Angels of War

WORLD WAR II AND THE PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

A film by	Andrew Pike Hank Nelson Gavan Daws
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Additional photography	Chris Owen Steve McMillan Gary Kildea Les McLaren Tim Asch Kim McKenzie
Produced with assistance from	Air Niugini Australian National University Australian War Memorial Burns, Philp and Company The Utah Foundation and Creative Development Branch, Australian Film Commission

16mm Eastmancolor
Optical Sound
Length: 1,960 feet (597 metres)
Running time: 54½ minutes (52 minutes at 25 f.p.s.)

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Angels of War

WORLD WAR II AND THE PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In January 1942 world war came suddenly to the islands of Papua New Guinea, north of Australia.

The people saw skies filled with warplanes, the sea black with battleships and landing craft, beaches cratered with high explosives, forests shredded by mortar and machine gun fire.

The violence stayed for more than three years.

A million Americans, 300,000 Japanese, and nearly half a million Australians fought their way across the country - almost one foreign soldier for every Papua New Guinean man, woman and child.

ANGELS OF WAR captures the experiences of villagers who lived through the Papua New Guinea campaign. Caught up in a war they could not understand or influence, they had no choice but to obey whoever held the gun. Their homes were bombed. They starved as refugees in the bush. They were conscripted as carriers. They fought as infantrymen and guerrillas. In Japanese-held areas, they were forced to collaborate or risk execution; some were later hanged by the Australians for treason.

A generation of Papua New Guinean men literally carried the war on their backs. They slogged to the Australian front line loaded down with ammunition, and bore the wounded to safety on stretchers. They lived on short rations, and drank water rotten with the flesh of the dead. They were paid ten shillings a month. Now they speak passionately of the white man's promises, made to them in war and never kept in peace.

Cut into their memories are archival film sequences shot by Japanese, American and Australian cameramen, still photographs and art work, and the songs and poems of black men and white, writing about life and death in time of war.

ANGELS OF WAR was shot in Papua New Guinea in 1980-81. In the film:

- The village women of Kila Kila are awakened by bombs, flee along the coast by canoe, and see every one of their able-bodied men marched away by the Australians as conscript labourers.

- Arthur Duna, of Buna, caught between two conquering armies, is forced to learn drill Japanese-style, and later in the war is flogged bloody with a cane by Australian military police.

- A Rabaul man watches a Japanese swordsman behead men from his own village.

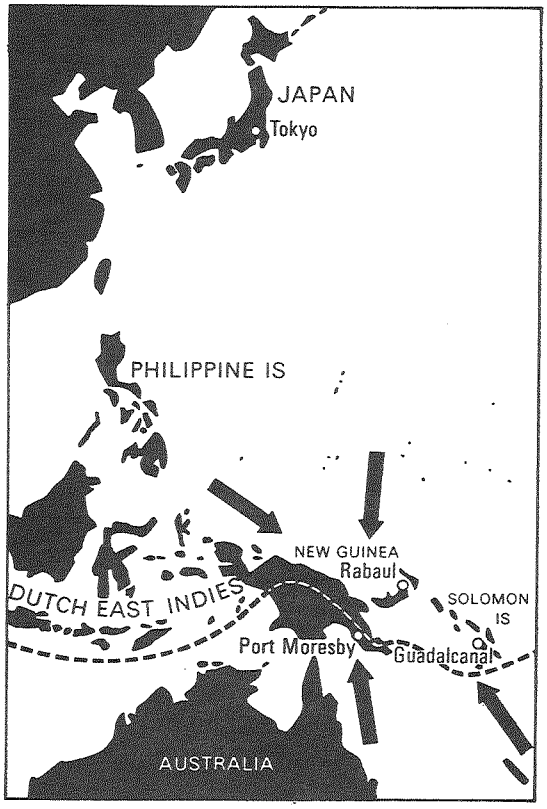
- General Douglas MacArthur comes ashore to organize victory.

- "Somewhere in New Guinea", Gary Cooper and two swim-suited starlets entertain the troops.

- Guiding a blinded Australian soldier to safety, Raphael Oembari of Hanau is photographed by an Australian cameraman, and becomes the archetype of the "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel", famous worldwide as the epitome of the black angel of mercy in the war-torn New Guinea jungle.

- Sergeant-Major Yauwiga, DCM (and other medals), a guerrilla fighter from Wewak, kills Japanese for the Australians - twenty-eight in one engagement - and ends the war with an arm blown away, an artificial limb with two hooks, one eye an empty socket behind a pink plastic eyepatch, the other saved by a corneal transplant from a dead Australian.

Angels of War



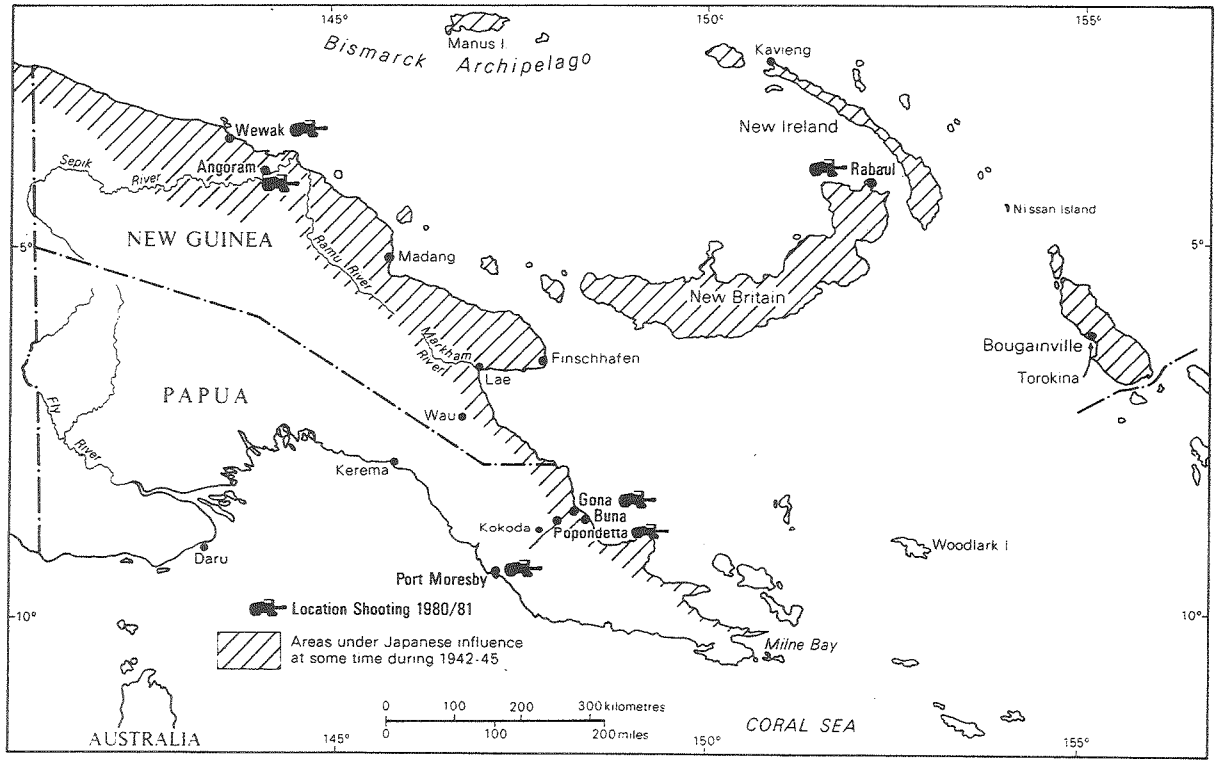
Limit of Japanese expansion 1942

THE WAR IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The first people to die in World War Two on Australian territory were seventeen New Guineans killed on 4 January 1942 in a Japanese air raid on Lakunai airfield, New Britain. The Japanese swept aside the Australian battalion at Rabaul, established bases on the New Guinea mainland, and launched attacks on the Allies in Port Moresby. In May 1942 the Allies held the Japanese in the Battle of the Coral Sea, and later defeated them at Milne Bay, on the Kokoda Trail and in the Solomon Islands. The Allies' "island-hopping" strategy took the big battles away from New Guinea to the north by 1944. But in Papua New Guinea the Australians, Papua New Guineans and Japanese went on fighting and dying, though their battles did not bring the end of the war one day closer.

THE COST IN LIVES

150,000 Japanese
9,000 Australians
3,000 Americans
and perhaps 40,000 Papua New Guineans



HISTORY AND FILM

Dr. Hank Nelson, the principal historian involved in making **ANGELS OF WAR**, has written several books on Papua New Guinea history and taught at the University in Port Moresby for many years.

"Sometimes the people between Kokoda and Buna hear that there is a film on the Second World War to be shown in Popondetta. They go along and see **The Guns of Navarone, The Dirty Dozen, Tora! Tora! Tora!** or **Bridge on the River Kwai**. Although they enjoy the films, they wonder why they never see themselves. Their sense of being unfairly excluded from history is all the greater because they think they were in the centre of the war, not just of one protracted battle.

"If they read the books on the Second World War their sense of injury would be all the greater. The books on the island campaigns rarely give more than a couple of lines to the peoples whose lands became battle-grounds for foreign armies.

"Yet the peoples' own oral culture has retained an accurate and detailed account of their experiences. During the filming of **ANGELS OF WAR** in Papua New Guinea, people everywhere were willing to speak to the camera, but one old man made a cutting point: 'What?', he asked, 'Is the memory of Australians so short that you must come up here to ask us what we did in the war?'.

"I will write a book on what happened to the people of Papua New Guinea during the war, but I will be lucky to sell more than two or three copies in Popondetta or Angoram. Yet a thousand people will go to an open-air screening of a popular film. Sergeant Jigede and Sergeant-Major Yauwiga would get little from a book. At most an educated member of their communities might read and interpret a few sentences for them. The writer would be remembered as another foreigner who came, offered friendship, took something away, and sent nothing back.

"With film the people can actually see how the film-maker has used their information. There is a chance of dialogue between subject and author. Those who appear on the screen can say whether or not their views have been fairly represented."

THE FILM-MAKERS

ANDREW PIKE - is co-author (with Ross Cooper) of a comprehensive history of feature film production in Australia, **Australian Film, 1900-1977**, published by Oxford University Press in 1980. He is also director of an independent film distribution firm, Ronin Films, and is an exhibitor of quality cinema in Canberra. **ANGELS OF WAR** is his first major film.

HANK NELSON - is a leading historian of Papua New Guinea. He has written two books and many articles about Papua New Guinea, and has written and documented a long-running radio series on colonial rule there, **Taim Bilong Masta**. He also taught at the University of Papua New Guinea for many years. He is now a Senior Fellow in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University, Canberra.

GAVAN DAWS - has worked on documentary films for the Public Broadcasting System in the USA, and has written screenplays for the Film/TV Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities. He is the author of four books about the Pacific, and is a member of the UNESCO International Commission for a Scientific and Cultural History of Humankind.

DENNIS O'ROURKE - is one of Australia's leading documentary film-makers, and has worked for many years in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific. His first major film was the prize-winning **YUMI YET**, the official film of Papua New Guinea's independence celebrations. He has also made **ILEKSEN** (in collaboration with Gary Kildea) and **YAP - HOW DID YOU KNOW WE'D LIKE TV?**, both of which have been sold widely in Europe and North America. His knowledge of language and his experience of filming in Papua New Guinea were invaluable during the production of **ANGELS OF WAR.**

GARY KILDEA - is director of one of the finest ethnographic films ever made, **TROBRIAND CRICKET**. Like Dennis O'Rourke, he has worked for many years in Papua New Guinea, and the two have often collaborated. His experience of filming in Papua New Guinea again contributed greatly to **ANGELS OF WAR**. His most recent film is about urban poverty in the Philippines.

STEWART YOUNG - has edited many prize-winning Australian documentaries. An editor of television documentaries for many years with the Australian Broadcasting Commission, he became an independent editor in 1978, and since then his films as editor include the Academy Award nominee, **FRONTLINE** by David Bradbury, **PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE** (also by Bradbury), and a series of three documentary films about Sri Lanka produced by Geoff Burton and Sharon Bell.

JOHN WAIKO - comes from the Northern Province of Papua New Guinea. He completed a BA at the University of Papua New Guinea, and an MA in London. He became involved in the production of **ANGELS OF WAR** while completing his PhD in history at the Australian National University. A frequent commentator on the history and politics of Papua New Guinea, he has been concerned with taking traditional oral forms and expressing them in contemporary media. He has written several short stories and plays, and has worked as consultant on a number of ethnographic films made in Papua New Guinea.

RAPHAEL OEMBARI - THE EPITOME OF THE "FUZZY WUZZY ANGEL"

On Christmas Day 1942, cameraman George Silk photographed a badly wounded Australian soldier, a bandage over his eyes and a stick in his hand, being guided to safety by a young Papuan villager.

The Australian censors hesitated to release a picture of a "Digger" who was in fact dying. But LIFE magazine in the U.S.A. published the picture and made it one of the best-known images of the Pacific war. It won George Silk a job with LIFE and led to his career as an internationally renowned photographer.

Everywhere that the photograph was printed, the young villager was identified simply as a "Papuan boy". For Western observers, he became the epitome of the compassionate native, innocent, strong and faithful, coming to the aid of the white man in need.

While shooting **ANGELS OF WAR** in Papua New Guinea, the film-makers managed to locate that same "Papuan boy", still a strong and impressive figure 38 years after the photograph was taken. His name is Raphael Oembari, and he still lives close to Popondetta in the area where he helped the wounded Australian. He told the film-makers his story, remembering the soldier, Private George Whittington, as George Washington:

"George Washington was put in my care, and I led him along the track. The photograph was taken near Siremi Bridge.

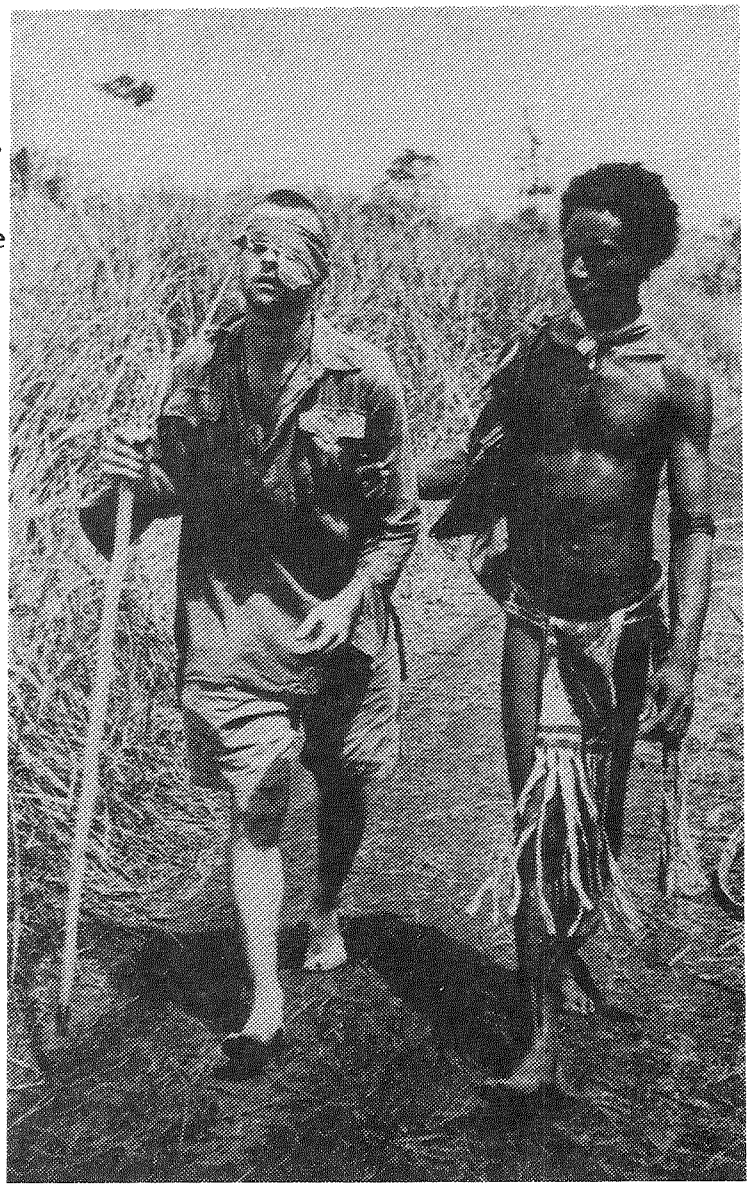
"We walked until the Japanese started firing in our direction, then we hid beside the track. Shells were bursting all around us.

"When it was safe to go on walking, he asked for some water and I found some. Then he said he was hungry, so I found a biscuit for him. He insisted that I have half, and so we shared it.

"When we reached the hospital at Dobuduru, their medicines couldn't help him, so they flew him to Port Moresby where he died a few days later.

"After the war I went to Port Moresby and I met his widow. She said, when your son marries and has a son, name him after my husband, George Washington.

"And so my son's first child was named George Washington. Then my daughter named her first child after the widow, and my other daughter named her son after me. **And so the whole story now lives on in my grandchildren."**

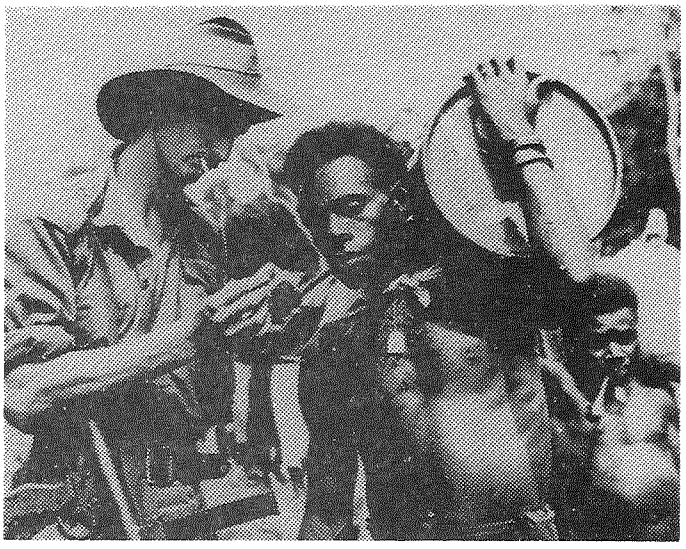


FUZZY WUZZY ANGELS

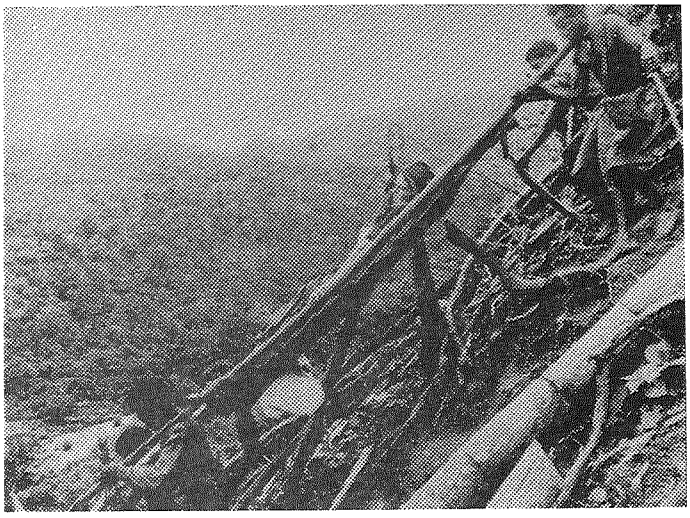
In October 1942 at Dump 66 on the Kokoda Trail, Sappers Bert Beros and Vic Cooke were watching the Papuan stretcher bearers. Beros recalled: "Seeing the way the natives looked after the wounded, Vic said to me, 'There'll be a lot of black angels in heaven after this.' " The next morning Bert Beros wrote his poem, "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels".

Published in the Brisbane Courier and then the Australian Women's Weekly, that poem was the centre of a flood of sentiment praising the Papua New Guinean carriers. For Australians who had rarely heard about Papua New Guineans except in stories of cannibalism or of quaint kanakas, it was a sharp change. In newspapers, newsreels, songs and portraits of the official war artists, the Papua New Guineans were presented as strong, sensitive and loyal.

The praise was well deserved. The excess of sentiment came from the Australians' own desperate need for allies, and their need to believe that they were themselves worthy of loyalty.



Many a mother in Australia,
When a busy day is done,
Sends a prayer to the Almighty
For the keeping of her son,
Asking that an angel guide him
And bring him safely back —
Now we see those prayers are answered
On the Owen Stanley Track.
For they haven't any haloes,
Only holes slashed in their ears,
And their faces worked by tattoos,
With scratch pins in their hair.
Bringing back the wounded
Just as steady as a hearse,
Using leaves to keep the rain off
And as gentle as a nurse.
Slow and careful in bad places
On the awful mountain track,
The look upon their faces
Would make you think that Christ was black.
Not a move to hurt the wounded,
As they treat him like a saint;
It's a picture worth recording,
That an artist's yet to paint.
Many a lad will see his mother,
And husbands wee 'uns and wives,
Just because the fuzzy wuzzies
Carried them to save their lives
From mortar bombs, machine-gun fire,
Or a chance surprise attack,
To safety and the doctors
At the bottom of the track.
May the mothers of Australia,
When they offer up a prayer,
Mention those impromptu angels
With their fuzzy wuzzy hair.



THE OTHER SIDE OF THE 'FUZZY WUZZY ANGEL' IMAGE

Australians praised Papua New Guinean labourers as "fuzzy wuzzy angels", but they were also often harsh masters. Papua New Guineans were forcibly conscripted to work for the Australian army: stories are told in many villages of the cruelty of the recruitment method. If men refused to go, or if they ran away into the bush to hide, the police would destroy their food gardens and threaten their women until they returned.

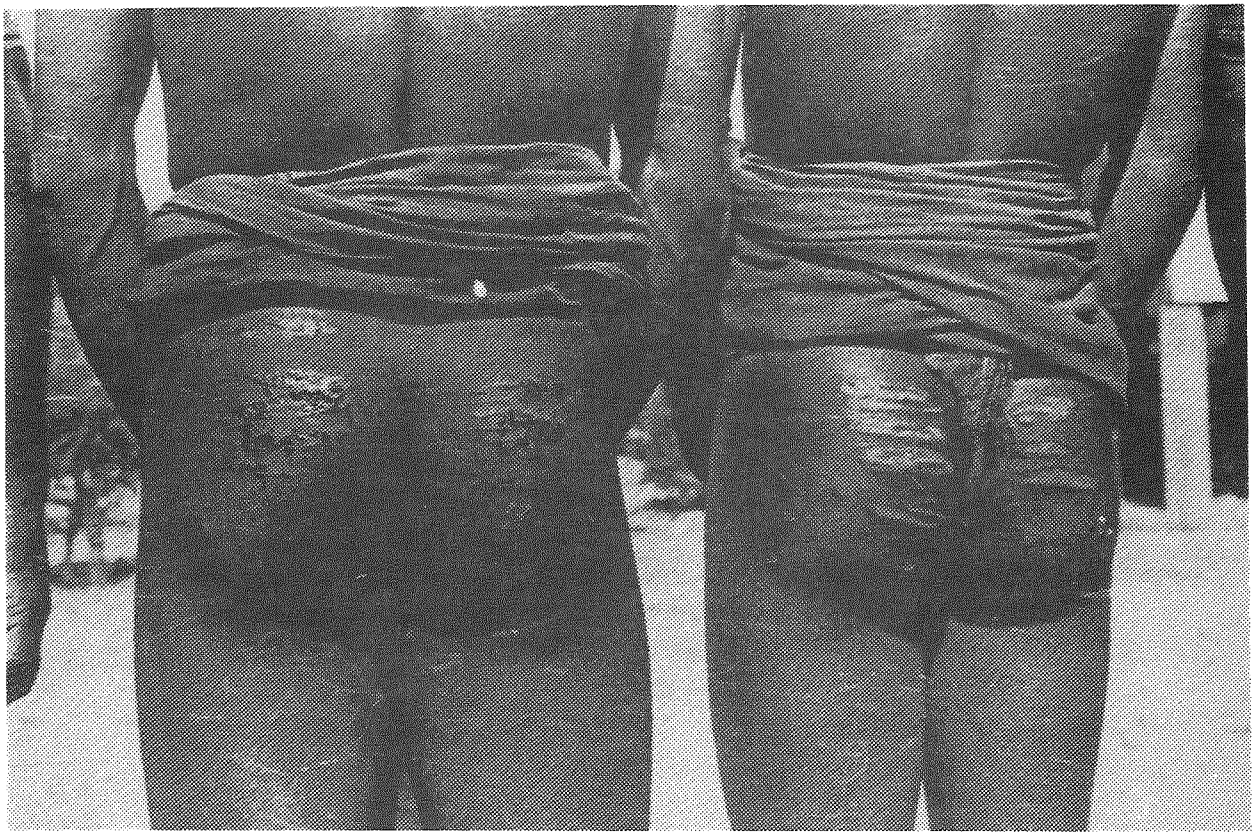
In some villages, all of the able-bodied men were taken away to work as labourers, lealving only women and old men and small children to fend for themselves for years on end. They rarely got news of the men who had been conscripted.

Many of the Papua New Guineans who were conscripted for the Australian army talk of seeing men beaten. Often, they say, the men to be punished were stretched across a 44 gallon drum. Some were whipped for offences that no white Australian would have even been cautioned for.

In **ANGELS OF WAR**, Arthur Duna, a former "boss-boy" from an Australian Army labour team, tells how he and two of his men had their backs furrowed by a cane:

"Two labourers on my team asked an Australian soldier if he could find some white nurses for them to sleep with. They were arrested straight away. Then the military police came to get me as well. They said that because I was leader of the labour line, I was responsible for what my men did. I was beaten first, with a long cane. I was whipped so many times I lost count. I was beaten hard, but the other two were beaten much harder. They were beaten until their piss and shit ran out, and they had to be taken to hospital to be looked after."

During the war the Australian army hanged at least thirty-four Papua New Guineans. Some of them were hanged for crimes that could have earned the death sentence in peacetime, but ten of the Papuans were convicted of treason. These men - not Australians - were killed for not being loyal to Australia. It was a harsh judgement on illiterate villagers in confused and violent times.



WHEN LIFE AND DEATH WERE ONE

During the final stages of the World War in Papua New Guinea, no one suffered more than the villagers who lived in areas occupied by the Japanese. They were constantly bombed and strafed by Allied aircraft. In Rabaul, the bombs fell regularly every day from ten in the morning till four in the afternoon, for eighteen months.

Starving Japanese looted the village gardens, and their officers, desperate to stop villagers giving aid to the Allies, tortured those who appeared to waver in their obedience. Men from Rabaul and the Duke of York Islands still talk of those days of terror when life and death were one and the same thing to them.

In **ANGELS OF WAR**, one of the many Papua New Guineans forced to work for the Japanese tells how he was caught up in the terror:

"I was taken and put into the Japanese military police, the Kempeitai. I helped the Kempeitai with their work. I used to go and arrest people, and when they were sentenced, I beat them. If I hadn't beaten them, I would have been beaten myself. I did it out of fear.

"Many men from the Duke of York Islands were tied up, some of them upside down. They had no food. Some were tied up for a month. They couldn't eat and some of them died. I helped the Kempeitai to do all this. I worked for them.

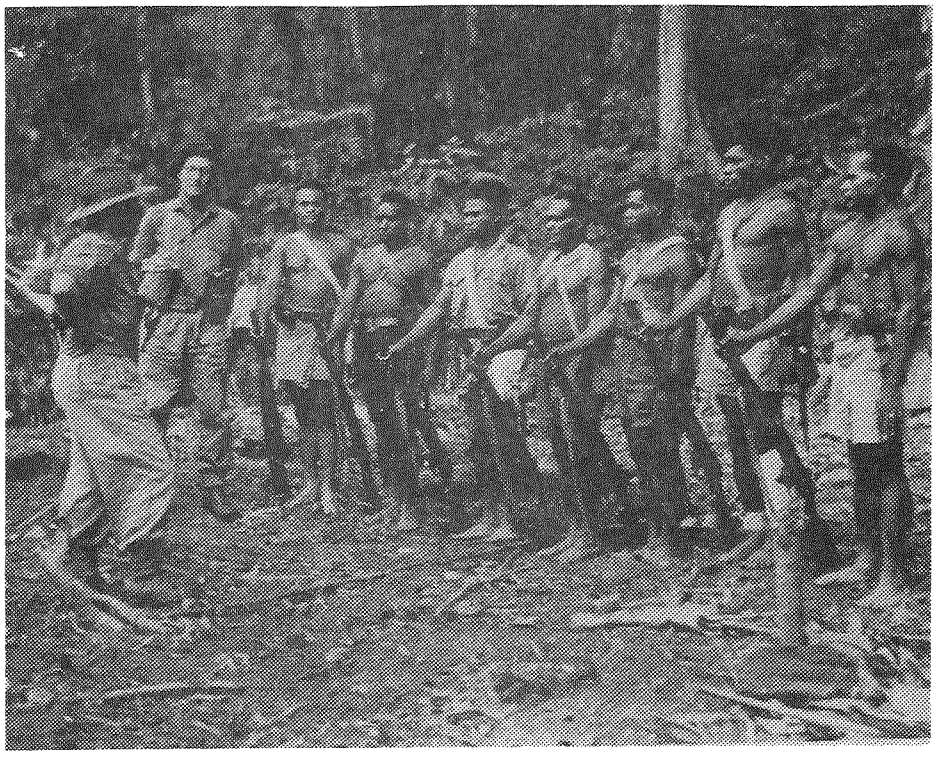
"We were all very frightened of the Japanese. Nobody had any strength against them. We were all like little children under the law of the Japanese."

How many Papua New Guineans were executed by the Japanese will never be known. But in nearly every area held by the Japanese there are still villagers who can recall watching the terrible process described by one New Britain man, John Kapelis, in **ANGELS OF WAR**:

"The Japanese military police executed some village men at Vunairima. We were there when they were arrested for walking off-limits along a beach. They were imprisoned in a tunnel - twelve of them altogether were shut up in the tunnel. They were there for two weeks. They were treated very badly - their hands were tied behind them and they were hung up by their hands so that only their big toes touched the ground.

"They were made to dig their own graves. Then they were blindfolded with a red cloth. Their hands were tied behind them. Then a Japanese officer gave the signal for execution, and down came the sword on the first man's neck. We noticed that the executioner used his left hand, not his right. We didn't understand how the left hand could make such a stroke."

GODWIN'S GUERRILLAS



In preparation for **ANGELS OF WAR** the film-makers sifted through scores of thousands of feet of film shot in wartime Papua New Guinea and stored in the archives of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. One short thirty-second sequence showed a young Australian officer, sturdily-built and bespectacled, checking the weapons of a squad of bare-chested, barefoot Papua New Guineans with rifles and submachine guns. They disappear in single file into the jungle, and the film runs to an end. The footage was identified simply as 'Godwin's Guerrillas'.

Independently, as we looked for people to talk to, it was suggested that we interview a man who was said to have led scouting and guerrilla forces behind enemy lines. He was now the bursar at a private school in Canberra. This turned out to be John Godwin, living and working only a few miles from the War Memorial, with a son in officer training at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, close by.

Godwin did not know he and his guerrillas had been filmed. We showed him the footage. For the first time, he saw himself again at twenty-five, in the company of Papua New Guineans whom he described as the finest of fighting men.

Before the war, Godwin played first-grade rugby and cricket in Sydney. Ironically, he was rejected by the army for poor eyesight. He went to Papua as an assistant plantation manager, and there in 1942 the war came to him.

"The final stages of the war were fought to re-establish our position with the native peoples of Papua New Guinea. It was also necessary to confine the Japanese to the least possible area where they could do harm to the native people. I was involved with my own guerrilla force, which was one of eight. Our main role was first, to kill as many of the enemy as possible, and secondly, to take the village people from the enemy areas of occupation and to bring them to within our own lines where they could be properly cared for. This also stopped the Japanese using them as labour.

"When we did this, we called for volunteers from the village people, to assist us in our task of destroying the Japanese. Many of them joined us, and I, in my own group, had several hundred.

"They were forever raiding one another, forever engaging in tribal warfare. These techniques were of immense value to us. The art of the game was to encourage them to use those techniques to our benefit, and we exploited them. I really believe that was the best way - to use their native talents, or their natural talents, to kill Japanese."

Like many other Australian returned service-men, John Godwin believes his black comrades-in-arms have been poorly treated by the Australian Government.

"It's to the everlasting disgrace of Australia that we haven't recognised the efforts of these people who did so much difficult fighting on our behalf. On many occasions, they were able to lead us onto the Japanese without them even knowing we were there, and on three or four occasions we destroyed large groups of Japanese soldiers without suffering a casualty, solely due to the efforts of these men who came to assist us."

AUSTRALIA'S SHAME

Papua New Guinea was Australian-controlled when World War Two broke out. Papua New Guineans did not have the rights of Australian citizens, but thousands fought in the Australian armed forces.

A private soldier in an infantry battalion was paid ten shillings a month - the lowest wages paid anywhere in the world to a fighting soldier in the Allied forces, lower than a black South African was paid.

At the end of the war the Papua New Guinea soldiers took home their deferred pay, rations for the journey, two shirts, a laplap, a pack, a blanket, a shaving brush, two towels and a toothbrush.

If a man was unwounded and his home property undamaged, he had no further claim on the Australian Government.

Under the compensation scheme introduced after the war, the value of a Papua New Guinean life was set at £60. Payments were also available for the loss of limbs. But many people did not receive the full amount. Widows of soldiers who died in the war sometimes received as little as five shillings a month until they re-married.

A few black ex-servicemen were able to take up land. But Australian soldiers wanting to settle in Papua New Guinea were given blocks fifteen times bigger.

Many of the old soldiers were bitter and remain so. The war showed them that on the battlefield they were as good as any other men. They believed they had been made promises about rewards for wartime service, but the rewards never came.

During the filming of **ANGELS OF WAR** in Papua New Guinea, many villagers seized the chance to talk of their expectations of the post-war years - expectations that were never fulfilled.

As one old Sepik man, Wamanari, told the film-makers:

"The Australian government said, you work and later you'll be like us. But it hasn't happened. They said, you work for us and then we'll all sit down at the same table and eat the same food with the same spoon. But it hasn't happened.

"I heard their promises and I worked day and night so that things would change. I thought of nothing else.

"When the war finished in 1945, the Australian soldiers went home and got pensions, and they're well off now. But me, I worked hard for nothing.

"Now Papua New Guinea is independent - young men wear shoes and trousers and look smart. But me, I'm just rubbish. Old men like me are dying without getting anything."

White men who fought alongside Papua New Guineans are equally strongly convinced that their black comrades have been shabbily treated.

The national president of the Australian Returned Servicemens' League, Sir William Keys, has condemned the Australian Government for "bureaucratic meanness". The RSL annual convention regularly passes resolutions calling for the cleaning-up of the pensions and compensation issue. "All the old fellows in Papua New Guinea", says Sir William, "believe that Australia has badly let them down".

Worse off even than regularly enlisted Papua New Guinean soldiers are police, carriers, and men who joined in the field without signing up. They are all technically civilians, even though they went through combat and in many cases carried guns and were decorated for bravery. For them there is no bureaucratic way to be compensated.

In mid-1980 the now independent Papua New Guinea government decided to make cash compensation payments ranging from 1,800 kina (roughly equivalent to the same amount in Australian dollars) for warrant officers, to 100 kina for formally enlisted privates. The Port Moresby *Post-Courier* headed its editorial "AUSTRALIA'S SHAME ON PAYMENTS".

The carriers, police and informally enlisted men may still miss out. And of course a lot of the old soldiers - the "green shadows", as the Japanese called them - have died in the forty years since the first shots were fired in New Guinea in January, 1942. But the sense of genuine grievance, that they were used, praised, and then discarded, remains vividly alive.

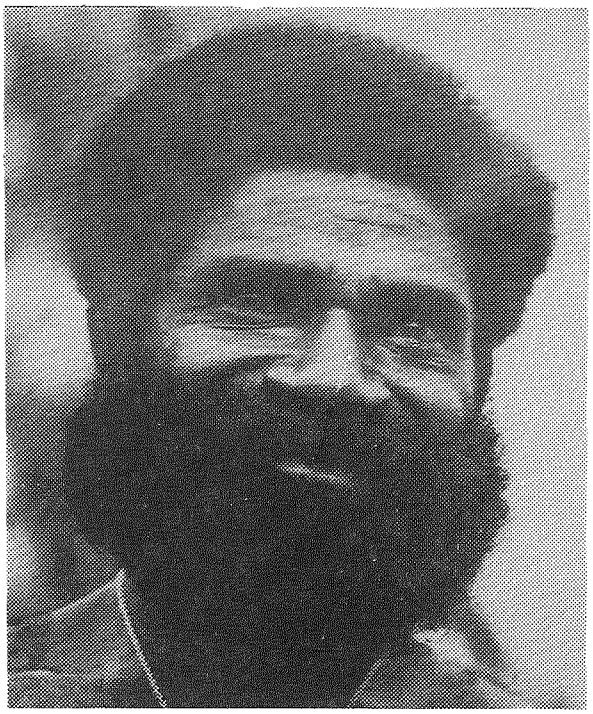
The final statement in **ANGELS OF WAR** is made by an angry spokesman at a crowded gathering of veterans in Popondetta, the scene of much savage fighting during the war: **"Australia has treated us as though we were shit. During the war we had to sleep in the jungle on the corpses of the Japanese. We had to drink water full of their rotting flesh. But for enduring all of this, we have got nothing."**

THE VALIANT YAUWIGA

Sergeant-Major Yauwiga is one of four Papua New Guineans to receive the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), second only to the Victoria Cross in Australian army gallantry awards. The Official War History praises him as "an outstanding soldier".

Yauwiga killed many Japanese for the Australians - twenty-eight in one guerrilla engagement. He ended the war with one arm blown away, replaced by an artificial limb with two hooks, and blinded in both eyes - one remaining an empty socket behind a pink eye-patch, the other a corneal transplant from a dead Australian.

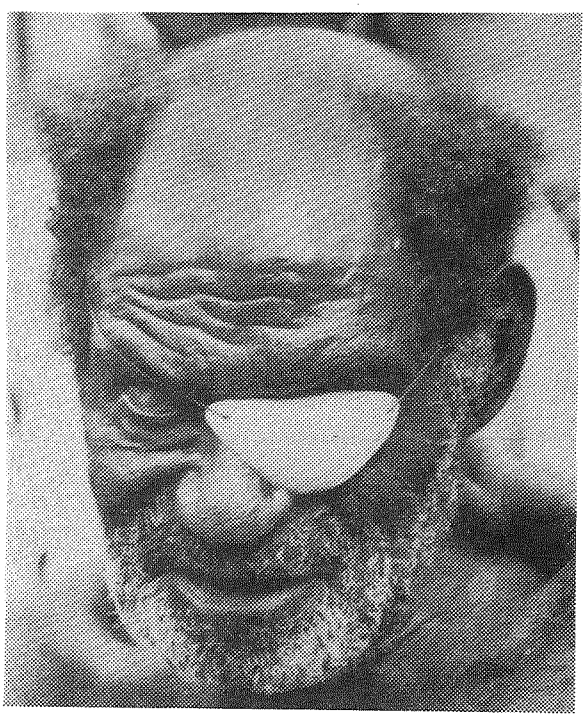
Despite his terrible war wounds and his own lack of formal education, Yauwiga came back from the war determined to lead the demand for better schools and economic opportunity for his people of the East Sepik province. Yauwiga survived until 1981, dying not long after he spoke to us for the camera about his life as a warrior.



"The people of Papua New Guinea don't make things for fighting wars with other countries. We just grow our own food and have sing-sings and beat our drums, that's all. We don't know how to make warships or submarines, bombs or bullets. We just live our own lives, that's all.

"The Japanese got us into the war. But what did they want? Did they want our land, or did they want to look after us? It wasn't clear to us at all.

"On one occasion, I was camped with an Australian coastwatcher in very rough country in Bougainville, when a huge force of Japanese and village people came up towards where we were camped. There were about a hundred village people with the Japanese - a whole crowd of them. They set up two machine-guns and fired at us, but we managed to crawl away like crocodiles, like lizards, to the base of a large tree nearby.



"We hid behind this tree and opened fire. I think we killed twenty-eight Japanese that night.

"I received my wounds from a smoke bomb which flamed up when I pulled out the pin and it burnt my body. At Greenslopes Hospital in Australia they tried to save my eye, but it was no use. Then a young man from Brisbane had a motor-bike accident - a young man with very good eyesight - and the doctors took an eye from this man. They took out my eye and put in this eye of a European man.

"My hand was cut off. When I was at Holland Park Hospital in Brisbane, they made a new hand for me and taught me how to use it and how to grip things with the hook. Later, when I went to meet the Queen, they gave me another one with two hooks. But now I've lost the key and the hooks don't work properly."