

Address to Kokoda Day

Sherwood RSL
10th August 2008

Guest Speaker: Soc Kienzle

Thank you Ron (*McElwaine, RFD, ED President Sherwood RSL*)
and good morning Ladies & Gentlemen.

I am very honored to be asked to address you today.

Members of my family always make a special effort to get to this service as it seems to be one of the few that acknowledges the real significance of Kokoda itself in the Owen Stanley campaign.

Our father, Captain Bert Kienzle, always said that the two battles for Kokoda and the Battle at Deniki, although not wins for the Aussies, played a vital part in the delaying the enemy until the AIF could arrive and the supply lines could be improved. One hates to think of the outcome if the 39th hadn't held the enemy back at Deniki.

Dad certainly achieved a lot in that period from mid July to mid August 1942. He had quickly realised that the greatest challenge to this campaign was going to be supplies and supply lines. Everything would have to be carried on the backs of men to and from the front. Air drops into jungle clearings had been disastrous, and it was during this period that he set out to locate the dry lake beds he had seen from the air as he had flown over the infamous Kokoda Gap many times before the war.

On the 3rd August, early in the morning, with a small group of terrified Koiari guides, because they believed that lakes were haunted or in their language "Taravatu", Dad broke out of the jungle and found the first of the two lakes. It was just what the doctor ordered. As he looked across the heath-like landscape, the sun was rising over the mountains and he decided to call the lake MYOLA, after the wife of Sydney Elliott Smith, his friend and now boss.

MYOLA is an aboriginal word meaning "Dawn of Day", and Dad felt this was a very fitting name in more ways than one, hoping as he did that this would be the start of a new era in air dropping of supplies. Of course, when our mother Meryl heard he had chosen this name, not hers, she was not very happy and he made it worse a few weeks later by writing to her and telling her to please write to him more often because

"Myola writes to Syd three or four times a week."

As Mum was flat out in Sydney caring for two young children and a house crammed full of relatives, she was not too impressed with this request. I think she probably used to snarl whenever Myola's name was mentioned for some years after that!

Having located the lake, Dad immediately contacted headquarters and arranged for some trial air drops as soon as possible, then he set about cutting a more direct track from the Lake along a ridge above Eora creek towards the front. The point where this new track met the old mail trail that the troops were now using, he called "Templeton's Crossing" after Captain Sam Templeton, news of whose death at Oivi had just recently reached him.

What most people don't know is that it was while cutting this track, Dad fell into a deep ravine carrying a heavy pack and badly damaged his hip. He bore this injury throughout the campaign without complaint, but it ultimately meant that he walked with a stick for the rest of his life, and underwent countless, mostly unsuccessful operations to repair the damage. The pain was always with him and I, for one, never knew him without his walking stick.

As many of you would know, Dad had actually guided Captain Sam Templeton and B Coy, the 1st Coy of the 39th Btn, across the track in July. When they arrived at Kokoda, he went out to the Yodda and stocked up on supplies from his home that he gave to Sam and his boys to get them to the coast. The rest he took himself to get back across the track. He also brought A & C Coy with Major Cameron which meant he walked over the Trail 3 times in 3 weeks.

All this time he was blazing new tracks, keeping supplies moving, evacuating wounded, and looking for lost troops. He actually crossed the Trail 8 times during the campaign.

From when he first met them in mid July, to their magnificent efforts at Kokoda and Deniki, where the enemy thought they were up against a much larger force of better trained troops than the boys of the 39th really were, Dad developed a huge respect and affection for the men of the 39th BTN. After the war, he kept in touch with many of them and in 1967 and 1972, the 25th & 30th Anniversaries of the battles, he hosted large reunions based at our home Mamba Estate at Kokoda. The 67' one was written up in the Women's Weekly, and the respect the men also had for Dad was demonstrated in this article where it comments on an argument amongst the diggers on the site of a particular battle. One bloke said "It's not marked on the map and Bert doesn't know it. If he doesn't know it, it's not there"

With this long family association with the 39th, it makes me very proud to have been asked by the newly reformed 39th PSB to lead them across the track for the Anniversary of the Battle of Kokoda. It was also very satisfying when for ANZAC day this year, I reopened Kokoda as a venue for a Dawn Service. I took up the 'Mud- over- Blood' emblem the men of the 39th gave to Dad in 1967, and raised it again at Kokoda. I am hoping that this Dawn Service at Kokoda will grow every year, not just to take the load off Isurava and Bomana, but because Kokoda is where it all began and it, and its people, should not be forgotten in these remembrance services.

There are four memorials at Kokoda where we held the service. The most significant one for Dad and our family is the one he built and paid for that is a tribute to the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. Back in late October 1942, as the retaking of Kokoda appeared imminent, Dad and Doc Vernon discussed what they would like to see happen after the war as a tribute to the local people and their vital contribution to the campaign. Doc wanted to see a proper hospital built at Kokoda, Dad wanted to see the best of his men get medals and they both agreed some sort of Monument should be built in honour of the Papuans. Sadly, Doc Vernon passed away in 1946 but not long before his death he wrote to Dad and mentioned again the need for a monument. It would be 1959 before Dad completed the project and it was opened on the 2nd November, the 17th Anniversary of the retaking of Kokoda. Not only did

he pay entirely for the memorial including the plaques sculpted by Ray Ewers, but he flew in as many of the carriers as he could for the opening. When they arrived at Kokoda they seemed a bit hesitant and dubious about the whole thing. They didn't understand why they were being called together again. Eventually one of them went up to Dad and said "Hey, if you're thinking of having another war, count us out, we've done our bit!"

Thank you again for inviting me here today, as we honour the great men who fought the battles of Kokoda.

I found a letter my father wrote to Kevin Crowley (39th BTN) in 1983 in which he said " We can be proud of our CO, who took over command 16th August 1942 Lt. Col. Ralph Honner DSO MC and for his stirring words of address on Kokoda day."

(I am sure many of you have heard these words before, but I feel they probably should be repeated every Kokoda day)

"So it should be with Kokoda and Kokoda day.

Their story too, should the good man teach his son.

Then, long after the last of those who have fought along the Kokoda Trail pass on to join the heroes whom they knew, the story of Kokoda will live on for generations made aware of their debt to those who gave up for them the happiness and fullness of their lives that they had barely entered on.

Then too, Kokoda day shall never go by from this day to the ending of the world, but the heroes dead we mourn today will be in it remembered by we, and our sons and daughters."

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