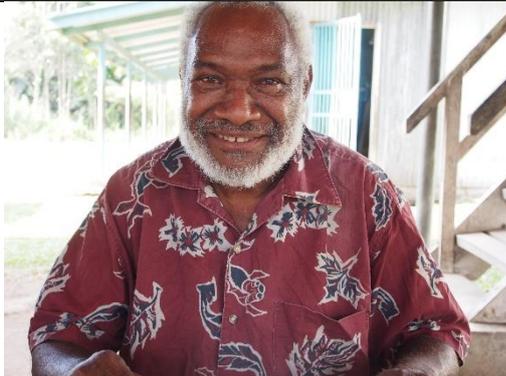


Name:	Sylvanus Siembo
Date of Interview:	13 May 2016
Location of Interview:	Awala, Northern Province
Interviewer/s:	Victoria Stead [VS], Margaret Embahe [ME], Mavis Manuda Tongia [MT]
Duration of Interview:	1:13:39
Main Language of Interview:	Orokaiva and English
Image:	

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

Time	Transcript
0:00	[VS] This is an interview with Mr Sylvanus Siembo, the date is the 13 th of May 2016. We are in Awala, and Mr Siembo's brother, Cecil Siembo, will be translating for him today. Mr Siembo, begin please.
0:00:34	I was born at Birore Village, on the 6 th of January 1951.
0:00:58	That was some time, two weeks, before the Mount Lamington eruption.
0:01:19	I started school in 1963.
0:01:34	I only went as far as grade three in a primary school.
0:01:49	In 1963 when I left school, I got employed in a company in Lae. I worked for thirteen years in a company and returned home in 1975 in Papua New Guinea first independence. When I returned I went into coffee business, I was cultivating what for coffee, and I was running a trucking business as a PMV operator, and I got married to my wife. I have seven children in the family.
0:03:20	I was elected a village councillor for Higaturu LLG, while I was still running a business in the village. I served as a village councillor for fourteen years. In 1992, I was elected as a representative to the national parliament. I was then given the CIS, Correctional Service Ministry, as a minister for CIS. As a minister responsible, I released 1800 prisoners both men and women free. When I released the prisoners,

	<p>the prime minister Sir Julius Chan told me that it was not proper, and these prisoners will kill us. So, in return I told him that, 'sir, we have two sorts of punishment, one will be punished here, and then later we have, you know, all judgment, and punishment would be there so let them decide'.</p>
0:06:15	<p>I told the prime minister that if any of these prisoners, I am releasing, cause another problem or if they go back to crime, I'll ask you to execute me. If I am wrong, on their behalf. After that, there was a reform in the government, so, they appointed me governor of the province, so I returned to the province. When I was in the province, the people thought it was an opportunity to express their concerns for their loved ones who have served in the war. Therefore, I would start up with my own grandfather Tahima Tigary, he is three. Tahima Tigary, was a village constable during the colonial time. My grandfather Tahima Tigary was arrested at Awala by the Japanese guard. After they arrested him they took him out to the base camp, stripped him of the Australian clothes, and punished him.</p>
0:09:30	<p>Then, they asked him 'do you know Kokoda, and do you know Port Moresby Track?' and he told them that 'I know the route because I worked for the government'. So, they know that he was resourceful person in the community, he has a local knowledge, so they told him that from now and onwards you'll be with us and you'll lead us the way. From there on they took my grandfather and he led them all the way to Kokoda because of his local knowledge. My grandfather was employed against his will. They chained him up when they want to go to sleep and they chained him to somebody, a soldier, so he does not have the freedom of movement. So all his limbs were chained so that he can use his local knowledge to lead them to Kokoda.</p>
0:11:46	<p>My grandfather was eye witnessed all the events that took place from Awala to Kokoda. Because, he witnessed all the good and bad, you know things that have been done to our own people by the Japanese troops. They successfully went through Kokoda and fought all the way. When they passed Kokoda, in between Kokoda, they raided a village called Hoy, Hoy Village, just after Kokoda station. And in the early hours of the morning they raided the village. My grandfather witnessed a terrible thing at Hoy Village. The villagers were all assembled in the centre of the village and the Japanese troops opened fire and killed the whole village. While in the process, a person, one of the survivors, a young boy, managed to jump over a cliff, and he was the only person in the village that was safe.</p>
0:14:12	<p>When they finished killing everybody, they got a canvas and covered all the bodies in a pile. They piled the bodies up, and covered with the canvas, and they continued on the trail. After killing the villagers they moved on and they came to a place where two girls were in the garden. They had tattoos on their faces. And the Japanese soldiers sighted them and took them and raped the two young ladies. After raping the ladies they cut off their clothes and put their clothes on the stumps of the trees, and they took shots at those ladies.</p>
0:16:09	<p>When they completed what they did, they went towards Ioribaiwa, and asked my grandfather if there was any tracks apart from the main track that they would walk in. And he said there is no other track apart from this, only one. And it is very steep cliff and it was only one way through. Okay, when they completed there, it was a one way track, so they took advantage of that single track and they blocked the Australians from advancing. And that's how the Australians managed to overpower them and they killed the commander.</p>

0:18:26	When the Australians managed to shoot a person who was in a cave where he was, you know hiding and shooting all these Australian soldiers. As soon as Australians shot that particular person/captain off, then the second-in-command said they were to surround. So, they took the helmet, the shot was put downwards and they put the helmet on top of the [gun] and this we have to move back to Buna. As they surrounded, they walked back towards Kokoda and my grandfather managed to escape from the Japanese troop. My grandfather managed to escape from the Japanese when they were surrounded, and he took refuge in the nearby bushes, and took the bush track back to the village at Awala. After that event, some one to two years later, the Australian administration returned to Higaturu. And they were going through all the records to see who have supported the Japanese forces, so they can punish them.
0:21:37	My grandfather was identified by village community members, and [they] reported him to the Australian administration, and the police came and arrested him, to lock him up, and he was chained at Higaturu government station. During those times people do not know much English. They only choose village constables with people with very big build, good build, so they can be able to recruit them as police. So, many people did not defend themselves because of, you know lack of understanding and they could not speak for themselves. When the prisoners were asked to defend themselves, because lack of understanding they could not speak for their rights, and the police were only recruited on their fitness, physical fitness.
0:23:34	Therefore, they could not able to translate the what properly. So, what they advised, what the constables advised the prisoners is this, when the masters say anything; you must always nod your head. So, they will know that you know that. So, by that way the poor prisoners tried to defend themselves. They only nod their head so they were found guilty by the magistrate and they were executed according to their approvals. My grandfather Tahima Tigary was set free because he know more about how to speak Motu, in that time white men used Motu language to communicate. So, being a village constable and have some knowledge about Motu language, he was able to speak for himself.
0:25:18	And what he said was, why he was set free was because he said, 'I was chained and taken away against my will'. So, they released him, he went free, they set him free. So, to set him free, they whipped him 100 times. His scars were still visible until he passed away. And the court told him that, in the future, you'll tell your generation that when War breaks [out] do not support the enemies, but you must help support your friends, so that they can be able to help you, and they set him free. So, when we grew up my grandfather tells us that he has the money back, coins back for Japanese coins, and he advises us that I have fought for Japanese, so, in future you have to, assistance from Japanese government.
0:28:15	The second in command wrote some statement for my grandfather and he gave him a bag of coins to keep and he was keeping it until when he had, police arresting all the victims who have supported the Japanese soldiers. He threw his money bag, coins, and the note into the toilet. That is a small account of my grandfather Tahima Tigary.
0:29:02	[VS] Thank you. Can I ask you one question; do you know anything about what that time was like for your grandmother? Were your grandfather and grandmother married at the time that your grandfather was taken away?

0:29:20	Yes,
0:29:21	[VS] What was that like for her?
0:29:45	My grandmother thought her husband was already killed, so she was a widow. She dressed like a widow and she with all her life she was mourning all that time.
0:30:04	[VS] How many years was your grandfather away for?
0:30:20	Because Northern Province was the last part of the War, and it took some months for her, he was taken away from her.
0:30:43	[VS] And during that time did she stay in the place where she had lived before, or did she move?
0:31:07	My grandfather had a village just some ten minutes' drive from here, and she was staying at that place.
0:31:21	[VS] Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us or anything else that you would like to add?
0:32:25	The Japanese soldiers took my grandfather not like a carrier; they took him as a soldier. But they have not done anything good to compensate for what my grandfather have done during the War, his contribution to the Japanese ... He went to prison for the sake of assisting the Japanese troops. He was whipped on certain occasions. Knowing very well that he would be hanged. He did not eat anything. He was only chewing betel nut. When grandmother takes his food he was telling her that I won't survive, I won't live, so why should I eat, so he was living on betel nut.
0:34:05	[VS] When he was at Higaturu in the prison.
0:34:48	Mmm. Thank you ... I have been thinking about this. It is a concern for me as a leader. And I've been thinking about then I believe this right time for you to come in and interview me. I believe when you write up a book, it is going to help and expose to the world, so you know whatever assistance is needed to give to the province and the country, I believe that with this interview you'll be able to expose our history. So, the whole world will know that during the execution of the, you know the prisoners of War, he was the only survivor who supported Japanese during the War.
0:36:08	[VS] Thank you Mr Siembo. Now, I know when you were governor one of the things that you did, one point was to close the Kokoda track. Would you like to tell us a little around that decision?
0:36:45	Okay, why I closed the Kokoda track that time was, you know, I got information that there was some people making money out of Kokoda, while the entire province and the village peoples' lives was not helped at all after the War. As the council leader, we did more, our grandfathers did more to provide the support to the Australian troops, in return nothing was given back to the communities of my province. And that concern made me put stop on the track, so that both governments will consider helping our people. After they're closer there was, you know good responses from both Australian government and I am very you know, thankful of what has happened. We have the Trekking in place. And all the fees are paid in Australia with Australian dollars. And the people all on the Track are benefiting more and, you know as a former governor I am happy to see what is happening now.

0:40:07	I am thankful to the government of Australia, because after that we have funded lots of bigger projects, and right now on the ground, like our bridges are funded by AusAID so I am very thankful of them. But, as for the Japanese government they are not doing anything for our province, as more manpower and support during the War was provided by the people of Northern Province, Oro Province. The Japanese government should now try to support our government to you know, help, fund projects in our province.
0:41:29	Okay, after that when I was in the province's governor the more people came forward to me with different stories of War crimes caused by Australians or Japanese troops. And they've lots of stories that they have, you know, reported through my office. Most of the information and those stories were given to you yesterday; I believe you have written them down in your book.
0:42:11	[VS] We have some written notes but if you would like to share any for the recording you can certainly do so.
0:42:40	There were two ladies from Kiarota, a village called Kiarota, and the village was from the north Isivita. There were in prison at Kokoda, two sisters. They were released when the War broke out and the Japanese landed Buna. They released two of these prisoners at Kokoda. When they were released from Kokoda prison these two ladies walked towards the village back to, and on their way they met a man called Samby, he was a village police, a village constable. And he asked them 'where are you from'. They said 'we are from Isivita'. So, the village constable said I am a lucky man he said, I am gonna have both of you as my wives. He married these two ladies.
0:45:40	That morning the two wives went to the garden, while the husband Samby was, he had his washing done by creek, and he was combing his hair with the mirror he was holding. The two wives were baking banana over the open fire. While he was combing his hair, he saw the Japanese come in on the rear side of his head, using the mirror, so when he saw, got sight of them, he just picked up his single shot, shot gun, and he went to hiding and left his two wives behind. When the husband was gone, Japanese troops came and surrounded the two women. In an event, Japanese troops took control of the two ladies and they were in a process to rape them, but they have a very good build, and they were very tough ladies. So, they fought against the Japanese troops. So, when they saw that these ladies are very tough, they took them to the nearby tree stump and they chopped off their fingers. And they were powerless. So, they threatened them if you move we will kill you, so the ladies gave themselves up to the Japanese troops.
0:48:34	The troop that got these two ladies all had chance in raping the two ladies. When the two ladies were raped they were unable to move. All their hip joints and all the what was really torn apart, and they could not – their husband came in the night, and carried them back. And he has to nurse them both. The women recovered from all the, you know pain that they got. But, after that these two ladies were barren they could not have any child. Okay, after the War, Samby took the two ladies back to the village, and took them to the government station at Higaturu, and released the two ladies to their relatives. And these two ladies stayed and remarried to their own local boys. One unfortunate thing that, when they remarried their husbands know about the story of how they have been raped. So, they, you know keep reminding the husbands to abuse their wives, they burst them up. They don't look

	after them properly because they know that, you know so many men have raped them. So, that was a lifetime pain for the two victims.
0:52:02	When I was a governor in the province, those ladies who were victimised, those victims, came to my office to the governor's office and told me what has happened to them. And they showed me the casts on their body and the missing figures, I witnessed that. I was so upset and so emotional and I paid an expatriate Filipino to do a video clip for the victims. But unfortunately this Filipino guy died and I lost everything, and the victims also passed away. I am very, very thankful for you, your presence here, yes I believe that you will be able to expose this. So, in the future you will probably know that, you know this has happened to those women and report it.
0:54:11	Okay, this is another account of two women, apart from the first ones that I have said. And this is for two ladies at our neighbour village, Vaseta village. Similar event was happened at Vaseta village, just our neighbour village. When the Japanese troops arrived, the whole village dispersed, and two ladies very unfortunately, they were unlucky, as they had been captured by the Japanese troops. This time a number of the soldiers were very large and huge, these two ladies cannot, you know move because they were raped by a big group of soldiers. The Japanese troops led the ladies to the nearby creek and told them to wash down. They washed their genital area. And they had chanced to rape the two ladies.
0:57:14	The two ladies were repeatedly raped, and in the process they were unable to walk, they were torn apart, and they could not even release the two ladies, they kept on doing it. And the villagers found it hard to get them out. So what they did, they had to kill a pig and took it to the Japanese troop, so they can let the two ladies go. So, the villagers took the pig and went and paid the Japanese troops, and they carried the two ladies and took them. These two ladies, it took them too many years to recover, because all the joints were dislocated. And it just took too many years for them to recover from this terrible thing.
0:59:22	One of the victims was very clever and she preserved one of the covers of that soap, they used to do the wash down, and it is an evidence, I saw it, and she passed on to the next generations, they are keeping that cover of that soap, and this is an evidence. The cover of the soap is still with the children and the grand children, and they have said to bring it to me to view it. And my brother's wife, has a brother in law, has been an offspring from the Japanese about he still here. He died, he passed away.
01:01:00	[VS] A child born by one of the two women.
01:01:02	Yeah, and died.
01:01:32	Okay, like what happened to the two ladies released from Kokoda prison, when one of the victims got married to a village man, neighbour, he treats her very badly, because of, you know he already heard how Japanese treated the woman. Seen actually seen the child born from the Japanese blood, he, you know, was abusing the wife in her life time. I beg a pardon, they were nearly married and the child came out of the Japanese blood, so the Papuan guy is not happy. He keeps beating the wife. So, that is how, you know, the woman suffered during the War and after the War.
01:03:13	Okay, that is the end of the second story that I gave about Waseta ladies. And this time, when I was a governor a story told about Siremi, down at the coast. At Joroba,

	Joroba was a place where the Australians and Americans were based, and there was a place called Siremi. In that village the girls carry fruits every morning to exchange for food and money and whatever. When the girls were going to sell the products, the fruits, to the Americans, there was a truck loaded of American troops that were going. Among the girls who were carrying the fruits were one young girl, and she was disabled, with hip joint, or something. As the girls were carrying the fruits on their baskets and dish and they were heading to Americans' base, the truck load of soldiers were going down towards the coast. And you know, War time, and men decide, so while the truck was still, you know moving, the soldiers jumped of the truck and they were trying to, you know grab those girls who were going to sell their products.
01:06:37	When the able-bodied girls saw the soldiers, you know running towards them, they threw all their fruits baskets and they were running away, and they left the disabled one behind. So, the disabled one, was unfortunately she could not run, so she had to go and hide herself in the grass. Well, those who were able to run they went for their life, while the disabled one was pulled out. They took her out. The disabled one was raped by the whole soldiers on that vehicle that they were travelling [on]. And she was really, you know torn apart, you know, she could not move. The ants were enjoying the blood that spilled out from her.
01:08:21	So, when the girls returned home and the disabled one did not come. The parents asked what happened to the girl. And they told them that they ran away from the soldiers and they left her behind, so you know what might happen to the girl, they were not sure. When they traced up this, went to the site, and saw that the girl was unconscious, and they had to carry her back to the village. And after this it took too many years for the lady to recover from that terrible ...
01:09:43	And, when I was a governor the lady herself came to report what has happened, and she told me that I was raped by the soldiers, and you know soldiers, American soldiers had, you know oversize, you know, sex organs, and they destroyed me good and proper. I am coming to report; you know what has happened to me. It is like funny to us but you know, it is a very sad thing that she was raped against her will. The victim has told me that you know, I was not treated, you know in a good way. And I see young girls, you know, want to go on prostitution and all these, that they have to wait till the Americans will come back, and they will try Americans.
01:11:42	That victim only had one daughter named Georgina. The daughter left the home to stay in town, and the mother was upset, she had to follow the daughter to Popondetta town, and she told her that, 'if you want to go into prostitution, just wait for Americans to come. I had my turn, and if you want to do that, just wait for Americans'. Plainly she said, in a very big crowd. So, that is our account of what has happened to women in our province. There are lots of hidden stories that haven't come out, but those are some of the accounts when I was a governor, they came out to report that through.
01:13:25	[VS] Thank you Mr Siembo for sharing your story and Mr Cecil Siembo thank you for your role in facilitating that.
01:13:34	Thank you.
01:13:35	[VS] All right, thank you both.

