

Name:	Maclaren Hiari
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Location of interview:	Kokoda Primary School, Kokoda, Northern Province
Chief interviewer:	Didymus Gerald & Bao Waiko
Time interview concluded:	11:34 AM
Duration of interview:	18:02:73 & 07:46:01
Main language of interview:	English
Image:	

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

Time	Transcript
00:00	[INTERVIEWER]: This is the recordings made at Kokoda on the 23 rd of May, 2014. Interview number one, with the Executive Director of the Buna-Kokoda Foundation, Mr Maclaren Hiari. Mr Hiari, you have been involved in the Kokoda-Buna campaign. Can you briefly tell us, when did it actually start?
00:37	Basically, I'll start with the story of my father, Jude Siroro Kure Hiari, from Sirata village. He was one of the eighteen from that village who were recruited by ANGAU officer named Claude Champion, and assembled in

	<p>Kokoda in June 1942. And they were told to – they were allocated various tasks to perform, while waiting for the first group of Australian soldiers to walk from Port Moresby across the Kokoda Trail to Kokoda, and then to advance to the beaches in preparation for possible Japanese landings.</p>
01:35	<p>But the Australians' arrival in Kokoda was late, and the Japanese advanced to Arawa, and then were marching up to the Kumusi River when the first Australians met them on the other side – the west side of the Kumusi River. And there were a few clashes between the Australians and the Japanese, and that resulted in the dismantling of the Kumusi bridge, but the Japanese were a strong force. They pushed the Australians back to Gorari, and to Oivi, and to Kokoda, and eventually to Deniki. So according to history, the battle, the severe battle took place at Isurava, and onwards.</p>
02:31	<p>So my father and the other carriers were forced to follow the Australian soldiers along the Kokoda Trail to Isurava, Alola, Templeton's Crossing, and to Myola. But between that period, they have never experienced such a modern warfare. So at Isurava, they saw many Japanese being slaughtered by the Australians, and many Australians being killed by Japanese, and one account my old man said was that place became a fierce fighting battlefield, and the people killed there is like you were assembling the killed pigs in a traditional Orokaivan ceremony.</p>
03:25	<p>So, you know, it's the war that they have never experienced, because traditional wars were fought with spears and clubs, stone axes, or bows and arrows. But this war was vicious and terrible and frightening, it razed the environment and people, chased people into hiding. But this environment on the Kokoda Trail is unforgettable, because the conditions, terrain, you know, it's muddy, and you are carrying cargo down from Alola to Kokoda, and then from Isurava you are evacuating the wounded, and evacuating the wounded was an experience they hadn't had before.</p>
04:23	<p>So, you know, the agony and the pain they had while initially evacuating the wounded was a solemn... because they regarded the young Australians as their sons being killed, and those who were being carried or being cared with loving and tender care, and taken over to the top of the hill where the first carriers were coming with supplies, in exchange for the wounded to be carried to Sogeri, while my father's gang would carry the supplies back to the battlefield. So that was one of the experiences he had on the Kokoda Trail campaign.</p>
05:25	<p>But when they were pushed back, when the Japanese were pushed back from Ioribaiwa to go back to the coastal areas to defend the positions, he was not in that group that initially went down, but he was in a company, a group of eighteen soldiers headed by Captain – I can't recall his name – but that got lost after the Isurava battle, and they spent sixty – six weeks in the bush, without food, and they didn't know where to go, so they had to feed on bush berries, fruits, for that period.</p>

06:18	And then on one occasion the native carriers, which included my father, managed to kill a cassowary, and they had to feed on that cassowary for the next three weeks to survive, and you know, ended up behind Kavana base [?], and then eventually ended up in Sengi, where they left eight wounded, and the rest of the – I think thirty-two of them, made their way via Ambene, Papaka, Sirota, Embe River, to Jowe, and across to Kapakapa in Port Moresby. And those ones who were left behind were eventually butchered by the Japanese, when they found out that they were being kept in the bush. But in Jowe, while leaving the Australians to go that way, they also escorted the one hundred American soldiers who came across from Kapakapa, and brought them towards Kumusi, where they connected with the Australians who were flowing down this way -
07:30	And then headed down to the coast, in two groups, via Higaturu and Popondetta, the other group going to Sapota and Gona, and the other group to Doboduru and through Siremi down to Buna. So he was one of those, one of many, that carried when they were going up, mainly supplies, ammunition, all sorts of rations packs. So he ended up down at Doboduru for the next three months, and eventually participated in helping the local people down there to carry cargo from Hariko, Cape Sudest, and even from Morobe, to Doboduru, because that's the base -
08:30	And then the next supply centre was at Siremi where they would take down the food and come back with the wounded again. So it was a – you know, when you're talking about people participating in the war, if you look at it two ways. One is evacuating the wounded to safe places, and the other is carrying the cargo. Those who participated in the Kokoda Trail were – didn't enjoy what they regarded as rugged terrain, and mountain, and severe conditions. Just with reference on the Kokoda Trail, on the record, I have what I usually support into my father's account,
09:27	I have identified that there were 3,677 Papuans been recruited, as carriers, carriers from Alola to Kumusi, and they were used around this track, and they carried almost 1,600 pounds, or more than four hundred kilograms, of cargo, and they became the human transport to bring those supplies across from Alola to here, I'll describe it as the human transport train.
10:14	So, you know, and I think this is the biggest and largest number, amount of carriers that worked on the Kokoda Trail, and those who carried the largest supplies, probably, may be entered in the Guinness Book of Records. So, possibly in Papua New Guinea, and in the world. So you know, those are a few highlights of what I can recall. But in summary, I think the war has taught our people to go back to the villages and say, 'Oh, something will happen, let's prepare ourselves. Let's educate our younger generation'. So during the interview with my father in May 1972, my father told me, he said, 'Don't talk about anything, but I want you to write my history'.
11:08	So he gave me that challenge, and I began my journey. And that journey has taken from 1972 to 2014 now, and I am amazed to find our old people, either

	as carriers, policemen, PIB soldiers, and have recorded over 800 recollections, and I have on record more than one thousand names, yet to write their history – that’s in Northern Province. And also I have 542 names from the Gulf Province, of which five I have written their accounts. So I find this oral history of our people who fought in the battle as challenging and I describe it as a golden nugget lining Papua New Guinea.
12:03	And I am not disturbed by anybody who talks about World War II but I keep myself quiet and I do what I – it has become my personal initiative or personal project – personal pride, commitment, determination. I have gone on this journey and I feel proud to write the stories of our fathers, and our grandfathers whom I describe them as somebody who did something to help the allied forces. And I would like to see other Papua New Guineans take the initiative, not going and asking people to help you to do it, but do what you can do for Papua New Guinea.
13:02	And I think my project is basically on that line, and I encourage other Papua New Guineans to take the pen and paper, and sit down and write their fathers’ history. If we cannot do it now, our accounts of our fathers will be lost. In conclusion I want to also highlight some of the significant things that happened on the Kokoda Trail. On record the Japanese brought three thousand New Guinea carriers, and about over five hundred lost their lives on the Kokoda Trail. And that’s an extraordinary story.
13:54	And out of that three thousand, five hundred have deserted the carrier, the Japanese caravan and were making their way towards the – go to Salamaua, when one of them was captured by Sergeant Katue from Kikori, and taken to see his PIB officer by the name of Lieutenant Alan Hooper, and Lieutenant Hooper gave him a uniform, rifle, and told him to go and kill as much as you can of the enemy. And at the conclusion of the war, this fellow, his name is now – he eventually became a Sergeant, Vulai Mati, has been recorded to have killed about 103 Japanese soldiers, single-handed, alone.
14:45	And he won, he became the first Papua New Guinean to win the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Also while the Japanese were retreating, New Guinea carriers were also retreating, and they were told, about three hundred were told, ‘how do you get to the other side of Kumusi? It’s your business. We are going to go across, and you find your own way, and meet us on the other side’. Instead of – they were looking at ways to escape, so Japanese gave them an opportunity, so they swam towards an island on the Kumusi River, and landed there. They were half, almost dead, exhausted, without food.
15:31	So they ended up there, and amongst them, and they were eventually rescued by ANGAU officers and PIB soldiers, and brought to Kumusi medical centre, where they were being fed. And amongst the people who became a hero after World War II, was one – two men from New Ireland Province. One became a Member of Parliament, as Member for Kavieng, Wala Gukup, whom I interviewed him, and he confirmed his involvement on the Kokoda

	Trail; and second is a person called Tiden Tasinap Toyen, who eventually became the second Papua New Guinean Police Commissioner. So I also met him when he became the Commissioner. I said, 'Daddy, did you serve on the Kokoda Trail?'; he said 'Son, that place is a hell place'.
16:24	So he confirmed he was a volunteer; so there are some exciting stories around, so I find this battlefield a research frontier, and I'm still researching, and I find it very exciting. This is where I do it on my own, without funding assistance, and I love it. So if Papua New Guineans can take pen and paper as I said, we'll get the job done. Thank you very much.
16:56	[INTERVIEWER]: Before you go, I've noticed a twenty-foot container at the back of your backyard. What does it contain?
17:04	Well, there is a red twenty-foot container at the back of my house in Popondetta. It is the national oral history archives. When you talk about oral history of Papua New Guinea, the base is there. There are over three thousand accounts stored in there. I have three tin trunks, three suitcases, six cartons, twenty-five folders, and two filing cabinets, and that's the accounts not of people of Northern Province, but accounts of people representing ten provinces of Papua New Guinea. So, you know – but I don't go out and tell them I'm doing this. I do it quietly, proudly and willingly. It's just a baby of my own. Thank you.

Interview continues –

00:00	[INTERVIEWER - BW]: Can you explain some of the emotions, and the trauma, and acts of bravery and friendship experienced by both Papua New Guineans and Australians?
00:16	Well, on the Kokoda Trail, I think one of my uncles was saying they walked with carriers, slipped and fell, pain, but they never complained. One thing good I hear from the accounts is that they never complained. Although they complained in heart, it was not openly said. They walked up the mountains heavily load, with wounded on stretchers or litters, but they never said any bad thing about it.
01:03	The most important aspect of their work was – especially when you are evacuating the wounded – they made sure that he got there, and got saved, and out of how many Australians that got wounded, they eventually evacuated two thousand, I think one hundred wounded Australians across from Templeton to Alola. And that's an enormous number of record, and to do that, you need a strategy, you need the train to move, and as I've said

	<p>earlier, a human train performs its job remarkably. And I call these men, not only heroes but you know, I don't know what to describe; but they did their job despite difficult conditions, despite the pain and agony they went through, despite little sleep, little to eat, without warm clothing on this mountain, but they did it willingly and lovingly.</p>
02:10	<p>And that's the whole class of their work behind the scene, which is unrecorded, unheard anywhere. Because this mountain here, it's a devil's mountain. It's haunted by the spirits of the ancestors of the Mountain Koiari people. And when our people went there, they were frightened. They said that 'We might get killed'. They were entering the unknown territory, and – but you know, the ANGAU officers made sure our fathers and grandfathers performed the task they were given. The first ANGAU officer to give credit to his men, he's an officer by the name of Herbert Kienzle, who was a former planter and miner in the Yodda Valley.</p>
03:00	<p>He ranks on the Kokoda Trail as number one ANGAU officer, and he's a legend, remains an icon, equivalent to Raphael Oembari, representing the fuzzy wuzzy angels of Papua New Guinea.</p>
03:15	<p>[INTERVIEWER - JW]: Mr Hiari, I want to thank you for very, very penetrating account of the role that Papua New Guineans played in the war. Can I ask you a question related to what is happening based on the bonding that Papua New Guineans and Australians had in the country. Now you have heard that the seventh state of Australia would have to be Papua, meaning that they want to continue to hold the love, they want to continue the legend, they want to share that history, because it has gone into their life blood, and now there is a big movement throughout this part of the world where they are saying that Papua New Guinea should become the seventh state of Australia. Thank you.</p>
04:30	<p>Well, I would say, the project I'm doing, the project we're doing, is the province of Australia. If Australia can support the project I'm doing, the project we are intending to do, then the relationship which Mr Orere describes as the people's relationship because the ... represented in Canberra, if we are to end and bend it much stronger than ever before, this is the bottom line. The history has to be told. The history has to be recorded, and I think this is where I personally would like to see Australia build a people's relationship.</p>
05:23	<p>The history of Papua is so enormous, so colourful, but I am concentrating on World War II history. If I am passionate about it, the Australian Government should be passionate about what I am doing. And that's my cry. And if we can build that people's relationship, it's the oral history of Papua New Guinea.</p>

05:54	<p>[INTERVIEWER - JW]:</p> <p>Thank you, can I come with a second question. The history of Papua New Guinea includes the entire country, not just Papua, but includes our parts of Highlands, parts of the Islands, and the entire country, and we should have, we must have the bond, the relationship between our two, in the olden days, the Germans and the British, we should put that behind and come forward with the national unity, with the cultural diversity, that we must have a bond with the country and tell the whole world the united Papua New Guinea. thank you.</p>
06:50	<p>Thank you. I will summarise in this way. I will repeat it again, that this is the whole crux of the whole relationship. Either between Papua New Guinea and Australia, or either between ourselves. As for the leaders of today, they don't give priority to history. And our children, including our children in Kokoda, they don't know history. I just dropped a bombshell, here this morning. And because of going on, they said, 'It's amazing'. They want to learn it, how would I learn it? The Government of Australia, the Government of Papua New Guinea, has to think about people like me, and operations that result in oral historians to write our history. Thank you very much.</p>