

**THE 39<sup>th</sup> AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION**, mainly composed of 18 to 19 year old Citizen Force soldiers, was based initially in Port Moresby on echelon tasks. In June 1942 the 39<sup>th</sup> was ordered north to secure Kokoda against a Japanese attack on Port Moresby across the "impassable" Owen Stanley Range. The Capture of Port Moresby would have given the Japanese a base for the invasion of Australia. On 21<sup>st</sup> July the Japanese landed near Gona and advanced inland. The 39<sup>th</sup> fought delaying actions near Gorari and later, reinforced by PIB elements, at Oivi before being overwhelmed at Kokoda. Kokoda was again lost. On 8<sup>th</sup> August, a three company attack enabled A Coy to re-take Kokoda. This Company resisted constant fierce onslaughts until nightfall of 10<sup>th</sup> August when, greatly outnumbered and food and ammunition exhausted, they withdrew with their wounded. The 39<sup>th</sup> then fought pitched battles at Deniki and Isurava. At Isurava they held the Japanese until 26<sup>th</sup> August when the 2/14 Bn arrived to save them from annihilation. The 39<sup>th</sup>, depleted and exhausted, stayed to support the 2/14. The 39<sup>th</sup> fought its last Kokoda Track action at Eora Creek and when finally relieved at Kagi on 5<sup>th</sup> September, it had marched and fought continuously for 6 weeks. By the time they were withdrawn for return to Australia they could only muster 32 men remaining from the original force. They suffered casualties of 118 KIA, 266 WIA and untold sickness.

**THE 2/14<sup>th</sup> BN** on 13<sup>th</sup> August 42, the 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade incl 2/14<sup>th</sup> Inf Bn disembarked in Port Moresby without urgent supplies and artillery held up on the wharves in Australia. Three days later they marched to Uberi reaching Myola 21 Aug. On 25<sup>th</sup> August the battalion received orders to relieve the severely depleted 39<sup>th</sup> Bn which was holding the Japanese at Isurava. On 27 Aug the Japanese offensive began in earnest putting Isurava at threat. The 2/14<sup>th</sup> Bn consolidated on 28<sup>th</sup> August around Isurava facing some 6 enemy battalions. Fierce fighting continued to Ioribaiwa and Imita ridge. In these ongoing battles to the 30<sup>th</sup> August the 2/14 was severely damaged. The 2/14 was temporarily withdrawn from the line on 16<sup>th</sup> Sep. The battalion had commenced the Kokoda campaign with 546 men. Upon arrival at reserve in Uberi they had only 88 men available for operations. The consolidated 39<sup>th</sup> - 2/14<sup>th</sup> campaign is considered one of the finest examples of battle endurance fought in the Pacific.

**THE PIB AND ANCILLARY TROOPS** at Kokoda. The first mainline military attack on the Japanese Army was an ambush conducted by the PIB on 23<sup>rd</sup> July near Awala. Later they joined the 39<sup>th</sup> Bn for operations against the Japanese. Maroubra Force was born. Together, the 39<sup>th</sup> Bn with the PIB in support, fought the first historic Kokoda battle which brought glory to them and the Allies. They held back the Japanese until the arrival of the 2/14<sup>th</sup> reinforcements. Throughout the campaigns to follow the PIB and NGIB troops supported by ANGAU, the Coast Watchers and M Special, NGVR and ancillary government administration, fought with the Australian forces in all the PNG campaigns throughout Papua New Guinea and the Islands. In 1944 the PIB was combined with the NGIB Battalions to form the Pacific Islands Regiment which today carries their Battle Honours on its colours. Their war time decorations included 1 DSO, 6 MC, 4 DCM, 2 GM, 20MM and 10 MID. More than 3,500 Papuans and New Guineans served during the course of the war. They imposed some 2,600 casualties on the enemy suffering 230 killed, missing and wounded.