

# The Kokoda track (kokoda.commemoration.gov.au)

## Four Peoples at War

### Lesson: Four Peoples at War

#### Overview

*In Papua from July 1942 to January 1943 over 120,000 people from four regions fought, or supported the fighting troops...*

The largest group were Australians, 56,000 of whom were at one time or another either in Papua or involved in air and sea operations there. The Americans, allied to the Australians, contributed 24,000 men. Their enemy the Japanese had 27,000 men, some not from Japan but from its empire, involved in Papuan operations. About 18,000 people from what is now Papua New Guinea, but was then the Australian Territories of Papua and New Guinea, fought, scouted and carried supplies for both sides.

#### The Australians

*Australians from all states and territories served in Papua...*

Several hundred of them were either born there or had worked there but the great majority came from mainland Australia as members of two branches of the Australian Military Forces; the Citizen Military Force and the Australian Imperial Force. The former was, from 1940, a part conscript, part volunteer force obliged to serve in Australia and its territories. The latter was an all volunteer force raised in 1939.

About 1800 Australians served in the Royal Australian Air Force in operations relating to the Papuan campaign. The majority were based at airfields in far north Queensland. The Royal Australian Navy guarded the sea communications from Australia and maintained a coastal supply line from Port Moresby to Milne Bay and later along the north coast of Papua.

#### The New Guineans

*The great majority of New Guineans who participated in the campaign did so as carriers of supplies for the Allies, though 400 men from the Papuan Infantry Battalion and the Royal Papuan Constabulary fought against the Japanese in 1942...*

Two thousand men from New Britain worked for the Japanese as carriers and between two and three hundred Papuans aided the Japanese as armed scouts.

The arrival of the Japanese intruded into tribal politics. Those of the Orokaiva, Binideri and Koiari peoples, who were employed by the Australian administration at the start of the campaign, in the main sided with the Australians. Others had no particular reason to favour either side. Of necessity it was more important for them to consider the effect of the arrival of the Japanese on the web of political relations between tribal groups. Consequently some calculated it was in their best interest to support the new arrivals, especially if a local enemy had thrown in their lot with the Australians.

## The Americans

*No Americans fought on the Kokoda track but 24,000 participated in the Battle of Buna-Gona, at Milne Bay, or were involved in air and coastal operations...*

The major American formation present was the 32nd Division composed of National Guards, a militia force from the states of Michigan and Wisconsin. This division arrived in Australia in May 1942 and went into battle at Buna in November 1942. A regiment of 41st Division was engaged at Sanananda and United States Army engineers fought at Milne Bay and maintained communications and supply at Port Moresby. American anti-aircraft units also served at Port Moresby, Milne Bay and Buna.

## The Japanese

*Like the Australians until late 1942, Imperial Japanese Army units tended to be recruited by region...*

During the Kokoda phase of the Papuan campaign the majority of the Japanese fighting troops were from the island of Shikoku or from the Hiroshima area. Later these were reinforced by troops mainly from Osaka. The Imperial Japanese Navy escorted shipping to Papua and was engaged in coastal operations. Two thousand of the Navy's marines served at Buna and Milne Bay. The IJN (Imperial Japanese Navy) also provided almost all of the aircraft supporting land operations from bases at Lae, Gasmata and Rabaul. Perhaps 2100 of the Japanese force in Papua were not from Japan. These men, primarily engaged in carrying ammunition and food, were from Korea, China and Taiwan.

	New Guineans	Americans	Japanese	Australians
1. Why are you fighting in this war?				
2. What will happen to you and your family if your side lose the war?				
3. What is your impression of the country you are fighting in?				
4. How do you feel about the enemy?				
5. How are your people different from the other three?				