

<b>Name:</b>	Chris Abel
<b>Date of interview:</b>	4 April 2017
<b>Location of interview:</b>	Alotau, Milne Bay Province
<b>Interviewer/s:</b>	Anne Dickson Waiko, Elizabeth Taulehebo and Keimelo Gima
<b>Duration of interview:</b>	22:41
<b>Main language of interview:</b>	English
<b>Image:</b>	

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW**

<b>TIME</b>	<b>TRANSCRIPT</b>
00:00	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>This an interview with Chris Abel dated on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2017. We are interviewing Chris about his uncle Cecil Abel who worked with ANGAU during the war.</p> <p>My first question, Chris is why didn't Cecil choose to go back to Australia when all the Europeans were being asked to go back to Australia at the time when the war is about to break out?</p>
	<p>I think because he was actively involved in running the MV <i>Osiri</i> and supplying the coastwatchers with rations. He was actually part of the war effort at the start, before the Japanese invaded, invaded Milne Bay. And circumstances had it that he was here when the war started. So he played this key role in supplying the front, looking to the front at night time and supplying rations and ammunitions, fresh troops and taking on board wounded troops. Because as you probably know he was - the <i>Osiri</i> was the only boat left after the other small boats that were here, ran into Japanese invading fleet and were all shot out of the water. It was quite fortuitous that he was still here with the <i>Osiri</i> because he played a key role in the actual fighting here.</p>

	<p>Just a couple of weeks the fighting was taking place between Ahioma and Turnbull so he stayed on and he did other things during the war also. I seem to remember him building the air strip in Safia [?] in the Northern Province so that the air force could be landing there, the Americans could be landing there during the war. I am not quite sure at what point but – because, because there'd gone into Amal and at the end of the hills behind Amal and across to the other side of Safia. So he was, he knew the way, the way across and so he, we could walk in Sekin air field. And you know, years later Popondetta, Hete Dickson was the lands officer there. He said that he when he went to Safia, one old guy had a little stub of elepe left which he said Cecil gave him during the war when they were making the air strip. That was another thing you did and then after, after the actual fighting left, and the Americans were here, he was running a saw mill at Kwato, supplying timber for bridges and you know, for the war effort. And that of course was when they were having a good time because the Americans had so much cargo, so many nice things, and there was a lot of fun.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer] Such as? I mean, most people talk about the food but you're obviously talking about the machines that men are interested in?</p>
	<p>Well the Americans - It's just, it just a funny time because the war effort was gone. I mean the actual fighting was gone and there were just like staging camps. Little bit of ships coming in and when we came back in 1946, the whole bay was ringed with wharfs that the Americans built, ground loading hospitals, hospitals here, and all the, all the, all the infrastructure that was in place. American still sort of came and go though. Boats were still coming in. But, now Cecil, that's right he, you know the nurses, American nurses and American soldiers, there were quite a lot of them got married. So Cecil was performing marriages at Kwato. They were going up for rest and recreation and so on</p>
	<p>[Interviewer] Yes, yes, on Kwato?</p>
	<p>Yes on Kwato itself and a lot of people made money making carvings and selling cap size and things like that. But they were actually involved in the effort, through the saw mill and milling timber and so on. But then Cecil ran afoul of the ANGAU because they wanted to control him. He was like a free agent and at one time, at one time they wanted him to give his itinerary when he was moving around. It was very pedantic and he was getting sick of it.</p>
	<p>So one day he went along to tell them what he was doing and, where are you going now?, I am going to so and so, ... and so and so and all that. And he said 'nue gai gili', the guy wrote this down and then he went off and shouted, "look at this! I've now got to get a permit to go to the toilet" (laughs). Oh well we were teasing each other and having fun and so on.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p>

	You mentioned rest and recreation, and American soldiers and I suppose Australian soldiers going to Kwato. Were there any social, social impact on men and women perhaps, young Kwato girls?
	Not that I've heard of but I doubt if there would be many young Kwato girls there at the time. Maybe, you know, maybe there was a bit of concern that might happen but like the old days, where, where there was male and female that can get married instead of just having an affair. You know a lot of soldiers were Negroes and I don't really know, if you know, we never really sort of talked about this things and we never thought to ask him. They weren't the sort of things that crossed our minds.
	[Interviewer] What was the relationship between the Australians and the American soldiers?
	I think after the fighting there weren't any Australian soldiers here at all, they were all Americans because the Americans were basically receiving all the liberty ships from America, unloading them and then moving things on to where the front was and they were coming back here for the hospitals. They were all Americans. I'll just show you another little interesting letter I found when I was going through these things and looking for them. I used to get a couple of these from people who'd been here, Albert Louis sent a letter asking about Cecil and what is happening now and stuff like that. But they were all Americans.
	[Interviewer] Why did the Australians leave in a hurry and the Americans were still here?
	I don't think they left in a hurry, but I think they simply, you know there weren't that many Australian soldiers and they were in demand in Europe also. So whether they went over there or whether they were re-deployed I don't really know. These were issues that, you know, we were little kids and we didn't really think about things like that.
	[Interviewer] That was after the battle of Milne Bay?
	Yes, that's why I wasn't born here, my father was born here, but because of the war Mum had to leave, so we came back in 1946. And that was a ...
	[Interviewer] How old were you when you returned?
	5 years old. I had my 6th birthday at Kwato.
	[Interviewer] At the time that the war broke out, there were people still living on Kwato, did they have to organize them to go away, so was Cecil organizing everybody to...?
	I think so, he would have been.

	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>Were they shipped down to Bugutu by Kwato boats, by Australians or ANGAU boats supplied by Australian administration?</p>
	<p>I think probably both, we, again Kwato wouldn't just have first look after Kwato people, there would have been other people.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>Other people as well.</p>
	<p>Other people need to get away. Although you see the, I mean when the Japanese landed everyone had a big surprise. Ahima people, some were killed and captured and so on, and so they were still living there, but after that everyone of course moved away quickly. But the few Australians who have come back are mainly people who are looking after these guns, guns at Kanakope and the guns at Dawadawa. And one chap came back and found, found the site where his father had been in charge of the gun. But those guns, they never really fired on the Japanese invading fleet. They were there sort of in case that happened but I don't know why they didn't really get involved. But they, they were Australians.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>There were certainly locals working under Cecil on the boats? There were locals working on the boat?</p>
	<p>Yes, it's in that thing that I'm photocopying to give to you. It's a speech I made at ANZAC day parade.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>How did the locals think about working under Cecil?</p>
	<p>I think you've got to project sort of yourself back inTO those days. Those days when you know, the Kwato people were a bit like an elite I think, they were ahead of everyone else in terms of education so on but essentially it was all like the same people and the Kwato people were the envy I guess of some. But then again the village life was pretty good in those days also, not like today, you know we had a lot of fun when we were living in Bisimako, all the activities at Wagawaga, Saturday night games and all these things that we used to do. These days people don't know how to enjoy themselves without their mobile phones, or Facebooks or what they, they've forgotten how to entertain themselves.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>Or tell stories.</p>
	<p>Or tell stories and you know have group, group activities.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p>

	<p>We heard stories like Americans teaching the locals, sports like boxing. Were there any sort of interactions between the Australians?</p>
	<p>There must have been I'd say. Surely because they weren't that busy, they were playing sports and things. What time? I don't know if there are any movies about life during that time here. But when we had, last year we had a, a big gathering of anthropologists for the hundredth celebration of Malinowski's visit here and they had quite a lot of interesting movies of the Trobes. There was a lot of Negro soldiers based up there; I think, I think that was a fairly fun time for everyone.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer] Very briefly what are some factors that your uncle talks about in contributing towards the victory?</p>
	<p>One was the very, very heavy mist at the time when they were invading and they mistook the headland. See they went to land up, up near Gabugabuna and just go straight up and take the air strip instead they landed up at, at Ahioma. Then they had to fight their way down and then the Australian Air Force was bombing them all time, and, you know, bombing their dumps of fuel and so on. That was one, the very, very heavy mist, unusually and sudden. Another one was this Captain Garin, who on his arrival, his presence greatly increased the morale and everyone sort of get, get on their ball again because they were very, very frightened. Cecil said that the sense of fear was very, very strong and they needed some strong person to come and break them up and you know, so they'd get ready to go again. Little things, like that, which on their own perhaps wouldn't have had much difference but all together it was just enough to lead to the first land defeat of the Japanese in the Pacific War.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer] That's true.</p>
	<p>After Kokoda, after back, back, back till they dropped the bomb.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer] What were the other factors; other factors (sorry) you talked about some factors, were ..?</p>
	<p>Well seven factors took place here? Just here. Not, it's all in that memo that I've given you there and some other ones. Funny things took place, I think that the Japanese must have really done a lot of research in terms of geography, seaways and all that sort of stuff, reefs and that. You know that they were hiding in Suau bay, sort of camouflage that they couldn't be seen. And the, they really didn't find out they where hiding until, till they were running away. Best you read, read his story because he's, he had that, he was there, I wasn't there, I'm just like a second hand.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p>

	<p>OK, what is your thought, you talk about the divine intervention but there is also the spiritual intervention in Milne Bay, what do you think of that?</p>
	<p>No, I think the terminology might be different but the meaning is the same, divine intervention and the spiritual side. There's an interesting, interesting theory that you can tag onto that, where, if you look at the history of the Anglo-Saxon race, the English, the Americans and people who have come from that stock. There has been a strong Christian principle and livelihood. You know, the American money was 'In God We trust' on the money and that is probably influential, some would say no but ... I think it's influential in the fact that we're still free from domination by a foreign power. Now people are getting worried today about the lack of sense of religion in the lives of people. We talk about being a Christian country, are we really in terms of behaviour, in terms of how our leaders behave? Now that the danger there is that if we lose that spiritual protection then what's the future going to be for our children? That's something which needs to be spoken about to make people just wake up a bit. The fact that the sacrifice by our 'ishivokona' are the ones, the reason why we are free today. Now what we are doing today is we're sort of spoiling it by our own behaviour and our own, you know we might go to church but are we really living the life? But you've introduced a very deep subject of debate.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>Also speaking along the lines of were informants are freely coming out in saying that my father or my uncle was saved by his mother or looked after by his mother. Did Cecil, or the Europeans think about that?</p>
	<p>The family was very, very close. His, my grandfather grew up in a family in England where both his grandmothers were in the same family, so they got a lot of influence from extended family kind of situation. And at Kwato also there was a very, very close family. My grandfather used to write a letter every day when he was away and, they were very, very close. So I think that kind of behaviour was something which, well, all Kwato families were like that weren't they? That's when we were young. We were all very close, very close knit community.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>They say the fighting here was very ferocious, just over two weeks. Did Cecil ever talk about the fighting? The actual fighting hand-to-hand fighting.</p>
	<p>I think they were, he was sort of worried about protecting the boat because they were very, they very vulnerable. Any mortar fire could have sunk them. So they were just been extra careful about doing what they were doing while the fighting was going on.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>On land?</p>
	<p>Yes, on land and you know trying to find where the front, the front might be. Never really knew. One minute they could find you're supplying the Japanese</p>

	<p>army instead of the Australian army. But the Australians, Australians were the ones that did all the fighting on the ground but the last, well the decisive battle was when they were trying to cross Turnbull air strip. And none of us can really understand why they didn't try to go around. They just kept charging across. But the American engineers, there were some Americans, the American engineers had taken the machine guns off the planes and put them on frames. So they were just simply machine gunning the Japanese as they were charging across. So the question, why didn't they go around or, they just run across? But I guess the fighting would have been ferocious. I mean there were also, you know bayoneting some local people and they were pretty brutal. You know their friends never got Japanese volunteers here now, people had German volunteers...</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>So was he involved in assisting the few Kwato men who were engaged in burying the dead, the dead soldiers?</p>
	<p>The Australians would have been evacuated but the Japanese dug a big hole, and there were some buried at KB and a number of years later there was a bit of an erosion and they found some bones but mostly down at Kainako, and the memorials down there. One other little, little story just worth relating probably is the, I don't know if you've seen the picture of the boat that was on its side down at Giligili. It was refloated and fixed up and it served on the New South Wales coast as a coastal boat before railway and road transports took over. But we had a father and son visitors, sometime ago and the father had been the captain when the boat was turned over here and the son had run the boat when it was on the coastal trade. That's a little story of interest. Alright that's the war.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>Did Cecil ever mention about a man named Sikana?</p>
	<p>Sikana, he might have but I don't remember.</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>You have not heard any stories about him from the locals? It must be a locals' legend then. Maia Garo, any stories?</p>
	<p>Maia Garo, off-course she was, all those people were here while we were growing up, I mean they were young, youngish during the war as so when, in the 40s and 50s. They well a ...</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>Did Cecil tell you stories about Maia Garo?</p>
	<p>Cecil? Only a story we all know but it was like, you know, when there's someone there then you expect that someone to tell their own stories and everyone was very modest. They just went about their business of being nurses and whatever they were doing. Maia Garo's story, "soai bubu nedi".</p>

	<p>Maia Garo's story of rescuing that air, airman and covering him with food so the Japanese didn't see him. She got good recognition for that.</p> <p>Now you want me to get/find a copy? How long are you here for?</p>
	<p>[Interviewer]</p> <p>We are here until Thursday.</p>