That brings us to the Papuan carriers, condescendingly known as ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels’. The Australians ‘recruited’ these unfortunates to virtual forced labour. No one told them what the war was really about, but they soon learned how vile it was. Many were paid nothing. According to Peter Ryan: ‘Recruitment in some villages was 100% of male adults… The villages suffered severely, without men to clear gardens, hunt, maintain houses and canoes etc. Diet was deficient, disease mounted … there was in some places near starvation and very high infant mortality.’

Doctor Geoffrey Vernon recalled that during fighting on the Kokoda Trail:

...many carriers were without a single blanket, rice was practically the only food issue, meat was withheld for two or three weeks and tobacco scarce: the regulation governing the reduction of loads to 40 lbs was often ignored, and excessive weights and distances imposed on the carriers as if they were merely pack animals.

T. A. G. Hungerford’s novel The ridge and the river portrayed rebellious carriers. The leading white character used violence to keep them working, then reflected bitterly:

The kanakas didn’t know what it was all about—it wasn’t their war, but he had to rag them and work them to a standstill carrying a bully who had never done anything but ill-treat them and abuse them—and if rumours were true, even worse.

In the late 1960s, former carriers told PNG University’s Ulli Beier that about two-thirds of them had tried to escape. Reasons for wanting to abscond included bad food, sore shoulders from carrying, beatings, cold, and bombs. But whenever some did escape, the Australians conscripted their sons, so that fathers were forced back to face ghastly penalties. ‘The most terrifying punishments were the so-called drum beatings in Kerema … A fire was lit in a 44-gallon drum and when it was hot the unlucky carriers were put cross the drum and beaten.’ A song still current among villagers in the 1970s ended:

The white man has brought his war to be fought on this land
His King and Queen have said so
We are forced against our wishes to help him.
They certainly had no reason to respect the whites, judging by Captain F.P. Brewer’s description of the troops at Port Moresby when it was bombed and people thought an invasion was near.

28 Quoted in Waiko A short history, p. 114.
31 Humphrey McQueen Social sketches of Australia 1888-2001 University of Queensland Press, St Lucia 2004, p. 176.
32 Humphrey McQueen Social sketches, p. 176.
Crowds of soldiers looted homes and shops ... Captain Fitch of the Steamship Trading Company caught an officer walking off with his golf clubs from the shipping company’s offices. They took refrigerators and wireless sets. Damage was done by men throwing silks, etc about and breaking bottles. The bulk store of liquor was looted and taken into the bush. There was no wild revelry in town; it took place out in the bush ... Officials just sat around waiting.33