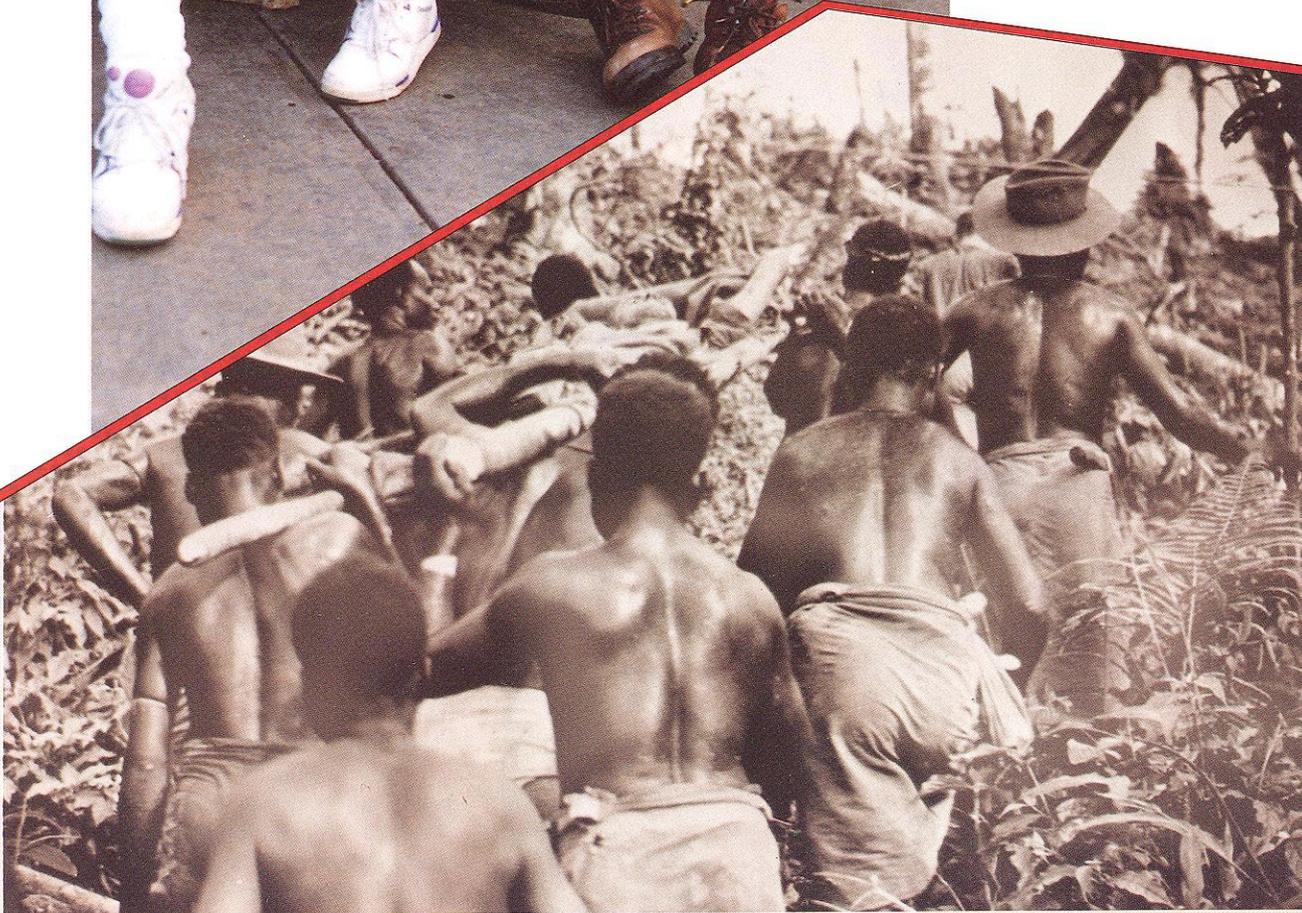
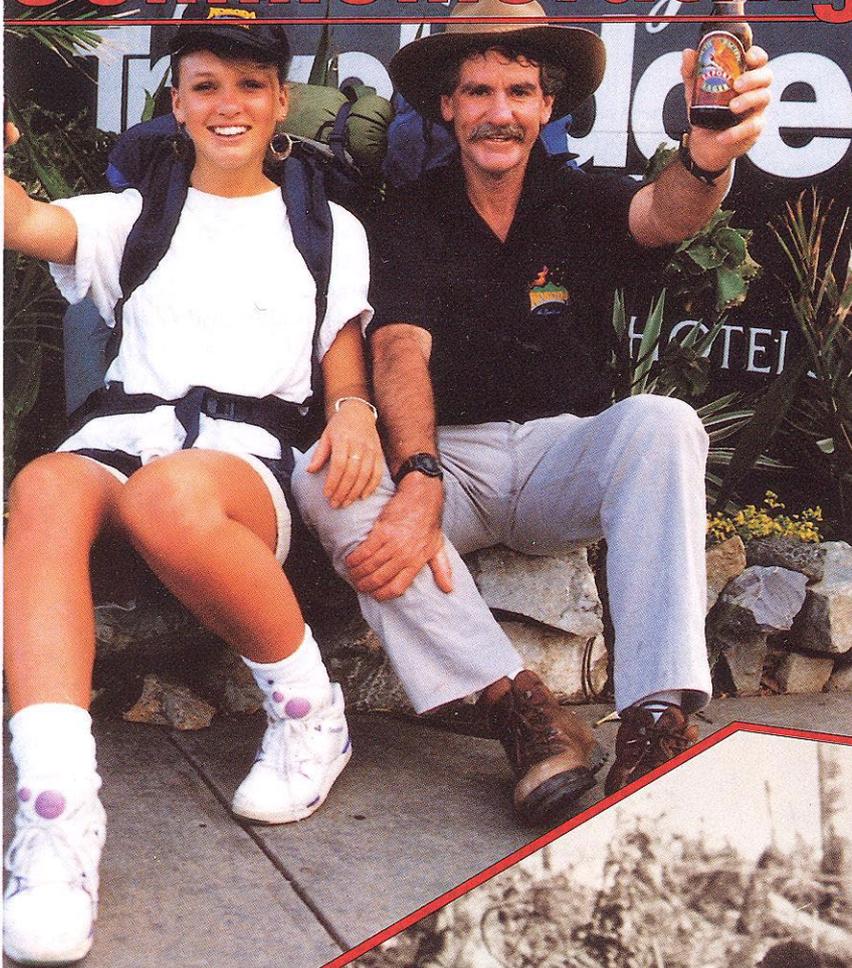


Commemorating Kokoda

Kokoda

Retracing the awesome wartime trail

by Steven Ingalls



Above: Clair McCaughey with trek leader Charlie Lynn enjoying a welcome drink after completing the Kokoda Trail. Full story overleaf.

■ *Wartime photograph of famous 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels', helping wounded back to safety.*

Clair follows mum's footsteps

When Dr Helen Dauncey excitedly telephoned her 19-year-old daughter Clair in Sydney and insisted she should follow in her mum's footsteps she really meant just that ... hiking over one of the most treacherous tracks in the world.

Dr Dauncey, an Australian doctor of pharmacy, explained to her vivacious blond daughter that she had just returned from a six day hike on a track called Kokoda across the Owen Stanley range of mountains in Papua New Guinea.

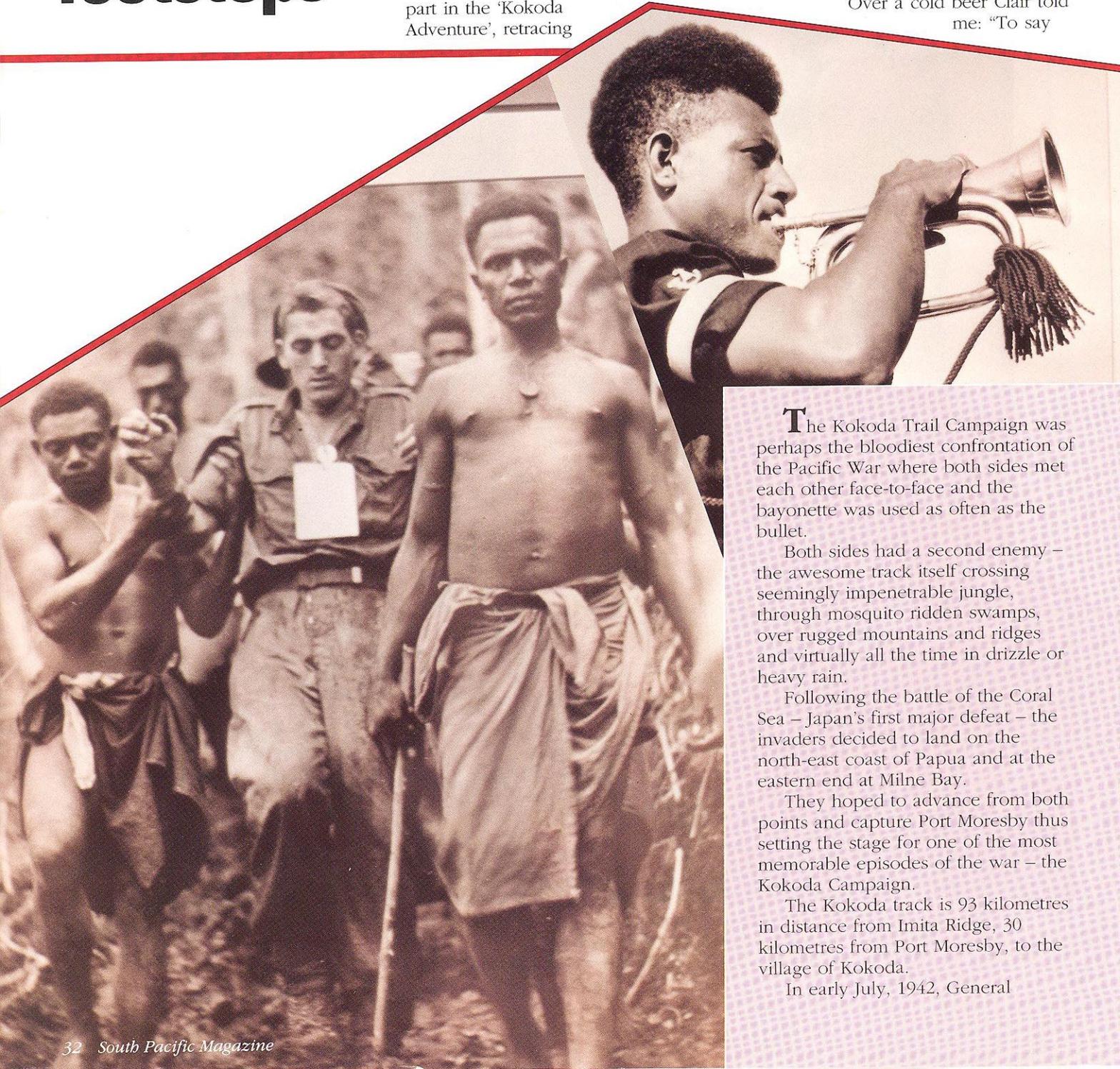
She had been in a party of six women and 14 men who had taken part in the 'Kokoda Adventure', retracing

the track to commemorate the bravery and sacrifice of Australian soldiers in the Kokoda Campaign of 50 years ago.

But what had intrigued Clair were her mother's remarks on how, besides having a great deal of fun, walking the trail had had a profound effect on her life. She felt totally stress free and she had been so deeply touched by the whole experience she offered to pay all Clair's expenses if she would also complete the walk.

Clair accepted. And when she arrived back in Port Moresby, South Pacific Magazine was there to congratulate her for her part in being the first mother and daughter team from Australia to complete the Kokoda Trail.

Over a cold beer Clair told me: "To say



The Kokoda Trail Campaign was perhaps the bloodiest confrontation of the Pacific War where both sides met each other face-to-face and the bayonette was used as often as the bullet.

Both sides had a second enemy – the awesome track itself crossing seemingly impenetrable jungle, through mosquito ridden swamps, over rugged mountains and ridges and virtually all the time in drizzle or heavy rain.

Following the battle of the Coral Sea – Japan's first major defeat – the invaders decided to land on the north-east coast of Papua and at the eastern end at Milne Bay.

They hoped to advance from both points and capture Port Moresby thus setting the stage for one of the most memorable episodes of the war – the Kokoda Campaign.

The Kokoda track is 93 kilometres in distance from Imita Ridge, 30 kilometres from Port Moresby, to the village of Kokoda.

In early July, 1942, General

that this has been the most amazing experience of my life would not do it justice. I feel so humble to have been in the presence of real masters of the bush.

"My mother was so right. After walking the Kokoda Trail you view life from a different and much more positive point of view."

And she added: "All along the way the guides kept asking me if I was alright. Did I need help in carrying my pack. They made me feel like the most important person in the world.

"Along the track they would point out events which happened during the War and sometimes where a relative had been killed. Sometimes I just could not stop myself from crying.

"On one occasion we stumbled

upon a grave where there was a shoe showing. The shoe contained a skeleton of a foot."

Trek leader is 47-year-old Charlie Lynn a former major in the Australian army and Vietnam veteran.

Sharing a beer with Clair, Charlie told me: "Dr. Dauncey was on the inaugural trek for Anzac Day where after we completed the Kokoda Trail we walked to Bomana Cemetery for the Dawn Ceremony.

"This in itself was a very emotional occasion and everyone in the party was deeply affected."

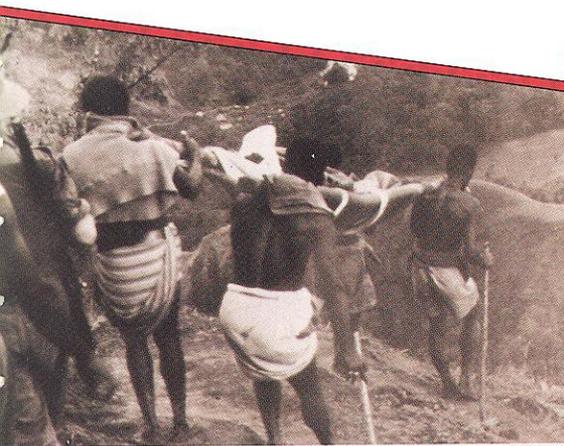
Charlie, an experienced adventurer with a detailed knowledge of the war campaigns in Papua New Guinea, hopes to lead one Kokoda Adventure a month for the next three years. His

father served in PNG during the War and ever since a child he has been in love with the country.

He is hoping to raise support for a Kokoda Youth Development Foundation for young people from Australia, PNG, Japan and the United States.

This, says Charlie, would keep the spirit of Kokoda alive forever and forge a bond between the four nations that took part in the Kokoda Campaign. ■

Further details of the Kokoda Adventure can be obtained from RSL Travel, PO Box Q70, Queen Victoria Building, Sydney NSW 2000. Phone Toll Free 008 221 611; Fax (02) 261 4420 or from Port Moresby Travelodge or Air Niugini offices.



Many a soldier owed his life to the Papua and New Guinea carriers. About 3,000 of them were "employed" in the Kokoda Trail Campaign. They toiled up the track with supplies for the soldiers and doubled as stretcher bearers on the journey back. The more severely wounded soldiers had to be carried every inch of the way. Ironically the carriers were encouraged to enter into a "contract of employment" by the Australian Administration but sadly to this day many have never received a cent for their life-saving services. ■

MacArthur was ordered to attack the Japanese in New Guinea. He ordered a force of some 3,000 men to be assembled and sent to the area around Buna.

The intention was to prepare and defend an airfield at Buna and to stop the Japanese from capturing the airfield at Kokoda and moving over the Owen Stanley Range to Port Moresby.

But these preparations were made too slowly and the Japanese surprised the allies by landing troops on the coast near Gona on the night of July 21.

By then the men of the Papua Infantry Battalion had crossed the Owen Stanleys and were spread out between the village of Kokoda and the coast around Buna.

The Japanese vastly outnumbered the Australians, forced them back and by July 29 they had captured Kokoda.

The Japanese then paused for 10 days to strengthen their position, organise supplies from the coast, and then continue their push towards Port Moresby.

This was the beginning of the Kokoda Campaign, four months of bitter fighting in the rugged mountains between Port Moresby and the village of Kokoda. The beginning of a stubborn rearguard action by the Australians which cost many lives, created many heroes and resulted in the turning point of the land war in Papua and New Guinea.

The Australians dug themselves in at Isurava which was attacked and captured by the Japanese after several days of fierce fighting which cost hundreds of Australian lives.

The 39th Battalion was reduced from 460 to 200 men and the two AIF battalions from a total of 1100 to 550 men. The wounded had to be carried back over the track to Port Moresby.

The Australians were exhausted and hungry. They had been fighting for a week without sleep or a hot meal. The Japanese attacked again and on September 1st the Australians were forced to retreat to Templeton's Crossing and then on September 5 to Efogi.

On September 7 and 8, the Allies were forced back yet again this time to Menari and Nauro; even further back to Ioribaiwa and eventually to Imita Ridge.

But the Japanese did not attack again. Like the Australians, hungry and exhausted, they had been moving further and further away from their own supply of food and ammunition and were forced to retreat back over the mountains.

After the Japanese began to retreat fresh Australian troops began to advance back along the track.

On November 2, 1942, the first Australians entered Kokoda. It had taken four months and the Australians had suffered 1,622 casualties, including 607 men killed.

By the end of the campaign in January, 1943, after many long and bloody battles in the Buna-Gona area on the coast, 2,165 Australians had been killed and 3,533 wounded. In the final battles of the campaign the Australians were helped by American soldiers. ■