

# Casualties at Kokoda

An order to all Australian army formations in 1942 stated that 'to ensure uniformity in the rendering of casualty returns the following standards entries will be used.' ...

[AWM 013933](#)



28 November 1942, Papua. Four dead Japanese soldiers lying beside a large pillbox at Buna.  
[AWM 013933]

The standards the order set were not always followed, consequently army statistics for casualties are not reliable in every category. For example numbers for those killed in action are accurate but Australians evacuated sick during the campaign can only be estimated.

Royal Australian Air Force and Royal Australian Navy casualty returns did not conform to army returns nor to each other. A key difficulty was in the categorisation of casualties. The following is by no means an exhaustive list of possibilities. A casualty might be killed in action, died of wounds, died on active service, died of misadventure or accidentally, died of illness, executed by enemy, died while prisoner of war, missing in action, missing believed killed, wounded in action,

evacuated sick, drowned, or even 'died of exhaustion and privation' as in the case of one Royal Australian Navy seaman in Papua.

Casualty returns for the United States Army and the United States Army Air Force contain similar difficulties and the situation is much worse when assessing the losses of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy. Most uncertain of all are casualties for New Guineans on both sides.

Read the [List of casualties for Kokoda, Milne Bay and Buna-Gona](#).

## Teaching and learning activities for the classroom

### Casualties

Answer the following questions in at least 20 words each.

#### The photograph

In the [photograph](#) at the top of the page are four of the 10,200 Japanese killed in battle in Papua. Examine the photograph closely. Think about it, then answer the following questions.

1. How do you feel when you look at the dead men?
2. What do the three Australians in the photograph seem to be thinking about?
3. What do you think happened immediately after the photograph was taken?
4. Would you feel differently if the dead men were Australians, or if you were Japanese?
5. Is there any evidence to indicate if the photographer came across this by chance, or do you think he posed the scene?

#### The text

Now [read the text](#). Find the answers there to the following questions.

6. The list in the text shows the wide variety of ways in which a soldier may become a casualty. Can you think of any kind of casualty missing from the list?
7. What is the main problem in obtaining accurate casualty statistics?
8. Why do you think it is so difficult to find accurate casualty statistics for New Guineans?

#### The statistics

Using the [List of casualties for Kokoda, Milne Bay and Buna-Gona](#) answer the following questions.

9. How many Australians altogether were 'missing presumed killed'?
10. In which battle were the most Australians killed?
11. Adding together all categories of casualties for all those who fought against the Japanese in New Guinea, what is the total number of casualties?
12. What is the total number of Japanese who survived the campaign?

# List of casualties for Kokoda, Milne Bay and Buna-Gona

*An order to all Australian army formations in 1942 stated that 'to ensure uniformity in the rendering of casualty returns the following standards entries will be used.' ...*

## Australian army casualties January 1942 to January 1943

### **Battle of Kokoda**

|                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Killed in action        | 491         |
| Missing presumed killed | 66          |
| Died of wounds          | 67          |
| Wounded in action       | 1023        |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>1647</b> |

### **Battle of Milne Bay**

|                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Killed in action        | 167        |
| Wounded in action       | 205        |
| Missing presumed killed | 5          |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>377</b> |

### **Battle of Buna-Gona**

|                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Killed in action        | 967         |
| Died of wounds          | 228         |
| Missing presumed killed | 66          |
| Wounded in action       | 2210        |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>3471</b> |

### **Goodenough Island engagement**

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Killed in action | 65  |
| Wounded          | 179 |

### **Other battle casualties including those to air raids at Port Moresby**

|                   |    |
|-------------------|----|
| Killed            | 12 |
| Wounded in action | 15 |

**Total battle casualties Australia Army in Papua** 5866

**Total evacuated sick Australian Army in Papua** 29,100

## Royal Australian Navy casualties

Killed in action 5  
Wounded in action 11

## **Royal Australian Air Force casualties**

Killed in action 310

## **Australian New Guinea Administration Unit**

Killed or died on active service 9

## **United States Army casualties for Papua July 1942 to January 1943**

Killed in action 558  
Missing presumed killed 176  
Wounded in action 2037  
**Total** 2771

**Total evacuated sick United States Army in Papua** 8259

## **United States Army Air Force casualties for Papua, air operations over land and sea, July 1942-January 1943**

Killed 330  
Missing presumed killed 195  
**Total** 525

## **New Guineans**

### **Papuan Infantry Battalion and Royal Papuan Constabulary**

Killed in action 14  
Died on active service 4  
Wounded in action 38

### **Other New Guineans**

Died while serving with Allies 140  
Died while serving with Japanese 1200

## **Imperial Japanese Army**

|                             |               |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Killed in action            | 8400          |
| Evacuated wounded           | 2000          |
| Died of illness             | 3100          |
| Evacuated sick              | 2000          |
| <b>IJA total casualties</b> | <b>15,000</b> |

## **Imperial Japanese Navy**

The figures given here include losses at sea and on land. As almost all aircraft flown by the Japanese in Papua were Imperial Japanese Navy aircraft their losses are also included here.

|                             |             |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Killed in action            | 1800        |
| Evacuated wounded           | 650         |
| Died of illness             | 300         |
| Evacuated sick              | 1000        |
| <b>IJN total casualties</b> | <b>3750</b> |

## **Total Japanese casualties**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Killed or died of illness                | 13,600        |
| Evacuated wounded or sick                | 5650          |
| <b>Total losses IJN and IJA in Papua</b> | <b>19,250</b> |