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7 April 2009

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA
ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

I have previously made submissions to Prime Ministers' Keating and Howard in regard to honouring the service of the wartime Carriers in New Guinea from 1942 – 1945. I refer to the issue of a Civilian Service Medal to the 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels'.

I believe Australia's failure to properly honour these people is a serious omission by successive governments since the end of the war. I am hoping you might have a bit more empathy for the cause due to your experience on the track and your close relationship with Papua New Guinea.

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 50th 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 50th 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 the PNG Government would divert resources to research an issue for such a small number of surviving ‘wantoks’.

I have been advised by senior PNG Government Ministers that they can handle any issues relating to ‘compensation’. Australia’s recent support in assisting the PNG Government to achieve a World Heritage Listing for the Kokoda Trail will assist in alleviating claims in this area.

But the issue of a medal is our concern and our responsibility.

Papua New Guinea was Australian mandated territory during the war and carriers were contracted/indentured/conscripted to support our Australian forces.

I am not aware that the carriage of wounded Australian soldiers back along the Kokoda Trail was ever part of their duty statement at the time. Furthermore I cannot imagine – even after 53 treks across Kokoda since 1991 – how they ever managed to carry a stretcher over some of the mountains between Eora Creek and Ower’s Corner. But they did it, and many Australian soldiers lived because of their effort and their devotion to the soldiers they carried.

We will never know their names and never be able to validate their service or their claims because of the lack of official record keeping in 1942. We should not use this as an excuse to avoid the issue.

The only way to find out who they were is to place a couple of full-page advertisements in the national newspapers – the Post Courier and the National – and ask their families – their ‘wantoks’ - for their names.

Their history is passed on through the spoken word. Many of them would know of their grandfather’s service as a Carrier because they would have been told about it. We should accept the fact that if a family believes their father or grandfather was a carrier then a medal should be issued to them with his name on it.

No doubt some will receive a medal who may not be entitled to one but we should not allow this fact to stop the surviving Carriers, and the descendents of the wartime Carriers, from receiving one.

I have attached a separate submission I have forwarded to the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Sir Michael Somare, to proclaim ‘Kokoda Day’ on 3rd November each year to honour the wartime Carriers in New Guinea.

If ‘Kokoda Day’ is proclaimed it would be a suitable occasion to issue the first medals to the small band of surviving Carriers from the war.

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.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Lynn', written in a cursive style.

CHARLIE LYNN MLC