried at Isurava.

This move was in motion when the Japanese arrived in front of Ioribaiwa, with 3/144 leading Kusunose's pursuit group. Their patrolling of the Australian position for two days to determine its frontage was vigorous enough that the Australian composite battalion, formed from the remnants of 2/14 and 2/16, thought it had repelled an assault. Unaware of the Australian reinforcements and the Australian's planned attack, Kusunose launched his own attack on the afternoon of 14 September on the Australians deployed on Ioribaiwa ridge.

AUSTRALIANS ENGAGED

The Australians at Ioribaiwa had a fresh brigade, 25 Brigade under Brigadier Ken Eather, with 1736 men in the three infantry battalions. Adding a brigade headquarters, 88 men, and a 37 man detachment of 2/4 FA this amounted to 1,861 men.

There were a number of men who fell out in the march up from the roadhead, 39 in one battalion, giving that battalion 540 on arrival but the same source also states almost all caught up a day later.¹ There was in Maroubra Force by now a constant high wastage of

¹ Crooks, *The Footsoldiers: The story of the 2/33rd Battalion AIF in the war of 1939-45*, p. 155.

soldiers, mainly from sickness, often amounting to ten men per battalion per day. It cannot have been this bad for 25 Bde as it was new, fit and had only been in the mountains for three days. It might be reasonable to assume a permanent loss over the whole new brigade of 50 men before it went into action in which case about 1,811 men were present.

To the number above must be added those already on the ridge when Eather's new brigade arrived. Under Porter this force consisted of a combined headquarters under MFHQ including, 21 and 30 Bde HQs which also now had L section of the 7 Division signals attached and was about 175 men in all.² Also present was a 'composite battalion' of 320 men. It was an amalgamation of the remnants of 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions. In addition there was the composite company of 21 Bde which had arrived at the front during the fighting at Efogi.³ Its strength was 101 at Efogi and now was about 90. The militia battalion, 3 Battalion, was also present with about 450 men.⁴ Last of all was C patrol of 2/6 Independent Company with 26 men who had just returned from a patrol to the Australian right flank. They were placed with MFHQ giving a total Australian strength of about 2,957.

There were three other Australian formations nearby but they have not been included in the total. The 2/5 Field Company was working on improving the track on the south side of Ioribaiwa ridge while 7 Field Company and two companies of the 2/1 Pioneer Battalion were deployed on Imita ridge just south of the pioneers.⁵ Their task was to

² The presence of detachments of 30 Bde HQ, 21 Bde HQ and 7 Division signals is verified by the fact all took casualties at Ioribaiwa. See AWM 54 171/2/48, Australian Military Forces, battle casualties, Kokoda to Imita p 1.

³ There was both a composite battalion and a composite company at Ioribaiwa. See AWM 54 577/7/29, p. 2. Here it is stated that the composite company was not incorporated into the composite battalion which was 320 strong. The 2/27 men who were casualties at Ioribaiwa were probably from those of its men who were in the composite company.

⁴ Crooks, *The Footsoldiers: The story of the 2/33rd Battalion AIF in the war of 1939-45*, p. 157.

⁵ Laffin J. *Forever Forward. The story of the 2/2nd infantry battalion ,2nd A.I.F. 1940-45*, 2/31st Australian infantry battalion association, NSW branch, Sydney,1994, p. 90. In AWM 52 5/13/23, it is recorded that 7 Field Company Royal Australian Engineers were building a bridge on the track behind

patrol the flanks and during the battle they suffered a casualty in a patrol clash with Japanese several kilometres to the west of Ioribaiwa. It cannot really be said these men were engaged in the action proper and, for similar reasons, a Japanese engineer company working along the track to the rear of Kususnose's pursuit group has not been included.⁶

MAROUBRA FORCE AT IORIBAIWA	
Maroubra Force HQ (MFHQ)	175
25 Bde HQ	88
L section 7 Division signals	55
2/31 Infantry Battalion	590 ⁷
2/33 Infantry Battalion	579 ⁸
2/25 Infantry Battalion	567
3 Infantry Battalion	450
2/4 Field Ambulance, detachment.	37
14 Field Ambulance, detachment	30
2/14 and 2/16 composite battalion	320
21 Bde composite company	90
C patrol 2/6 Independent Company	26
less 50 estimated sick =	2,957 ⁹

Ioribaiwa. They were close enough to the fight, though unengaged, that as they withdrew they could hear Japanese fire.

⁶ Another omission is 49 Battalion. They patrolled the Goldie and Brown rivers but this did not commence until the end of the action of Ioribaiwa. AWM 52 8/3/88, 49 Battalion war diary. 18/9/62. The battalion also patrolled the Needle, Mt. Hombrun, Mt. Smith and Mt. Lawes but had no contact with the Japanese.

⁷ The battalion history states the battalion had, unusually, two additional platoons presumably made up of carrier platoon and other personnel that in the other battalions of the brigade were left out of battle (LOB). See Laffin, *Forever Forward*, pp. 80-81.

⁸ Crooks, *The Fightsoldiers*, p. 145. Here it is stated that 2/33 had 30 men LOB and 55 detached so 579 men with one 3in mortar and one Vickers went up track.

⁹ AWM 54 577/7/8, notes on operations, 25 Australian inf bde. A list from 9/9/42 gives the following strengths:

Bde HQ	85
L section 7 Division signals	55
2/25	818
2/31	834
2/33	735
2/4 Field Ambulance, detachment	37
PIB, detachment	5
14 Field ambulance, detachment	30
C patrol 2/6 Independent Company	25

This was the largest concentration for battle so far achieved on the track by either side. It was only possible because the Australian concentration was a mere twenty kilometres from the Australian roadhead at Uberi .¹⁰

JAPANESE ENGAGED

The Japanese force engaged was Kusunose's pursuit group, essentially the same force that fought at Efogi, less casualties and plus the mountain artillery and a detachment of medical personnel. The battalion history of 3/144 gives their strength as 539 present at Ioribaiwa.¹¹ For 2/144 there can only be an estimate of strength. Its 5 Company was reduced to 88 men, half strength, but this one had borne the brunt of fighting on Brigade Hill, having taken ninety per cent of the battalion's casualties there.¹² Allowing for losses at Efogi the battalion would probably have been close to 525 strong. This gives about 1,064 infantry in the two infantry battalions to be added to the same RHQ force that fought at Efogi.

The company of 15 IER was about 150 strong. Two of its platoons were allocated one each to the infantry battalions and the third platoon was engaged in cutting tracks to facilitate the deployment of the artillery. The 55 Division medical detachment and a detachment of the PCB was present. The presence of all three mountain guns and the 144 regimental gun company is confirmed by a 16 September order instructing Hozumi, commander of the mountain artillery, to move two mountain guns and the 144 Regiment

The PIB were withdrawn before the action and the infantry battalion strengths were reduced before they went up the track. See battalion war diaries for 12/9/42-20/9/42, AWM 52 8/3/25, 2/25 Battalion war diary, AWM 8/3/31, 2/31 Battalion war diary and AWM 52 8/3/33, 2/33 Battalion war diary. Additional information on the Australian forces present can be found in AWM 52 8/2/21/17, 7 Australian Division operational instructions, no. 9, 8/9/42, Appendix 1.

¹⁰ Both sides had several hundred carriers present but in no sense can these be considered engaged in the fighting.

¹¹ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshō, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 65. In action 3/144 had in Bn HQ 87 men, 7 Company 89, 8 Company 78, 9 Company 102, 3 MMG Company 118 and gun platoon 65.

¹² AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 15, p. 21.

gun company to new locations defending Ioribaiwa ridge from the south.¹³ The order stated that a separate instruction will be issued for the remaining gun.¹⁴ In addition to the 1,064 infantry the remaining units listed here were probably about 650 strong in all.¹⁵

The Nankai Shitai was, as yet, not much troubled by sickness. In the month of September just 76 men from 144 Regiment were listed as sick out of 226 for the entire uniformed component of the Nankai Shitai.¹⁶ A deduction of 50 sick in Kusunose's pursuit force since Efogi seems reasonable. There is however another reason to reduce the numbers of Japanese fighting troops present.

A food shortage was looming and - several days before Ioribaiwa - 1,050 men, chosen from all units in the Ioribaiwa to Nauro area, were sent to Isurava for supplies. While the fighting units sent as many of their attached carriers as was possible, instead of their soldiers, some fighting troops also had to go.

Kusunose's infantry regiment was asked for 200 of the 1,050 men needed. One of his two battalions, 3/144, did contribute 30 infantry from the battalion who were thus absent from the front for ten days, missing the action at Ioribaiwa. If the other fighting units had to send a quota similar to 3/144 then at least 70 men, probably more, were absent from the fighting elements of the pursuit group.¹⁷ However as we can only be sure about the 30 men gone from 3/144 the total Japanese force engaged at Ioribaiwa should be estimated at 1,650 men – not a great deal more than half the number of Australians that opposed them. In terms of firepower, the outstanding feature was that the Japanese had at least a

¹³ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, Kusunose order of 16/9/42, pp. 25-27.

¹⁴ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, Kusunose order of 16/9/42, pp. 25-27.

¹⁵ AWM 54 423/4/28, translation of captured document no. 66, data on Japanese mountain artillery organisation. The original company strengths in Papua were 156 each. Casualties sick and detachments reduced this to 120 by the time of Ioribaiwa.

¹⁶ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, p. 32.

¹⁷ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 48. The information is also in Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 216. The infantry

dozen medium machine guns and nine artillery pieces – the largest assembly of guns they managed until the Oivi-Gorari action in November. There were five 75mm mountain guns, two 70mm battalion guns and two 37mm light guns. The Australians had three Vickers medium machine guns, used for the first time on the track, and three 3 inch mortars (75mm).¹⁸ The infantry of 25 Bde had brought double the usual complement of sub machine guns, giving an average of two per infantry section - a powerful addition for the close-range fighting that typified the campaign.

As the ratio of Japanese to Australians present seems so far below the numbers that have become accepted it is necessary to be sure of the location of the other Japanese fighting units forward of Kokoda. There are four to be accounted for; the NSHQ, including attached dismounted cavalry, 41 Regiment, 1/144 Regiment and the remainder of 15 Independent Engineer Regiment.

The Nankai Shitai headquarters had been camped on the high ground just south west of Nauro since 12 September and remained there until at least 16 September. Attached to it was 1/144 Battalion.¹⁹ Yazawa's 41 Regiment had, at this time, one battalion on the coast at Giruwa, one battalion less a company at Kokoda, and one battalion plus a company, the regimental HQ and the gun company around Nauro. On the night of 10 September, one company bivouacked in Nauro and the others just short of the village.²⁰ Apart from

was to send 200 men, artillery 200, 55 Regt Cav 170 men, 41 regiment 100 men and 55 division medical detachment 60 men. Most, but not all of these would have been non combat troops and carriers.

¹⁸ There were 3x3 inch mortars (2 with 2/25 and 1 with 3 Battalion). There may have been as few as 12 rounds per barrel. Two Vickers mmg were with 2/25 and one with 3 Battalion. The remaining mortars and MMG allocated to 25 Bde did not arrive until 17/9/42. See AWM 52, 25 Brigade war diary 12/9/42-17/9/42.

¹⁹ In AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17. Lt. Hirano of 1/144 wrote on p. 6 that the battalion was directly attached to NSHQ, so was not at Ioribaiwa. See also AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no 23. Pte Chiya Haruyoshi of 1/144.

²⁰ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 33, file of Nankai Shitai operational orders 16 August to 15 October, p. 12. On 10/9/42 the main force of the Yazawa Regiment was to wait at a river crossing near Nauro (Wamai). They were to look for tracks out west from Nauro in co operation with Yokoyama engineer regiment (15 IER).

AWM 55 3/3, current translations, no. 33, Yazawa butai documents, pp. 23-24. This document states that the main force of Koiwai's battalion (2/41) bivouacked on the night of 10/9/42 with one company at Nauro and the rest a kilometre short of it. On the following day, this force was to patrol west of Nauro covering the Japanese right flank.

patrols sent out from there they stayed in that vicinity until the retreat. There were four reasons the Yazawa Regiment were so placed in the rear. First, as the Australians were to find in their advance in October, it was difficult to supply more than one brigade/regimental group in contact with the enemy. A more successful method both sides used was to alternate two brigade/regiments forward. The Japanese had found at Efogi that Kusunose's force was sufficient to defeat whatever force the Australians could put up against them and now it was thought only the remnants of that force had to be dealt with on Ioribaiwa Ridge.

Second, it will be remembered that Horii had been ordered by Hyakutake not to attack Port Moresby and to maintain the main body of his fighting troops north of the crest of the Owen Stanley Range. Horii's deployment shows that he was barely in compliance with this order. Including combat engineers and SNLP and deducting for casualties there were about 5,000 Japanese fighting troops in Papua in mid September of which about a half were forward of Kokoda.

Horii still expected to be reinforced and to be given permission to go ahead with the Port Moresby attack. Yazawa was assured an important part in it. Consequently, while Kusunose's Regiment pushed directly down the track, Yazawa's Regiment was given the task of examining the other approaches into Port Moresby.²¹ Pre-campaign intelligence, which appears to have come from Hofstetter the Swiss, had informed Horii that there was a suitable track branching west from Nauro.²² It led down towards the Brown and Goldie rivers, both of which offered approaches to the allied airfield complex in the Laloki-Kila-Bomana area, just north of Port Moresby.

While Yazawa's 41 Regiment was based about Nauro, his patrols extended out to the west as far as the Brown River and into the Maguli Range around the sources of the

²¹ AWM 55 3/3, current translations, no. 33, Yazawa butai documents, p. 26. On 13/9/42 Yazawa butai was still near Nauro patrolling, foraging and carrying patients to the rear. On 16/9/42 the men were informed that 6 and 8 companies would leave for Kokoda while 5 Company continued patrolling.

²² See AWM 54 423/4/106 pt. 2, folio of maps and AWM 54 423/4/99, AMF analysis of the Hoffstetter maps, p. 3.

Goldie River. The Australians had patrols out watching for just such a flank move and there were three or four brief skirmishes between 41 Regiment patrols and patrols of 2/1 Pioneer Battalion and 2/6 Independent Company.²³ The patrol fights and other intelligence alerted NGF to Yazawa's activity, clearly preparation for a possible flank move on Port Moresby.²⁴

It was at this time that the commander of the United States Fifth Army Air Force, Lt. General George Kenney, informed NGF that if a single Japanese patrol crossed the Goldie River he intended to pull all his aircraft back to Queensland. In fact, 41 Regiment patrols did get as far as the Goldie river, but may not have crossed it.²⁵

By the time Yazawa reported that he had found no suitable track leading west then south towards Port Moresby, plans had changed and the retreat was being organised. Even as Ioribaiwa was being fought Horii was still making preparations for the attack on Port Moresby in the hope he would eventually be granted permission to go ahead. On 14 September 41 Regiment was ordered that, in two days time, it would advance "on the western side of Ioribaiwa."²⁶ The next day, Hyakutake's order for 41 Regiment to withdraw was received. Yazawa was to take his force back to Kokoda-Giruwa.

The third reason for the deployment of Yazawa around Nauro was to protect the supply line. A garrison was at Giruwa (3/41 and the SNLP) and another was at Kokoda (1/41) for this purpose. It was known to Horii that several large groups, mainly 2/27 Battalion,

²³ AWM 66 10/1/5, RAAF war history section combined operations centre situation report. Interim report no 378, 2/1 Pioneer Battalion patrols, p. 2.

²⁴ AWM 52 9/2/4, General staff intelligence, New Guinea Force, September, situation report no. 153, 14/9/42. On this day the Japanese were reported building a track around the Australian left from Nauro.

²⁵ AWM 55 8/6/1, 2/1 Pioneer Battalion war diary, 10-20/9/42. Old Port Moresby hands from the 1950s say that items of Japanese equipment, perhaps indicating an observation post, have been found on Hombrun Bluff which overlooks Port Moresby.

²⁶ AWM 5/3, enemy publications no. 33, file of Nankai Shitai operational orders 16 August to 15 October, 1942, order of 14/9/42, p. 22.

were driven off the track at Efogi and were lurking to the east.²⁷ The main body of 2/27, 303 men, was in fact east of Nauro at this time working their way south to rejoin their brigade. They had a few times bumped into 41 Regiment patrols. Yazawa was instructed to make sure they did not interfere with the Nankai Shitai supply line. For this reason, he also sent patrols to the east of the main track along the Nauro River and perhaps as far south as the Adai River. The story of the privations endured by 2/27 in their hazardous retreat are fairly well known but it has not been realised that they also materially contributed towards Japanese anxiety for their communications along the track.²⁸

Yokoyama's 15 IER HQ was also at Nauro and his men were working on the track from the north of Nauro to Ioribaiwa. The earlier arrangement for the attachment of 15 IER engineers had been maintained. One company was with Kusunose at Ioribaiwa, another was with Yazawa's men on patrol to the east and west and a third (attached to Yokoyama from 55 ER) was working on improving the track from Kokoda to Menari.²⁹ The activity of the engineers in improving the track to pack horse standard may indicate Horii expected, if the order did not come through to attack Port Moresby, to stay in the mountains for some time to come.

The reason previous researchers have been misled as to the number of Japanese engaged at Ioribaiwa may well be because they have misinterpreted an order issued by Horii on 22 September for the withdrawal of the Nankai Shitai after the action at Ioribaiwa. The order stated that "...adjutants [are] to attend an orders group from following units: Kusunose [Kusunose's two battalion pursuit group], 1st battalion [Kusunose's other battalion of 144 regiment], Koiwai, [2/41 battalion], Kawashima [55 Division cavalry detachment], Hozumi [mountain artillery], Takamori [15 IER], Akao [hygiene unit], and Banto [medical]." ³⁰

²⁷ AWM 52 8/2/ 21, 21 Brigade war diary, 18/9/42.

²⁸ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific- first year*, pp. 250-253.

²⁹ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 29, Horii bulletin no. 10, 21/9/42. This order instructed 15 IER to retire from the mountains to work on the Sambo-Kokoda road.

³⁰ AWM 55 2/1, spot report no. 3. p.1.

The 39 Battalion war diary, for instance, states that this order shows which Japanese units were at Ioribaiwa.³¹ The order lists the times when each unit should withdraw and the places it should get to each day thereafter. What has not been noticed is that it would not be possible for the units mentioned to get to the places mentioned in the time allowed unless they were already north of Ioribaiwa, as explained above. The NSHQ, for example, was to leave its present location at dawn on 24 September and spend that night at Kagi. This was difficult enough to do from Nauro, impossible from Ioribaiwa.³² It is apparent from this order, as well as from the other evidence above, that NSHQ, 41 Regiment, 1/144 Battalion and the bulk of Nankai Shitai engineers were not present at the Ioribaiwa action and probably never came that far forward.

IORIBAIWA

On 11 September, Kusunose ordered his regiment, 3/144 leading, to advance to find the enemy and for 55 MAR, under his command, to follow.³³ After two brief clashes with elements of 21 Bde in the Maguli Range, Kusunose's force arrived in front of the Ioribaiwa position on 12 September.³⁴

The regimental gun company was placed under Hozumi, the mountain artillery commander. He sent artillery spotters out to "locate enemy positions in the direction of Ioribaiwa" for the artillery now massing in one body on the slope north of Ioribaiwa ridge.³⁵ The next day, Kusunose ordered the infantry scouts out to more precisely locate

³¹ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, appendix G, p. 4. It is stated here that the "Order captured at Ioribaiwa shows the following units at Ioribaiwa on 23 September. 1/144, 2/41, Kawashima cav det, Hozumi mtn art, 15 Independent engineers, 55 engineers, fld hospital." The order does not actually show more than that these units were somewhere in the Owen Stanley Range at this time.

³² AWM 54 422/7/8, translation of captured documents, document no. 92

³³ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 22, Nankai Shitai order 1/9/42, p. 24.

³⁴ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshu, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 45.

³⁵ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshu, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 48.

the Australian front line, meanwhile sending all of 2/144 off to the west to, as it had done twice before, swing around the Australian flank into their rear. That Kusunose sent off 2/144 *before* his scouts had fully informed him where the Australians were suggests 2/144 was in field telephone communication with his regimental commander.

On 14 September Kusunose explained his plan to his subordinates. “It appears that over 200 of the enemy have occupied a position in the Ioribaiwa area. 2nd Battalion’s main force is making a flanking attack to the W[est]... and will be the right front line. 3rd Battalion [less detachments] will be the left front line and will attack the enemy position at Ioribaiwa parallel with the main road. The mountain artillery will stay at present position and co-operate with the regiment and with the 3rd Battalion. The regimental gun company will establish itself with the mountain artillery and [also] co-operate with 3rd Battalion. The communication unit will liaise between the front line battalions and regimental headquarters. I will advance at the rear of 3rd Battalion. Kusunose. Regimental commander”.³⁶

Kusunose’s estimate of enemy strength was revised upwards on the same day but only to two battalions, so it is apparent he made his plan in complete ignorance that a fresh new brigade of Australians was in the offing.³⁷ The other point to be noted is that Kusunose ordered his artillery to support the infantry battalion conducting the pinning attack, not the flanking attack.

The plan was for 2/144 to swing around the Australian left while 3/144, supported by eight guns including its own battalion gun, pinned the Australians to the front. Like the previous occasion at Efogi when 2/144 had had the flanking role, it did not take its battalion gun with it. In essence Kusunose was trying the same plan he used successfully

³⁶ AWM 55 3/4, current translations no. 42, Nankai Shitai order 11/9/42, pp. 22-25. The translation has been clarified a small amount. See also AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 33, a file of Nankai Shitai operational orders 16 August to 15 October, 1942. Order of 14/9/42, p. 22.

³⁷ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshō, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 48.

at Efogi. This time, however, the appearance of Australian reinforcements, 25 Bde, was to turn the plan on its head.

While Eather was not officially placed in command of Maroubra Force until 17 September he exercised command at the Ioribaiwa action under the instructions of his divisional commander Major General Arthur Allen, and with the compliance of Porter.³⁸ Having consulted Porter, already on the ridge, as to suitable approaches and a plan of action, he decided to leave Porter blocking the track while using his own brigade to swing around both flanks, a battalion on each side, to take Nauro in the Japanese rear. The first of his battalions to arrive, 2/33, was to swing east from Imita while 2/31 was to march west long the Ioribaiwa ridge then turn north and approach Nauro from the south west. The third battalion, 2/25, was to remain centrally placed in reserve and directly behind the composite battalion and 3 Battalion.

The plan fell apart as Lt Colonel Arthur Buttrose, commander of 2/33, realised that with only five days rations and the slow rate of advance off the main track, his battalion would not get to Nauro in the Japanese rear any time soon. Eather revised the plan. Buttrose brought his battalion back to the main track then up to the ridge on the Australian right and from there it was to make a shorter right hook into Nauro. This brought him along the line of the present track which runs east of the wartime Kokoda track and through post-war Ponoon village.

However, as 2/33 arrived on the right of 3 Battalion on 13 September, the composite battalion was attacked by the Japanese. Eather now decided to hold 2/33 in place to see how 2/31's advance on the left progressed.³⁹ Almost by chance he now had a deployment on a line at right angles to the enemy line of advance. He had four battalions (counting the composite battalion as one) in line abreast and one battalion in reserve. On the left was 2/31, next to the right was the composite battalion then 3 Battalion and last

³⁸ AWM 52 8/2/ 25, 25 Brigade war dairy, 17/9/42.

³⁹ For a day to day account of plan changes see AWM 52 8/2/ 25, 25 Brigade war dairy for 10/9/42-16/9/42.

on the right was 2/33. His line was not quite two kilometres long. At all the other Australian defensive battles a position in depth along the track had been the deployment, but now a line at right angles to the enemy was adopted.

Kusunose's scouts probing of the composite battalion on 13 September was seen by the Australians as a full blown attack. This actually began on 14 September. Narrating the fighting along the line starting with the Australian left flank 2/31, advancing west along the narrow ridge crest, collided head on with 2/144 making its own flank move. Both sides threw a company out to both of their steeped-sloped flanks and butted against each other all afternoon, no progress being made on either side. Meanwhile, in the Australian centre, one and a half companies of 3/144 plus elements of engineers advanced against the composite battalion. In support seven guns, fired from the north and the battalion gun of 3/144 was brought up to within 100m of the Australian position.⁴⁰

Throughout the action Japanese artillery concentrated its bombardment on the composite battalion. They inflicted a considerable number of casualties and forced the composite battalion to give ground. Even so the progress of the 14 September attack was not satisfactory to Kusunose. A company officer's account stressed the stiff resistance of the Australians and stated that the Australian mortar bombardment wounded five men.⁴¹

On dark, Kusunose's attack was not getting far against an obviously strongly reinforced enemy. He had held half of 3/144 in reserve and now he decided to use it in a new attack around his left (east) while his centre and right pinned the Australians to their front. The reserve, built around 8 Company and reinforced by a platoon of engineers and half of 9 Company, headed off east with the engineers leading.

The Japanese often used this arrangement for moving a battalion through the jungle off track. An engineer platoon would lead. One of its sections would cut the track, one

⁴⁰ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Sosho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 50.

⁴¹ AWM 55 3/1/193, p. 1. There were two 3 inch mortars with 2/25 Bn.

behind that would escort the cutters and one behind that would be charged with navigation. Late in the morning of 15 September this force approached the Australian right along the present Kokoda track where it crosses Ofi Creek. They surprised D Company of 3 Battalion and inserted themselves between 3 Battalion and 2/33 Battalion.⁴² The Australian reserve, 2/25 Battalion, sent two companies to eject them, while 2/33 sent one company to do the same. This counterattack failed, partly because, as happens so often in the campaign to both sides, A Company of 2/33 got lost and failed to find any enemy to attack.⁴³

In the Australian centre it was the same story as the day before. At 0400 on 15 September the attack began with 7 Company of 3/144, plus a platoon of 9 Company and one of engineers. They advanced on the Australian composite battalion while calling in an artillery bombardment on positions identified by them further up the slope. Again their battalion gun fired in close support and again progress was slow but steady.

The IJA doctrine for the use of battalion guns stressed that in the attack their proper place was 800m or more behind the leading infantry.⁴⁴ Frequently in practice, as here, the gunners worked their pieces up much closer than this and suffered crew casualties to small arms fire as a consequence. The 3/144 Battalion battle report described the effects of this fire. The battalion gun was brought up to within 50 metres of the enemy and fired rapidly. "In a moment the position of the enemy's Czech machine gun [Bren light machine gun] in front was blasted away and the nearby jungle was transformed into a forest with dead trees...The roar of the gun echoed in the valley creating an intense and

⁴² AWM 52 8/3/39, 3 Battalion war diary, 15/9/42 and situation report in appendix B. In these two accounts it is said at 1310 some 20 enemy surprised 17 Platoon, causing them to withdraw. The cause was said to be insufficient sentries.

⁴³ AWM 52 8/3/33, 2/33 Battalion war diary, 15/9/42.

⁴⁴ AWM 55 5/ 1, enemy publications, no 5, p. 59.

heroic atmosphere. In accord with the battalion gun, the mountain gun unit and the infantry gun unit fired at any enemy positions which perturbed them.”⁴⁵

Meanwhile, on the Australian left, 2/31 (Australian) and 2/144 (Japanese) continued to tentatively spar with one another. It is likely Kusunose told Hori of 2/144 to do no more than pin the enemy on his front while they awaited the outcome of the new thrust on the Japanese left flank.

By the evening of 15 September Kusunose's position was unsatisfactory. He had committed all his infantry and in two days fighting had failed to drive the Australians off Ioribaiwa ridge. It was even worse than perhaps he realized for if the Australians essayed a counterattack with their reserve he had nothing spare with which to meet it.

On the morning of 16 September, 8 Company of 3/144, on the Japanese left, enlarged its position by seizing 'Sankaku yama' a striking pyramid-shaped hill just east of the modern Kokoda track. This was serious as the crest of Sankaku yama overlooked the spine of Ioribaiwa ridge and it would be possible from there to place machine gun fire along the ridge crest into the Australian centre.⁴⁶ The Japanese in this area also stood off another counterattack by B and D Companies of 2/33 Battalion. With the failure of this effort, Eather contacted his divisional commander, Allen, in Port Moresby, and obtained permission to withdraw.

The withdrawal commenced at midday and by evening, apart from a battalion in a rearguard position, Maroubra Force had set up on the next ridgeline to the south, Imita Ridge. Just why the Australians retreated, not clearly defeated and with half their force as yet only lightly engaged, requires some explanation which will be dealt with after casualties have been calculated. For now it is enough to say that the Japanese, heavily

⁴⁵ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshu, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 54.

⁴⁶ This location was pointed out to the author by Kokoda guide Frank Taylor.

outnumbered and fought to a standstill with no reserves in hand, were not in a position to interfere with the Australian withdrawal.

CASUALTIES

Australian casualties are given in the official document on battle casualties for the Owen Stanley campaign as 49 dead and 121 wounded for the period from 13 to 17 September 1942.⁴⁷ This must be very close to correct though other lists add a few more in the killed column who died of wounds some time after the battle. All but one, from a patrol clash between 2/41 Regiment and 2/1 Pioneer battalion well to the west, was from the action at Ioribaiwa.

Apart from among the infantry there were few Japanese battle casualties. The 15 IER lost at most two killed and four wounded.⁴⁸ The massed artillery were not located so were not fired on by the Australian 3 inch mortars, the only weapons with the range to hit them.

The *Senshi Soshō*, the Japanese official history, says the whole force lost 36 killed and 106 wounded and very close to this number is stated by the 144 Regimental history as total losses for the battle.⁴⁹ A third Japanese source gives 38 killed and 106 wounded for the period 13 to 16 September.⁵⁰ A fourth gives 54 killed in action or died from other causes for the whole Ioribaiwa period until the retreat.⁵¹ This included the loss of several men in two clashes in the Maguli Range before Ioribaiwa and a few who were killed while the Ioribaiwa position was held from after the action through to 25 September.

⁴⁷ AWM 54 171/2/48, npn. See also McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, pp. 234 and 236. 2/25 Battalion lost 4 KIA and 16 WIA at Ioribaiwa.

⁴⁸ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns, 1942-43*, p. 166.

⁵⁰ NIDS 302. 9.S, *Hiho to Tomoni-Sanpohei dai 55 Rentai senshi* (With Fire - The war history of 55 mountain artillery regiment), p. 25.

⁵¹ Azuma Shigetoshi list of 144 Regiment dead, authors collection, p. 2.

The records of 3/144 suggest the ratio of killed to wounded was closer but this may be accounted for by the difference between killed in action and died of wounds.⁵² The latter category is always problematic and Australian records, especially during their retreat, are also likely to be in error in the number of killed in action as against died of wounds. This is not a problem here as long as it is accepted that, while the total number of fatal battle casualties can be ascertained, which of these were killed in action and which died of wounds cannot be assessed with the same degree of accuracy.

Another reason to believe Japanese casualties may have been slightly higher is that, a week later the hospital at Kokoda, having received one or two casualties a day, suddenly took in 122 wounded over two days.⁵³ The best that can be said is that the higher figures are probably the more accurate so Japanese battle casualties for Ioribaiwa were probably 40 dead and 120 wounded and may have been slightly higher again.⁵⁴ Against this Australian casualties were 170.

While we are on the subject of casualties two further points should be made. At this point in the campaign, at the Nankai Shitai's furthest point of advance, a number of Japanese sources give the overall casualties suffered by the Nankai Shitai. The figure which appears in the *Senshi Soshō* is 1,000 battle casualties and this figure can also be found in a number of Japanese diaries and other Japanese primary sources.⁵⁵ The figure receives

⁵² NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshō, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 65.

⁵³ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no 24, records of 67 LOCH, September admissions chart. Npn.

⁵⁴ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no 24, records of 67 LOCH. The total Japanese wounded admitted to a medical unit for the month of September was 272. If the estimates for wounded at first Eora-Templeton's and Efogi have been reasonable, 162 wounded in total, then added to 140 wounded here would give a total of 302 wounded to mid September. In the second half of September there was very little fighting so if it is right to assume about ten percent of all Japanese wounded were not hit badly enough to require evacuation then the number admitted to medical care this month supports the view that the wounded for Ioribaiwa was probably 120 and not as high as 140. There were almost no Japanese casualties to air attack in the period of the Ioribaiwa action to consider here.

⁵⁵ NIDS 302. 9.S, *Hiho to Tomoni-Sanpohei dai 55 Rentai senshi* (With Fire - The war history of 55 mountain artillery regiment), p. 25. See also Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 166.

rough support from another Japanese account which states that by 4 October, two weeks after Ioribaiwa but before any further serious fighting and just as illness and starvation are having an effect - that 405 men had been killed in battle, 50 had died from illness and 900, half wounded and half sick, were in hospital.⁵⁶ A 144 Regiment officer's diary gives the regiment's own killed and wounded to 28 September as 300 killed and 400 wounded.⁵⁷ This seems a bit low as the regiment had done the lion's share of the work to date.

The other major unit, 41 Regiment, was the pursuit group for just five days at the start of September and took about 100 casualties at that time. Just 11 battle casualties are recorded for other units in September and the number for August is unknown.⁵⁸ There were, though, patrol skirmishes and air attacks not dealt with here that could account for the missing casualties or it may be that 900 is a better estimate of Japanese casualties thus far. Either way it seems fair to say that, by the end of September, Nankai Shitai battle casualties were probably not in excess of 1,000.

Examining now all Australian battle casualties since the campaign commenced up to nearly the end of September, the official figure for both killed and wounded is 805.⁵⁹ This figure may be too low. It comes from *Australian Military Forces, battle casualties, Kokoda to Imita* and has been used as this source gives casualties for each day of the campaign, the only way to obtain casualties for each action or engagement. It is not though in accord with other Australian sources. General Rowell's post campaign report

⁵⁶ NIDS, Nanto Zenpan 102, Daitoa senso minami taiheiyo homeni ni okeru sento (East Asia War, south pacific area), npn.

⁵⁷ AWM 55 3/3 current translations, no. 29, p. 62. McAulay, in *Blood and Iron*, p. 295, quotes a medical officer, Hayashi Hiroyuki, as saying there were 400 killed in August and 200 in September. This figure is much too high.

⁵⁸ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH. See PCB figures for September. The list includes all Nankai Shitai casualties except for a civilian hospital run by Umeda Tai for Korean, Taiwanese and other civilian labourers.

⁵⁹ AWM 54, 171/2/48, Australian Military Forces, battle casualties, Kokoda to Imita, p. 7.

gave 464 killed and 567 wounded for the 'Kokoda front' up to 4 October.⁶⁰ By this date, there were no small parties still adrift in the jungle and yet to emerge and we would expect Rowell to have had, after the campaign, access to reasonably accurate figures. Indeed the figure he gave in the same document, 161 killed at Milne Bay, is exactly the accepted post war number that appears in McCarthy's *South-west Pacific area-first year*.⁶¹ Another AMF end of campaign report also indicates Australian battle casualties for the period under discussion were at least 900.⁶² It is not clear why the daily numbers are not in accord with post campaign assessments but it is a useful reminder that while Australian casualty figures are more accurate than Japanese, they too have their problems.

If the Japanese casualty figures we have calculated thus far, with all their uncertainties, are still about right, and accepting the lower official Australian figures, then not much credence can be given to the argument that while the Australians were being pushed back from July to September, they were exacting an extremely high price from the Japanese as they advanced. It certainly appears the Australians were inflicting more casualties than they were taking, (1000 Japanese to 805 or perhaps 900 Australians) but not by a great margin.

Australian claims made at the time for casualties inflicted on the Japanese for this period of retreat have in general been taken at face value since the war. They have been served up once again in books about Kokoda dating from the revival of interest in the campaign in the 1990s.⁶³ In general, these claims exceed the actual figure by three or four times. During the war, exaggeration cannot be checked and is permissible for reasons of morale, but afterward there is not the same excuse.

⁶⁰ AWM 123 270, Rowell's report and attached documents and intelligence summaries, intelligence summary 23-30/10/42, war cabinet minute p. 2 for 6 /10/42.

⁶¹ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area- first year*, p. 185.

⁶² AWM 54 171/ 1 /2, graph showing AMF and AIF battle casualties in New Guinea June 1942-February 1943.

⁶³ For example see Brune, *A bastard of a place* p.151 and Ham, *Kokoda*, p.380.

As it happens, there was at Ioribaiwa a suitable and well documented example of this phenomenon of Australian casualty claims of the campaign being accepted without any check. On 17 September, the day after the Ioribaiwa action, a Japanese patrol pushing down the main track towards Imita ridge came into a clearing and was ambushed on three sides by C Company of 2/33 Battalion.

The ambush was regarded as somewhat of a classic. It is described in detail in the battalion war diary (with a map), the brigade war diary, the battalion history, almost all books on the campaign since and, with glee, by veterans of the battalion. The Australian account runs thus: A few members of the company concerned showed themselves to a Japanese patrol which came after them and fell into the ambush. Fifty Japanese were killed with no loss to C Company, who then withdrew to Imita Ridge.⁶⁴ This is the number always repeated with the exception of 25 Brigade's account which claims 40 dead.⁶⁵ It is said 3,000 rounds were fired and that many Japanese must have been hit several times over. There is no estimate of the number of Japanese wounded but the number of 50 killed is, as can now be seen, probably more than the Japanese lost in the entire three day fight on the ridge.

The ambush can be checked against Japanese records. The troops involved were from 3/144 Battalion and were led by Lt Okabayashi Shintaro. His own account of the event, which was given to the battalion historian, is at variance with the Australian one. On 17 September the patrol he was leading was advancing down the main track when they saw a few enemy and chased them but they were then fired on from all sides. Some support arrived to help but in the end all the Japanese withdrew with a total of two men wounded.⁶⁶ It is likely one of these men subsequently died as the regimental list of deaths

⁶⁴ AWM 52 8/3/33, 2/33 Battalion war diary, 16/9/42.

⁶⁵ AWM 52 8/2/ 25, 25 Brigade war diary, 17/9/42. "...known enemy casualties inflicted by 2/33 bn on way back 40. Own cas nil." Paull R. *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 230, repeats the story that 40 Japanese from the Kuwada Battalion [3/144] fell into the ambush and none returned.

⁶⁶ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Sosho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 56.

records one man only for 17 September and Okabayashi's fight was the only fighting of the day.

It appears then that there should be considerable doubt about this episode in terms of Australian casualty claims and the numbers of Japanese allegedly killed. Japanese records are not so accurate that they don't allow for doubt that a few more casualties from the ambush may have gone unrecorded. However, they are good enough that we can be sure it was not very many and nowhere remotely near 50 men claimed killed in the ambush. Nor is it suggested only the Australians were guilty of such errors. A Japanese account, with a map, states that 30 dead Australians were counted after the skirmish in the Maguli Range on 11 September however Australian records show that just two Australians were killed.⁶⁷

DISCUSSION

The most surprising feature of Ioribaiwa is the success of the Japanese. They were outnumbered almost two to one and were attacking a naturally strong position against an enemy tolerably well deployed and dug in. Moreover Kusunose's plan was based on a great underestimate of both the size of the enemy force he had to deal with and consequently the length of front they might be deployed on. The result was that 2/144 Battalion failed to get behind the Australians as it had done at Efogi.

Instead, it bumped into 2/31, a large and fresh battalion of Australians west of Ioribaiwa, and accomplished nothing other than to keep engaged a force similar in size to itself. Eather said afterwards, correctly, that he thought the Japanese did what they did because they, initially, had no idea of the presence of 25 Brigade. In the Japanese centre and left, 3/144, essentially fighting in two parts, fought against elements of four Australian battalions. The Japanese were too greatly outnumbered to drive off such a force. In their centre they were able to slowly gain ground against the composite battalion while on their

⁶⁷ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Sosho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), pp. 46 and 61.

left they were able to hold, against Australian counterattacks, the ground they had seized. All this requires some explanation.

The first cause of the Australian defeat to eliminate is any general collapse of morale on the part of the fighting troops, as had occurred to 53 Battalion at Isurava. There was no disordered retreat and when the order came to go back to Imita, it was done in exemplary fashion. While a platoon or, the argument perhaps could be stretched to a whole company, of 3 Battalion were surprised and panicked so allowing the Japanese penetration of the Australian right this was an isolated, though tactically important, incident.⁶⁸

Nor had the Australians suffered grievous casualties having lost six per cent of their force by the end of the action. Why then did Eather retreat? The reasons usually given are those in his report written up a few days later though he mentioned some of them on the telephone to Allen when asking if he might withdraw. They are repeated in 7 Division's report on operations and are summarised here:

- a) By continuing to hold the ridge, all units were committed to defensive tasks so freedom to adopt the offensive was lost.
- b) It was essential to keep the force intact for future offensive roles.
- c) The supply system was precarious.
- d) A withdrawal allowed a firm base at Imita from which patrols could regain the initiative.
- e) Supporting artillery [Australian 25 pounders placed south of Imita] could be had from the Imita position but not the Ioribaiwa position.
- f) Enemy supply problems would increase to breaking point.⁶⁹

Most of this sounds plausible but it is at variance with what was written in the brigade war diary at 1100 on 16 September at the time withdrawal was decided upon: "Owing to

⁶⁸ Porter was critical of the whole of 3 Battalion and believed they were not well enough trained to fight the Japanese. See Ham, *Kokoda*, p. 253 and Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, pp. 221-222.

⁶⁹ AWM 54 577/7/34, 7 Australian Division, report on operations Kokoda-Gona, 13/8/42-2/12/42, pp. 8-9

enemy penetration on both flanks of our position on Ioribaiwa Ridge Brig. Eather considered that enemy could not be held in present position and ordered Bde to withdraw to vicinity of Imita Ridge.”⁷⁰ Another similar account appeared in 2/25 Battalion war diary: “Brig. Eather ordered withdrawal of brig group to Imita range owing to Jap encircling tactics on left and right flanks.”⁷¹

The 7 Division account explains a number of sensible reasons why a withdrawal would be a good idea but the war diaries’ explanations get to the nub – in the opinion of the commander the position could not be held - which in the end is the best reason of all, if correct. Eather could not have known that he outnumbered the enemy by almost two to one so there was small chance of Kusunose’s force driving him off the ridge. From the afternoon of 15 September, the Japanese infantry had made almost no forward progress - precisely because it was heavily outnumbered. However, again, Eather could not have known both of Kusunose’s battalions were stuck fast and that Kusunose had no reserve to hand. Had Eather hung on rather than retreated then Kusunose could have done nothing more. Had Eather counterattacked with 2/25 which he still had in reserve, then Kusunose had nothing to counter it with.

It has been said that it is not necessary to defeat the enemy force so much as it is to convince their commander that he has lost the battle. A likely cause for the Australian defeat would seem to be that Eather became convinced he was defeated, and so he was. Australian casualties were light and, apart from the penetration on the Australian right and some loss of ground on the front of the composite battalion, the position was intact and Eather still had a battalion in reserve. Yet at 1100 Eather, believing himself beaten, ordered withdrawal. What prompted this belief?

It may be that Eather thought the composite battalion was about to collapse. If that occurred he still had 2/25 to fill the gap but would then be left with no reserve. The

⁷⁰ AWM 52 8/2/ 25, 25 Brigade war dairy, 16/9/42.

⁷¹ AWM 52 8/3/25/18, 2/25 Battalion war diary, 16/9/42.

members of the composite battalion had seen hard service for three weeks now. They had been constantly defeated and retreating. A week before Ioribaiwa Potts considered them unfit for further operations.⁷² At that time the enemy too had expressed the view that “these troops are in a state of utter confusion, and to a great degree have lost the will to fight.”⁷³

For two days now the composite battalion had fought under the fire of the largest concentration of Japanese artillery so far assembled in the campaign. Of 12 killed and 19 wounded in the composite battalion from 14-16 September half, six killed and 11 wounded, were from enemy artillery.⁷⁴

None of this appears in Eather’s report nor in any other official reports but there is other evidence from those present that it might have been that the composite battalion’s morale was about to fail under artillery fire. The importance of the Japanese artillery is mentioned in this exchange on the ridge on 16 September between Dr Vernon and an unnamed AIF officer.⁷⁵ The officer said that “...too many were picked off at long range from lack of skill in concealing themselves... [and] ...the Jap mortars were firing with deadly precision and they had more powerful weapons with longer range than we had.” “I asked... why we were evacuating Ioribaiwa and he said it was because we were losing too many men.”⁷⁶

⁷² Ham, *Kokoda* p. 243.

⁷³ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications, no. 33, file of Nankai Shitai operational orders, 16 August to 15 October, p. 15.

⁷⁴ The sources for casualties to Japanese artillery at Ioribaiwa are:
Uren, *A Thousand Men at War*, p. 153. On the morning of 15/9/42 C Company was hit by artillery fire and lost 4 KIA and 10 WIA.
AWM 52 9/2/4, General staff intelligence report, New Guinea Force, situation report no. 153.
AWM 52 8/2/ 21, 21 Brigade war diary. On 13-16/9/42, at 1220 a 37mm QF gun opened fire on Bde HQ, killed one and wounding seven. The next day one man in 2/16 was wounded by artillery and on 15/9/42 2/14 and 2/16 lost 4 killed by artillery.

⁷⁵ AWM 54 253/5/8, pt 1, Captain G. H. Vernon, war diary, July-November 1942, p. 19.

⁷⁶ AWM 54 253/5/8, pt 1, Captain G.H. Vernon, war diary, July-November 1942, p. 19.

The diarist of 2/14 Battalion is more specific: “The strain was beginning to tell... and some of the lads... began to crack up. Enemy mortar, MG and field pieces continued to do deadly work on our forward positions all morning and our casualties mounted”.⁷⁷ Perhaps it was this that prompted Eather at 0815 on 16 September to signal Allen “enemy feeling whole front and both flanks. Do not consider can hold him here. Request permission to withdraw to Imita Ridge if necessary. Porter concurs.”⁷⁸

It is difficult to imagine Kusunose asking Horii for permission to withdraw with a list of woes similar to those Eather used. Kusunose might have argued that he had attacked what he thought was a small force to find it greatly reinforced. His flanking attack, 2/144, had achieved nothing. He was aware by now that he was significantly outnumbered and his attack had stalled. His left flank, having penetrated the enemy line, was trapped there. He had no reserve at all with which to hazard a new blow nor any to meet a counter attack of the enemy which might come at any time.

The difference between Kusunose and Eather was that the former in parlous circumstances held grimly on, the latter withdrew. Pierre Bonnal’s explanation for the defeat of the French under General Frossard at Spicheren, in 1870, is apt. “General Frossard, undefeated, thought he had been defeated and so he was. General von Zastrow was half defeated but refused to be and so was not.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 232.

⁷⁸ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 232.

⁷⁹ Howard, M. *The Franco-Prussian War*, Methuen, London 1985, p. 98.

CHAPTER TEN.

EORA-TEMPLETONS 2.

CHAPTER 10- EORA-TEMPLETONS II, 8-30 OCTOBER, 1942

In the previous chapter, the orders for Horii to withdraw from Ioribawa were mentioned and in the strategy chapter the reason for these orders has been related. Beginning on 24 September the withdrawal began and a clean break was made, the Australians being unaware of the Japanese retreat until they assaulted the empty trenches on Ioribaiwa ridge on 28 September. The Nankai Shitai retreated rapidly, completely breaking contact with the Australians for two weeks.

Now exchanging the role of attacker for that of the defender, in the first few days of October Major-General Horii made new dispositions to take account of three problems.¹ First he had to return enough troops to the coast to deal with an expected Allied move against his base. There had been rumours to this effect since mid September and Hyakutake in Rabaul had formally warned Horii to guard against it on 26 September.² In addition to 3/41 Battalion already at Giruwa he sent 1/41 from Kokoda to Giruwa and 2/41 from the Owen Stanleys to Oivi.³ Secondly, Horii wished to withdraw as large a body as practical to the lowlands in the Kokoda-Oivi area along the Mambare River valley. With this move, Horii was now well within the restrictions placed on him by his orders of late August, to keep the major part of his fighting force on the north side of the mountains.⁴

¹ As of 1 October Hyakutake instructed Horii to guard against a) the enemy coming out of the mountains east of Kokoda and b) coastal landings. See AWM 55 3/3, current translations, no. 34, Horii operational orders, order no. 123, 1/10/42, p. 32.

² AWM 55 3/3, current translations, no. 34, Horii operational orders, order no. 123, 1/10/42, p. 32.

³ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, p. 75 and ANL Japanese monograph no. 37, p. 17. In October the Giruwa base was defended by an SNLP and the main body of 41 Regiment. The commander of 3/41 had, since his arrival in early September, been given responsibility for the defence of the base and the battalion had never left there.

⁴ As three quarters of Horii's 2,360 IJA combat engineers and, except for two weeks in September, the major part of 41 Regiment were always north of the crest of the Owen Stanley Range, Horii could argue he had maintained the balance set by 17th Army, that the major portion of his fighting men should stay north of the mountains. If the engineers are excluded then Horii overstepped his mark by committing over half of his infantry and most of his artillery south of the crest of the range.

There were two advantages to having a concentration about Kokoda-Oivi. Troops could, to some extent recover, their strength as they had easier access to supply than in the mountains.⁵ A convalescent camp was set up for those in special need of rest and more food but not weak enough to require hospitalisation.

Secondly, a concentration at Kokoda-Oivi was centrally placed to respond to a threat either on the coast or south in the mountains at Eora where the newly formed 'Stanley detachment' was.⁶ This detachment was Horii's solution to his third problem. There were a number of reasons, dealt with in due course, to believe the Nankai Shitai might still receive an order to have a crack at Port Moresby. This being so, it was useful to hold a position in the mountains from which any new advance could be launched. This was the task of the Stanley detachment. The Australian attack on this detachment, its reinforcement and subsequent defeat is called the action of second Eora-Templetons.

The October action at Eora-Templetons has not been well understood. It is best examined in three stages - the Australian attack on the first Japanese position south and west of Templetons 2 (the original Templetons crossing) in mid October, the Australian attack on the main Templetons 2 position and, thirdly, the final attack on the Eora creek village position at the end of October.

Beginning with the official history, studies of Eora-Templetons 2 have concentrated on

⁵ The deployment of the Nankai Shitai in early October in the Mambare Valley was as follows: NSHQ, 144 RHQ and 55 MAR were about Kokoda village. 3/144 guarded Kokoda strip and patrolled towards Yodda, The portion of 1/144 not in the Stanley detachment was also in this vicinity. 2/41 was initially north of Kokoda but later was placed closer to Oivi. See AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 42, p. 5, Nankai Shitai order, 4/10/42, and AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 42, 3/10/42, p. 4. Living quarters were constructed in anticipation of a long stay.

⁶ The original formation of the Stanley detachment, on 16/9/42 was 2/144, 55 MAR, no. 2 Company 1/144 and no. 1 Company, 55 ER. NIDS 302. 9.S, *Hiho to Tomoni-Sanpohei dai 55 Rentai senshi* ,(With Fire - the war history of 55 mountain artillery regiment), p. 40.

the third period of fighting, at Eora village.⁷ The examination here argues that this focus on Eora is unwarranted because the decisive Australian attack occurred in the Templetons phase of the fighting. The Australian 2/2 Battalion, at great cost, broke the back of the Japanese position on the heights above Templetons 2 on 20 October, forcing on the Japanese an unexpected withdrawal to Eora. Suddenly, Horii was forced to play catch up. He sent reinforcements to Eora but they arrived too late to secure the position there and the story of the Eora phase is really one of the failure of Horii's dispositions to meet the crisis that arose when the 2/2 Battalion broke through the Japanese a week earlier.

The neglect of events at Templetons in mid October extends even to some of the fighting being wrongly located. One of the two Japanese outlying positions at Templetons has been misplaced by three kilometres and there is a somewhat similar but lesser error with the main Japanese Templetons 2 position. It is best to deal with these errors here before examining the forces engaged, the course of the fighting and casualties.

The Templetons part of the Japanese deployment was in three places. One Japanese force blocked the Kagi-Templeton's track, one blocked the main track from Efogi to Templetons and the third position was in the rear of these two on the high ground overlooking where these two tracks intersected at Templetons 2. Dealing with the outer positions first, the one on the main Kokoda track is usually shown a kilometre south of Templetons 2 on the track to Templeton's 1. In fact it was three kilometres south of here and there was no fighting in the region so marked. On the ground today can be seen the remnants of an Australian position, occupied during their retreat, that has probably been mistaken for a Japanese position.

To 2/33 Battalion men, the location of the 12-14 October fight with the Japanese on this outer position on the Efogi to Templetons track is called 'Myola Ridge'— which

⁷ That the focus tends to be on Eora rather than Templeton's can be seen in maps. Compare the map of Templetons on p. 270 of McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year* with the Eora map on p. 288. McAulay's account in *Blood and Iron* p. 301-311 contains a map that mislocates the Templetons fighting as does the map in James' *Field Guide to the Kokoda track*, p. 285. There are no useful maps of the fighting in Brunei, *A Bastard of a place*, Ham, *Kokoda*, Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda* and Keogh, *South West Pacific 1941-1945*.

immediately suggests it may be much closer to Myola lake than has been thought. Also known as “Bamboo ridge” in 3 Battalion’s war diary, the ridge is a long steep sided and narrow one, nothing like any terrain to be found three kilometres north, where the fight is usually thought to have occurred.⁸

However, there is just such a ridge, with a battalion’s worth of Japanese fighting pits still visible along it, on the modern track two kilometres northeast of ‘propeller track junction’ where the main Kokoda track intersects one going directly to Myola 2. Here, where the track to Myola leaves the main track, is where the 7 Australian Division report correctly places the fighting, but this has not been noticed by researchers since then.⁹

The soil in the mountains can be stiff and often still shows at least some sign of a fighting pit. Sometimes the arrangement of pits into platoon, company, even battalion positions can be seen. The difference in the pits dug by the Japanese and the Australians is also easy to see. The battalion sized position atop Myola ridge still is as clearly Japanese as the one three kilometres north is Australian.

Further evidence that the outermost Japanese position of the Nankai Shitai’s deployment about Templetons has been mislocated comes from the 2/33 Battalion history. After the Japanese withdrew from Myola ridge on 15 October the 2/33 Battalion history has the battalion marching north for two and a half hours until it reached “the first crossing of Eora Creek” (modern Templetons 1).¹⁰ The following day, the battalion marched for five hours with no enemy contact, through the supposed site of the Japanese position, now

⁸ AWM 52, 8/3/39, 3 Battalion war diary, 14/10/42.

⁹ AWM 54 577/7/34, Kokoda Trail-Gona, 7 Division Report on Operations, 13 August to 2 December, 1942, p. 16. The report states that the Japanese position was “Due north of Myola (upon track leading from Myola-Alola)”.

¹⁰ Crooks, *The Footsoldiers*. pp. 211-212 and 215. The very detailed account here of the two day advance from 15 October when the Myola Ridge fighting ended, makes it very clear that the Japanese position on Myola ridge must have been well south of Templetons 1.

with Eora Creek flowing north on its left, to Templetons 2.¹¹ The battalion war diary and battalion and brigade sketches support this account.

With the other Japanese outer position on the other track, Kagi to Templetons, there is no disagreement. It was well to the north side of Mount Bellamy, two and a half kilometres west of Templetons Crossing (or Templetons 2).¹² The third portion of the Templetons defences, the main Japanese Templetons position, has been generally understood to extend along much of the length of the track north from Templeton's Crossing to Eora. The maps in 2/2 Battalion's war diary as well as Australian brigade and divisional sources show this too to be incorrect. The main Japanese position was 500 metres north of the creek crossing at Templetons 2 and was about 500 metres deep.¹³ There remain a few small positions to the north of this but they were not fought over except for the last one overlooking wartime Eora village, where the Australian rearguard had fought on the night of 1/2 September during the first Eora-Templetons engagement.

Having cleared up the errors in the presumed location of some of the fighting, we are in a better position to understand the larger purposes behind the Japanese deployment.¹⁴ There has been some discussion as to whether or not the Stanley detachment was a rearguard in the truest sense or whether it held an advanced post from which Horii would return to the offensive against Port Moresby when the Guadalcanal problem was solved, allowing him to be reinforced. It has been explained in the strategy chapter that the predominant view in Australia is that the Stanley detachment was a rearguard and not, at least potentially, an advance guard, and that the plan to take Port Moresby had been abandoned. There is good reason to doubt this.

¹¹ Crooks, *The Footsoldiers*, p. 213.

¹² AWM 54 577/7/34, Kokoda Trail-Gona, 7 Division Report on Operations, 13 August to 2 December, 1942, p. 16. Strong Japanese resistance was found "at a point 1 ½ miles from Templeton's crossing upon track leading from Kagi-Templeton's crossing."

¹³ AWM 52, 8/3/39, 3 Battalion war diary on 16/10/42 places the Japanese main Templetons position "500 yds n of Templetons."

¹⁴ Frank Taylor, a Kokoda track guide, supports this interpretation of the locations of Japanese positions in the Templeton's phase of the fighting. Frank Taylor telephone interviews and emails 8/11/07 - 1/12/07.

Hyakutake ordered Horii to maintain a position from which the advance could be resumed once events again favoured Japan.¹⁵ If this, in hindsight, seems unduly optimistic, then it should be remembered that the largest attempt yet to retake Guadalcanal was about to be made and the IJN had, thus far, usually met with success in the sea battles around Guadalcanal. It is true that the IJA on land there had already failed twice but it was apparent that whoever controlled the sea around the island must in the long run triumph. It seemed, then, quite possible to many of those in authority on the Japanese side that Guadalcanal would fall to them either in the short term if the next offensive succeeded or in the long term, providing the IJN was able to maintain ownership of the sea around the Solomon Islands.

Things at Guadalcanal looked so promising that on 15 October, in the midst of fighting at Templetons, Hyakutake informed Horii that the whole of 38 Division would be sent to Papua and the Nankai Shitai would come under its command. Horii informed 38 Division's commander that he would be honoured to serve under him.¹⁶ As important, Horii was told the air support he had lost to the Guadalcanal fighting would be returned. Fighters would once again be based at Lae and Buna to cover the air-dropping of supplies which would become, as it was for the Australians, the main arm of logistical support. Nor should it be forgotten the Nankai Shitai had yet to suffer a battlefield defeat at the hands of the Australians in the mountains and held, certainly since Efogi, a low opinion of the fighting spirit of their enemy.¹⁷ There were in short, real grounds for optimism in Japanese ranks in mid October but within ten days the latest plan to take Guadalcanal then reinforce Papua fell apart.

The Japanese failed on land at Guadalcanal at Edson's Ridge on the night of 24/25 October and at the sea battle of Santa Cruz at the same time. Hyakutake consequently withdrew all his promises to Horii. Horii's deployment at Templetons had however been

¹⁵ Bullard, *Japanese army operations in the south Pacific area*, pp. 185-186.

¹⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), pp. 141-142.

¹⁷ The Japanese force defeated at Milne Bay in late August 1942 was not part of the Nankai Shitai.

based upon the expectation of reinforcement and a resumption of the offensive. When Horii told 2/144 commander Horie, the Stanley detachment commander, to prepare for future operations by placing ‘one group holding a high point east of Kagi [on the Kagi-Templetons track] and the main group on a ‘north south line’ on the track junction near Myola, all concerned had reason to believe these future operations would be forwards and not backwards.¹⁸

Placing the main body of the Stanley detachment on Myola Ridge, just two kilometres north-west of the northern tip of the dry lake called Myola 2 served another useful purpose. From here it threatened the Australian use of Myola 2 to once again drop supplies from the air close to their advanced troops. It is easy to imagine the effect upon the regularity of supply dropping if Japanese patrols were able to sneak up on the edge of the lake and fire on the Australian aircraft. Nor could this be entirely prevented as the lake was far too large for the Australians to hold its perimeter.

Worse still, the lake was longest on a north south axis, the one the Allied aircraft used to increase accuracy of dropping. So either the aircraft had to fly near enough to the Japanese on Myola ridge to take fire from them in approaching or leaving the lake or they flew in on an east-west axis and accepted a far greater loss of supplies into the jungle. Firing on the aircraft did occur from Myola ridge and from patrols sent out from there for just this purpose. On 11 October, the first day of supply dropping, a pilot reported that he “had been fired on by LMG [light machine gun] using tracer from a high point SE of hut on W side of Myola lake.”¹⁹ A patrol from 16 Brigade was sent to look for, but failed to find, what was described to them as an anti aircraft light machine gun.²⁰

Now Horii’s new plan for October can be properly understood. The idea was to stand far enough back into the mountains from Port Moresby that the Australians, if they did

¹⁸ AWM 55 3/3, current translations, no. 34, p. 30, Horii operational orders, order no 122.

¹⁹ AWM 52 8/2/25, 25 Brigade war diary, 11/10/42.

²⁰ AWM 52 8/2/16, 16 Brigade war diary, October sitreps and messages, 14/10/42.

advance, would suffer from supply problems but not so far back that the dropping zone at Myola would, at one stroke, solve all these same supply problems. Tactically, the Myola ridge position was also a good one. The track ran along the narrow top of a steep ridge. To its south, in the direction the Australians would come, there was low ground generally observable from the Japanese position. Unfortunately there was a catch.

Myola ridge could be cut off by an Australian force coming directly from Kagi to Templeton's 2 over Mount Bellamy. This was the track the Japanese had used in their advance. It was both necessary to place a second Japanese force, one infantry company of 2/144, here to block this track and to keep the battalion on the Myola track within reach of the Templetons 1 creek crossing in case a retreat became necessary. This, and the fact that there was no good position immediately on the northern edge of Myola lake, is why it was not wise to place the Japanese Myola ridge force right on the edge of the Myola lake thus preventing the Australians doing any air supply at all.

FORCES ENGAGED

There is a close to complete order of battle for the Stanley Detachment as of 3 October 1942. The primary unit of the detachment, formed on 16 September, was 2/144, all of which was present. Detachments from other units bolstered its fighting power.

STANLEY DETACHMENT ORDER OF BATTLE	
2/144 HQ, three infantry companies, MMG company and gun platoon	398 men
Number 2 Company of 1/144 Battalion	85
Number 1 MMG Company of 1/144, detachment	18
1/144 Battalion, gun platoon	26
55 Mountain Artillery regiment, Number 2 Company	107
144 Regiment signals company, detachment	28
144 Regiment, medical detachment	25
55 Engineer Regiment, Number 1 Company	120
unidentified infantry unit of 144 Regiment	179
Total strength	986²¹

²¹ NIDS 302. 9.S, *Hiho to Tomoni-Sanpohei dai 55 Rentai senshi* (With Fire - the war history of 55 mountain artillery regiment) p. 40 and AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 24, p. 7. This captured Japanese document is misdated 3/9/42 but there was no Stanley detachment at that time. The correct date is 3/10/42.

Almost a third, some 319 of these men, were listed as sick. On 4 October, before the pursuing Australians had regained contact, the sick began to be withdrawn. The last group of 150 sick left on 12 October, leaving 667 men in the Stanley detachment.²² The infantry battalion around which the detachment was built and whose commander also commanded the detachment, 2/144, was by then down to about 300 effectives.²³

This force was placed in the two forementioned forward locations. On the Kagi track was a 92 man infantry company of 2/144, a platoon of the machine gun company, an engineer platoon and a medical section, no more than 150 men.²⁴ The main force of 520 or so was on Myola ridge with all three of the Stanley detachment's guns (one mountain gun and the battalion guns of 1/144 and 2/144). In their rear, and not a part of the Stanley detachment, was another company of 1/144 Battalion. With the assistance of an engineer company on 29 September they began constructing the main Templetons position, overlooking and north of the crossing.²⁵

LHQ estimated there were 4,600 Australian soldiers and 2,000 carriers forward of the roadhead on 15 October.²⁶ The major part of this was composed of seven infantry battalions and one pioneer battalion but in the first period of fighting at Eora, when the two Japanese outer positions were attacked, half of this force (including the 140 strong MFHQ and a field company of RAE) was well to the rear and need not be considered for the moment. The Australian pursuit group was built around 25 Brigade which had arrived in time to participate at Ioribaiwa. They had been depleted by battle casualties but even

²² AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 42, Nankai Shitai intelligence report, no. 21, 9/10/42. pp.3-4.

²³ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 30, p. 6.

²⁴ NIDS, Nanto higashi New Guinea, 255, Hohei dai Rentai New Guinea Senkyo Houkou, (War reports of 41 Regiment in New Guinea), pp. 20-21. Another explanation of the layout and strength of the position is in AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 17, p. 63. This diarist also notes that the 2/144 Battalion gun was present for this period of fighting but not in the Japanese position on the Kagi track.

²⁵ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, p. 7.

²⁶ AWM 3 drl /6643, Blamey papers, series 2, wallet 47 of 1415, p. 1.

more by sickness, mainly dysentery, which was as fully a problem as it had been in September.

AUSTRALIAN PURSUIT GROUP 12 OCTOBER, 1942.		
25	Brigade HQ	75
2/33	Battalion	449
3	Battalion	372
2/25	Battalion	426
2/31	Battalion	450
2/4	Field Ambulance	110
Total Force		1,882.²⁷

The number that can properly be considered engaged against the first Japanese positions is, however, less than this. The action was on two fronts, with Eather's Bde HQ outside the fighting area co-ordinating both. Detachments of signals and the field ambulance were sent forward on both fronts. Also excluded from those engaged was 2/31 Battalion, held in reserve at Kagi. From here another track led north, an approach Allen, 7 Division commander, feared the Japanese might use.²⁸ Eather and Allen were husbanding this battalion for future operations. The actual number engaged on both sides was then about 1,400 Australians against 670 Japanese.

THE FIRST PERIOD OF FIGHTING

On 12 October, 2/25 Battalion advanced on the old mail track (the Kagi-Templetons track) towards Templetons 2 with orders to take it. They had no contact with the enemy that day. The next day the Australian scouts were fired on and the Japanese position was found. Two companies, B and C, deployed to flank the position. They lost eight men wounded but did not, in the words of the battalion war diary, "take much ground".²⁹ On 14 October

²⁷ For battalion strengths see AWM 52 8/3/33, 2/33 Battalion war diary, 1/10/42, and Crooks, *The footsoldiers*, pp. 189-190.

²⁸ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 96.

²⁹ AWM 52 8/3/25, 2/25 Battalion war diary, 13/10/42.

A Company relieved C Company, two 3 inch mortars were brought up and there was “active patrolling”. One man was killed.

On 15 October there was a one hundred yard advance at first light. C Company took over the attack again and reached a barricade of wood and wire thrown up by the Japanese but they “failed to advance further and withdrew to former position.” One man was killed and two were wounded. In three days the battalion had lost 13 casualties from 426 men and made little impression on a force one third their size. The following morning the Japanese were gone and the battalion advanced to the objective, Templetons crossing.

It does seem that, in the period 12-15 October, little attempt was made by 2/25 to obey the order to attack through to Templetons 2. It may be a small example of the lack of results MacArthur, Blamey and Lt. General Edmund Herring (who on 1 October replaced Rowell as NGF commander) were soon to complain about. Eather had urged the battalion on, several times, stressing that as 2/33 was making progress on the other track, 2/25 might be able to get through to the track junction and cut off the Japanese there. These messages did not have much effect. A relevant factor may have been that 2/25 had been through two commanding officers in less than a month. Soon they were to lose a third, Captain Marson, who commanded here. He was wounded by artillery fire on 15 October as he approached Templetons 2. Three days later another unnamed 2/25 officer was relieved of his command for failing to attack so there are some bits and pieces of evidence which suggest, combined with 2/25’s small effort on the Kagi-Templetons track, that all was not well with the battalion.³⁰

Meanwhile, on the main track near Myola, no such problems beset 2/33 Battalion. Here it opposed the main body of the Stanley detachment, 520 men placed on the long, narrow north/south Myola ridge, each company behind the other in the favoured Japanese deployment. The gaps between each company were wide enough to give depth to the position but not so wide they were not covered by fire.

³⁰ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 100.

High in the mountains the foliage is often not very thick and visibility can often be 50m or more. Here the Japanese left about 70 metres between each company position. These gaps were later penetrated by Australian patrols. One from 3 Battalion, going around to the Australian left, met one from 2/33 which had gone around the Australian right, in the rear of the southernmost Japanese company position.

The attack on Myola ridge commenced when 2/33 Battalion, with its 3 inch mortar in support for the first time, made a company attack to the front, then put a company around its left flank then one around its right, all taking fire from Japanese artillery as they manoeuvred. None of this dented the Japanese position, so 3 Battalion was brought up to swing further around the Australian left. The Japanese may have got wind of this, as on the morning of 15 October, when the attack was about to be launched, the Japanese were discovered to be gone. This was at the same moment that the Japanese in front of 2/25 also withdrew.

Now that the actual strength of these two outer Japanese positions is known, some light can be shed on the various explanations for this phase of the campaign that have been offered. At the time, NGF argued that it was the success of 2/33 and 3 Battalions that prompted the Japanese on the other track to withdraw lest they be cut off from Templetons 2.³¹ This is probably correct, though it is notable that it is the threat to the Japanese rear, rather than any actual progress in taking the position, that was seen as the important move. Unknown to any Australian, the Myola ridge position was held by more than 500 Japanese. Some 800 Australians in the two attacking battalions were almost certainly not enough to subdue this many well placed Japanese, with artillery support, had the Japanese chosen to await the 15 October assault.

Sublet's view was that: "With minor forces, the enemy had parried Buttrose (2/33) and Marson (2/25) for four days which gave Horii time to progressively feed his rested men

³¹ AWM 52 9/2/4, General staff intelligence, New Guinea Force, situation report no 277.

from the more moderate climes of Kokoda into their positions in the mountains.”³² Sublet is correct to say that the Japanese were successful in this phase of operations but he, being unaware of Japanese strength and dispositions, could not know that on 2/33’s front, until 3 Battalion arrived in support, there was no real prospect of success against an equal number of men in a good position with artillery support. Sublet’s criticism does apply, however, to 2/25 Battalion. He carefully hints that the battalion’s performance was far from satisfactory.³³

Looking now at the Japanese view of these few days of fighting, they seem to have been in agreement with the NGF explanation.³⁴ On 14 October a Nankai Shitai report referred to strong enemy attacks and the possibility of envelopment. This presumably was a reference to the movement of 3 Battalion around the Japanese right at Myola ridge. As a result “withdrawal [was] being considered”.³⁵ The report went on to say that “tomorrow Lt. Colonel Tsukamoto with 2 Company of 2/144 will join Stanley Shitai and become its commander”. At this difficult moment, Major Horie, the Stanley detachment commander, had the good fortune to be directed to return to Japan to take an examination to enter the IJA university at Ichigaya. He was seen the next day riding his horse through Kokoda on his way to the coast.³⁶

In this first period of fighting, two Australian battalions (before the arrival of 3 Battalion) had failed to make much impression on one reinforced Japanese battalion with artillery support. This is not surprising. As Allen related, his subordinates could not form an estimate of Japanese strength, so were not aware that only on the front of 2/25 was there an opportunity for an Australian battalion to make progress against one weak company of Japanese. For unknown reasons 2/25 did not make a wholehearted effort. Regarding

³² Sublet *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 98.

³³ Sublet *Kokoda to the Sea*, pp. 98-100.

³⁴ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 8.

³⁵ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p. 22, 14/10/42.

³⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 142.

Australian casualties, as far as a comparison of these on the two fronts might support this point, it does so. On the Kagi track 2/25 lost 13 men in three days while at Myola ridge 47 men were battle casualties in the same period.

Japanese casualties for the period were 23 dead from 144 Regiment.³⁷ There may well have been a few casualties among other attached units which formed one sixth of the force but, as near as can be estimated, Japanese dead probably did not exceed 30. Working with our killed to wounded ratio total Japanese casualties for the first period of fighting were likely to have been around 60 against 15 Australians killed and 49 wounded.³⁸

THE SECOND PERIOD OF FIGHTING

Action now shifted to Templetons 2, five kilometres north of Myola Ridge and two and a half kilometres east of the first Japanese position on the Kagi-Templetons track. The Japanese position here, overlooking the creek crossing from the north, was the one Horii was determined to hold. The positions forward of this he was prepared to give up and now had done so. Those in the rear, at Eora village, were an insurance policy he did not expect to need.

The Japanese withdrawal from the outer positions was ordered by Horii on 14 October.³⁹ On the same day he advised all commands that the Stanley Shitai will be relieved.⁴⁰ Major Koiwai wrote that “the plan was to have the exhausted 144 Regiment go to the rear

³⁷ NIDS 302.9.H, Hohei Dai 144th Rentai Senki, (War record of 144 Regiment), appended list of regimental war dead. Also Azuma Shigetoshi list of 144 Regiment war dead p. 2, author’s collection.

³⁸ AWM 54 171/2/47 Australian Imperial Forces, Battle casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Imita to Wairopi. pp. 1-6.

³⁹ The main strength of 144 Regiment was assembled around Kokoda by 4/10/42. After 11 days rest there detachments were ordered forward to aid the Stanley detachment. ANL, Japanese monograph no. 34, p. 108.

⁴⁰ Copy of Japanese order in AWM 54 577/7/9, messages, sitreps relating to the period 1/10 to 10/11, Owen Stanleys.

and instead to have the spirited 41 Regiment take over their duties”.⁴¹ This redeployment, replacing the tired and hungry soldiers in the mountains with those who had now had two weeks rest and increased rations, would take more than a week to complete as 41 Regiment was spread between Oivi and Giruwa.

As a stopgap, when Tsukamoto went forward to take over command of the Stanley detachment he took the main body of his own battalion, his regimental headquarters and one 37mm gun from the regimental gun company.⁴² Forty-first Regiment were to be in position not later than 25 October and it can be concluded from this that Horii anticipated Templetons could easily be held by Tsukamoto’s force until then.⁴³ In this he was mistaken.

Counting the loss of 60 men, making an adjustment for the about 20 sick per day that the Stanley detachment were losing, and including the 300 new arrivals with Tsukamoto, the Japanese in the main Templetons 2 position were at very least 800 strong.⁴⁴

The Australians were reinforced to a much greater degree than their enemy. The newly arrived 16 Brigade under Brigadier John Lloyd was now at the front and Allen’s plan was to use them to replace the worn out 25 Brigade. This occurred during the fighting for the main Templetons position but as each new battalion arrived the one it replaced was not necessarily withdrawn. Seven battalions were available – in itself testimony to the improving Australian supply arrangements. There were 1,850 men in 16 Brigade and 1,520 men in the four battalions (including 3 Battalion) of 25 Brigade.

⁴¹ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 142.

⁴² AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, Lt. Hirano diary, p. 8.

⁴³ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 33, file of Nankai Shitai orders 16 Aug to 15 Oct, order A no. 127, p. 24.

⁴⁴ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, Lt Hirano diary, p. 8, Hirano relates that at 1600 on 14/10/42 the order suddenly came to depart for the Stanley detachment. The next day 1/144 and the RHQ departed at 0400 and camped at Isurava from 1315. On 16/10/42 they camped at Eora and reached the front line on 17/10/42. They almost immediately made a counterattack. On 19/10/42 he was present when the Australian mortars inflicted several casualties on RHQ.

The fighting power of this force was further increased by the eight 3 inch mortars and 4 Vickers guns now available. Ammunition was limited but these weapons were still a considerable enhancement to Australian strength. Now, as the Japanese had been doing to the Australians, the Australians could bombard a position before the infantry assaulted. On 18 October in the Templetons 2 position three Japanese were killed and seven wounded by “enemy trench mortars”.⁴⁵ The next day 144 RHQ was hit by mortar rounds and several more men were wounded.⁴⁶

The main Japanese Templetons position offered two strengths and one weakness. There was a view overlooking the crossing and the two battalion guns and one 37mm gun within the position could fire down along the line of the Australian approach.⁴⁷ Secondly, the one Japanese mountain gun present was deployed 2,000 metres further north outside the position so as to fire down the gorge of Eora Creek, also in the direction of Templetons crossing. The day that 2/33 Battalion arrived at the crossing, on 16 October, Japanese artillery observers called in the fire of this gun. It dropped 49 shells on 2/33 Battalion in 20 minutes inflicting one casualty.⁴⁸ The one weakness of the Templetons position was that it was itself overlooked from high ground running north south along the Japanese left (east). An Australian attack coming from this high ground was to be the decisive move of second Eora-Templetons.

In the period 17-20 October, five of Allen’s seven battalions were involved in the fighting, giving the Australians a four to one superiority or three to one if it is taken into account that a maximum of four battalions were engaged at any one moment. Handled

⁴⁵ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 24, p. 7.

⁴⁶ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, Lt. Hirano diary, p. 8.

⁴⁷ AWM 54 577/7/9, messages, situation reports relating to the period 1/10/42 to 10/11/42, Owen Stanleys, messages of 17/10/42- 23/10/42. There are several mentions here of a Japanese 37mm gun in action. While the Australians were usually confusing the 70mm battalion guns with mortars, of which the Japanese had none, the sound of the 37mm gun is distinctive. Japanese records do not make it clear where the main body of the 144 regimental gun company was at this time but it was not engaged at second Eora-Templetons and was probably at Kokoda.

⁴⁸ AWM 52 8/3/ 33, 2/33 Battalion war diary, 13/10/42.

passably well this was more than enough to break the Japanese position. From 17-19 October 2/33 and 3 Battalion bore the brunt of the fighting, though 2/25 and 2/2 were also involved. Two Japanese counterattacks were beaten off on 17 and 19 October. Then, on 20 October, 2/2 Battalion made a very successful and very costly attack that drove into the centre of the Japanese position, causing a withdrawal to Eora village.

The attack of 2/2 was a result of gradually working around to the high ground on the Japanese left. From here, the battalion attacked downhill into the Japanese as 2/1 Battalion attacked north directly along the main track.⁴⁹ The Japanese withdrawal that night was sufficiently well organised that they were able to get away all their artillery. That there was also some urgency is attested by Tsukamoto ordering the retreat to Eora village without first consulting Horii.⁵⁰

This second period of fighting cost the Japanese 28 dead from 144 Regiment and, as near as can be estimated, eight dead from other units.⁵¹ Assuming an equivalent number of wounded the Japanese casualties were around 72 against the Australian loss of 54 dead and 68 wounded. This, the first time in the campaign the Australian infantry closed with a well defended Japanese position and captured it outright, was also the third time in the campaign, after Isurava and first Eora-Templetons, that the attacker's casualties were so much higher than those of the defender. This pattern was to be repeated at Eora village.

Another feature worth noting here is that, for the first time since the controversy over the morale of 1/144 at Isurava, there appears a couple of mentions in Japanese diaries of a similar problem. Of 5 Company of 2/144, another company commander observed that it "lacks fighting spirit."⁵² This company had suffered more casualties than any other in the

⁴⁹ AWM 54 577/7/9, messages, situation reports relating to the period 1/10/42 to 10/11/42, Owen Stanleys, see messages of 17/10/42-20/10/42.

⁵⁰ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 143.

⁵¹ NIDS 302.9.H, Hohei Dai 144th Rentai Senki, (War record of 144 Regiment), appended list of regimental war dead.

⁵² AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 29, p. 66.

battalion, having lost half of its men in one day at Efogi. Another company commander noted an additional sign of falling Japanese morale; “men under the rank of NCO, especially orderlies, are getting disrespectful”.⁵³ A reason for the drop in morale was stated by the regimental historian of 144 who said that when the announcement was made that 38 Division was arriving and that the regiment would soon be on their way towards Port Moresby once more “the situation improved immediately, and the desire to take Port Moresby blazed up and there were many shouts of joy and exultation”. Then, a week later, when the decision was countermanded, “the morale of the Stanley Force dropped alarmingly”.⁵⁴ As the Australians had recently learned, retreat under enemy pressure by itself lowers morale just as advancing driving the enemy back raises it. A problem with Australian morale after the stand at Isurava, certainly at Efogi and Ioribaiwa, is observable. From the middle of October there are signs the Stanley detachment, though not the Nankai Shitai in general, may have been suffering from a similar problem.

THE THIRD PERIOD OF FIGHTING

It will be recalled that on 15 October, Horii ordered Tsukamoto to Templetons with the main body of his battalion. This was a temporary measure while the relief of 144 Regiment with 41 Regiment was organised. On the night of 20 October, when Horii learned of the sudden collapse of the Templetons position as a result of the attack of 2/2 Battalion, a new rush of orders went out, completely changing the plan.

Horii ordered everything he could lay his hands on to march immediately to the Eora village position. The complete dislocation of Japanese plans caused by the attack of the 2/2 Battalion can be observed here. The reinforcements shown in the chart below were drawn from units resting dispersed along the Mambare valley so there was no time to gather formations properly. Rather the fit men in any locale were placed under any

⁵³ AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 29, p. 63. This officer further complained to his diary that he woke up at 0400 “and made a fire but not one man got up to assist me. Everyone is so egotistical.”

⁵⁴ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 17.

officer available and marched immediately to Eora. Some 495 men were fed into the battle as they arrived in the period 22-27 October.

STANLEY DETACHMENT REINFORCEMENTS		
Date of arrival	Unit	strength
22 October	3/144 detachment	120 ⁵⁵
25 October	3/144 detachment	70
26 October	2/41 detachment	92 ⁵⁶
26 October	55 Engineer Regiment, platoon	30
26 October	2 Wireless section	24
26 October	55 Division field ambulance, platoon	22
26 October	55 Mountain artillery regiment, 1 Company	120 ⁵⁷
27 October	Lt. Okamoto's detachment	10 ⁵⁸

There was a constant drain of sick men from both armies which makes it difficult to total their strengths. Making an allowance for this, and for casualties since 12 October when the Australians first came up against the Eora defences, on 22 October there were probably, adding 120 Japanese who arrived that day, close to 700 Japanese within the Eora village position. By 27 October an additional 375 men had arrived.

Against this the Australians had the same seven battalions in two brigade groups. Of these, the strongest and most recently arrived was 16 Brigade. The battalions, 2/1, 2/2 and 2/3, were the first battalions raised in the 2nd AIF in 1939. They also had the greatest experience of battle and the benefit of several months jungle training in Ceylon on the way back from the Middle East. It would not be unreasonable to say they were possibly the highest quality Australian infantry encountered by the Japanese thus far. The fight at

⁵⁵ AWM 55 3/3 current translations, no. 29, p. 67.

⁵⁶ NIDS Nanto higashi New Guinea, 225, pp. 20-21. Hohei dai 41 Rentai New Guinea Senkyo Houkou, (War reports of 41 Regiment in New Guinea), pp.20-21.

⁵⁷ AWM 54 577/7/9, messages, situation reports relating to the period 1/10/42 to 10/11/42, Owen Stanleys, see messages of 17/10/42-20/10/42. See message of 22/10/42.

⁵⁸ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 82.

Eora crossing was to be 'their show'. Lloyd's 16 Brigade with detachments from a field company, divisional and medical units can be considered the engaged force here. There were 1,770 infantry in the three battalions and with Bde HQ and attached units Lloyd had about 2,100 in the fight. This was thrice the number of the defenders as this phase of the fighting began and closer to twice the defenders numbers as it ended.⁵⁹

The third period of fighting in the second Eora-Templetons action took place in the vicinity of Eora Creek village. A small element of Nankai Shitai made a brief stand on the ridge overlooking, from the south, the wartime location of the village. They then retreated to prepared defences north of the village and creek crossing.

This phase of the action is related in detail in official and non official works on the campaign.⁶⁰ What has been missed in all these otherwise satisfactory accounts is that Eora, far from being the best prepared and most heavily defended position on the track, was at first a scene of desperation for the Nankai Shitai. It was a well prepared position, in a way too well prepared. The position was designed for at least twice the force that was available to defend it.

Horii had assumed that, if he ever needed to use the Eora crossing position, he would have plenty of time to bring up sufficient units to fill it. However, the attack of 2/2 Battalion in breaking the Templetons position was completely unexpected and resulted in a desperate effort to rush reinforcements to hold Eora. Horii had been force to cash in his insurance policy and it did not pay as well as he expected.

⁵⁹ For strengths and locations of units see AWM 52 1/5/51, Headquarters New Guinea Force, G branch war diary 31/10/42. Apart from infantry battalions and their brigade headquarters 7 Division had in forward areas the Divisional headquarters, the 2/5 and 2/6 Field Companies, Chaforce, 2/4 Field ambulance, 14 Field Ambulance, 2/55 Light Aid Detachment and and Army Service Corps detachment. Numbers for these detachments are not always obtainable.

Marshall J. *Nulli Secundus Log. 2/2 Australian infantry battalion, AIF, 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion Association*, Sydney, 1946. p. 218.

McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, p. 276 and p. 300.

⁶⁰ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, pp. 295-308.

Tsukamoto placed 2/144 forward in the centre at Eora, covering the creek crossing. On its flanks were the other two battalions, 1/144 holding the Japanese left close in behind 2/144 and 3/144 some distance behind it to the Japanese right. This battalion held the high ground where the Japanese artillery was deployed; two battalion guns and one, later two, mountain guns.⁶¹

This high ground was the key to the position as artillery there could place direct fire on the possible Australian approaches. Unfortunately it was also much too far from the creek crossing which 1/144 held. Consequently, there was a gap of 600 metres between 1/144 and 2/144 down by the creek and 3/144 defending the artillery on the high ground.⁶² In order to benefit from the advantages offered by the artillery position, the ground to be held was really too large for the force present. As a result, in the centre of the position there was a large gap into which the enemy could intrude.

From 22 to 24 October, Lloyd's 16 Brigade, spurred on by Allen who was hearing threatening noises from Blamey to get a move along, made a frontal assault on the Eora crossing position. Cullen's 2/1 Battalion, at great cost from the Japanese artillery, got across Eora creek and penetrated a short way into the ground held by 2/144 but was stopped as they attempted to climb to the high ground north of Eora village.⁶³

Both the map of the 3/144 Battalion record and the one in McCarthy's *South west Pacific area-first year*, which all Australian studies have followed, do not properly represent the

⁶¹ For the deployment of Japanese infantry and artillery in the main Eora position see NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 74.

AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 16.

AWM 55 3 / 5, current translations no. 52, p. 35.

The 37mm gun from Templetons was also probably present.

⁶² Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 145.

⁶³ Paul Cullen, Major General, ex battalion commander of 2/1 Battalion, record of interview with author, Marulan, NSW, 4/4/2003.

locations of either side.⁶⁴ If 2/1 Battalion had advanced as far as is shown on McCarthy's map it would have completely occupied the position held by 2/144. As this battalion held most of its ground until the Japanese withdrawal, it seems 2/1 cannot have advanced as far as is shown.

Nor did the Australians enter the gap in the Japanese lines in any strength. The 3/144 history states that once, on 24 October, an Australian patrol did enter the gap between 3/144 and 2/144 but it was driven out.⁶⁵ Towards the end of the fight a 92 man detachment of 2/41 arrived to fill the gap, which it could only do by holding a position in the centre of the gap and sending out regular patrols towards 3/144 and 1/144.⁶⁶ A second time, on the last day of the fight, an Australian patrol again approached the gap in the Japanese centre.⁶⁷ What is clear is that Lloyd had no knowledge of the gap in the Japanese centre and felt his brigade had been halted in its frontal attack so he sought another solution. Lloyd brought 2/2 alongside the right of 2/1 and committed 2/3 Battalion around the Australian left. Swinging wide around the flank this last attack, on 28 October, broke into 3/144 battalion's position on the high ground north of the crossing where the Japanese artillery had been massed.

From the Australian perspective, the 2/3 attack demolished the Japanese defences and they fled the field. From the Japanese perspective the story was somewhat different and it is necessary to look at a broader picture to understand this difference. Again, the long shadow of Guadalcanal lay over Papua. The disaster to Kawaguchi there resulted in Hyakutake ordering Horii to, in the midst of the Eora fighting, withdraw to the Kumusi River. Horii walked up from Kokoda to the Eora position on 25 October and ordered

⁶⁴ NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 82 and McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, p. 288.

⁶⁵ NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p. 82 and McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, p. 76.

⁶⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 145.

⁶⁷ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 146.

Tsukamoto to withdraw from there on 28 October, the same day as the final Australian attack took place.⁶⁸

On 27 October Japanese wounded, sick and the non-combat units were withdrawn. The next day, the artillery left early and by 2000 all infantry were to have begun to leave.⁶⁹ The withdrawal of the battalions by the creek, 1/144 and 2/144, was successful though they were under renewed pressure by 2/1 and 2/2 Battalions but 3/144 on the high ground was at this time closely engaged with 2/3 Battalion. Australian accounts provide strong evidence that the Japanese battalion was routed off the position and the Australian version seems likely to be correct as 3/144 was under the huge disadvantage of being attacked while withdrawing.

Preliminary moves towards withdrawal were begun by 3/144 around midday and when the Australians developed their attack the battalion was caught out of position and dispersed. The battalion history of 3/144 does not concede this. It claims that the battalion was caught badly disposed, part of it already on its way down the hill to the rendezvous point. Though at one point it was almost surrounded, the battalion account is that it fought off the Australian attack. The facts do not support this interpretation as only Kuwada, the battalion commander, his headquarters and the machine gun company made the rendezvous at the foot of the hill on the track.⁷⁰ The three infantry companies were scattered and survivors found their way out by moving through the jungle to the north.⁷¹

⁶⁸ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p. 6.

⁶⁹ AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 29, p. 68. On 28/10/42 the artillery was ordered to withdraw at 0900, all preparations for withdrawal were to be complete by 1900 and the withdrawal was to commence at 2210.

⁷⁰ See McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 303 for an Australian account of the defeat of 3/144. Japanese accounts are in NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment). p. 78 and Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), pp. 148-149.

⁷¹ ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 37, pp. 19-20.

The battalion was reunited at Isurava having lost 44 killed and 15 wounded out of a total engaged of 190 men.⁷²

CASUALTIES

From 22 to 29 October the Australians lost 72 killed and 154 wounded.⁷³ The highest Japanese statement for their total killed is 72 and the lowest 56.⁷⁴ As wounded are estimated at one to one, the total Japanese casualties were probably between 124 and 144 against the Australian's 226. That half of the Japanese dead were lost on the last day of fighting, against seven Australians on this day, suggests that, caught in the midst of a withdrawal, the Japanese suffered accordingly.

That two thirds of the Australian casualties were lost in the first frontal attack period of 22-24 October, against a much smaller number of Japanese casualties, shows that this first phase of the Australian attack was far from a success. Forty-three Australians were killed at this time against probably 23 Japanese. All accounts record that the battalion commanders involved in the first frontal attack, Cullen and Stevenson, in the words of the official history "did not like the plan much".⁷⁵ Cullen's much later account paints a grimmer picture than this, one where insubordinate, heated and foul words were exchanged with Lloyd but the attack went ahead anyway.⁷⁶

⁷² NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), chart one, p. 84.

⁷³ AWM 54 171/2/47 Australian Imperial Forces, Battle casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Imita to Wairopi. pp. 2-6.

⁷⁴ Japanese battle casualties are drawn from NIDS Nanto higashi New Guinea, 225, Hohei dai 41 Rentai New Guinea Senkyo Houkou, (War reports of 41 Regiment in New Guinea), p. 25.
NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Shoho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), chart one, p. 84.
Azuma Shigetoshi, record of war dead of 144 Regiment, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁵ McCarthy, *South west Pacific area-first year*, p. 290.

⁷⁶ Paul Cullen, Major-General, ex battalion commander of 2/1 Battalion, record of interview with author, Marulan, NSW, 4/4/2003.

Adding together the casualties for the whole of second Eora-Templeton's action we find that the Australians took 412 battle casualties against about 244 Japanese. Our estimate of one to one Japanese killed to wounded in the latter half of the campaign is broadly supported by the number of wounded admitted to hospitals, about 145 for the period under discussion.⁷⁷ Only one member of 41 Regiment was a casualty at Eora and Azuma Shigetoshi calculated 132 Japanese from 144 Regiment died in the period 12-29 October. This is ten more than the number given here but includes deaths to disease, air attack and accident.⁷⁸ Even if our estimates of Japanese battle casualties are slightly low and if wounded were higher there is still a significant difference between Japanese and Australian casualties.

DISCUSSION

Eora creek was an Australian victory but the degree of success should not be exaggerated. No Japanese guns were lost, the mass of the Japanese force, already withdrawing, managed to get away and it was the Australians who lost by far the larger number of men.⁷⁹ Earlier we have commented on the failure of the Nankai Shitai at Isurava and first Eora-Templeton's to achieve their aim, the destruction of the enemy. At Efogi they came nearest this. If the same standard were applied to the Eora village phase of this action then the Australians also fell short. Outnumbering the enemy at least by two to one they defeated, but did not destroy, their opponent.

Allen, having won a victory, was famously sacked at the end of Eora. In the light of Japanese evidence the justice of this might be re-considered. On 17 October Allen was informed by Blamey, who was quoting MacArthur, that his light casualties indicated no

⁷⁷ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, pp. 60 and 75. See also chart 9. In all 245 wounded received medical attention in the month of October which suggests that casualties to air attack were on the increase, though probably not as high as 100 for the month.

⁷⁸ Azuma shigetoshi list of 144 Regiment war dead, in author's collection, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁹ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publication no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p. 7. Here the withdrawal from Eora was presented as generally successful.

serious effort was being made to advance. There is a school of thought that the proportion of casualties lost does not say much about the results of a battle but Pyrrus of Epirus would disagree – a victory while taking as many or more losses than the enemy is a lesser victory than one where the enemy is both defeated and his casualties are great.⁸⁰

Allen replied to Blamey that 25 Brigade, since first contact with the Japanese, had taken 183 battle casualties but as Sublet, no fan of Allen, points out - more than half of these were from the defeat at Ioribaiwa in mid September.⁸¹ The official battle casualty records bear out Sublet's criticism. Since Allen's advance commenced, just 87 casualties had resulted to 17 October.⁸² What is missing from the long post war discussion of the rights and wrongs of Allen's departure is that his advance was very slow *before* he had any contact with the Japanese. From 26 September when the advance commenced to 12 and 13 October when the enemy were contacted again by the main bodies of 2/25 on the Kagi track and 2/33 on the main track, there was almost no contact with the enemy. In seventeen days his men advanced forty kilometres, a little better than 2 kilometres a day, all unopposed.

Comparing this to the Japanese rate of advance, Allen's men went forward at the same rate achieved by Yazawa in early September but Yazawa was fighting all the way. Yazawa thought that to go too fast would be too expensive in men. Horii's view was it was better to advance rapidly and pay the higher cost. On 5 September he replaced Yazawa with Kusunose who advanced eight kilometres a day over the next eight days administering a defeat to the Australians at Efogi along the way. The casualties suffered by Yazawa while trying to be cautious were in any case high. He lost 105 men in the period compared with 75 Australians. When Kusunose took over he managed to advance quickly while not losing any more men than the Australians. Against this Allen's two kilometres a day, against no opposition at all and with better supply, looks unsatisfactory.

⁸⁰ Tsouris, P. *The Greenhill Dictionary of military quotations*, Greenhill Books, London, 2000, p. 503.

⁸¹ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p9. 99-100.

⁸² Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 100 and AWM 54 171/2/47, Australian Imperial Forces, Battle casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Imita to Wairopi. pp. 2-6. See also Braga, S. *Kokoda commander*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2004.

A second criticism of Allen came on 26 October when Blamey said "...progress has been negligible against an enemy much fewer in number... in spite of your superior strength enemy appears to be able to delay advance at will".⁸³ This point too has some validity. Allen was able to place not less than two and sometimes four Australians into the fight for every one Japanese defender. The Australians could have had even more men engaged at Eora and this touches on the third criticism. Allen had seven battalions available but used only one brigade, three battalions, at the sharp end. His defence of this was that no more than this force could be supplied that far forward from Myola and that he wanted a reserve of 21 days of food built up there. He also said he had to keep a battalion at Kagi track junction in case of a Japanese counterattack though there. This last point at least finds Japanese sources in support of Allen. They did indeed plan to counterattack as soon as they possibly could.

If the Australians were to be husbanded rather than pushed to their limits then Allen's supply points have some validity. It was however the opposite of what his superiors wanted. Blamey said that the Australians were fresher than the Japanese and that the Australian supply problem could hardly be worse than the Japanese. This is the nub. Allen's superiors wanted the troops pushed harder even if it meant short rations. They saw that, under pressure, the outnumbered Japanese, already in worse circumstances than the Australians, would succumb first. A rapid advance was essential for like the Japanese they were responding to events at Guadalcanal.

While the Japanese were devoting all their resources there, at Guadalcanal, it was important to take as much advantage from this in Papua as possible. If there was a chance to get to Giruwa before the Japanese could reinforce it, then Allen's superiors were prepared to run risks at Eora-Templetons. In such a circumstance a subordinate running the battle and who is unwilling to take those risks, becomes a liability.

⁸³ AWM 3drl /6643, Blamey papers, series 2, wallet 47 of 141, Blamey to Allen, 26/10/42.

The explanation offered by Rowell in a letter to Gavin Long covers most of these points and concludes that the relief of Allen was the correct thing to do:

“The rate of progress of 7 Division was a matter of concern to TAB [Blamey] and me... Allen wouldn't go forward until he had 21 Days supply in reserve... but he just would not see that owing to the terrain and the shortage of carriers, the building up of reserves at any one spot tended to hamper the advance we all wanted and not expedite it.

“For first of all it took some time to build up the reserves and then after they had been built up, they could only be of use if carried forwards as the troops advanced. Left behind they were of course useless. And with the shortage of carriers they could only be carried forwards by the troops themselves.

“What NGF wanted to do was to keep dropping as far forwards as possible, so as to reduce the problem of carrying and making as many of the fighting troops available for battle as possible. NGF did not want the supply situation to enforce the siting of one bde defensively in the rear and yet it was just this very thing that Allen [did]. This prevented full pressure being exerted on the enemy and necessarily slowed down the progress of the advance... Paragraph 4 [concerning the Kagi track junction battalion] of Allen's signal is significant, it shows the type of commander he was. Not only was he saying that he could not press on without reserves, but he was worrying about a counterthrust by the Japs... Progress had been slow when everyone agreed the greatest possible speed was necessary. This being so, something had to be done about it by TAB or NGF [Herring]. It was our business to speed things up if we could. Pressure clearly had to be put on to the responsible commander and that was Allen...”⁸⁴

That the real reason for the relief of Allen was he was not acting aggressively enough nor pushing his men as hard as his superiors wanted is summed up in the conclusion of Rowell's letter. “It is so easy to... worry about all the things that might go wrong, to

⁸⁴ AWM 67, 3/167, pt 2. Rowell letter to Gavin Long, 1957, p. 10-13.

exaggerate ones own weaknesses and the enemy's strength, to take counsel of one's fears in other words. This way lays timidity, bold action is almost necessarily stultified... and may I add that it's a poor compliment to the Australian fighting man that he can't be pushed beyond a certain limit..."⁸⁵

A complaint from Allen that may have some justification was his inquiry as to why the advance from Milne Bay along the coast to Giruwa was not being pressed. Hatforce, mainly 2/10 Battalion, had flown into Wanigela on 5 October. On 14 October Harding told Sutherland that they should push on to Giruwa quickly as he expected easy pickings there.⁸⁶ By 16 October, the American 128 Regiment was also present and its advanced elements reached Pongani on 21 October. From that point, the advance slowed and no assistance to Allen was provided by pressure being placed on Giruwa. Oddly the Japanese were completely unaware of the Allied forces in the Wanigela-Pongani area until 15 November.

The answer to Allen's inquiry is likely to be that SWP HQ and LHQ were both still wary of their own not unlimited supply capacity and of Japanese seapower. On 5 October, Blamey wrote to MacArthur that the supply capacity forbade advances on all fronts so priority would be given to Allen's 7 Division.⁸⁷ Two days later he assured MacArthur that no undue risk would be run with the coastal move. "We are pressing on with two strings to our bow, one over the hills via Kokoda and one along the coast via Wanigela and we will use every possible means to get to Buna in the shortest time that conditions permit.... A larger force [at Wanigela is] unwise owing to the difficulties of supply and the possibility of isolation should the enemy carry out a successful operation against Milne Bay.... I don't intend to make foolhardy advances."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ AWM 67 3/167, pt 2, Rowell letter to Gavin Long, 1957, p. 10-13.

⁸⁶ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, pp. 278-279.

⁸⁷ AWM 54 577/6/3, messages and reports, Blamey to MacArthur, 5/10/42.

⁸⁸ AWM 54 577/6/3, messages and reports, Blamey to MacArthur, 7/10/42.

Those who believe Allen was unfairly dismissed on the point of victory also miss the fact that the Japanese were withdrawing from Eora and that being caught in the midst of this must have substantially contributed to their defeat. Had Tsukamoto been ordered to hold on at Eora he might have succeeded in doing just that. If this is so then Allen may have only won, in the event, because the enemy chose to retreat.

Further, a very good opportunity was presented to Maroubra Force a week earlier on 20 October when the Japanese defences at Templeton's were torn asunder. There was a window of opportunity from 21-25 October to perhaps overcome the Eora defences before more Japanese arrived. After hasty and ill organised Japanese reinforcements were rushed to Eora, by 26-27 October, the Japanese had stabilised their position. Koiwai, who arrived on 26 October, wrote that "considering the enemy's movements the situation at the front did not seem to be as pressing as reported... I thought we could hold on without any problem...."⁸⁹ As Horii in Septemer removed Yazawa from the attack (though he did not sack him) for not thrusting hard enough, so Allen's superiors were probably justified in removing him for the same reason.

⁸⁹ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 145.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

OIVI-GORARI.

CHAPTER 11 - OIVI-GORARI, 4-13 NOVEMBER

It is not always clear who can be said to have won a battle. It depends on what each commander was trying to do, what he managed to achieve and how many men he lost doing it.

In the previous chapter it was argued that Eora-Templetons 2 began as a position the Japanese were determined to hold for a future advance but became, owing to external circumstances, a rearguard. As a rearguard it could almost, but not quite, be looked upon as a modest success. The Australians were delayed and the defending force escaped largely intact (except for 3/144) while inflicting many more casualties than it suffered. One clear marker that a serious defeat has been suffered is the loss of artillery pieces to the enemy. In no battle so far, including Eora, had this occurred to the Japanese but at Oivi-Gorari the Nankai Shitai, for once assembling all 15 of its guns, lost every one of them.¹ This and other considerations mark it out as a very great disaster for the Nankai Shitai, on a par with what happened to Kawaguchi's men at Edson's Ridge at Guadalcanal. Even for the optimists in the Nankai Shitai and Rabaul it clearly marked the end of Japanese prospects for taking Port Moresby.

On the collapse of the Eora position the question became, where would the Nankai Shitai next make a stand? The most important piece of real estate was the Kokoda airstrip. Kokoda itself was not an option for a defensive position as it was too close to Eora for reinforcements to come from the coast before the Australians arrived and it could be bypassed along the Alola or Deniki tracks leading to Oivi and beyond. The next position which offered good ground, and difficult ground on the flank if the enemy wanted to go there, was Oivi. Fifteen kilometres east of Oivi was the Kumusi River, the next possible choice.

¹ One 75mm gun of 55 MAR was left at Giruwa early in the campaign. Apart from the guns of 20 MAR which arrived in late November this was the only Nankai Shitai artillery that survived Oivi-Gorari.

There has been confusion in Australian accounts as to why Horii stood at Oivi but the reason it is not so hard to fathom.² It is that Hyakutake ordered the Nankai Shitai to stand as far forward as it reasonably could. There must have been some discussion about where this should be but no record of that is available. However on 28 October there is a record of Horii sending a message to 17th Army saying that he was withdrawing and requesting confirmation that he should stop at Oivi as presumably had been previously ordered.³

The 17th Army HQ was at this time moving to Guadalcanal as a part of command re-arrangements. Hyakutake had already gone but Miyazaki, the chief of staff, did not leave until 29 October. He sent back a message to Horii confirming that he was to stand at Papaki.⁴ He did not mean precisely *at* Papaki as this is the general term for the crossing of the Kumusi River used by the Japanese just as the Australians might say ‘in the Wairopi area.’

The Japanese, at one time or another, built six bridges at different places and used five fords along a seven kilometre section of the Kumusi from north of Wairopi to south of Asisi. Papaki was on the western bank, a kilometre from the river in a central position in relation to all the crossings. In addition, three kilometres north west of Papaki was Ilimo, an important supply dump. The reluctance to abandon food and ammunition dumps in the Gorari-Ilimo area played a part in the decision. On 26 October, when Horii was planning the retreat from Eora, he specifically ordered that the contents of the dumps about Ilimo and Gorari were not to move to the rear.⁵ What Miyazaki was saying was, hold a

² “Why Horii chose to contest Vasey’s advance in this area is hard to fathom.” See Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 419.

³ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p. 6.

⁴ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 198-199.

⁵ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p 6.

bridgehead west of the river far enough forward that the supply dumps would be protected.⁶

To hold a bridgehead is also an indicator of an intent to renew the offensive at some future point - or at very least to retain the option to do so. Major Koiwai told another officer at the time that “the plan is to hold out here until the situation improves.”⁷ At the end of October, the 17th Army plan was still what it had been in early September. To throw everything at Guadalcanal, solve that problem then reinforce Papua. Now that 17th Army was taking over Guadalcanal (which was why Hyautake had left Rabaul for there), there was to be a new army. This, the 18th Army, would deal with New Guinea and 8th Area Army placed over both 18th and 17th armies. This arrangement had not been altered.

We have seen that in September and October it was 17th Army’s hope that the Kokoda track could be held as far forward as Templetons. That was not possible but it was still regarded as desirable to hold as far forward as was practical. In any case the Kumusi was the next defensible location and river lines are poorer defensive features than is usually thought. The problem with defending a river is the defender has to extend his front or the enemy will cross the obstacle up or downriver from him. It would have been enough to force the Australians to cross south of Asisi or well north of Wairopi, however, this is a ten kilometre front, impossibly long for the 2,000 or so Japanese infantry now available. In other words, the cost of extracting a benefit from the obstacle was to disperse the force - a bad state to be in if a concentrated enemy did manage to cross at some point. It also decreases the prospects for a future offensive as the river then becomes an obstacle to the erstwhile defender’s renewed advance.

To sum up, if it is asked why Horii did not fall back to the line of the Kumusi then the answer is in three parts: First, because Horii was ordered not to fall back that far; second,

⁶ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 198-199.

⁷ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 162. Koiwai also wrote “If things go wrong, [at Oivi] the whole detachment will be surrounded by the enemy like a rat in a trap.”

the supply dumps of Oivi, Gorari, Ilimo and Papaki would have to be abandoned and third because the Kumusi was not really as good a defensive position as is generally imagined.

Why then did Horii deploy so far forward from Papaki and the river? That too is not a mystery. Papaki is flat, the streams do not run the right way so it had little to offer as a defensive position.⁸ Oivi was the only good defensive position along the track between Kokoda and the Kumusi crossings. Koiwai described it as having a steep slope to its front, suitable gun positions and offering “all the desirable defensive advantages”.⁹

This much is obvious to any observer approaching it from the west. Proceeding along the route from Kokoda to the sea, the Ajule Kajali Range runs parallel to the road in the north and Hydrographers Range runs parallel to the south of the road. The Oivi area is a link of high ground between the two. It is a watershed. The Mambare River runs away from it west through Kokoda and the Oivi creek runs east from it to feed the Kumusi. After the Kumusi, the northern range curves away north east, making Oivi the location with the shortest front, five kilometres, and with rough ground to the flanks, that can be found between Kokoda and the sea. Chester Wilmot saw another advantage of the Oivi heights. Thick timber and jungle there concealed the observer there while thinner coverage on the lower ground in front of it aided his observations.¹⁰

Oivi did have two weaknesses. The northern and southern ranges are really too far apart and the whole distance could not be closely defended. As the Oivi heights are closer to the northern range there is a gap of lower ground on its southern side, easier to transverse than the mountains and with a track leading into the Japanese rear. The second weakness

⁸ Streams, to be included usefully in a defensive position, should preferably run parallel to the front line which they did not do west of the Kumusi. On pp. 9-10 of Yoshihara T. *Southern Cross, An account of the Eastern New Guinea campaign*, Yoshihara, with the Nankai Shitai, stated that Horii lost at Oivi-Gorari because he did not stand at Papaki but Yoshihara, a journalist not a soldier, takes no account of the poor potential for Papaki as a defensive position.

⁹ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 159.

¹⁰ MacDonald, *Chester Wilmot Reports*, p. 279.

was it was further from the Kumusi crossing than would have been desirable. Yet again it is a 'Potts at Efogi' dilemma. The position was too large for the force holding it.

Despite these limitations, the choice of Oivi-Gorari was a fair one. It must be remembered that no one in the Nankai Shitai was as yet aware that the Allied coastal advance from Milne Bay was closing on Giruwa from the south, rendering any position outside the defences at Giruwa base strategically redundant. Miyazaki would not have ordered a stand in the Papaki vicinity had he been aware of this. That the Allies were at Pongani, closer to Giruwa than Oivi, was not discovered until 15 November, five days after the retreat from Oivi-Gorari began.¹¹

Within the defences, which had been prepared in late October in case of need, Horii placed his freshest troops, 41 Regiment, on the Oivi heights.¹² As the rearguard of the whole force, 1/144 was placed to the west of Oivi and was to fall back through the Oivi defences delaying the Australian advance from Kokoda. As it arrived within 41 Regiment's position 1/144 came under Yazawa's command. Some distance to the rear, to provide a link with the Kumusi crossings as well as to act as a reserve, was the main body of 144 Regiment at Gorari. It could march west and reinforce 41 Regiment or southwest to block the track that ran parallel to the main track and led to the Kumusi - the track the Australians later used. This track was well known to the Japanese, who had considered it as an alternate supply route but rejected it as being too rough for that purpose.

FORCES ENGAGED

By 2 November the Nankai Shitai had reorganised. The 144 Regiment was no longer known as Kusunose Butai as a new regimental commander arrived from Rabaul. He was Colonel Yamamoto Shigekagi. At the time the Australians believed the 'Yamamoto

¹¹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 203.

¹² NIDS, Nanto Zenpan 102, Daitoa senso minami taiheiyo nomen ni okeru sento (Battles in the south Pacific area in the greater east asia war), map of Oivi, npn.

Butai' indicated fresh troops had arrived and this confusion has sometimes been repeated in postwar studies. In fact, reinforcements, and the first replacements either infantry regiment had seen for a year, did arrive on 2 November and 17 November but none took part in the action at Oivi-Gorari.¹³

The 700 men who arrived on 2 November were, under Colonel Murase, massed east of the Kumusi in case the Australians did attempt to cross the river in the Japanese rear. Other changes were made. The Stanley detachment and the temporary transport unit were dissolved. All the men taken from 41 Regiment for the temporary transport unit in August were returned to their regiment but not necessarily to their own battalions. The only battalion of the regiment which had been in battle, 2/41, was weaker than the other two with 300 men. The battalion which had spent all its time in Papua defending Giruwa, 3/41, had 400 men.¹⁴ The third battalion, 1/41, had 385 men. Twelve days before the fighting at Oivi, Colonel Yazawa submitted to Lt Colonel Tomita his own estimate of his regiment's strength for supply purposes.

He had with him, on the coast, regimental headquarters, the regimental signals company, five infantry companies from 2/41 and 3/41, one machine gun company, a battalion gun platoon and one attached engineer company. The total strength of this force was 1,100 men.¹⁵ The attached engineer company was then about 200 strong so, deducting this while adding the 385 men of 1/41 and the 92 man detachment of 2/41 which had fought at Eora (where it lost one man) and rejoined the regiment at Oivi, there were 1,377 members of the regiment present. The 80 men in 11 Company of 3/41 were to stay guarding the beach but the rest, about 1,300 men, were ordered to advance across the Kumusi.¹⁶ Once there, an infantry company was placed to cover the Kumusi crossings.

¹³ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, pp. 31-32.

¹⁴ Koiwai, *Nyuginea Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 163.

¹⁵ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 30, Col. Yazawa to Lt. Col Tomita. 21/10/42, p. 34.

¹⁶ NIDS, *higashi nyuginea 156, Daiichiji Nyuginea sen rentai sento kodo gaiyo hohei dai 41 rentai* (Battles of the 41st Regiment in New Guinea), pp. 145-146.

Another was placed at Ilimo to provide protection for Horii's headquarters.¹⁷ The rest went forward to Oivi to the prepared trenches on the heights west of the village.¹⁸

Turning now to the other Nankai Shitai infantry regiment a number of sources give 144 Regiment 891 men, or very close to that number, present in early November. This is supported by battalion strengths given in various Japanese or captured documents which had 1/144 at 182 men, 2/144 at 180 and 3/144 at 275.¹⁹ Adding the RHQ, gun company, signals company and medical detachment, proportionally reduced, the number 891 seems right. For the first time in the campaign, all six infantry battalions of the Nankai Shitai were assembled on one battlefield. Also present was the whole of the mountain artillery and a second company of engineers attached to 144 Regiment. Adding Nankai Shitai HQ with the usual accompaniment of minor detachments the total Japanese force engaged at Oivi-Gorari can hardly have been less than 2,800 men. In a postwar interview of senior officers who had served in 17 Army Rabaul, Tanaka, Kato and Adachi thought that there were about 2,500 Japanese engaged at Oivi-Gorari but this is probably too low.²⁰ At last the Nankai Shitai was able to do what Australian accounts imagine it was doing all along – bringing all its fighting troops to the battle.

The Australian 7 Division had seven infantry battalions available. All Australian battalions had been in the mountains for from one to two months and had been reduced to two thirds strength. The infantry battalion strengths as Oivi–Gorari began were as follows.

¹⁷ AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 82, p 2.

¹⁸ AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 82, p 2.

¹⁹ For Japanese unit strength at the time of Oivi-Gorari see AWM 55 3/1, current translations no 4, p. 40 and AWM 54 577/7/2 report on operations in New Guinea, information gained on the enemy. AWM 55 3/3 current translations, no. 29, p. 69. AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary August-September 1942, captured Japanese documents in appendix E.

²⁰ AWM 67 11/29, Gavin Long papers, interviews with Japanese officers, p. 2.

MAROUBRA FORCE INFANTRY AT OIVI-GORARI	
2/33 Battalion	449
2/31 Battalion	450
2/25 Battalion	426
3 Battalion	372
2/1 Battalion	425
2/2 Battalion	450
2/3 Battalion	437 ²¹

There were a total of 3,009 men in the infantry battalions against 1,800 Japanese in their infantry battalions. Adding MFHQ, 7 Division staff and signals, brigade staffs, guard platoons, detachments of 14 FA and 2/4 FA, a field company, there were about 3,700 Australians engaged at Oivi-Gorari.²² Major General George Vasey, who had taken over 7 Australian Division at the end of October so was now Maroubra Force commander, was about to attack a strong enemy position without much of a superiority in numbers.

Against the 15 Japanese guns and about 30 medium machine guns, the Australians now had some reasonable fire support with ten Vickers medium machine guns and ten three inch mortars whose capabilities were much enhanced by the proximity of Kokoda strip.²³

²¹ For Australians engaged at Oivi-Gorari see
 AWM 54 577/7/29, report on operations in New Guinea, serial 16.
 Walker A. *The Island Campaigns* (medical) vol. 3, series 5, Australia in the war of 1939-1945, Canberra, Australian War Memorial. 1957. p 73.
 AWM 52 8/3/39, 3 Battalion war dairy 6/11/42.
 AWM 52 8/3/33, 2/33 Battalion war diary, 2/11/42-11/11/42.
 7 Div adjutant and QM general branch war diary March-December 1942,
 present with 7 Division was
 2/5 field company, 185 men.
 12 guard platoon, 47 men.
 2/4 field ambulance, 163 men.
 2/44 Light Aid Detachment, 14.
 Provost detachment, 16.
 2/5 Army service Corps, 352.
 Postal detachment, 5.
 Wick, S. *Purple over Green, the history of the 2/2nd Australian infantry battalion, 1939-1945*, 2/2 nd
 infantry battalion association, Brookvale, 1978, p. 232.
 Giveney, *The first at war*, p. 306,

²² Further details for medical units can be found in Walker, *The Island Campaigns*, pp. 64-65 and 73.

²³ AWM 54 577/7/29, report on operations in New Guinea, serial 16. 16 Bde carried two Vickers and two mortars per battalion, 25 Bde and 3 Battalion had one of each per battalion.

In the mountains the mortars rarely had more than 24 rounds each to employ but now the Australians were able to deliver sustained three inch mortar bombardments on occasion. Bill Crooks of 2/33 Battalion recorded that “as ammunition for our mortars was now in plentiful supply from Kokoda airstrip, and the Japanese were actually fighting on the sites of their own dumps, the sounds of exploding bombs never stopped.”²⁴

OIVI-GORARI

When the Australians occupied Kokoda, Vasey's orders were to advance to the sea. It was not known the Japanese intended to make a stand at Oivi. At Alola, Vasey had, following Allen's plan, split his force. His 16 Brigade advanced by the most direct route, across to the east side of the Eora gorge then towards Kobara via Missima and Fila. Simultaneously 25 Brigade advanced on Kokoda. On 2 November Kokoda was entered unopposed by patrols from 2/31 and on the eastern track 2/3 advanced beyond Kobara.

The Australians had two axes of advance to the field of battle. This resulted in two separate fights. One was along the main track in front of Oivi, where three Australian battalions engaged 41 Regiment. Following the other axis, after a tentative advance by one battalion, three more Australian battalions were thrown into the rear of the Japanese position and engaged 144 Regiment in the Baribe-Gorari region.

On 3 November the Japanese rearguard (1/144 with a mountain gun) was encountered west of Oivi. They withdrew after contact. Again, on 4 November, they stood briefly then retired into the main Oivi defences. On 5 November 2/3 Battalion came up to the Oivi defences, attacked and was stopped cold. On 6 November 2/2, 2/3 and two companies of 3 Battalion attacked again, searching for the flanks of the Oivi position.

On the Japanese north (right flank) 2/41 had all its four infantry companies in a line extending as far north as possible and the Australians were unable to find the flank.

²⁴ Crooks, *The Footsoldiers*, p. 221.

Hooking out to where they believed it to be they hit, instead, the centre of 2/41's line. The Japanese company commander there reported that the attack was easily repulsed.²⁵

On the Japanese left or southern flank the Australians had more success. They found the enemy flank and threatened to get around the left of 1/41 Battalion. Major Miyamoto, the battalion commander, became concerned. It was his battalion's first fight since arriving in Papua and he was nervous.²⁶ Unlike 2/41 Battalion he had held out one infantry company as a reserve.²⁷ The regimental commander also contributed the attached company of engineers to Miyamoto's proposed counterattack. On 6 November this counterattack was made and enough ground was recovered to stalemate the Australians.

This was the first time more than a platoon of Japanese engineers had been committed to combat. Usually an engineer company was with each infantry regiment and the engineer platoons or sections were parcelled out to infantry battalions or companies as required. Some of these had seen some action but a full company had not before been used as infantry. In the event, the engineer company, drawn from 55 ER, refused to advance and played no part in the counterattack.²⁸ It was the first time in the campaign, for which we have a witness from the Japanese side saying that a large body of men flatly declined to attack.

Fighting on this flank, the Australian right in front of the Oivi defences, continued on 7 November then settled down to a 'drawn game' right along the Oivi line until 11 November when the Japanese trenches were found deserted. The 7 Division report explained that no headway could be made against the Oivi position so Vasey decided to throw his main weight against the Japanese rear at Gorari.²⁹ Once this decision was taken

²⁵ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 160.

²⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 160.

²⁷ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), pp. 161-163.

²⁸ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no 21, Pte. Tamura Hikoichi, p. 1.

²⁹ AWM 54 577/7/34, 7 Australian Division report on operations, p. 25.

it was only necessary that the Japanese at Oivi were kept engaged at minimum cost. It will be necessary to go back a few days to explain how this change of plan came to pass.

Leading the advance down the other track which approached the Japanese from the west was 2/1 Battalion. Their task was to find a way into the Japanese rear about Ilimo. Orokaiva scouts working for the Japanese advised Horii that there were Australians on this track as early as 3 November but that the number of Australians was unknown.³⁰

On the night of 5/6 November, 2/1 camped at Leaney's corner, close to Waju on the track junction. To the west the track they had just come along went back to Deniki; to the east it led to Asisi on the Kumusi River. The northeasterly track from the junction led to Gorari. A patrol up the Gorari track bumped a Japanese post, alerting them to the Australian presence. Leaving a company at the track junction, Cullen took the rest of the battalion east on 6 November but missed the track junction he was looking for, the one north to Ilimo. When he realised he was almost at the Kumusi he retraced his steps bringing the battalion back to Leaney's corner on 7 November. The loss of two days in finding his way to Ilimo was full of consequence. One of these was that had Cullen made his way to Ilimo on time he would probably have found Horii and the NSHQ protected by only one weak company of 3/41.

Even as Cullen was getting lost, at 1800 on 6 November Vasey made his decision. He believed there was enough promise in Cullen's advance, and enough evidence the Oivi approach was not promising, to commit his main force, three more battalions, along Cullen's route. Vasey explained later that he felt confident committing his entire force. With Kokoda airstrip in his immediate rear he could count on a flow of food, ammunition and, should he require it, reinforcements.³¹ Eather was to take the three battalions of 25 Brigade, follow up 2/1 and take that battalion under command. With four battalions he would cut into the Japanese rear by taking the track between Oivi and Ilimo.

³⁰ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p. 17 and AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p 27.

³¹ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 321.

While Horii may have been negligent in leaving the southern track almost undefended he responded promptly when he learned Australians were probing along that way.³² It will be remembered he had most of 144 Regiment in reserve for just such an eventuality. He shifted first a company and then the whole of 3/144, then all of 144 Regiment except 1/144 which was still with 41 Regiment, to Baribe, two thirds of the way from Gorari to the track junction known to the Australians as Leaney's corner.³³ To 144 Regiment the action is not known as Oivi-Gorari, but rather as Baribe. There the regiment dug in. Horii, aware that the Australian pressure on Oivi was easing off, also ordered 1/144 to leave 41 Regiment and head east to hold the track junction at Gorari.³⁴

Thus on 8 November, when 2/31 led the advance of four Australian battalions north east from Leaney's corner towards Gorari, they encountered a position with 700 men of 144 Regiment defending it. Here a manoeuvre occurred which marks an important advance in Australian tactics. The Japanese position was surrounded while the remainder of the Australian force passed by it and continued to advance on Gorari.³⁵ Cutting through the jungle, 2/25 came out on the Waju-Gorari track behind the Japanese position and, with 2/31 Battalion, surrounded it. The other two Australian battalions continued through the jungle towards Gorari. There, on 9 November, 2/33 Battalion encountered 1/144 and drove it off the track junction. By evening 2/33 held Gorari village. With 2/33 was 2/1 which headed east from the Gorari junction and became engaged with NSHQ and the company protecting it. Horii personally assembled this force for a counterattack. There is some evidence this order was not received enthusiastically, nor was the counterattack carried out vigorously.³⁶

³² Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 197.

³³ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai sento shoho, (Detailed battle reports of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), pp. 90-91.

³⁴ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 161.

³⁵ AWM 55 3 / 5, current translations no. 52, p. 35, map of Japanese dispositions at Baribe.

³⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 162. Koiwai was not present so presumably heard this story second hand after the action.

With the Australians on the main track, communications between NSHQ and the several parts of the Nankai Shitai were cut. Horii was unaware whether the main body of 144 at Baribe was still holding on, had been destroyed, or had retreated to the Kumusi.³⁷ There was a suspicion in NSHQ that Tsukamoto, who was still in command of 144 at Baribe as Yamamoto had not yet arrived, was an independent minded fellow who may have pulled out east without orders. Yazawa, commander of 41 Regiment, had heard nothing from Horii since 8 November and no one at 41 Regiment knew what had happened to 1/144.

There is again a small parallel with Efogi. There, the placing between Potts and his main body of a Japanese infantry battalion had severed communications and led to confusion and retreat just as happened here to Horii. Yazawa considered sending his reserve battalion rearward to re open communications but without any contact with Horii he was reluctant to act.³⁸

On 9 November 17th Army decided Horii could not hold on and ordered a measured retreat across the Kumusi to be completed by 16 November.³⁹ By the morning of 10 November Horii realised there was not that much time available and an immediate retreat was ordered lest the Nankai Shitai be destroyed. Something more resembling a dash to the rear now took place. Having lost signals communications Horii sent out runners to inform 144 and 41 Regiments.

The runner for Yazawa found him and 41 Regiment pulled out of its Oivi position unseen by the Australians on the night of 10/11 November. Their orders were to provide a rearguard at the crossing of the Kumusi and cover the retreat of 144 Regiment. What actually occurred was, with little contact with the enemy, they marched east then north along the west bank of the Kumusi until they found a crossing place. Abandoning all their guns, three infantry guns, the two regimental guns and two attached mountain guns, they

³⁷ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), pp. 161-162.

³⁸ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 197.

³⁹ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications, no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, pp. 18-19.

crossed the Kumusi river on 14 November with 900 men.⁴⁰ By 19 November this force was dug in at Buna. The failure of 41 Regiment to perform its rearguard role, or even to attempt to do so, is yet another black mark held against it by 144 Regiment veterans to this day.

The messenger from Horii to 144 Regiment did not get through but Tsukamoto, still surrounded at Baribe, had (as Horii suspected) decided on retreat. On the same night 41 Regiment retreated he cut his way through the Australians on the front of 2/25 Battalion, again abandoning all guns, two infantry guns and four guns of the regimental gun company, and managed to cross the Kumusi near Asisi on 14 November.⁴¹ They found the Kumusi was up to their chests but did not lose a man in the crossing.⁴² The fourth of the four parts into which the army was now split, 1/144, also abandoned its battalion gun and its mountain gun and managed to escape across the river.

In the confusion Horii was parted from the main body of his headquarters and headed down river to find a crossing. Several days later at the mouth of the Kumusi he and one other boarded a canoe to paddle along the coast to Basabua. The canoe was upset in rough waters and Horii drowned. In varying degrees of disarray, but with better fortune than attended Horii, the Japanese survivors of Oivi-Gorari made their way to the coast. The day before 144 arrived there Colonel Tsuji had informed IHQ that in his opinion there was now no possibility of taking Port Moresby.

⁴⁰ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), at this time Koiwai says 2/41 and 3/41 had 600 men altogether, see p. 175.

⁴¹ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 27.

⁴² AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, pp. 30-31. The main body of 144 crossed the Kumusi in the vicinity of the old suspension bridge.

CASUALTIES

The Japanese claimed to have killed 416 Australians at Oivi-Gorari and this claim has not been disputed thus far in Japan.⁴³ Australian figures show the correct number to be 121 killed and 225 wounded.⁴⁴ Less easy to sort out is the accuracy of Australian claims of Japanese dead. The Australians at the time stated 500 to 580 Japanese dead were counted from Oivi to the Kumusi. Less rigorous accounts claim it was from 800 to 1,000 dead.⁴⁵ More accurate numbers might be obtained if the action is examined in its constituent parts.

The best Japanese sources are those from 144 Regiment. Two battalions of this regiment, 2/144 and 3/144, were surrounded at Baribe though the majority escaped east across the Kumusi. The Australians claimed to have counted 143 dead Japanese within the Baribe area.⁴⁶ This appears to be reasonably accurate as regimental sources state either 132 or 152 men died there. Just less than half of the Japanese in the Baribe position were made up of 3/144 and the battalion's own history can account for 48 of its men who were killed there.⁴⁷ The casualties from RHQ, the regimental gun company and attachments are included in the regimental total but there is no estimate of the casualties to the attached mountain gun company, about 50 strong at this time, that was with them. The most accurate count seems to be the Australian one. As it also falls in the middle of the estimates of two Japanese casualty studies this should be accepted.

⁴³ NIDS, Bunko jiku 469, Rikugun Tsushin no gaikan (Overview of army correspondence), npn.

⁴⁴ AWM 54 171/2/47, Australian Imperial Forces, Battle casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Imita to Wairopi .pp. 2-6.

⁴⁵ James, *Field Guide to the Kokoda track*, p. 400. See also AWM 54 577/7/32, documents and notes used in writing vol. 5, Army, South-west Pacific area-first year, interview with Colonel Buttrose, Melbourne 28/3/1943. The 7 Division report claimed 580 Japanese dead were counted at Oivi-Gorari. See AWM 54 577/7/34, 7 Australian Division, report on operations, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 122.

⁴⁷ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai sento shouho, (Detailed battle reports of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p 106.

The second fight involving 1/144 was at Gorari where Azuma's list of regimental dead states 53 men of that battalion died.⁴⁸ This totals up to 196 dead for 144 Regiment west of the Kumusi which is close to the 188 in the regimental history's list.⁴⁹ Another Australian count of bodies encompassing all the units of 144 Regiment found 187 Japanese bodies in the area bordered by Baribe and Gorari in the west and the Kumusi in the east. Six men from the regiment were captured in this region.⁵⁰

When the 144 Regiment was gathered together after Oivi-Gorari to form the garrison of Buna, it had 700 men including those who had arrived from Oivi-Gorari having been wounded in battle there. None of these were the newly arrived replacements which, formed a separate ad hoc battalion of the regiment, the Murase battalion, at Giruwa.⁵¹

All the evidence here points to 144 regiment losing no more than 200 dead of the 891 who went into action. The uncertainties for this part of the field of battle are that NSHQ and the company of 41 Regiment with it were engaged for a short time but there are no figures for their casualties nor for those of the the mountain gunners nor the engineer company with 144 Regiment.

The other scene of combat was at Oivi where the main body of 41 Regiment stood. The fighting here was not as close, vicious and sustained as at Gorari-Baribe so we would not expect such high casualties. The Australians on this front lost 33 killed in action or died of wounds and 81 wounded from 4 November to 11 November.⁵² Many of these were

⁴⁸ Azuma Shigetoshi list of 144 Regiment war dead, authors collection, pp. 2-3 .

⁴⁹ NIDS 302.9.H *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), appendix of regimental war dead.

⁵⁰ AWM 52 9/2/4, general staff intelligence report, Headquarters, New Guinea Force, situation report no. 272, 12/11/42.

⁵¹ Tanaka K. *Operations of the Imperial Japanese Armed force in Papua New Guinea during WWII*. Japan-Papua New Guinea goodwill society, Tokyo, 1980, p. 139 and 142. A possible reason for this unusual move, not to join the replacements with their parent regiment, is that it was feared the new troops would be infected by the poor morale of those just defeated at Oivi-Gorari.

⁵² AWM 54 171/2/47, Australian Imperial Forces, Battle casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Imita to Wairopi. pp. 2-6.

doubtless caused by the seven guns dug into the Japanese position overlooking the Australians. Almost all of the casualties were on 5 and 6 November when 2/2 and 2/3 each made unsuccessful attacks.

We might then expect Japanese casualties here to be low. There is just one record, a map showing Japanese dead and wounded from 41 Regiment. Nothing is said about 4 November, the first day of fighting at Oivi. For 5 November the map records no casualties, two killed on the next day, three killed and one wounded on 7 November, none on 8 November and three killed and ten wounded on 9 November.⁵³

This is not enough to tell what 41 Regiment's casualties might have been in total but it is enough to indicate they were very low while the regiment was at Oivi. Japanese hospital records for November have not been located but there is one other useful figure repeated in several Japanese records. It is that Yazawa, after he slipped away from Oivi, crossed the Kumusi downstream at Pinga with 900 men on 19 November and brought this same number to temporary safety at Gona on 27 November.⁵⁴

Deducting for the company left to guard a crossing of the Kumusi and a company left with Nankai Shitai HQ, there were close to 1,000 men of 41 Regiment in the Oivi position and it would appear 900 of them successfully got away to Gona. This is broadly in accord with Milner, the United States historian who deduced from interviews with Japanese veterans that in all (those at Oivi, the two detached companies and the company that remained on the coast) 1,200 men of the regiment assembled on the coast after the action.⁵⁵

⁵³ NIDS Bunko jiku 469, Rikugun Tsushin no gaikan (Overview of army correspondence), npn, an attached map of the fighting includes a partial list of Japanese casualties at Oivi.

⁵⁴ AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 45, p 2. In crossing the Kumusi 41 Regiment lost most of its infantry weapons and requested 500 be made available when it got to the coast. There is a lower estimate, 800 men present on 15/11/42, for the 41 Regiment force that retreated with Yazawa to the coast in AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no 29, miscellaneous orders and bulletins compiled by 67 LOCH, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Milner, *Victory in Papua*, p. 120.

Assuming Milner's number included wounded, it suggests 41 Regiment lost about 180 dead. As the losses on the Oivi hills were probably not even one fifth of this total, these losses presumably occurred in the company defending NSHQ, which 2/1 Battalion seems to have surrounded and virtually destroyed, and in the retreat to Pinga. There are a number of Japanese accounts of stragglers falling by the way here and of a few drowning in the river. The Australian 3 Battalion account also mentions finding bodies there and that some of them were suicides.

For once, Australian claims for casualties inflicted on the enemy were not wildly optimistic. There were about 380 dead among the two infantry regiments. For the NSHQ, the mountain artillery and other lesser units nothing is known of their casualties. As they composed one sixth of the force, all that can be done is to say that if they suffered casualties in proportion to the infantry, then another 50 Japanese died at Oivi-Gorari giving a total of 430 dead and probably a similar number wounded.⁵⁶ One third of the total force, by this estimate, were casualties. This was something not seen in the campaign so far.

DISCUSSION

Both Clausewitz and Sun Tzu argue that mountain fighting has a delaying effect on the decision as battles in mountains are rarely decisive. To reach the decisive moment in a campaign it is usually necessary to push the enemy out of the mountains and beat them on better ground where there is more opportunity to manoeuvre. Oivi-Gorari is a good example. For all their wins in the mountains, the Japanese did not obtain a decision there. Nor did the Australian attacks from Myola Ridge to Templeton's to Eora decide the campaign. The Oivi-Gorari action, outside of the Owen Stanley mountains, did so by

⁵⁶ AWM 67 11/29, Gavin Long papers, interviews with Japanese officers, p. 2. One among General Adachi, Lt General Kato, Lt Col. Tanaka, Lt Col. Ota and IJN Captain Sanagi, (it is not clear who) thought that 1,500 Japanese were killed at Oivi-Gorari, an impossibly high figure.

inflicting great casualties, capturing the enemy guns and supply dumps, and driving the Japanese in complete disarray to the coast.⁵⁷

There were three major factors which gave victory to the Australians. First, the Australians held Kokoda. Having an operational airstrip just 16 kilometres west of the most advanced Japanese positions at Oivi, increased several times over the supply capacity for Maroubra Force. Increased supply also increases fighting power. In addition, it shortened resupply routes on the ground, reducing manpower committed to this task.

Second, the Australians were fitter and healthier than their enemy. By Oivi Gorari there were signs the cumulative effect of an extended period in a hostile climate on short rations was having an effect on the Japanese. The Australians at Oivi-Gorari were not the same men who had fought through August and September. None had been in Papua for more than two months, half had been there just a month.⁵⁸ On the Japanese side, most had been had been in Papua for three months, some closer to four months.

The third factor was generalship. It has been observed that Oivi-Gorari was the first time any of the enemies of Japan had thrust an entire brigade into the rear of a Japanese army.⁵⁹ The boldness of Vasey's move is comparable to that of Kusunose at Efogi or Ioribaiwa. That it should work, against a force Vasey did not much outnumber, adds to the view that the quality of the Nankai Shitai had deteriorated after an extended time in Papua.

From the Japanese perspective, the action was very poorly fought. A defender dug in with 2,800 men and 15 guns was briskly defeated by an attacker with fewer than 4,000 men

⁵⁷ AWM 54 577/7/34, 7 Australian Division, report on operations, p. 26. "There is no doubt that Gorari was the deciding action of the campaign. The defeat of the Japanese was decisive... and resulted in his subsequent withdrawal to the Gona-Soputa area".

⁵⁸ 3 Battalion was the Australian infantry present at Oivi-Gorari that had served in the campaign the longest, having been on the track since early September.

⁵⁹ Horner D. *General Vasey's War*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p 212.

and no artillery though a dozen 3 inch mortars and some air support was available. The reason this occurred was that Horii was outmanoeuvred and Vasey was able to bring more fighting power to bear at the decisive point. While three Australian battalions kept 41 Regiment busy at Oivi, Vasey was able to throw four more battalions, three fifths of his fighting strength, at Gorari against the weakened 144 Regiment. There, from Baribe to Gorari, the Australians had a local superiority of more than two to one. It is said that a combination of firepower and manoeuvre increases combat strength and Oivi-Gorari is a fine example of it.

Horii exercised battlefield command just twice in Papua, at Isurava and here. Isurava was a mismanaged victory and Oivi-Gorari a crushing defeat. It is tempting to propose that his regimental commanders (Kusunose, Tsukamoto and Yazawa) who commanded at the other five actions and engagements, may have been better at the job than Horii.

Stopping short of this, it can at least be observed that Horii was clearly mistaken in his thinking, as he really did not expect the Australians to send a large force into his rear. Had he anticipated this then he would have placed a strong force blocking the track at Leaney's corner. The unadventurous moves of Allen during October may well have contributed to Horii's expectation that Australians would not be so bold in attack as they proved to be at Oivi-Gorari. What occurred was the Australian riposte to Efogi – a classic pinning attack to occupy the enemy to the front followed by a deep thrust into the enemy rear.

THE KOKODA CAMPAIGN, JULY- NOVEMBER 1942, AN ANALYSIS

PART THREE- OTHER ISSUES OF THE KOKODA CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER TWELVE, NANKAI SHITAI SUPPLY, THE SYSTEM AND THE CRISIS.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN, ALLIED AIRPOWER AND WEATHER.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN, THE ARTILLERY OF THE NANKAI SHITAI.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN, NANKAI SHITAI AND AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL PROBLEMS.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN, CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER TWELVE.

NANKAI SHITAI SUPPLY, THE SYSTEM AND THE CRISIS.

CHAPTER 12 - NANKAI SHITAI SUPPLY, THE SYSTEM AND THE CRISIS

The reasoning, in both Australia and Japan, that Japanese failure in the Owen Stanley Range was in large part a supply failure is not without any merit but neither is it entirely true.¹

The Nankai Shitai did suffer from supply problems and this has in part been put down to poor preparation.² In fact, it was a well supplied force by Japanese standards. The Nankai Shitai's logistical arrangements typified those by which the spectacular Japanese offensive from December 1941 had been accomplished. Moreover, only a fraction of its number, those who advanced furthest into the mountains and stayed longest, suffered from a catastrophic lack of supplies.

This is not to say there were no shortages. There were, and they were more severe than those suffered by the Australians but, up to mid November 1942, the image of a starving Japanese force is an exaggerated one. The root cause of the food shortage, heavy rain washing out the supply line, is explained elsewhere. Here we will concentrate on examining how the Japanese supply system functioned and what were the effects of the food shortage.

The evidence shows that sufficient supplies were delivered to Papua. Enough was brought forward from there, and was supplemented by local sources of food, such that the four fifths of the Nankai Shitai that never went beyond Kokoda had no greater problem than an extended period on reduced rations. Some had no shortage of food at all.

¹ Ham, *Kokoda*, pp. 300-304, McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area- first year*, p. 303, Brune, *A Bastard of a place*, pp. 241-242. Okada Seizo's account also exaggerates conditions. He was a Japanese journalist who travelled with the Nankai Shitai. In the first few days of September for example he claims that 80 per cent of the Nankai Shitai had already been killed wounded or disabled by illness and lack of food. The correct figure was probably one tenth of this. Quoted in Roberston, Problems of supply encountered by the Australian and Japanese forces on the Kokoda trail, AWM MSS 701, item 1, p. 13.

² McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, p. 30.

For the remaining portion of the Nankai Shitai that did go beyond Kokoda, captured Australian supplies kept them going for an additional two weeks after their own food ran out. Within a further two weeks, three quarters of those beyond Kokoda had returned there and could again be adequately supplied. The remainder were the fewer than 1,000 men of the Stanley detachment. These soldiers stayed in the mountains at Templeton's and Eora through to the end of October. Some died of starvation, some resorted to cannibalism. The few emaciated, dead or near-dead Japanese overtaken by the Australians during the advance from Ioribaiwa to Eora were widely publicised at the time for morale and propaganda purposes. These same men's diaries were captured and translated, giving the impression that starvation was widespread in the Nankai Shitai. The death by starvation of a large number of Japanese soldiers in the Giruwa area in January 1943 has also helped to create the impression that hunger was also an enormous problem in the prior Kokoda campaign.

Before examining evidence for the supply crisis it is necessary to say something about the foundations of supply. The first problem is a lack of data and scholarship. Of the one hundred or so books in English on WWII logistics, none address Japanese supply. There are a few general Allied reports and post war papers but these also lack the detail required.³ There is very little on it in Japanese; even the vast official history has little to say about the theoretical side of supply. While discussions of AMF supply in 1942 would have a clear starting point, the same cannot be said for what Japanese supply requirements were and how they went about meeting them.

The second reason some background is necessary is that the Japanese system of supply was unique in WWII. No other major army expected to conduct operations on such minimal amounts of supplies. The Japanese supply system more resembled that of the

³ The only analytical work done in Australia on Japanese supply is by Robertson. A, 'Problems of supply encountered by the Australian and Japanese forces on the Kokoda trail and the question of morale'. AWM MSS 701, items 1 and 2, and Richmond, K. *Japanese Forces in New Guinea During World War II, a primer in logistics*. privately printed, 2003.

Chinese army in Korea, the Viet Minh or the North Vietnamese Army than any other WWII army with the exception of the Chinese nationalists and communist forces.

NANKAI SHITAI SUPPLY REQUIREMENTS

Logistics is the entire business of moving armies while keeping them supplied. It involves march order, traffic control, the distribution of transport assets and a host of other considerations. Supplying an army, getting food and ammunition forward to the men in the front line, is then a subset of logistics. In what follows when the whole problem is under consideration we will refer to the former (logistics) and when it is the marginally smaller matter of getting food and ammunition to the men in the front line, to the latter (supply).

Water shortage occurred in the Owen Stanleys occasionally when soldiers on high ground found themselves cut off by the enemy from nearby water. However, water was usually abundant and neither side found it necessary to carry it forward as a supply item so it will not be necessary to deal with it here. The other two main requirements that must be provided to soldiers to maintain their effectiveness are food and ammunition.

In the distant past, most armies did not need a line of supply because they carried all their ammunition with them and, moving only through well populated areas, they gathered food as they went. An army could easily function on a metric ton of food for a thousand men per day, sufficient fodder for the horses and not much else. As recently as 1914 the German army, advancing with two million men into Belgium and France, was able to feed itself, both man and horse, off rich countryside in a favourable season.⁴

A soldier who can find 16,000 kilojoules, the modern Australian army field ration, can be extremely active yet maintain fitness and health. The same goes for a horse on 100,000 kilojoules per day but as a French general observed on the road to Moscow in 1812,

⁴ Creveld van, M. *Supplying War, Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p. 124.

horses have no patriotism to sustain them in times of extreme shortage. As weight will become important later on, it is worth pointing out that - presuming the food is of ordinary nutritional value - a man's ration weighs between 0.66 and 1.0kg and ten times that for a horse.⁵

While a soldier's requirement for a sustaining diet has not changed, modern armies require other items of supply. In WWI or WWII a single field artillery piece might require two tons of ammunition in a day, an amount that cannot be carried with the army but must rather be brought from the rear. Also the mechanisation of armies requires a great weight and volume of petrol, oil and lubricants (POL). Together artillery ammunition and POL make up about three quarters of the supply tonnage required for modern mechanised armies. Food, small arms ammunition, medical, engineering and administrative stores and suchlike, account for the remaining quarter. Another change in the modern era is that armies more often campaign in inhospitable regions (the desert, or in winter or in mountains) where there is little food to be found. In mountain war, where there are no roads, the proportions of supply requirements change. In the Owen Stanleys one third, sometimes a half, of all Japanese supplies was food. While something will be said about other supply items in the following, because our interest is in the Nankai Shitai's food shortage, food will be our main focus.

What, then, was the 'bare subsistence' level for WWII era armies? At the bottom end of the scale three tons of supplies per thousand men was the modest amount requested to be flown in to Stalingrad to maintain the surrounded German 6th Army there in early 1943.⁶ More was needed when on the move and Oberkommando der Wehrmacht calculated the Germans on the eastern front in 1941 could get to Moscow on an average of six tons per thousand men per day only provided that some parts of the army did not move for weeks at a time.⁷ In Korea in 1950-53, the Chinese army, which resembled the WWII Japanese

⁵ Crevelde van, M. *Supplying War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, p 34.

⁶ Beevor, A. *Stalingrad*, Penguin Books, London, 1999. p. 270.

⁷ Crevelde, *Supplying war*, p. 152.

in terms of supply, required six tons per thousand per day for its offensives. Contemporary non mechanised armies also manage to function on this same level of supply.⁸

Going to the other end of the scale, there was the United States armed forces, for the past 150 years the best supplied troops in the world. Even American Civil War Union armies, when at the end of rail networks, were receiving six tons per thousand per day of all kinds of supplies.⁹ By the the Spanish-American war 12 tons of supplies per thousand men was being shipped to American armies overseas. The United States Army in Europe in 1944 received 70 tons of supplies per thousand men per day, which is the highest rate that can be found in WWII.¹⁰

For geographical reasons this level of supply was not possible in the Pacific where the Americans were able to supply each thousand men with an average of 22 tons per day.¹¹ The Australian army sent 19 tons per thousand men per day to Port Moresby to supply the 1942 campaign.¹² By the Finschhafen campaign of 1943 they had reduced requirements to 12 tons per thousand men per day.

It was the transition from a motorised army requiring at least 15 tons per thousand men per day, which it was in the Middle East, to a lighter but still far from light army, that occupied the Australians from 1942 to 1944 by which time the transition was complete.¹³ The Japanese, in stark contrast, made their offensive in the eight months between Pearl

⁸ Dunnigan, *How to make war*, p. 500.

⁹ Sinclair, J. *The arteries of war*, Airline Publishing, Shrewsbury, UK, 1992, p. 81.

¹⁰ Crefeld, *Supplying war*, p. 212.

¹¹ Lynn J. (ed) *Feeding mars, logistics in western warfare from the middle ages to the present*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1993, p. 22.

¹² The 1942 figure is calculated from numbers given at <<http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j34/stevens.htm>>.

¹³ AWM 67 1/6, Gavin long interview with Bde Major of 21 Bde, Major G. Lyon, 15/8/44, p. 11.

Harbor and Kokoda, over some of the world's harshest terrain and least forgiving climates, on a basis of four tons of supply per day per thousand men.

The essential distinction above is between armies which tried to supply their men with everything they can and armies which try to get by on as little as is necessary. There is virtue in both approaches for the 'heavy' army diverts much of its manpower to logistical jobs intended to ensure the combat power of its fighting forces is increased. To maintain such an approach, logistical 'tail' increases proportionally with terrain difficulty. The advantages of 'light' armies is they could put a greater percentage of their men into the fighting formations and they could move faster in unfavourable terrain than heavier, motorised armies. On Pacific islands, where there were relatively few to no roads, the light army was well suited to the locale and the heavy army was not.

By the end of 1942 the Australians were well aware of Japanese logistical advantages in mountain and jungle war. In his report on the Kokoda campaign, General Rowell observed that "we were behind the enemy who had reduced these matters [of supply] to extreme simplicity".¹⁴ While the Imperial Japanese Army, founded in 1873, had taken much from the western military tradition it borrowed from China when it came to logistics. First tried experimentally in the 1877 samurai rebellion in Kyushu by the then newly established IJA, this frugal system had worked for them since the Sino-Japanese war of 1894 and they reasonably expected it would suffice for the advance into south-east Asia and the south-west Pacific.

THE SUPPLY LINE FROM RABUAL TO PAPUA

In late 1941 it had been decided that the divisions on 'southern operations' would each have the usual *kaisenbun* or 'calculated logistical unit' which was enough for one campaign of three, sometimes four, months duration.¹⁵ For the Nankai Shitai, a 'special'

¹⁴ AWM 54 591/6/60, Rowell, report on operations, p. 13.

¹⁵ Hayashi. S, *Kogun, The Japanese Army in the Pacific*, Marine Corps Association, 1959, p. 33. See also Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 96.

division (with two regiments of infantry instead of three) this would call for approximately 7,200 tons of supplies of all kinds apart from what the IJN needed to establish an air base and a port in the Giruwa area.¹⁶ As it became obvious, in August, that the campaign might well be a long one, a second kaisenbun was sent though it is unclear if all of it arrived in Papua.¹⁷

Rabaul had, by mid 1942, several months supply for all its subordinate formations.¹⁸ There, in late June of 1942, the head of the 1st Shipping Division of the 4th Fleet, Major General Ito Shinobu, assisted by 17th Army logistics officers Majors Masaru Shinohara and Etsugu Kazo, set his staff to planning the delivery of supplies to Giruwa. There were 14 transport ships, mostly less than ten years old with a total gross tonnage of approximately 85,000 tons and a carrying capacity of 55,000 tons of cargo.¹⁹ Twenty one

¹⁶ At 4 tons per thousand men per day and assuming a 120 day kaisenbun. See military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, exhibit T, p. 89.

¹⁷ Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 18. By the end of 1941 the IJA had 108 kaisenbun and produced 25 in 1942. p. 6.

¹⁸ For southern area campaigns 85 percent of all supplies came from China and 15 percent from Japan. Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 62 and p. 89. See also AWM 54 917/7/1, Japanese logistics, p. 11. By March 1943, Rabaul and vicinity had war materials for 120,000 men for six months, medical supplies for nine months for 100,000 men, veterinary supplies for 6.3 months for 10,000 head and 6,000,000 sq.m of storage space.

¹⁹ See Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 102 for slightly different shipping estimates. All the following gross tonnages and cargo capacities are taken from Lloyd's *Register of shipping*, vols. 1 and 2, 1939-1940, Lloyd's Printing House London, 1939, and Jordan R, *World's Merchant Fleets, 1939, the particulars and wartime fates of 6,000 ships*, Chatham Publishing, London, 1999.

Kotoku Maru 1937, gross tons, 6702, deadweight tons 10,003, 13 knots, p. 248

Myoko, 1937, 5081, 8304, 12.5, p. 250.

Kazuura, 1938, 6804, 10069, 15.5 p. 254.

Ayatosan, 1939, 9788, 10,700 17k p. 256.

Hakubazan, 1928 6650, 9775, 13.5 p. 256.

Teiyo, (tanker) 1931, 9850, 12200, 17.0 p.257.

Nankai, 1933, 8416, 10162, 16, p 263.

Ryoyo, 1920 5974, 9102, 11.5 p. 266.

Yamaura, 1937, 6798, 10004, 14p 267.

Tamahoko, 1919,6780, 10993, 9.5 p. 268.

Kinai, 1930, 8360, 10142, 16 p.263.

Nagara (sunk Guadalcanal) 1934, 7149, 9688, 16 p. 260.

Kiyokawa, 1937, 6863, 9687, 17, p. 251.

Yasugawa, 1930, 6770, 10086, 13.5, p. 251.

Ayatosan, sunk 22/7/42 by aircraft at 06 08 north, 102 16 east, p. 540.

Kotoku sunk 8/8/42 by aircraft at 07 01north, 147 07east, p. 543

Also AWM, 54 423/4/130, allied land forces SWP area, documents captured on Guadalcanal, item 2, p. 2.

shiploads arrived at Giruwa up to 2 November 1942 of which two were sunk after unloading some cargo (see appendix A).

Incomplete records of what was landed show that at least 2,000 tons of food was brought ashore. At the standard Nankai Shitai ration this was enough to feed the entire force (assuming an average strength of 15,000 men) for four months or the maximum period one kaisenbun was expected to last. Apart from a shaky start, when the *Ayatozan Maru* from the first convoy was sunk by air attack, ships were able to proceed almost uninterrupted from Rabaul to Giruwa. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey paper on the effects of Allied interdiction of Japanese supply lines concluded that 95 per cent of all Japanese shipping to New Guinea in 1942 arrived and returned successfully.²⁰

Another way to assess that sufficient supplies arrived at Giruwa for the Nankai Shitai is to examine ship capacity. An unusual feature of Japanese transportation practise was they crammed far more men into a cargo space than could 'heavier' western armies. Incredibly, infantry, for short voyages, were packed in at a rate of three men to a one by two metre area, some three or four times more closely packed than was practised by western armies.²¹ The entire initial Malaya landing group in December 1941, a force of over 50,000 men plus vehicles, tanks and horses, required only 20 ships of around 6,000 gross tons each.²² At Giruwa in August 1942, two ships, the *Ryoyo Maru* (5,973 tons) and *Kazuura Maru*, (6,804 tons) between them held 3,400 men, 167 horses, half a dozen artillery pieces, 185 tons of fodder and other unspecified cargo.²³

²⁰ Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logisitics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 91 and 94, table 6. The estimate was that to the end of 1942 New Guinea requested 122,000 tons of shipping, 110,000 was sent. 10,000 tons was sunk and 100,000 tons arrived.

²¹ Zeitz, L. *No Half Hearted Soldiers*. The Japanese army's experience of defeat in the SW Pacific, 1942-45, ADFA masters thesis, 1992 microfiche no. 2420, pp. 41-42.

²² Tsuji, M, *Singapore, 1941-1942*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1988, p. 93. An extreme example is provided by the Takumi detachment which landed at Kota Bharu on 8 Dec 1941. In three ships there were 5,300 men and their equipment.

²³ Compare this to western practice as in Hamley, *Operatons of War*, p. 351 where three times the shipping was required. The Japanese practised this system in the Russo Japanese War. It may be they learned it from the Chinese who, in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894, used it when they landed an army at the mouth of the Yalu. See Forbes A. *Battles of The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2, Cassell, London, 1902. p.82.

Eight shiploads sufficed to transport all Nankai Shitai personnel, equipment and artillery to Giruwa and one, the *Nankai Maru*, was entirely devoted to all the paraphernalia of the IJNs airfield and the base administrative facilities. This leaves, not counting the two ships which, hit by air attack, were only partially unloaded, nine shiploads or about 34,000 tons of cargo space for the 14,200 tons (two kaisenbun) required to be shipped.²⁴

After the Japanese saw the strength of allied air attacks on their first two convoys, ships arrived at dark and left by dawn, which sometimes saw them leaving still part loaded but this was not an insurmountable problem.²⁵ It seems safe then to conclude that sufficient food was landed at Giruwa.

THE SUPPLY LINE FROM GIRUWA TO KOKODA

A fleet of fifty barges and later a jetty brought the cargo ashore, initially at Basabua. By 20 August the anchorage shifted to the Giruwa River mouth where the barges could transport the cargo directly from the ships some distance upriver to the supply dumps. From here a road ran 40 kilometres inland to Sambo.²⁶

Anchorage command, an administrative unit with at times up to two thousand men providing labour, oversaw the landing and storage of all Nankai Shitai supplies. Tarpaulins and prefabricated huts were sent from Rabaul to protect the supplies from the

For an Allied calculation see AWM 54 917/7/1, Japanese logistics dealing with shipping codes, loading tables, ammunition, rations, timetables, New Guinea and New Britain, p. 6.

²⁴ Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 18.

²⁵ NIDS nanto zenpan 168, Nankai Shitai shireibu Toyufuku shosa kowa (lecture of Major Toyufuku, headquarters, Nankai Shitai) p. 20, see also Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 18.

²⁶ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no 28, p. 61. The 1927-28 New Guinea administrator's report related that a road from the coast at Buna leading inland towards the Yodda goldfields was commenced the previous year but there is no more mention of it in the annual reports. *Territory of Papua Report, 1927-28*, Australian Government Printer, Canberra 1929, p. 28. Rusting roadbuilding equipment can still be seen there but it appears the road was never completed.

weather.²⁷ The main dumps were along the present Popondetta to Sanananda road not far from where the Huggins roadblock monument now stands.

The first forty kilometres of the route from Giruwa inland was found by the Japanese in good enough condition that troops were driven along it on the day of the Yokoyama Force landing. On 25 July, the first of two truck transport companies started work transporting between the main dump at Giruwa and the roadhead at Sambo. The average load was just over a ton per truck and at first 51 trucks and 10 other vehicles were available. Forty bushels of rice per vehicle were transported on the first day of operations. A force of engineers and labourers were permanently engaged keeping the road to Sambo motorable as its capacity fluctuated.

Every now and again the road became useless as rain fell and the trucks churned it into mud. There is a record for 21 August of rice being carried forward by hand but the next day the road was again motorable.²⁸ On 4 August just 6.27 tons of food and fodder went up to Sambo but the next day 20 tons of rice went forward.²⁹ In the first 13 days of regular transportation 92 tons of rice alone arrived at Sambo.

As the campaign wore on many of the vehicles broke down.³⁰ However in the first few months there was no such problem and each truck was completing one trip a day. So, even if two thirds of the eighty trucks landed in total were non operational on any given day there was no obstacle, apart from the weather, to delivering 25 tons of supplies per day to Sambo. This enabled a reserve of supplies to be built up as it was much more than was required for the 5,000 men forward of there in August. Troops were also sometimes

²⁷ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication no. 28, the Morimoto anchorage report, p. 44.

²⁸ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication no. 33 , p. 3.

²⁹ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no 1, Sakigawa tai report, pp. 11-14.

³⁰ A diarist of the Sakikawa motor transport company wrote that his unit brought twenty six wheeled one ton Toyota trucks as well as American Fords and Chevrolets captured in Guam. By campaign's end, in January of 1943, the back axle on every one of them had broken. See AWM 55 2/1 spot report no 62, p. 1.

brought forward by truck, suggesting the motor transport companies were not having any problem filling their daily quota of supplies.³¹

From early August to mid November, when the Australians overran the Sambo dump, it seems to have always contained a sufficient amount of food and ammunition. On 2 September, 300 tons of food were warehoused there and, assuming a ratio of one to two food against all other supplies, probably 600 tons of ammunition, engineers stores and suchlike was also present.³² New arrivals passing through Sambo topped up there with food at least as late as 1 November. On that day, Kiyochi Ishiguro, a first class private, reported that his whole battalion loaded up with nine kilograms of rations per man as they proceeded up the track to the front.³³

From Rabaul to Sambo we have so far seen no insurmountable supply problem but, from Sambo onwards, all supplies had to be carried on the back of a man or a horse or in a cart. The Japanese were well practiced in moving supplies and equipment over rough terrain. Their organisation of ponies, carriers and purpose-built light carts, as well as their habits of packaging supplies in man portable size packages was noted and admired by western officers in the Peking operation of 1900.³⁴ Their next task was to establish a supply line to Kokoda with a dump there to meet the requirements of the force when it had used up the initial 20 days' supply each man was carrying. There were some arrangements for light carts and for 40 kilogram loads to be mounted on bicycles. Many of the bikes were early on returned to storage in Giruwa suggesting they were not a success. Carts were more successful, 3/144 had 140 of them as it marched up to Kokoda.³⁵

³¹ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 33, p. 3.

³² Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 157.

³³ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 30, p. 1.

³⁴ Baker, Major C. *The transportation of troops and material*, Franklin Hudson Publishing Co. Kansas City, 1905. pp. 135-136.

³⁵ AWM 55 3/1, ATIS 110, p. 17.

The idea that if each man could carry 20 days of food that this would allow enough time for more permanent supply arrangements to be made was a controversial one in Rabaul. Second Lieutenant Kanemoto Rinzo was one of the supply officers tasked with assessing if it could be done. “The research ordered by the South Seas detachment shortly after I joined 17th Army was to experiment how many *sho* (1.8 litres or 1400 grams) of rice each soldier could carry and how to carry the rice. It was apparent to lower ranking officers like me... and even to ordinary soldiers, that this experiment was the key to the overland advance on Port Moresby”. A frame was made for carrying on the back and Chinese rice sacks full of volcanic ash were used. As a result of the experiment 17th Army decided the average soldier could carry 8 *sho* (11.2 kilograms) of rice and still be able to fight. If the standard quantity of rice a day for a soldier was reduced from six *go* to four *go* then the soldiers could advance for about 20 days without resupply from the rear.³⁶ In the interim before a full food ration was re established local sources of food were to make up the difference. Once a permanent supply line was established rations could return to normal. Kanemoto added that he was somewhat sceptical that this would all work as planned but that the consensus among the supply officers was it could be done.

Some Nankai Shitai men ended up carrying up to 14.4 kilograms of food with them. Most did not take this much as they were also carrying extra ammunition. The total weight carried was on average 40 kilograms, more for the machine gunners who were not supplied with horses to carry their weapons.³⁷ This seems an incredible amount but the plan was that if the men rested half an hour then walked half an hour then it was possible. In the Isurava chapter we have seen the consequences when men, ignoring these restrictions, were ordered to force-march with such loads. Many fell behind and were not present for the fighting there.

³⁶ Kanemoto, *Taiheiyô Senki* (Account of the Pacific War) pp. 7-9.

³⁷ See Paulson, Lt O. Light infantry-a perspective on load carrying and the soldier from past to present, *Australian Army Journal*, Vol III, number 2, winter 2006, pp. 81-88.

What, then, were the arrangements to supply the Nankai Shitai at and beyond Kokoda once they had consumed their initial 20 days of food? Standard IJA operating procedure was that a supply echelon for each two days march should be established.³⁸ A day's carry was set at 15 kilometres, a concession to the extremely heavy loads. The march from the roadhead to Kokoda was to be done in four days. The first echelon under Lt Colonel Tomita Yoshinobu was responsible for forwarding supplies from the coast to Ilimo.³⁹ The second echelon under Lt Colonel Hozumi was based at Ilimo to cover the remaining distance to Kokoda.⁴⁰ A depot was set up half way along each of these 30 kilometre segments. There supplies were to be stored in huts or under tarpaulins to protect them from the weather.⁴¹

In August, each segment of the supply line had about 500 carriers from 15 NP and two horse transport companies of 300 horses each. The Takasago volunteers from Taiwan were assigned to the west and the Koreans to the east echelon.⁴² About a half of the 2,000 Rabaul carriers were also used as carriers on the supply line. The horses were to carry 80 kilograms, each Asian carrier 35 kilograms and each Rabaul carrier 25 kilograms.⁴³

The total carrying capacity of this force was 150 tons in ideal circumstances. It would, in fact, have been more as carts were certainly used but there is insufficient information to say how many there were so they have been left out of the calculation. As it was an eight day round trip from Sambo to Kokoda, then, in theory, one eighth of 150 tons, about 18 tons per day, could have been delivered to Kokoda once the system was properly

³⁸ AWM 54 917/7/6, Japanese logistics, South west Pacific area, 1944, pt 3, npn. Speaking of 1942 the report says "Japanese maintenance plans impress with their flexibility and far greater allowance for improvisation than is customary with western armies... when advancing they push forward a branch of the main depot, then moving forward the balance of the depot when the forward branch is established and functioning". "They have supply points in between... [and] ...staging points may be at half day intervals."

³⁹ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹ Onda S. *Tobu New Guinea Sen*, (Advance in New Guinea), Kodansha Bunko, Tokyo, 1988, p. 179.

⁴² AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, p. 4.

⁴³ AWM 55 6/1 interrogation report no. 9 and AWM 55 3/2 atis no. 292, p. 13.

established. However there were factors ensuring this amount could not be delivered regularly.

Neither the men nor the horses could work without a break, later there was sickness among both and there were, from early September, delays when bridges were washed away by flood. In addition, the transporting men and horses themselves consumed some of their own load which in itself reduces the amount that goes forward. Before we return to what supplies arrived at Kokoda, this last issue calls for some examination.

The commander of the Nankai Shitai, Horii, did not at all like the 'fast' plan to take Port Morsby by a rapid march over the mountains. Not surprisingly, he wrote a negative appreciation of the, in his view, impossibility of supplying such a march.⁴⁴ He calculated that a carrier would consume half what he carried on the round trip from the coast to the front line so the number of carriers required could be enormous and unobtainable. However Horri knew well that it was not done this way.⁴⁵ What actually happened is the carrier brought forward his load to a dump and went back to get some more from the dump where he was based. The next echelon then picked up the load and carried it to the next dump and so on until slowly a large dump was built up at Kokoda. Once this was done, consideration could be given to repeating the process into the mountains. Both the carriers and the horses in each echelon would consume about ten per cent of their own load. This last estimate also requires some explanation.

As horses eat ten times what a man eats yet carry only thrice what a man might carry there would be no profit in using them at all unless they are better able to obtain food en

⁴⁴ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Horii's document is reminiscent in its simplistic approach to that of the Australian, Dr Vernon's, assessment of the impossibility of supplying an advance in the mountains. The doctor can be forgiven as his field of expertise was not supply, but it is very hard to understand how Horii could write a supply appreciation that bore no relation to how things were actually done.

route than men are.⁴⁶ There is probably no military campaign on record until the advent of vehicular transport where horses have been completely supplied with fodder from the army rear. On the contrary, the norm was for an army's horses to live on grass available locally for a several month campaign season, receiving nothing from the rear. At the end of several months, the horses would be in poor condition and many would be dead unless their intake was supplemented with high protein concentrated fodder, about ten per cent of their total intake. This was the Japanese system – to give each horse one kilogram of concentrated oats each day.⁴⁷

Even grass which is low in nutrition can keep a horse going for months despite continuous hard work as long as it gets 10 kilograms a day. However, unless the horse has a supplement of ten per cent of its gross intake after it has lived off grass and worked hard then it will decline. Larger centres of population will have more grass as jungle is cleared around villages. In contrast, in the mountains south of Kokoda, there was very little grass.⁴⁸ Without high nutrition fodder, such as the concentrated oats the Japanese brought to Papua, a horse will want much more green fodder, reducing the time he can be worked. The Japanese used nosebags to overcome this problem and expected fourteen hours of work from each horse each day provided it received its oats supplement.⁴⁹

The Japanese brought 2,360 horses and 200 tons of fodder (enough for 90 days) to New Guinea as just such a ten per cent supplement.⁵⁰ Interestingly, this was about the same

⁴⁶ Boyd, Colonel J. *Supply handbook for the Army Service Corps*, Royal United Service Institution, London, 1895. For details on feeding army horses see pp. 29, 79 and 94-97. See also van Creveld, *Supplying War*, pp. 111-113.

⁴⁷ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28 pp. 56- 57. For a US assessment of Japanese arrangements to compress concentrated fodder see Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 126.

⁴⁸ Dr Michael Burke ANU, record of interview with author, 8/8/2006, see also CSIRO report no 32, Land research series, *Land forms, types and vegetation of East Papua, and lands of the Buna and Kokoda area*, series, no 10, 1964.

⁴⁹ Lynn, *Feeding mars*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ AWM 55 3/1 current translations no. 5 p. 23. A much smaller number (Ham, *Kokoda* p. 146) of horses, 400, is often trotted out as the number used by the Japanese in the Kokoda campaign. It would be unusual if true as the compliment of horses for a Japanese infantry division was up to 7,500 at times though 3,000 was

proportion of fodder, one kilogram per horse per day, brought forward from Port Moresby to supply the animals of the Australian 1st Independent Horse Transport unit working at the other end of the Kokoda track.⁵¹

Having established the supply line from Sambo to Kokoda was theoretically capable of delivering 18 tons a day and that the carriers, both men and horses, would not consume more than ten per cent of this, we can now set against these calculations what the Japanese in practice hoped to achieve. It appears the supply plan of 17th Army Chief of Staff Major General Futami made an allowance of about 20 per cent for carrier consumption, wastage and delays. The plan called for the delivery of 780 tons to Kokoda within 62 days of the first landing, that is, by 23 September. As it took two weeks to set up the system, 15 tons per day of supplies should have been arriving daily at Kokoda from early August. Nothing like this was achieved.

In chapter two it was explained that, in mid August, the plan to rapidly advance on Port Moresby was postponed due to events at Guadalcanal. One fortuitous result was supply was reassessed and a more realistic supply plan was made. The new plan was to deliver three tons of food alone per day so as to have 33 tons of rations and one ton of ammunition at Kokoda by 23 August.⁵² This was achieved and it appears, with reduced expectations, the supply line was functioning satisfactorily.⁵³ On 23 August there was a dump at Papaki and sufficient food at the Ilimo dump for men to top up as they marching through and on 26 August soldiers passing through picked up 17 kilograms of rice each

more normal for the period Dec 1941 to mid 1942. See Rottman, *The Japanese Army in WWII*, p. 35. The USSBS estimated 5,000 horses were available to 17th Army in 1942. Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 38, table 30.

⁵¹ AWM 54 917/3/11, Report on Operations in New Guinea. Supplies by air transport, Appendix B.

⁵² AWM 55 3/1, current translations, no. 6, appendix, p. 2. No doubt here food was the first priority and more ammunition was to come up later.

⁵³ But it can only recently have begun to function properly for on 14 August members of 1/144 went to the rear to locate food. See Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, pp. 157-158, AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 6, p. 2, and AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 28. pp. 56-57.

from there.⁵⁴ After the arrival of the temporary transport unit in early September it was anticipated supply line capacity could be lifted to six tons per day.⁵⁵ The major part of this was to be stored for use when the main body of the Nankai Shitai consumed the 20 days food carried by each man.

Should the supply line encounter further problems, air supply was to be used to overcome this: “Fodder and rations will be supplied by dropping from planes and air transport should the situation require it”.⁵⁶ It is often forgotten that the Japanese planned to supply their force in the mountains with air drops as did the Australians. An air transport squadron in Rabaul was to be used but with the redeployment of almost all air assets to back Guadalcanal operations, this important part of the supply plan had to be dropped.⁵⁷ Even so, from 1 September five air supply drops of, in total about twenty tons, mainly food, were made.⁵⁸

Having seen that under the second, reduced capacity plan, the Nankai Shitai supply line was functioning well to Sambo and probably adequately as far as Kokoda, we will turn now to other sources of supply.

⁵⁴ AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 20 p. 2, AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 23, p. 2.

⁵⁵ AWM MSS 701, *Problems of supply encountered by the Australian and Japanese forces on the Kokoda trail and the question of morale*, item 1, p. 7.

⁵⁶ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 24, pp. 12-14.

⁵⁷ ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 127, p. 26.

⁵⁸ The air drops that did occur were on 23 September and 4, 24, 28 October and 10 November. It seems possible there were two more. Air drop locations were scouted at Wamai and Kagi but it appears no drops took place there. For IJN air drop plans and occurrences see

AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 25 p. 12.

AWM 55 5/3 interrogation report no. 37.

Onda S. *Tobu New Guinea Sen*, (The Advance to New Guinea), p. 139.

AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 33, pp. 21-22,

AWM 55 3/5 current translations no. 62.

ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no 121 pp. 24 and 45

ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no 122, document 60877. This paper points out there was enough food on the coast but as it was not easy to get it to Kokoda, that's where the air drops were taking place.

LOCAL FOOD SOURCES

By WWII western armies had given up the idea that a large part of their food should be obtained by foraging locally. The Japanese had not and planning laid great stress on what could be obtained either from the enemy or from local produce. In heavily populated parts of China the IJA sometimes obtained all of its food locally and in the Malaya campaign it was found almost all food required could be obtained locally. It was appreciated that this would be impossible in Papua.⁵⁹

The preamble to an operational order dealing with supply stated that: “Considerable thought must be given to the difficulties of supplying material during the last phase of the operation. For this reason, captured material and local supplies are to be used to economise in material transported”.⁶⁰ A rectangle of land running from Giruwa beach to at least as far as the Yodda Valley, northwest of Kokoda, was divided into foraging areas. As soon as the main body landed, a foraging program began. Prior to the campaign the Japanese soldiers were also told pigs would be a valuable supplement to their diet. One estimate is that there was, in Northern Province, an average of one pig per four persons and if this average is correct then this, too, was a significant source of food.⁶¹ Japanese diaries contain many references to taro gathering and pig shooting. On 8 September, a soldier of one of the transport units, probably in the Oivi area, recorded his delight when his adjutant shot two pigs, each of 30 kilos.⁶² Major Toyufuku, in a lecture on returning to Tokyo, said that on the way inland taro was the most commonly available food but

⁵⁹ Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground logistics*, United States Strategic Bombing Survey USSBS, p. 124.

⁶⁰ AWM 55 3/2 current translations no. 24, p. 12

⁶¹ Dr. Bryant Allen, ANU , Interview/emails with author, August, 2006

⁶² AWM 55 3/5, current translations no. 54, p. 4. Also record of interview with author, Dr. Bryant Allen 8/8/2006. There may have been as many as 2,500 domestic pigs alone in the Kokoda-Giruwa area. At 20 kilograms of edible meat each this was 50,000 kilograms of meat.

there was also sweet potato, pumpkin and coconut mainly along the coast and inland occasionally.⁶³

Logisticians can calculate how much food an army might obtain passing through a given area. The starting point is population and harvest. For example, in his advance on Georgia in 1864, General William Sherman obtained taxation returns for the state in order to calculate the population, hence what food might be obtained there.⁶⁴ In a simple case to illustrate the method, if an isolated rural area has a population of 1,000 then it produces 1,000 x 365 days supply of food and probably a small surplus for trading purposes. If it didn't do that reliably then fewer than 1,000 people could live there. If it had only one harvest a year and if the army arrived soon after the harvest there should be something like 365,000 rations - or enough to feed an army of 36,500 men for ten days. Of course, the locals will then starve to death but this does not always concern armies.

In wartime New Guinea the staple crop, taro in 1942, was planted and harvested constantly. Even now rarely more than a few days go by without harvesting from the small village gardens.⁶⁵ As the crops were grown year-round, estimates suggest that at any time ten percent of this produce might be taken without bringing about widespread starvation as this was the excess used for festivals or trade. The soil in the Mt. Lamington area, within the region described, is considered among the most fertile in New Guinea and it may well be more than ten per cent of local food could have been taken without causing starvation.⁶⁶

It has been mentioned that in well populated areas an army can often entirely feed itself on what they can obtain from the inhabitants. While the area from Kokoda down to the

⁶³ NIDS nanto zenpan 168, Nankai Shitai shireibu Toyufuku shosa kowa (lecture of Major Toyufuku, headquarters, Nankai Shitai) p. 19.

⁶⁴ Sherman, W. T. *Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman*, Viking, New York, 1984, p. 495.

⁶⁵ Professor Hank Nelson, ANU, Record of nterview with author, 1/8/2006.

⁶⁶ Allen. B, Agricultural systems of Papua New Guinea, working paper no. 16, p. 30.

sea at Giruwa could not be said to be densely populated neither is it true that food sources there were negligible. There was no census held in New Guinea until the 1960s, around the time a continuous population increase began, but before that the administration relied upon annual estimates based on sample counts in small areas. In the twenties and thirties these recorded little or no annual increase.⁶⁷

There was also a significant increase in population after the war - but before the first census - which must also muddy the waters. Estimates of a population of 400,000 for Papua in 1942 are probably not far wide of the mark.⁶⁸ Of these, about ten per cent lived in the area under examination, from the Yodda Valley to the sea and twenty kilometres either side of the Kokoda-Giruwa track.⁶⁹

If 40,000 inhabitants could spare ten per cent of their produce then 4,000 Japanese could subsist there without causing the native population to starve.⁷⁰ In reality, this translates to some 12,000-15,000 Japanese who spent August to November in the region being able to supplement their rations by a quarter by using local produce.

In the event, the consumption of local food was far from orderly. The soldiers rapidly exhausted some areas by simply taking everything in the village garden including the root of the taro plant so nothing more would grow from it.⁷¹ In some cases this drove the

⁶⁷ Dr Michael Burke and Dr Bryant Allen, record of interview with author, ANU 8 August 2006.

⁶⁸ NAA: A 518/1, FI 112/1. In Oct 1938 J. H. Murray, the Lt Governor of Papua, estimated the native population at 300,000. See *Territory of Papua Report, 1937-38*, Australian Government Printer, Canberra 1939, p. 45.

⁶⁹ Allen. B, *Agricultural systems of Papua New Guinea*, working paper no 16, northern province, Department of Human Geography, ANU, 2002. Table one, npn. Professor Nelson estimates that if the 1966 census gave 66,000 then 40,000 was the approximate population of the area under scrutiny in 1942. See also *Papua New Guinea census preliminary bulletin no 2*, northern district, p. 3, Bureau of Statistics Konedobu, 1966 and *Territory of Papua report, 1955-56*, Dept of territories, Australian Government Printer, Canberra, 1956, esp. pp. 16 and 80.

⁷⁰ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 28, p.47. Japanese reports in July reflect surprise at the amount of food available locally.

⁷¹ Dr Michael Burke, record of interview with author, ANU 8 August 2006. Dr. Burke pointed out that as soon as the Japanese began to take much of the food, the whole growing system could fail and the locals would leave. Japanese sources support that this did, in places, occur.

Orokaiva to hide from the Japanese. Lt Colonel Tanaka, the chief of staff of the Nankai Shitai, wrote on 3 October that there was a plan to grow vegetables around Giruwa base.⁷² He stated that as there were more than 10,000 men in the base area local food was exhausted and foraging parties were now going as far as 20 kilometres away.

The sometimes disorderly collection of local produce notwithstanding, taro and pig doubtless greatly supplemented the supplies of Japanese, in the Kokoda to Giruwa area, to a much greater degree than in the mountains where the population density was less than one quarter what it was in the lowlands to their north⁷³. An additional problem here is that taro and sweet potato is not easily transportable. A short time in a backpack in a hot climate reduced it to rotting mush, so it was impractical to carry it from the lowlands east of Kokoda any distance into the mountains.

This reliance on local produce can to an extent be quantified. The normal Japanese ration, about 16,000 kilojoules per day (6 *go* of rice supplemented by bean soup, shoyu sauce and fish), was cut for the Owen Stanley operation to about 12,000 kilojoules per day (4 *go* of rice plus the same). Providing the kilojoule balance was made up with local food and captured rations the soldiers of the Nankai Shitai may have had, before the supply crisis, an adequate ration comparable to that of the Australians.

SUPPLIES CAPTURED FROM THE AUSTRALIANS

One of the advantages of a rapid advance has always been the capture of enemy supplies before they can be moved out of harm's way. The Japanese advance from Isurava after their victory was rapid. In ten days they had overrun Australian supply dumps at Alola, Eora, Templeton's, Myola, Kagi, Efogi, Brigade Hill, Menari and Nauro. With one or two exceptions Australian reports greatly underestimate the amount of food captured.

⁷² Onda, *Tobu New Guinea Sen*, (The Advance to New Guinea) p. 142.

⁷³ The Japanese also foraged in the Yodda valley. The population of the Chiruma people there was low except for the area close to Kokoda.

Japanese sources mention the great advantage conferred on them by this, because a thousand rations carried into the mountains by an enemy is 50 men not needed to carry it yourself and 50 men the enemy must have used to, in effect, supply it to you.

After Isurava the first Japanese unit to come upon the Australia dump at Alola was 2/41. The battalion commander recorded that “we captured unexpectedly a great amount of ammunition and food (hardtack biscuit and canned food) and some clothes. They were indeed a gift from heaven. We were not interested in the ammunition and clothes but the food was distributed to the troops. We had as much food as we could possibly carry. The supply of food was so abundant that our regiment could not carry it all and the rest was handed to the main force of the South Seas Detachment... capturing this much enemy food was absolute bliss. Everyone was as excited as a child with their gorgeous breakfast of hardtack and butter”.⁷⁴

The Japanese official history supports this account: “an unexpectedly large amount of supplies had been stockpiled at Isurava... There was an abundance of food over and above what the men of the 41st infantry regiment could carry, to the extent that some was also distributed to the 144th infantry regiment.”⁷⁵ Lt Noda of 144 regiment wrote “we filled our stomachs with potatoes, sugar, biscuits etc which were left by the enemy”.⁷⁶

Australian records show at Alola, as the battle began, there were seven days’ reserves of food, apart from what the men carried on their person, for 2,000 men and 80 carriers. This equated to some 20,000 Japanese rations.⁷⁷ The 21 Brigade report stated “Time and

⁷⁴ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p 80.

⁷⁵ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 163.

⁷⁶ Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 58

⁷⁷ The Japanese ration was in effect two thirds that of the Australian for three reasons. First, the Japanese on average weighed less. Taking the 215 men of 2/1 Australian Field ambulance as the example, the average weight of the men was 157 pounds (AWM 52 11/12/10, 2/1 Field Ambulance, war diary 1942) while the average weight of Japanese soldiers (taken from the officer graduates of the Ichigaya IJA academy) was 128 pounds. Allied soldiers were on average 30 pounds heavier and six inches taller than Japanese soldiers. See (Dunnigan and Nofi, *Pacific War Encyclopedia* p. 455).

Second, the Japanese ration had less packaging and third, as has been discussed, in this campaign the Japanese ration was a less generous one than the Australian.

circumstances did not permit destruction of stocks to any great extent” but goes on to say the estimated loss was only 2,000 rations”.⁷⁸ This may be a considerable underestimate.

The next occasion when the Japanese captured food was at Eora Creek a few days after Isurava. “It is impossible...” records the Australian 21 Brigade report “...to state with any accuracy the amount of stores destroyed but it is estimated that approximately 1,000 unbalanced rations were not destroyed”.⁷⁹ As another estimate in the same report gave a total of one days reserve for 2,000 men and 250 carriers at Eora it may be that here half the rations were in fact destroyed. One Japanese source stated two and a half tons as the amount of rations captured in the Eora area but it is not clear if it was all found at Eora. The writer may also be including what was captured at Alola immediately after Isurava.⁸⁰ Either way, it represents four days rations, at the reduced level adopted for this campaign, for the 4,000 men of the Nankai Shitai who had entered the mountains.

At the Australian supply dump at Templetons crossing on 24 August there were “27,000 lb of edibles”.⁸¹ There is no figure for how much of this remained when the dump was evacuated by the Australians. The 21 Brigade report said “...once again it is impossible to accurately estimate quantity of stocks destroyed however all ration stocks not evacuated were completely destroyed.”⁸² This is untrue. Negligible quantities were evacuated as there was no-one to do it.

What destruction was achieved was done by 70 carriers in the two hours from the time the order to evacuate was given and 1500 when the Australians retreated. Most of the food was rice or tinned beef and fires were not used for fear of advertising the location which may have brought artillery fire down upon it. The normal system was to scatter the

⁷⁸ AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 3.

⁷⁹ AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 3.

⁸⁰ NIDS, Bunko jiku, 469, rikugun tsushin ni gaikan (Overview of army correspondence) npn.

⁸¹ AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 4.

⁸² AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 4.

rice and puncture the tins so it spoiled. This was not very effective if, as at Templetons, the enemy arrived within a half hour. It does not seem likely under these conditions that the majority of the supplies were destroyed.

The air drop zone at Myola was the next place taken by the Japanese. It was the source of almost all supply for the Australians by this time.⁸³ “No carriers were available for evacuating supplies from Myola... consequently stocks on hand at Myola had to be prepared for immediate destruction.” The claim was that 10,000 rations were destroyed by the time Myola was evacuated at 0700 on 5 September.⁸⁴

Now the interesting thing at Myola is that at least 110,000 rations were air dropped there until it was evacuated and it is widely agreed, and was the subject of acrimonious signals at the time, that one third of this was poorly dropped from the air and ended up in the jungle around Myola.⁸⁵ Almost none of this was recovered by the Australians present who pointed out that there were not the spare carriers nor troops to go looking for it. It would be very strange if the Japanese, who controlled Myola for almost a month and camped a battalion (1/144) there and did send foraging units far and wide, did not extract many thousands of rations from the Myola area. Observations from Australian aircraft would seem to support this. They reported much Japanese activity at Myola and that the Japanese seemed to be accumulating supplies there. These may well have been Australian supplies recovered from the failed air drops.⁸⁶

On the same day as the Australian order was given to evacuate Myola an order was given to Efogi dump also. A few days notice was enough and all stocks in the Efogi-Kagi area

⁸³ AWM 54 917/3/11, Report on Operations in New Guinea. Supplies by air transport, esp. sub appendix VIII.

⁸⁴ AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 4

⁸⁵ This is an estimate drawn from McCarthy, *South-west pacific area-first year*, pp. 130-132, 140-141 and 197-198. See also footnote 90 this chapter.

⁸⁶ AWM 52 9/2/4, NGF HQ intelligence summary no. 79, sitrep 8/10/42. states the following; “considerable enemy activity observed by a/c at Myola - likely supply dump.”

should have been moved or destroyed. Some was moved, to a dump on Brigade Hill just behind MFHQ. More went to Menari. However, not all was taken away because a 3/144 Regiment diarist recorded that they found a food dump at Kagi and that the AAF air strike of 6 September occurred as this food was being distributed to the troops.⁸⁷

The sudden defeat of the Australians at Efogi and the ensuing chaos meant no rations from the dump behind MFHQ could be withdrawn. "Owing to darkness and confusion... many native bearers left without being loaded. Time and circumstances did not permit the destruction of ration stocks and it is estimated that approx 1,500 rations were left."⁸⁸

At Menari there was no demolition or firing of dumps and 3,000 rations were left there and at Nauro an estimated 1,000 rations were left behind.⁸⁹ Again this seems to understate the case. Dr. Vernon recorded in his diary that when he left the dump at Menari "quantities of tobacco, chocolate, boots and clothing dropped from the air were spread out in the village square for anyone to take."⁹⁰ The last dump at Ioribaiwa, at the furthest limit of the Japanese advance, was also pilfered by the Japanese, but is unclear how much food was obtained.

Even if the Australian estimates are accepted at face value there were 8,500 rations abandoned to the enemy or at least three days supply for the Nankai Shitai then in the mountains at the ration scale they had at that time. Another 39,500 rations are estimated to have been destroyed but we can be fairly sure this is not true. No Japanese supply echelon dump was set up at Isurava until late September and the Japanese advance from August 31 was rapid so food carriers are unlikely to have caught up with the most advanced Japanese troops. The 20 days food carried by the soldiers themselves can hardly have lasted past early September yet the troops leading the advance did not run out

⁸⁷ AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 11.

⁸⁸ AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 21.

⁸⁹ AWM 54 577/7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, p. 21.

⁹⁰ AWM 54 253/5/8, pt. 1, Captain Vernon's war diary July-Nov 42, p. 17.

of food entirely until 20 September. It appears what food the Japanese ate for the ten days or two weeks prior to that date may well have been substantially Australian food. A postwar Japanese account described captured food as the main food source for a period in September.⁹¹

It is a reasonable supposition that captured supplies postponed the Nankai Shitai's supply problem for, at best, two weeks. If this is so then up to 12 September possibly ten per cent of all food carried or flown into the mountains by the Australians, that is about ten tons, fell into Japanese hands.⁹²

THE NANKAI SHITAI SUPPLY CRISIS

When we last looked at the Nankai Shitai supply line, in late August, the dump at Kokoda was slowly growing. After a poor start the supply plan was working but, in early September, as is detailed in chapter thirteen, all the bridges and much of the road from Giruwa to Kokoda was swept away in a flood caused by heavy rain. Consequently the next dump after Kokoda, at Isurava, did not become operational until October and other dumps planned for Eora and Myola never became fully operational. A resupply of food did reach the front line troops on 8 September but it cannot have been much as from 11 September the food shortage became serious.⁹³ On this day, 1,050 Nankai Shitai men were sent from the front back to Kokoda for food. While they were away the ration was reduced to two then one *go* (140 grams) of rice per day.⁹⁴

⁹¹ ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no 37 p 17.

⁹² The calculation that approximately 100 tons of food was flown or carried into the mountains by the Australians in this period is drawn from figures given in AWM 54 917/3/11, Report on Operations in New Guinea. Supplies by air transport.

⁹³ Boeicho boei senshishitsu, *Senshi soshō, minami taiheiyo rikugun sakusen* (War history series, South Pacific area army operations), volume 1, p. 586

⁹⁴ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 33, p. 16. As is discussed in the text, the actual ration at any given moment seems to vary between units. See for example AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, p. 20.

Foraging parties were sent out. An order of 17 September reported “there is an abundance of potatoes ne (north east) of Ioribaiwa. All... [units] will collect them”⁹⁵ While it has been said local food was less easily found in the mountains than in the lowlands it was not a negligible amount. Even after the Japanese had scoured the mountains for local produce the Australian 2/25 Battalion noted on 8 October in its war diary during its pursuit of the Japanese that “rations [were] augmented by food from native gardens and wild pigs.”⁹⁶

The 1,050 Japanese sent from the front arrived at the dump at Isurava to find little food there. They had to proceed to the Kokoda dump where each was loaded with 20 kilograms of food, ninety percent of which was rice.⁹⁷ That there was little food at Isurava while there was at least 21 tons of rice in the Kokoda dump indicates that, in mid September, Kokoda was still the limit at which the permanent supply line functioned. The departure of the 1,050 men from Kokoda supply dump to return to the front lines coincided with an urgent request from the Nankai Shitai for an air drop of food at Kokoda. This suggests the 21 tons they took from Kokoda had made a serious dent in the stores available there. Bad weather delayed the drop for several days but in 23 September eight medium bombers dropped a maximum of ten tons of food near Kokoda.⁹⁸

The front line troops ran entirely out of food at Ioribaiwa on 20 September. On that day a medic wrote in his diary “had no meals today” and it seems to have been the first time this occurred.⁹⁹ The next day, the 1,050 men returned from Kokoda: “21 September. Long awaited rice for two days was issued, 2 *go* of rice with miso and soy bean sauce. Though ration is only 1 *go* a day life is tenacious.” This diarist mentioned food again the

⁹⁵ AWM 55 3/ 4, current translations no. 42, Kusunose operational order no. 141, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁶ AWM 52 8/3/25/18, 2/25 Battalion war diary, 8/10/1942.

⁹⁷ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publication no. 33.

⁹⁸ See footnote 58.

⁹⁹ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 25.

next day when a day's ration of dried bread was issued to each man. On 25 September two days' rations were issued, one pack of dried bread and 7 *shaku* (100 grams) of rice.¹⁰⁰

There were a number of reasons, all avoidable, why the supply crisis need not have occurred so soon. The first was wastage. An order of 28 August, in the midst of the Isurava action, tried to limit wastage: "while on the march, some stragglers have thrown away ammunition [and] used clean rice in excess of their ration, and consumed biscuits etc. In view of the special nature of the present operation, in which replenishment of munitions and provisions is extremely difficult, those of all ranks who hold authority must exercise the greatest caution, control and supervision."¹⁰¹ Another report stated large amounts of half cooked rice was left by the side of the track to Kokoda.¹⁰²

The second reason was pilfering. Another diarist reported "Occasionally one or two units land canteen supplies and at such times there are horrible incidents. Last August 13th while a boat was being unloaded at Basabua, about 60 cases of beer disappeared and no one knows where. A box of condensed milk was guarded but disappeared at night. It was for the hospital patients. There are among soldiers some who are not worthy of the name."¹⁰³ On 6 October a report noted that bags had food removed from them by the time they arrived at the front line; boxes had holes punched in them by bayonet. Food was stolen and some was spoiled. Of 33 tins of beef five remained, the rest were filled with stones.¹⁰⁴

A third reason the Nankai Shitai ran short of food before it needed to was mentioned by a 41 Regiment veteran. "To tell you the truth, old soldiers like us learned from experience, I think we carried only half of the food... that we were supposed to bring.... but it was

¹⁰⁰ AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 29 p. 21.

¹⁰¹ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no 33, p. 9.

¹⁰² AWM 55 5/3, atis no. 39, p. 4.

¹⁰³ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 13.

¹⁰⁴ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, p. 4.

still heavy. We believed if we win like in China, the Philippines, and Malaya, we can have the enemy's food."¹⁰⁵ It is hard to say how much of this went on. In an effort to avoid it Major Koiwai had his officers check that all their men had at the start of the march "twenty days' supply... white rice for nineteen days hardtack for one day, and seasoning and snacks".¹⁰⁶

Four days after the portion of the Nankai Shitai at the front line ran out of food, the Japanese withdrew from Ioribaiwa. From this time it is necessary to consider the supply problem of each of the three groups into which the Nankai Shitai were now effectively divided. The Stanley detachment withdrew from the front line only as far as the Templetons crossing area and stayed there until the Japanese defeat at second Eora Templetons at the end of October. These men had little, on some days no food, for six weeks. Secondly, there was the main body of the force in the mountains which immediately retreated to the Kokoda-Kumusi area. They began to leave the mountains on 16 September, four days before food ran out at the front line and they never ran out of food themselves. Over the period of the supply crisis they seem always to have had at least a half ration. The third group is the rest of the Nankai Shitai which had always remained north of the mountains. Some experienced two thirds or half rations for several weeks, others had no food shortage at all.

Only the first of these three groups experienced a debilitating and sometimes fatal food shortage usually credited to the Nankai Shitai as a whole. The terrible privations suffered by the original Stanley detachment have been narrated in other studies of the campaign so it is unnecessary to say more here except to point out two things.

First, there is evidence not all the Stanley detachment was suffering severe hunger though there is no doubt the great majority were. One Australian patrol which must have heard the story the Japanese were starving were at pains to point out, on 13 October, that "Jap

¹⁰⁵ AWM 55 3/2, atis no. 292, p. 53

¹⁰⁶ Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea), p. 52

killed by 2/33 battalion did NOT appear starved or exhausted.”¹⁰⁷ Lt. Colonel Dice also recorded that “Japanese troops encountered along Kagi and Myola tracks forward of Templeton’s crossing (the precise location of the Stanley detachment) appeared fresh and well equipped, with plentiful supplies of food.”¹⁰⁸

Secondly, it was only the original Stanley detachment, mainly 2/144 Battalion, that suffered severely. The reinforcements for the Stanley detachment had rested about Kokoda for several weeks and brought ten days’ rations with them when they again advanced to the front line. These men, the second of the three groups mentioned above, arrived in the Kokoda-Oivi area a week after food ran out at the front line. Many of these men had not been as far forward as Ioribaiwa and none ran out of food. A medical officer behind the front at Eora wrote that rations there were 4 *go* per day in mid September though he was expecting it to be cut to 3 *go*.¹⁰⁹ Another reported there was a ‘considerable quantity’ of rice when he got back to Eora.¹¹⁰ The men of 41 Regiment at Nauro were instructed to take 18 *go* (2.52 kilograms) of rice each on the withdrawal.¹¹¹ The rest of the rice on hand was to be distributed to other units.

On returning to the Kokoda – Oivi area these men received a two thirds ration until the supply line was repaired after the floods, in early October. Major Koiwai’s battalion, for instance, arrived at Oivi on 4 October. He wrote that now “we, the battalion, were spending very careless days. As we had retreated this far the transport of provisions seemed to be working effectively and we could eat almost four *go* (560 grams) of rice a day and sometimes even canned fish was delivered to us as a side dish... there was no shortage of cigarettes... we were leading an easy life”.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ AWM 52 8/2/25, 25 Brigade war diary, 13/10/42.

¹⁰⁸ AWM 54 519/6/51, notes from theatres of war, New Guinea July 42-January 43, p. 138.

¹⁰⁹ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 439, p. 22,

¹¹⁰ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 29 p. 62.

¹¹¹ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 33, p. 26.

¹¹² Koiwai, *Nyuginia Senki*, (Battle history of New Guinea) p. 161.

For the third group, those who had always been in the rear, the supply problem was even less. Those east of the Kumusi did not complain about any shortage until late September and it was 9 October before the several thousand labourers at Giruwa were first ordered to forage for food, as opposed to doing so voluntarily. Apart from a brief period on half rations, the 67 LOCH at Giruwa received a two thirds ration all through October. In addition, the hospital staff and patients were given 7,000 cigarettes and 21,600 litres of wine.¹¹³

Lt Sawatori Zengoro, from the provisional transport unit which worked between Kokoda and the coast, told his interrogators that food was plentiful in his unit until December.¹¹⁴ On 28 November Pte. Miyaji Chikara of the infantry gun platoon of 1/144 was captured. He had been in New Guinea with his battalion at the very start of the campaign in July. When questioned about Japanese supply he said he thought the reduced rations were caused by insufficient transport personnel and the fact Japanese officers did not look after their men too well. The interrogating officer wrote that, “this prisoner, by his own admission, [was] quite healthy when captured 28 November”.¹¹⁵

One of the reasons the supply problem had never been so great north of the Owen Stanley Range is that there were still local supplies available, though unevenly, in the region. At Kokoda early in November an Australian 2/6 Independent Company officer reported shooting pigs and obtaining pawpaw, taro and pineapples in the area.¹¹⁶ Dr Vernon, having no food on arrival at Kokoda, dug up potatoes there.¹¹⁷ The 2/4 FA arrived there at the same time and “12 native boys delivered [to them] loads of sweet potatoes, taros,

¹¹³ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH p. 61.

¹¹⁴ AWM 55 6/3, interrogation report no. 86

¹¹⁵ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 25, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ AWM PRO 3106, papers of Lt. F Winke, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ AWM 54 253/5/8 pt. 1, Capt Vernon’s war diary July-Nov 42, p. 24.

pawpaws....”¹¹⁸ In November it was also still possible to find “fields of sweet potato and fruit” on the banks of the Kumusi.¹¹⁹

That the supply problem was over in October, at least for those not in the Stanley detachment, is well supported by the evidence. Yazawa asked that those of his men in the provisional transport unit be returned to their battalions and Horii acceded.¹²⁰ This reduced the number of men engaged in carrying forward supplies by 700 and it was done even though there were fewer Koreans, Rabaul carriers and horses engaged in supply work by October. Several hundred Korean labourers were taken from the supply line and returned to Giruwa as they were thought to be stealing rice.¹²¹ Of the 2,000 carriers brought from Rabaul by October there were only 800 still working for the Japanese. Some had died, the rest had deserted.¹²² Of 2,360 horses about one quarter had died or were sick.¹²³

With a shorter length so less men and horses were required, the supply line from the coast to Kokoda was, with breaks due to rain, working satisfactorily in late October and early November. Even the dump at Isurava and another at Deniki seem at last, and all too late, to have been functioning. Passing through Isurava at the end of October, Doctor Vernon saw there “cities of accomodation and supply dumps, abandoned gear...” [and] “ ammo

¹¹⁸ AWM 52 11/12/13, 2/4 Fd Ambulance war diary October-December 1942, 3/11/1942 and 8/11/1942.

¹¹⁹ Bullard *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 202.

¹²⁰ Boeicho boei senshishitsu, *Senshi sosho, minami taiheiyo rikugun sakusen* (War history series, South Pacific area army operations), volume 1, p. 339. See also AWM 3/3 current translations no. 29, pp. 2-4

¹²¹ NIDS nanto zenpan 168, Nankai Shitai shireibu Toyufuku shosa kowa (lecture of Major Toyufuku, headquarters, Nankai Shitai) pp. 29-30.

¹²² NIDS nanto zenpan 168, Nankai Shitai shireibu Toyufuku shosa kowa (lecture of Major Toyufuku, headquarters, Nankai Shitai) pp. 29-30. The small amounts of food received by the Rabaul carriers during the supply crisis doubtless contributed to their desertion.

¹²³ This can only be an estimate. It is derived from the following sources:

AWM 55 3 /4, current translations no. 49, p. 44

McAulay, *Blood and Iron* p. 408.

AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 78, p. 2

AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p. 66

left by the road, food, even biscuits very like our own... dried fish and barrels of a fermented sauce, a first class preventative of beri-beri”¹²⁴

It was from the dumps at Papaki, Ilimo, Gorari, Oivi and Kokoda that the troops sent to Eora creek to reinforce the Stanley detachment obtained additional food to take to the front line. Supply may even have been starting to recover in late September as on 22 September 9 Company of 3/144 left Kokoda to go forwards to Eora taking ten days food per man.¹²⁵ The Stanley detachment reinforcements in October each carried 12.6 kilograms of rice to the front line.¹²⁶

Entering the Kokoda-Kumusi region in early November the Australians found Japanese dumps still full of food. The 2/25 Battalion war diary stated that “captured rice supplemented our depleted rations and helped considerably.”¹²⁷ On 18 November “much rice and biscuits had been left by the enemy in what was apparently a large ASC dump”. The battalion’s end of month report added that “the [supply] position was... greatly relieved by the use of foods left by the retreating enemy. Rice became the staple diet.”¹²⁸ A Japanese prisoner taken by 2/2 Battalion had five days rice on him when captured and said that rice was “plentiful.”¹²⁹ The 2/2 Battalion historian wrote that the Japanese they encountered at Oivi (41 Regiment) in early November “had plenty of food”.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ AWM 54 253/5/8 pt. 1, Capt Vernon’s war diary July-Nov 42, p 24.

¹²⁵ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshu, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion), p. 71.

¹²⁶ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 39, p. 21.

¹²⁷ AWM 52 8/3/25/18, 2/25 Battalion war diary 8/10/42 and 18/11/42.

¹²⁸ AWM 52 8/3/25/18, 2/25 Battalion war diary, end of November report.

¹²⁹ AWM 52 9/2/4, general staff intelligence, NGF, HQHGF, sitrep no. 275 of 13/11/42.

¹³⁰ Wick, *Purple over Green, the history of the 2/2nd Australian infantry battalion, 1939-1945*, p. 237, see also AWM 54 423/12/3, NGF to land forces sitreps of 14/11/42.

The Japanese supply crisis may be quantified to some degree by assessing the effect on soldiers of a poor diet. An average sedentary male adult uses around 9,000 kilojoules per day.¹³¹ Light activity would require 12,000 and daily heavy work or long marches would use up to 16,000.¹³² The ordinary Japanese field ration of 1942, 16,000, as we have seen, was cut to 12,000 on the assumption the remainder would be made up locally. It is fairly clear from the evidence so far that some were succeeding in this but others were failing. From 11 September the 3,000 men in the mountains had their ration cut to about 4,000 kilojoules and nine days later many of them had no food at all for varying periods. The Stanley detachment existed in this manner for four to six weeks. Within one week, the other two thirds of the force in the mountains had returned to rest in the Kokoda-Ilimo area where they were placed on a ration of about 10-12,000 kilojoules, (and whatever could be obtained locally) that detailed by Koiwai above.

What then was the effect of the ration reduction? A modern United States Army study found that men on half rations for thirty days, but not doing strenuous work, can still perform their duties and were still capable soldiers though there was a small slow deterioration over the whole period. An Australian study placed the volunteers on half rations and worked them hard but for a shorter period, twelve days, and found there were no special problems at the end of this period.¹³³

Another US study showed soldiers can perform effectively for ten days on 5000 kilojoules with no loss of performance.¹³⁴ The Australian Defence Nutrition Research Centre holds that a soldier can operate effectively, though not at one hundred per cent

¹³¹ Bourne G. *Nutrition and the war*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1940, p. 8. Four *go* of unpolished rice is about 10,000 kilojoules.

¹³² Telephone interviews and emails with author. Dr Christopher Forbes-Ewan, Defence Nutrition Research unit in Scottsdale, Tasmania. October 2006.

¹³³ Telephone interviews and emails with author. Dr. Christopher Forbes-Ewan, Defence Nutrition Research unit in Scottsdale, Tasmania. October 2006.

¹³⁴ Marriott, B. (ed) *Food components to enhance performance*, Committee on military nutrition research national academy press, Washington DC, 1994, p. 487.

efficiency, for two months on 8,000 kilojoules per day.¹³⁵ The most extreme example is a British army nutritionist who has stated that well nourished soldiers with eight kilograms of fat can stand a fast of 20 to 30 days.¹³⁶

The Stanley detachment of October 1942 cannot be described as well nourished. These studies have more relevance to the second Japanese group, those that retreated to Kokoda by 4 October, in pointing out that soldiers can still be effective, though not fully, after an extended period on half rations. As the third Japanese group, those always north of the Owen Stanley Range, suffered less than this we can conclude the Nankai Shitai supply crisis was probably a catastrophic event only for the Stanley detachment, fewer than 1,000 men.

The difficulties of the second Japanese group may not have been very much worse than the Australian 21 Brigade, whose campaign report described their food supplies in September. When the supplies delivered to Maroubra Force fell as low as three and a half tons per thousand for several weeks, it was seen as “hopelessly inadequate”.¹³⁷ Another example was the 2/27 Battalion after it was forced off the track as a result of the engagement at Efogi. As is well known the major part of the battalion existed on very little food, often nothing at all for several days at a time, for 17 days until it regained the Australian lines.¹³⁸ When the force reached safety the average loss of weight was 12 kilograms yet only one third required hospital treatment at the end of the ordeal.

The 2/27 Battalion history explained that “apart from the loss of weight, digestive complaints and sores due to scratches on the legs and arms, the men were still fit, though

¹³⁵ Telephone interviews and emails with author. Dr.Christopher Forbes-Ewan, Defence Nutrition Research unit in Scottsdale, Tasmania. October 2006.

¹³⁶ Paton, D. *Army rations: their bearing on the efficiency of the soldier*, His Majesty’s stationery office, London 1920, p. 5.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Robertson, ‘Problems of supply encountered by the Australian and Japanese forces on the Kokoda trail and the question of morale’. p. 25. A calculation of 3.5 tons/thousand/day is drawn from figures in AWM 54 964/4/2, letter from Air Vice Marshal Bostock to Maj-Gen Kenney, 30/8/42.

¹³⁸ Burns, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War*, pp. 122-130.

weakened, and their morale was high.”¹³⁹ Within 20 days of returning, more than a third of the men had set off into the mountains again as members of Chaforce and Jawforce. A third example can be found in 2/14 Battalion. The Battalion engaged in hard fighting and marching while on approximately half rations, or 8,000 kilojoules, for five weeks from the time of Isurava. The medical report on the health of the battalion at the end of the ordeal said more than two thirds would be fit for operations within two weeks.¹⁴⁰ Further afield there is a comparison which may be closer to what was experienced over an extended period by the majority of the Nankai Shitai. The 111th Brigade of the Chindits, which operated in Burma in 1944, were poorly supplied throughout their campaign. Over 110 days with a great deal of hard marching they carried out their assignment on an average of 12,000 kilojoules per day.¹⁴¹ Average weight loss was 15 kilograms.

A curious feature of the Nankai Shitai’s supply crisis is the level of disorganisation apparent. It is easy to find one unit on a satisfactory ration while on the same day another not too far away has nothing. In August some soldiers were maintained on 6 *go* of rice after it was decided 4 *go* should be the standard ration for the Nankai Shitai. Between September 13 and 17 three Nankai Shitai sources variously state that the ration for active troops was 3 *go*, 2 *go* and 1 *go* of rice.¹⁴²

Another diarist wrote that on 13 October, a time when it is known the Kokoda dump had several tons of food, he went there and was given nothing.¹⁴³ This unfortunate man marched into the mountains as a reinforcement for the Stanley detachment and, unlike the others, carried only two days rations. In early November, when supply difficulties had eased for the great majority and the soldiers who landed on 2 and 14 November were

¹³⁹ Burns, *The Brown and Blue Diamond at War*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁰ AWM 54 481/2/25, report on 2/14 Battalion standard of fitness, 3/10/42 p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Masters, J. *The road past Mandalay*, Cassell and co, London 2002, p. 279.

¹⁴² AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, pp. 22 and 25 and AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 31 , p. 1.

¹⁴³ AWM 54 423/4/109, miscellaneous materials, atis documents, npn.

each given 14 days rations, it is still possible to find a diary account saying that “we have not eaten for four or five days... some fell down from weakness today.”¹⁴⁴ Similarly, we have seen Australians reporting that the Stanley detachment men they killed were fit and strong but it is as common to find a report stating the opposite. A 7 Division message said that the majority of the Japanese killed on the night of 28/29 October were thin and carried no food except for a small amount of fish paste.¹⁴⁵

It is also true that, although the crisis eased, supply was not proceeding smoothly all the time. There were still short periods when rationing had to be reintroduced. On 2 November the 4 *go* ration, the original one which had been reinstated after the crisis, was reduced again. For a week only those carrying supplies were to have four *go*, others had three and the Rabaul carriers two. “Any shortage will be made up with taro, etc and the utmost economy must be practiced with the use of rations”¹⁴⁶ On the same day the remaining food and ammunition at Kokoda dump was moved back towards Oivi.¹⁴⁷

Japanese sources for the supply question can seem contradictory. The major source of evidence during the war was ATIS translated evidence. ATIS reports were only too keen to conclude the enemy were all starving and there are Japanese diary entries that seem to support this. The diaries, though, were in large part taken from dead Stanley detachment men in the mountains in October 1942 when the Australians were very anxious to know the condition of their enemy.

After the Allied victory at Gona, Buna and Sananada in January 1943, when their enemy lay dead all around them, the Australians might have obtained a more representative sampling of diaries and documents but, as the enemy had now been destroyed, there was

¹⁴⁴ AWM 55 3/5 current translations no. 62, Lt Hayashi Yiroyuki, p. 1

¹⁴⁵ AWM 54 577/7/12 messages between advanced HQ 7 Australian Division and NGF, October-November 1942, message of 29/10/42.

¹⁴⁶ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, pp. 10-12.

¹⁴⁷ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publication no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p. 4.

no requirement for this to be done. It is easy to see how a small sampling of the ATIS collection, or a large sampling which does not look to analyse, might conclude that serious food shortage among the Nankai Shitai was long term, widespread and frequently resulted in starvation or near starvation. This chapter has tried to demonstrate that this was not the case.

It was, rather, for the great majority of the Nankai Shitai, that there was a long and very gradual deterioration caused by not quite being able to obtain their 16,000 kilojoules per day. This was exacerbated by the serious shortages of September occasioned by heavy rain washing away the supply line. It may be that the two combined have something to do with the unusually poor performance of the Japanese at the Oivi-Gorari action. A much smaller group, the Stanley detachment, did suffer all the appalling conditions described in postwar accounts.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

ALLIED AIRPOWER AND WEATHER.

CHAPTER 13 - ALLIED AIRPOWER AND WEATHER.

To what degree did the allied tactical air offensive contribute to the Japanese defeat in the mountain campaign in the Owen Stanley Range? At the time it was claimed air attack killed and wounded many Japanese and crippled their supply line.¹ If this were so, then it might be considered a decisive factor in any explanation of the outcome of the campaign. On the face of it this does not appear likely, as both the ground support and air interdiction effort were feeble in terms of tonnage of bombs dropped.

This is not to say the Allied Air Force (AAF) was not dropping a fair number of bombs in 1942. Rather it was dropping them on Japanese shipping, not in an interdiction role along the Japanese supply line in Papua nor in a battlefield support role directly on top of Japanese troop concentrations.² From Japanese sources it emerges the Japanese themselves were more concerned about the effect of heavy rain on their supply line than air attack. Far more bridges along their Giruwa-Kokoda supply route were destroyed by rain than by bombs.

Until the landing in July, the major effort of the AAF was directed towards distant targets.³ Briefly, in late July, the attack was re directed against the ships of Yokoyama's advanced force arriving in Papua. After this, the heavy bombers switched their effort to supporting the Guadalcanal campaign by bombing Rabaul, Buka, Buin, the Shortlands and shipping to the west of the Solomons.⁴

¹ Assistant chief of air staff, *Air action in the Papuan Campaign 21 July to 23 January 1943*, Army Air Forces historical studies no. 17, Historical division, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, August 1944, p. 1.

² The AAF was formed from all USAAF, RAAF and Royal Netherlands East Indies Army Air Force air units in Australia on 20 April 1942. Its north-eastern command exercised operational control of air operations in north Queensland and eastern New Guinea. See Gillison D. *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942, Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, series 3, vol. 1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1962 p. 473 and 478. The 5th USAAF was not formed until 3 September 1942 and General Kenney retained command of both organisations. Here (for simplicity) AAF is the term used to denote Allied aircraft units operating in eastern New Guinea including those that later in the campaign are more accurately described as under 5th USAAF command. See also McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, p 409.

³ Munday E. *USAAF Bomber units, Pacific 1941-45*, Osprey, London, 1979, p. 8.

⁴ McAulay, *Blood and Iron*, appendix B, p. 415.

The medium and light aircraft of the AAF embarked on a land attack campaign in September in Papua and it is on this that we will focus. In this examination it is not necessary to compare the air strengths of the Allies and the Japanese. From 10 August, before the main body of the Nankai Shitai landed in Papua, Japanese air activity over New Guinea was low and, by 1 September, with the shift of Japanese focus to Guadalcanal, there was a near complete absence of air opposition to Allied air activity along the Kokoda track. After this, only when resupply convoys approached the Giruwa anchorage did allied aircraft meet IJN fighters flying escort missions. The AAF operational survey, in summarising events through to January 1943, noted that “air superiority over the area was retained by the AAF throughout the campaign. Between 20 July and 23 January 1943 enemy air raids on Port Moresby numbered but 30, none of them caused serious damage. Australian ground forces were molested by enemy air attacks in only a few isolated instances.”⁵ What was being described was closer to air supremacy than air superiority.⁶ The most telling number is that, of about 2,000 AAF sorties flown along the track, but not out to sea, from August to November, only three encountered any opposition in the air.⁷

Putting aside the four engined bombers which had returned to bombing their strategic targets, the AAF air campaign along the track was conducted by medium and light bombers, fighters and fighter bombers, in interdiction and battlefield support roles. Interdiction has been defined as “the employment of airpower to destroy enemy troops, supplies and equipment before they reach the battlefield, or otherwise to hinder rear area movement so as to delay or prevent the arrival of troops and supplies at the front”.⁸ The

⁵ AWM 66 2/3/1, AAF operational survey no. 1. p. 1.

⁶ Air superiority is when the enemy are usually not able to disrupt ones own air operations. Air supremacy is when they can almost never do so.

⁷ The approximately 2,000 sorties are recorded in both AWM 66 2/3/1, AAF operational surveys 1-50 and AWM 66 HQ AAF SWP area intelligence summaries no 29-50. In AWM 54 519/6/58, air operations, appendix 1, p. 1 it states that “during the entire period of operations enemy air activity was negligible, allied air forces retained overwhelming superiority.”

⁸ Mossman, B. *The Effect of air interdiction during the Korean war*, Office of the chief of military history, Department of the Army, Washington 1966, 1.

battlefield support role, also known as ground support, is also an attempt to hinder or destroy enemy forces on or very near to the battlefield.

General Kenney provided a useful explanation of the special problems of tactical airpower in the unusual environment of the south Pacific.

“Tanks and heavy artillery can be reserved for the battlefields of Europe and Africa. They have no place in jungle war. The artillery in this theatre flies... In the Pacific theatre we have a number of islands garrisoned by small forces. These islands are nothing more or less than aerodromes... from which modern firepower is launched. Sometimes they are true islands like Midway, sometimes they are localities on large land masses. Port Moresby, Lae and Buna are all on the island of New Guinea but the only practicable way to get from one to the other is by air or by water; they are islands as far as warfare is concerned... every time one of these islands is taken the rear is better secured and the emplacements for the flying artillery are advanced closer and closer to Japan itself.”⁹

There might be a tendency to imagine, with a picture of tactical air power from the later part of the war in our minds, that uninhibited control of the air over Papua could resemble what the Allied tactical air forces did over France in 1944 or what the tactical bombers and fighters of the USN/USAAF could do near Japan in 1945. In fact, in the early war, it was nothing like this.

The massive increase in size of the air offensive, from 1942 to the end of the war, can be gauged from fuel consumption and bomb tonnage. In 1942 (May to December) the USAAF in the Pacific consumed 2,009,000 gallons of fuel. In 1943 it used 12,903,000 gallons and in 1944 41,396,000 gallons.¹⁰ The figures for bomb tonnage show that for every one ton dropped in 1942 sixteen tons were dropped in 1944. These numbers

⁹ Craven W. (ed), *The army air forces in WWII, Guadalcanal to Saipan, August 1942-July 1944*, volume 4, Air Force historical division, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956, p. 24.

¹⁰ <www.usaaf.net/digest/t140>

demonstrate that the USAAF air effort in 1942 was a small fraction, around five or six per cent, of what it was in 1944. The RAAF flew, at most, ten per cent of the interdiction/ground attack sorties along the Kokoda track, so its absence from the fuel and ordnance figures above does not materially alter the point that the tactical air offensive over the Kokoda track, like the tactical air offensive elsewhere in the Pacific in 1942, was small.

Narrowing our focus to operations of the AAF from Queensland and Port Moresby, it dropped 1484 tons of bombs from July to November 1942 – about what allied tactical air power alone in France dropped in one day in 1944. Of this, 842 tons were dropped on land targets in New Guinea. Some 307 tons of this was dropped on the Kokoda front, on troop concentrations, the Giruwa base or on bridges along the supply line.

AAF Bomb Tonnage July-November 1942¹¹					
	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV
AAF total tonnage dropped	180	212	240	340	512
Of above tonnage dropped					
On land targets	0	200	170	170	302
On sea targets	0	12	70	170	210
Of land targets total dropped					
In Papua on Kokoda front either in					
direct sup or Sup line interdict	0	44	101	42	120
Of land targets total on bridges	0	11	12	6	0

What effect did this small air offensive have on the Nankai Shitai? There are two ways the evidence available might be used to answer this question; by counting the number of Japanese casualties caused and by assessing its effect on Japanese supplies.

¹¹ See AWM 66 2/2/2, AAF operations reports and AWM 66 2/1/1-2/4/1, RAAF war history section, AAF situation reports and reconnaissance reports. The heaviest bomb tonnage dropped by the AAF in 1942 was by B-17 four engine bombers on targets distant from Papua. Rabaul, Manu, Kavieng, Gasmata, Buka and Buin were repeatedly attacked by aircraft based in Queensland staging forward through Port Moresby.

First we will look at the most common method of attack, interdiction, then at battlefield support. Some evidence for the scale of casualties caused by AAF interdiction can be found in Japanese medical records. If fighting units are put aside and only units that did not go near the front, or went near it only as carriers of supplies are considered, then presumably the majority of the wounded in those units would have been as a result of air attack. Below are listed the wounded (not the sick) for most of these Japanese units for September 1942.

PCB record of wounded	
Includes all Nankia Shitai casualties for September 1942 except for those in the Umeda civilian hospital. ¹²	
Unit	Number Wounded
15 Navy Pioneer	2
120 Land Duty Company	0
106 Land Duty Company	1
9 Division Bridge Construction Company	0
24 water purifying unit	0
55 Transport Regiment, detachment	0
47 Anti Aircraft Artillery Regiment	0
55 Division Field Hospital	0
7 Independent Wireless Platoon	0
8 Independent Telegraph Company	1
17 Army Headquarters, detachment	0
5 Company, Shipping Engineer Regiment	0
Temporary transport company	0
55 Division Water Purification Platoon	0
55 Division infantry group HQ, detachment	1
45 Fixed radio Platoon	0
40 Land Duty Company	0

Of some 2,500 men in the above units, just five are recorded as wounded in September. For the month of October for the same selected group of units the number is almost the same - except for the more than 2,000 civilians with 14 and 15 Naval Pioneers. Of these 14 were wounded in October.¹³ There were presumably some killed as well but the

¹² AWM 55 5/2 enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, chart, p. 61. Some civilians do appear in this list but were usually treated in the civilian hospital at Giruwa.

¹³ AWM 55 5/2 enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, p. 75.

Japanese casualty lists of September and October, even though we cannot tell which of the fighting unit's wounded were to air attack, strongly indicates that the number of men behind the front line who were killed or wounded by air attack was extremely low. A medical sergeant of 55 Division recorded in his diary undergoing 15 air attacks in six weeks. Once, he wrote, two men were killed and two wounded. Otherwise there were no casualties.¹⁴

Further, accuracy in bombing was not what it would become, so close battlefield support missions were rarely executed in Papua because it had the added disadvantage of the jungle which hid both the target and nearby friendly troops. An American study of tactical air power in WWII stated that the USAAF's April 1942 ground support manual "went out the window" when the aircrews encountered the difficulties of ground support in the jungles of New Guinea and the Solomons.¹⁵ Many times, friendly troops were bombed by mistake and a lack of accurate maps increased the reluctance of ground units to call in air attacks on enemy close by as the bombs sometimes fell on them. A Japanese post campaign study noted that "the force nearest the enemy suffered least damage from bombing."¹⁶ For these reasons, direct air support on the battlefield was rare in this campaign.

Aerial bombing, to cause casualties to troops, had to be truly massive in scale. From June 1942, the USAAF began an air bombing campaign against the Japanese-held islands in the Aleutian chain. After the war it was discovered 4300 tons of bombs killed 450 Japanese. This pattern was found again and again in the Pacific War.¹⁷ In the Aleutian example ten tons of bombs were required to kill each enemy combatant. Though the target in this case was well dug in and Japanese attacked on the Kokoda track were often

¹⁴ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no 25, pp. 3-6.

¹⁵ Hellion R. *Strike from the sky, a history of battlefield air attack, 1911-1945*, Smithsonian, Washington, 1989, pp. 163-166.

¹⁶ AWM 54 423/4/156, Lessons from New Guinea operations July 42-April 43, p. 4.

¹⁷ Dunnigan, J. and Nofi, A. *The Pacific War encyclopedia*, Checkmark, New York, 1998, p. 107.

not dug in, it makes the point that a lot of aerial bombs were needed to kill soldiers on the ground. If this ratio is of any value then the total number of Japanese that might be expected to have been killed by the tonnage dropped on Papua, both in direct support or interdiction and over the period of the Kokoda campaign to mid November, would be about thirty.

The USSBS study of the effect of Allied air attack over the whole war concluded that about one in nine of all IJA killed and wounded were caused by air attack.¹⁸ As Allied airpower increased almost twenty fold to 1944, presumably the proportion of IJA killed and wounded by air attack was smaller in 1942. Another study of the effects of aerial bombs and artillery on troops argued that the key factor was not how well dug in the target is but how well dispersed the men were.¹⁹ A given amount of bombs can be expected to kill or injure twice the number of men within the target area if they are concentrated in half the space. The degree to which they are entrenched is a factor, but a lesser factor than how concentrated they are. The study did not address the added difficulty of determining the location of the target under jungle foliage. That the targets in the Kokoda campaign were often not well dug in is likely to be counterbalanced by the fact that the targets were, in the majority of cases, dispersed in a single marching column over great distances along a track. The pursuit group of the Nankai Shitai in the mountains in September had about 4,000 men including carriers. If all were marching on the one track at one time the column in single file would extend over 16 kilometres. In short, mountainous terrain will of itself disperse the target.

There is one comparatively well documented account of direct battlefield support by the AAF. On this occasion the Nankai Shitai was caught concentrated. As Kusunose's pursuit group gathered at Kagi, to attack the Australians several kilometres south west on the Mission Ridge feature, two bombing attacks were made on 6 and 7 September. The attack

¹⁸ Military analysis division, *The effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics*, The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 42.

¹⁹ Dunnigan, J. *How to make war*, Harper Collins, New York, 1993, p. 120.

of 6 September caused two wounded and two killed.²⁰ The air attack of the following day is, in Australian sources, heralded as a great success.²¹

The evidence usually cited is from Lt Hayashi Hiroyuki, who wrote in his diary on 7 September “our losses from the bombing attack today totalled 100”.²² If this were true it confirms the importance of allied tactical airpower, but there is reason to doubt it. First of all, Hayashi was not present. He served with 1/144 which was at this time attached to NSHQ then at Eora village. Another person at Eora then was Major-General Horii who, like Hayashi, heard the news and passed it on to Hyakutake in Rabaul on the same day, before he could have known if it were accurate or not.

Horii may have been influenced by his desire to have some air support to prevent this kind of thing happening, so may have been happy to exaggerate the numbers of casualties. In the same message he followed up mention of the air attack with this: “The lack of Japanese fighter activity means that enemy planes have complete control of the air... I wish for steps to be taken to dispatch Japanese planes.”²³

Somehow the number of casualties has grown post war. A recent account has 100 Japanese dead alone from this aerial bombing.²⁴ Whatever Horii’s reason for sending the signal to Rabaul, it is easy to show that the casualties inflicted on the Japanese must have been many less than 100 and certainly far less than 100 dead. The force attacked by the AAF aircraft was almost entirely from 144 Regiment. For the month of September 144 Regiment had just 219 recorded wounded and can hardly have lost less than 196 of these

²⁰ NIDS 302.9.H. *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), appendix of regimental deaths. See also AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of a Japanese officer, p.6.

²¹ Paull, *Retreat from Kokoda*, p. 192.

²² AWM, 55 3/5/685, current translations no. 62, diary of Lt Hayashi Hiroyuki, p. 1.

²³ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 165.

²⁴ Ham, *Kokoda*, p. 231.

in their two major fights of the month, at Efogi and Ioribaiwa. This leaves only a small number who must have been wounded elsewhere.

The regimental history of 144 says that as a result of the air attack on 7 September “Lt Kazue (the 3/144 pay officer) and ten others were killed.”²⁵ A private of 144 Regiment wrote that damage was inflicted on the force but his company was unscathed.²⁶ Another 144 officer recorded that there were no casualties in his company as a result of the air attack.²⁷ Lt Noda Hidetaka of 3/144 stated his company had two killed and one wounded to air attack on 7 September.²⁸ Azuma’s list of 144 Regiment killed gives 73 for the period 6-9 September and all but about ten can be accounted for in the ground fighting at Efogi. Finally the 144 Regiment list of dead corresponds to the text of the regimental history in showing 13 men were killed, other than at Efogi, on 6 and 7 September.²⁹ There is sufficient evidence here to be reasonably confident the regimental dead to the air attack of 7 September was 11 dead. Wounded are less certain but the numbers given above allow for about 20 who might have been wounded by this air attack.

The only non-144 Regiment unit present was the Taiwanese ‘battalion’ of 15 NP, on supply carrying duties at Kagi on 7 September.³⁰ Its war diary recorded casualties on a daily basis. It does record two wounded by air attack on 5 September (as shown in the table for September wounded above) but makes no mention of casualties on 6 or 7 September.³¹ For 16 tons of bombs dropped from 16 USAAF Marauders on 6 and 7

²⁵ NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshu, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 32. See also AWM PRO 0297, Papers of Lt. Salmon, War History of 144 Regiment, p. 11.

²⁶ AWM 55 3/ 4 461, diary entry of a private of 144 Regiment, p. 1.

²⁷ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 15, p. 19.

²⁸ AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of Lt Noda Hidetaka of 3/144, p. 6.

²⁹ NIDS 302.9.H. *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), appendix of regimental deaths and AWM 54 577/7/26 diary of Lt Noda Hidetaka of 3/144, p. 6.

³⁰ Yet to catch up to Kusunose’s rapid advance, so not present during the aerial bombing, were the PCB, 15 IER, NSHQ, 55 MAB and 1/144 and 41 Regiment.

³¹ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 6, pp. 1-2.

September to kill 13 and wound probably about twice that number was still an impressive tally, more than five times better than what might have been expected.³² The same USAAF squadron a week earlier, in the same location, accidentally dropped six tons of bombs on the Australian 39 Battalion and hit no one.

It is not likely this modest success of the AAF in the ground support role was repeated on any other occasion in the campaign. For one thing, the battlefield casualties we have calculated thus far to enemy rifles, machine guns mortars and so forth, leave very little room for casualties to air attack. The record for 3/144 is the most complete. It is known how many men arrived in Papua (738) and the battalion record has lists of casualties for every company for every major fight. We can be reasonably sure that 298 were killed or wounded in ground actions and engagements up the action at Oivi-Gorari in November. At that time 275 men were with the battalion and 145 were sick. There would seem then to be only about 20 casualties to remain to account for. It may have been more because lightly wounded and recovered sick men return to duty and records, while good, are not precise. However the point remains that there just are not a lot of Nankai Shitai casualties left over after those for the major fights have been counted. Those battle casualties that are left over must be shared by the numerous small patrol clashes and by air attack.

A second example about which a little is known is the AAF air attack on Oivi. Just 8 tons of bombs were dropped on the Japanese 41 Regiment position at Oivi in the period 4-10 November and it has already been noted that 41 Regiment's casualties there were two or three a day over this period during which they were also in action with Australian infantry. This leaves no room for a large number of casualties to air attack.³³ The aerial bombing at Kagi was probably an exceptional event because the terrain was remarkably open over a large area. There was no other occasion in the campaign where a sizable

³² Assuming the average to be one killed per ten tons of bombs.

³³ AWM 66 2/3/1, AAF operational survey no. 1, part III, p. 1.

Japanese force was caught by air attack concentrated in preparation for an attack and in open ground.³⁴

One place where there was a reasonable concentration of troops was the Giruwa base. The log of 2 Company 47 FAAAB recorded that there were an average of two air attacks per day there in October and that the anti aircraft battery was the target of many of them. The battery lost just one killed and one wounded for the entire month.³⁵ Also at Giruwa was 5 Yokosuka SNLP. The unit log recorded 25 air attacks in 11 days which wounded two men.³⁶

The evidence presented should make us doubtful that air interdiction or ground support played anything approaching a decisive role in the campaign. This view was supported by Japanese senior officers interviewed in Rabaul at the end of the war who characterised casualties to air attack in the Kokoda campaign as 'light'.³⁷ This is not to say it was completely ineffective. General George Marshall's postwar study of US servicemen in WWII concluded that while air attack was far from the main killer of infantry it was the most feared item in the enemy's arsenal. The Australian army, after 1942, also looked into what weapon was most feared by the Japanese and came up with a result similar to Marshall's study. The report cites comments from Japanese diaries: "September 6. Enemy air attacks have struck terror into our hearts. The morale of the ground troops is low."³⁸ Or "PW stated he joined the army prepared to die for his country but when he thought of the bombing and the strafing [when] they got caught in the open in New

³⁴ Strafing has not been dealt with here as it is impossible to quantify. Millions of rounds were expended in this way as bombing attacks were often followed by strafing. One thing that can be said about it is the evidence for bombing applies to it to the extent that it seems neither to have killed many Japanese nor seriously interrupted supply.

³⁵ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, daily log of 2/ 47 FAAAB, pp. 19-25. The wounded man was later mentioned as having died.

³⁶ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 26, daily log of 5 Yokosuka SNLP, pp 1-7.

³⁷ AWM 67 11/29, Gavin Long papers, post war interview with Japanese officers - General Adachi, Lt. General Cato, Lt Colonel Tanaka, Lt Col. Ota and naval Captain Sanagi, p. 5.

³⁸ AWM 55, current translations no. 22, p. 11.

Guinea, he still got the cold shivers... he said it was surprising they were not completely wiped out every time they were strafed".³⁹

The second manner in which tactical airpower was used on the Kokoda track was interdiction. This takes the form of attacks along the enemy supply line in an attempt to slow or even cut his delivery of supplies to the front. Kenney's analysts recommended attacking a choke point. They determined that the best choice was where the Japanese supply line crossed the Kumusi River. This place was generally spoken of by the Australians as Wairopi and by the Japanese as Papaki. There, or rather over a seven kilometre stretch of the Kumusi River in this vicinity, the Japanese, at various times, used six bridge sites and the same number of fords when the river was low.

Then as now, the theoreticians warn that not much can be expected from interdiction unless it is used in truly massive amounts. A study of interdiction in Korea, Italy in 1944, against the Viet Minh from 1952 to 1954 and in Vietnam concluded that a small interdiction effort was not valuable.⁴⁰ Apart from Italy in 1944 these studies are more comparable to Papua than might be realised. In all other cases the enemy was an army which chose to keep its supply requirements to a bare minimum like the Japanese, and in three cases the interdiction campaign was usually fought over forested and sometimes mountainous terrain.

The problem identified by the study was that there can be a lot of slack in a supply system.⁴¹ In Papua, for example, the AAF's interdiction campaign encouraged the Japanese to move more often at night. To illustrate the point we will suppose that moving mostly at night cuts the time supplies can move along the track from 24 hours a day to 12 hours a day. It would not be this much but an allowance is also being made for slower movement in the dark. If however the use of the track for 12 hours a day is enough to

³⁹ AWM 55 12, interrogation report no. 249, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Hellion, *Strike from the sky, a history of battlefield air attack*, pp. 263-264.

⁴¹ See also Mossman, *The Effect of air interdiction during the Korean war*, p. 2.

meet the supply needs of the force then there is 50 a per cent 'slack' in the system and the overall effect of enforced night movement may not be great.

Looking at our example from the supply chapter we find that the 4,000 or so Japanese forward of the Kumusi in September and October could do well enough on 16 tons per day. This required the arrival each day at Kokoda of 100 horse loads and 200 man loads. These, moving at 15 kilometers a day, as the supply arrangements were, could cover this distance in a maximum of six hours each night. In other words even if all supply movement was done at night the supply arrangements had sufficient slack in them to allow for that. Looking back after the war General Tanaka Kengoro, who was at Giruwa for two months of the campaign, said that "enemy bombing did not so seriously interfere because the land movement of supply was carried out during the night or [during] intervals of the bombing."⁴²

In theory then, the maximum capacity of the supply line, 24 hours a day use, was probably three or four times what was required and if it was cut by half because of the decision to move supplies mainly at night then it can be seen that this should not be an insurmountable problem. Worse still, from the air attacker's perspective, a force which is not doing anything can, in the short term, make do with half the tonnage of one moving and engaged in active operations. James Dunnigan's study of the practical aspects of warfare concludes that "When troops are well supplied they are profligate. When times are lean so are expenditures. Necessity is the mother of efficient supply. When supplies dry up for any reason expedient methods are found to get by on less."⁴³ Just as the interdiction offensive got underway in September the bulk of the Nankai Shitai in the mountains withdrew. In October it was back in the Ilimo-Kokoda area, where it rested. Whatever the capacity of the supply line it was obviously improved by the shorter distance supplies had to go.

⁴² AWM MSS 701, item 2, questions addressed to General Tanaka Kengoro, p. 6.

⁴³ Dunnigan, *How to make war*, p. 500.

Now, none of this is meant to imply the Japanese did not have supply problems or that this simplified example is just what did occur. Rather, it is an illustration of the problem of having much effect on an enemy supply line by interdiction when the enemy supply line is not operating at its full capacity. It follows also that, had the Japanese been trying to maintain a much larger force beyond Kokoda such that they needed to use their supply line 24 hours a day, then even a small interdiction effort would have some negative effect.

On 29 August, Kenney decided to embark on a serious interdiction effort with the focus on the Kumusi crossings.⁴⁴ There was some fanfare at the time and post war accounts have taken Kenney's statements at face value, typically stating that from then on "US fighters and bombers repeatedly attacked Japanese supply stations and troop concentrations along the Kokoda trail... Kokoda, the bridge at Wairopi, and Buna were key targets."⁴⁵ It can be seen from the chart above that not much actually changed from August. Then 11 tons of bombs were dropped on bridges, almost entirely at the Kumusi. Twelve tons was dropped the next month and six tons were dropped in October.

These low numbers undercut the grand claims made for this series of attacks. It did, however, manage to twice destroy a 'permanent' wooden Japanese bridge over the Kumusi. On 25 September the bridge was first knocked down but by 28 September the Japanese engineers had rebuilt it. On 3 October it was destroyed again and not rebuilt. Two companies of Japanese anti aircraft artillery from 47 FAAAB were in Papua but no anti-aircraft guns were ever moved to protect the Kumusi crossings though they were often moved about in the Giruwa area. In fact nothing was done to protect the Kumusi bridges from air attack until 22 October when a machine gun company was moved there.⁴⁶ Why was the bridge not rebuilt? Why were anti-aircraft guns not deployed there?

⁴⁴ Assistant chief of air staff, *Air action in the Papuan Campaign 21 July to 23 January 1943*, Army Air Forces historical studies no. 17, Historical division, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, August 1944, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Gailey H. *MacArthur strikes back, decision at Buna*, Presidio, Novato, 2000, p. 93.

⁴⁶ AWM 577/7/9, messages and situation reports relating to the period 1/10/42 to 10/11/42 Owen Stanleys, report of 22/10/42.

The answer is that these responses were judged by the Japanese to be unnecessary. The reason they judged it so has little to do with aerial bombing and more to do with rainfall, which they had discovered was a far greater hazard to their supply line than bombs.

The rainfall charts the Japanese brought to Papua showed that rainfall in the Kokoda-Girua region increased after August to an average of 27 days in September, 25 in October and 27 days in November.⁴⁷ The rain tends to fall heavily for several days then there will be light or no rain for a period. A post campaign Japanese study noted that the levels of rivers in New Guinea rise and fall alarmingly, depending on rainfall in the mountains, which in turn gushed down the streams that feed major rivers like the Kumusi.

The transition from low to high water is usually accomplished in moments.⁴⁸ A wall of wild water arrives, sweeping everything before it. The next day the river is calmer and within several days it may well be fordable again. When the Kumusi is high it is also wider, 120 metres when unfordable and about 60 metres when fordable – at which time, at the fords themselves, the width of water to be crossed is much less. Over the period the Japanese were west of the Kumusi it was fordable, on and off, about a half of the time.⁴⁹

The other half of the time there were almost always several Japanese suspension bridges across the river from Asisi in the south to where the Kumusi meets Oivi creek in the north. On the odd occasion the river flooded to such an extent the suspension bridges were also swept away. Then, for short periods, even boats could not be got across and all forward movement of supply halted. As half of the time the Kumusi could be waded at a half dozen fords, about a kilometer apart, it can be seen that the Kumusi, while a great inconvenience to the Japanese, was not actually a true choke point where the Japanese

⁴⁷ AWM 55 5/14 enemy publications no 11, p. 5.

⁴⁸ The author has witnessed this phenomenon in mainland PNG and Bougainville. When heavy rain in the mountains comes down rivers it initially does so literally as a sudden great wave of water.

⁴⁹ This is an estimate based on ATIS documents and interviews with PNG meteorologist, Kasis Inape, and three others with much experience of the Kumusi River: Frank Taylor (Kokoda Treks and Tours), Clive Baker, (author of Kokoda guidebook), Mark Fox (Australian Federal Police, 2007 flood relief operations, Northern Province).

supply line could be cut, even had the AAF had the aircraft and resources to wage a large interdiction campaign.

The AAF was aware several fords and bridges were in use across the Kumusi but were not certain of how many. On 17 September air crew reported observing a rope bridge in use and the day the AAF knocked out the wooden bridge a second time, 3 October, a rope bridge was again observed in another location. The 6 October intelligence summary, again from the observations of aircrew, reported the 'old' suspension bridge was destroyed but there was bridge building activity "between the old and new bridges." Another pilot reported a bridge at 'Sirota' three miles south east of Wairopi but the report was unclear about where this might be or which of the several Japanese bridges it was.⁵⁰ This was probably the suspension bridge near Asisi which Nankai Shitai sources give the impression was their preferred crossing of the Kumusi.

On 10 October the river was again reported to be fordable in many places.⁵¹ At least five sites were used for bridges and about the same number of fords were sometimes in use. On 20 October the river was low and a 2/6 Independent Company observer stationed on high ground near Asisi four kilometres south of Wairopi reported Japanese troops crossing the river at a ford there.⁵² The AAF and 2/6 IC observers noted either that the river was fordable, or that Japanese were using the fords, on 25 September, 28 September and 24 October.

The reason Kenney thought the Kumusi was a choke point has to do with the wooden bridge mentioned earlier. It was pointed out in the strategy chapter that the MO operation to take Port Moresby was part of a larger plan to take all of eastern New Guinea. Communications there were to be improved and, for this reason, road and bridge building

⁵⁰ AWM 66 2/5/1, HQAAF SWP area intelligence summary no. 40, 6/10/42, pp. 10-11.

⁵¹ AWM 66 2/5/1, HQAAF SWP area intelligence summary no. 47, 30/10/42, p. 6 and p. 10.

⁵² AWM 66 10/1/5, RAAF war history section, combined operations centre situation reports, reports no. 376 and 378.

personnel were brought to Papua. A motorable road from Giruwa to Kokoda was seen as a necessity, so permanent wooden bridges capable of bearing trucks were required.

For this task, 1 Bridge Construction Company was detached from 9 Division in China. It arrived in Papua on the *Kinai Maru* on 13 August. The company brought 1,650 tons of lumber and 220 tons of cement for bridge building.⁵³ With the assistance of 4 IER, the wooden bridge capable of bearing vehicles, was complete on 7 September. This was the bridge destroyed by the AAF on 25 September. It was rebuilt and destroyed again on 3 October and not rebuilt.

Drawing together the threads of the discussion so far, three points stand out. First, the Kumusi offered many crossings so it was impossible to cut supply there. When it was cut it was the weather's doing, not the AAF. Second, the wooden bridge built by 1 BCC was not an essential feature of the supply line but, rather, an upgrade of it to allow trucks to proceed to Kokoda. It is worthy of note that General Tanaka, who stated earlier that bombing and straffing was not so serious in this campaign did mention one exception.⁵⁴ He stated that "excepting the destruction of the suspension bridge (not the wooden bridge) at Papaki, enemy bombing did not so seriously interfere because the land movement of supply was carried out during the night or [during] intervals of the bombing. Third, the wooden bridge was not destroyed by air attack until 25 September, ten days after severe supply shortages first occurred at the Japanese front line in the mountains (see Chapter 12 on the Japanese supply crisis) and five days *after* the front line troops ran out of food.

What supply problems the Nankai Shitai had, seem so far to be less a result of AAF air interdiction and more to do with the weather. It is now time to examine this more closely. Narrowing our view to the month of September, it was then that the Japanese first realised that rainfall was by far their biggest problem. On average 277.5 mm of rain falls each September but over the past 100 years it has varied up to 440.1 mm and down to

⁵³ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no 51, p. 3.

⁵⁴ AWM MSS 701, item 2, questions addressed to General Tanaka Kengoro, p. 6.

124.7 mm.⁵⁵ Unfortunately for the Japanese, September of 1942 was a month with exceptionally high rainfall. It cannot be known exactly how much rain fell as the rainfall gauges were not being manned in the areas the Japanese held and the Japanese records, if any, have not been located. September 1942 was a famously wet month and a Papuan meteorologist has estimated that probably in the vicinity of 400mm of rain fell into the tributaries of the Kumusi that month.⁵⁶

Heavy rain fell from 9-13 September and swept away the Japanese supply system.⁵⁷ From Kokoda to Popondetta there are, today, seventeen large modern bridges, probably about the same number of large bridging tasks that were presented to the Nankai Shitai when they arrived in July and August. In mid August it was recorded that there were, to that point, “five incomplete suspension bridges on the way to Kokoda”.⁵⁸ In addition there were dozens of smaller bridges across streams easily fordable at low water but small torrents in their own right during rain.

On top of this where, after heavy rain, the water overflows the river banks, it sweeps away the track and leaves a mud lake in its place. The heavy rain which fell from 9 to 13 September destroyed the Kumusi bridge, the three bridges west of that between Ilimo and Oivi, which was the watershed between the west flowing Mambare and the north-east flowing Kumusi, and all bridges east to the sea.⁵⁹ On the coast it was reported that on 11 September “heavy rains fell in the mountains [and] the Giruwa River overflowed.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Rainfall charts for Kokoda-Buna region 1906-1973 supplied by Kasis Inape of Papua New Guinea Meteorological Service, in authors collection.

⁵⁶ This is an estimate based on ATIS documents and emails with PNG meteorologist, Kasis Inape, Frank Taylor (Kokoda Treks and Tours) and Clive Baker, (author of Kokoda guidebook). Mark Fox (Australian Federal Police, 2007 flood relief operations, Northern Province).

⁵⁷ AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, record no. 35, p. 95. The bridge was washed away on the second day of rain, 10 September and was rebuilt by 20 September.

⁵⁸ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 24, p. 21.

⁵⁹ AWM 55 5/2 enemy publication no. 24, p. 43. The rain at Giruwa began on 6/9/42 and continued to 11/9/42 then there was little in the second half of the month. The Yazawa butai intelligence report stated that on 10/9/42 the road to the coast was first cut by rain. See AWM 55 5/3, enemy publication no. 28, p. 71.

See also AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, record no. 28, p. 8.

For two weeks, from Giruwa to Oivi, there was very little movement of any kind. It was this, not aerial bombing, that was the cause of Japanese supply problems. It was thought by Japanese engineers that another two weeks was required to rebuild just the main bridges.⁶¹ By and large this was achieved, the AAF intelligence summarist noting with admiration that the enemy's rate of bridge construction was unequalled by any western nation.⁶²

Lesser but still serious floods occurred twice again up to the start of November. Speaking generally of these, a Yazawa Regiment report stated simply that "when the Papaki bridge floods, supply stops."⁶³ Another Nankai Shitai correspondent said that it was the heavy rain that cut off supplies to the Stanley detachment and an artilleryman wrote that with the bridges washed out "we can't get provisions through so they must be dropped by aeroplanes."⁶⁴ The first Japanese air drop of supplies took place at Kokoda on 23 September, two days before the wooden bridge was bombed by the AAF.

On 15 October, during one of the periods the river was in flood due to rain, Horii wrote that "the quality of Shitai supplies will depend entirely on the equipment available for crossing the river... the Shitai will improve the equipment for previously mentioned river crossing. The Yokoyama Independent Engineer Regiment will, according to requirements, strengthen the personnel employed at the river crossing, and apart from ropes and boats for crossing the river, separate provisions will be made in case the above equipment is damaged. [They] will prepare river crossings by bridges and fords in wide areas both upstream and downstream. Col Yokoyama... will be situated in the vicinity of Papaki to

⁶⁰ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publication no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, p. 1.

⁶¹ AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, record no. 28, p. 8 and AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, record no. 31, p. 90.

⁶² AWM 66 2/5/1, HQAAF SWP area intelligence summary no. 27, p. 6.

⁶³ 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28 pt 2, Yazawa butai intelligence report, p. 68.

⁶⁴ ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 34, p. 108 and AWM 55 3/7/841, p. 1.

encourage the foregoing arrangements.”⁶⁵ Another problem caused by the rain was also observed; “Heavy rain for four days completely cut off supply to the Stanley detachment. Dysentery was a major problem in a country where very heavy rain washed infection into the myriad of streams which intersected the broken terrain... as a waterborne disease it was almost impossible to control.”⁶⁶

The IJA’s 1943 report *Lessons from Operations*, stressed that rain was the major factor in halting supply and movement. It was written by engineers of 15 IER and 55 IR who had served in Papua. It recommended that in future operations twice the proportion of engineers would be needed to maintain any similar line of communications and that “halts are unavoidable after rain.”⁶⁷ The general problem of fast rising rivers was enlarged upon. “Estimations of width and velocity of a river is apt to be inaccurate” and “precautions must be taken with rivers which flow out from a mountain range. Such rivers cannot be crossed except by cable... As the rivers as shown on aerial photographs were narrow it was estimated that they would be easily crossed. However the mountainous areas have steep inclines and... the velocity of the stream is surprisingly great. In the future it is necessary for the engineers to make a study of the method of crossing rivers with very rapid currents.”⁶⁸

Japanese references to the interruption of supply caused by air attack can be found but they are far fewer and of less value than those which support heavy rain as the cause of several temporary but total halts in the movement of supplies. Some who had not been there, such as Lt. General Miyazaki Shuichi of IHQ, thought that fighter planes were particularly effective, “they attacked our rear lines of communication, destroying bridges

⁶⁵ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, file of Nankia Shitai orders, p. 21.

⁶⁶ ANL, mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 37, p. 19-20. pp. 19-20.

⁶⁷ AWM 54 423/4/156 SWPA, lessons from operations, [a Japanese post campaign analysis of errors], July 1942-January 1943, p. 3 and pp. 12-13.

⁶⁸ AWM 54 423/4/156 SWPA, lessons from operations, [a Japanese post campaign analysis of errors], July 1942-January 1943, p. 3.

and attacking fords...”⁶⁹ The *Senshi Sosho* went further and implied it was aerial attack which forced Horii’s retreat in late October.⁷⁰ This was not, however, the majority view at the time of those present, Horii, Yokoyama and Yazawa nor even of the majority of the staff in Rabaul.⁷¹

The wisdom of the ages has it that in a rapid advance on foot and without motor transport, no supply system can keep up with the forward troops.⁷² So it was in Owen Stanleys. After Isurava, the Nankai Shitai advanced 80 kilometres in 11 days from 1 September. This, seven kilometres a day, was fast going for a large body of troops in inhospitable terrain. More importantly, it was too fast for supplies coming up from the rear to keep up with them. With the halt of the Nankai Shitai on Ioribaiwa ridge in mid September, supplies could be expected to catch up but they did not. Food ran out in the front line ten days after the bridges were washed out by rain and five days before the AAF first knocked down the new bridge.

General MacArthur claimed that: “The outstanding military lesson of this campaign was the continuous calculated application of air power... employed in the most intimate tactical and logistical union with ground troops”.⁷³ Nothing we have seen in this chapter concerning the period July to November 1942 would seem to substantiate this and a more circumspect conclusion was reached by the USAAF 1944 study of AAF air power in New Guinea in 1942 in which MacArthur’s claim appeared.

⁶⁹ Military analysis division, *the effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics*, The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 174.

⁷⁰ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 199.

⁷¹ AWM 67 11/29, Gavin Long papers, copy of post war interview with Japanese officers, General Adachi, Lt. General Cato, Lt Colonel Tanaka, Lt Col. Ota and IJN Captain Sanagi. p. 5.

⁷² Furse, Colonel G. *Provisioning armies in the field*, William Clowes and sons Limited, London, 1899, pp. 265-267.

⁷³ Assistant chief of air staff, *Air action in the Papuan Campaign 21 July to 23 January 1943*, p. 1.

The study concluded that the performance of the AAF was hard to judge and that it did not seem to have been very successful.⁷⁴ “ It is difficult to assess the contribution of the allied air forces during the first months of the Papuan Campaign... little evidence exists to support the glowing claims as to the damage done to the enemy along the Kokoda track. Over much of it jungle foliage made possible effective concealment... even the bombing and strafing of villages did not necessarily result in the wholesale destruction of stores since it is doubtful trained soldiers would have conveniently concentrated supplies in such obvious targets [and] in spite of losses the Japanese navy was able to reinforce the New Guinea invaders almost at will.... In spite of allied [air] efforts during the first phase of the campaign the Japanese had had almost complete success.”⁷⁵

The Kumusi was not the chokepoint Kenney thought it was, being easily crossed at many points when it was not raining and crossable by boats when the rain was light. The size of the AAF interdiction campaign was tiny in contrast to later in the war and studies suggest that small air offensives are not worth the cost. In the Papua campaign, the AAF lost 344 aircraft and 540 aircrew to January 1943. About a half were lost in the tactical air offensive over Papua that we have been examining. It does not appear that they killed anywhere near this number of Japanese nor that they were the major cause of the interruption of Japanese supply though, at best, they might have exacerbated what the rain initiated. When we consider that all the bridges and much of the road from Giruwa to Oivi was washed away on 10 September, leaving 100 kilometres of mud and water in its place, this is clearly an achievement of the weather of an order of magnitude unapproachable by tactical airpower.

⁷⁴Assistant chief of air staff, *Air action in the Papuan Campaign 21 July to 23 January 1943*, p. 42.

⁷⁵ Assistant chief of air staff, *Air action in the Papuan Campaign 21 July to 23 January 1943*, p. 29.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN.

THE ARTILLERY OF THE NANKAI SHITAI.

CHAPTER 14 - THE ARTILLERY OF THE NANKAI SHITAI.

There is a habit in writing about Australian military history to explain more about what the infantry did and less about the artillery.¹ The same applies when the topic turns to the enemy artillery. It has led to the impression that artillery was less important on the battlefield than was the case, a strange turn of events when it is not disputed that the two major twentieth century wars were 'artillery wars.' In WWI and WWII the estimates for casualties caused by artillery vary from 60 to 70 per cent of all battlefield casualties.

It is true artillery played a smaller, though far from small role, in mountain and jungle war. In the South West Pacific the particular problem was a poor or non-existent road network. It was more difficult to deploy large amounts of artillery. Even so American and Japanese estimates during the war calculated that from 30 to 40 per cent of all land warfare casualties were caused by artillery.²

There was an American study of which weapons inflicted casualties on their own troops in Papua at Buna from late November 1942 to January 1943. Thirty-eight per cent of all casualties were to shrapnel but this included grenades and light mortars.³ If the percentage was at all similar in the Owen Stanley Range then, especially considering that the Australians had no artillery, the 15 Japanese guns available at various stages of the fighting may have inflicted significant casualties and may provide a large part of the explanation as to why the actions and engagements under examination turned out as they did.

¹ Charles Bean has set a number of the trends for the writing of Australian military history. One not followed since his time is to include in the narrative a reasonable amount about the doings of artillery and of the enemy. His account of the battle of Fromelles is a good example of striking a suitable balance between telling the story of the Australian infantry and that of the enemy and the artillery on both sides.

² Dunnigan and Nofi, *The Pacific War encyclopedia*, pp. 143-144.

³ Assistant chief of air staff, *Air action in the Papuan Campaign 21 July to 23 January 1943*, attached 5th AAF document on casualties of US 32 Division, 26 September 1942-28 February 1943, Appendix 6.

Inflicting casualties is not the only thing artillery does; it also inhibits enemy manoeuvre on the battlefield. Often infantry under severe artillery fire cannot be persuaded to move at all. Artillerymen will argue that inhibiting enemy manoeuvre is often more important than inflicting casualties. This is not quite so crucial in defence as it is in attack but it is still important. Moving troops are far more vulnerable than stationary troops to all fire including artillery fire and the attacker will usually want to move most of his forces as the attack progresses but the defender may only need to move his reserve. This was the case for the Australian defenders in the first part of the Kokoda campaign. On the attack, after Ioribawa, it was probably even worse for the Australians and probably contributed to the overlong period of time it took a much larger Australian force to overcome the Japanese at Eora-Templetons 2.

The Japanese embraced mountain artillery in time for the Russo-Japanese War and later fought with it for a decade in China. They learned that, in very difficult country, all the artillery they would have was literally what they could carry on their backs. The Australians had no similar experience. They had fought for two years in North Africa, Greece, Crete and Syria. Some portion of this was mountain fighting but these were mountains with at least a minimal road network, quite a different proposition from the Owen Stanley Range. In the Malayan campaign too, Australian infantry were rarely far from a road and possibility of artillery support.

Bill James, in his *Field Guide to the Kokoda Track* seems to be the first writer to have pointed out that further investigation of the Nankai Shitai's artillery is warranted.⁴ James' attention was drawn to the number of Japanese dumps along the Kokoda track containing 75mm and 70mm rounds. The connection he did not make was that this does not sit well with the ubiquitous Australian front line reports of the effectiveness of Japanese 'mortar' fire. There has been an assumption the main Japanese long range weapon was, together with a single mountain gun, the 81mm medium mortar.

⁴ James, *Field guide to the Kokoda track*, pp. 184-185.

However, of the hundreds of Japanese rounds recovered during the campaign and since, not one mortar round of this size has been found on the track. In Melbourne in early 1942 a facility was established to receive and test one of every type of Japanese equipment, ammunition or weapon. As rapidly as possible examples were sent there from the field of battle. No Japanese medium mortar rounds appeared there until after 15 December 1942.⁵ This is because no Japanese medium mortars were used in the Owen Stanley Range. The only Japanese medium mortars used in Papua were those used for the defence of the Gona-Buna area from late November 1942.

Medium or heavy mortars were not a standard Japanese divisional weapon nor were they, as with the Australians, integral to an infantry battalion. Seventeenth Army had some 81mm mortars in Rabaul in mid 1942 but a decision was taken to take to Papua the more effective light and mountain artillery and to leave the mortars behind.⁶ Most of these medium mortars were later sent to Guadalcanal. It should be noted here we are not talking about the 'knee mortar', an altogether different, lighter short range mortar. There were three of these to the mortar section in each Japanese infantry platoon and they are comparable to the two inch mortar each Australian infantry platoon usually had. These were short range weapons incapable of filling the role of artillery as, to some extent, the medium mortar was.

There are two reasons why Australian accounts have understated the part of Japanese artillery and written of medium mortars instead. The first is because the sound of the exploding shell of the 70mm gun was difficult to distinguish from that of a mortar. Both the Japanese 75mm mountain gun and 70mm infantry gun were high angle weapons. In effect they were, respectively, a medium and a light howitzer.

⁵ AWM 54 320/2/7, file of documents dealing with captured enemy equipment, see monthly lists.npn.

⁶ AWM 54 320/3/7, Japanese divisional orders of battle. Also in AWM 55 3/6/732, a member of the Yazawa Regiment wrote that mortars were to be left behind in Rabaul and the crews organised to carry additional ammunition for the artillery.

The 70mm infantry gun was actually the standard mountain artillery weapon until the advent of the 75mm. Then, in 1932, the 70mm mountain gun was handed over to the infantry as their close support weapon, known as a battalion gun. Australian veterans agree it was hard to tell, even from the sound of the weapon discharging, if heard, or from the impact of a high angle round, what kind of weapon was being fired. A clear cut example occurred at Efogi where two situation reports sent from 21 Brigade to NGF reported “Japs using long range mortars” and “heavy mortars” or “enemy using two QF guns, a heavy mortar and MGs”.⁷

What the Japanese actually had at Efogi was two 75 mm guns, two 70mm guns and two 37mm guns. Some Japanese, who presumably had become used to the sound of their own artillery, made the same mistake. At Efogi, where the Australians used a three inch mortar, a Japanese account recorded that “it was the first time the enemy used the mountain gun.”⁸ Again at second Eora-Templetons, when the Australians opened up with four three inch mortars, a Japanese officer reported that “mountain guns opened fire at our troops.”⁹ Notably while the front line soldiers were making this mistake NGF were not.

Information from signals interception and prisoners gave NGF, over time, accurate information on the type if not the number of the Japanese weapons. On 1 November an NGF estimate of enemy weapons stated the Japanese had nine mountains guns and ten 70mm ‘mortar-guns’.¹⁰ A mortar-gun is so called because it has been thought of as a highly portable, breech loading mortar on wheels. However this is not really correct. As the gun’s round is spin stabilized not fin stabilized (and more accurate thereby) it is in fact an artillery piece and not a mortar.¹¹

⁷ AWM 52 9/2/4, General staff intelligence, NGF, intelligence summary no. 79 of 7/9/42.

⁸ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, file of Yazawa Butai intelligence records, p. 82.

⁹ AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 29, p. 65.

¹⁰ AWM 581/7/21, NGF intelligence estimate 1/11/42. In addition it was believed the Nankai Shitai had 135 LMG, 40 HMG and that three more guns were at Buna.

¹¹ Major Michael Shevak, ex Royal Australian Artillery. Record of interview with author. 1/2/06.

The second reason Australian students of the campaign have typically written of the Japanese having ‘a mountain gun and several mortars’ when describing the Japanese artillery, is because of a translation error.¹² The Japanese, as we have seen, called their 70mm battalion gun a ‘gun-mortar’. The ATIS translators have usually translated this as ‘mortar’.¹³ Australian army technical reports, those resulting from test firing captured Japanese artillery, do not make the same error but elsewhere it is a common mistake.

The Nankai Shitai brought 16 artillery pieces to Papua. They took 13 of them into the mountains and later employed 15 at Oivi-Gorari.¹⁴ The fighting group which went forward into the mountains was built around four infantry battalions, a mountain artillery battalion and two engineer companies, the whole, including headquarters, being around 3,500 men. This was a lot of guns for a small force though it was exceeded by the proportion of guns to infantry taken to Guadalcanal, where the coastal strip on which most of the fighting took place was easier ground for artillery.¹⁵

On a European scale, eight guns per thousand men was high for WWII but in the Asia-Pacific region it was more likely to be half of this, about what the Nankai Shitai brought with them. One spare mountain gun was left at Giruwa and the infantry guns of two battalions of 41 Regiment also stayed there. The artillery which went into the mountains was organised as follows:

¹² Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 135. Here Brune implies there was only one mountain gun used in the campaign.

¹³ A typical example is in AWM 54 320 /2 / 1, where a type 92 gun is referred to as a mortar.

¹⁴ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 157.

¹⁵ Franks, *Guadalcanal*, p. 330. The Japanese transported 66 guns and howitzers, 19 mortars, and 14,000 men to Guadalcanal by 20 October.

NANKAI SHITAI ARTILLERY IN THE OWEN STANLEY RANGE		
55	Mountain artillery Regiment (1 battalion)	3 x 75mm
144	Regiment gun company	2 x 75mm, 2 x 37mm
41	Regiment gun company	1 x 75mm, 1 x 37mm
1/144	Battalion gun platoon	1 x 70mm
2/144	Battalion gun platoon	1 x 70mm
3/144	Battalion gun platoon	1 x 70mm
2/41	Battalion gun platoon	1 x 70mm ¹⁶

Was the immense effort the Japanese put in to bringing along six 75mm, four 70mm and three 37mm QF guns worth it? To answer this we must first quantify what the effort was, then establish whether or not the results achieved justified it.

Normally a Japanese mountain artillery battalion had 12 guns and 610 men. Even this is not strictly true as often the number of guns was reduced to nine if the terrain was expected to be difficult. In the Owen Stanleys the terrain was expected to be near impossible so each of the three gun companies was directed to take only one gun with a spare gun to be left at Giruwa. The mountain artillery battalion was also slimmed down to, as detailed in the order of battle chapter, 420 men. A mountain gun battalion would normally have had a horse transport company of 230 horses.¹⁷ Again, in Papua, this was reduced. It seems no more than 45 horses, just enough to carry the guns and first line ammunition, were allocated to the mountain artillery battalion to get them as far as

¹⁶ Sources for Japanese artillery present are as follows:

NIDS, Nanto, Soromon Bisumaruku 130, Nankai Shitai Efogi minamigawa ni okeru sento (Nankai Shitai battles south of Efogi) npn. The document states that 144 Regiment took to Papua 2 x 75mm and 2 x 37mm in the regimental gun company, the mountain gun battalion had 4 x 75mm and the regimental gun company of 41 Regiment had 1 x 75mm and 1 x 37mm .

AWM 55 3/ 4, no. 474, a list of cargo aboard *Teiyo Maru* , notes that 144 Regiment gun company, two mountain guns and two 'field guns' arrived at Giruwa.

NIDS, 302.9.H, *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), the artillery allocated to the Nankai Shitai for the MO operation is listed on p.44.

AWM 55 3/3 current translations no. 33, Col Yazawa to Lt Col Tomita, 2/8/42, concerning weapons to be taken to Papua by 41 Regiment, pp. 16-17.

Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 157.

¹⁷ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 49, p. 1.

Kokoda.¹⁸ Doubtless this contributed to their delayed arrival at Isurava. From Kokoda on, everything was carried on the backs of the men. The battalion's three guns served together as a unit only at Isurava, Ioribawa and Oivi-Gorari but individual guns were often in action on other occasions.¹⁹

The 144 Regiment gun company was at full establishment, 122 men, while the reduced gun company of 41 Regiment had 88 men.²⁰ The infantry battalion gun platoons began with 55 men but all the gun platoons in the Nankai Shitai were stronger than this, because while the medium mortars were left in Rabaul some of their crews were added to infantry battalion gun platoons as ammunition carriers.²¹ Lt Sakamoto Mitsuri's gun platoon had 87 men and that of 3/144 was 72 men strong.²² Assuming the average battalion gun platoon was mid way between these two then, counting the mountain artillerymen and the regimental artillery, about 940 men in all, or about one quarter of the uniformed portion of the Nankai Shitai that penetrated the mountains, was devoted to its artillery.

The 75mm gun weighed 540 kg, the other two types about a half of this. In good going, the average weight carried by each man when the gun was man ported was 30 kilograms and heavier parts were shared between two men. As the total weight of the 13 guns was about five tons, 160 men were required to carry the guns at any one time. The reason for the reorganisation of both mountain gunners and infantry gunners in Rabaul was so two crews of gunners could share the load, half carrying and half resting.²³ With 320 men

¹⁸ Nakanishi R. *Nihon no hohei kaki*, (Japanese infantry weapons), Dai nippon Kaiga, Tokyo, 1998 pp 52-59. See also AWM 55 3/5 678.

¹⁹ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 23, Pte Chiya Haruyoshi of gun platoon 1/144. Chiya stated that he saw the three mountain guns in frequent use. In the retreat, one was sent back early, another was buried at Oivi and the third thrown into the Kumusi along with his own battalion gun.

²⁰ NIDS, Nanto higashi Nyuginea, 255, Hohei dia 41 rentai New Guinea senkyo houkou (Battle reports of 41 Infantry Regiment, New Guinea), p 72. See also Daugherty, *Fighting techniques of a Japanese infantryman*, p. 44.

²¹ AWM 55 3/6, current translations no. 68, pp. 3-4.

²² AWM 55 3/5, current translations no. 58, p. 17.

²³ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 23, p. 3. Pte Chiya Haruyoshi of gun platoon 1/144. Chiya stated that his gun was used at Deniki and he saw another gun brought up by horse. The gun was in action at

devoted to carrying this left about 620 to carry ammunition and other unit stores. Small numbers of Rabaul carriers were also sometimes used to assist the artillery. Mentions of their numbers range from half a dozen per gun to, in one case, forty per gun.²⁴

An ammunition box for the 75mm gun contained three shells each weighing eight kilograms.²⁵ A man usually carried one box, so it seems the average 75mm gun unit, be it from the mountain gun battalion or the regimental gun company, should have had the capacity to carry at least 120 rounds in its gun train, excluding the 20 rounds always carried with the gun itself.²⁶ The 70mm ammunition was lighter, just five kilograms per round and five rounds were carried in a box by one man. In this case, deducting for doubled gun crews, some 200 men were available to carry ammunition giving 1,000 rounds for six pieces, in the vicinity of 167 rounds per barrel.

The third artillery piece was the type 94 37mm gun. It was an anti tank gun which was also capable of firing high explosive rounds. Both types of rounds were quite small, weighing only 650 grams.²⁷ One horse carried the first line ammunition. When carried by men three usually shared this same load.²⁸

Some studies of the campaign, both Australian and Japanese, point out the effect of the Japanese artillery was much reduced as they had only from 150-200 rounds per piece and a little more for the 37mm.²⁹ The *Senshi Sosho* states only 200 rounds were with the

Isurava. The gun did not get beyond Nauro, where ammunition was buried as they retreated. At Eora he carried 20 rounds into action and the gun was discarded after Oivi. Over short distances, Chiya said ten men could carry the gun disassembled but over rough country 15 were required. They had five or six Rabaul carriers carrying ammunition each with the normal load of one box with five rounds in it.

²⁴ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 23, Pte Chiya Haruyoshi of gun platoon 1/144, p. 3.

²⁵ AWM 54 320/4/27, file of reports from examination of enemy equipment, report on type 92 gun. See also Nakanishi, *Nihon no hohei kaki*, (Japanese infantry weapons), p. 54.

²⁶ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 49, Kawakubo Yasuichi, p. 1.

²⁷ Nakanishi, *Nihon no hohei kaki*, (Japanese infantry weapons in World War II), pp. 46-51.

²⁸ Nakanishi, *Nihon no hohei kaki*, (Japanese infantry weapons in World War II), pp. 52-53.

²⁹ Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns* p.157.

No. 1 mountain gun company as it advanced in July on Kokoda with the Yokoyama detachment. Records of 17th Army stated that by 2 September 150 rounds per piece for the 70mm battalion guns, 180 per mountain gun and 300 per 37mm gun had arrived in Giruwa.³⁰ These numbers roughly correspond to those estimated above but there is also an error here. The error is that these accounts consider only *first line* ammunition. Much more was brought forward to Giruwa, then on into the mountains.

An unnamed mountain gunner recorded that on the docks of Rabaul on 26 July he loaded onto the *Ryoko Maru* “600 or 700 rounds” of ammunition for No. 2 mountain artillery company.³¹ This is about four times the amount the company, with only one gun, would be taking into the mountains as its first line ammunition and corresponds closely to the amount set down by IJA logisticians in the kaisenbun. A kaisenbun, it will be remembered, was a unit of supply issued to a Japanese force, usually of divisional size as was the Nankai Shitai, which is about to embark upon a campaign. It was supposed to maintain the unit’s effectiveness in food, ammunition and all the other things it needed for three or sometimes four months.

One kaisenbun was originally sent to New Guinea and another one to Guadalcanal as that campaign gathered steam in September.³² The ammunition in a divisional kaisenbun was assumed to be for 20 ‘firing’ days in a four month campaign. Its total weight was between 2,500 and 3,000 metric tons for a full division plus a proportion for corps troops.³³ Normally, each regimental or mountain gun would have had 1,300 rounds of which 10 per cent was carried, ten per cent was in an ammunition train and 80 per cent

³⁰ NIDS Nanto zenpan 297, Nanto taiheiyo homen sakusen kiroku, Nankai Shitai no Sakusen (Operations record in southeastern Pacific area, operations of the Nankai Shitai), p. 47.

³¹ AWM 55 3/7, current translations no. 74, p. 42.

³² Memoirs of naval Lt. Ogino Teruzo, unpublished manuscript in authors’ collection, p. 9. Ogino was a supply officer at Guadalcanal. He wrote that the plan was to land one kaisenbun on the island by October but much of it did not get there.

³³ Military analysis division, *the effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics* The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, chart, p. 89.

was in a nearby depot. A 70mm battalion gun would normally have had 1,500 rounds of which 20 per cent was carried, 10 per cent was in a supply train and 70 per cent was in the depot. A 37mm gun would have 1,200 rounds with the same proportions carried, in train and in depot, as for the 70mm gun.³⁴

There is enough here to show that 17th Army supplied the Nankai Shitai artillery with a standard kaisenbun and that the 150 rounds carried per 70mm gun corresponded both closely to the calculation we have made above of what probably was carried as well as to the proportion of ammunition recommended to be always with the gun on active service. It has also been established in the supply chapter that at least ninety per cent of supplies intended for Papua in 1942 actually got there so there is every reason to believe the artillery of the Nankai Shitai was adequately supplied with ammunition.³⁵ It may even have been more than adequate because an estimate of the IJA Inspectorate general of communications indicated that two kaisenbun, or the major part, were consumed in New Guinea (including areas outside the Kokoda front) by year's end so there may well have been even more than one kaisenbun of ammunition available to the artillery of the Nankai Shitai.³⁶

The snippets of hard evidence we have for how much ammunition was with the artillery also supports the argument here. There is one Japanese report of a gun arriving at Isurava with 261 rounds.³⁷ The single 75mm gun with 41 Regiment gun company had, in late August, sixty boxes or 180 rounds as its reserve ammunition with its gun train suggesting these calculations may be, if anything, on the conservative side. This was also a slightly higher proportion of its allocated rounds than was recommended in the kaisenbun. This

³⁴ Military analysis division, *the effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics* The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, chart, p. 89.

³⁵ Military analysis division, *the effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics* The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 91.

³⁶ Military analysis division, *the effect of air action on Japanese ground army logistics* The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, p. 95.

³⁷ AWM, 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p. 48.

gun company was further advised that if they ran short of ammunition they may dip into other stocks - presumably those of the only other units with 75mm guns, the mountain gun battalion or 144's Regimental gun company.³⁸

Further evidence that the Japanese artillery suffered no shortage of ammunition in the fighting is provided by the records of 3/144 Battalion. The battalion gun expended 120 rounds during the action at Ioribaiwa from 14-16 September. As this gun had been in action only once before, at Efogi where it fired 40 rounds, we can be sure it had brought at least 160 rounds that far and presumably more as it would have been unlikely to expend its entire supply of ammunition in the attack on Ioribaiwa.³⁹ An artillery officer of 41 Regiment, when captured, said there was "little or no ammunition shortage."⁴⁰

Several dumps of 70mm and 75mm ammunition were left behind by the Japanese when they retreated from Ioribaiwa.⁴¹ Australian photographs from September or October 1942 show these to be carefully stacked - not dumped ad hoc beside the track. This indicates it was an orderly disposal. The Nankai Shitai was burdened by many wounded at this time and it is probable the order came to dump ammunition to free up carriers for the wounded. Even so it would not be likely they would abandon ammunition if there was not more to come.

On the way to finding out whether or not the Japanese artillery was an important factor in the fighting, we have seen that a major part of their force was involved in getting the guns and their ammunition to the front and that there appears to have been no shortage of ammunition. Next, before we examine the damage the guns inflicted, it will be appropriate to look at how they were used.

³⁸ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publication no. 33, file of Nankai Shitai orders, 16/8/42 to 15/10/42, order no. 102 of 24/8/42, p. 7.

³⁹ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshu, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) Chart 2, p. 166.

⁴⁰ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 48. Lt. Naka Masao, p. 2.

⁴¹ AWM 52 9/2/4, General staff intelligence, NGF, situation report no. 191 of 3/10/42, p. 1.

There were three roles for the three kinds of guns. The first was indirect fire. That is, with the fire (where possible) being directed by an observer while the gunners themselves could not see the target. Both the 75mm and the 70mm gun were howitzers, that is, capable of high angle fire so both were suitable for the role, but mostly it was the 75mm guns that were used in this manner. At Efogi, those of the 144 Regiment had their fire directed into the Australian rear on Brigade Hill and at second Eora-Templetons the mountain artillery had its fire directed down the Eora gorge from an observer overlooking Templeton's crossing.

The second role was direct fire, with the gunners able to observe the target at medium ranges of 1,000-2,000 metres, out of effective range of all but the Australian 3 inch mortar. Before the Australian three inch mortars arrived in numbers, Japanese artillerymen were usually safe a little beyond 1,000 metres from the Australian infantry. At Isurava, 70mm guns were used in the direct fire role. The battalion gun of 2/144 fired along the Eora gorge from the eastern side at MFHQ which was on the west side less than 2,000 metres away. At Efogi, 70mm guns fired directly at 2/27 Battalion from 1,500 metres.⁴² A medium machine gun company was sometimes, as at Efogi, deployed just forward of the artillery group. It was found that with the telescopic sights that the Japanese had for their medium machine guns, these weapons could fire accurately to 1,000 metres.⁴³

The third role for the Japanese artillery was in very close support of the infantry. The 37mm gun was usually used in this way and sometimes also the 70mm gun.⁴⁴ Both were lighter and had a lower profile than the 75mm and were, when necessary, dragged forward by ropes drawn by their crawling crew. The ideal location was thought to be from 800 metres in defense but much closer than that in attack.⁴⁵

⁴² AWM 67 2/97, Gavin Long papers, interview with Major C. Sims of 2/27 Bn, Balikpapan, 1945, p. 7.

⁴³ AWM 54 320/3/19, Japanese army notes on infantry weapons of 1942, npn. The telescopic sight for the Juki mmg was sighted to 2,700 metres though this was well beyond the range used.

⁴⁴ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 20, Pte Tsuno Keishin, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁵ AWM 55 5/ 1, enemy publications no. 5, p. 59, chart of artillery deployment.

In this role, the preferred tactic, as explained in a Japanese pamphlet on the combat principles of the infantry gun, was “to seize the initiative and open fire unexpectedly and to get good results within a short period”. The gun should be used “close up behind the infantry and [should] fire on enemy heavy weapons.” The crew “should avoid firing on targets within 150 m of friendly infantry unless they are prone.”⁴⁶ One who faced this tactic, a British officer in Burma, described its use: “One of the weapons [a 37mm] the Japs used most adroitly was a tiny... field piece, an infantry gun which could be man-handled easily in forward positions and fired over open sights at point blank range. We nicknamed the shells from these guns ‘whizz-bangs’ - you would never have time to hear the one that hit you.”⁴⁷

At Ioribaiwa there are accounts from both sides of Japanese artillery being fired 100 metres from the Australians and of the gunners losing several men to Australian rifle fire. As the IJA pamphlet stated it was important to be able to generate a great deal of fire suddenly in such circumstances. All three Japanese artillery weapons were capable of rapid fire. The ‘urgent fire’ rate was the one used when the weapon was first revealed. It was 10-12 rounds a minute for two minutes. The quick rate was 6-8 rounds a minute for five minutes. The rate normally used in long range fire was two rounds per minute.⁴⁸ Well trained artillerymen can always exceed standard rates when required.⁴⁹

How then might the success or otherwise of the Japanese artillery on the track be gauged? It will already have been observed that the effect of Japanese artillery, though usually mistaken for mortars, often features in Australian records. The 2/4 FA diary recorded that at Templetons a mountain gun seriously inhibited all Australian movement around the

⁴⁶ AWM 55 3/5. current translations no. 59, pp. 2-4, Combat principles of the infantry gun.

⁴⁷ Cooper. K, *The little men*, New English library, London, 1975, p. 117.

⁴⁸ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 26, p. 2 and AWM 55 6/4 interrogation report no. 151, Shibata Shinichiro, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Major Michael Shevak, ex Royal Australian Artillery. Record of interviews with author. 1/2/06-21/2/06.

creek crossing and that smoke by day always drew mountain gun fire.⁵⁰ On 23 October a situation report stated that “our attack [was] maintained in the face of tenacious enemy resistance and heavy persistent fire arty, mortars, MMGs.”⁵¹ The war diary of 2/16 Battalion said Japanese guns were very effective and seemed to suffer no shortage of ammunition.⁵² Such statements, though generally persuasive, admit of no quantification.

Australian soldier’s service records sometimes give details of the kind of wound sustained. A random survey of one hundred service records in the National Archive of men wounded in the campaign has proved to be of limited use, as in many cases the notation GSW (gun shot wound) was used to describe any and all kinds of wounds.⁵³ Just ten of one hundred cases provided enough evidence to show the wound was probably inflicted by artillery. A blown off hand or foot, as a 14 FA report noted, was more likely to be from artillery than any other cause.⁵⁴ There is also the problem that while there are medical records which sometimes give details of those wounded by artillery there are obviously none for those killed.

Medical records made during the campaign or post campaign reports have some value but they do not provide the detail required. In an article on the operations of surgical teams in the Kokoda campaign, Doctor Robert Grogan reported there were generally two kinds of wounds, gunshot wounds and fragments of shells, grenades and mortars. The latter, he

⁵⁰ AWM 52 11/12/13, 2/4 Field Ambulance war diary, 20/10/42.

⁵¹ AWM 54 577/7/9, messages and situation reports relating to the period 1/10/42 to 10/11/42, Owen Stanleys, report of 23/10/42.

⁵² AWM 52 8/3/16, 2/16 Battalion war diary August to October 1942, report attached to diary, p. 4.

⁵³ NAA service records refer to ‘multiple shrapnel wounds’ but this could have been caused by a grenade or artillery. ‘Multiple wounds’ could be shrapnel for a grenade, artillery or even a number of bullets. Very rarely was mention of artillery as a cause of a wound made in the service records. Department of Veteran Affairs veterans’ personal files contain very detailed records of the wounds sustained by Australian soldiers. A selection from those who were wounded in the Kokoda campaign would likely allow the proportion of Australians wounded by artillery to be estimated but these files are not accessible to the public.

⁵⁴ AWM 54 481/2/48, Papuan campaign reports dealing with medical problems, native carriers, evacuation of casualties, 1942. Report of Captain W. McLaren, p. 2.

noted, was the larger class though unfortunately it is not clear if he meant larger in size of wound or number of cases.”⁵⁵ Nor are the frequent Australian references such as ‘Japanese mortars caused a number of severe wounds’ of any value in attempting to estimate the proportion of Australian casualties caused by the Japanese artillery.

There are two times in the campaign where there is sufficient evidence to arrive at a proportion of casualties inflicted by the Japanese artillery as against fire from Japanese infantry. At Efogi, the 2/27 Battalion was under fire from Japanese artillery and attack by 3/144 battalion over three days from 6 September 1942. In this time the battalion took 38 battle casualties. Between 16 and 19 were from Japanese artillery fire.⁵⁶ The discrepancy involves casualties on 7 September when, depending on the source, two were killed and five wounded or two killed and eight wounded by this fire. The battalion history stated that all casualties on this day were in C Company whose position was “rendered untenable by mountain gun fire”.⁵⁷ The next day, 8 September, the battalion history stated that the “whole battalion was deluged with HMG, mortar and mountain gun fire.”⁵⁸

A second example was at Ioribawa. It is known that one of the nine Japanese guns present fired 160 rounds but it is not known how many the others fired. However it was probably, after Oivi, the second heaviest bombardment faced by the Australians in the campaign. In addition to one killed and seven wounded at 21 Bde HQ by Japanese artillery a combined artillery, MMG and knee mortar barrage inflicted six killed and eleven wounded on the composite battalion in a short period.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Grogan, R. The operation of forward surgical teams in the Kokoda-Buna campaigns. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Surgery*, no 68, 1998, pp. 68-73, See p. 68.

⁵⁶ AWM 52 8/3/27, 2/27 Battalion war diary 6/8/42-9/8/42 and Burns, *The brown and blue diamond at war* p110-117 and Sublet, *Kokoda to the Sea*, p. 72.

⁵⁷ Burns, *The brown and blue diamond at war*, pp. 115-116.

⁵⁸ Burns, *The brown and blue diamond at war*, p. 117.

⁵⁹ For the Japanese arrangements for this bombardment see NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Sosho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment), p.52. The casualties are drawn from McCarthy *South West Pacific Area-First Year*, p. 231. The records for casualties caused by Japanese artillery at Ioribaiwa are:

It is not possible to say how much of this was done by the artillery but it represents over half of all the casualties taken by the composite battalion on Ioribiawa ridge. The 2/16 Battalion history says the battalion lost four killed and ten wounded there from mountain gun fire but it is not clear if this was the same incident.⁶⁰ It has been mentioned in the Ioribaiwa chapter that a sharp decline in morale seems to have occurred in the composite battalion as a result of enemy artillery bombardment and that Eather may have decided to withdraw from the ridge as he feared the battalion would not face the Nankai Shitai's artillery bombardment for much longer.

The second thing artillery does is to stop the enemy doing as it wishes, either properly directing his fire in defence or manoeuvring his forces in attack. In the former case a powerful bombardment in support of an attack, though it must lift when the attacking infantry gets close to the target, will much diminish the defender's fire against the attacker's assault as many of the defenders will stay low in their fighting pits rather than expose themselves to fire their weapon. Japanese artillery especially sought to neutralise the defending infantry's major source of firepower, its automatic weapons. In the earlier fighting along the track this was usually the Australian Bren light machine gun. When Vickers medium machine guns were used then they became the priority target for the Japanese artillery. Overnight on 24/25 October, an Australian Vickers gun was carefully camouflaged overlooking Eora creek. At first light it was spotted by the Japanese artillery which destroyed it and its crew with one shot.⁶¹

The second kind of suppressive fire involves firing to prevent the enemy moving freely. At Templetons and Eora some accounts suggest the slow advance of the Australians –

Uren M. *A thousand men at war the story of the 2/16 battalion*, AIF, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1959. p. 153. On the morning of 15/9/42 C Company lost 4 kia and 10 wia from a single mountain gun.
AWM 52 9/2/4, General staff intelligence report, New Guinea Force, situation report no. 153.
AWM 52 8/2/21, 21 Brigade war diary. On 13-16/9/42, at 1220 a 37mm QF gun opened fire on Bde HQ, killed one and wounding seven. The next day one man was wounded in 2/16 by artillery and on 15/9/42 2/14 and 2/16 lost 4 killed by artillery.

⁶⁰ Uren, *A thousand men at war*, p 153.

⁶¹ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p. 297.

which drew the ire of Herring, Blamey and MacArthur – was in part due to the inhibitions imposed on Australian movement by Japanese artillery fire. In the opinion of one of the Australian battalion commanders who faced it there, the Japanese artillery was the major problem for the Australians in their counter offensive over the mountains.⁶² Major General Paul Cullen (then battalion commander of 2/1 battalion) has said that the Japanese artillery was often able to inhibit or even halt Australian manoeuvres at second Eora-Templetons. He cited the example of 22 October when the major part of 16 Brigade was pinned down by Japanese artillery on the ridge south of Eora village for most of the day.⁶³ It has also been mentioned that the seven Japanese guns on the Oivi heights in November were probably a very important factor in stopping dead the Australian attack there.

We are still short of conclusive proof that 17th Army, in allotting to the Nankai Shitai a high proportion of artillery requiring one quarter of the manpower sent into the mountains, made the correct decision. There is however enough to say that they probably did. It should be re-emphasised that the Australians had no artillery at all.⁶⁴ Air attack accomplished little and only later in the campaign were Australian three inch mortars with their longer range able to counter the Japanese artillery to a small extent by returning fire.⁶⁵ When one side can fire on the other from over 2,000 metres while the other is limited to ranges of not much more than 1,000 metres then it is the equivalent, as Australian veterans have said, to boxing when one man has a much longer reach than the other.

⁶² Major General Paul Cullen, Record of interview with author, Marulan, NSW, 12/12/ 2004.

⁶³ An account of this is in McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year* , p. 289.

⁶⁴ For several days around 20 September two Australian field guns briefly and ineffectually fired on Ioribaiwa ridge from Owers Corner.

⁶⁵ Australian two inch mortars cannot be considered to do the job of artillery as their range was well under 1,000 metres. Three inch mortars, known as the ‘infantryman’s artillery’, had three times the range and three times the explosive power (a 2 kilogram round as against a 6 kilogram round for the latter). It was only in the last action of the campaign that we see nearly as many of these in action on the Australian side as we see artillery pieces on the Japanese side.

It has been established earlier that the Japanese had no superiority in numbers in the first half of the campaign. In the second half they were outnumbered by two or three to one and against fresher troops. It has been said that, given these numbers, some new explanations for the outcomes of the actions and engagements of the campaign is required. A possible candidate is the artillery of the Nankai Shitai, which may well have been a major contributor towards determining the results of the fighting.

Perhaps the last word on artillery should go to Carl von Clausewitz, who made two pertinent observations. One is that there is a correct proportion of artillery for every campaign and too much will become a logistical inconvenience.⁶⁶ The Nankai Shitai's artillery certainly imposed a huge burden but our conclusion is it was probably justified. Clausewitz's second observation, taken to heart by the Australians after the Kokoda campaign, was that artillery is the one arm an army can least do without.

⁶⁶ Clausewitz, C, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, book five, chapter four, pp. 285, 287 and 291.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN.

NANKAI SHITAI AND AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL PROBLEMS.

CHAPTER 15 – NANKAI SHITAI AND AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL PROBLEMS

Hans Zissner has written that epidemics get the blame for defeat while the generals get the credit for victory.¹ The defeat of the Nankai Shitai in January 1943 can doubtless in large part be blamed on sickness. Prior to this, in the mountains, it was the Australians who suffered more from illness than did the Japanese. In the second half of the mountain campaign, sickness among the Japanese began to rise, but it was not until November, as the mountain campaign concluded, that Japanese medical problems became overwhelming and worse than those of the Australians.

All armies start to get sick as soon as they leave their barracks. In healthy environments this decline is slow, but New Guinea was not then - and is not now - a healthy environment. As soon as thousands of soldiers are camped in close proximity, well away from the hygienic conditions offered to them in modern barracks, disease prevention will become a major consideration. The Australian 49 Battalion, for instance, had been in Port Moresby, supposedly one of the healthier places in Papua, for three months and had seen no action except for air raids when it held a parade on 29 August 1942. There were 666 men on parade, 96 absent for various reasons and 110 men in hospital.²

An Australian senior medical officer thought three months in New Guinea brought about a noticeable decrease in effectiveness in a unit independent of whether or not it was engaged with the enemy. By six months, the unit would probably be worn down to uselessness by the health hazards of the environment. This is the same conclusion American studies of Guadalcanal came to. A Japanese 1943 study of the Papuan campaign concurred stating that after three months there troops were only fit for static defence.³ Critics of Allied command, who argue that more Australian infantry could

¹ Zissner, H. *Rats, lice and history*, Macmillan, London, 1985, p. 153.

² AWM 52 8/3/88, 49 Battalion war diary, 29/8/42.

³ AWM 54 267/3/9, statistical research New Guinea. Notes on failures and remedies in control of dysentery, malaria and casualties, 30/1/43, attached papers, p. 3.

easily have been sent to New Guinea earlier in 1942, forget that maintaining the health of the troops was a good reason to hold them back until they were definitely required.

An examination of medical concerns must be comparative as if both sides will rapidly get sick in New Guinea the question becomes which army will deal with this best and become disabled the slowest. In the Kokoda campaign there has been no comparative study of medical problems. Rather, while stories of Australians afflicted with dysentery are common, it has been assumed Japanese effectiveness was even more reduced and that sickness was a cause of their defeat. Along with this it has been thought that the Japanese came to Papua unprepared for the health problems and suffered accordingly. The available evidence suggests that this view may be in error.

Before looking at both sides' medical records, something should be said about malaria and dysentery. The Japanese base at Giruwa was a hyperendemic malarial area. The Australian base, Port Moresby was malarial but to a much lesser degree.⁴ Half of the Nankai Shitai line of communications, from Giruwa to Kokoda, was also malarial but (owing to a thinner population) it was not as bad as Giruwa. Malaria is a human disease. There are no animal hosts. A low population inhibits the spread of the disease. The mosquitoes which can act as a carrier for the disease, (most mosquitoes cannot) transfer it by biting humans who carry it, then biting those who don't. Consequently troops suffer far more in heavily populated areas. Where there are no humans, there is no malaria. Anopheles mosquitoes usually bite at night and a soldier taking maximum precautions might well sit in a hyperendemic area for months and not get malaria. If his officers ensure a rigid prophylactic regime, he may not contract malaria at all. Once malaria is contracted recurrent attacks can occur from two to six months later if suppressants are not taken.⁵

⁴ Unless otherwise stated the sources for this overview of malaria are Professor Frank Fenner, ANU, John Curtin school of medicine, record of interview with author, 4/10/06. Professor Fenner served as a malariologist to the AMF in New Guinea 1943-45; and Bullard S. 'The great enemy of humanity, malaria and the Japanese medical corps in Papua 1942-43', *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol 39, no 2, 2004.

⁵ Interview by telephone with Professor Ian Clarke, ANU, 3/10/06. Professor Clarke pointed out that atebrine and quinine can sometimes kill the malaria bug, not just suppress it.

The Japanese, most of whom had had malaria before in China, Indo-China, the Philippines or Rabaul, used a high dosage of quinine and had (in general) no problem until supplies ran out.⁶ Milne Bay, where the Australians suffered 5,000 cases of malaria in 1942, is at sea level in a well populated area and few anti malarial precautions were taken. The Kokoda campaign was largely fought above 1,000 metres, where malaria was then absent. So it is no surprise that none of a party of fourteen men of the 2/27 Battalion, who were lost in the mountains for a month without quinine, or much food for that matter, caught malaria.⁷

Dysentery is a bacterial disease. It is necessary to swallow the bug to contract it. The faecal oral contamination occurs most commonly when contaminated food is eaten or water drunk or the bug is picked up on the hand which then touches the mouth. Healthy troops moving into an area after others have contaminated it will quickly become infected. This occurred to the Japanese as they advanced to Ioribaiwa and to the Australians as they later advanced to Eora creek. A Japanese post campaign analysis reported that “Dysentery was a major problem in a country where very heavy rain washed infection into the myriad of streams which intersected the broken terrain... as a waterborne disease it was almost impossible to control.”⁸

By January 1943, the Japanese suffered a catastrophic breakdown and almost the entire force was debilitated by malaria, dysentery and beri-beri, to name only the three most prominent illnesses. This began in November and by December 1942 there were 2,500 patients in hospital at any one time and there were others who should have been there.⁹

⁶ Fenner made a study of Japanese malaria precautions and said they were very well disciplined regarding precautions but their problem arose when their atebirin and quinine ran out. He also explained that there were two kinds of malaria, vivax and falciparum. Vivax is not fatal but there are recurrent attacks. It would be an ordinary thing then if most of a battalion caught vivax then three or four months later most of the battalion had a relapse. With falciparum, while it is of course possible to be reinfected, there are no relapses. Falsprim can be fatal while vivax is not.

⁷ AWM 54 577/7/21, description of an isolated party of 2/27 Battalion men, p. 4.

⁸ ANL mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 37, pp. 19-20.

⁹ ANL mfm 1383, Japanese monograph no. 37, p. 31.

By the end of January it has been estimated, by both Japanese and Australian post campaign accounts, that the major part of the Nankai Shitai was debilitated by disease. The Japanese report stated that one third of the men were still fit in December but only one seventh by January, including those who had arrived in December. The shocking standard of health in the Nankai Shitai at the end of the campaign has had the effect of obscuring their high standard of hygiene and, relative to the Australians, low incidence of illness in the previous mountain campaign.

Many benefits accrue to a regular army with much practical experience of war. One of these is an understanding of the importance of maintaining a very serious approach to medical matters lest the army wither away. The Japanese had this approach, as did the Australians in the Middle East where malaria and dysentery had been encountered and largely defeated. There is a general impression that the Japanese were not prepared for war in the tropics but this is a doubtful claim.¹⁰ The Japanese medical services were widely admired by western observers to the Russo-Japanese war. In China they had, for ten years, fielded large armies in sometimes hostile climates and dealt with both malaria and dysentery.

When 11 Division returned from Shangahi in 1938, 500 men came down with malaria and in 1940 it was estimated 47 per cent of the men returning from Korea were carriers of malaria – but only seven per cent showed symptoms owing to a strict regimen of prophylactics.¹¹ Realising they would encounter similar problems in any southern advance across the equator, the IJA established a medical branch at their school of tropical research in Formosa in 1940. Some of the students, who had taken a course in malaria prevention there, as well as some of the teaching staff, served in the Nankai Shitai.¹² Two broadly equivalent Australian schools, that of jungle warfare and malaria prevention, were not established until 1943.¹³

¹⁰ Bullard, *The great enemy of humanity, malaria and the Japanese medical corps in Papua 1942-43*, pp. 208-209.

¹¹ Bullard, *The great enemy of humanity, malaria and the Japanese medical corps in Papua 1942-43*, p. 209.

¹² AWM 54 243/17/3, pt 8, *Papuan campaign, malaria in the Japanese forces*, p. 2

A post-campaign Australian study of the IJA noted that “No army has ever been as frequently and diversely inoculated as the Japanese are today”.¹⁴ Smallpox, typhoid, plague, cholera, food poisoning and dysentery were routinely inoculated against although there was doubt as to the efficacy of the last two. Refresher doses were given at “astonishingly short intervals by our standards. Laboratory work in the field on infectious diseases is carried out by the hygiene and water purifying units-they are equipped to carry out pathological and bacteriological work. They used animals for experimental work... It would appear the Japanese are keen pathologists and a great deal of work is done... blood is examined for malarial parasites...this was frequently, if not regularly preformed on whole units with a view to determining the number of infected men... Amoebic dysentery was diagnosed by culture when at all possible.”¹⁵

A variety of inoculations, including those for cholera, plague and typhus, were given to all the men of the Nankai Shitai beginning in July and completing the courses of injections in August.¹⁶ Another indicator that the Nankai Shitai were initially better prepared for medical problems than the Australians is the numbers of medical personnel each side had. For the Nankai Shitai in August it was seven per cent, for the Australians it was often less than four per cent early in the campaign and five per cent later.¹⁷ Among these, the Japanese had 230 personnel in specialist water purification and hygiene units. One of their main tasks was the prevention of dysentery and other waterborne diseases. When Colonel Kingsley-Norris, the senior medical officer of 7 Division, arrived in Port

¹³ Walker, *The Island Campaigns*, p. 280.

¹⁴ AWM 54 423/4 88, items of medical interest compiled from captured Japanese documents, p. 1.

¹⁵ AWM 54 423/4 88, items of medical interest compiled from captured Japanese documents, p. 3.

¹⁶ AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 36, p. 3, and AWM 54 577/7/26, diary of Japanese officer, p. 2.

¹⁷ For Nankai Shitai see chapter 4, order of battle. For Maroubra Force medical personnel present can see AWM 54 481/2/48, Papuan campaign, reports dealing with medical organisation and medical problems, medical units pp 1-2, AWM 481/12/13, brief account of activities of the 7th Australian division pp. 1-10, AWM 329/2/4, New Guinea campaign, extracts from medical appreciations, pp. 1-4,

Moresby in August he was surprised to find he had no specialist hygiene personnel at all in New Guinea.¹⁸

This idea that the Japanese, prior to the disaster on the coast at years end, were worse off than the Australians as regards medical casualties seems to have its origins in the severe ordeal undergone by the Stanley detachment, a small portion of the Nankai Shitai, in October of 1942. Early in the month, the members of the Stanley detachment were briefly examined by an unnamed medical officer. Probably it was Medical Captain Tsunobu who had just been sent up from Kokoda to the detachment. Of 986 men, 126 had malaria, 95 beri-beri, two were wounded, 55 had stomach trouble and 41 had some other illnesses not named.¹⁹

STANLEY SHITAI, Current Casualties, All Causes, 3 October, 1942.²⁰							
UNIT	Size	A	B	C	D	other	total
[Where A = malaria; B = Stomach; C = beri-beri, D = wounds]							
2/144 HQ	66	5	2	8	0	0	15
1/144, 2 coy,	85	19	16	1	0	2	38
2/144, 4coy,	86	5	0	4	0	0	9
2/144, 5coy,	46	5	2	3	0	4	14
2/144 6 coy,	5	8	4	12	0	5	29
1 MG coy	18	0	0	0	0	0	0
2 MG coy	91	4	14	4	0	11	33
1 bia	26	5	2	7	0	3	17
2 bia	55	1	2	6	0	0	9
ITL	28	6	2	6	0	0	14
[unknown]	25	20	0	0	5	0	25
BA	107	8	2	4	2	1	17
P	120	29	9	30	0	15	83
S	179	11	0	5	0	0	16
Total	986	126	55	95	2	41	319

¹⁸ Kingsley Norris F. *No memory for pain*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1970. pp. 146 and 150.

¹⁹ AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 24, p. 7.

²⁰ AWM 55 1/1 bulletin no. 24, p. 7

This force, always fewer than 1,000, did suffer greatly from hunger and illness but, as with the food shortage, it is wrong to think it was representative of the entire Nankai Shitai or even the portion of the Nankai Shitai which advanced into the mountains. We have already seen that the majority of them, at least until the end of November, did not suffer any disastrous food shortage and it will be argued here that nor did the same occur regarding sickness.²¹

End of campaign Australian medical reports, on their own troops as well as those of the enemy, have unintentionally tended not to make a distinction between conditions in the mountains in 1942 and those on the coast in January 1943. One study said enemy losses to malaria were high because the Buna area is hyperendemic and the advance into the range was made with infected men.²² This is not quite right.

It takes a lot of mosquito bites at night to stand a good chance of contracting malaria, because malaria-carrying mosquitoes are rare among mosquitoes in general. The great mass of Japanese who fought in the mountains spent a very short time on the coast. They usually disembarked at Giruwa and marched off up the track within a few hours. Professor Frank Fenner, who during the war was a malariologist with the AIF, has expressed the view that troops taking all sensible precautions would be very unlucky to contract malaria in such a short stay.²³

²¹ The first specific Australian record of Japanese medical problems seems to have originated between 3-7 October 1942. Much was made of a report that twelve Japanese had been found dead on the track, somewhere between Ioribaiwa and Nauro, as the Australians advanced. The corpses were reported to have no discernable wounds. It is implied that starvation was not the cause but illness was. The impression was given that these men had just keeled over by the side of the track as a result of illness. From this time there appear in Australian reports frequent mention of Japanese debilitation due to disease. AWM 52 9/2/4, general staff intelligence, NGFHQ intelligence summary no 86, 3-7/10/42. p. 1.

²² 54 243/17/3, pt 8, Papuan campaign, malaria in the Japanese forces, p. 1.

²³ Fenner, record of interview, 4/10/06. Professor Fenner said that it was extremely bad luck to contract malaria in a short stay in most places in eastern New Guinea and that camping even one kilometre away from the human population with malaria could make a great difference as anopheles mosquitoes do not travel very far. Perhaps only one mosquito out of one hundred might be infected so it is quite possible to be bitten many times with no effect. As anopheles usually bite at night a soldier taking precautions, especially at night, might well stay in an infected area for months and not get malaria. Professor Fenner pointed out that he served in New Guinea for two and a half years, in the field as well as at various bases, and by taking all possible precautions, did not contract malaria in that time.

What the Australian wartime report ignored is that half of these men had spent six months in Rabaul, a hyperendemic area. The rest had most likely had malaria during earlier southern China, Malay and Philippine campaigns. Almost all of those had already had one bout of malaria, in some cases many more, and were taking suppressants. Few long service veterans of the IJA would never have contracted malaria in China. This was noted in a message from Colonel Yazawa to Major General Ota. He observed that the coastal area was highly malarial, that malaria was increasing in his regiment “and relapses will occur as all officers and men of this unit have had malaria before.”²⁴

When atebirin and quinine, in common with other supplies, stopped coming into the mountains in mid September these men had another bout of the malaria they had been carrying since Rabaul or elsewhere. One 144 Regiment soldier said there was no malaria at all until the suppressant stopped arriving.²⁵ A large number of Japanese did die from cerebral malaria but this too occurred in the December-January period.²⁶

The Australian report went on to say that “widespread bacilliary dysentery... swept though their force”.²⁷ Again, this is true, but as the figures below would seem to show it did not begin until towards the *end* of the Japanese advance in the mountains and seems not to have made an appearance until the Japanese occupied the ground where the Australians were suffering a dysentery outbreak of epidemic proportions. The Australian problem with dysentery began much earlier. It can be traced to an outbreak of dysentery among carriers at Ioribaiwa in July. A field hospital detachment came forward to Ioribaiwa to attend to this.²⁸ As all Australian troops had to pass by this point on the way to the front, it appears dysentery spread up and down the track from here, arriving at Isurava as the fighting there ended.

²⁴ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 30, p. 3

²⁵ AWM 55 6/1, interrogation report no. 19

²⁶ AWM 54 243/17/3, pt 8, Papuan campaign, malaria in the Japanese forces, p. 1.

²⁷ AWM 54 243/17/3, pt 8, Papuan campaign, malaria in the Japanese forces p. 1.

²⁸ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*. p. 132.

The medical issue shares much with the supply problem with which it overlaps. Humans on a limited diet in war, as elsewhere, are more susceptible to disease, though the greatest medical problem for the Japanese was malaria. The contraction of this disease is entirely unrelated to the diet of the 'contractee' though the recovery period is related.²⁹ While afflicted with malaria, a person on a poor diet is more likely to perish from other causes than one on a rich diet. However, it remains true to say that this unusual feature of malaria at least offers us an opportunity to make more distinctions between Japanese supply problems and Japanese medical problems than would otherwise be the case.

Turning now to the evidence from Nankai Shitai and Maroubra Force records it should first be said that, for the Australians, there is both more and more accurate evidence available but there is enough from the Japanese side to make a comparison. There are good records of Japanese sick and wounded for September and October 1942. Before this time what little is available from the Japanese side indicates illness was not problem.

A report of casualties to all causes in Papua to 31 July stated there were 110 to that point.³⁰ As battle casualties were certainly between 80 and 90 by then, and casualties to accidental causes unknown, there would not seem to have been many sick. Evacuation from Papua to Rabaul of the seriously ill did not occur in July or August. It began on 17 September when 124 sick left. These, presumably, would include the seriously ill from August.³¹ The numbers present and battle casualties of 3/144 Battalion is also known. This battalion landed in mid August with 738 men and lost 182 battle casualties up to Ioribaiwa where it began the action with 539 men.³² This leaves 17 men, gone from the battalion, probably due to illness, up to mid September. There would have been some lightly wounded who had returned to their unit by then so the number that may have been

²⁹ Interview by telephone with Professor Ian Clarke, ANU, 3/10/06.

³⁰ AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 26, p.6.

³¹ AWM 55 5/2 enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, pp. 1-7.

³² NIDS, Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Soshu, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) pp 25, 41 and 64.

sick was probably a bit higher than 17. Lt Hirano of 1/144 usually noted his company's health in his diary. In 16 August he wrote "a few cases of diarrhea and malaria have broken out" but his and other Japanese diary entries as well as the evidence here make it clear enough that there was no general problem and no general concern about health until September.³³

The Japanese arrangements for evacuation of medical cases were similar to the Australian ones. A Line of Communication Hospital, much like the Australian 2/9 General Hospital in Port Moresby, arrived with the main force at Buna. It then split into two parts, one staying in place and one going to Kokoda. En route it marched through Sambo on 23/24 August and the forward element was operational in Kokoda on 1 September.³⁴ In advance of it was a casualty clearing station run by 55 Division's field hospital.³⁵ This unit set up in various locations as far forward as Nauro.³⁶ Acting like a larger version of an Australian field ambulance was the Patient Collecting Butai though whose hands passed, and were recorded, most if not all men collected from the battlefield wounded or sick.³⁷ Their figures for September appear below.

³³ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, p. 3

³⁴ AWM 55 3 / 4, current translations no. 42, Nankai operation order A no 133 10/10/42. pp. 11 and 17. See also AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, records of 67 LOCH, pp. 1-2

³⁵ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no 38, pp. 14-15.

³⁶ AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no 33, file of Nankai Shitai operational orders 16 Aug to 15 Oct, see 10/10/42 order.

³⁷ The files of papers stated in ATIS to be 67 LOCH papers are in fact more than this. They are lists of wounded or sick for the entire Nankai Shitai. This is confirmed by the fact that some casualty lists contain wounded or sick for all the other medical units. Secondly, the casualties listed can be compared to other sources, confirming the list contains the complete casualties for the unit for that month. Those of 3/144 and 144 Regiment are the best and a comparison shows that the regiment's records and 67 LOCH's records are close enough to agreement that it is apparent the 67 LOCH documents constitute a record, albeit incomplete, of all Nankai Shitai casualties.

PATIENT COLLECTING BUTAI MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 1942		
<i>Includes all Nankai Shitai casualties except outpatients and patients of a civilian hospital run by Umeda Tai for Korean, Taiwanese and other civilians.³⁸</i>		
Unit	Sick	Wounded
55 Engineer Regiment	1	4
144 Regiment	76	219
15 Independent Engineer Regiment	72	1
15 Naval Pioneers	50	2
120 Land Duty Company	25	0
106 Land duty Company	38	1
41 Regiment	23	41
9 Division bridge construction company	8	0
24 Water purification unit	1	0
55 Transport Regiment	2	0
47 Anti Aircraft Artillery	8	0
55 Division medical unit (67 LOC)	3	0
55 Division field hospital	12	0
7 Independent wireless platoon	3	0
8 Independent telegraph company	1	1
17 Army headquarters	2	0
5 Shipping engineer Regiment	3	0
Emergency transport company	5	1
55 Division water purification	4	0
55 Division infantry group HQ	2	1
45 Fixed radio unit	1	0
55 Mountain Artillery Regiment	2	0
2 Independent Mountain Artillery Regiment	0	1
40 Sea Duty Company	5	0
Total	sick 299	wounded 273 = 572

Note that this is the number collected for treatment through the month, not the number in the hospital at month's end. Also the figures above are for the whole of the Nankai Shitai, not just the force that went into the mountains hence the number sick is comparable to NGF figures but not Maroubra Force figures. To obtain a comparison with those from Maroubra Force evacuated sick from the mountains, medical casualties for those units which never went beyond the Kumusi River, 93 cases, should be deducted. This leaves 206 evacuated sick from the Nankai Shitai in the mountains. This is about five per cent of

³⁸ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24. Records of 67 LOCH, PCB records for September. See p 32 and p.62.

the force which, as will be seen, was a small fraction of Maroubra Force losses to sickness in the same month.

In October, illness among the Nankai Shitai increased threefold overall but was higher in 144 Regiment which made up nine tenths of the Stanley detachment and 41 Regiment, much of which spent the period at hyperendemic Giruwa. It is probable the list below does not include all civilian labourers.³⁹

NANKAI SHITAI SICK AND WOUNDED, OCTOBER 1942		
UNIT	SICK	WOUNDED
41 Regiment	257	22
144 Regiment	261	173
106 Land duty company	69	2
120 Land duty company	101	0
55 Infantry group HQ	15	1
17 Army HQ, detachment	1	0
17 Army military police	1	0
4 Independent engineer company	2	0
55 Division water purification	4	0
15 Independent Engineer Regiment	158	1
40 Water duty company	4	0
55 Mountain artillery Regiment	43	5
55 Engineer regiment	36	13
45 Fixed wireless platoon	1	0
1 company temporary transport unit	29	0
2 company temporary transport unit	20	0
2 company 47AAA	5	0
55 Division, no.1 Field hospital	15	0
55 Division medical unit	55	2
7 Water transport platoon	15	0
17 Army, 24 water purification section	1	0
9 Division, no. 1 Bridging material company	7	0
2 Company 55 Trans Regt	1	0
3 coy 5shipping Regt	3	0
105 sea duty coy	4	0

³⁹ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no 24, field staff diary of 67 LOCH, medical captain Kubo Fukunobu p. 75.

88 indep teleg unit	8	0
3 coy 55 Cav Regt	9	0
17 road construct unit	11	civilians
15 Naval pioneers	88	civilians
Total wounded 223, Total sick 1,118 = Total 1,458 inc 116 civilians		

There are two other lists of total patients for the month of October which confirm these numbers though one shows 1,325 instead of 1,342 as the number of uniformed patients, 1,342 being the number one should get if the 116 civilians on the list above are deducted from the 1,458 total of patients.⁴⁰ Again not all of the 1,118 sick were present in the hospitals at month's end. Some 395 of them were evacuated to Rabaul in October and if we deduct cases for those not beyond the Kumusi then, taking away 245, we arrive at 973 medical cases evacuated from the mountains.

Another Nankai Shitai chart graphing daily hospital occupancy shows a great increase towards the middle and end of the month which marks that time as the period when sickness began to be a serious issue among the Japanese.⁴¹ Even so just four per cent of the entire uniformed force spent a period in hospital in October which is why the end of month hospital report could say there had not yet been an epidemic. It stated that diarrhoea was more problematic than malaria in the lowlands, but malaria was worse at the front – a point that supports the idea it was malaria relapses occurring in the mountains as there are no malarial mosquitoes there. On 3 October a one month supply of medical requirements for the entire Nankai Shitai arrived at Giruwa on the *Yamaura Maru*.⁴² The end of month 67 LOCH report also noted that a medical resupply will soon be needed indicating this supply was not yet exhausted.⁴³

⁴⁰ AWM 55 5/2 enemy publications no. 24, field staff diary of 67 LOCH, medical captain Kubo Fukunobu, 67 LOCH, chart No 9. pp. 1, 30, 46 and 51.

⁴¹ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no 24, field staff diary of 67 LOCH by med captain Kubo Fukunobu, p. 75.

⁴² AWM 55 3/3, current translations no. 30, p. 6

⁴³ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24. Records of 67 LOCH, end of October report.

Another Nankai Shitai document stated that in mid October the force had had 400 sick at Kokoda and 500 on the coast, a total which roughly corresponds to the chart above.⁴⁴ A 17th Army report repeated this figure.⁴⁵ On 14 October an order was given that 485 sick should be evacuated from the “forward areas” [west of the Kumusi] as “they are too weak from illness to be of use”.⁴⁶ Presumably these included the 400 sick at Kokoda. Lt Hirano noted the number from his company of 1/144 who left in this group was nine out of 73 present all ranks.⁴⁷ Medical reports stated civilian labourers suffered worse than the uniformed force and this is supported by an Australian study of the effects of disease upon the Japanese.⁴⁸ There is one diary entry from a medical sergeant of the Yamamoto butai, Korean labourers, which stated that on 13 September most of his unit was sick, half with malaria. However, this cannot be checked against hospital records as those of the Umeda tai, the civilian hospital, have not been located.⁴⁹

In summary, the Japanese figures shown here give the following totals for those evacuated sick from west of the Kumusi, the Maroubra Force equivalent, in the period 1 September to 15 November.

EVACUATED SICK FROM WEST OF THE KUMUSI, 1 SEPTEMBER TO 15 NOVEMBER 1942	
Sick for month of September	203
Sick first half of October	485
Total sick for October	973
Total Sick on 15 November	2,264

⁴⁴ NIDS, nanto zenpan 297, Nanto taiheiyo homen sakusen kiroku, nankai shitai no sakusen,(operation record in southwestern Pacific area, operations of the Nankai Shitai), pp. 42-43.

⁴⁵ NIDS, nanto zenpan 102, daitoa senso minami taiheiyo homen ni okeru sento, (the general east asia war, the battles in the southeast Pacific area), npn.

⁴⁶ AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 39, file of Nankai Shitai orders, p. 23.

⁴⁷ AWM 55 3/2, current translations no. 17, p. 7.

⁴⁸ AWM 54 243/17/3 pt 8, Papuan campaign, malaria in the Japanese forces, p. 1

⁴⁹ AWM 55 3/5, current translations no. 61, p. 30.

The figures for September and October include the sick from the 593 sick and wounded from August-October who were evacuated to Rabaul.⁵⁰ However, to have a total figure of all those who have been evacuated sick from the front line or were currently sick on 15 November another 350 who were evacuated to Rabaul in early November (another 150 were evacuated wounded) must be added. This gives a final figure of close to 3,440. Then there must be a deduction for those who went to Rabaul, or were sick on 15 November and were *not* from units west of the Kumusi. This is unknown but, as a third of the force was east of the Kumusi and malaria was worse there than in the mountains it would be more than reasonable to deduct a third from the sick (not wounded) evacuated to Rabaul and the total sick on 15 November. This gives a final figure of about 2500. This is probably about the number who were at some point evacuated sick or were currently sick, from the Nankai Shitai west of the Kumusi, to 15 November. By October men had begun to die, mostly from cerebral malaria.⁵¹

The pattern that arises is that illness was not a large problem for the Japanese in September, and probably not earlier, but emerged as a problem in early October, then became a very serious issue for the Japanese in late October. By mid November it had begun its destruction of the force, just as the mountain campaign ended.

A small example of the general pattern proposed here is in the record of an officer in charge of the Takasago volunteers, a civilian labour unit recruited in Formosa and a part of 15 Naval Pioneers. His company began the campaign with 264 men.⁵² Prior to September there were no unusual medical problems. On 5 September 33 men had malaria and one diarrhoea. By 13 September 39 had malaria but two days later the crisis had passed and 14 had malaria. On the same day three of them died in the field hospital at

⁵⁰ Bullard, *The great enemy of humanity, malaria and the Japanese medical corps in Papua 1942-43*, Toyoda and Nelson, *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea: Memories and Realities*, p. 212. Total evacuations from the Nankai Shitai to Rabaul to 16 November were about 1300.

⁵¹ NIDS, nanto zenpan 102, daitoa senso minami taiheiyo homen ni okeru sento (The general east Asia war, the battle in the southwestern Pacific area, npn. p. 356. At least 50 men of the infantry died of disease in October. The Australian record shows only 17 deaths to disease to December. See AWM 54 481/7/48.

⁵² AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 6, pp. 1-6.

Kokoda. On 21 September 36 men out of 238 had malaria. So far, at any given time the unit was operating with at least 85 per cent effectives but, by 27 October, 50-60 per cent of the men were down with malaria as there were no preventatives available west of the Kumusi.⁵³

Regarding the fighting troops, there is the record of 3/144. At the start of the Oivi-Gorari action the battalion had 420 men of which 145, just over one third, were currently sick.⁵⁴ The conclusion which the Japanese post campaign report came to was that by the end of September, one and a half months after the main force landed, malaria had appeared.⁵⁵ This was because rain had washed out the supply line, preventing suppressant drugs getting to the front. At the end of another month, just before Oivi-Gorari, the fighting troops numbers had been halved and dysentery and beri-beri had appeared alongside malaria.

Japanese medical officers agree that those units which stayed on the coast (like the Takasago volunteers mentioned above) suffered more from malaria than those in the mountains, which does not contradict the report stating that dysentery was the major coastal problem. It was rather that to the extent that malaria was a problem on the coast it was less so in the mountains. Medical Captain Kubo Fukunobu mentioned this when writing about his outpatients in October. He noted that of 21 sick 144 Regiment men, one third had had malaria. In contrast in 47 FAAB, who stayed on the coast permanently, 24 out of 31 outpatients had malaria. He also wrote that of all his outpatients at that time, 168 men, 68 had malaria and the rest were mainly recovering from dysentery.⁵⁶

⁵³ AWM 55 3/1, current translations no. 6, pp. 1-6.

⁵⁴ NIDS , Nanto zenpan 174, Hohei Dai 144 Rentai dai 3 daitai Sento Sosho, (Detailed battle records of 3 Battalion, 144 Regiment) p. 106, chart 1.

⁵⁵ AWM 54 423/4/156, (Japanese) lessons from operations July 42-January 43, p. 23. This study stated that after one and a half months from main force landing malaria appeared. That would be the start of October.

⁵⁶ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no 24, field staff diary of 67 LOCH, medical captain Kubo Fukunobu p. 57.

Malaria was at first the main Japanese medical problem with dysentery and diarrhoea appearing later. For the Australians dysentery was by far the major problem. The precise number of medical evacuations from Maroubra Force before the arrival of 2/4 FA and 14 FA are difficult to come by. One report (which states it is incomplete as records were lost as the force retreated) gives, for the period of 29 July to 29 August, 74 evacuated sick. Eight more were stated to have malaria.⁵⁷

The 39 Battalion war diary on 26 August recorded that “Bn [was] greatly weakened by dysentery, malaria and lack of food, sleep and shelter.”⁵⁸ For the Australians, dysentery broke out in Maroubra Force at the end of August and from the beginning of September 50-80 men a day were being evacuated on its account according to a 14 FA report.⁵⁹

For the early part of the campaign Australian records are contradictory. One Australian record states 530 men had been evacuated sick by 8 September, another stated it was 493 evacuated sick, mostly with dysentery, by 12 September.⁶⁰ Nine days later 80 more men per day had passed through the 2/6 FA post at Ilola. Captain L. Joseph wrote that in the first three weeks of September he recorded 1200 men evacuated (sick and wounded) through the post, “mostly with dysentery”.⁶¹ As the average strength of Maroubra Force was 2,000 in this period one man in thirty per day were being evacuated.

The Assistant Director of medical services wrote a report after his visit to Maroubra Force which stated this was caused by poor field hygiene among the troops resulting in

⁵⁷ AWM 54 481/12/17, report of ADMS visit to Maroubra Force, appendix A, casualties evacuated from Maroubra Force to 12 September, 1942.

⁵⁸ AWM 52 8/3/78, 39 Battalion war diary, 26/8/42.

⁵⁹ AWM 54 481/12/68, 14 Australian Field Ambulance, Papua, pp. 128-9. On 3 September it was stated that dysentery evacuations were running at 50-80 per day.

⁶⁰ AWM 54 481/12/48, NGF medical notes, New Guinea campaign, p. 2. Also AWM 54 577/7/13, casualties evacuated from Maroubra Force and AWM 54 481/12/13, brief account of activities of 7th Australian Division, p. 2.

⁶¹ Walker, *The Island Campaigns*, p. 36.

fouled ground.⁶² Another Australian report noted a “high incidence of dysentery during retreat [and] poor hygiene”.⁶³ Captain J. Oldham of 2/6 FA wrote that field hygiene was “amazingly bad for a two year old army”.⁶⁴ Elementary hygiene precautions were ignored - inefficient latrines, poor garbage disposal and unboiled water. He concluded: “the hygiene of the march and campaign was generally a disgrace for a modern army and dysentery figures support this remark”.⁶⁵

Lest it be thought that this was just in the battle zone, where hygiene precautions will be of lower priority than combat considerations, another Australian medical officer commented on the track from the roadhead at Uberi to Ioribaiwa, a portion of the track the Japanese never reached. “The whole length of track from Ioribawia to Uberi is seriously fouled and undoubtedly a dysentery focus. During the retreat in darkness the men were compelled to relieve themselves anywhere and the whole route literally stank. By this means the dysentery which had established itself at Ioribaiwa was spread further back”.⁶⁶

Having established the main culprit was dysentery, or the ‘large majority’ of sickness cases according to 21 Brigade’s medical officer Major Rupert Margery, we can return to Australian figures for those evacuated sick.⁶⁷ As stated above, the number was at least 493 by 12 September. Another report gives a higher figure, 883 sick for the period 6 August to 19 September. In one day, 4 September, from 2/16 Battalion alone, 33 men, or almost ten per cent of the battalion strength at this point, were evacuated sick.⁶⁸ The 2/25

⁶² AWM 54 481/12/48, NGF, medical notes, New Guinea campaign, p. 2.

⁶³ AWM 54 481/12/4/8 NGF, medical notes, New Guinea campaign, p. 2.

⁶⁴ AWM 54 481/12/26 NGF, medical notes, New Guinea campaign, medical report of Capt J. M. Oldham 2/6 Fd Ambulance, p. 3.

⁶⁵ AWM 54 481/12/26 NGF, medical notes, New Guinea campaign, medical report of Capt J. M. Oldham 2/6 Fd Ambulance, p. 3.

⁶⁶ AWM 54 253/5/8 pt 1, Captain G. H. Vernon war diary, July-November, 1942, pp. 39 and 56.

⁶⁷ Margery quoted in Brune, *A Bastard of a Place*, p. 186.

⁶⁸ AWM 54 577 / 7/3 21, Brigade report on operations, part 5 general narrative of events, p. 12.

Battalion lost 92 sick and 14 battle casualties in 21 days from 26 September.⁶⁹ After 38 days in the mountains from mid September 25 Brigade had lost 771 sick to 203 battle casualties.⁷⁰ This was an average loss of a platoon every day to the brigade's fighting strength. During the fighting at Oivi-Gorari, about the point where Nankai Shitai losses to illness overtook those of the Australians, the latter were still high. On 6 November six wounded Australians and 93 sick arrived at Kokoda, now in the Australian rear. On 7 November the numbers were 46 and 173 and on 8 November 52 and 203.⁷¹

The total Australian medical evacuations from Maroubra Force to 16 November have not been agreed upon. It is known it was 1752 by 30 September and by 27 December it was 4857.⁷² After the extremes of early to mid September the rate of medical evacuations among the Australians settled to about 35 men per day for the remainder of the period.

MEDICAL EVACUATIONS FROM OWEN STANLEY RANGE, LATE 1942		
	MAROUBRA	NANKAI
	FORCE	SHITAI
To end of September	1,752 ⁷³	343 ⁷⁴
Month of October only	1050 ⁷⁵	973 ⁷⁶

⁶⁹ AWM, 52 8/3/25/18, 2/25 Battalion war diary, September-October, esp. 17/10/42.

⁷⁰ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, p. 276.

⁷¹ Walker, *The Island Campaigns*, p. 72.

⁷² AWM 481/2/48, Papuan campaign, reports dealing with medical problems, p. 3.

⁷³ AWM 54 577/6/4, Australian 7th Division, messages dealing with Maroubra Force operations, Kokoda, June to October 1942, message of 30 September.

⁷⁴ This figure includes an estimated 30 sick from 110 casualties to all causes to the end of July, an estimate of sickness in the Nankai Shitai in the mountains for August- a figure based upon an average half way between July and October figures, and the 203 known to have been sick in the mountains in September.

⁷⁵ There are no figures for the month of October alone. In AWM 481/7/50 analysis of admissions, statement of casualties chart, 722 dysentery cases alone were admitted to hospital in Port Moresby and the figure given is based on the estimate, discussed in the text, of an average of 35 men evacuated sick per day from early October to December. The average figure of 35 men per day can be calculated from AWM 54 577/6/4, Australian 7th Division, messages dealing with Maroubra Force operations, Kokoda, June to October 1942, message of 30 September and AWM 54 481/12/13, brief account of activities of 7th Australian Division, p. 10.

Total medical evacuations including		
Japanese to Rabaul to 16 November	3,452 ⁷⁷	3,500

The numbers given above have even more impact when we recall that in September and October the Australians in the mountains were a smaller force than the one the Japanese had west of the Kumusi. At any given time in these two months the Australians had 2-3,000 men north of the Kokoda track roadhead. The Japanese had closer to twice this number west of the Kumusi though most of these were not engaged in combat operations. In September and October the Australians lost approaching half of their average strength to sickness while the Japanese lost much less. By November the Japanese rate began to increase rapidly.

There are of course many problems with these numbers. However it is important to attempt an estimate for it gives an unbalanced view to compare numbers evacuated from Maroubra Force with total medical evacuations from the Nankai Shitai most of whom were never in the Owen Stanley Range. It would be as if we counted NGF medical casualties for all of New Guinea as Maroubra Force casualties. The Australian figures for July and August are incomplete. McCarthy said that there were no accurate Australian figures for the whole period but the number was about twice the number of battle casualties. Australian battle casualties to 16 November were 1,680 so this would suggest about 3,360 losses to medical causes, not much different to the number estimated above.⁷⁸ If either McCarthy or our estimate is right then Australian losses to sickness

⁷⁶ AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, p. 1, records of 67 LOCH, p. 30 and p. 46 and charts pp. 60 and 63. Deducting units not west of the kumusi from the total figures on the charts gives the figure shown.

⁷⁷ See AWM 54 577/6/4, 7th Australian Division messages dealing with Maroubra Force operations, Kokoda June to Oct 42, AWM 52 1/5/15, 7th division adjutant and quartermaster general branch war diary, Mar-Dec 42. Various figures are given, some lower, some higher than this figure. The figure is derived from a) what is known to 30/9/42, b) what is known for December and c) an estimate of daily casualties in between. From 30/9/42 to 27/12/42 there were 3105 medical evacuations from Maroubra Force, an average of 35 per day. Deducting 40 days we arrive at 1705 plus 1752 to end September. After 25 December the malaria rate occasioned by the arrival of the force in hyperendemic Gona-Buna increased the average rate to about 70 men per day. See Walker, *The island campaigns*, p. 98.

⁷⁸ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, pp. 334-335.

were significantly in excess of those of the element of the Nankai Shitai they were fighting until the end of October.

Consider the case of 2/14 Battalion and 2/16 Battalion who participated in the campaign for a month from 20 August. The first had 550 men, the second 590 men when they left Port Moresby. On 19 September there were respectively 101 and 143 men with the battalions. McCarthy may be right that accurate overall figures for Australian sick cannot be known but battle casualties are known. Over one month 2/14 had 243 battle casualties and 2/16 had 163 so where were the other 210 men from 2/14 and 284 men from 2/16? Presumably the majority were victims of dysentery.⁷⁹ On 4 September it was said of 2/16 Battalion that “the condition of the troops can be judged to some extent in that 2/16 Bn during the day lost 1 officer and 32 ORs through dysentery.”⁸⁰ By comparison the one Japanese battalion we know about in detail had only 145 medical evacuees after spending twice the time in the mountains as did 2/14 and 2/16 Battalions.

Another problem with our estimates is that, on both sides, small numbers of men recovered from illness and went forward again to return to their units. Only partial figures for the Japanese are available.⁸¹ On 2, 8 and 14 October a total of 18 men of 144 Regiment were discharged, issued with ten days rations and told to report back to their units.⁸² It is reasonable to assume this was occurring frequently but nothing more about it is known. The Australians too formed ad hoc units from the sick, Chaforce and Jawforce, and sent them back into the mountains, though neither of these were engaged in fighting.⁸³

⁷⁹ AWM 54 171/2/47 Australian Imperial Forces, Battle casualties, Owen Stanley Campaign, Imbita to Wairopi. p. 2.

⁸⁰ AWM 54 577 / 7/3, 21 Brigade report on operations, part 5, general narrative of events p. 12.

⁸¹ McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area - first year*, p. 335.

⁸² AWM 55 5/2, enemy publications no. 24, p 1 records of 67 LOCH, pp. 76, 79 and 81.

⁸³ AWM 52 8/2/21/17, 21 Brigade war diary, appendix B.

With all the difficulties of arriving at reasonable estimates there is still enough here to cast doubt on the idea that the Nankai Shitai west of the Kumusi, up to the start of November, had a worse problem with sickness than did Maroubra Force.⁸⁴ The pattern suggests the Australians began to suffer very great losses to illness at the end of August, certainly by early September. Major Toyofuku believed the numbers of sick men did not become serious among the Japanese until October.⁸⁵ By the end of November the two sides had an equally great problem. The success the Japanese had in combating sickness in the early months of the campaign can be put down to their higher degree of preparedness.

It was mentioned earlier that the Australian impression in 1942 that the Japanese had worse health problems than themselves seems to have arisen from what they knew of the Stanley detachment. The figures suggest that about one third of all evacuated sick from west of the Kumusi came from that unit to 3 October. The figures for the Stanley detachment alone after this date are unknown but it would be reasonable to presume an increasing rate of illness in the same unit. Even if there was no increase compared to the rest of the Nankai Shitai then a third of all Japanese sick west of the Kumusi to the end of October probably came from the Stanley detachment which represented just one fifth of all Japanese west of the Kumusi and one twentieth of the Nankai Shitai as a whole. This in turn suggests that to base a general idea about the health of the fighting element of the

⁸⁴ It might be objected that the figures are skewed by the Japanese tendency to keep sick, who were judged to recover soon, with their units while the Australians did not. There is some truth in this, although there are a number of reasons why it does not have much effect upon the basic point being made here. The first of these is the Australians had a similar policy. Men who were judged would recover in ten days were not evacuated though this may have been more honoured in the breach than in the execution. (Walker, *Island Campaigns* p. 72) Australians were also evacuated for being “worn out”, “unfit to travel”, having “war neurosis” or being “exhausted”. Few of these problems ever appear on any Japanese list of sick men. A Japanese study also found that 27% of men with malaria could be given some light work. This may not be as harsh as it sounds. Australian studies found that men with malaria on average required 18 days in hospital and ten days convalescence so it maybe to this latter category that the Japanese document are referring to. There is also a Japanese document, written before the campaign, that proposes lightly wounded likely to recover soon, be carried forward with the advance. There are very few cases of this being put into effect for by the end of August the advance on Port Moresby had been postponed.

⁸⁵ NIDS, Nanto zenpan 168, Nankai shitai shireibu Toyufuku shosa kowa, (Lecture of Major Toyofuku, Headquarters, Nankai Shitai), p. 30.

Nankai Shitai on the Stanley detachment may have led to an exaggerated view about illness among the Japanese. Secondly, if the estimates for medical evacuations here are reasonable then it was the opponents of the Japanese, rather than the Japanese, for whom medical problems, dysentery in particular, were a contributing factor in their early defeats and an inhibiting factor in their later victories.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN.

CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN - CONCLUSION

The monument known as the Lion of Macedon still survives on the field of Chaeronea to mark the victory of Phillip II of Macedon over the Greeks in 338 BC. In the ancient world a trophy was put up on the battlefield by the victor – never the vanquished.

Now the vanquished are in on the act and, at Isurava, Australia has erected four pillars to a defeat. The sentiment has admittedly changed over more than two millenia and the meaning of the Australian monument is like that of the earth mound containing the remains of Spartan, Beotian and Theban dead at Thermopylae. An important part of the Thermopylae tradition is that the Greeks, though defeated, died fighting against overwhelming numbers. We now know that is not the case with Isurava.

There can be no cast iron certainty about the precise numbers engaged on both sides in all the actions and engagements calculated here. It is, however, fairly certain that the numbers do not err by more than ten per cent either way. It would also be possible to argue that the assessment here of which units were or were not engaged is faulty. Even if these errors are present it only alters by degree the main point - that the Australians were not significantly outnumbered in the actions and engagements of the campaign up to mid September and, after that, had the advantage of odds of two or three to one against the Japanese. Many aspects of the campaign might be seen in a new light now the numbers engaged have been more accurately determined.

Before reviewing what has been learned, something more should be said about how Australians became convinced their men were greatly outnumbered at Kokoda, Isurava, first Eora-Templetons, Efogi and Ioribaiwa. Most importantly the sources which show the actual numbers of Japanese are not all in Japan, so remote from Australian researchers. Information available within Australia from 'most secret sources' during the campaign, post-campaign AMF studies and intelligence reports and ATIS translated documents and diaries contain enough evidence to show the correct numbers.

Why has this been overlooked? There might be three factors. First Australian military history tends not to be comparative. The focus of study is usually on the Australians, not their enemy. Second, the correct enemy numbers were known at the top of the chain of command during the campaign while contrary information, that the Japanese were in great strength, was coming from battalion and brigade sources. There is an implicit prejudice in popular post war accounts against those in the most senior positions, such as MacArthur and Blamey, and in favour of those lower down, Potts and Honner for example, but especially the prejudice favours the ordinary digger. Thirdly, it is palatable to read of victories; almost as acceptable are defeats against overwhelming numbers. It is quite the opposite to read of battles lost fairly and squarely.

Guadalcanal has loomed large in our examination of Japanese strategy as it concerned the campaign in Papua. Midway has long been seen as the turning point of the Pacific War. It still is - but the profile of Guadalcanal is now also rising. As far as the Kokoda campaign is concerned, the effect of Guadalcanal on Japanese strategy was that the march on Port Moresby was put on hold almost before it began. Horii was told to limit his advance and await an order to go for Port Moresby. The order never came, though in September and October there was enough reason for the Nankai Shitai to believe it might.

At the same time Horii was told to limit his advance, a restriction was placed on the number of troops he could take to the southern side of the Owen Stanley Range. The importance of this to the larger picture is great. The reason smaller numbers of Japanese fought along the track than is thought was not so much that the Japanese were unable to get large numbers forward or feed them there, though this last might be true; rather, Horii was told not to send them south of the mountain range crest and he obeyed that order. The connection between Guadalcanal and Kokoda was simply put by Lt Colonel Tanaka of 18th Army: "There was originally a plan to assemble a large force at Kokoda and push it over the mountains but, because of Guadalcanal, the force never assembled."¹

¹ AWM, 67 11/29, Gavin Long papers, interview with Japanese officers, General Adachi, Lt Colonel Tanaka, Lt Colonel Ota, Lt General Kato and Navy Captain Sanagi, p.2.

Regarding intelligence, there is plenty of work still to be done. A study of the effect of the Allied interception of IJA and IJN signals in 1942 is warranted and the Japanese effort to intercept broadcasts from Australia is also of interest. It would be intriguing to know how useful to the Japanese were the remarkably frank broadcasts of Chester Wilmot on 4QG Brisbane.² Here the examination has been restricted to what the Japanese knew about Papua, especially the Kokoda track, and how they knew it.

The point has been made that the attacker knows where he plans to go so, naturally, has more time to prepare. Japan had long contemplated a southward advance so New Guinea received a share of attention in the intelligence work done in the 1930s. Later, the Japanese, always more interested in a landward approach to Port Moresby, were prompted to examine the route via Kokoda. Among their sources of information the names Chinnery, Hofstetter, Cheesman and Toyofuku are important.

It has also been pointed out that the decision to send less artillery and more engineers to Papua than to Guadalcanal is evidence that the Japanese were reasonably well apprised of the difficulties of an attack over the mountains. As a starting point for estimating the numbers of Japanese engaged in the fighting, an order of battle of the Nankai Shitai has also been made. The major feature to emerge from this is that though the Nankai Shitai

² It is clear from ATIS that the Japanese listened avidly to broadcasts from Australia. Apparently this proved useful, as the interception unit in Rabaul greatly increased its number of foreign language specialists in early 1943. Regarding Chester Wilmot's broadcasts it is not completely clear if the Japanese did listen to them but if they did there was useful information therein. On 28 July, when the Japanese themselves had lost contact with their foremost troops and had no idea where they were, Wilmot broadcast their location. He also gave the Allied estimate of the Japanese strength. In mid August he reported the commencement of Allied supply drops from the air at Myola which the Japanese may well not have known about. He mentioned that clouds in the Owen Stanleys greatly inhibited this operation and this comment appears in Yazawa Butai intelligence report within days. On 5 October, when the Japanese were unsure of the rate of the Australian pursuit, Wilmot announced that it had got as far as Efogi. This statement also soon appeared in Japanese intelligence reports but again we cannot be sure if it was obtained from Wilmot's broadcasts. See:

MacDonald, N. *Chester Wilmot Reports, broadcasts that shaped WWII*, ABC books, Sydney, 2004, p. 276-278, 285-288.

AWM 55 5/3, file of Yazawa butai intelligence records, intelligence record no. 28, pp. 84 and 87.

AWM 55 3/4, current translations no. 42, Nankai Shitai intelligence report no 21, 9/10/42, p 2.

was larger than has been thought, owing to attrition and a poor replacement system all the fighting units were smaller by the time they fought along the Kokoda track.

Turning now to the seven actions and engagements of the campaign, the iconic fights, from the Australian perspective, were the first and second engagements around Kokoda. This is where the legend of large Japanese numbers originated. In July, before other sources of intelligence were available to the Allies, the enemy numbers estimated by the front line soldiers were accepted. Second Kokoda was the more important of the two engagements. At that moment, the Japanese may have seen the American landing at Guadalcanal as a potentially small problem and were not yet disposed to change their plans because of it. Possibly it was Cameron's counterattack on Kokoda that convinced Hyakutake that a more measured approach to Port Moresby was required. The planned advance was postponed, as it turned out, permanently.

At Isurava, the Japanese were surprised at the toughness of the Australian defence. At the same time the Australian stand presented an opportunity for Horii to wipe out Maroubra Force. He failed to do this as he mishandled the attack. A severe defeat was inflicted on Maroubra Force but it was not destroyed. Yazawa's regiment took over the pursuit and twice failed to cut off and annihilate the Australians. At both Isurava and first Eora-Templetons, entire Japanese battalions became lost in the jungle and failed to have any effect on or participate in the fighting. After first Eora-Templetons, Japanese diaries and official documents commented that the Australians had lost their fighting spirit. There may be something in this for the Japanese successes at Efogi at even numbers and at Ioribaiwa, outnumbered two to one, were easier victories than Isurava.

At Efogi, at last, the Japanese hit their stride. Isurava and first Eora-Templetons were bumbling victories but Efogi was far from that and Kusunose showed himself to be a better commander than either Horii or Yazawa. Whether Potts was responsible for the defeat at Efogi is debatable but at the next action, Ioribaiwa, there is a clearer case of Australian command failure. Kusunose, so sick he was carried on a litter to the field, persuaded the Australians to retreat with aggressive use of an inferior force.

It was not an episode creditable to Eather, the Australian commander, who it must be said later in the campaign fully made up for his mistake. The defence that he did not know how many enemy there were at Ioribaiwa, and the same might be said of Potts at Efogi, does not hold up for two reasons. First, that is a normal condition for commanders, not to know the strength of the enemy. Second, when the standard of generalship of an individual is measured only small allowance is made for ignorance of enemy strength. The American Civil War Union Generals, George McClellan, in 1862 and Joseph Hooker in 1863, outnumbered their enemy but sincerely believed themselves heavily outnumbered so they retreated. The verdict of military historians on these two men is that their generalship was at fault and that ignorance of the enemy's strength is not an excuse for defeat. Vasey noted that in the jungle it was hard to estimate enemy strength. He concluded "I don't see how we can overcome this, so [we should] make a well informed guess and get on with it."³

With the Japanese on the defensive and the Australians now on the offensive, the period of the Australian advance northward is full of interest. At second Eora-Templetons the Australians had no advantage in numbers on Myola ridge so progress was slow. In the other half of this fight, on the Kagi track, 2/25 Battalion much outnumbered its enemy and probably should have done better but the battalion seems not to have tried very hard. The attack on the main Templetons position, it has been argued here, was the decisive moment of this phase of the fighting rather than Eora, where attention is usually focused. As a result of their defeat at Templetons, the Nankai Shitai position at Eora was initially vulnerable. The Australians had a three to one advantage and increasing heavy weapons support. Many of their opponents were starving or sick and there was a large gap in the Japanese position that the Australians failed to find. The decision to relieve Allen was probably correct, the more so now we know from Japanese sources that the Eora position was initially such a weak one. The strategic position was that with the Japanese committed to Guadalcanal there was an opportunity to drive forward swiftly to Giruwa.

³ Horner, *General Vasey's War*, pp. 212-213.

Allen did not achieve his victory swiftly and Japanese sources make it clear that he was well placed to do so.⁴

The last action of the campaign, Oivi-Gorari, does not fit any pattern discernable thus far. To November a certain man for man superiority of the Japanese over the Australians could be argued for but it seems to be absent at Oivi-Gorari. Though a comparative assessment of the Japanese and the Australian infantry merits study, the reasons it has not been examined in detail here is it would involve a calculation of morale which is extremely difficult to quantify and there is a distinct lack of evidence from the Japanese side. What can be said about morale is that the Japanese were followers of Scharnhorst's doctrine and the Australians were not. "Victory", said Scharnhorst, "is won by teaching soldiers how to die, not how to avoid dying". General Sir Edward Hamley, a disciple of Scharnhorst, added that "The army whose motto is 'avoid loss'... will certainly never succeed against an adversary of anything like equal strength."⁵

This is now not a very popular view in Australia, or in Japan. There is some evidence that Australian morale was poorer than that of their enemy in the first half of the campaign. The Japanese certainly thought so. While there are a few comments in Japanese personal diaries or official documents praising Australian fighting prowess these are not representative. In general, Japanese sources from the war and afterwards are not complimentary about Australian 'fighting spirit' in 1942. If, as is argued here, the Japanese had no numerical superiority, then the conclusion of General Sir Thomas Blamey, may be open to doubt: "The chief reason for our success in this campaign was our ground troops proved to be better led, better equipped and better trained than those of the enemy and were, man for man, better fighters."⁶

⁴ Kokoda campaign command issues are summarised in S. Gower, Command in New Guinea <www.awm.gov.au/events/conference/2002/gower.asp> Army History conference, 2002, *Remembering 1942*.

⁵ Hamley, General Sir E. *Operations of War*, William Blackwood and sons, Edinburgh, 1914, p 411. Scharnhorst, quoted in Hamley, would have approved of a traditional Japanese saying that Bushido is a soldier's search for a place to die.

⁶ AWM 54 519/6/58, part 4, C in C Allied land forces SWPA, report on operations, 23/9/42-23/1/43, p. 25.

In Australia, the difference between the militia and the AIF has been well known as well as the tension between the two.⁷ It has not been realised that a similar tension occurred in the Nankai Shitai. In Japan the argument concerns the two infantry regiments, 144 and 41. At Isurava, first and second Eora-Templetons and at Oivi-Gorari bitter words, even blows, were exchanged when 144 Regiment felt 41 Regiment had let them down on the battlefield. Even now the argument between the veterans of the two regiments continues. It is said by 144 and denied by 41 that the latter were so poorly disciplined they pilfered supplies meant for the former. The Japanese official history comes down squarely in support of 41 Regiment and the author is inclined to agree that 41 Regiment's performance, while inferior to 144, was not so very far behind.

By Oivi-Gorari the Japanese had had their three months in the jungle whereas none of the Australians they faced had been there as long. Studies from both sides agree that after three months in the jungle the performance of soldiers drops off alarmingly. Perhaps the combination of jungle living, hunger and disease had finally got to the Nankai Shitai. Whatever the cause, something had changed though this should not be seen to take away from Vasey's fine victory. It has been pointed out that thrusting a brigade, over half the total Australian force, into the enemy rear at Gorari, was a bold move not before attempted in the Pacific war.⁸ It was, as Rowell and Blamey observed, the deciding action of the mountain campaign. The last act would now be played out on the coast.

It may be that the Nankai Shitai artillery gave them such an advantage, especially against an enemy without any, that it largely accounts for their success up to mid September. In their retreat, too, it appears to have been an important factor in delaying the Australians. There is evidence it was influential in all the actions and engagements and it is difficult to imagine the great Australian victory at Oivi-Gorari occurring at all if the Australians had had no choice but to attack straight into the eight Japanese guns on the Oivi heights. It is

⁷ Ham, *Kokoda*, pp. 24-25.

⁸ Horner, D. *General Vasey's War*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p 212.

likely, then, that the Japanese did obtain value from the immense effort they put into carrying a dozen guns into the mountains.

Other factors which seem to contribute less in explaining the outcome of the fighting than has been believed are Japanese sickness, Allied air power, and Japanese supply problems. Up to mid November, the Japanese appear to have lost fewer men to sickness than the Australians. Studies of air interdiction campaigns have shown very large numbers of aircraft are necessary to have a serious effect but we have seen that the AAF campaign was a quite small one, so not really likely to achieve results. Its effect on Japanese supply was nowhere near as large as the exceptionally heavy rain from September which, for two weeks at a time, washed away the supply line from Giruwa to Kokoda.

At the beginning, the Japanese were fairly well prepared in terms of supply and planned to do, with some modification, what had been working well for them so far. Air dropping of supplies was expected to supplement what could be carried but Guadalcanal took away this option by taking IJN aircraft away from Papua. The Japanese supply crisis from September has been overstated. When it arose in late September the Nankai Shitai was in retreat but, it must be emphasised, not because of the supply difficulties. When the main body of the combat troops returned to near the Kumusi River, supply improved for them. It was the smaller force, the Stanley detachment which stayed in the mountains, that came close to starvation. The assumption that the privations suffered by this force were representative of the whole is incorrect.

Another feature of the campaign that has emerged without winning a chapter to itself is casualty reporting. There have been large errors made on both sides in the casualties claimed to have been inflicted on the enemy. In both countries these are still taken at face value. Here we have seen casualties were broadly even, with two exceptions usually one to one, until Oivi-Gorari when the vanquished lost three times what the victor lost. By this time 144 Regiment had 655 dead. It then lost another 1,925 dead at Gona, Sanananda and Buna.⁹ Of 2,900 who served in Papua (600 arrived after Oivi-Gorari) 420 escaped

⁹ Azuma Shigetoshi. List of 144 regimental war dead, authors collection, p. 3.

after the debacle. Of 4,650 men who left Japan with the regiment just 1,386 survived the war.¹⁰

A comparative analysis of Japanese and Australian doctrine, tactics, equipment and weaponry would also be of great interest. Regarding training and tactics, the two forces represent, in effect, the clash of the Confucian and Clausewitzian doctrines. Probably the most interesting feature of the former, which also has overtones of Bushido, is the stress Japanese tacticians lay on winning by cunning and with as few casualties if possible. The Australian impression of Japanese reliance on the 'Banzai' charge is in error. It was mainly a later war tactic when the quality of the Japanese infantry was in decline. The army Japan possessed in 1942 was highly skilled after a decade of war in China. Japanese officer training stressed that their good quality infantry was not to be thoughtlessly squandered when manoeuvre, firepower and time might obtain a better result at less cost. Japanese bayonet charges, (usually no more than platoon size) were made in the Owen Stanley fighting but rarely without such thorough preparation that they were likely to succeed at little cost. In spite of frequent references to massed Japanese bayonet attacks in Australian histories there would seem to be no occasion in the fighting on the Kokoda track from July to November 1942 when Japanese infantry were wasted in this way as was to occur later in the war. This contrast between actual Japanese tactical practise and the quite different impression of it delivered in much Australian writing on the subject is a small example of the theme this thesis has addressed.

Problems for the Australian account of the Kokoda campaign do arise when Japanese sources are consulted. Hopefully this thesis has contributed to a more balanced and accurate view of the actions and engagements of the campaign as well as some of the larger issues concerning its outcome. A very important one of these is the number of Japanese who fought in the campaign. Napoleon 1st noted that victory goes to the big battalions. He should have added that when it does not it is necessary to search among tactics, firepower, generalship, morale and so forth to find out why it didn't. In the period

¹⁰ NIDS 302.9.H, *Hohei Dai 144 Rentai Senki* (Battle Records of 144 Infantry Regiment), p. 88.

of the Japanese advance they administered, from Deniki, five severe defeats to the Australians. Only at first Eora-Templetons did they outnumber the Australians significantly, though not by two to one. At Ioribaiwa, the defenders had twice the number of the attackers yet the Australians still lost. Any explanation for these Australian defeats can no longer be based, as it has been, on the Japanese having a superiority of numbers.

APPENDIX A- TABLE OF SHIP LANDINGS AT GIRUWA

22 July. Two fast ships, *Ryoyo Maru* and *Ayatosan Maru*, brought the Yokoyama advanced force and the Sasebo special naval landing party. The *Ayotozan Maru* was hit by air attack and sunk on this day while partly loaded. The cargo successfully landed included 1200 horses, 663 bales of foodstuffs, mainly rice but including 200 bales of powdered shoyu sauce, 200 bales of powdered miso (bean) paste and 210 bales of oats for the horses (AWM 55 5/3 enemy publications no. 28 p. 44).

27 July. *Ryoyo Maru* returned, disembarked troops, vehicles, 90 horses and supplies. (McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year*, p.145 and AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28 p. 44).

29 July. *Kotoku Maru* and one other ship disembarked troops and supplies. The *Kotoku Maru* was hit from the air and took on water before much unloading had been done. The heavy equipment was not unloaded but all personnel were. The *Kotoku Maru* sank on the return journey. As a result of intensive air attack and a lack of air cover the *Ryoyo Maru*, with trucks still aboard left early and returned to Rabaul unhit. (AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28, p. 48).

31 July. *Nankai Maru*, with the complete equipment for the planned air base in the Buna for 25th air flotilla, was attacked from the air. It was not hit but turned back and arrived in Rabaul intact.

13 August. *Nankai Maru*, on its second attempt, successfully landed all the airfield equipment (McCarthy, *South-west Pacific area-first year* p. 145). *Kinai Maru* and *Kanyo Maru* accompanying also landed all stores and troops including 2,000+ men of 14 NP and 15 NP. *Kinai Maru* landed 200 telegraph poles, 1,650 tons of lumber for bridge construction, 15 trucks, 700 tons provisions, 220 tons cement plus battle and canteen supplies and 280 men.(AWM 55 1/1, bulletin no. 51 p. 3)

15 August. *Ryoyo Maru* and *Kazuura Maru* landed 360 shore duty troops, 167 horses, 692 carriers, 1,400 men of 2/144 and 3/144, 185 tons fodder and 250 artillerymen. The total number of troops landed by these two ships was 3,400. (AWM 55/3, bulletin no. 2, p. 32).

18 August. The main force of the Nankai Shitai, the rest of 144 infantry regiment and other units landed from the *Kazuura Maru*, *Ryoyo Maru* and *Kanyo Maru*. (AWM 55 5/3, enemy publications no. 28 p. 44).

19 August. A bridging material company and part of 10 IER arrived on *Yasukawa Maru* (55 1/1, bulletin no. 11, p. 2).

21 August. *Kiyokawa Maru* and *Myoko Maru* land a part of 41 Infantry Regiment and supplies.

25 August. *Matsue Maru* and *Tamahoko Maru* make successful trip to Giruwa. No record of cargo.

2 September. Remainder of 41 Infantry Regiment arrives on one unnamed ship which also carried 300 tons of food *Boeicho boei senshishitsu*, *Senshi soshō*, *minami taiheiyo rikugun sakusen* (War history series, South Pacific area army operations, volume 1, p. 134.)

15 September. *Kazuura Maru* landed 134 horses, 3 hand carts, 202 men, 6 trucks, 270 tons of rations in 11,000 boxes and 180 boxes of medical supplies (AWM 54 423/4/41, pt. 15, combat intelligence centre, SPAC force of the US Pacific fleet, p. 10).

20 September. A ship (the *Sugie Maru* or *Myoko Maru*) landed 9,000 bales of rations (36 tons) at Giruwa.

4 October. *Yamaura Maru* delivered 40 days food for 10,000 men (Onda Segitaka, *Tobu New Guinea Sen*, Kodansha Bunko, 1988, p. 44 and *Boeicho boei senshishitsu*, *Senshi soshō*, *minami taiheiyo rikugun sakusen* (War history series, South Pacific area army operations), volume 1, p. 144)

10 October. *Taiko Maru* arrived with 180 tons of fresh vegetables, 60 tons of meat, 25 tons of soy sauce, 9 tons of sugar, 100 tons of rice, 2 million cigarettes, 200,000 bottles of soft drink, 20,000 bottles of beer and 5 tons of sweets.

2 November. *Choryo Maru* and *Kiyokawa Maru* landed food, reinforcements and ammunition (Bullard, *Japanese Army Operations in the South Pacific Area, New Britain and Papua Campaigns*, p. 199).

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