

# Kokoda

## takes O'Loughlin down a new track

**T**hick, humid jungle, rapid changes in weather from intense tropical sun to torrential downpours and a crew harassed by ticks, leeches, venomous snakes and deadly spiders.

These were the conditions faced by Australian Director of Photography, Jules O'Loughlin whilst shooting his first feature film, *Kokoda*.

Produced by Leesa Kahn and Catriona Hughes of GFN Productions, Sydney, and directed by Alister Grierson, who also co-wrote the production with John Lonie, *Kokoda* is a psychological thriller about a lost patrol of Australian soldiers isolated in the jungle behind enemy lines and cut off from their supply line on the Kokoda Trail during the battle for Isurava in New Guinea in 1942. It is a story of survival by a group of untrained, under-equipped men (known as 'chocolate soldiers' so called because it was assumed they would melt in the heat of battle) against an experienced, battle-toughened enemy.



**Inset:** DP Jules O'Loughlin shooting a scene from the film

**Below:** Jack Finsterer emerges from his muddy grave

The film was shot over 25 days during 2005 in southern Queensland, Australia, primarily on and around Mount Tambourine. O'Loughlin chose the KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 for day exteriors and KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 for nights.

"Shooting under the jungle canopy during the day and at night meant I needed stocks that reached deep into shadow areas and would perform well in low light situations. I was not disappointed and both stocks performed tremendously", enthuses O'Loughlin. "I was particularly impressed with the latitude on the 250D keeping detail in shadow areas and holding highlights exceptionally well which is really encouraging when shooting in a high contrast environment such as a jungle. Being very familiar with the 5218, I knew it would cut seamlessly with the 5205 because it has a very fine grain structure even if pushed a stop".

The events of the movie took place in the Pacific and Grierson wanted a look distinct from most World War II films that had been made and set in Europe. "There was to be no bleach bypass and no desaturation", explains O'Loughlin. "In fact Alister was keen to explore just the opposite - a heavily saturated palate. We used no filtration other than NDs, grads and a polariser because I wanted the image to be clean and undiffused".

Shot largely handheld using Moviemcam SL and Moviemcam Compact cameras, the film had to have a sense of realism and was given an expressionistic style to help explore the psychological journey of the soldiers. "At times we wanted it to be hyper-real", said O'Loughlin. "We wanted the camera to become almost an unseen member of the patrol and the light and colour had to be representative of the soldiers' state of mind, and also had to give the jungle a menacing presence, almost as if it itself was the enemy."

Transforming the jungle, in harmony with the storyline, from its natural green to a deep inky blue, O'Loughlin lit the cast with various grades of warmth shifting the entire image into the cooler end of the spectrum. "My intention was to correct the skin tones in the grade" he comments. "Prior to the shoot I worked with Al Hanson, digital colourist at Frame Set & Match, to determine the right amount of warmth and exposure.

Tests revealed that hitting the actors with full CTO and having them around one stop over the shadow areas in the jungle produced the best results. At times conditions in the jungle were difficult to control, making this less achievable, but on the whole the strategy produced fantastic results!"

O'Loughlin enjoys using the richness and diversity of cinematography to express himself creatively and artistically. "Being a cinematographer is wonderful in that it allows the experience to be shared with passionate, like-minded people". ■

