

HISTORY OF FIJIInvestigator: Miliana. RInformant: Sailasa Rakaucoka.....Korovisilou, Serua

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MEMORIES OF LAST WAR (1939)
TOPIC: HISTORY OF FIJI IN THE OLDEN DAYS.

ACTUAL

- I would like to talk about old times that we came in the nineteen thirtynine. During this time the second world war begun. By this time my age was twenty-nine years old. Also the same time my two brothers have join the army, and I was the only one left in the family because I have to look after my parents because I am the youngest in the family. From this time then the chief of Fiji call all the young men of Fiji who wants to join the army can come. But these group of soldiers they are different from the others. They are called the Qorilla, of Fiji. But the people does not what was the meaning of the name of those group. Also the people can not tell what do these have to do. They were only wanted by the chief of Fiji at that time in which he was called the Turaga Talai, it means like he is the kind of person like the Queen that he can give orders. But for these group of soldiers they have to go to the place where the people are fighting each other. And these people they have been trying to conquer all the islands of

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- the pacific. So in the year nineteen fortyone then some of our boys in Serua we went and join the army. So the person who is talking to you at this hour is one of them. So we occupy the island of Serua like the camp for the army, and this camp is only for this kind of soldiers called themselves the Qorilla. It was after awhile then some other soldiers came and join us. And some of them was the school teachers, and so we were camping on the island of Serua. One of us is the member of the Cabinet today. So from quite a while then the chief of Fiji realise that the school children does not have enough teachers. So they were told to go back to school. And one of these teachers is Vilimoni, so I was chosen to take his place. So we stayed until three months. Then one day I was told that I have to go to my parents and tell them that I have to join those armies who are camping at Kalokolevu. And so I went one day then I told my parents the message which I have to deliver. So my parents agreed to the decision of the chief and so I went back to the camp and I tell my leader. But from that time my parents were staying alone because all of us have join the army. So we went to Kalokolevu and join the army there and so were there for training like soldiers. And so we were camping over there because we have to train ourselves like good soldiers, and be very strong. Even though it was very hot but we have to face it because we have make use to it.

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- We have to stay right inside the interior where there is no grass, notrees like an open place, because we have to make sure that we know what we have to do in that kind of place. Even if it is raining at all times still we stay there. At this time the people from the middleeast have been trying to take over the Solomon Islands. So we kept on training until the time our leader felt that we are strong enough. But from the time we join the army nobody tell us whats going to happen or do we have to go somewhere or do we have to join any other group. We don't know anything about it. We were doing this because it was the word from our chief so we have follow it no matter what will happen we never know as long as we are obeying our chief and thats it. Sometimes when we have to come to the big bushes then we felt that somebody is looking at us, that they are the leader of the army that they hide in the bush in order to see what we are doing. But sometimes when we don't do well then we get shock when we heard that a voice from the big bushes, but when we looked we could not see anybody, because they cover themselves with green leaves. So we have to carry on doing our training until the time our leader tell us to stop then we stop, otherwise we still have to carry on. Also at this time of our training everyday we must receive an injection because they are trying to preventus from getting any kind of sickness or any kind of desiease. So we kept

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- on doing our duties that we are told to do so . So we are very hounored that we have been chosen to do this kind work. We really enjoyed our training. After a long time fo training then we told that we have to go to Suva to have a look around. And we were very happy about it because we know that this time we are able to go and enjoy ourselves. So we prepared ourselves and off we went, and we reach Suva then we waited until we were told what time do we have to come back.

The place of general post office today was before the biggest camping ground fo the army. Then we were told that by ten oclock we have to come back because we have to go back to Kalokolevu, or may be we going to shift to another ground. And so went through but it was too bad that we are not allow to touch any alcohol. Because at that time it was the time of Colony. And so went through the town but it was not so good. The soldiers from New Zealand they camped at two miles. But we the group who came from Kalokolevu we wore different uniformas altogether, that it is very special.

But I can also tell you that those young boys who are joining the army nowadays they do not really realise how it was during that time, because they just only go and try to persuade the people not to do any killing in Lebanono as well as in Sinami. But before we have to face the hungry faces of the Japanese, and we have to fight with them. With our uniforms that always carry around our small knife tied to our belt, and our food just have to hang on to the belt also.

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- And so we were just loafing around the place we never know what's happening. By the time we have to go back to the boat then we realise that something has been occurred. And the message has been delivered that we have to go at that night and nobody must know about our leaving the place. Even us we never know about anything. This is because mainly that they do not want anybody to know of our leaving, otherwise it can be a problem. And so we went back to Kalokolevu because we have to shift at that night that was the first message delivered to us. So we went and we have to prepare our things so that we are ready in time. So when we just prepared our things then one big truck arrived at the same time. When we looked like this then we saw the carton of beer inside the truck. But we only know that we are not allowed to touch any alcohol. Then after a while then our leader told us today is a big day that we are going to drink beer. And we were very happy about it because we know that now we can taste the alcohol. And so drank up to the most and we really had it. Most of us really drunk because it was quite a long time that we do not taste anything like that. So by the time we had it then we were being placed into the lorry, without us feeling anything. Because we were really drunk then some of us went off to sleep the same time that is why we never feel anything is happening. When all of us was inside the lorry then off we came to the place where the Suva market is because it was the place where the biggest camp is being sited. And so were shaken by the driver that we have to get

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- up because we have to go somewhere. Then we just wake up but we thought we were at Lautoka but we never know that it was the biggest camp for the army in Suva. But the place we have to go is the place for the navy, which it is near to the wharf. In this place it is forbidden by any other person to go through there. They got the main gate there that nobody can go there without any card. All this place I am talking about is the place for the army camp and the navy. And so went the same time we arrive there, for those people were working there they were told to go and drink grog very far away at another place. So nobody was at the wharf at that time that they have gone to the place it was told to them. They will have stay there until one hour and they can come back to their working place. So we came to the main gate and it was about nine o'clock at night.

When we enter the main entrance then we realise that it is a different place altogether. And when we looked up then we saw that it was the leader of the army who is standing there and beside him is Ratu Sukuna and another leader of the army. The same time our drunken sign finished at that time because we feel that this is something. And so we stand in one line then we stood still and face them. Then after that then Ratu Sukuna have to give his speech to us, saying that it was a very good idea to develop a group of soldiers in Fiji, that now we have those group who have to built houses, those who have to guard the land, and from those who

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- have to guard the interior and for those who have to guard the highlands and for those who have to guard the coast and the sea. So from all having these group of soldiers that I know that we can make a very good soldiers in Fiji. So I ask the Commander if he could a chance for us to train some fiji soldiers to go and fight, and that is why you are here in front of me. And so the commander agreed to the discussion then we train you people to get enough courage and enough power that can make a good fighter. And I Have chosen you people to be my soldiers that you will go and fight in the name of your country. Before I go on I will have to ask you, if anyone of you standing here feel that he is not suppose to go please do take one step forward. If you feel that the village will be very angry that you are going somewhere else please do step forward. If one of you feel that your parents won't pleased that you are very far away from them may be they will miss you please do step forward. After three minutes then he repeat the same thing then he keep on saying it until three times to all of us. Then after still nobody wanted to take a step forward then we realise that the chief is crying apart from his voice we can tell. Then after awhile then he continue okay that nobody want to go back so that means that you have built your mind that you are going no matter what happen. Even us who were standing there we don't feel like going back because we are going to take the name of our country.

- As I have to tell you our country Fiji is a very good country. Even the Queen tell me you have to protect your country very well, also she told me that I should got every group of the soldiers. So I am telling you when you are going to leave Fiji it does not mean that you have to forgot about your country no, you have to bear in mind that you are fighting under the name of your country. If you come back with a good mark then I will tell that all the soldiers of Fiji will have to go. But if you come back with a bad mark then it is the first and the last that the Fiji soldiers have to go. So we went straight to the rooms which we had been shown for us to occupy, when we reach for our bed then we went to sleep straight away. And so we were slept by then when we wake up in the morning then we realise that we have went pass Beqa. So we know that we are going, then we went down and pass Kadavu island then we moved on. The name of the big ship we came by is Tawamaca, it is a cruise ship which it always take the tourist around, so the colour have changed because it have to be used to take the soldiers. And this big ship the Tawamaca is from America. So then we reached Lautoka and we stop there then the leader told us that five Fijians should be leaden by one white soldier. If one of you want to go to the toilet you have to go altogether, so that no one can run away. Even Lautoka was already crowed with soldiers, so went over to Lautoka then I ask if I could go and see one of my cousin at Lautoka. So I went to Namoli and see my cousin there and I came back. At four o'clock in the afternoon we have to go

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- back to the ship and we have to move on. When we arrive at the ship then one of our leader came over and ask us if one of us have bring any yaqona, then no one said anything. So we went over because the leader told us that we have to go back and buy the grog. Even the leader told us that we Fijian boys have to get the grog wherever you go. So the leader ask us if one of us know anyone at Namoli, then they all said that it is me whom I got a cousin over there. So the leader told me to take the lead that they will come later and also I have to ask for chief of the village of Namoli. And so I went but the same day the people of the village were doing a village occassion to those from Yasawa who came and built there house. So the house was finished then they have to do the feast for them and some entertainments. And so I went to Namoli when I arrive there I see that this people they were very busy entertaining the young people who came and built the house. Then one of them came and I ask him if I could see their chief. Then the man said oh yes, we can and see his son he can tell the whereabouts of his father. And so we went and this man went inside and talk to the chief's son. And he said that one soldier is standing outside and he wants to see the chief. Then the chief's son said see thats what the soldiers always do, whenever got drunk then they came and take our young girls. He does not come to see my father he came to take the girl of this village. Come we go and fight him then they came outside at one time towards me. Then I told

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- them look I don't come here to fight or to take your girl.

I only came because my leader told me and see your chief.

Then the people of Namoli still say no, but the same time I looked then I saw my leader and some of the soldiers were coming with him. Then I told them look here comes my leader, and so he came forward and ask me what happen. Then I told my leader that this people think that I came to take their girl. So the leader by hearing that message then he got angry.

Then he told the people if you are going to do something to this man then I will order that big ship in the sea to shot at this villages of Lautoka. Don't you know that I am taking this man to fight for your country, in which he was not suppose to tell it. Then the people realise that is was their fault then they said fi they can go inside the house. So they went there and presented their yaqona of Bulubulu to the leader of the soldiers and even to me also. Then after that they prepared one gift for them and it was a very big Tanoa with twelve legs. Then the chief of Namoli presented the gift to them implying that it is the gift from all the people of Fiji not only us at Namoli. If you did have enough time we could prepare a very traditional ceremony for you before you leave, but as you have said that you have not enought time thats is we are just giving this gift the Tanoa for you to use it.

And so we brought the yaqona which was eight pounds altogether plus the Tanoa. So we came back to the ship then from then on another gorup of American soldiers have to come aboard. And it was one thousand five hundred soldiers altogether.

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- For that Tanoa which was given to us as a gift is now at our head quarter in New Zealand and all our names are written on it. And we took it to the Solomons then we use it there without any damage happen to it until today. It was night time when we went off to sleep then we feel that the ship is moving then we know that are leaving Fiji at this time. We were twentyfour fijians soldiers and the rest were Americans and New Zealanders and so we went and we reach which we have to go. It was told that we can hardly see anything because it is only the black smoke of the guns and weapons. So we arrive at Villa, which it is only part near enough to the Solomon that the Japanese have not occupied. But all the other parts they have been taken by the Japanese. At this place at Villa you cannot step on the water you can just step from another navy ship to the other and also the sub-marine plenty of it which I cannot tell. This is the place where the leader of each division have decide to fight against the Japanese. Also the Americans came to that place so that they can fight against the Japanese to stop them from going right down to Fiji. And so they stayed there for awhile and we rest and prepare our materials. But what the Japanese wanted that they want to conquer Fiji also so that it will be easier for them to go right down to Australia and New Zealand. It means that he is planing that Fiji should be a very good base for him and from there he can send his army to fight with the other country. These is what the Japanese are aiming at and are really trying to get it.

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- They were two groups one is the Japanese and the other group is the Germans. But this Germans stayed at Europe that he will fight there only the Japanese said alright I will try and conquer the pacific. So they were divide like that and that is why the Japanese have to come down to the pacific. And so by coming down to the pacific they have to conquer all the island there. Even in Fiji at that time they do not have to light their light afte six o'clock, because it is being frighten that the Japanese might come and bomb the country. Even also nobody should light a fire to make the black smoke thutthe Japanese will have to see it. During that time the people of Fiji they are vry frighten about this that they think something might happen. If the aeroplane only are allowed or two hours to come and re-oiled the flight. Even alo for the aeroplane they only meet at the air space and they fight there. They never come to the land and fight there they njust meet at the air space and fight. So we have to go there in this ship, so when we go there then we realise that there is one navy ship infront and one at the back and the two the sub-marines on each side also. At day time we could not see this navy ship because they are very far away, only at night time then they get closer to the main ship. It is their work to guard this big ship who is taking one thousand fivehundred soldiers. Then we arrive at Port Kanal it is the only place which is a little bit of space not occupied by the Japanese. Even though they Have not occupied the place but we still can see the firing of guns flying around over our head.

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- So we have to go in the kind of small boat called the Barge. The entrance in the front of this boat when it is open every body can run out from it just to make it easier. So four Barge was taking the soldiers to the land, and when we reach the land we have to go do right down to the hole. So from this four Barge altogether only two were survive to reach the leand. The other two was dropped out from the sea. So as soon as we reach the land then we have to run for our life to the hole. Then we ran into the hole then when we reach there then we realise that some people are staying inside the hole, then we looked like this then we see the dinning rooms, the kitchen that the people at that time they built their house underground, they do not live in the surface area. And so when we reach the hole then they ask us are you from Fiji then we say yes we are fijians, then they gave us food and tea and they told us to rest for awhile. It is really a very dangerous time because we have seen the flying of the machine guns everywhere. And so we stayed there until after one hour thirty-minutes then we saw three big man they were coming towards us. Then when we looked we know that this man is different, then he ask us if we are from Fiji. Then we said yes we are from Fiji, alright I have come to take you to the place have been chosen for you to stay. Then off we went with these three big man. We went in one truck and we only see the flying of the objects comparing to the rice field you can see it when it is very windy the rice palct are moving like hell. The place where it is forbidden to anyone to enter it is not very far

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- So we reached the place which is being chosen for us to camped there. It is this place where the Japanese soldiers are firing which never stop at anytime. And so we get off there then we listen to the commander what do we have to do. You can not see any house or anybody to around the place not at all. And we are told when we get off like this we have to dig our hole in order to protect ourselves from getting any wound. Because if you are going to stay at the surface then it is too bad that you are going to be killed. So in order to protect ourself you have to dig your hole and hide there. Then our mind came back to the speech made by Ratu Sukuna that he said that we are going to die then it is the first and the last fiji soldier to go. But if you are going to do well then I tell you all the Fiji soldiers will come there. We get off at the place then we can see this roll of barb wire in which I can't tell how does it move that it really move very fast. So on the twentysecond of December then we think back of Fiji, that on the twentythird we still there at the war ground. After one week during our stay there then we realise that the sound of the guns is getting far away from us. And on the second week then we know may be they are shifting back. So we were able to built our house and also we were able to dig our hole. On the next morning then we know that it is the christmas day in fiji. then our leader said during tea time I want you to come here so that we can have one bowl of grog each. Then when I ring another bell that means that you have to go back to your place.

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- So at ten o'clock we came for our grog but before we drink any grog, then we saw that three other big man ~~are~~ coming towards us. So we stand still and waited, during the war the big high standard in the army does have to wear their medals or their star because they might try to kill them first. We just have to wear the same uniform. And accompany then one of our leaders, then he told us now you have seen me before and he explained to use who are those two fellows. They have come at this moment because they have to take three Fiji soldiers to go with them. We look at each other we think who is going to be the frist three to go. So we did not have any grog because we have to leave the same time, but we are only happy becausewe are doing our dutiês according to the order from our chief. So the first name was announced was may name, and the second one was Tui from Beqa then the third one was Matereti from Gau. So we have to go in the truck which was waiting to take us. Before we leave then our leader imply again before you boys leave if you wants any message to pass to your parents to your frieads please go to the head-
quater and leave it there. If you want to leave the gift for them then do so, but we do not want to leave anything so went. Because we Fijian we beleived its only when you know that you are going to die, so we shake hands with the other fiji soldiers then we have to move. And so have to go in the lorry and drop us to the place. So we arrive then we were told that we have to lead the American soldiers in order to climb the

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- Japanese hospital, which is covered with rocks and green leaves. It is quite a very big one that it started from the sea shore until it reach the highlands. So in here you can take any kind of weapon you want to use and also the amount you want to take it is up to you. For you bullets you can take any amount of any kind, then our food were just a very light food like biscuit so that we can carry it around. Also everything was provide for our meals, and it is said four o'clock in the morning that we have climb the hospital. In here ther may be nearly thousand wounded Japanese soldiers are in there, so we have to try and destroy it. So the map was shown to us which way we have to follow. So early in the morning we have to walk from our place towards this place. And so we have to go in one line and I was chosen to take the lead, then my friend from Gau then our friend from Beqa then the American soldiers behind us. In here it is up to us how do we have to go, do we have to go fast or do we have to go slowly. And also we have to look well so that nothing happen to us. Everything was given to us that we have to take, our weapon, our food and all the things we need like first aid kits we have to take along with us. So we have to make sure that we have enought for this materials because there is no time to come back get what we need. Once you are going to the war ground then you have to take the weapon at any amount of nay kind, and also the bullets.

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- And so we have to leave and we have to go and we have to walk down. Then we across one small stream then we carry on with our journey to fighting area. But one of the kind of soldiers they have is that they called themselves the 'Snap' they are very good fighter and they aim the right shot. They never fail when they give a shot then thats it. And these people always climb right at the top of the tree, and they covered themselves with green leaves and they are really smart people. Even the kind of gun they use is that it does not give a loud sound like we are using today. The kind of gun they got is a small kind and when they shot like this we can only feel that something fly above our head and the sooner the better we have to cover ourselves. They climb at that tree for three days they got their food with them, nevermine it is rain or what they going to stay there. Then on our way when we come under a big tree, then I told them okay we rest for awhile. So I was just about to hang my gun on the brunch then I feel that something just fly over my shoulder. Then I dive the same time it apply also to the Americans that they hâde themselves. But this snap here were keep on firing his gun then I hide under the big piece of wood, until I reach the stream then I jump on to the water. But after awhile then I climb up again and join th group. But for that 'snap' if he did not fire at me he can be alive, just because he wants to get rid of me but he did not get me was shot by them. And so were able to conclude

- our task which was given to us. We were still there then the message was being passed to us that our chief will be arriving today. And we were very afraid that something might happen to him because he come at wrong time and it was a very hard time for them. Then so we were told to go the airport to wait for him and also the American soldiers were there. So when Ratu Sukuna arrive at the airport, even some of the Solomon's were ther but they think that it might be the white man. So then every soldier taking part have to get ready and stay attention. So we perfomed the guard of hounor and then the Solomon people realise that it is the man from Fiji because he is black'. Then they said one prase: 'skin mai black' but inside white ', which meaning the skin is black but his feeling is white. Then after that we do a yaqona ceremony for him then he gave us a speech. Now I am here and I am very much delighted that we have good soldiers in Fji, as I have told you already that if you going to have good mark then all the soldier from Fiji will have to come here just this month. But if were going to have bad mark then this is the first and the last for any Fiji soldier to come here. Now we have come to know why I have come here for, I have come because of your good leadership and very good fighter and it have announced around the world that you boys smell the Japanese, it is when you smell the Vono then you know that is the Japanese and it never fails. I ami very happy about that, now I have come to take you back to Fiji.

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- So we were told to wait for the ship and we have to go with some of the wounded soldier. And so we have to go then but it was a really bad time because whenever some of them died then they just have to wrapped them and they have to be thrown to the sea. And so it happen to some of the soldiers which they were badly wounded. And so went on day and night the ship were just moving and it is something funny also that we even the passengers did not know which place the ship is taking us. Then we just sit down and wait only the captain of the ship know which place we have to go. Then it was after a while then we saw a very dry place then we thought that we were lucky that we are now able to see Australia. And so kept on saying look this is Australia who is there on the horizon. Then when I came up then I saw that it was the stream from the Sigatoka river then I told the people that it is Sigatoka look at that that is Maumi, then the people realise oh yes it is right that is Sigatoka river and that is Maumi. So all of us were very happy about it because now we know that we are saved. And we came past Yanuca then we were on our way to the Suva wharf. But the story about the war I won't tell you because it was really a hard time and it was a very hard time for us, because people were just killing each other and we really get frighten by the look of killing that it just like animal. That people are just killing from this side to that side then we have to take it because it is during the war.

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- And so came over to our camp which have been shown to us, that at that time our camp was at Nasese. And so we went there, and the the message was sent to us that we have to come and see our chief. And so we went there when we arrive at the residence then Lady Maraia told us that we have to go straight down to the office that he is waiting for us there. And we went and when we arrive there the we realise that the people were waiting for us. That nobody in that day do his work, that it was the order from the head that they have to do the ceremony to those who have just returned from Solomon Is land so you have to come also so that you can hear some stories from them, and so we present our Sevusevu then the people presented their Qaloqalovi. Then after that we telling stories to them in which they could like to hear about and they were very happy they did not know either the time we went, because nobody talk about it. Now we have come back they are very happy to see them again. Then the chief told them he is going to give them twenty-eight days leave, in this leave they have to go and find their wives because they are more powerful then anyone. But if they could not marry any woman they have to come back so that I will have to give another twenty-eight days leaves again. And so we went and find wives and lived happy ever after.
- Thank you very much for the story you have said.

T H E E N D