

Name:	John Knox
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Chief interviewer:	Lalen Simeon
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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW	
Time	Transcript
0:05	[Interviewer] Thank you, Mr John Knox for making time available, the interview is conducted in Knoxy's guest house office in Kavieng, New Ireland Province on the 1 st of April 2017. We are now with Mr John Knox and the first question I will ask you is, can you first tell us about what you know about what happened in New Ireland in World War 2?
0:37	OK, thank you so much for the opportunity to talk to you guys and you are most welcome to come. I was not alive during the World War 2, my Dad however, was alive and information that he passed on to us was about his experience during the War; but I'm interested in one particular chapter in the War where he became the prisoner of war. My father's name was Noah (Moa) Knox and his father is a white man and he befriended my grandmother from Panmana village and then my Dad was born. He did not have anything to do with the War. But because his skin was partly half white he was imprisoned by the Japanese during the Second World War and that's his history that he related to us. And today a lot of people in his village and a lot of people down in Nalik area, (ah) Panmana and all this, together with others often come up and tell this story when he was in prison during World War 2.
2:11	He was young I guess, maybe early 16 or 17, during that time. And (ah) like I said, because of his colour, he was in prison at Luburua. Luburua is next to Lakurumau, where the Japanese had a cave. It's almost a natural cave and the Japanese got hold of it and in it they imprison all the prisoners... and

	among them were Chinese, and nuns, from the Catholic church, and they had a farm like garden next to the cave.
3:04	The cave is still there at Luburua (ah) it's inside the plantation there. So these days I often take tourists there and often show them the cave. My Dad's experience, whatever he relates to us is (you know) it was not a good experience. So the result of that one after the War was that you know, my Dad became the driver for the -what we call- the 'hangou' time. He was a driver for the jeep. He drove the jeep and carried all the people around and then he turned out to be an operator- a grader driver- and then he ended up working for the Japanese logging company.
4:07	Now his experience in the Japanese company was that people would say no but hear the instructions for the Japanese. He would not even question and it sort of dawned on me that his experience during the War would have resulted in him being very scared of the Japanese and he was so afraid of them even though he was- you know- a really experienced operator because he had to go and work for them and all that. A Japanese is a Japanese. And he was ruling the place, you know, and he related back his experience where he was psychologically affected by that, and he just (ah) acknowledge that Japanese is his authority. And he cannot say no to them or he cannot question them. So... and because of that, you know, it dawned on me that we got to check him and I asked a few questions when I was a bit young. He was in prison.
5:07	The cave is such that there's a big dorm inside and there's another dorm area outside, they had it levelled; all the prisoners levelled it and the commander would sit there. And inside there, there's no other exit except out towards where the commander was sitting and towards the Japanese soldiers. And then there's another natural opening on the other side where there's a little ledge, a little rock ledge, and over the ledge it's (ah) straight rock for about two metres or 3 metres onto a 'liklik baret (drain) or little creek or little... and (ah) if any prisoners were to be executed, they would make mention of their names the day before. And so the prisoners would come up, the ones about to be executed, they would take them out, blindfold them and lead them towards this little opening into a ledge and there's a natural ledge there where they'll stand them on top a rock, and then the Japanese with a samurai sword would come back, a little bit, stand there and chop the necks off. When they chop the neck off the blood would shoot up into the ceiling of the little ledge, it's a rock ceiling and the head and the body would fall down the little creek. And that little creek would be bright red coloured with blood. And then the prisoners would come now after the execution, the prisoners would come and carry all the bodies and go and bury them (ah).
6:56	So my father, his name was mentioned now to be executed the next day, (ah) I think with a few other people but his name was mentioned to be executed the next day. So during the day, the day before he just walked out that hole, that door, past the Japanese soldiers... you know. And the Japanese soldiers didn't realize or notice, whether they took notice or not,

	<p>maybe they thought he was going to be executed so he's probably psyched up with all these funny thoughts and he's just walking around. After that, they did not notice him so he just walked out and there were other openings in the cave you know. So he just walked out and they thought he was going out to the loo or something and then he went and crawled under one of those tunnels. He kept on crawling and crawling despite the pitch-black darkness and sometimes the tunnel... natural tunnel becomes narrow but he kept crawling. And then finally he saw a bit of opening on top where there's a bit of sunlight so he tried to push the rocks and all these and surprisingly it was still daylight so he went down.</p>
8:26	<p>And then he escaped because he was from that area there. So his relatives, my (ah) granny on the Mum's side... that's their village. It's Luburua and then there's Lakurumau and Panmana. And my Dad from Panmana and all our relatives is from that area. So he managed to crawl up and he came out of an opening but because it was daylight he went back into the tunnel and stayed there, until at night he would open that rock, go to the beach, collect some coconuts and then go back into the tunnel and make sure he uses some brushes to clean his footsteps and then he'll go back and have his coconuts. Until his relatives came and got him and took him away into the village and hid him there for some time. When he escaped, you know, all the other prisoners, the Japanese used to get them in piquet lines and (in like) they'll send a piquet line across to search all the bush and everywhere and then once they come back the next line will go, and they did that from morning till dark (dawn) but they couldn't find him. He was taken away and (ah) looked after by his relatives.</p>
10:21	<p>And one day he got tired of running away and he was just standing next to the coconut tree and the Japanese patrol came past, and he said they didn't notice him. So he thought, 'well you know' he said 'Big mahn ah,' protected him. Like God protected him. But (ah) it was one of the incidents that (ah) eventually the Japanese caught up with him. They did get him back and they took him in and then once they took him in, it was in a solidly confined place. No food, no water and they starved him away. It did not really matter because there was no toilet, you urinate and you do the hard stuff in that hole; you don't go out. And then when you are thirsty you just drink whatever you urinate out. And you know, it's a cave and there's like drips of water coming down mix with whatever and those are things they drank in the Japanese cave. So they stayed there and ah... in one of the incidents before he escaped was, you know, the Japanese camp ran out of food. They ran out of rice because the Americans were just next to them with their allied forces at Emirau and they use to come in and strike all these Japanese locations with their planes and (ah) their supplies could not come through. So eventually they ran out of food in the camp, in the prison camp and then the Japanese commander said look does any prisoners know where we could find some food? Ah this is one of the stories he told me. And (ah) you know, it very difficult you know, then my Dad put his hands up and said if you go out and harvest sago this morning, you know by afternoon we'll have food. You know the sago palm? You just go and thrash it and then you wash and it comes out in dust form and then in the afternoon you'll have</p>

	<p>food. So the Japanese said 'OK show us.' so they walked up and harvested sago and in the afternoon they had food. And that's one of the incidents he mentioned to me.</p>
<p>13:06</p>	<p>And then another incident, you know he was, you know, the Chinese. There were Chinese there in the prison camp with them and one of them lied, (that's) he told the Japanese, said 'look! Moat has a pistol... he's got a pistol.' So ah he didn't have a pistol, so the Japanese took the word of the Chinese and one of the fellow prisoners was put in the solitary confinement. It was during the solitary confinement that (ah) you know, some of those funny incidents use to come. His relatives were guards as well, they were working as Japanese guards. They used to come up when they were in solitary confinement and they used to bring kaukau and taro and the ladies used to bake it in the village and they used to give it to them. Ah, and they'll come in and work with the Japanese, you know, they'll leave their guns and swords in front and all his relatives use to come and say And What? Come here! Now they're shouting_ what? Come here! (You know) they shout and order him to come and then his relatives will take the kaukau and put it on the sword, 'mi tok yu kam lo here, yu kam.' And then he'll sharpen his sword and he'll pretend to shout and pull the kaukau away and then they'll share it with all the other people. One time they had (ah)... the Chinese they had pig, so these other Chinese fellow, (you know) he got all the pig's stomach and boiled it in pig's fat and then he stored it in the container. And you know, with the pig's fat over the saucepan acts like a preservative. So these guy use to open that pig fat, take a little bit of the pig's stomach and then he use to cook it once every so often, so that it keeps them alive. But that guy does not give any other prisoner any, this Chinese guy, he just going to cook it for himself.</p>
<p>15:39</p>	<p>One other incident during the War, eventually as the War was turning towards the allied forces, the Japanese knew that they were about to lose the War, so they wanted to, according to him (you know) they wanted to transport all of them to Namatanai. There's another cave there at Nabutoh at Nambutu, so they were in the process of taking all of them to Nabutoh, so they put them in trucks, all the prisoners, and of they went to Nambutu. (Ah) And the intention for them to take them to Nambutu was already pre-prepared a cave there. And they were going to bring all these prisoners in, and put them in the cave and blow the entrance to the cave and bury them alive, that was the intention. That's when the allied forces, the Japanese surrendered, and then they started dropping leaflets from the plane to say look, the War has ended, all you Japanese no more ah... you have to now disperse and come under the... what's the name? All you people have to surrender, put down your arms and they were safe second time again from being mass buried by the Japanese alive. And those (ah) one or two little incident that I recall him telling me about and ah (you know) one other... one of his (you know) mix race, one mix raced Malaysian, when he died and we were burying him, (you know) he came across and he said (you know) the Japanese cannot kill Noah, I don't know how he died, (you know) he supposed to be still alive with me because Japanese cannot kill him. He used to escape from the Japanese (you know). But anyway, that's a little bit</p>

	<p>of (ah) the story that I'm able to remember from his point of view, and a lot of people, from the village they remembered the story because he actually escaped from the Japanese and he was one of the ones that cause a lot of headaches for the other Chinese and running spigot lines day in and day out and no food and just water and you just keep on doing that.</p>
18:31	<p>Because ah... On one occasion another Chinese escaped, (now) he escaped and he just hid in the grass (you know), a little bush while there were piquet lines out around looking for him, and coming back and going, and changing shifts, and another piquet lines (going)... will go and come. And my Dad, he was in (ah) solitary confinement so (ah), you know, and then the Japanese forced them into the solitary confinement to no food, no water to be on the piquet line to walk up and down. So everybody got really fed up and they were talking in Chinese or pidgin or whatever, asking for this guy to (you know) please surrender, so that we can have a rest as well because we are suffering without food and (you know) little bit of water here, (there) we drink it from the creek or something, (you know) surrender yourself so that we can rest. So this guy eventually stood up you know, and he was not far from the prison camp, he was very close. And then they (ah) got him back in and the commander said OK, this guy is giving you guys so much problem trying to locate him, you know, this Chinese guy. So his penalty is, every one of you prisoners you go there and punch him one punches, and he shouted again 'don't, (don't) pretend to punch' and (ah) everyone will have to go and punch him as hard as you can. We'll be watching, if you don't punch him as hard as you can, you'll be the one. You'll be punched. So on that occasion my Dad said look, you know I'll tell you lie, if I go and punch his face. I'm so weak, you know, from lack of food and water I cannot punch hard... I cannot punch him there. I think you're better off not asking me, then he started asking the commander and all the Japanese, you know, I can't punch up so (you know), whatever you want to do to me, you might as well do it now because I cannot punch him because I cannot punch hard. But all the prisoners punch these guy, one by one they took their turn to go and punch him, and they kept on going until this guy fell down, and they continued to punch him and by the time all the prisoners punched him he was dead. So that's another story he was able to relate and (ah), you know, I asked him, you're sure you didn't punch him? Yes or No... And he said, 'I'm too weak, I'm always in the... you know, he was always in there for another Chinese telling the Japanese that he had a pistol. And it was... they were really hungry and they drank their own urine, you know, and they ate nothing. So those are the... you know, he wouldn't say much about his experiences in the prison camp or during the War. But like I said earlier when he was working for the Japanese logging company (you know), he wouldn't say no or even question the Japanese. Whatever the Japanese say was a command.</p>
22:23	<p>[Interviewer: Jonathan Ritchie]</p> <p>Do you know if after the War when the Australians came back, did any of them go and ask him about his experiences? Because after the War they</p>

	wanted to capture the worst of the Japanese for their, you know, war crimes. Did they ask him about that? And do you know?
22:47	I know but he hasn't told us anything concerning that, he only told us his little story (where), when he was in the prison camp and you know, when I was little, you know, all the early villages as well, did now confirm that he was in there. And (you know) I've waited when I came back from work, back to New Ireland (you know) I made it a point to make sure I visit this cave and just try to see what it was like (ah), and then I went and I could relate now how he may have escaped and when they should have chopped his head off and all this and (ah), for me I think it's quite an experience.
23:40	[Interviewer: Catherine Nolan] So your father said that they gave the name before the executions, did he say why? They had chosen certain prisoners to execute?
23:52	No he didn't say that, but for whatever reason maybe (ah), if you do something bad or something like that then they'll choose you. Because I think, maybe because of (ah) lies about him having a gun and something like that, and then he was put in the solitary confinement. So after that, you know, they decide now who goes first and one day his name was listed. I think he was ah, if I could remember properly he was with one or two more, their names were called for executions. And ah he didn't mention, because when he went away he didn't mention whether the other two were executed or not, maybe they used them for the (ah) piquet line and ah, their execution was deferred or, he didn't mention.
24:53	[Interviewer: Catherine Nolan] And you said there were (ah) several men and women, in the prison camps or you said nuns?
25:00	There were nuns too. Ah, in fact the nuns they ah... you know, the Catholic Church went and built the monument on top the cave there to (ah), celebrate the 100 years or something since... but, you know, the boys went up and destroyed that monument. They took the kapper (roofing iron) and all this, but the Catholic Church too will have some records. And there's (ah) another mate like, a friend of my Dad who's in his 80's and is still alive and is now at Miom, so he's there and he could tell you a bit more stories about the War because alive and there during the War well, and he's Mr David Tse, so (ah) he's at Miom just few kilometres down the road. And there's a lady just next door there, not this house there but the one across the street, Shayna is her name and she's about 100 years old. So I think she's probably bed ridden or chair ridden but she may be able to recall something, but definitely David Tse is the age as my Dad and is still alive. So it's good for you guys to go and get the story from him.
26:46	[Interviewer]

	<p>Apart from what your father told you, did any of your family members told you where they lived during the occupation? Had they moved from the village?</p>
27:01	<p>(Sighs: as he thinks) ah, I'm not sure about that.</p>
27:03	<p>[Interviewer] OK.</p>
27:04	<p>Because ah, he didn't mentioned it, whether they are...</p>
27:08	<p>[Interviewer] OK</p>
27:10	<p>[Interviewer: Jonathan Ritchie] Did he talk about the start when the Japanese came into the village? And how they picked him out because he was like a father, did he talked about that?</p>
27:26	<p>No, unfortunately I was a small guy. I was only about 10 or 11 and it was not important to me. So all the little stories that he mentioned, only the little ones that sounded interesting to me I got on to it. I went away and never came back to ah, get the full details.</p>
27:49	<p>[Interviewer: Jonathan Ritchie] The stories he told you are very powerful</p>
27:53	<p>[Interviewer: Catherine Nolan] Did he... ah sorry just one more bit. Did he mention what they made the prisoners do? To work or something.</p>
28:02	<p>Oh yes, they go and you know, make gardens every day, because the Japanese were conscious of the supply line being cut, so every day they'll go and work in the garden and plant all their things. And they'll (ah), where the commander used to sit, it's all carried there. The soil was carried by the prisoners and ah, they work in the garden. And anything they do, the Japanese would chase them and punish them for what they did, you know, very little things and are order them around and more or less like ah, mistreat them. So they were very conscious, if the Japanese say go and work at the garden they will go and work at the garden, they'll go there or anywhere. And ah, build this one or build that one, you just have to build. But I think those hills next to the tunnels there, I think those hills were built by ah... they were like a trenches or something and they were built by the prisoners of war. But (ah), you know, the Japanese had it like their training ground and every day they'll be there and next to is flat, that's where they plant all their crops. And these guys part of their job is to go and plant and make sure there is enough supply of food.</p>

30:09	[Interviewer: Jonathan Ritchie] Well thank you, I think that's been really terrific hearing these stories and experiences concerning the War. It's good to know at least what really happen during the War
30:15	OK.