



# KOKODATRACK

OCTOBER 2024

MEMORIAL WALKWAY NEWS



## 79TH ANNIVERSARY OF VP DAY

The focus for the 2024 VP Day service was on the careful preparations that were under way 79 years ago, as Australia and its allies readied for the final assaults on Japanese positions throughout the Pacific.

The video which was played showed the way in which Australian troops were assembled in Queensland and trained for the ordeals ahead. From September to November 1944 all three AIF Divisions (6th, 7th and 9th) were encamped on the Atherton Tableland. For the men of the units training endlessly, 1944 was the most frustrating year of the war, but they were ready for the battles ahead, including amphibious landings at Balikpapan, Tarakan, Brunei and Labuan.

The service began with the Mounting by the Catafalque Party, drawn from members of the Australian Armed Forces Re-enactment Heritage Unit, and the acknowledgment of country by children from the Concord West Rhodes Pre School. Cr Michael Megna, City of Canada Bay Mayor, delivered the Prologue, and guests were welcomed

by Carole-Anne Priest, KTMW Deputy Chair.

Three WWII veterans were able to attend this year: Bruce Robertson (104), Reg Chard (100) and David Trist (100). The trio laid wreaths at the front of the stage, before the formal wreath-laying ceremony at the Memorial Centrepiece and at memorial stations on the Walkway.



The guest speaker, Air Commodore Steve Pesce AM, Deputy Air Commander Australia, reflected on the fighting during the Kokoda Campaign being among the most desperate and

vicious encountered by Australian troops during WWII.

"Last year, aviators from the RAAF's 35 Squadron walked the track to pay respects to those who fought there," he said.

"One of the Sergeants from 35 Squadron described the track as relentless, and said the terrain was incredibly tough. He spoke of sheer rocky cliffs and ankle-deep mud, and everything in between. Reflecting on what it must have been like for our diggers, he said: *It was hard enough to keep yourself upright, let alone soldiers in wartime trying to do it with heavy packs, limited food and sleep, and with an enemy constantly engaging them.*

Air Commodore Pesce said those aviators described walking the track as a life-changing experience and something that would stay with them forever.



## REMEMBERING THE PAST HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT

In his VP Day address, Air Commodore Steve Pesce AM, Deputy Air Commander Australia, said that for all the memorials, history books and documentaries, we will never quite comprehend the horrors of WWII or the remarkable human spirit that rose to defeat it.

“Remembering the past, and the terrible price of war, has never been more important, as we strive to maintain peace in the region,” he declared.

“Today, we are experiencing the most significant shift in Australia’s strategic circumstances since the Second World War. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has sparked an acute awareness of the fragility of peace. Russia’s attack on Ukraine has reminded us that cross border invasions are possible.

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“Taiwan is now regarded as the most dangerous potential flash point for conflict between the world’s great powers. Our region is experiencing the largest military build-up since 1939 and the intent of these emerging world powers is unclear.

“Our principal focus must therefore be on deterrence – to ensure that strategic miscalculation does not lead to the catastrophic consequences of WWII. And we must never forget the terrible price that war inflicts on society, both civilian and military alike.

“Memorials like the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway are important in helping us understand, especially younger generations, and making sure we never forget.”



# MIGRANT COMMUNITY WELCOMED AT THE WALKWAY

The campaign to encourage migrants to assimilate and understand Australian history and culture accelerated in September with a large group visiting the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway and then enjoying a community barbecue.

About 60 people attended, responding to an invitation from local MP Sally Sitou. KTMW director Alice Kang spoke to them in the Ralph Honner Education Centre, outlining the history of the Walkway and its significance.



Also present was Federal MP Julian Hill, the Assistant Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, who joined the group in laying wreaths at the Memorial Centrepiece.

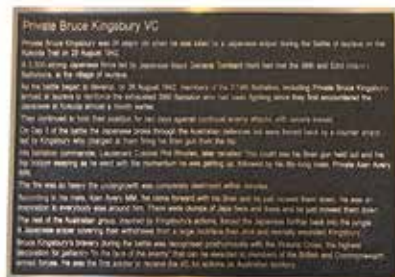
This event was yet another example of how the KTMW has moved from being simply a war memorial, to developing a significant educational and social role in the wider community.

# KINGSBURY VC TO BE HONOURED ON KOKODA DAY

An important part of this year's Kokoda Day commemoration will be the unveiling of a plaque honouring Private Bruce Kingsbury VC. It will be fixed to a boulder which sits in the centre of the Bruce Kingsbury garden, at the front of the Education Centre.

Private Bruce Kingsbury was killed by a sniper on 29 August 1942, during the battle of Isurava. He had charged a large group of Japanese, firing his Bren gun, and clearing a path for his comrades.

Bruce Kingsbury was just 24 years old. He was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously. The Kokoda Day service will be held on Sunday 3 November, commencing at 10.00 am.



## REFURBISHMENT OF MEMORIAL STATIONS

Work has started on much needed refurbishments to the 22 memorial stations along the Walkway.

Photographs on each have been removed and repaired, fresh graphics will be added, and new protective glass covers will be installed. The refurbishment should be



completed by mid-October, ensuring the stations are weatherproof and in excellent condition for many years to come.

Two information signs are also being repainted and repaired. They are the sign at the Walkway entrance from the hospital car park and the other near the covered barbecue area.



A group from the Richmond RSL sub-Branch was among recent visitors to the Walkway. They reported that they found the tour illuminating and very enjoyable. The group was enthralled by Reg Chard as he explained the photographic panels at the centrepiece and the soldiers portrayed there, as well as his own experiences and hardships during WWII.

More and more community groups are booking tours of the Walkway, while the number of school pupils coming on organised visits is more than 4000 each year.



YEAR 6 STUDENTS FROM ST BERNARD'S SCHOOL, BOTANY, WITH SUPPORT FROM BOTANY RSL SUB-BRANCH