

Name:	Bigore Mikari
Date of interview:	30 March 2017
Location of interview:	Gabugabuna, Milne Bay Province
Interviewer/s:	Elizabeth Taulehebo, Anne Dickson Waiko and Keimelo Gima
Duration of interview:	24:36
Main language of interview:	Tawala
Image:	

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

TIME	TRANSCRIPT
00:00	[Interviewer] This is an interview held at Gabugabuna village on the 30 of March 2017 with Bigore Mikari who will be talking about herself and her sister Agnes Mikari and how the war affected them.
	I don't remember when exactly the war reached my area because I was only a child about three or four years old. I was like that child when we ran away. My mother passed away before the war and my father married another woman. So my father's mother took care of me and I was living with her at Waema. When the war came my father's small brother named Luidagu Loihai carried me and we all ran away. We went to Rabe and the war was growing worse so we went to Gehua. While at Gehua, he said okay, from here the ANGAU officers came and instructed us that we were to go and stay at Naura. They instructed my uncle to tell the people that we were all going to move to Baraga.
01:55	In my family was me, my father. My biological father is from Rabe and he married another woman from Rabe also named Hinakwainole who was my stepmother. My stepmother refused me as her child so my father took me and gave me to his mother to raise me. The woman my father married had children like Waileuya, the eldest and others were Agnes and Catherine, were the ones we ran away

	<p>with to Naura. One of the small sisters drowned in the Naura river and died. I was very sad to see her drown and die. This happened during rainy period when there was strong cyclone and big flood at the area we were living at Naura. Their house was uprooted and washed away by the flood because they were living next to the river. There was a very big flood and it destroyed all our shelters and things and we all had to run away from where we were camping. People were swimming in the flooded areas and trees were falling everywhere so we had to dive in to let the debris pass by and we would surface again. Because the river started flooding in the midnight around 12 o'clock like that so we were caught by surprise. I was carried by my grandmother and she clutched one banana tree next to our shelter and we stood there till morning. We were living at Baraga when the flood destroyed our camps and all our things. We had no camps so some of our friends had to help us for the time being while we built new shelters. There were plenty people there and there were three main groups, one, two, three and we were in the third group residing next to the river so when the flood came we were the most affected. So we stayed with our other friends until new shelters were given to us. No people were living there when we were evacuated to live there due to the war. Plenty people were moved to live there.</p>
03:50	<p>The next morning, our friends who were not affected by the flood assisted us, the men provided laplaps to the men and the women provided spare grass skirts to the women because in those days women don't wear other clothes except grass skirts. Those women affected by the flood had nothing to wear because they removed their grass skirts and threw them in the flood so the other women had to take their spare grass skirts and cover the other women who were just sitting after the flood subsided. Also the men were still sitting in their flooded shelters when their fellow men provided spare laplaps for them to wear.</p>
04:30	<p>We had labourers there who provided and cooked our food. They cooked rice in huge drums [coppers] and boiled tea aee sorry but meat and tinned fish were in surplus supply especially Ox & Palm- six pound meat- were plentiful. Big tinned meat but I was small so I don't eat much because I don't really like eating protein in those times. Yes, they were really nice to eat but we don't eat much even though there was surplus food. We didn't have proper shelters and clothing to keep us warm and it was cold always. Okay after the flood and sometime later they had to move us away from the river, further inland and proper camps were built for us. We stayed there for a very long time until the war ended then we moved to Ladava and later on moved up here.</p>
05:32	<p>My grandmother did not carry plenty things when we were asked to leave our homes and run away. Whatever we could carry and what we were wearing were the only things we took with us when we ran away. We were in our camps and were supplied things by the armies, like food and clothing. They were the ones who took good care of us, fed us and clothed us. They made shelters for us and also for themselves and we lived together. But there were plenty of food and they really assisted us.</p>

06:08	My sister Agnes was the one who drowned during the flood at Baraga. After the flood they found her dead body and she was buried there. No one else was drowned by the flood, only my sister. Everyone was okay after the flood. All the big people were okay, only the little ones were affected by the flood and we were all family.
06:40	I remember the war but I was too small to judge whether it was good or bad. All I remember is there was war and we had to run away from our homes.
06:49	After the war we returned to our homes and as I was growing up my father used to tell me stories about the war. My grandmother passed away during the war while we were living at Baraga so my father and stepmother had to take me back and look after me along with my sister Catherine. My father told me stories about the war while we were living here.
07:22	During the war, my father was given the role of gathering the bodies of dead soldiers. Prior to that my father was working as a cook for the Army's big man called Major Paul. That's what my father told me. Before that we were all at Baraga when the flood came and my sister was drowned and my father buried her dead body. He was given a job while we were living there. We were given a house to live in while my father and the others were recruited to help in the army. Men who were recruited were my father and few men and were given the task to collect bones of dead soldiers. So they would gather dead soldiers, burn them and wash the bones and load them inside plastic bags with their details attached. So all the people from Giligili to Waigani and from Waigani went to Duabo and one plane crashed there where two brothers were killed, they were asked to collect the bodies of the dead soldiers, burn them and load the bones in the plastic bags. They continued until all the bones were collected then they stopped. That was part of my father's job.
08:50	But they promised to show us some appreciation but it was all lies till now.
09:33	Yes, they would collect the dead soldiers and burn them then collect the bones and wash them and load them inside plastic bags. They were doing this to the dead Australian and American soldiers and even the Japanese soldiers. The Americans and Australians were not plenty but there were a lot of dead Japanese soldiers.
10:15	Life was hard up there at Baraga, Naura. Most of them didn't have proper shelters and that's where her small sister died due to the flood because you know Naura river is very big. It [flood] was caused by the cyclone at that time. The elder sister was the one drowned during the flood. After the flood they realised that she was missing so they had to search for her the next day and found her body so they buried her there at Baraga. She was raised by her grandmother.
11:42	When my father was burning the bodies of the dead soldiers, he removed whatever personal stuffs the soldiers had and I remember he got one necklace but it has been lost already. They only get whatever thing that is interested to them. But I can't remember if he actually brought some of the dead soldiers'

	<p>stuff with him. I don't think so he would do that. But truly he collected bones of the dead soldiers. He would burn them. That Maiwara river was closed and people were stopped from using it because it was used to wash the bones of the dead soldiers after they were burnt. The meats of the dead soldiers were washed off into the river and separated from the bones. The bones were dried then packed inside plastic bags. It was a tiring and hard work because they were manually doing the job. The bones were separated into two groups parts of the left side were loaded in different bag and parts of the right side also in different bag. The bones were separated but the person's name was written to easily identify them. They had a white man boss who instructed them what to do so they knew what they were doing. After the bones were collected the white man used to transport them to the ship and they are carried away. The job was done by my father and his other men. They were supplied with gloves and disinfectant medicines to do their job.</p>
13:56	<p>My father used to see dead people but not as numerous as what he saw during the war. There were a lot of dead soldiers he saw and had to deal with. Digging forks were used to separate the human flesh and meat from the bones. They separated the meat from the bones, the meat was also loaded inside bags and buried while the bones were collected and disinfectant medicine was poured into a big dish and the bones were loaded and washed; the bones are then dried in the sun before being packed into plastic bags and taken away. The river next to Giligili was also used to wash the bones of the dead soldiers. And here Kalo river was used. They also went to Waigani. At Duabo, a pilot soldier and his friend were shot and their plane crashed there. Their bones were also collected. What they were doing was not something good or desirable but they had to do it because it was their job.</p>
16:10	<p>He didn't like the job but he had no choice because he was recruited to do the job and you know we Papuans were labourers back then. His only food was Lae biscuit and coffee. He only drank coffee there was no milk or proper food. He was dealing with dead bodies and the stench was too strong and most times he refused to eat. Thinking of the dead bodies caused him not to eat proper meals.</p>
16:52	<p>However after the war, he does not have nightmares or bad dreams about those dead bodies of the soldiers he was handling. He did not use any custom ways to deal with the dead bodies. The bodies were rotting and all they had to do was separate the flesh from the bones to easily transport them out. But there was too much of bad smell so they had to wear masks but most of his friends didn't like the job and left so he had to handle the dead bodies himself most of the times. They were asked by the boss of the army to do the job so they had no choice but to do it anyway. They did not volunteer. They would not do such a job had they volunteered but they were recruited and assigned the task. He had to do the job because there were a lot of dead bodies and the stench was really bad. But he was given medicines to protect him from other infections. There were medicines given for washing and drinking. After handling the bodies and</p>

	<p>when he returned home, he used to use the medicines to wash himself and drink medicines given to protect him.</p>
18:41	<p>He handled the dead bodies for almost one month. Because you know there were a lot of bodies of dead soldiers. There were a lot of Japanese bodies than the Australians and Americans. They could not count all of them. My father was living with Major Paul and doing this job until he finished it. Major Paul was the boss. He was an Australian. Those who refused to work were not punished, man like Maino's father.</p>
20:11	<p>I think my father played a part during the war but we have been lied to several times to be compensated by filling in documents to receive money for the war carriers. They came and told us that those of you who ran away or whose properties were lost during the war have to lay your complaints so you will be compensated but I refused. All I wanted is for my father to be recognized and appreciated for the job he did by collecting the bones of Japanese, Australians and American dead soldiers during the war. That's the only thing I want them to compensate for: my father's role. So I filled in some documents given to me but since then nothing has been done. So what happened then? These people only lied to us. They got our photos and made our IDs that we were going to get money but nothing. Our own people were doing this, at Rabe is Sineduba. They were the ones coming and asking us to give them our names and what we did during the war or how it affected us so we can be compensated. There were other people to who came and asked us to do the same thing but I don't know their names. I only know of Sineduba from Rabe.</p>
22:16	<p>I told you what my father did during the war. But those people who came in the previous years have promised to pay some compensation so I am still waiting for them. Telling you my story and my father's story about the war is not a problem for me. I willingly recollected my stories and told them but I am not happy because other people have been coming and lying to me a lot. First they lied to us and I paid some fees so they can prepare my father's documents for his compensation money and I paid K20.00. I was given some documents which I filled in my details but no result. Second time we asked to pay K30.00 so I did and my photo was taken and my ID was made so I'm keeping it in my house there. They promised that I will wait and whenever the bank requests then we would be paid. I don't know which people exactly and who they represented.</p>