

Name:	Taupili Palemeni
Date of interview:	6 April 2017
Location of interview:	Rabe, Milne Bay Province
Interviewer/s:	Anne Dickson Waiko, Elizabeth Taulehebo and Keimelo Gima
Duration of interview:	41:43
Main language of interview:	English
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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

TIME	TRANSCRIPT
00:00	[Interviewer] This is an interview with Palemeni family and it's Taupili Palemeni who is going to talk with his sisters about their father Palemeni Litapi who was a Coastwatcher and he is going to be assisted by his sisters Waineuya Kanatupa Palemeni and Wainoino Palemeni. This interview is dated 6 th of April 2017 and held at Rabe.
	Our dad was at Kwato with late Cecil Abel. While they were at Kwato Mission the war came this way in 1942. He was much older at that time than our mum. He was thirty or forty years old like that and married already. He was a trainee at the first place of all trade ... you know at the Mission school they were trained for anything. They were jacks, not masters. He was at Kwato when the war broke out so I think at that time it was the Australian Army requested the Mission to assist by nominating certain persons they knew. Dad at that was proven to be very brave so Cecil Abel chose him to engage him in the war but not knowing what area or field he'll be working in till ... after dialogue with the Army ... So up till now we understood him to be and we normally call him spy.

	<p>He was spy for the Australians. The term really is Coastwatcher. Whether you are up in the mountains or seas ... So he was given that role.</p>
04:05	<p>Kwato has to be evacuated because of the China Strait and the activity that was going on this way from Buna, Gona areas and to the Coral Sea. So when Kwato was evacuated our mum went with children she was taking care of, she was a teacher, to Duabo which is just across there. From there our Dad was immediately engaged. At that time the Australian army unit were based at Giligili, it's just two kilometres from down this way. So he was based there and given the job of watching, particularly these mountains. He was at those mountains up to I think as far as Goilanai. They cover those areas because that's his area so they placed him there. He had relief from time to time. Other men like Barnaba and another one was known as Dalua from here. They relieved him from time to time because of his problems with his ears.</p>
05:37	<p>When he's given a mission and he goes out and spots the enemy, he returns to Headquarters and reports. There's some kind of radar system that they used with the gun, it goes together and when he comes to the spot, they say okay. So immediately he's near the gun when its fired and that damaged his hearing. So he had to be relieved for a week just to recover and come back. What they call them, those big guns, 16 mm guns I can't recall. I was never shown one so I can't recall. Okay but the big guns. There were two guns, one was covering these hills from Giligili and the other one was up at Mt Bilobilolo, just up here. That's the one was covering the China Strait. On top of Rabe, that small mountain. They were watching these waters up this way and this one here was concentrating on the hills. Mostly he was around this area because there were no ships came that came through this way until ... I forgot the date, that's when the Japanese finally came through to Wahuhuba. They missed Giligili and they landed there. This gun up at Bilobilolo was never used; it's only the Giligili one. So that's all.</p>
07:38	<p>He told a story: he was caught a number of times by the enemy and given you know very very harsh Japanese punishment. One punishment was to drink up a bucket of water. Good water, stream water. And he had to drink it all up. One go, I mean drink, drink, drink until finish because you are at gun point. And the other one was, it's not a punishment but to me it is because he pretended to be deaf and dumb, you know when they catch him, he's deaf and dumb. He cannot talk and he cannot hear. He pretends to be like that so they tickle him to see if they could make him laugh which he manages not to laugh. He never laughs. Sir Cecil Abel made the right choice by choosing him because he was brave enough to withstand anything, physically and mentally.</p>
09:06	<p>He did not say how he was communicating with the Japanese but by actions, the gun you know ... because they had fixed bayonets on them. ...</p> <p>And he would escape. One time he was caught on a tree, up these hills here. He was just overlooking them when they, the Japanese were inside the kunai grass but below the grass they dug tunnels. So when they are spotted you know there's no movement on the surface of the grass, they are underneath.</p>

	<p>So he was on this tree spying on them and making a rough count on them because they were told to find how many in the platoon or brigade. He was making a count on them. Suddenly he dropped just a bark of the tree and when they looked up they saw him. But the good thing about what he said was they were not that harsh against the locals. They were also taken as innocent bypassers and you know curious people ... He looked normal so they took him as a villager and not someone who was spying on them. He had to look normal and he acted normal.</p>
11:00	<p>The Japanese knew that most of the village people were evacuated to Suau and Sawaia and some other places. So the place was you hardly find locals. Only very rare ones so when our father acted to be deaf and dumb, they believe that they left him because he was deaf and dumb. He was no use. He was caught by different platoons or whatever. He said he was caught twice. He was not taking anything to keep notes of what he was observing, just used his mental only. Used only his memory and sight. This was his place so he knew it better. He knew almost every hill and mountain here because he was a hunter, and this is his place.</p>
12:14	<p>His younger days before he went to Kwato, he knew every gorge, every hill. He enjoyed the job. He enjoyed it because one reason was that he came out of Mission work and all that and free to be roaming his own places there and he also knew the importance of it. Through Cecil Abel and he stressed to them that it is a must, it is a must that they put their efforts in because nobody else would do it. And the Australian army only had very young lads, eighteen and nineteen years old. The only leaders they had were the older ones that come from the Europe war. The rest of the troops were very young people so they needed a lot of help. So our dad played that role, standing firm on his post as a Coastwatcher. The last term he held, how many years, think 1942 to 1945, about three years. He was just helping here.</p>
13:49	<p>But the other men that went across to New Guinea Islands and Solomons, you'll get their stories separately. They were the PIBs, the Pacific Islands Battalion.</p>
14:12	<p>So basically that was what he did but he witnessed the actual war. I cannot tell how he felt or think of the war because he would only tell us stories, even if we ask him he would just tell us stories but how he took it, the importance of war. He only told us that if the war was lost, this would be Japan. Japanese would have taken over but ... One thing he told us was that this was the last post and then when they get to Konedobu, that's it. At that time I think at that time General MacArthur, he used to mention in the Philippines and he came and he was in Darwin. These are the extended stories that he told us because he heard from the soldiers.</p>
15:24	<p>So he was in the thick of battle. He did not see the gun battles so much but the hand to hand combat, fixed bayonet. Fixed bayonet warfare and he witnessed that. Maybe it was so cruel that he did not want to tell us anything ...</p>

	<p>He only said that it was a fearful battle. He did not want to reveal the details about it but he told us where and where the hospitals were, the big warehouses. He only told us those. And then if we were curious enough to ask about something else then he would tell us.</p> <p>He was based at Giligili and sent out but not daily, only when there's intelligence reports of enemy spotted and then they send him out. They were sent as individuals. Yes he shared his experiences that there were raining at times. Rain and mud in the bushes.</p>
17:06	<p>The general story of it was that he, the full impact of the war here is only a short while but most of it was rain. That's how the Japanese could not get in because this place was covered so they mistook Wahuhuba for Giligili, with their landing barges. So it was very bad. They were not given any uniforms, he only wore laplap and he smokes pipe so he carries his smoke and pipe and go. ... Sometimes tapa cloth.</p> <p>He acts like a simple villager so nobody would know. So if he gathered the information then he had to walk all the way to Giligili, day and night. His return to Giligili was not rushed. He took his time like ordinary bush walker and he took different routes all the time and never the same route. And when he gives the information to them and then they get the enemies by surprise.</p>
18:45	<p>One thing he mentioned is they do the shelling first from Giligili. They do the shelling of the area and immediately after that they ... these Japanese call them Zero or so but the Allied Forces had theirs as Kittyhawks. Kittyhawks like bombers, not really bombers but gunners. They send them off from Turnbull airstrip, just across here that was the army aerodrome they call it. They do the shelling first from the reports of the Coastwatcher and immediately after is the flight will go in, the shell of the ...</p>
20:00	<p>Our mum went over up to Duabo and stayed there. Yes, they were watching the war from Duabo. Because it's up on the hill so they just look down at the war and she used to think of our dad. They were trained and brought up in a way that they lived by prayer so it was normal. They lived by prayer.</p>
20:40	<p>Yes, there were traditional help. There is a big big saying that we had our clever mothers involved, you know. Our clever mothers involved that is why the rain persisted all the way through. Yes, my father experienced it. It was all the way, even the PIBs that left and went to the other parts of the country, they knew it. It was with them so there were hardly any casualties from the PIB that helped during the war, there was none. They all returned home and died here (Milne Bay). Our father knew that he was being by protected by his mother. Even Aunty Maiogaru too. Coming from the Kwato Mission and their upbringing, they knew about the two powers, Christian God and their traditions and that God was powerful. They saw it that way but lived it the other way. They talked about it but ... because they are brought up that way. They accepted both (forms of belief). They needed each of them.</p>

22:28	<p>Our mum was content enough at Duabo because she had a handful of responsibilities. She was looking after mostly orphans. Local children. And many of them lived to tell her stories. Rastus Rowalimo, former president of Huhu was one of them; Kembol Bigebige, Collin Kiwiwi is another one. They were in that same ... that our mother took care of. Collin was one of the orphans and Maiogaru adopted him. Rastus Rowalimo from Maiwara, he was once the president of the Milne Bay Local Level Government before it became Huhu rural. So they had their own stories about that time as children.</p>
23:38	<p>At Duabo: They survived mostly on local food from the local people living around there. They had plenty of food. They had gardens. They used very basics king gum from Kwato Ray Murari, depending on the war itself. If it was not possible, it has been ... So they relied on local vegetables. No, there were no rations supplied by ANGAU to Duabo.</p>
24:35	<p>Oh yeah, I don't know whether she told my sisters or not. What she told was that she was worried about her husband in the war area. But she had most of her time and concern was on the children she was taking charge of. But she told the stories that when there was air raid, siren goes on and lights. That's the time to go and hide into the air raid shelters, pits were dug for them to hide. She would usher the children and rushed them down under the tunnels until it's over and they come out again. We were not born yet. After the war then I (elder sister) was born. What they call peacetime. Peacetime and I was born. In 1946.</p> <p>But actually she was worried about her boyfriend.</p> <p>Every time they go underneath these tunnels and when the warning goes on she says, 'my heart comes up to my mouth.' And we use to say, 'ay mum, how does your heart comes up to your mouth?' She prays. She was brought up at the Mission so she does not know anything about those (traditional beliefs). She was brought up by the Abels. Our mother's name is Mary Sioni.</p>
26:38	<p>Maybe the first few days was something strange and new. They normally carried on, taking for granted because it was war. At that time their level of thinking was not that broad, and they were not exposed to the outside world.</p>
27:18	<p>After the war everyone was relieved and happy returning home. The people returned from the south coast. Some people went further up inland at Naura. At the Naura area, they had mostly camps up there, the workers. The Army employed also civilian workers and they were based up there. They were taking care of the war ammunitions and rations and it comes this way. They had trucks and people who knew how to drive were driving and they had to look after the stores. Much later almost towards the end of the war then the Americans came. When they came, they based at Gamadoudou, just across the Bay. What I heard from them was that they did not do the actual fighting, they came much later. Yeah, they came in September. I asked him why and he told me those twenty-one battle ships that were going into Nawae, that held back the American Forces ...</p>

28:48	<p>Some of these stories ... related to the war, I knew it from them before. He picked ...</p> <p>We feel proud about our father. He's not a big man, he's small. We are bigger and taller than him. He's very short. We got photos of him and our mother. We feel proud of him for his contributions.</p>
29:38	<p>Sikana, yes I heard about him. My father did not tell me about him. But other uncles down here did tell me the story. Okay their version of it was that, Kalebo and others because they were mingling around in the war. They were warriors anywhere so they did go. What I heard from them was that, when the Japanese landed at Wahuhuba, they swept down this way and later they found that Giligili was actually several kilometres west. They had to come in by force and then they came down by force and fixed bayonets. So they used the ammunition or they had this particular area here was they had lines of defenders. They were mostly Australian New Zealand soldiers so they would come.</p> <p>I heard that he led his troops, not in metal gear but he had only a bayonet. He left for that area there. He ran until, there is a place called Taela, just before Giligili plantation and there's a river that was manned by two New Zealanders and that was the last post. He carried the Japanese flag with him on one hand and bayonet on the other hand. He slain almost everybody on the way down until this last two at Taela, that river.</p> <p>And so the younger one was on the gate and they planned that the elder one engage with him in fighting on the ground so whichever way he went then he would shoot him. So that's exactly what happened. But he still he carried the flag across and he planted it. And the surviving brother shot him with the rifle got it back again over to the other side and placed it there. One of them that he engaged with hand to hand was killed so the younger brother shot him. That's the version of it. Maybe others have a different version.</p> <p>We kept it very confidential because of the flag. In fact I never talked about it until now because you asked me. Later he was found that he was made to look like a Japanese but he's from Gona. How they got him and lure him to join them, I don't know. That's the suspicion he was from there. So he had special powers too, I don't know but powers again. Only that name was given Sikana, that's not our name. A Japanese name Sikana but the man who carried name was not a Japanese.</p> <p>My dad did not tell me that, only my uncles told me. There were couple of my uncles who did not evacuate the place, they were mingling around in the war and usually they had fun carrying around sharp sticks and when the Japanese moved this way there was a lot of dead men along this way. They usually had their bellies enlarge, the dead bodies so they enjoyed poking those stomachs. And they go poof! So that's a little part I have from them.</p>
35:20	<p>He only mentioned that he like to joke about them (Japanese soldiers). They were short people like him, and not that white, yellow skins he called them.</p>

	<p>And yeah yeah the eyes, slanted eyes. And not so much as the Chinese. He described them as that but he did not have any sentiments about the bad. He's not somebody who can describe negatively. He just keeps it quiet. He was never a negative man.</p>
36:35	<p>I think I started with the last one about ANZAC Day and the other things and yeah Before the Mission was on, I was saying, we knew it as ANZAC Day, Australian New Zealand Army Corps and April 25 was that Day. And even when our dad was not that old yet he wanted me to have the feel of it to be honouring the Day. He would be at home but send me with the medallion and I go and join the older people but I was confident because Auntie Maiogaru was there all the time, the PIB men all over the Bay, some from Taupota and some from around here and we could march together that morning and we had one bugle from the, not the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary but they call them The Police. They always gave us one bugle for them. They are from here (PNG).</p> <p>When we started, they send him down from Samarai because Alotau was not established yet so he comes down from Samarai and we do the flag raising and not the law, which is the race then Church service done by the priest, a caretaker or a local priest here. And that's it that's the end of the Day.</p> <p>The school children will go along and sing songs and somebody would tell a very brief story about the war, very brief and that's it. I can't remember what year the ANZAC Day was done away with and we have it replaced by ... Yeah, soon after Independence. We were nationalistic so did away with it. And had it as Remembrance Day.</p>
39:14	<p>That was a good opportunity to remember our parents as carriers, fighters. And unfortunately you said you were young and taking part and our young people now are not taking part so they don't remember its significance so hopefully this project will revive the interest of what our fathers did. And unlike Australia and other European countries, their young men would be traveling where they ... because they have the money to travel. Even if we don't travel, at least we show some interest.</p>
39:50	<p>And it was also customised because every family had its own record and story about how the brave grandfather took part in the war and it comes down all the way and it became custom to them. So when we had Remembrance Day, there was not much activity, you know many people resented the Day being changed, people around here. So participation and attendance on that Day, it got out ... Until two years ago, we also had for Milne Bay alone we had the Battle of Milne Bay ... This time it was ... no Cecil Abel was gone already (deceased), only when he was alive. But Chris Abel had a good part in that I think arranging with the Australian consul, he lives here so as arranged and that's two years ago. Last year I don't think anything happened. So we believe and thought that we have the celebration now as Battle of Milne Bay all the way, depicting the Coral Sea all the way. It might change again.</p>



41:39	[Interviewer] Thank you.
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