

Name:	Nicholas Wowora
Date of interview:	Saturday, 24 May 2014
Location of interview:	Beama village, Oro Bay Rural LLG, Northern Province
Chief interviewer:	Didymus Gerald
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Image:	

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER

Can you tell us the war story of your father by giving your name and the village you come from? Can you also give the name of your father? Now you can tell the story.

WOWORA

My father was Conrad Wowora and he came from Kopure Village. He was in the village when ANGAU officers with the help of Papuan policemen visited and recruited my father and other men to work as carriers and labourers for Australian and American troops. But my father and other men were initially engaged to thatch sago leaves for roofs of the shelters which were being built to accommodate both the white soldiers and the native carriers and labourers at Erero, Kopure, and Dombada. After my father's group of carriers and labourers completed their initial tasks, they joined other men who were recruited from Erero, Dombada, and Beama Villages and were assembled at Erero where they were told to help the white soldiers to fight the Japanese by carrying supplies of ammunition and other fighting weapons, food supplies, and other different jobs.

After talks, many of these native carriers and labourers were allocated the task of carrying ammunition, other fighting weapons, and food supplies from Erero to Embogo, Dobuduru, and Buna. My father and other men carried the huge supplies from Erero to Embogo and then from Embogo to Dobuduru. They then carried them from Dobuduru to Buna. By the time, they were unloading cargo and other supplies, the Japanese landed at Buna which forced the carriers and labourers to flee to Sangara for safety, but the Japanese pushed along and came to Awala where the first gun fire between the Papuan soldiers and the Japanese took place.

INTERVIEWER

What happened to your father and his friends when they reached Awala?

WOWORA

My father told me that they were travelling past Awala Plantation when the Papuan soldiers fired the first gun shots at the Japanese at Awala. The Japanese had a strong force so that they forced the Papuan soldiers to fall back towards Kumusi River, Gorari, Oivi, and Kokoda. The native carriers and labourers also fell back to these same places with the soldiers.

The Japanese were strong and forced Papuan and Australian soldiers as well as the carriers and labourers from Kokoda to Deniki and Isurava where a fierce fighting took place. My father said many Japanese and Australians were killed at Isurava which was a cold place on the Kokoda Trail. The carriers and labourers carried supplies and helped Australians from Isurava, Iora Creek, and Templeton's Crossing. These places were strange to the coastal men like my father and they were the difficult and dangerous places to work, but they worked hard to support Australians.

INTERVIEWER

Can you tell us what your father told you about the conditions of the track faced by native carriers and labourers?

WOWORA

Kokoda Trail was not a good place for the coastal men to work. The place was a thick jungle with steep mountains, gullies, steep climbings, steep going downs, slippery and muddy. There were plenty of leeches which sucked the men's blood. It was the place of evil spirits of the Mountain Koiari. We were fearful and frightened, but we were very careful in carrying out their tasks. The going was tough. The loads of supplies and cargo were heavy, but they carried them with complaints. They were not issued with warm clothes so they went down with sickness. They were over-worked and underfed. They were tired and hungry, but they worked, worked very hard along this rough and difficult place. They carried along this rough track. They were always on the track going to and from every day with little rest. They walked and carried supplies in the mud, heat, rain, cold, and the jungle, and up the mountains, down the mountains and hills, in gullies, and across creeks and fast-flowing rivers. It was the tough and difficult track and a gruelling country which was very fearful to men of different ethnic groups, language, and culture. But they trekked, carried, and worked to help the white soldiers under poor conditions. They helped and helped the white soldiers

because it was the time of war. They carried and worked because they were under the supervision of ANGAU officers.

INTERVIEWER

What did your father think of the fightings on Kokoda Trail?

WOWORA

My father said the native carriers and labourers saw fierce fighting at Isurava, Iora Creek, Templeton's Crossing, Efogi, Brigade Hill, and Ioribaiwa between the Australians and the Japanese. The Australians killed many Japanese, and the Japanese killed many Australians. They saw many dead bodies of Australians and the Japanese. These killings scared and frightened them, and they wanted to run away to their villages, but they were in the mountainous country which made it very difficult to run away. ANGAU officers and Papuan policemen were always around to ensure that the native carriers and labourers did not run away. If the carriers and labourers ran away, it would be difficult to move the supplies along the track to support Australians so ANGAU officers kept close watch over them.

INTERVIEWER

Did your father tell you any stories about the native carriers and labourers running away from this work, and deaths?

WOWORA

My father told me that there were some cases where the native carriers and labourers had run away and made their way to their villages, but most of the deserted men, were rounded up and brought back to work. Some men died of sickness, hunger, cold climate, exhaustion, and food drops from aircraft along the track, but my father does not know how many died. He felt sorry and sad for the deaths of these men. It was not the fault of these men to die, but it was the fault of the Australian Army. These deaths should have been compensated because the army recruited them to work for Australian soldiers. The war was bad for these men and for the village people in Papua. The war did not help these men and the village people. The war destroyed the people's villages and properties. The war caused the carriers and labourers to die far away from their villages and families. The families still mourn for the deaths of these men. The families are not very happy with the army which had not cared them well, and had not paid compensation to these men for the war service. The war had done nothing for these men. The war had brought nothing to the village people. The war had brought many damages and sadness to the people. The war became a disease for the village people. The families of those men who went to war to work for the white soldiers are very disappointed with the Australian Army and the Australian Government. They are all feeling sad and unhappy today.

INTERVIEWER

What did your father and other men think of Australian soldiers fighting the Japanese? Was it good for our people or not?

WOWORA

My father told me that the war between Australians and Japanese was bad thing for our people because it destroyed our villages and many properties. It damaged the land and left many debris and relics which create many social problems. One of them is bombs which explode and kill our people when they try to make gardens to plant vegetables. But many soldiers killed on both sides was the bad thing to do in the war. It was not the native people's war. It was the white man's war so they killed each other on our land. Australian soldiers fought the Japanese to protect our land and this is one good thing for our people. Now our people still own their land since the war. For this we must

thank Australian soldiers, but at the same time the Australian Army and the Australian Government must think of our wartime helpers and pay compensation to them.

INTERVIEWER

What happened to your father and other men after Kokoda Battle?

WOWORA

The native carriers and labourers helped Australian soldiers to defeat the Japanese on the Kokoda Trail. The Japanese ran away from Australian soldiers at Ioribaiwa to Kokoda, Oivi, Gorari, and Kumusi River, and then to Gona, Sanananda, and Buna on the coast. The native carriers and labourers followed Australian soldiers from Ioribaiwa to Kokoda where the big Australian Army general thanked our people during a ceremony for helping Australian soldiers to defeat the Japanese.

INTERVIEWER

What did your father and his friends do after coming to Kokoda and Kumusi River?

WOWORA

My father and his friends came to Kumusi River and walked to Sangara with Australian soldiers. At Sangara, the men from Dombada, Eroro, Kopure, and Beama Villages deserted the carrier line and journeyed back to live with their families because we did not like to be involved in the white man's war where they saw many bad things take place on Kokoda Trail. One bad thing is the killing of many soldiers. Second bad thing is the carrying of heavy loads of supplies and ammunition on this rough and difficult track. Our families were glad to see us come back to stay with them. We stayed in our villages without ANGAU knowing it until the Buna Battle was over.

INTERVIEWER

What did your father and other Eroro people do after Buna Battle?

WOWORA

After the Buna Battle, the native carriers and labourers including the Eroro people helped Australian and American troops to build various facilities for the large Dobuduru-Oro Bay Base B Area. Clearing grasslands, bushes, and grounds to build staging camps and towns, roads and bridges, airstrips, hospitals, workshops, food supply depots, water and power generating plants, entertainment and recreational facilities, bakeries, wharves and jetties, fuel depots and fuel pipelines, and many other facilities were built with their help. These facilities existed between 1943 and the end of the war in 1945. These facilities were big and better than the present facilities we see in Popondetta and Oro Bay. We saw many Australian and American troops. We also saw black American soldiers. We saw many jeeps and big trucks compared to what we see in Popondetta today. We saw many good roads and bridges, and airstrips, hospitals, wharves and jetties. My father said these facilities were best and he admired them, but they are no longer there. They have been destroyed or removed, but that was one of the biggest developments he had ever seen. There is nothing today and my father passed away without seeing new things taking place to replace those he saw during 1943-1945.

Thank you. That is the end of my story of my father's work during the war.