

Name:	Michael Esoma
Date of interview:	Thursday, 3 July 2014
Location of interview:	Kovelo village, Northern Province
Chief interviewer:	Javith Abavu
Time interview concluded:	10:18 AM
Duration of interview:	40:16:67
Main language of interview:	Biage
Image:	

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

00:55	[INTERVIEWER] When the war was about to reach our place (Kovelo), our fathers advised us to be very careful in conducting labour work for the Australian soldiers. Our fathers only advised us to be good carriers and never kill any of the soldiers either a Japanese or Australian.
01:35	We heard what was being told and started moving our families to the mountains for hiding. Not even for a week, the war got landed in Buna and we could hear echoes of explosive bombs.
02:30	We were very frightened as people from Kaiva and nearby villages started walking in through our village with bags of food supplies for soldiers along the track. The sound of warplanes even made us not to join the labour force as they were landing bombs on the enemy lines and even to our villages.
03:20	There was no one left in our village by this time as the war had reached Kokoda Station. This road was all being used by labourers and soldiers. People from all Biage villages were all gone hiding up in the thick bushes and mountains. People from Velai and Hagutava were not there also. The mountains of Biage were all occupied by local people and the lowland Eora Valley was being occupied by Australian and Japanese soldiers with their labours. There were massive groups of people using this track at that time of war. The war moved easily out from Kokoda Station with the strong forces from Japanese armies and pushed up to Deniki ridge. The Japanese soldiers were countless and they all looked like ants, working day and night.
03:47	The Japanese soldiers were all over this track. Some were on the other side of Eora Creek, chasing, killing and destroying every properties. They followed Hagutava road and some of the soldiers crossed Eora Creek and climbed up to Deniki ridge. This is where the war moved further inland and reached Isurava then to Battlefield. There was heavy battle of war at Isurava village (known today as Battlefield). There were so many soldiers been killed at that site. I cannot know exactly today how many lives were lost at that time.
04:30	We were very worried and upset towards the Japanese. The Japanese were also being killed and they (Japanese) were always rude to us. They even also killed so many of the Papuan labourers and eventually hid or threw them on the roads. They stole from our gardens, raped our young girls and mothers, destroyed our homes and didn't care who you were. The Japanese soldiers started doing these evil practices at Buna and when the war moved up to Eora Creek, they took few of our belongings with them. At that time of the war, horses were used by the soldiers for transporting food supplies, ammunitions and the wounded to the small aid post for getting treatment. Many of the local carriers couldn't believe their eyes with the use of horses on the war zone areas. We all don't know what the war is all about. We don't know who exactly caused the war to reach us. We taught that it was just a game match between the two countries (Australia and Japan).
05:46	But this war is an extraordinary game. It is very heavy bloody game. Men, women, children and soldiers on both sides were killed to death. There was no mercy for

	love, peace and joy for everyone in here. We taught that this war should be hosted in their own countries. They should either fight in Australia or Japan.
06:15	The war couldn't stop at Eora Creek and further pushed up onto the Owen Stanley ranges. So many soldiers got killed in this section of Eora and Templeton's Crossing. The food supplies have started to drop now. The environment was uneasy for both the Papuan and Australian soldiers. Many got sick and have died on the way. The defensive lines were also being affected by this problem. There were two of my brave sisters who walked the track in secretly providing garden food for our local Kovelos young men when the news of starvation reached their small hiding hamlets up on the mountains of Deniki and Mudulu. These two elderly ladies used to hide secretly in providing local garden food for their brothers at Eora Creek and one time they were got red handed by the Japanese soldiers. The Japs marched them to their camping ground and repeatedly have turns in raping them for three days. After the three consecutive days, they chopped the two ladies heads and threw them into the creek. The heads and bodies were found during the search being conducted for the missing girls.
07:30	The war was very terrible for us and the whole Papua New Guineans. So many Papua New Guineans took part during this war. The war continued onto Kagi, Efogi and then to Menari and Ioribaiwa. Some of these villages where battle took place are as: Ioribaiwa, Nauro, Myola, Isurava and Deniki. As a teenager on that time, I could only assist in transporting food supplies from Kokoda to Kovelos route only. I heard that my two sisters were raped and killed by the Japs and got withdrawn and escaped into the bush. Never made any attempt to assist during the rest of the war events until it ended up back in Oro Bay.
08:20	That is how the war ended and how we have suffered during the war. I want to get back to you and tell you the root of how the war came in here. These stories are basing on what I have seen and have experienced...
08:45	[Comments by Interviewer] Mr Esoma couldn't say something longer for this time period. Was suspected of having short memory therefore leads to coughing and yawning. Was also being told to move his location.
09:30	The stories regarding this Kokoda Campaign and the war came in advance to us. We were told to prepare and leave away from our homes and the road itself. This war notice was announced to us while having a meeting in here by an Australian Kiap Officer. Many of us took the message as fun game while others took it as a legend story to them. One of my clansman announced later in one evening that Australia and Japanese will be having a big football game in here so he needed supporters for Australian side. Everyone were so excited and started forwarding their name list to my clansman without noticing that he is conducting recruitment for the war to begin. The list was being handed to the Australian kiap officer at Kokoda Station and selected people were told to make visit to Kokoda Station for training.
10:50	We were told again by our training boys that the war is coming soon to our place and it's to do with guns, bombs, swords and bullets and will end up into death. Our community members started preparing underground homes on the mountainsides and others shifted all necessities for use. My clansmen moved further away to Maiadi River on the headstream and settled in there. The war preparation was done

	by all local villagers living along the track. However, few communities couldn't manage to do what the instruction has been told due to disobedient.
11:45	Less than six to seven months later, the war started reaching Buna and Gona. The final warning of departing to various hiding spots was being announced and everyone moved out at nighttime in fear. Quite not long after the announcement, the war grew bigger and ended up in Kokoda Station. This is where the Japs had outnumbered the Australian soldiers and the war was being pushed forward through the mountain rangers of Koiari people. And it got held up at Ioribaiwa ridge and pushed back again.
12:20	Our people fully supported the Australian soldiers in bad and good times to bring peace, love and joy for this generation and the future unknown years. Only few handful of the Japanese soldiers and their labourers were being killed by our people while trying to steal from our gardens at Savaeva. Few were captured and later killed and thrown into Eora Creek while floating downstream.
13:20	The Australian soldiers have small aid posts all along the track. They had major hospital centre built at Eora Creek Crossing. Most of the wounded and sick patients are being carried to this aid centre where medication is provided to them. The Japs on the other hand doesn't have such medication or supply centres. The Japs were strongly cut off from receiving their main food and ammunition supplies and were forced to escape through the bush. Many of them were being killed at Alola and Abuari. The whole unit of Japanese soldiers were trained professionally in fighting against their enemies. They are more smarter than the Australian soldiers. They have logical and crucial plans during the war. A good example of this can be said like escaping and floating downstream on Eora Creek and making advance movement to rugged falls and undulating terrains.
15:02	The battles between Kokoda Station and Alola have drawn so much attention to our work as labours or carriers. So many casualties were not being identified properly till today due to heavy fighting. Such cases were found at Isurava Front Creek Crossing where dozen of Australian soldiers were being killed from hand grenade bombs prepared by the Japanese soldiers. Their remains were recently discovered by the local people among dead leaves and logs in a water cave tunnel. At that time of retreating back, the Japs got no rations and they usually steal from our gardens at night times. We found out what was going on and waited quietly at our garden. When our guard alarmed us of the Japs' invasion into our garden, our men suddenly ran out from their hiding places and held them.
16:18	They took about four Japanese soldiers to their dug out caves and killed them. Moreover, the four Japanese soldiers' guns were also removed from them. Today our local people use these guns to hunt for wild pigs and cassowaries. When the war came in here, the Japanese dug out tunnels and holes for protecting themselves when explosion erupts. They have started digging from here and ended up in Naoro and Ioribaiwa. Our people were very frightened in the way they operate during the war. These actions have made our people to flee to higher mountains and to the head of river Maiadi. The war came in here and not for some days later, it had moved up to Deniki. The Australian frontline was very weak so it moved further to Battlefield. The war lasted for three to four days at Battlefield. And this war site was filled with so many wounded and dead bodies.
17:40	We taught that due to so many deaths being occurred at Battlefield, the war would end up in there but however it pushed further to Eora Creek Crossing. There were

	<p>also so many killing being made on that area. Not only the soldiers have felt great pains in their hearts, we the locals also felt for them...especially our young Australian soldiers. They have lost so many of the soldiers and we too have also lost our men and women during that period of war. The war will never stop in this area. It has caused so many bigger problems in our area and this is what we used to say to each other during the war. And it continued on to Kagi and to Efogi. Am not very clear sure how many soldiers were being killed at Kagi. Up at Brigade Hill, there were also some soldiers being killed and buried by the Papuan natives.</p>
18:40	<p>The fighting continued to Menari and then to loribaiwa. This is where the war turned and the Australian soldiers got advanced in attacking the Japs. The Australians used very high powered machine guns to bomb the Japanese soldiers at loribaiwa ridge. The Japanese best sniper was being killed at that point with some of the strong Japanese men. Their colleagues couldn't do much and started moving back to Naoro village. At that time of fighting at loribaiwa, the Japanese could notify that they are almost advancing into Port Moresby town and were very anxious about reaching Sogeri plateau.</p>
19:40	<p>The news of reaching Port Moresby spread widely in all major locations of the Australian campsites and even it has also reached Australia. Quick unit response team was placed at Sogeri entrance. The unit contacted the soldiers and advised them of their plan of hitting Japanese front line at 12pm midday with the machine gun. The soldiers at Imita ridge gave the direction to the response team at Sogeri base and their plans of defending Port Moresby. The Papuan carriers were very busy at that time. They have supported enormously with food supplies and among others.</p>
20:53	<p>When the bomb landed on the targeted location from where the Japanese shoot out area, there was massive explosion heard away for some kilometres. The surrounding trees were all cut down and the Japanese soldiers were killed. The soldiers from Australia moved in very quickly and attacked some of the enemies who were trying to escape out. They could see that the Japanese were powerless and started moving and killing them all the way to Menari and to Efogi. At between 19 hundred and Kokoda Cap, a soldier by the name of Mr Wireless [?] meet with Mr Kienzle soldier and both travelled the short route with the support from the local natives to Templeton's Crossing. The two brave soldiers hide themselves from the road side and attacked the second patchment of Japanese soldiers who were on run for freedom. They both killed the enemies and threw them down onto a shortfall at Templeton's Crossing two.</p>
22:51	<p>The group met with the rest of the soldiers and carriers and kept pushing back the Japs until they reached Kokoda Station. While moving the Japs on the way to Kokoda, the Australian soldiers captured some of the enemy soldiers with them. They took the enemy soldiers with them to Popondetta when the war was pushed back. I couldn't know any available story regarding these captives. They might be killed or put into prison at Popondetta. The Papuan carriers at that time of retrenching never looked back. Slightly few heads like us remain back and watched what the finishing line would bring. I tell you. Private Kingsbury at that time had maybe five to ten rounds of shooting and killing the Japanese at Battlefield. He was one of the brave Australian soldiers. He has done lot during the war and helped us the natives with food supplies, cigarettes and others.</p>

24:11	Private Kingsbury in his possession has three big guns during that time. He used these guns to fight the war at Battlefield. He was supposed to live on and fight with the rest of the soldiers but the Japanese sniper targeted him and killed him. We taught to ourselves that he should be the man of war hero when the war finishes. By the time when Kingsbury was being killed, the sad news reached us. The local Papuan carriers quickly carried him on the stretcher and took him to the Boumu theatre or operating centre (today known as surgery rock). The doctors couldn't do much work on him and he passed away. However, the war was pushed back and reached our place in here. It also reached back Kokoda and went down to Buna. I am quite really sure that the Australian soldiers have might took away some of our local men on that time by ship or by plane. Am not very sure of the exact numbers that went on board at that stage and time. We are still waiting for our men to return home and see their families.
25:30	The war is totally not a good event for us. We have experienced so many deaths and even it brought hunger to us. Today you are free and have so much to do with families and friends. Life is good and enjoying today. War doesn't bring any family enjoyment. It only brings sadness with massive destruction to innocent people. Our stories about war histories and other related issues are not very good to hear. Our local communities in here and Deniki have faced the same problems. The Australians were very good to us while the Japanese treated us badly and never looked after us.
26:47	And the labourers that the Japanese have brought with them also have great conflicts among us. These labourers supported the Japs. They even killed our local men, children and women. We also have exchanged fights with them and killed couple of these labourers believed to be from Buka and Rabaul. We are very sad today for what has happened to us during the war. So many bad things have happened to us and we don't know what to do. On the other side of the story, our people in here care and protected some Japs from not to be killed or persecuted. Like the story being told of people from Savaea. A Japanese air fighter crashed landed onto the grassy land and escaped in fear of being killed. However, he couldn't manage to run away due to injuries to his body. One of the elders rescued him and gave him water and food. He protected him until the soldier got recovered and gave him direction to escape out.
27:50	However, many Japanese soldiers who couldn't be able to catch up with their mates were all being killed. At Eora Bridge Crossing some were killed and also at Kebara village few Japanese were found at the garden house and were brought to Kokoda Plantation where they persecuted them. About a handful of Japanese soldiers found on the road were taken to Higaturu Plantation where they were also being persecuted. It's a very sad story and experience for soldiers, carriers and to people of all walks of life who contributed their time during that war years.
29:11	When the news of ending war reached us, we were released. Everyone started to bring their families back from their hiding zones. And because the war was over, we were told to never make any more enemies now with the Japs. Our elders advised us not to kill any white men upon meeting them. We searched everywhere in here at the caves and hillsides. Only few were found and handed over to commanding officers at Kokoda. The commanding officers interviewed them and take them to Higaturu in Popondetta. We're not sure what they will do to them.
31:04	Not only the Japanese soldiers were found, among them were local natives from Japanese team who had helped them during the war were also brought for

	<p>interviews. On our side at Abuari village, a person by the name of Kesia found a wounded Australian soldier in a cave next to the waterfall. He told the poor soldier that the war was over and soldiers are now returning back home now. He sheltered the soldier and gave him assurance to take him to Moresby. On a foggy rainy morning, Kesia led the soldier all the way to Kagi village. Over the next morning, he took the soldier to Menari where they met fellow Australian soldiers and handed him to them. Kesia later described the soldier's appearance and said that he has tattoo all over his bodies.</p>
32:20	<p>The commanding officers heard what Kesia has done and took him to Kokoda Station for questioning. The officers couldn't believe Kesia's story and locked him in cell for harbouring Japanese during the war. Kesia had court charges against him and was flown to Port Moresby for further investigation. It was in Moresby were all soldiers were brought on line for identifying purposes where Kesia found the tattooed soldier and made his clearance against the court battle. He was later sent back to Abuari village. Kesia's story is very famous in this Kokoda track region. He is one of the carriers and was a hero to so many Biage people.</p>
34:25	<p>So that is Kesia's story and what he has done. Among Kesia were also some local heroes who have helped secretly but didn't make any mention in public areas. They kept their stories secretly and now this program will open doors for them to deliver what they have done during the war. People on the track at Isurava, Alola, Kagi and the rest have the same bad feelings about the war. Talking to you and sharing war histories is something different and being part of the war and experiencing the life of it is totally badly different. Something not very good for today's generation.</p>
35:45	<p>Our local Papuan carriers were tasked into so many field sections. They helped in with food supplies, ammunitions and provided local logistics in entering into any new areas. They had sleepless nights and often have less to eat before going out into battle areas. At night times they provided securities and most often do commanding work given out by the soldiers. Work such as fetching water, cigarette distribution and providing daily meals were usual duties for us. The war got ended and everyone started to depart to their various homes. Not for longer period, new faces of white men came in and told us to do cleaning along the track. The campaign for cleaning the entire whole track started with men from Koiari and Kaiva side. They have collected bombshells, hand grenades, helmets, knives and many other live ammunitions. The white men gave instructions in digging dumps for the ammunitions to be buried separating it from the dead bodies which were not being done earlier.</p>
37:05	<p>There were big dump sites taken at Eora Creek Crossing. The leftover remaining food supplies, ammunitions and first aid drugs were buried at different locations along this track. The dangerous weapons and ammunitions collected were all shifted to Deniki and then to Kokoda. These collected weapons and ammunitions were later transported to Buna and Gona for burial. The cleanathon campaign only took place where the war has gone through starting from Sogeri and Ioribaiwa side and finished off at Buna and Gona. That is all what I can say and recall from my memory.</p>
38:44	<p>[INTERVIEWER]</p> <p>Your stories are very great to hear old man. And our team from oral history project are happy to meet with you and collect your stories today. Once again from me (Javith). How do you feel as a teenager when the war came into here?</p>

I feel bad and sad. Not good for my grandchildren today. The war is always terrible.

[INTERVIEWER]

And are you happy for our team to do this recording for you in here?

Yes, very appreciate your work and want you to publish these stories so that the whole nation of PNG will know.

[INTERVIEWER]

Thank you Mr Esoma and may GOD bless your stay in here at Kovelov village.