

FALL OF RABAUL

In April 1941 members of the 2/22nd Battalion AIF began to arrive in Rabaul and their role was to protect the airfields and give early warning of Japanese movements through the islands. The Battalion, known as “Lark Force”, was ill equipped to match the strength of the Japanese.

On January 23 1942, over 17,000 Japanese troops began landing in Rabaul with strong air and naval support. The Australian force, numbering approximately 1,300, had neither air or naval support and the order was given **‘Every man for himself’**. The Battalion was forced to withdraw into the jungle without provisions or planning.

Some 28 Australian soldiers died that day, of the survivors 400 managed to escape and return to Australia over many months in perilous conditions. Those who remained, including 300 Australian civilians, were eventually captured and interned as prisoners of war.

The fall of Rabaul on January 23 1942 marked the beginning of a dramatic and traumatic period in Australian history. The island of Ambon, Indonesia fell on February 3 1942, with Singapore falling on the 15th and Timor on the 20th.

GEOGRAPHY

Rabaul is situated on the island of New Britain. It was part of the Australian Mandated Territory of New Britain and the British Protected Solomon Islands administered by Australia under the Mandate of the League of Nations.

The invasion of Rabaul by Japanese troops was the first time enemy forces had landed on Australian controlled territory.

