



The Kokoda Track Foundation

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The Hon John Howard MP  
Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA  
ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

I wish to propose that my previous request to issue a medal to the PNG Carriers who served us during the war in Papua New Guinea be reconsidered.

Next year is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Pacific War against Japan. This will be the final opportunity to honour them as only a handful remain. They will almost certainly not be here for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

I believe Australia's failure to properly honour these people is a serious omission by successive governments since the end of the war.

According to our official history of the war in the Pacific written by Dudley McCarthy (Australia in the War 1939-1945, p116) the Australian New Guinea Army Unit (ANGAU) was authorised by the Australian government to provide for:

*'the conscription of whatever native labour might be required by the Services ....'*

Rates of pay were to be determined and the Senior Military Officer or District Officer was empowered:

*'to have the natives so employed to enter into a contract with the Australian Government.'*

The record shows that some 10,000 nationals served as carriers in support of the Australians during the Kokoda campaign and it is a matter of historical fact that we would not have been successful in preventing the Japanese from capturing Port Moresby without their assistance.

During the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kokoda campaign the issue of payment and compensation for many of the carriers who claim they were never paid was raised.

On 21 April 1992 The Australian reported that returned servicemen in PNG had called on the Australian Government to pay hundreds of local war veterans who helped Australian troops during the Kokoda campaign. According to the report:

*“The President of the PNG Returned Services League, Mr Wally Lussick, said Australia had sent about \$3.5 million to PNG to help compensate local war veterans in the early 1980s, but much of the money had gone to the wrong people and a large group of carriers missed out.*

*“Mr Lussick said much of the money went to those press-ganged into being carriers for the Japanese and many people who took no part in the war received payments.*

*“The visit to PNG later this week by the Prime Minister, Mr Keating, for Anzac Day services to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kokoda battles would provide a good opportunity for Australia to make a commitment to the surviving carriers, he said.”*

In the PNG Post-Courier of 24 April 1992, the Prime Minister of PNG, Sir Rabbie Namaliu called on Australia ‘to help compensate WW2 carriers and stretcher bearers’. He raised the issue with Prime Minister Paul Keating at the time. According to the Post-Courier:

*“Most of the carriers and ex-servicemen received compensation payments from Australia in the mid-1980s, but many legitimate veterans from the Southern Kokoda Trail near Port Moresby, missed out.*

*“PNG authorities estimate up to 200 surviving carriers are still waiting for some kind of payment from Australia for their wartime labour and service.*

*“Mr Namaliu said the Government was considering making an approach to Australia to identify and pay those carriers who have gone unrewarded for half a century.”*

On 5 May 1992 the Bulletin with Newsweek reported:

*“Keating says compensation cases will be dealt with on their merits and all worthy claims examined; but no concrete sum for individuals has been discussed. The difficulty of maintaining a list of the original carriers is underlined by how few speak English. Family members of dead carriers are calling for posthumous compensation – after all, they took part in a battle that Keating described this week “as more important to Australians than any other battlefield in Europe or Africa.”*

I believe Prime Minister Keating was genuine in his desire to resolve the issue but the Department of Veterans Affairs most likely put it in the ‘too hard basket’ at the time.

The argument that ‘it would be inappropriate for the Australian Government to consider taking any further action on this matter in the absence of a detailed proposal from the Papua New Guinea Government’ was an effective cop-out at the time, notwithstanding the approach from the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea. It was unrealistic to suggest that a National Government who cannot provide toilet paper in their national hospital in Port Moresby would divert resources to research an issue for such a small number of surviving ‘wantoks’.

The issue of payment and compensation has now been resolved with the establishment of the Kokoda Track Foundation, which is developing a strategy to have the Kokoda Track proclaimed as a National Memorial Park. The aim of the

Foundation is 'to develop a self-sustaining eco-trekking industry for the Kioari and Orokaivean people who live along it.' It is our legacy to the carriers and it will provide an economic future for them.

**However, the issue of a medal for the carriers is still relevant.**

It is also our responsibility to resolve. Papua New Guinea was Australian mandated territory during the war and carriers were contracted/indentured/conscripted to support our Australian forces. Whether they were all paid for their services or not will never be resolved.

I am not aware that the carriage of wounded Australian soldiers back along the Track was ever part of their duty statement at the time. Furthermore I cannot imagine – even after 32 personal crossings of the Track since 1992 – how they ever managed to carry a stretcher over some of the mountains between Eora Creek and Ower's Corner. The fact is they somehow did it and many Australian soldiers lived because of their selfless sacrifice.

The most appropriate way of identifying those who served as a carrier during the war would be to run a campaign via the PNG Post Courier and ask the families of the carriers to provide their details.

If a family believes their father or grandfather was a carrier then a medal should be issued to them with his name on it.

A parade could then be organised in Port Moresby on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese surrender to issue the medal to the few surviving carriers and to the families of those who have since died. There will undoubtedly be a small number who will get it wrong but we should not deny the greater majority of such an important symbolic presentation because a few might possibly slip through the net.

This action would bring closure to a long standing grievance and would be welcomed as a positive and long overdue initiative by the wider Australian community.

I would appreciate your support in making it happen in time for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the surrender of Japan in 2005.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLIE LYNN MLC  
Chairman