

Name:	Charles Ofa
Date of interview:	Friday, 23 May 2014
Location of interview:	Kokoda Primary School, Kokoda, Northern Province
Chief interviewer:	Didymus Gerald
Time interview concluded:	2:53 PM
Duration of interview:	14:57:07
Main language of interview:	English
Image:	

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

Time	Transcript
00:00	[INTERVIEWER]: This is interview number 9. We have Dominic Beaga, who will be telling the story of Vernon Ofa, the father of Charles Ofa. Dominic Beaga is the son-in-law of Charles Ofa. They are both sitting in front of us. The son-in-law Dominic will be telling the story.
00:35	My name is Charles Ofa. I would like to share this history of Vernon Ofa Kiviki. This is my father's story. My father Ofa was one of the one hundred and fifty people from villages around Kokoda who was recruited by the ANGAU officer named Claude

	Champion, and assembled at Kokoda in June 1942, for the allocation of tasks to be done in preparation of arrival of Australian soldiers along Kokoda Trail to Kokoda.
01:24	My father told me that ANGAU officers at Kokoda had told Papuan carriers that war in Papua was created by the Japanese when they invaded and occupied Rabaul in January 1942. My father told me that ANGAU officers had told Papuan carriers that Japan had started the war because it ... wanted to take the land off the Papuan people in order to put its people to live here.
02:11	ANGAU officers told the Papuan people that they must help Australian soldiers to fight and stop the Japanese from taking our land. It is for this very reason that ANGAU was recruiting Papuan men to work as carriers and labourers to help Australian soldiers. My father and other Papuans were angry when they heard the story that Japanese were fighting to take our Papuan people's land. These Papuan carriers told ANGAU officers that they did not like the Japanese to take away their land, because their land supplied all the needs of many generations of natives of this land. These Papuan carriers further told ANGAU officers that they would support while soldiers to fight, and chase the Japanese away.
03:25	Chase the Japanese away... So the Papuans people helped Australian soldiers on the Kokoda Trail and in Papua during the war. When the first Australian soldiers come to Kokoda, Papuan carriers help them to carry their supplies to Kokoda, Oivi, Gorari and Kumusi River, where they met the Japanese who had already advanced after landing on the beaches at Gona, Sanananda and Buna on July 21, 1942. It is at Kumusi River that my father and other carriers saw the Japanese for first time. My father told me that Australian soldiers were forced to retreat to Gorari, Oivi and Kokoda by the Japanese.
04:31	Kokoda, by the Japanese, because they had strong force. The Papuan carrier also fell back with the Australian soldiers. My father told me that at Oivi the carrier named Hojawa, from Amanda village and himself, were chosen by a Papuan policeman named Sanopa, to walk with Captain Samuel Templeton, commander of B company of the 39 th battalion to Kokoda. So Ofa and Hojawa walked with Templeton while he talked to the them in Motu, asking Papuan people to support Australian soldiers to fight and chase the Japanese out of Papua by carrying supplies and giving intelligence reports and information on the movements of Japanese and Japanese positions.
05:46	Captain Templeton told Ofa and Hojawa, according to an interview held by a local historian in May 1987, that white people did good things for the native people in Papua before the war came, and many other good will be done for the people after the war is won. So the people must support people white people.... if the natives do not want to become slaves. Ofa and Hojawa were pleased with Templeton's talks, while they continued walking towards Kokoda.
06:46	But they were soaked and frightened and ran away into the bush and hide when a group of Japanese ambushed them at Siri Creek crossing. The Japanese got hold of Templeton and quickly rushed him along the track to Siri village, and disappeared into the thick jungle. Ofa and Hojawa do not know what happened to Captain Templeton, but they kept quiet about the matter when it was being investigated by army officers, during and after the war.
07:39	They did not want to reveal the truth because they feared that they would be punished by being hanged by the Australian army, just like it did to many Orokaivan

	men at Higaturu Government Station. They kept the matter so secret for forty-three years since 1942. But two former Papuan carriers decided to confirm the story when the local historian approached and interviewed them in May 1987 after Herbert Kienzle, in a letter to him, gave a lead to discover this mysterious story.
08:44	So with the permission of this local historian, we as sons of Ofa and Hojawo decided to tell one of the many greatest mysteries of World War Two to the oral history team, project team. This we believe is the most appropriate. Apart from this story, Ofa and Hojawo were among many thousands of Papuan carriers who carried supplies for Australian soldiers on the Kokoda Trail and who evacuated the wounded men between July and November 1942.
09:47	Papuan carriers worked under very bad conditions on the Kokoda Trail, with no warm clothing, little sleep, little food, or under little rest, and little medical care. The track was slippery and dangerous. The men fell down with their loads and patients and got hurt, but rose up without complaints and walked to the next stopover. These men also saw many Australian and Japanese killed and their blood was colouring the ... damper ground. These men felt sorry and sad for these dead when they thought back about the deaths of their family members back in their remote villages.
11:03	Despite these problems and difficulties, these black men did their very best to help Australian soldiers and also to look after themselves before returning home to reunite with their own families. After Kokoda Trail battle, these Papuan carriers joined other carriers at Soputa, Popondetta, Gewoto, Dobuduru, Siremi, Ango, Buna, Hariko, Barisari, Inonda, Embi, Hanakiro, Keta Creek, Dombada, Kopure, Eroro and Beama areas, to help Australian and American soldiers during battle.
12:17	After Buna battle, some Papuan carriers worked as labourers to help. After Buna battle the same Papuan carriers worked as labourers to help build staging camps, and stations, hospitals, roads, and bridges, communication facilities, workshops, wharfs and jetties, recreational and entertainment facilities, and other facilities. Both Ofa and Hojawo finished working as labourers together with other labourers at the end of 1944, and returned to live with their families. Thank you.
13:40	[INTERVIEWER]: Dominic, will you be able to tell us the graveyard, have you located the graveyard of Captain Samuel Templeton?
14:00	I can't tell you. Because at that time when they took Templeton out, that's where we left him.
	[INTERVIEWER]: OK. From your father's stories to you, when the Japanese ambushed Captain Samuel Templeton, Ofa and Hojawo fled into the jungle. What happened to Sergeant Sanopa?

	He was not there.
14:49	[INTERVIEWER]: Thank you, thank you for talking to us. Thank you for the statement.