



2015



Kokoda Day Memorial Service

To commemorate

the 73rd Anniversary
of the

Defence of Kokoda 8 - 10 August 1942

by

39th Australian Infantry Battalion

at the

Kokoda Stone and Kokoda Plaque,
Croll Memorial Precinct, Corinda

Sunday, 9th August, 2015

at 11.00 a.m.

"The Price of Liberty is Eternal Vigilance"

39TH AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION
39TH AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION 1941-1943

ORDER OF SERVICE

- 10.55 39th, 49th, 2/14th, 2/16th, 3rd Bn and PIB stand and are acknowledged
- 11.00 Catafalque Party (218 Sqn AAF Cadets) and Flag Orderlies take post.
- 11.03 Master of Ceremonies: Mr Kevin Alcock
- 11.07 Prayers: Rev Dr Hugh Begbie
- 11.10 39th Personnel Support Battalion - Message: Mr Scott Mitchell, Sub-branch Committee
- 11.13 Guest Speaker: Brigadier Ross Grant
- 11.23 Laying of Wreaths and Lantana.
- 11.33 Last Post **Mr Stewart McKenzie Fowle
Brisbane Municipal Concert Band**
- The Ode: Mr G. Palmer**
Silence
Rouse
Lest We Forget
- 11.40 Benediction
- Advance Australia Fair
Catafalque Party marches off.
-

All present are invited to join the 39th Bn and their comrades for a light lunch afterwards in the Harry Dalziel VC Centre.

The 39th Battalion Hands Over The Battle of Isurava and the Kokoda Track - Aug/Sep 1942

Dr. David Horner's *"Battles That Shaped Australia"* rightly describes Isurava as a "turning point in the Pacific War". The 2/14th Infantry Battalion played the major part in this battle, arriving in the nick of time to save the 39th Bn from annihilation. The 39th had performed with great credit in delaying the forward elements of the Japanese Army poised to advance over the Owen Stanleys and capture Port Moresby. The delaying battle was fought over four days - 26th to 30th August '42, with the enemy suffering many casualties and a severe disruption to his plans. 2/14th and 2/16th with the 39th in reserve then executed a fighting withdrawal back to Efogi and Brigade Hill. Here the remnants of the 39th were withdrawn and the 2/27th arrived, completing the 21st Brigade.

During the Isurava battle and withdrawal to Ioribaiwa Ridge, the Australians were out-numbered and out-gunned by 4 and 6 to 1 by the Japanese who had not suffered a defeat and possessed heavy machine guns, mortars and mountain artillery.

The Japanese had suffered many battle and sickness casualties and were unable to maintain their lengthened supply line. As a result they withdrew and after receiving reinforcements fought delaying actions at Templeton's Crossing and Iora Creek, and eventually were forced back to Gona, Sanananda and Buna by the Australians.

Papuan Infantry Battalion 1940-46

The Kokoda Campaign brought together the PIB, the 39th and other battalions who fought an historic battle which brought credit to many servicemen. The PIB were first ordered from Port Moresby across the Track on 19 February 1942. The official War History states that the first mainland military attack on the Japanese Army was an ambush conducted by the PIB on 23 July near Awala. Major W.T. Watson MC and Bar, DCM was CO of the PIB and Acting Commander of Maroubra Force on two occasions earning him the DSO. PIB and NGIB servicemen fought with other Australian Forces in all PNG campaigns except Milne Bay.

In 1944, the PIB was combined with the NGIB to form the Pacific Islands Regiment.

Commemorating Kokoda at Corinda since the Sixties

From the late 1960's veterans of the Kokoda battles gathered at the home of Jack Hand at 14 Consort St Corinda to hold their annual commemoration and lunch. After a few years the luncheon moved to Sherwood RSL Sub-branch, in the Croll Hall. In February 1973, the Kokoda Stone was dedicated and unveiled on the Sherwood RSL Sub-branch property. The stone was a gift from Port Moresby Sub-branch which had arranged for it to be won from the back of Iloilo Plantation at the famous McDonald's Corner near the southern entry to the Kokoda Track. On Sunday 11 August 2002, the Kokoda Plaque was dedicated and unveiled. The Memorial Service is proudly hosted by Sherwood Indooroopilly for the 39th Battalion Association, whose service it is. The sub-branch has undertaken to the 39th to continue to hold this service in perpetuity.

The 39th Battalion was formed in October 1941 in Victoria largely of 18 and 19 year old militia troops who volunteered for service in Papua. Initially it was officered by veterans of World War I.

On the 24th June 1942, the 39th received orders to oppose a possible Japanese *overland attack on Port Moresby via the so-called "gap" in the Owen Stanley Range near Kokoda.* (At the same time, the 39th's sister battalion in the 30th Brigade, the 49th from Queensland, was designated to remain and defend Port Moresby. Subsequently in December and January the 49th engaged the Japanese at Sanananda, suffering casualties totalling 14 officers and 282 men).

First contact with the Japanese had been made at Awala by elements of the Papuan Infantry Bn. B Company of 39 Bn then fought delaying actions along the track forward of Kokoda during July, and was driven from Kokoda on 29th July by the overwhelming strength of the Japanese. Meanwhile, the other companies had been moving forward over the track.

On the 8th August A Company reoccupied Kokoda. The Japanese returned in force and after fighting a series of fierce day and night attacks A Company ran out of food and ammunition by the evening of the third day (10th August) and were forced to withdraw with their wounded.

The battalion then fought a heart- and back-breaking withdrawal through mud and driving rain across the Owen Stanleys, until they were relieved on 5th September.

The 39th had been the first militia unit to meet the Japanese and they had broken the momentum of his southwards thrust.

Later the battalion returned to action on 30th November, being airlifted to the Gona front where they fought many battles until the Japanese resistance had been crushed by late January 1943. By then the battalion had been reduced in strength to 32 all ranks. Clearly the spirit of Anzac lived in these men.

The battalion returned to Australia and sadly and inexplicably was disbanded on 3rd July 1943. The 39th Battalion's Battle Honours are:

South West Pacific Area 1942-45

Kokoda Trail, Kokoda-Deniki, Isurava,

Eora Creek - Templeton's Crossing 1,

Buna-Gona, Sanananda Road, Amboga River