An oral history collection recording the memories and stories of Papua New Guineans about World War Two

Voices from the War

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| Name: | Elking Doroda [ED] |
| Date of Interview: | 17 May 2017 |
| Location of Interview: | New Buna, Northern Province |
| Interviewer/s: | Margaret Embahe [ME] |
| Duration of Interview: | 30:04 |
| Main Language of Interview: | Ewage and Orokaiva |

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW**

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
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<tr>
<td>0:00:00</td>
<td>[ME] Before we begin our story, you know why we are here so can you tell us who you are and where you are from?</td>
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<td>0:00:15</td>
<td>Thank you. My name is Elking Doroda and I am from Buna. My father worked for the Fuzzy Wuzzy and then he went to Salamaua. I went to Port Moresby to pick up my father’s medal [Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel Commemorative Medallion]. I will show you the medal before I go into the story.</td>
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<td>0:00:45</td>
<td>This is your father’s medal showing that he worked as a Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel. Can you tell us what kind of work your father did?</td>
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<td>0:00:56</td>
<td>My dad was a young man, about twelve years, when the war came. When he was about thirteen he was selected to go to Salamaua to carry cartridges and other things.</td>
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<td>0:01:19</td>
<td>[ME] Where did they go after carrying those things?</td>
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<td>0:01:20</td>
<td>From Lababi they went to Salamaua and stopped there. The war ended there. A lot of people got on the boat. There were so many people—Buna people and Gona people got on the boat and went to Salamaua. People like Necodimus, Deacon Ananais, and the others, with these people they landed at Salamaua. From Salamaua they returned to Buna while the war continued to Lae.</td>
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0:01:58  [ME] Like you said, your father carried the cartridges to Salamaua and then to Lae. What happened to your father?

0:02:12  From there they returned to Buna.

0:02:15  [ME] So what happened, they got back?

0:02:16  Buna was already taken over by the Japanese, but the story I am going to tell is about where the war started and went up. That’s the story I want to tell you.

0:02:36  [ME] OK, you start the story.

0:02:38  At the government station when the Australian administration were here during the colonial times, under Mr Kevin Atkinson, that man was the one who was the administrator at Buna. When he was there the Pacific War was declared and when the war was coming Mr Atkinson told the policemen to go and see him. It was hard for him to explain to them, to tell the people about war because it was their first time to hear about war. Because they wondered what it was all about, so he told the village policeman to tell the village people, go and tell the village people to kill their big pigs and gather their food, make feast, get whatever belongings they had like their necklaces and treasures, to build houses in the bush and take them there. They should also take the old people to the houses they built in the bush, that’s what Mr Atkinson told them to do. He didn’t come out plainly to tell them why they should do this, because this was the first time for war to come for the local people. Mr Atkinson said there would be big machines, big bombs. Those kinds of things were coming, he said. There would be a lot of noise, but it was hard for him to explain such things to the village people. So he was he just telling them to kill their big pigs, get their food together and feast.

0:04:21  While they were doing that the Japanese boats started arriving. Some landed here, some at Gona. When the boats started landed mist was falling and covering the place because of their ‘medicine’ [siwo], or ‘smoking bombs’. They blasted it and the sea was covered with smoke. They could not see the place. And then the Buka people who were recruited by the Japanese and were also on the ship, it was the Buka people who were beating the bamboo on the boats so that the people would hear the beating of the bamboo and the noise of the boats, and run away. While that was happening the village people didn’t know what it was all about, so the children ran their way, men and women ran their way. They never met their family they were all scattered.

0:05:25  When that was happening Atkinson wrote a letter and gave it to his dog. In the letter he said that ‘war has just begun, I have seen it with my own eyes and I am taking off. Pick me at Kokoda’. He said he wanted the plane to land at Kokoda to pick him up. When he gave the letter to the dog, his dog took the letter to Kokoda then all the way to Konedobu. The village people saw the dog running with the letter and they were saying, ‘a white man’s dog is running with the letter’. They were coming towards the dog but it was trying to bite them so they never got close. As he was running he passed Ango and the people of Ango saw the dog running with the letter. When the dog reached Konedobu he gave the letter to the big man, the boss. He read the letter and did what he was told to do.

0:06:32  As the boss [Mr Atkinson] was beginning to walk up towards Kokoda the boat landed at Gona. Gona is in the open area so they could see clearly. When they landed they found it was a mission station. In fact they were searching for where the Australian administration was based, but the place they told to go to was in fact
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the Gona mission station. So after they arrived and they realized it was the mission station they sent the scouts out in the plane to search the area. The plane flew around the station. As the boss [Atkinson] was walking up he came to a place where the PIBs were, so he told the PIBs to move when the Japanese got closer.

0:07:18 The scouts in the plane flew further up the coast to Buna and as they were circling the area, one of the men from Kerema who was a PIB fired and shot the pilot. When he was shot he went and the plane fell in the sea. The people in the boat realized that there were soldiers in that area. After that, realizing that there were soldiers in the area, all the planes on the boat flew up and the place was covered in aeroplanes. The planes dropped many bombs that spoilt our land, our place. That happened because they knew that there were soldiers living here, so when the bombs fell down our place was ruined. Nowadays we live on bomb craters.

0:08:25 [ME] You just stop your story there, and tell us how old were you at that time when the war came up?

0:08:35 My dad told me the story I am telling you.

0:08:38 [ME] Your dad told you this story that you are telling us?

0:08:42 Yes, my father was a story-teller. That’s why he told me what I am telling you now. When the Japanese landed their scouts ran up on the bicycles. They could have made it all the way to Port Moresby but the PIBs who were here blocked them. When the scout was killed the Japanese all got off the boat and they were on the land. They were thinking that the Australian soldiers were already in the area. But while that was happening the boss had already walked a distance. When they checked the area there was nobody there. When they moved in the PIBs started firing at them. They moved up to Ango. They moved up but slowly, until they met the Australians at Awala, and that was when the first firing took place by the Australians. When the Australians came and met the Japanese at Awala, it was when the first shot was fired by the Australians.

0:10:18 All the way from Buna to Awala it was the natives who went up to Awala. The first gunshot of the Second World War was shot at Buna by the Kerema PIB man, Moripi. OK, and when they got to Kokoda the boss [Mr Atkinson] had been picked up already by the plane at Kokoda. While that was happening the war went up to Kokoda and then went right up to the border of Northern Province and Moresby, Isurava. From there the Australians chased the Japanese back. At that time our fathers were still in the bush. They didn’t come out, they were scattered living in the bush. They were scattered but eventually some people were dying, some were still alive, and they started finding each other and coming together. They came together and started a village at Gorobada. That was because there was a river bed there next to where they started their village, so it was easy for them to go and hide at the banks of the river. So they started the village there. If they were outside and heard the planes coming they would go to the banks of the river, make holes and hide in there while the bombs were thrown. When everything was over they would come out again.

0:11:59 While they were in the bush they didn’t know if it was a week, what day it was, what month it was, what year it was. To them they thought the war would begin and finish the next day. For their food they would eat ferns, tulips and the young shoots of the sago palms. They would break open the palm and eat the white pulp inside.
That’s what they used to eat while they lived in the bush. All their food in their gardens, they all ran away so the food was finished [rotted].

0:12:43 While they were living there, between Ango and Doboduru there was an old war airstrip built by the Americans and the Australians, where they used to land by parachutes. The landed there because they wanted to raid Buna. After landing some Australians and Americans went towards Eroro and were moving in, the others were moving from Ango and Doboduru, moving in and their base was at Boanda. My dad never told me the name of the commander but he was carried to a Hanuabada woman and he had a tattoo of a coconut mat [tenembo] on his back. Because he knew Motu he would talk to the locals in Motu to find out how they were living and where they were. He also brought a census book and he was recording how many were alive, how many were dead.

0:14:01 [ME] Was he an Australian or an American?

0:14:03 Australian. After that was done, from Doboduru they went and stayed at Boanda. While they were there my grandfather, Joseph Tauno, went to his garden with his wife. That was in the morning. There were soldiers already there at Boanda with their tents erected, and they were preparing themselves. He went with his wife to the garden and on his way back he heard some noise. He said, ‘are those the Japanese? Who is making that noise?’ So he told the wife to wait while he went to find out who was making the noise. But because he went with his dog the commander had told the soldiers, ‘if you see a dog you know the dog is with some people, so get them to take us to where the local people are’. The grandfather hid near the tree to see what the dog would do. The dog went to where the soldiers were. When the dog got to them the commanding officer said, ‘just follow the dog and see where it will take you’. The dog took them to where his grandfather was hiding at the back of the tree. When the grandfather looked their way he knew how the Australians were dressed, but he realized that these people were dressed differently. So he got scared and they made actions to him that ‘we are here to help you, we are your men’. When the soldiers went back they told the commanding officer that they had found one man. He told them to bring the man to him, and he spoke to him in Motu.

0:16:29 He asked all these questions, ‘are Buna people there? Is the councillor there? The village policeman?’ They said to him, ‘you leave your food here’. They also asked him, ‘have you got a wife’. He said, ‘yes my wife is over there’, so they told him to bring his wife over. They gave him some food and told him, you and your wife take this food and go. Tell the Buna people to get together where they are, and you tell the village policeman to put his uniform on. Tell the councilor to wear his medal. Get those men and come to me in the morning.

0:17:15 [ME] Mr Doroda, can you stop the story there. I want to ask you how old your daddy was at that time?

0:17:26 He was twelve. He was twelve when he saw all these things.

0:17:32 [ME] You said something about him going to Salamaua?

0:17:35 He was fifteen when he went to Salamaua. After that he brought the Buna people to where the Australians were camping. When they saw them they were worried and the Australians greeted them. There was a river called Buanda where they were, and on the other side of the river they built a health centre. They had a camp on the other side for their food and when the arrived the commanding officer told
them to stay there at the care centre. The medicals were there, so when they found out that they were sick they would treat them, or if they were not sick they would tell them to go to their tents. When everybody had got into their tents the boss said, ‘you will rest for two days’. They were preparing to go to raid at Buna so they told the people to rest, and the soldiers also rested for two days.

0:19:15 After two days, all the men and young boys were told to all stand in line, the soldiers also were told to stand in line. The commanding officer was going, checking all the soldiers and the village people, to see if they are fit. The commanding officer was checking their fitness, and selected some of the men and boys. The ones who he did not select, he sent back to the tent. Those that he picked, those were the ones who would go down to Buna. The track that they would be taking was an old track from the Australian colonial days, and they were to follow that track down to Buna. But the Japanese had already blocked the main roads, the roads on the side. All the roads they could take had already been blocked by the Japanese, putting their machine guns on the road. So it was hard for the Australians to get the men to Buna because the Japanese had blocked every path, the main roads, and set up all their bunkers, their machine guns. It was hard for the Australians to get their men down so they had to make a new path along the swamp. As they were coming through the swampy pathway one of the Japanese spies had already built a little lookout up in the tree and he was sitting up there looking out for the Australians and the Americans. They had to walk through the swamp because there was no other pathway they could use. They were all trapped and the Japanese were firing at them. There was no way they could avoid the guns. When they were firing the machine guns at them, nearly all the Australians were killed.

0:21:17 Some of the soldiers who were shot, the wounded soldiers were just lying everywhere. Some of the village people were told to carry the wounded people and they built stretcher beds and carried them to the Australians’ camp at Buanda. When the grandmothers and the mothers saw this they used to cry for the wounded soldiers. They cried because very strong, young men were dying just like that. While they were doing that the ones continuing to Buna were going through the Andere [stream] to get to Davegi [river] in order to get to Buna. But when they got down to Davegi the Japanese were there too. They were looking for a pathway to get through to Buna. A different group were coming in tanks from Eroro at Oro Bay, also trying to get to Buna. But it didn’t work out for them, still it was very hard. That tank was bombed by the Japanese and the wreck was there until somebody came and removed it recently.

0:22:53 [ME] Mr Doroda, you are saying that it was hard to come down. Why was it hard?

0:23:00 Because the Japanese already blocked every path and road, they blocked every place so it was hard for them. They blocked every path and so they knew their way around to shoot them. The other sides were all swamps. The parts where there were no swamps were all blocked. So when they followed that road down they were all shot. They tried everything and they couldn’t get through. So they decided to get the village men and use them as scouts. Those who went down to Davegi couldn’t come through, so they remained there.

0:23:55 A man named John Bald Bundari and a Solomon man named John Dau, who was the medical during the colonial time, the both of them went down to John Bald’s village. The fighting was still continuing and they went down. The Japanese could
not shoot them because they [the Japanese] were fighting with the Australians and the Americans, not the village people. So they did not do anything to them. While they were on their way to go down to the village the Australian soldiers were already down there at Davegi. As the both of them were going down they could feel that there were people around them, and they spotted the soldiers’ helmets when the sun’s rays went on to them. They were frightened. One of the Australian sergeants came and talked to them. ‘are you frightened?’ The sergeant asked them if they could speak English, and John Dau said ‘I know English so I can talk to you’. The sergeant asked the both of them, ‘can you make a map for us?’ He said, ‘when you make the map we don’t want to go close to where the Japanese are, show us another track that goes around so that we can attack them’.

0:25:58 John Bald was taken as a scout and they all went back to the base at Buanda to try and set up how to attack. They also got another village man named Martin, Martin Koe, as a scout. John Dau was also taken as a scout, and he led them between Davegi and Moindaga swamp. He led them through the swamp, down to raid Buna. And John Bald led another troop down to Siwori. And Martin Koe led another troop to Karako towards the kunai area. That area Karako was an area where there was a Japanese base. Siwori, Sanananda and the old Buna village were all occupied by Japanese. Buna was the Japanese headquarters, they were trying their best to bomb the headquarters and get through. That is why they got the villagers to be scouts, in order to help them to get to those places. The Japanese knew very well that the Australians could not go through the swamp so they just blocked the other areas and left the swamp. So the Australians were trying to make use of the swamps and go that way. The Japanese did not use the swamp area because it was filled with bush canes and they could not put their base there.

0:28:08 So John Bald led the other troops down to the swamp area. He led them all the way to Siwori village. When they came to Siwori they got all of the good spots and occupied the area. The Japanese could not get through to Siwori because John Bald had already taken his troops and blocked the area. From there the Japanese were looking out towards the main road to see if the Australian and American soldiers would appear that way, but they had already come from the side. They already blocked the spots. They were everywhere now and surrounded the whole place. The Australians and Americans already shot the Japanese scout who was in the tree and they ran towards Siwori and they were shooting all the Japanese soldiers down. The Australians and American soldiers, they surrounded the whole place so the Japanese soldiers had no way to fight back. They shot all the Japanese soldiers down. They finished all the Japanese soldiers at Buna and then they were heading down to Sanananda. My story comes and ends at Buna.

0:29:35 [ME] Was your father taken to Salamaua when the war ended here? Is that right?

0:29:41 Yes, yes.

0:29:44 [ME] And from there when he was carrying the cartridges and other supplies for the Australian soldiers, from there he returned to Buna, is that correct?

0:29:52 Yes

0:29:52 [ME] Thank you Mr Doroda for your story, is that all with your story? Thank you for your story

0:30:00 Thank you.
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