

Name:	Julian Justus Erero	
Date of interview:	26 March 2017	
Location of interview:	Alotau, New Ireland Province	
Interviewer/s:	Anne Dickson Waiko, Keimelo Gima and Elizabeth Taulehebo	
Duration of interview:	30:48 & 8:55	
Main language of interview:	English and Tawala	
Image:		
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW		
TIME	TRANSCRIPT	
00:00	[Interviewer] This is an interview held at Alotau town on the 26 of March 2017 for Julian Justus Erero, who will tell the story of his father Justus Erero.	
00:53	My name is Julian Justus Erero. I am mix parentage of Oro Province and Milne Bay Province. My mum is from Milne Bay and my dad is from Oro Province. My father is Justus Erero who was born in Buna and Gona area of Oro Bay. He was born to a family of three, a sister and two brothers. He was elder one and Emmanuel was the second one.	
02:06	They were still in school when the war broke out. He was old enough, between the ages of 18 and 20. During those days, men were already men before they went to school actually. So he was already a man. He was schooling at Gona Mission school. That's Anglican run school. The Mission established the school for the children.	
02:43	One time there was a fight. It was a fight between clans and the village people were gaoled, you know during colonial days. There was a feast	

	made after the gaoled people were released for them to say sorry to one another. Reconciliation.
03:14	Before that feast, the priest from the Anglican Church told the school children by saying, 'you go back and tell your parents, tomorrow, there will be one ship arriving in this bay, Oro bay. We do not know whether it will be an American, Japanese or Australian ship. After school the children went home and informed their parents but the men swore, it's a bad swearing word. They said 'you go and f* your Fathers' The Father, the Mission priest.
04:00	The next day, they continued with the feast. And not long, they saw a big ship coming in. By then food was already ready. But everybody started running away. It was a Japanese ship. Today if you go to Oro Bay, it's just there. As it came closer to the harbour, planes were flying overhead, that's what he was saying. Warplanes were flying and dropping bombs. It happened that one of the bombs went into the exhaust pipe and it blew the ship up and it started to sink slowly. And all the Japanese soldiers were marshalled onto land, where the food was already there and they pleased themselves with the food there already cooked. They were all hungry. That's what my father normally tells us. They ate and they used the Church which still stands today as their base. The Anglican Church at Gona. They used the Church building as their base camp. They stayed there and they waged the war against the Allied Forces. The Japanese waged the war against the Australians, the Americans and maybe other allied.
06:04	My father at that time was a young man but he did not join any Force yet. He was with his people there and they kept running away. He said that there was one Commanding Officer from the Japanese side that led the war in. they based there and started to walk over the Kokoda Track.
06:40	When the war was going on, my father's mother and father and the rest of the people in the village kept running away and hiding from the Japanese. This was around the whole area of Buna, Gona and Sanananda, around the Oro Bay. The war concentrated there because the landing was there so it was a concentrated area. So everybody from there ran away. They try to get as far away as they can go.
07:21	There were many people. My father told me that they recruited many of the Oro people into the Japanese Army as guides to penetrate Kokoda, because they got the map and they can really see ... they had that intelligence. He said yes there were local people who assisted the Japanese to fight against the Australians. My dad said that they [Japanese] were small people but they are fierce. Don't try them, he said. They know taekwondo and all these.
08:16	During the war, the Army recruitment came around, mostly Australians came to recruit native soldiers. So my father was one of them recruited. He was recruited and they were trained down at Port Moresby. After they

	<p>finished training, they got them into their units. They call them as native soldiers. They were actually trained. They went into the units and deployed them to their areas. My father was put back to mostly Oro Province, between Oro and Lae. And they fought against the Japanese.</p> <p>He did not tell us how long the training was but it was war, so they may have taught them how to hold and use a gun, and stuff like that. And then they go them out.</p>
09:38	<p>He said they were wearing laplaps, sulu and stuff like that with rifle and that's it. Actually he said they were trained. According to the war, if you are trained you got to be equipped. And he said they fought. When he was sent out with his unit, he was part of them that concentrated on Wau-Bulolo area. Even to Kokoda Trail area.</p>
10:34	<p>At one stage in Wau, they were in the higher ground and these Japanese were running after them up the hill. That area is a grassy hill so you could see who's running up, and exchanging fire and. Somehow these natives would run up and lift their sulus and show their bottoms [buttocks] to the Japanese down the hill. And these Japanese would continue to shoot at them. They showed their bare buttocks to psychologically tease them. Or attacking them in a psychological way. And the warfare was more to tease them so they could run more so they can fall. So they were doing that and one of those stages that one of the Japanese caught up with my father.</p>
11:34	<p>My father is a huge guy, huge man and tall. My father underestimated this Japanese soldier. And it happened that they ran out of ammunitions and they had to have close combat. When close combat, this simply means, bayonet to bayonet- fixed bayonet on another. My father who was not that trained was down on the ground and the Japanese was too smart. This is what he said, my son I thought I'll kill the Japanese but that was wrong, he almost killed me. He said when I threw my punch he caught my hand. When he held my hand, I felt like it was broken. And he said he knew what joints to hold. Normally in self-defence we go for the joints. He held my wrist and when he twisted it, I was on the ground. And then when I was on the ground, he took his knife to just slice my throat when my Commanding Officer, who was an Australian, came forward and put the bayonet from the back of the Japanese soldier. That was when I got saved.</p> <p>So I looked at my father, you know those days when we almost dropped tears and run and grabbed our father. And he said yes, if it wasn't for that Commanding Officer, I would not be alive. So I was really grateful about this old man.</p>
13:41	<p>And another story he told was that in Oro itself, there were a lot of native soldiers fighting the Japanese around. It happened that one of them who used to be interested in the lime. He used to make his lime out of the kina shells. He tied his handkerchief and he was loading these kina shells so maybe after the war, he would make the lime for himself. While he was</p>

	doing that, he was killed in the mangroves. The Japanese soldiers just burn him, and he was dead with that thing in his hand.
14:20	So he said, I saw my men but if we can't fight we will die. So this is not time for lime and my friend died collecting those things. His friend was from Oro. They are Oro people, and they send them back to fight there.
14:46	My father did not mention anything about killing a Japanese soldier. He said, 'son war is a war.' Many things when you grow up, I don't want you to join with anything to do with guns and wars. Or you join Army or Police or these kinds of jobs. I actually tried to follow my father's steps. I already went but I decided not to go there. So I chose for the Law Enforcement [police man] job.
15:24	Up in the Kokoda Trail, they went to Ioribaiwa. He said that area was the most concentrated area for the Japanese. He said the Japanese soldiers were up the high ground and most of our native soldiers with the Allied forces were on the lower ground. And to attack they had the upper hand and they found it hard to combat them, and that's where they had made a lot of loss of soldiers. Big loss for the Allied force.
16:03	He said in order to win they had the natives scouted out going around the mountains and climb from the top and attack from the rear where the Japanese soldiers were. He said the only way to kill them is to kill them from the back. He said that was the only place where a lot of loss was made. Ioribaiwa, that's at Kokoda.
16:52	They were recruited as the first Papuan Infantry Battalion soldiers. He said there were about thirty of them. I had to research about my father's history. While working as a policeman, I thought it best to put my history right. So I had to get my letter written through the Defence Force to check records to be able to process the records. And then I thought it was a simple letter wrote but it ended there, all the way to Returned Services League in Port Moresby. When they received the letter, it was sent all the way down to Australia, down to Melbourne. His history records were there. They got it done and a letter was sent me. I got it and when I look through, my father had at least
18:17	He told me before I received the letter that he was shot and his right leg was injured. The lower bone was tied up and was rushed to the hospital. And he was treated. Because of that he was discharged from the force. He joined in 1942 and discharged in 1945. I wished I got that record here so I will show you but it's in my house. He was in the PIB [Papuan Infantry Battalion]. His regimental number was 'P145'. That was his number. He was number one forty-five. He never mentioned of how many Japanese soldiers, he killed. There were too many, maybe. But he had injuries and he had won medals like a war medal, Pacific star and there's another one like the Australian war medal That's three medals.

19:56	He is a left-handed man and he holds his rifle like this [imitated action]. He was too smart and he was really good. He said that it was a good job but also dangerous that his children should not join. He found it exciting to be in the army during the war. He was interested to fight the Japanese.
20:48	I believe my father joined the Allied forces because of the missionaries' influence, and colonization by the Australians. And the Japanese were intruders into our country. He thought it was right for him to fight the aliens.
21:11	He mentioned that there were some Oro people who helped the Japanese forces. There people also from the Buna area who helped the Japanese soldiers. I would not know if there were tensions between the people who helped the Japanese and those who helped the Australians after the war.
22:09	He told us that there were many things that the war brought. A lot of suffering. During the war my grandmother, something fell ... and broke her backbone. It's not a good thing.
22:50	He said the village people ran away but which way, I wouldn't know. There were three ways, one is up to Saiyo and Popondetta way, or some ran away to Tufi side and others to Mambare side.
23:18	[Anne Dickson Waiko] Just talking to villagers around here in Milne Bay, they organized them and they went to Suau area. [Keimelo Gima] Even the Hanuabada ones as well went to Porebada. [Justus Eroro] Some of the people here went to Taupota side and north coast. They established a lot of relations with the people. [Keimelo Gima] That sort of relationship was created during the war.
24:23	I did not hear anything from him about the use of traditional magic or power during the war. Maybe there were some put into practice but I did not hear anything from him.
24:44	Most of time my mum was around so my father did not mention much about the women. But in the war, it is always bad. We find that women are one of the groups of people who suffer a lot. They are used by the soldiers to please themselves. Our ladies those days were uneducated and most of them were taken from that group. My father did not mention about it because my mum was always with us. Maybe it was also bad for him to tell us.
25:33	My mum is from Walalaia, just towards East Cape, Milne Bay. She was about 18 or 19 years old when the war came so they had to run away to the other side and lived at Biwa. Most of the people ran away to Tawali side and stayed there during the war. This Huhu area was concentrated with soldiers both the Japanese and the Allied forces. There were a lot of recon patrols done by both forces.

26:24	There were times when they came to Walalaia, where the Walalaia Primary School is today and one of them got very sick, he got malaria. So they stayed there and he died so he was buried. One Japanese soldier and I heard that his name was Ailee.
27:41	My mother said the war was mostly fought in this area. Walalaia and up to East Cape, you could only hear the war planes flying. Much of the war was concentrated in the bay area. My mum said they were scared and they always run away when they heard sounds of planes. She said they would always run and hide under the coconut trees. When they see these Japanese or the Allied forces on patrol, they would run and hide.
28:14	After the war they returned to their homes. She said she was a young girl at that time and her first experience with men was when they were running away. They did not actually experience the real war in their villages, because it a bit far from the real war action areas. They were safe at least.
29:00	My father said that there were a lot of native soldiers who lost their lives during the war.
30:30	My father said the Australians were good people because they were their 'mastas'. All the commanding jobs were given to them, and the Americans were not part of them. In Oro it was all Australians.
PART 2	Papuan soldiers were helping each other. My father was injured. He was shot on the right leg and the scar was visible. He said that he was shot by the Japanese soldiers but he did not die. He was treated and he got better. He said they helped one another during the war and their Commander was always a white man, an Australian. And most of them were just native soldiers. It's a unit of its own. And Australians too were on their own. Their commanders were good. They fought a brave war, he said. He said if without them, the Australians alone would not win the war. They put in their efforts and they risked their lives. He said they were fighting white man's war and not their war.
01:39	He knew that it was not their war because he said in our old days there were no such wars, massive and with guns. Because of the white people, they brought in that war and many of them died. He did not know why they were fighting. He said he was recruited so he was sent to fight the Japanese soldiers. Politically maybe he did not know that. Maybe later while he was out there he realised that they were fighting for the countries.
02:25	He had a friend, I forgot his name. His friend is from Divinai but got married to one woman at Gadudu. They lived in the same area and they were neighbours. His friend would come and both of them would sit and tell stories about the war, their memories of the war like what they did. Most of the times were being naughty so they prohibited us from coming near them when they are telling stories. He's an aggressive man. He would

	chase us and tell us to go and play our own games while they told stories. We never sat with them to listen to their stories. From time to time I would see two of them sitting and telling stories.
03:32	My father lost his war uniform and medals in a fire while he was serving at Baniara with the Health Department as a medical. He served at Baniara in the Rabaraba District, his house caught fire and he lost all his things. So he did not have much to wear but his friend would wear his uniform and medals and both of them would attend big Days like the ANZAC Day. I saw them ...
04:50	Those people who were trying to make peace by feast when the Japanese ship landed in the Oro Bay in 1942 was only a minor fight that concerned them. It was a tribal fight. The offenders were arrested by the Kiap in charge of the area under the Australian colonial Administration and imprisoned. They offenders were released so they were making feast to make peace with the offended party. Coincidentally the Japanese ship arrived that day so they all ran away and never made peace. The peace was disturbed by the Japanese troops.
05:24	He said that Oro area was concentrated with soldiers. The Japanese were starving so when they landed where the feast was abandoned, they helped themselves.
05:54	There was a story he told that if we go to Buna there is a cross that still stands, it's a cement cross and we could see bullet marks all over it. The Japanese soldiers are not Christians so when they saw it they used it as a target practice. They were shooting at the cross and all was out except for the metal that was holding the cross. The top part, the bottom part and the centre area where the chest could be were all removed by the bullets and only the metal remains. He said they would use the bible pages to wipe their bottoms.
06:52	He said these Japanese soldiers were starving.
07:02	He was not compensated by the Australian Administration and the Defence Force but they sent me some forms to fill and send. But I prefer not to because he will not have anything to do with the money. He fought a war while he was a single person. Although his widow is still living, she has nothing to do with the money. He married her after the war. Whatever he suffered during those war years working with the Australian Army was felt by himself and not by anyone. So I think if we got the money back then, we would buy like biscuits and rice is not fair for him. I just don't want it.
08:54	[Interviewer] Thank you very much.