

Memorial to Kokoda heroes

Artillery gun symbol of troops' spirit

by JULIE HARTIGAN

IT is impossible to comprehend the conditions faced by Australian troops who fought on the legendary Kokoda Track during World War II.

But six Central Coast men determined to honour their spirit have a better understanding after dragging a heavy field artillery gun to the southern end of the Papua New Guinea battle site earlier this month.

The men faced isolation, torrential rain, mosquitoes, mud and steep terrain – but there was not an enemy in sight.

“It’s all to do with the Australian spirit,” Bob Long, of Bateau Bay, said.

“The Kokoda campaign with World War II is like the Gallipoli of World War I.

“It all comes back to what our troops did 60 years ago.”

Mr Long and friends Peter Feeney, Warren Hayes, Jamie Smith, Kevin Sullivan and Sean Reardon joined a team from the Kokoda Memorial Foundation which has been working on a memorial for the Australian troops at Owers Corner for nearly three years.

The artillery gun, donated by Australian Defence Industries, is a



major component of the memorial which is strongly supported by the Australian defence forces.

“The army transported the gun to Garden Island, the navy restored it to original condition and the RAAF flew it to PNG on a Hercules,” Mr Smith said.

“We really had the easy job.”

The gun had to be transported just 61km from Port Moresby to Owers Corner, but it took two days in horrendous conditions.

“It was a major task for us and we just can’t imagine what it was like for the blokes who had to do the same thing during the war,” Mr Long said.

“We had a tilt truck but they had to manhandle the gun up there.”

The “road” to the memorial was in an incredibly poor state and in the torrential rain the memorial convoy got “bogged to the axles” several times.

The memorial has been going up in stages for the past 2½ years and is almost complete.



ABOVE: From left, Warren Hayes, Sean Reardon, Bob Long, Kevin Sullivan and Jamie Smith.

LEFT: The memorial at Owers Corner in PNG. Main photo: PETER CLARK