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Chief interviewer:	Barnabas Orere
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Image:	

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

Time	Transcript
00:00	<p>[INTERVIEWER]:</p> <p>Interview number 7 at Kokoda, Friday May 23 2014. Can you begin by telling us your name, where you are from and introduce the person you are going to speak of?</p>
00:23	<p>Thank you. I am Max Itolo, I am aged 59, turning 60 on 10 December, end of this year. I am currently residing at Yuro block here in Kokoda. I am here to share a story about my late father Corporal Inta Derajinga [?] who passed away in 2009. It all started when</p>

01:03	they were here and the war broke out. At that time he was employed at Mamba in making sluice boxes for the younger Kienzle, Wallace Kienzle, so that was Wallace's boy, my father was, but eventually if you look at the books written by the Kienzles we're one of the family friends, that's well documented. Eventually because of the trust, when the war broke out and when they were evacuating, the key for the store and the major buildings were given to my father, according to my father, given to him, so at Ebei he was looking after those assets. And the kiaps who were based here, the kiap officers based in Kokoda had a duty to make sure that all white people were evacuated, all the labourers were evacuated, because the Japanese had already landed at Gona.
02:02	And so the kiap went over to Ebei and found my father, faithfully looking after that when everybody had gone. So the kiap got up and said, 'you get out'. 'Throw the key away', he said, 'this is wartime. Give us the shot gun, you get out, go for our life, this is not normal situation'. So my father followed the Mamba River up, at that time I think it's recorded it was a bit dry, at that time, and the place was burned so he could just leave. He followed up, all the way, he joined up with some other people that were walking through, and at Siri, which is about one to two kilometres west of Oivi almost at Oivi bridge when the first group of Japanese arrived on bicycle, so they all scattered which way, and went into the bush. He went up the ridge, Oivi ridged on the top, if you're driving down you'll see on the top is the ridge, there is two down there and saw the camp there. Then he followed down all the way down to Hungiri village, and because my mother's from there he teamed up with them and continued to Barala. On the way they lost a son they were young, so he lost one son there, may have been rescued another time. They went to loma and settled there.
03:27	But what made him join the PIB was mostly, I think if I gather from his information, stories, there were two major events. One was that in quick time he lost a mother and a father, I think the good life that they had at the station they couldn't enjoy there. And also because of no medical facilities. He said they die of sorcery but with a little bit of education I have and all that I believe it's not sorcery but just that the good life was not there and they succumb to disease and weakness, and all just natural.
04:09	So that made him start thinking, but what really made him move – the final decision was made by a Daru policeman who on his way to deliver a letter to the Australians at loma station, came and found him with my mother, my father was planting coconut, and he ordered him down: 'you come and get me across on the canoe'. So my father had no choice but to come down and carry him across. And then, because my father had been already employed here, he was a shooting boy here – shooting boy meaning that he would shoot pigs here to supplement the government ration here before the war. So he was already familiar with that. He said, 'you can't fool me like this, I've been there before and I've done it, and if you are going to do this to me then show who I am'. So he went, he got up and he told his younger brother, Corporal Embuto.
05:08	So the two brothers ended up in the war. They got up and told him, 'You stay here, look after our wives, and our maybe one children each, I'm going off, I'm going off to the war'. So he took off, not realising that the younger brother was following him also. Every time he would hide until my father turned away, until they got to loma station and then the white man asked him in Motu, 'dako omura', meaning, you

	<p>know, he asked the question to more than one person. That's when my father realised he was addressing more than one person, turned around, but very quickly my uncle stepped in because if he was still outside, my father would have come and chased him back. So they enlisted. So the number you see is 405, 406 PN. OK, had he stayed back he would not have lost his wife to another man, like what happens when soldiers go to war they lose their wives to another man. That's what happened, he should have stayed back, and looked after the family, but that's exactly what happened ... But in the end, if I may cut the story short, my uncle got decorated and my father didn't. They all ended up as corporals.</p>
06:23	<p>But anyway, the white man there, they told him their intention and he gave them a short test, by tying a bandage, that was the physical test he gave them, tying a bandage, and if they could break it free, you're fit enough, so that's what exactly happened, sent my uncle to Kumusi, with a 303 one magazine, one 303 one magazine, to my father and said 'go, join this battalion', so that's how they were the first action without training. And they were to hunt down the retreating Japanese because they had already come back, so my father and them were really the second lot of recruits, not the first. So from there they were sent up to the training base at the place that somebody just mentioned. They got trained there. The first action was the retake of Lae, if you can remember history the Americans were transferred coming that way, and the PIBs, Australians and some Americans were going, so they landed at Bukawa.</p>
07:27	<p>On the first night, evening, a spotter plane came around. By the way my father and my uncle graduated, passed out as Bren gunners. They were both Bren gunners. And so, on the first night there, evening there, the spotter plane comes looking at the bulldozers that are making a road for them to go, and they could easily spot the Japanese pilot looking out the side, my father, true to his training, changed the normal bullets to I don't know what a more high powered, red-tipped ones, I think.</p>
08:05	<p>He wanted to fire but the officer said 'Just stop it, you will see your action later, not now, this one is spotting, you're only going to invite trouble'. So that's what happened. The next day as they were walking along they came across dead Japanese, and the officer that was in the lead, he told him 'that's the men you're trying to face. Have a good look at them', he said, 'if you're not carefully you'll be dead like that, but from now on you're going to get the live ones, not dead ones like these. Those were already killed by Australian and Americans'. Anyway my father got his first action with a Bren gun at that time. They came across a camp, and they were to attack. So the Australian officer opened up with a short, Owen gun I think it is. Somebody had the – I am telling this because it's a little bit funny. Somebody loaded a magazine but I think there's a proper way to load, you don't just feed them in.</p>
09:02	<p>So every time it burst, it would jam or it would stop, so he would cock it and go, and the officer realised that in the thick of battle, he was not firing. He said, he turned around and said 'what's wrong', he said 'it's not working'. The officer in his rush just said 'Off!'. So like I said, true to his training, my father stripped the whole gun down in the thick of battle. When the officer couldn't hear what was going on, he turned around and saw that the gun was stripped down. My father was waiting for next order. The officer almost had a heart attack that time. So he was eager to use the Bren gun and on his first action, he made a mess of it. Luckily they were attacking so things were in their favour a little bit. So that's what happened.</p>

09:45	OK, they continued on for the retake of Lae. The other thing that happened was that in the eyes of the Japanese, anybody who's gone to Busu River has said that it's a fast flowing river not far from the mountains. They cross that, the Japanese saw them but they thought they were carriers, and allowed them to go carrying the cane or whatever to cross over and tie it on the other side so they could hold the rope and start building right under the eyes of the Japanese. That's another thing they told me. OK, they went and took over Lae and that's history.
10:20	The next action was the retake of Finschhafen landing. So it was a Sunday morning, coming up, and all the Orokaivas and Binanderes were there, and they could see that the vegetation and the secondary regrowth was just like at home so they were discussing, 'that looks like Onga, Hakere' [?]. And then somebody heard a bullet just come and hit on the landing craft. None of the officers told them that the place had already been occupied by the Japanese. All they knew was there going to be a landing. They go there, they're landing and the officer, all they know is the officer with the pistol and their back said 'go go go go', and they had to go. Nobody turned around – shoot. Because anybody who falters during that attack would spoil the whole thing I think, all military people know that. And that's where they lost their officer who had taken them for training at Moresby, and then they lost one of their officers there. You can see the history book which officer that was.
11:20	OK, as for my father, there were planes now attacking. At the same time I think the step, or whatever put there, was blown off by the Japanese who had been there already and they were opening fire. So this very tall Australian, when you went down in the waters of Finschhafen, it was there, but for my father it came up to there and he dropped the Bren gun. And then he had to save his own life, went up and found that he was empty handed, and without the weapon, he's useless, and maybe the officer would get on to him, so he had to dive back. If you go to Finschhafen you see it's very clear water, you'll see that, he dived back, the Bren gun was there, he got it, came up to the beach, and saw that the officer had been killed. He dropped his tears for him because that was the man who trained them, and took them over but no time for anything else.
12:18	By that time, his friends were already already about fifteen metres ahead. He didn't even fire gun then. OK, from there they went up to Sattelberg. They were in camp, and he told me that that is one of the places where we read about one man Front, with his Bren gun, because it's a sharp ridge nobody, it was just himself. But he said, 'there was fighting everywhere, left, right and centre', and I was wondering why. But later on I figured out that the Japanese were not stupid too, they know the gun would be there so they probably were trying to creep on the side that's what I figure out. He was there. His leg got swollen because about a week in the water in the tunnel with heavy rain. He was there so the vehicle that got relief supply took them down to the landing craft back to Lae. He was sitting down in there in the water
13:15	with this leg useless, with one leg practically useless, when the ANGAU officer came and said, 'labour, out, out of the bus, this is only for the wounded soldiers'. But one of the Australian soldiers who had been there had seen him and said 'no, this is a soldier', and then to prove it he had that doctor, who allowed him to come to Lae. As they landed at the water tank, a bomber came and attacked, and he's very thankful to this young Australian captain, who lifted him and only if only he knew whoever saved him, this young officer while everybody was taking cover came and got him off. My father couldn't do anything, he was just looking, picked him up, I

	don't know what, maybe that officer's family will be watching this if ever this is produced, and I think my father had heartfelt gratitude to this person, this young captain, a young man, came and got him, went and dived in the [shelter?] too. From there he was flown over to Moresby. And this is the part I liked. He went to the white man's hospital. From that together with the white Australian soldiers,
14:34	he was flown straight to it. The army nurse came and did a quick job of his laplap, scissors, he was naked. As if it was on the day that he was born. My father felt very, very small, but got some encouragement from the cheeky Australian soldiers that were wounded once, even though they were wounded, made it a bit easier for him but my father got a very VIP treatment there. He was treated there for one week, one nurse personally for him on the chair, changed what he was wearing, a green gown, magazine even though he couldn't read, lit him a smoke, sat down and said 'whatever you want, I'm here'. And that was paradise for one week until his boss started looking for officers and said 'come on kanaka, get out to Gemo, that's where you belong'. He didn't say that but – 'get back to Gemo'. Gemo used to be what, leprosy hospital, where people were sent when they were treated.
15:40	So after one week in paradise he went down there. From there, there were I think NGB was beginning to be formed, so they were looking for old hands in the PIB and about five wantoks in whole Oro province volunteered but in the end they started pulling out so he was only one who ended up at Anabag, and he calls it Anisbunara, but he's an old man, for instance Sattelberg, he would say Saddlebagara, but I know that it's Sattelberg in Finschhafen. He calls it Anisbunara but in the history books it may be written as the fight at the headwaters of Ramu and Sepik. He was there, they floated down, and to make a long story short, they got run over by the Japanese.
16:39	They lost an officer there, in the thick of battle he just saw that officer shot and fell down and never recovered, the lieutenant I think, in the history books, and then the sergeant led them out. OK, because he was a Bren gunner, the last bet he made with his life was to save this officer, because the officer was all, with the trousers and heavy and all that, so he allowed him to go, and two Japanese rushed over. All their attention was on the dreaded hated Australians, they didn't look around for anybody else. I think they were going to cut him with swords, otherwise they would have fired. They were going there, he stepped around the breadfruit tree, emptied the last magazine, the last on those two. The officer turned around and said 'throw the gun away'. The reason why I'm saying this is because until the time he died he would always talk to himself, 'I would never throw the gun away on my own intention', he was very worried about that gun he threw away,
17:46	that Bren gun, because he couldn't dive across with it. So they pushed the officer across to the other end they were watching the Japanese come in, while the was alive... OK, replacement Australian company from Madang. But during that time my father realised that he was given a section to lead and all that, so he was not expecting, but during that time they went to the Q Store, put on a stripe, corporal, and then he went to Moresby. But the nearest he came to being killed was at that operation.
18:33	And it all happened because he failed as a normal human being and his bodily desires. They saw a young girl there so the two of them went chasing for this young girls, and I'm saying this because I don't think the rest of the members of the family know that they mentioned that to me. They went and got the girl, and when he

	<p>turned around, that labourer that they took over, because that place was occupied by Japanese before, so they were supporting both sides, picked up my father's gun and was already aiming at him. The only thing that saved him was that this man knows how to use the Japanese gun, he doesn't know how to use the – safety pin, he didn't know, he was still fiddling around with the safety pin. My father came and picked it off. They probably would have killed him, but if he did so, nobody would carry the casualty, so that's the nearest he came to almost being killed, and from a silly mistake like that.</p>
19:36	<p>OK, from there they went for retraining again at Moresby, then the last operation was at Bougainville, Torokina like the other speaker talked about. They went and then they were there. He reckons he would have died there if the war continued, because after the surrender, when they went to get all the Japanese they found that they were well dug and had they been ordered to attack, my father reckons he would have died there.</p>
20:19	<p>My father never talked a lot about this war, he didn't want to talk about it. He's cross at people who get up and say 'I killed a hundred people', he said the Japanese are well trained soldiers, well disciplined. He said I run way to survive, I survived because sometimes I ran away... A good example of when they went to one operation at Bougainville and boss told him to climb up a cliff in Bougainville to observe the camp up on the top. He came and luckily for him the Japanese was sleeping on the job. But when he heard my old man, he woke up suddenly and then fired the first shot.</p>
21:06	<p>and the bullet got him on his webbing. And very quickly my father turned around to the other side of the one and what saved him was that, in his haste to turn the gun around, it got caught on the webbing, on the string, vine. Had he thought to just release it slowly and to turn around he would have shot my father. But it nearly killed him. But the best part of the story is that after that my father rolled down, tumbling down. Came to the base of the hill, nobody was there, they had deserted him. He picked up a rifle, one water bottle, went and while everyone was peering down to see if he was coming and the sergeant, a white man, came and said 'Are you OK?' 'Yes'. But he said 'Whose rifle is this?' And so it was a guy from Daru, a fresh man on the field so the officer gets up and says 'If I want to shoot you I can shoot you now for leaving a rifle behind'. So very slowly, that Daru guy got up and say 'Masta, you two you run away now', the sergeant, all arguments stop on the spot.</p>
22:25	<p>From there he came back, he never got to see his family, and the child. Mr Kienzle picked him up on the road, came back here until 1974 when he was too old to do anything and he went down to the village. In all this time, about two years, my mother didn't know whether my father was alive. Right now I have two mobile phones in the world. I wish my mother had one. She never knew whether my father was dead or alive. And this is why my aunty was stolen by another man, they probably said 'your husband is dead, what are you doing, what are you waiting for?' My father came back, he had to do a lot, a little bit of catch up to do. Within a short time he produce eleven of us.</p>
23:20	<p>And seven of us, the rest died. My uncle came back, he too had to catch up, he married two wives. I got beautiful cousins. So that's his story. He never talked much about it. He just doesn't like people putting the Japanese down. 'The Japanese are trained soldiers just like you are. There's no such thing as a one-sided fight' That's</p>

	<p>what he would tell me. And if you're saying that you killed a hundred, that's probably the whole section; you yourself is the one that can, you can ... but if affected my mother very badly, and I feel for her, without knowing whether father was dead or alive. Thank you.</p>
24:15	<p>[INTERVIEWER]: That's a wonderful story. I can see why your father was a very good man. Well done.</p>