

Brokenville

Leonard
Fong Roka



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DEDICATION

To my father, the late John Roka, who was killed on 18 March 1993 by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and to my mother, Therese Pokamari, who cared for me throughout the sorrowful and hopeless days of my early Bougainville life.

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I owe much to the crisis on Bougainville that began in 1988. It made me who I am and gave me experiences worth telling to younger generations. The people who were around me throughout the conflict and the places where events occurred are the things that have made *Brokenville*.

I also should mention the Panguna's Upper Tailings Landowners Association office in Arawa and thank Camillus Kabui and Francis Nazia for letting me use the office from October 2013 through to January 2014 to complete the final chapters of this book.

And lastly a lot of thanks to Phil Fitzpatrick for making this book possible and my friend Keith Jackson and the *PNG Attitude* blog for all the time and space to let me tell my Bougainville stories.

Thank you also dear reader for taking the time to read my book.

FOREWORD

NEVER HAS A war, so unique in its geographical proximity and ferocity, attracted so little empirical attention. Of course, much has been written in academic forums about the Bougainville conflict, but rarely are these works based on primary sources, or indeed rich lived experience. As a result, to this day, an epic event seared in the memory of the South Pacific remains obscure.

Yet vivid memories and insightful analyses frequently circulate on Bougainville itself, insights in great need of formal recording, so that we can collectively participate in a process of learning and understanding. But telling the history of this important Melanesian struggle is difficult, only those rare few with a deep reservoir of relevant cultural knowledge are astutely positioned to talk about the war on Bougainville and its foreboding human consequences.

That said, there have been several commendable attempts to date. For example, former rebel and President of Bougainville, James Tanis, a commanding intellectual in his own right, has written several articles, each of which offers a rare insight into the conflict, and its origins.

On the other side of the fence is Yauka Aluambo Liria, a Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) soldier, who penned a celebrated and insightful account of the government's counterinsurgency operations.

Others have had their memories recorded in important edited collections such as *Mothers of the Land: The Birth of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom*.

But what we are so sorely in need of are more accounts written by those 'everyday' actors caught in the whirlpool of events that emerged on Bougainville during 1988-90, ordinary people who had to grapple with complex circumstances well out of their control, and make sense of a rapidly changing situation.

Leonard Fong Roka represents a rare entity in this respect. Leonard first established himself as a talented scribe who told the story of others. On his celebrated blog posts, Leonard tirelessly recorded the memories of elders who had endured immense loss during the conflict, opening up to the world unseen stories of struggle and survival, which few to this day know properly. But in Leonard's cathartic narrative, there are never victims, only a resilient and proud people, who endured the extremities of war, but came through the other end with their pride and culture intact.

Now in *Brokenville* Leonard has moved on to document his own story, which is invariably also the story of the conflict, its complex fault lines, its barbarity, and the courage of everyday people who survived a decade of fighting.

Foreword

First and foremost this volume is a majestic personal narrative. But, equally, it is rich in historical detail. While many of the events recounted in *Brokenville* were seen through a child's eyes, this was a child mature beyond his years, made mature by the epic events that were occurring around him.

To this end, *Brokenville* has all the hallmarks we have come to expect of Leonard Fong Roka. His accounts of events are written in meticulous detail by a person with the cultural knowledge to explore their multidimensional meanings. Leonard's voice is also honest and reflective. He is both a commentator *and* an actor – neither side of the coin is left absent in this account.

Many different dimensions of this book are praiseworthy.

For instance, Leonard captures in intimate detail the moment of rupture in 1988-89, and the deeply racialised tensions that emerged. He also recounts with rare detail, some of the brutal PNGDF atrocities, which had the effect of pitching Bougainvilleans against Papua New Guineans. Through these intimate accounts, one gets a sense – as much as one can without being there – of the deep fear and insecurity unleashed on the island by the armed forces. Village burnings, extra-judicial killings, and torture were commonplace. Leonard bares testament to this.

Equally shocking, is the complicit role played by Bougainville Copper Limited, a fact which they, to this day, contest. Leonard remembers otherwise.

Nevertheless, this is not a one sided narrative or 'BRA propaganda' as the Australian media pundits might pejoratively put it, as they did with so many civilian accounts published during the war.

Leonard also captures with penetrating detail the petty criminality that emerged in areas under BRA control, and the often vicious tactics used by the rebel forces to 'deal' with those suspected of conspiring with the PNG state.

In the book's most heart wrenching chapter, Leonard recounts how his father died at the hands of the rebels. Only a writer of Leonard's calibre could have relayed a personal story of such profound loss, with unflinching realism.

Brokenville is a window into a boy (now a man), a family, a conflict, a people, and a struggle.

Other windows, different windows, of course exist and need to be written in equally exquisite detail.

In this respect, Leonard is a pioneer and has lit a flame I hope other aspiring writers on Bougainville will contribute to in time. Indeed, if *Brokenville* is an indication of the talent shared more widely by a new generation of Bougainvillean scholars, writers and leaders, things are looking up.

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1
RUMOURS OF FIGHTING IN THE
HILLS

IT WAS A September day in 1988, as I recall, just after returning from our third term break, that my papa gave me a slapping across the back in the Our Lady of Mercy Church conference room. We were residing on the church grounds because he was an Arawa Parish catechist.

It was a punishment for roaming around Arawa with my friend, Jeffery Aba from Panguna and our little 'bicycle-and-marble' gang of all-Bougainvillean students from Sections 35 and 37.

I gave a self-pitying squeal and shed tears and for a week avoided my gang of brothers, Jeffery Aba from Damara, Leonard Bobola from Pakia and Russell Teona from Poaru (he was a student at Tupukas Community School).

In school I also distanced myself from Jeffery because he knew I had been punished, as he was too. This was possible because he was in Grade 2A and I was in 2B. Our other Bougainvillean brothers in Grade 2B with me, Lawrence Tane and Stanley Sirosis, who were cousins from Pidia, during that 'week of guilt' were regularly joking, 'What's wrong

with the great Panguna alliance? You are all acting so strange to each other'.

But one day we told Lawrence Tane, who, although not part of our gang, dwelled in Section 13, what had happened and that we were being punished. Lawrence was our 'Iron Man' because he had the natural ability of demoralizing New Guinean kids to tears whenever they threatened us. The brothers just laughed and we joked about it as we marched out of the gate.

But our gang was intact and active. One afternoon, after this slap-in-the-face we arranged a street fight with a bunch of Kaperia Community School kids on the Arawa General Hospital lawns. At the moment of starting the first bout patrolling armed policemen spotted us and shouted at us so we dispersed.

The Kaperia mob went off but we gathered in front of the Arawa Town House flats and then moved to the town's public library and University of Papua New Guinea study centre across the road to steal Malay apples. Both places were protected by the Arawa Town Authority (ATA).

Like parrots we were up there singing and gobbling the juicy fruit in the lower branches of the tree. A stream of minutes passed before our common foe bloomed with burning rage. A lawn slashing tractor, driven by a New Guinean highlander, spotted us and signalled with his indicator lights his intention to enter the grounds, so we darted off!

Through the McKillop Gardens we ran and the machine sped behind on our tails. We made our way across the foot bridge over the magnificent McKillop Pond and headed for the northern Arawa High School fence line while the tractor came along the

banks of the pond dragging its pace.

As the machine made it to the front of the 'under-construction' government Tokunari Village housing block our escaping party was on the western fence some three hundred metres ahead and in the creek bordering Arawa High School and reaching Section 21, the Peter Lahis Community School twin soccer fields.

The creek was inaccessible to the machine and saved our arses from the punches and slaps we would have received from the aggressive ATA's New Guinean tractor driver.

Days faded with less and less to do for the gang but in the adult world there was much happening.

One day, a commotion unfolded down my row of desks among New Guinean male students. A son of a police officer, I remember only by his first name, Eliza, led the talking backed by others, like Joe Apa, another policeman's child.

'Police are fighting rascals behind those mountains up there', our Eliza said pointing towards the boulders of Taako in the Widoi cluster of villages situated kilometres away in the mountains south of Arawa.

We all listened. Not a word was uttered for we knew nothing; the police officer's children had the raw information thus the talking was theirs.

Even our teacher, Mrs. Waira from Buka, had little to say but also paid attention as the story dominated our 10 o'clock recess break away from the classroom.

As time dragged on the class gossips began to reveal that there was some fighting near the Aropa International Airport and policemen had been stoned with a few sustaining minor injuries and more police

were being deployed.

It was in this class sharing that one day I heard that the rascals were called 'Rambos'. A name I was familiar with from the movies I watched at home.

'Some are called Rambo 1, Rambo 2 and Tomato,' I overheard. I did not participate in the talk, nor did my other fellow Bougainvilleans.

Late that afternoon I asked my papa if he knew that there were some rascals called Rambos who were fighting with the policemen from the Police Barracks in Section 22 down the road from the Our Lady of Mercy Church.

Papa said nothing at first as he busied himself washing the church bus, Saint Christopher, with a stretched fire hose water sprinkler.

Later on he said that they were not rascals but militants. They want K10 billion from Bougainville Copper Limited for the destruction of the environment in the Panguna area. If not given what they want they said they will fight and kill the BCL workmen, especially the Redskin infiltrators.

Papa told me that the Rambos were also burning down buildings in Panguna. A good number of repeater stations that back the telephone services had also been burned he said. They want the Redskins out of the slums and the towns back to the place where they come from.

After gaining this information from Papa I began contributing to the daily classroom gossip. To add more authority to the stories I identified myself as hailing from Panguna and the hills from where the militants came.

Then one afternoon, as we were busy with our school work, an ambulance siren wailing from the

east of town approached our ears. Closer it came and then the sound headed towards the Arawa airstrip along the highway to the north. We all stood up to look at it across the Section 21 soccer field. With its red lights flashing it darted in front of the Tokunari Village alongside Arawa High School and made for the hospital.

‘Someone must be have been injured or killed by the Rambos at Kieta,’ someone said thoughtfully as we stared towards the air strip.

Our teacher ordered us to sit down and complete our class work and we did so but with the question ringing in our minds about who was in the crying ambulance.

Later on, with the rising of the militancy becoming a matter of discussion on the streets, I had to admit to some of my friends that the Rambos were from my home in Panguna.

As we were snailing home after school they started to hear more and I elaborated and exaggerated, often backed by Tane and a New Guinean Highlands boy named Jerry Pompore, who was transferred into our class from Panguna because of the militant’s activities.

Jeffery and I usually walked with the group as far as the Arawa General Hospital. The month of November was a merry month because December, the month to say goodbye to our desks, was dawning.

One day, sometimes laughing and sometimes serious about the events, we reached the main Arawa High School gates on the Marimari Road, that stretches from Section 4 on the western edges of town right to Section 22 in the east. Before us we watched as a yellow utility made it onto the foot path in front of the College of Distance Education Centre

(CoDE) building.

Following behind it was a Toyota Hilux loaded with armed riot police personnel. It parked next to a utility carrying indigenous people, mostly women and baskets of food.

'Olgeta kam daun. Lukluk lo wanem olsem ol longlong?
We heard and saw a bulky and short Redskin police man ordering the travellers off their transport using his rifle as a pointing and poking stick.

Our party halted our progress at the public vehicles' entry point into the Arawa General Hospital and watched. This did not bother the police so we were entertained for several minutes.

The police lined them all up and frisked them and every basket on the trailer was foraged into. A bag of *kaukau* was dropped on the concrete foot path and scattered purposefully to see what was inside.

There was great anger in the eyes of the Redskin policemen towards the Bougainvillean travellers so we left the scene and marched into the children's' clinic of the hospital to drink cold water. As we went one Bougainvillean was pummeled to the concrete pavement.

From a distance, as we played with the seesaws and swings of the Children's Clinic, we watched the police action.

After they were satisfied they let the Bougainvilleans go free. The yellow utility drove down towards the government's Tokunari Village while the police car left towards town.

Jeffery and I also left our companions for our area of town.

I remember then that I was in deep thought: why were the police so cruel?

Rumours of Fighting in the Hills

From my Papa's newspapers and his stories I had gleaned information about the attack on the popular BDC chopper; the burning of two BCL offices, Pink Palace and the Crystal Palace, and the stealing of explosives from the mine.

Also, there was the burning of the local airline, Bougair planes at Aropa; daily attacks on Redskins at Aropa plantation, the Aropa sawmill, the Aropa crusher and the Aropa vegetable farm. I also heard of ambushes and attacks on the police at the Lului Bridge and other places, the burning of the Buin Police station and the AEL Buin Supermarket. There were many more such stories and it was rumoured that the police were incapable of dealing with the incidents.

Maybe it was because of this that the police were cruel to the travellers I wondered as I left Jeffery to continue on his journey to his street, Singiri Street in Section 37.

2

VIOLENCE AND BLOOD ON THE STREETS OF ARAWA

JEFFERY STROLLED DOWN the road. Like me, he now believed we were the lost children of Bougainville, without a future.

For the 1989 school year, I and my little brother Justin were sent to dwell with our relative Michael Pariu in Section 14. From there, we walked to the Peter Lahis Community School every morning.

The rest of my family was concentrated in our little hamlet called Pomong in the Kupe Mountains. Justin and I were sent to live with Michael because travelling from the village to Arawa every day was getting risky.

During the recent January holidays Arawa's main water supply station near Rumba SDA mission had been burnt by the locals. For many of us the militants were becoming dangerous.

During the holidays they had also blown up power pylons at different locations along the port-mine access road. The first pylon went down at a location called Policeman Corner. The second one was blown

up at Waterfall Corner. They also had killed Mathew Kove from Guava, a man accused for a long time, with his cronies, of misappropriating landowner royalties.

Because of the growing violent reputation of the militant Rambos many people were living in constant fear and others, especially non-Bougainvilleans, were fleeing from Bougainville.

Papa quit his church activities when a friend of his, Martin Atobu from Damaosi village on the Arawa-Kupe road, called him to help work at the BCL Mananau piggery and poultry farm in the Nagovis area of South Bougainville. Many of his workers were resigning in fear and he was shorthanded.

During the uprising I saw many of our locals getting similar employment. Before the crisis the government and BCL would have ignored these people and not employed them. My papa also ushered others from Kupe to work at Mananau. Despite the fact that their education was poor BCL now employed them.

One day I witnessed a display of the fear and dread that was creeping through the spines of the people in the town. There was a sniper-style shoot out at the Morobe Camp behind Section 16, known locally as the Tongkuru slums. No one was killed but the terrified illegal New Guinean squatters attempted to counter attack and trailed up the Arawa-Kupe road but were driven back at the Rumba SDA mission.

As we were about to drive home some of our own

people suggested we wait for the PNG police, who had gone up to clear the road. Later on we drove home. No squatter settlers were seen on the road but we passed the armed police patrol at the Damaosi Road junction.

Beyond the Rumba junction, there were no police but armed locals, many of whom I was familiar with. They were fierce looking and armed with bush knives, axes, bows and arrows, a few shotguns and the now familiar Bougainvillean weapon locally known as the *pokat*, a spear-gun for fish utilized to shoot an arrow.

They were our own people and did nothing to us but only asked if we had seen the Redskin foreigners and their policemen.

Towards the end of our first 1989 school term the New Guinean students began announcing that their parents were planning to transfer them to where they originally came from across the sea. So one lunch time we were sitting debating the latest news in the war and their departure across the sea when something in the distance caught our attention.

There, just passing my old residence, the Our Lady of Mercy Church, was a convoy of three military vehicles. The largest was a camouflaged truck; in the centre was a BCL double-cab Toyota Hilux followed behind by a camouflaged Land Rover. All were laden with uniformed and armed to the teeth soldiers. All were New Guineans; Redskins, as we in Bougainville were used to calling them.

On the cabin roof of the leading truck a machine

gun was resting on its stand with the gunner firmly holding it while standing in the midst of the seated soldiers on the tray. For some reason, they were patrolling the Marimari Road, either towards Section 22 or the police barracks there.

I was shocked. I clearly remember that day in 1989; I never knew that there was an army anywhere in Papua New Guinea. All I knew about armies were the American soldiers fighting the Vietnamese in the movies. To me there was a place called America with a powerful army led by someone called Rambo.

This 'bunch' as our teacher was calling them, were the security forces that had come to fight the militants in the mountains and restore the peace.

I anticipated getting a more thorough look at them when they were returning but our teacher had us glued to our class activities. Our class's artist, Jeffery Mailau from the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea began drawing them in his exercise book.

Our community school kept classes going even as militant attacks increased. After our first term holidays in early March we heard stories about intermittent shoot outs and arson. We were told these were happening on the edges of town and in the mountains known as the Crown Prince Range. Undeterred, we kept steaming across the rough seas.

One by one our Redskin school mates began to leave us. A student from Rabaul in New Guinea and a neighbor of mine from Section 14 by the name of Thomas Erebu was the first to withdraw from our

class at the beginning of the second term in 1989.

He withdrew but was still around for a week as his family sorted themselves out.

So, after my first personal encounter with the PNGDF soldiers on the Tupukas Bridge, I came straight to him and some friends playing marbles under the shade of the gigantic Pikus tree in Wasa Street and revealed to him my story.

I and my brother Justin were marching down the sides of the SSQ flats after school when a double-cab BCL Toyota Hilux halted beside us. Following us for company was a taciturn New Guinean Highlands girl. The military men inside the vehicle smiled.

'Avinun. Piniis skul?' a uniformed soldier with a gun barrel protruding from near his chin greeted us.

I remember that we and our New Guinean escort hesitantly crooned a 'YES' that made the soldiers laugh.

Then, satisfied by our response, they handed us some of the popular BCL lunch parcels of meat and cheese croissants and drove away.

We dragged behind munching the miracle food.

On his last day on Bougainville I chatted with Thomas as his family packed. We took a hike as far as the Arawa Enterprises Limited supermarket (then the largest supermarket in PNG) with some other friends and back. The next morning when I woke up the house was empty; my classmate Thomas Erebu was gone.

My awareness of the unfolding conflict began to

take shape slowly from all these unwelcoming events. The moments that especially brought fears to me were the encounters with the government men. I did not fear the village men or the militants, as the rebels were now being regularly called by the media.

I did not fear the militants but I feared the New Guineans because every day the men in the village told us as we came to school to be careful of the foreigners. They are rascals, rapists and murderers they said. And of course we believed them, for the New Guinean's kids were always molesting us as we passed the edges of Arawa on the way home.

One day holding this fear was shown to be reasonable. Papa, who was very good at giving himself days off work, and Mama, came to town to bring us some garden food. On their return they walked into hell.

In a corner of town the alien New Guineans of Kirokai Camp on the slopes behind Section 17 had been attacked and they were on the streets shamelessly looking for Bougainvillean blood. Cautious of the police in the centre of town they waited with knives, axes and stones at the town's fringes,

My papa, realizing that the blood-hungry aliens, bored of waiting at the Rumba road's *ta'botu*,¹ were sending spies into town, led my Bougainvillean mama and some other Bougainvilleans through the Tupukas

¹ 'End of the coal tar' in the Nasioi language.

Community School and trespassing in and out of the residential houses in Section 16 until they reached Karove street. This was a street, where a family friend of ours, Captain Nukumori from the Bougainvillean atolls and pilot of the BCL tugboats at Loloho, resided.

My parents and their company hid here and watched and waited for the New Guineans to exhaust themselves in waiting.

After hours of pressuring by some law abiding persons the police, who many said, being New Guineans, were sympathetic to their friends finally acted and the angry settlers left for their camps. My parents and many others then quickly passed the hostile edges of town and fled into the safety of the hinterland.

From Michael's house in Section 14 I saw how my people, the rightful owners of the land, began to avoid coming into town.

Those early times in the crisis mostly affected the adults but not so much us kids; they knew the latest gossip of what was going on around us. Every day I saw my relative, Michael, running from radio station to radio station or newspaper to newspaper as he worked. He was a man wanted by the militants in Panguna.

He was wanted, I learned, because he and others like Severinus Ampaoi were feeding themselves and their families with the Panguna Landowners Association's money. All BCL royalties, people said,

went into a business arm of the landowners' association called the Bougainville Development Corporation (BDC) that a band of educated elites, including Michael, had created in the name of the landowners. However, those poor landowners never had any taste of the fruits of the organization.

So, one day during a weekend, as we were sitting and gossiping beneath our house, a car entered our street. This was a man from Damara called Dobokia; a good friend of the Pariu's who worked as a mechanic for the ATA. He had his wife with him.

Before coming to us Dobokia had rung Michael in his office and told him that a certain element of the militants was planning to assassinate him that very night. Thus the safest option for him was to move to an unidentified location unnoticed.

When they pulled up Dobokia and his wife called Pariu's wife, Elizabeth, onto to the lawn and told her the bad news and the need to move quickly.

Immediately Pariu's wife ordered us to pack our few belongings. My brother and I had no suitcases and packed a few clothes into some AEL's plastic shopping bags and assisted the others to sort out and pack. In the night we were to be relocated in an undisclosed spot in town.

Our New Guinean neighborhoods paid no heed. They were also confused about whether the crisis would push them out of Bougainville. Only the family from Siae up the Arawa-Kupe road, Tanui, a BCL bus driver and his wife Desisia, were giving some words

of sympathy and a helping hand to Elizabeth.

By nightfall, around 7 o'clock, Pariu arrived in a yellow Mazda Dyna truck belonging to a subsidiary company of BCL called Removals Limited that specialized in the moving in and out of workers' stuff and other related activities.

We left our street, Wasa Street and drove down the Rumba Road towards the spine-road of Arawa, the Marimari Road. Then we turned east and over the Tupukas Bridge we went. In the cover of night, when the truck slowed before the lighted Arawa General Hospital, we worked out that our secret destination was somewhere in Sections 17 or 18, either the SSQ Flats or the Town House Flats.

The truck entered Aniaka Street in Section 18 and deposited us in a secured brown flat marked as Lot 27. I heard my friends saying that it belonged to some business partners of my kindred Michael.

There we lived. Some of my fellow school mates were confused one morning when they saw me walking out of Aniaka Street.

'Have you deserted Section 14?' one of only two Bougainvillean colleens from Siwai called Fiona, asked one morning.

'The Rambos are trying to kill my relative so we escaped in the night over the weekend,' I said warmly.

I told the whole story of our escape to some of the boys in school much later.

Two weeks after our departure from Section 14 our people in the bush killed a Redskin in an attack

on the Kirokai Camp settlement, which was occupied by New Guinea Highlanders.

This time, from the gossip I heard, it was a young student from the New Guinea Highlands. The rage of the highlanders was extreme. They would have randomly executed a good number of vulnerable Bougainvilleans but at the moment of their boiling anger a relative of theirs, dwelling in Section 14, told them of a house where a local Bougainvillean family was living.

Arming themselves, the relatives of the dead student marched, like a pack of deaf bats in broad day light, for Section 14 and a house in Bantoka Street for the kill.

Their targeted prey was a family from Pomaua village in Kieta. The parents were out. There were only the little children ranging in age from 2 to 11. With them was their old grandmother, who was illiterate.

I was familiar with the family because, with my parents, I once visited them. The old woman, whose son was a BCL employee and owned the house, was of a fine nature. When my family arrived at the house she went straight away to collect a jar of cold water for us.

We drank as she joyfully, revisited old family ties and connections. She regularly interrupted herself, with streams of cordial laughter.

Upon seeing the knife and axe wielding attackers approaching the old woman and her four

grandchildren rushed into the house. They hid themselves in whatever spaces were available as the New Guineans axed their way into the house.

The older three children hid behind clothing hanging inside a cupboard and closed the door. The old woman helped the 2 year old get beneath a king-size bed with her. Unfortunately she left her foot exposed beyond the over lapping bed-cover. Thus, entering that room, the killers spotted her.

They chopped the old woman and her granddaughter as they held tightly to each other wailing to their death.

Swiftly they did their job and walked off, satisfied with the payback.

After hearing the story from my parents, fear was now something I could not run away from. Every day, passing Bantoka Street, I avoided looking towards that house. It was not far up the street from the main Rumba Road; it was the fourth house on the left.

To me, from that incident, the feeling of fear now had a name and it was death.

KILLING AT BAKABORI VILLAGE

DEATH, I WELL remember, was what most of the adults around me feared the most. As we walked east and down the ever brawling Bovong River from our mountain home at Kupe to Arawa we attempted to avoid being killed by the security forces or being caught up in the curfew enforced in town by the Papua New Guinea government.

This was all part of the Redskin's shameless threats designed to end Bougainvillean rights and dignity over the land our Solomon progenitors had conquered and left for us.

In the town people avoided any unnecessary confrontations with the New Guineans. In the minds of my people the Redskins were backed by the security forces that were now bringing in more men and equipment to search for and kill the militants who were fighting against the destruction of our land and culture and the unnecessary burning of our homes.

We were living with it - that curse. But there was worse to come.

It was an early June day in 1989 when the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, some weeks or so after

their arrival in May, flew into our island their helicopter gunships given to them by the Australians to attack the rebels and transport their soldiers where ever they wanted to fight.

It was then that the BCL mine, I heard, was officially closed down.

We were having our lunch and playing marbles when the popular BDC (Bougainville Development Corporation) chopper piloted by a person popular in Kieta and known as 'Horse' circled our area of the town and then swiftly soared up higher in a northerly direction.

We all tracked it with our eyes. And then, above the Tunuru Catholic Mission, and fast approaching us were four new helicopters. They were different in shape and the sound was ominously threatening to our ears. They came above our azure airspace but then our BDC chopper escorted them away from town down south-west to Aropa where, we had been told, there were many PNGDF men stationed.

The choppers passed and faded behind the hills of Kerei leaving us wondering about these strange machines.

Our resident artist, Jeffery Mailau was always reactive to such developments with his artistic hands. Using all those Vietnam War movies for inspiration he drew some pictures and showed us the next day. They were lovely and accurate, as I remember.

Later I heard from the adults that they were American helicopters known as Hueys.

With all these machines in our skies, I felt the true presence of war. The Security Force patrols became regular near the towns and in the hinterland. But mostly, people said, they were concentrated around

Panguna hunting down Francis Ona and his Rambos. In our bush-material house we had a newspaper with the rebel leader's photo in it; thus I had a clear picture of the man when people talked about him.

Many of the local people said that he was from Guava village and had once been a BCL employee whose efforts fighting against the exploitation of Bougainville the company had frustrated. Now he was standing up to fight the company and the Redskins. Fortunately my Redskin papa was good to the people of Bougainville and was not included with the rest.

Even in our Kupe village nobody knew who this man, Francis Ona, was. None of us knew why the PNG government had promised to pay a K200,000 bounty to anyone who brought him in. The helicopters patrolled and patrolled every day hunting for him.

One day in late May two of these dreadful flying objects visited our Kupe Mountains. They noisily tracked up the Bovong River and into our atoll-shaped valley. They crawled over the canopies of trees making everything dance.

From our lone hamlet we watched them in the south scanning the Turampa slopes that border the Pomaa Valley and the Kongara area. Then they came west towards the village of Sirona at the foot of the destroyed Perum'paretuu Repeater Station on the western side of Panguna. Then, like apparitions, the choppers were at the north-eastern end of the Kupe Valley where we lived.

I was about to run into the bush but Papa made us all stand in a clear spot so that the airborne gunner could have a good look at us. Maybe Papa didn't want

the security forces to think that this isolated hamlet was a militant hideout.

The adults were also telling us to wear white coloured clothes on so that the men in the flying gunships could easily spot us and not harm us.

Satisfied with whatever they were doing the choppers left flying over the coconut palms and cluster of bushes to the east that covered the river-side trail we employed for going into town with goods for the market loaded like Arabian camels. They flew well below the Birareko boulder that stands imposingly guarding our Pomong hamlet.

Our valley is shaped like a table spoon. The head is the Kupe Valley on the Crown Prince Range; the source of the Bovong River and numerous tributaries that water Arawa town. The tail or handle of the spoon is the river that runs through a rugged terrain between slopes occupied by communities, some standing by the banks but others dotted up the brae. Down by the north bank there are Siring village and the Bakabori cluster of hamlets. By the south bank there are Siae, Piruana and Kaino villages.

Most of these communities are some distance apart and the only means of reaching each other is by foot. Siae, Piruana and Kaino, however are connected to each other by a government road.

From Kupe it takes roughly around two hours to go to Arawa on foot and vice versa. Vehicles can come as far as the village of Kaino but that leg is so rugged it is only suitable for four-wheel drives; most vehicles only come as far as Piruana, which is the centre of the Tunuru Catholic Parish's sub-parish at Kaino. The people with their wet-bean cocoa and garden produce for the markets labour along the

banks of Bovong River on foot to Piruana where most of the cocoa buyers are based and where other buyers come by PMV.

The weekly cocoa buying day dawned a few days after the helicopters had toured our home valley. It was a Tuesday and our people shouldered their bags of cocoa wet-bean to take to Piruana, which is over an hours walk involving repeatedly crossing the rugged and rocky banks of the Bovong River.

On the previous day Papa had harvested a plastic bag of wet-beans weighing about ten kilos and told me and Justin to go and sell it in Piruana. We had done this labouring job many times under Papa's incontestable powers.

On this particular Tuesday morning Papa's camels did not want to move. We hesitated and ignored the orders till about 9 o'clock. Papa was furious and fuming and threatening us with a whipping so we left. I remember that Justin was crying as we took off and I helped him down the trail.

After meeting a few people going to their gardens we accepted our lot as subservient labourers and sped along. We left the borders of Kupe and were about to enter Bakabori, when a mother, a niece of my grandfather, and her two children bumped into us.

They were running away from something.

'Oh my two children,' she cried at us, fear shining on her face, 'Where are those two old stupid parents of yours sending you to? They shouldn't be doing this'. She helped me dump my cargo under some bushes and then continued. 'The army has killed Karebuu down there and we are running away. Come, you must go back.'

As we began turning we heard gunfire echoing

below and we started to run. I was afraid as I led our company to the safety of the mountains. This was the first time I had heard automatic heavy gunfire. I was only familiar with the single shotgun used by a local hunter, Tony Anung, who had a licensed *Baikal* shotgun.

Karebuu was from Bakabori but was married to a relative of my family's at Sirona. On the previous day he had been at his cocoa plot, about five kilometres east of the village, harvesting the pods off the trees. Then, on market day, with the cry of the cock and before the other villagers were awake, he went back to his plot and his cocoa trees taking with him his cocoa hooking tool to check for any ripe pods that he might have missed the previous day.

He was working and calling to his relatives when the PNGDF shot him. The whole village was then woken and lined up and searched and abused by the uniformed New Guinean soldiers. The troops checked the houses for weapons but discovered nothing. They then collected all the villager's fishing spears, diving goggles, bush knives and axes. They then tied up four innocent people with nylon fishing line and marched them into the cocoa plantation by the banks of the Bovong River.

The confused captives were held by the PNGDF till late afternoon. As it was turning to dusk, another group of soldiers arrived. The villagers were blind folded and they were wondering what was going on but one of them, Angkanu, watched through a tiny opening in his blindfold and saw why their eyes had to be covered up.

There on the ground just metres away, was his brother-in-law, Karebuu covered with blood but still

alive. His muscular body was mutilated by a bullet wound. Flies hovered around him and ants paced with purpose over the blood stains. He was groaning and attached to a tether.

They were all kept there until nightfall and then crossed the river to patch of high ground when a chopper arrived. They were all airlifted in the new Australian-donated gunship to Arawa. Karebuu died on the way and his body was placed in the morgue.

Justin and I kept going the Peter Lahis Community School but we lived in fear. The fighting in the streets of Arawa was decreasing because the New Guineans in the squatter settlements had been moved to the centre of town where they were safer. For our still inexperienced fighters getting at these Redskins was now very risky.

The main soccer-rugby fields and the main market in Arawa were turned into a tent city. All the Redskins were housed there in blue canvas tents. One day, travelling with Papa on a test-drive of a vehicle that he was fixing for an Australian in the BCL welfare office at the Bamboo Corner complex I got to admire the camp of blue canvas.

The tents were all neatly lined up from one end of the fields to the other and looked especially neat on the premiers' field.

When we were driven by the Australian back to the Tupukas Community School that afternoon so we could start walking back home we saw the red-skinned children and adults sitting hopelessly on the foot path network between the tents.

The Redskins knew they were at risk. The Aussie was living by himself at Section 8. All his family had left. Under his house were his crates of possessions

ready for shipment.

He saw no point in risking dying by driving us into anti-BCL country so he left us at Tupukas and returned home.

As we walked home Papa was joking about his people in the tent city: *Lusim peles kam lo hia, em bai olsem tasol* - deserting your home and wandering about leads to your disadvantage. He said that many New Guineans were still pouring in from the many plantations to the north and the south. These were the labourers on the plantations and their families.

And now they were on the run looking for a safe haven and that haven was Arawa. The town of the BCL workers was now turning into a huge care centre with the Red Cross and the government feeding people and protecting them from the Bougainvillean militants.

KAINO CARE CENTRE

TO THE PAPUA New Guinea government, the militants were a problem and needed to be crushed by its Australian-nurtured army. But to our people the government was the problem because, in pursuit of their enemy, they were burning down our homes and shamelessly harming us on our island.

Furthermore, to my people, it was a Redskin's government that was destroying and stealing the wealth from our land; thus, it was not our government but a government that belonged to strangers, some of whom were my Papa's relatives.

So far, across our district, they had killed, tortured or captured a few innocent people but claimed in the newspapers that they had killed or captured hard core rebels or close aides of Francis Ona, the militant leader.

I well remember a pair of Kupe villagers who were taken from a local PMV truck by the PNGDF at the Rumba SDA Mission junction while returning home from town. These men had gone to shop after selling their wet-bean cocoa at Piruana. Unfortunately they ended up in the hands of the Redskin infiltrators.

Driving them back to town for questioning the

PNGDF bashed them up, telling them to fuck their rebel leader, Francis Ona.

Two days later, with complexions of agony and demoralization after enduring torture, they were displayed on the front cover of the *Post Courier* newspaper and depicted as Francis Ona's closest aides. This success by the PNGDF would eventually lead to the capture of their foe the newspaper said. This was a lie; even we little kids knew that.

Back in Kupe people were really furious, calling the army liars and good-for-nothing rascals. People were condemning them by saying: 'They are acting tough as if this is their land, rotten foreigners' or 'the PNGDF acted tough in Vanuatu but here in Bougainville we will piss on them'. My papa, who was so religious, was also swearing about the PNGDF, even though it was against the dictates of the Bible; the book he so loved.

In the Bible, in the book of proverbs, there is a lesson that suggests continuously visiting a friend will eventually turn him to hate you for your pestering. In this sense the holy book may have been hinting that we should be going to school from Kupe, instead of living a life as guests of the Pariu family in Arawa.

The fact was, Arawa was becoming more insecure. The month of June saw the killing of two Redskin children at the Nambis Camp, just beyond the Arawa Country Club. There was also a shoot-out at the provincial government office, an attempted killing of an expatriate in Section 12, another shoot-out in Section 4 and the burning down of the Morobe Squatter Camp.

During one of these mid-June weeks in 1989 Papa arrived home from Arawa with the news that his

friend Martin Atobu had been shot and wounded. He was admitted to hospital with shotgun wounds. In those days the militants were replacing the compacted lead pellets in the factory-made shells with small ball bearings for greater impact.

Martin had been driving from Mananau through the Tumpusiong Valley to Arawa when the rebels shot him. The ball bearings penetrated the car door and hit him in the buttocks and the ankle of his right foot. Another vehicle driving a short distance behind him rescued him some minutes later and took him to the hospital in Arawa.

While Martin was recuperating at the BCL's Arawa Medical Foundation Hospital Papa had more discretionary power at Mananau. Driving home through my mother's Tumpusiong Valley he was often deliberately stopped because he supplied my kindred militants with fresh pork and eggs from the farm. This meant that as he drove back and forth he was spared from aggression.

Papa resigned from the Mananau farm shortly before it was closed. He was then regularly sharing tales about how the government authorities were calling for the immediate clearance of people from places they considered to be within their army's theatre of operations.

Earlier in April, the PNGDF Chief of Operations on Bougainville, Colonel Leo Nuia, had issued an order to his soldiers to 'shoot to kill' suspect Bougainvilleans. This was the PNG government's effort to eradicate the militancy that was affecting its national budget. Reopening the Panguna mine would restore an operation that created 40% of PNG's export earnings.

It was announced in July 1989 that we had to move out of our home to free it up for the PNGDF war effort and to ensure that our people would not get caught in any cross-fire. Kupe was on the list for evacuation to Kaino. Originally we were to be accommodated with the Bakabori people at Piruana but everyone protested that it was too far from their home.

Radio North Solomons, which was broadcasting from Kieta, ran jingles advertising the evacuation. In the Sunday services the catechist also took turns to announce our migration to Kaino.

Many of our people really hated this government decision because they were hearing about villages being burned down by the PNGDF and the police. The government blamed this on the militants but we knew that it was not the *pora'naving*² doing it. Nevertheless, a lot of my people left because of the known brutality of the security forces.

One event that determined many people to leave was the PNG police attack on Anganai village in the Kerei area in April.

Following an attack on them at Kerei Hill on the Arawa-Kieta road the police stormed the village. The village was known as the home of notable pre-1988 rascals who had turned into militants. The police burned down every house they could reach. In the course of this cowardly act they also shot dead a middle aged man, who didn't realise what was happening around him and was feeding his piglets by the Kerei River.

People also knew that there were bomb-making

² 'A group from the jungle' in the Nasioi language.

activities going on in our valley which would have put Kupe on the PNGDF radar screen. Some of our people from nearby areas were entering our valley bringing with them chemicals. With these and other materials they were making and testing home-made bombs.

There was a week where Kupe was continuously rocked by heavy explosions from these activities. One morning Justin, Papa and I were shown around a site where they had attempted to uproot a gallip-nut tree by placing a bomb at its base.

The giant tree had not fallen but was burned and its leaves were falling off. We also toured the bomb maker's camp in a neighbouring hamlet to ours called Kutu'enung.

So, one sunny morning in mid-July we deserted our little hamlet of Pomong. I remember it was a windy day as Papa locked our two sago-thatched houses and we departed. Arriving at a hillock above Kutu'enung, we stood looking at our people down on the southern bank of the Bovong River; also watching were some occupants of Kutu'enung. Moving lines of humans dotted the trail right from Mape, a patch of flat land below us, and stretched westwards towards the main Kupe villages of Sirona and Nengke'naro.

Then from the lawns of Kutu'enung we collected the old mother of the Kutu'enung family, called Okai, and descended to the Bovong River where we would cross and meet the rest of our runaway people.

It was like a great army of ants; but not a complete one, for it was only half of our village population that was marching for Kaino, where the government would supposedly protect and feed us for the duration of the crisis.

We met at the trail junction called Tonaka'kung. We stood there for a minute as Papa and his friend and village leader, Kam'peii, chatted over some areca nut stimulation. Our friend Kam'peii had with him his troop of children that I usually related to as my uncles in the absence of my blood uncles, who dwell in the Tumpusiong Valley. The Kam'peii family and mine were all originally immigrants from Panguna.

All my uncles and the other younger kids had their catapults and a plastic bag or pocket full of pebbles for shooting birds. Running after birds and other animals with catapults day-in-day-out was part of the kid-culture in our mountain home.

And, as I remember, at the peak of this reunion when the elders noted all our hunting gear a command was given to the kids to hide their catapults and pebbles and continue on without them. For, as they announced, the PNGDF were reaching out in their patrols regularly towards Kaino and the surrounding places and the catapults could be mistaken for weapons. Some of my friends abandoned their much-loved hunting gear in tears. For, to us, the catapult defined us as boys.

'Children, you hide your catapults here and we go,' I remember Kam'peii saying. 'We will be coming back here on the way to fetch our other belongings and you can retrieve them then. Your relatives in Panguna are killing the army with catapults, so if they find us with them they will kill us all!. He said this to scare us.

We refugees arrived at Kaino at midday to a welcoming and sad gathering of Kaino villagers. We were seated on the lawn of finely mowed grass as a kinswoman of my family, an old woman by the name of Kuu'ii, began a lamenting chant.

In tears she cried: 'Come my people, come. Don't feel ashamed of us...These Redskins occupied our Arawa a long time ago when the Germans brought them here and they are now killing us; they are bad people...bad people. They killed and carried Karebuu in that evil looking helicopter of theirs and dumped our son there in the hospital freezer to rot. You will live with us; there is land for you to garden till the war is over.'

Each Kaino family chose one or two Kupe families each to accommodate on that first day of arrival. My family and Kam'peii went along with Kuu'ii's children and their families. They were also originally an immigrant family from the Tumpusiong Valley at Panguna.

The Kam'peii family went with the old lady, Kuu'ii and my family went to her daughter Naomi's family, who I relate to as Grandmother.

Within the week our people were at work. Some of us were shipping our left-behind belongings into Kaino from the Kupe Mountains. Some were busy erecting huts with sago palms or the government-supplied canvas.

During one of those weeks of busy activity we heard an ambulance siren approaching. Being kids, we rushed past the shelters to the main car park and volleyball court to await its arrival.

After weeks of worthless and lengthy negotiations with the government and PNGDF authorities in town by the local grieving families and elders the body of Karebuu had been released for proper burial.

From the road camber I watched as women, relatives and the wife of Karebuu gave hysterical cries the like of which I had never heard before around a

coffin. We looked on at the opened coffin and the white, dead body inside. An old man performed some rituals of death by opening agape the corpse's contracted mouth.

The smell of death was intoxicating and it took me years to let go of the stench from my mind.

The old man spoke out: 'You Kupe people will labour now to carry the casket to its resting place; the place where he was killed by the Redskins; for it is because of you and your culture of drinking beer that my son was killed'.

There was silence. I wondered why with interest. It seemed like the silence of guilt.

Then I learned that the PNGDF patrol that killed Karebuu, had been dropped off at Kaino at dawn that day. The previous afternoon a band of Kupe men, who had been boozing, were walking from Arawa to Kaino when night caught up with them.

Being too befuddled by liquor to navigate their way into Kupe they passed the night in a deserted house. By early dawn, one woke up and saw some BCL trucks in the distance; he woke the rest and they fled down towards Bakabori village.

The PNGDF in the trucks followed them but lost their tracks by the Bovong River. But the sight of Bakabori lured them on. It was then that they found Karebuu and shot him.

The villagers guiltily lifted the coffin and walked off followed by a whole mass of people.

After the burial our activities continued as usual but I recall that my papa didn't help much for we moved into a house that had already been built for a deceased relative of ours by the same name as my third-born sister, Desi'kau . With all the construction

work going on it was my grandfather who was always helping others, despite his chronic spinal illness.

These activities made Kaino village larger and larger everyday as more and more people poured in; a few from as far away as Mosinau village in Panguna.

Some of our people, however, chose not to come and they built hideouts in the mountains or dwelled in caves away from the main villages.

PNGDF RAIDS ON KUPE

AT KAINO ADULTS were busy erecting shelters in every hospitable spot available; our brothers and sisters who did not join us were clearing out the caves and constructing huts that were hidden from the eyes of the enemy; mostly on the steep rocky slopes of the Kau'para Range that stretches from the colonial era Kupe Gold mine (1929-1937) in the north to the Turampa area in the south. They were investing all their efforts to survive just like us.

Our people in the bush were still living in fear; but at our government backed care centre at Kaino all appeared, if not exactly promising, at least reasonably fine.

After the village of Kupe was declared a cleared area the PNGDF patrols into our mountains increased rapidly. Our young bomb making band from Kutu'enung dissolved further into the dale we call Kumpo'uu to our east. This was a boulder-infested area bordering the Kupe and the Dangku'a valleys close to Pavaire Village.

High among the boulders this band lived like hermits. They were armed with a few shotguns; one being the *Baikal* of the hunter, Tony Anung. They

were, as many said, helping themselves to our food gardens.

The people at the Kaino Care Centre heard little else about this band and did not know whether it went to fight the PNGDF in Panguna or not. Our elders, during those days, wanted the whole Bovong River Valley to remain a non-fight zone for the safety of us all, especially the student population. Also, back in our home we had gardens which the government authorities had permitted us to visit every Tuesday when it was felt that the conditions were right. Most people ignored this rule and went home at will however.

Apart from Kaino, in the upstream area of the Bovong River there were also care centres at Burimai, Sibuna and Piruana. Downstream the Rumba SDA Mission was occupied by the run-away villagers from the Tumpusiong Valley in Panguna. The main road to Arawa was the route that we used to go to school in town every morning and afternoon.

In one of those late 1989 weeks after we had settled down at Kaino a PNGDF patrol arrived in our Kupe Valley. Our Kupe band of militant bomb makers from Kutu'enung had spotted them around the Turampa side helping themselves to a domesticated but abandoned boar and taro from the gardens. The owners were in their hideouts cooking only under the cover of night.

With all the stolen food they made their way to Mape, our doorway into the mountains of Kupe. Here they camped. They were there searching our valley for militants for almost a fortnight.

During this time no one at Kaino attempted a visit back home. We all stuck to the bush in the vicinity of

the care centre or our parent's gardens around Kaino Village because of the potential danger. No one had the heart to risk of going back to our gardens. Except my stubborn papa.

On one particular Tuesday we went home to the mountains. With Mama and a few other mothers, but mostly just us male kids, we trooped through Tonaka'kung and then Kutu'enung.

My Redskin papa led the way and we went; all keeping quiet for no one was willing to be the source of any noise that attracted attention. Dumb we were as we passed the lawns of Kutu'enung and climbed the hill we call Koro'rovai to its peak.

As we slowed to catch our breath our eyes were across the valley watching a clear patch in a cluster of trees where there were barely discernible tents. As the minutes ebbed away we spotted two figures coming into the clearing and together dragging back into the cover of the trees what seemed to be a sheet of canvas.

Then we continued on into Kamarove Plantation, Kupe's only coconut plantation, between my hamlet of Pomong and Kutu'enung. There were signs of human activity all around.

Under the swaying coconut palms there they were - the militants! At first I did not recognize any of the armed men because I was captivated by the weapons they carried.

The first man we came upon had the familiar *Baikal* shotgun. Climbing onto the road, we met a bunch of men wielding tomahawks and knives and a *pokat* and its arrows. These were familiar men from the Turampa area with two of them from the bomb making band of Kutu'enung. They chatted with Papa

and walked on with us.

The next lot we encountered mostly had shotguns. One had a carpenter's nail gun that I heard people calling a *Ramset*. These were mostly men from the Panguna area who must have stolen them from BCL employees there. These men chatted easily with us because they were mostly our clan kinsmen.

'Daughter, we came to fight the rascal men below,' one cordially addressed my mama as he pointed towards Mape, 'we have surrounded their encampment and any time now we will start firing at them. They will piss themselves; those shameless foreigners'.

'But it's okay, you just go to your garden quietly and then return home,' a man from Panguna added through a mouthful of betel nut.

Our party later made its way back safely in the afternoon. The militants were there in every little corner shining a smile as we passed them on our way back to Kaino. Some of our entourage told the militants that they were free to help themselves from their respective gardens. The militants willingly accepted.

Early the next morning gunfire began to rock our Kupe Mountains. I was with the other children playing games of tug-of-war and marbles when the first sounds of automatic gunfire from the PNGDF echoed through the valley. The militant's shotguns only sounded intermittently.

The adults told us to cease our games and we all stood looking towards our mountain home. There was a gathering of the whole village with those from the other sections of Kaino that didn't have a view flocking into our section. We all expected that some

of our homes would go up in smoke but none did.

The women were feeling sorry and continuously cursing the security forces: 'These foreigners came to kill us on our land. Don't they have any feeling of shame? Is this New Guinea land we are living on? They are very bad people with their boss Rabbie Namaliu crying for our land, copper and gold.'

I vividly remember a woman called Mimio from Bakabori and a relative of the late Karebuu leading the verbal assault against the foe in the distance.

'Bad people,' she lamented in tears, 'you are yet to compensate me for my brother, Karebuu – you shameless foreigners!' She had to be comforted by her daughters in the midst of our gathering.

We stood, transfixed, not a mother moved to visit her kitchen hut.

Towards the afternoon, at the peak of the gunfire, now solely from the PNGDF, we heard the buzzing sound of a chopper over Pavaire village, a dozen kilometres to the north in the Dangku'a Valley.

It sped above the village and then to the north-west, well below the foot of the Orempii and Sin'go Navoii pair of boulders that separates the Dangku'a Valley from Bakabori village.

Viewing it against the coconut-cocoa covered slopes the wheeled chopper, a M1-8 type transport, was white against the ever green brae.

It was not the first time we had seen it because it was a BCL contracted chopper employed for mine-related tasks, especially the airborne mineral exploration of our island. We had seen it in our air space before the arrival of the PNGDF soldiers but now it was making a military run against us.

We watched. The chopper did not land on the

ground but remained airborne and had a rope-ladder or something hanging down for the soldiers. In a matter of seconds we saw the soldiers climbing up and into the flying white machine.

And then it resumed flying in the same direction. Minutes later it again reappeared above Pavaire village to fetch more soldiers. Everyone concluded that the soldiers were being deposited at Camp 5, a BCL employees' residential area on the port-mine access highway to the north.

We all stood or sat chewing betel nut with our eyes fixed on our mountains until the chopper made no return. People cursed the New Guinean army for infiltrating our innocent valley.

Into the night the cursing and storytelling went on like a fine stream in the bush till we all fell asleep in the strange joy that none of our homes in the mountains had gone up in smoke.

A few weeks later another PNGDF patrol came to the foothills of Bakabori. Commuters to Arawa from our care centre came across them disembarking from a convoy of trucks in the coconut and cocoa plantation along the river near the Piruana Bridge.

The patrol scavenged once again through the Bakabori brae. It was hearsay that two notably promiscuous women from Bakabori and Siae villages were guiding the security forces in this operation. Kaino bristled with gossip.

The patrol was later traced by the band of Kupe militants to a dell among the boulder-rock cliffs near Kutu'enung but they could not work out exactly where the infiltrators were camped; the jungle canopy was too impenetrable.

This new incursion resulted in the migration of the

Kupe militants to the south side of the Bovong Valley; that is, to the side of the mountains between Kaino and Turampa that forms our valley. From this safe haven they could infiltrate the northern slopes to identify anything they came across that might affect the safety of the Kaino people.

The patrol was soon lost from thought. But from our daily commuting into Arawa we sighted regular PNGDF drop-offs on the roads between Kaino and Piruana village. Since these were mostly random encounters many of us began to ignore the Redskins in military uniform.

Many of our people who gossiped said that the people the government authorities were now calling security forces were, in fact, New Guinean squatter settlement occupants in uniform.

Then one morning, as some of our people were sitting in the sun for warmth, someone spotted the silhouette of a figure in distant Kutu'ening as they moved in front of the light-coloured bamboo wall of a house. Slowly the single figure appeared to be joined by more friends. Everyone concluded that it was a PNGDF patrol that our care centre had not been informed about.

It was a weekend and we all stood there and watched the foreigners as they began dismantling the house wall after wall. Among us was my New Guinean father.

People cursed as we watched the PNGDF soldiers destroying the house three or so kilometres away in our mountain home.

As the minutes passed, my father told our gathering: 'I am going out there to tell my *wantoks* not to destroy my in-law's houses and off, without

hesitation, he went towards the hamlet that the PNGDF were destroying as we watched.

As my father was climbing the slope up to the hamlet the PNGDF soldiers saw him. Papa later told us that they were surprised and amazed to see their relative in the militant infested mountains of Kieta.

But my father's visit was no joke; he told them direct that they were destroying innocent peoples' property that they had been forced to leave because they, the PNGDF, had ordered them to evacuate to the care centres for protection. But, instead of protecting them and their valuables, they, the PNGDF, were destroying them.

The soldiers were ashamed and hung their heads down, for it was not a Bougainvillean facing them, but rather a New Guinean defending his children against his relatives. The soldiers halted their crime against Bougainville and departed

At Kaino my father earned respect among the people for his stand against the PNGDF. Our people reasoned that with Papa they had somebody from New Guinea to face the infiltrating New Guinean military.

6

A STORY FROM KAVARONGNAU

WHILE MY BRAVE father was working as a team leader at the Mananau farm and driving to Panguna and Arawa delivering its products my extended family from Enamira had their own problems.

My grandfather was with us due to his chronic illness and his will to die in Kupe, where he grew up. He wanted to be buried next to his parents in the Bobakuu Cemetery so he was either in the hideouts with the witch-doctors or more often at Kaino with us.

But his wife and my grandmother, with her two sisters and their children and other relatives were still at Kavarongnau hamlet in Panguna. In early 1989 we heard that the cruel New Guinean police had raided the hamlet and lined up our extended family members and questioned them as suspected militants. They later took a few men into custody and moved them to the dirty Kuviria Detention Centre, 30 kilometres north of Arawa.

That was all we heard. We were in the dark because my father had left the Mananau farm to drive a PMV belonging to a wheel-chair-bound former workmate from Manus who he had worked with at

the BCL Light Vehicle Workshop.

It wasn't until late 1989 that some people who had gone to town told Mama that her mother was coming to Kaino with some other relatives.

I remember watching my grandmother in my grandfather's shelter doing his cooking in the afternoon shortly after her arrival. My little auntie Nabanangnii and little uncle Domiura looked shy and scared in our great refugee village. I knew they were wary because this was not Kupe where the bush and boulders gave freedom.

Later, in the cool of the night, Grandmother began telling stories of our distant home, Kavarongnau hamlet in Panguna. Like the other people there I was eager to learn what the government's security forces had been doing in the Panguna area.

The riot police had first arrived in late 1988. One of them, a Redskin, had slapped my grandmother and ordered everyone at gun point to tell him where the militants were hiding. But he was told, 'We the ordinary people know nothing of the jungle-dwelling fighters'.

Then, on the pretext of searching for weapons and other items prohibited under the PNG government state of emergency declared on 23 December 1988, they helped themselves to some goods from the hamlet's canteen that was managed by my family member, Martin Miriori. Later they drove away towards Panguna to scavenge neighbouring villages for militants.

With this sort of harassment by the police my extended family became alert to every development in the area. From their hillside home their eyes watched the tunnelled entrance of the Panguna mine pit for

police or army vehicle convoys, many of which were made up of BCL's yellow trucks and cars.

Whenever a suspicious looking vehicle slowed down below them at the junction of the feeder road they would all dart into the bush and wait to see if anything further happened. If the engine began the high pitched roar that indicated it was climbing up to the hamlet they dissolved further into the Tonau'a River ravine and the caves there to wait for hours until the uniformed bastards left.

On one particular weekend my family at Kavarongnau was awaiting the arrival of my three young mothers (aunts) who were at school at Saint Mary's Asitavi High School. They were coming up to spend their second term holiday at home. Grandma had prepared some food from her garden as well as a chicken for a delicious welcome dinner and waited in anticipation.

During the fine tropical skies and twinkling nights my militant uncle, David Perakai, commonly known as Davire, was visiting the family providing them with vital information for their safety. Davire was a mysterious character who regularly popped up at Kavarongnau with his shotgun and then disappeared.

One late afternoon a sweating Davire arrived at the hamlet with news that there was a build-up of government forces at Panguna. This meant that a raid on our militant-infested valley was imminent.

He advised my relatives to leave for my other grandmother's home in a brae in the Onove Mountains for safety because the PNG army was cruel. Thus some family members shifted their belongings to a garden camp of Biroisi.

With Davire escorting them they made their way

to Biroosi and Davire disappeared for a militant camp somewhere.

Others ignored the calls, thinking the government soldiers were law abiding people and would not harm them or their property.

As the week wound down and with the school holidays getting closer, Grandma ignored the brewing trouble in the air and, instead, focused on her daughters' arrival.

My family members were busy watching a convoy, thinking it was heading for Orami or some other place. They were also busy with daily activities like cooking food and feeding animals. But down in the foothills of our brae the engines had lowered their cry. People were still wondering what this meant when they realized that the soldiers were now on foot and were firing at the houses on the edge of the hamlet.

My grandmother and the rest of the family darted into the cocoa plot that surrounded the hamlet and then ran up the Tonaua River ravine for the caves.

In the empty hamlet the soldiers broke into the shop and helped themselves while others torched the homes and shot a family dog. They then slaughtered a pig and carried it away.

My grandmother just wept in the bush as the belching smoke from the twelve burning houses reached them and they were deafened by gunfire.

With my uncle Davire at their side the family left by dusk for the Onove Mountains. Here they rested for a few days.

But after continuous mortar attacks and a PNGDF raid on an Onove village just above them two days later they fled at 10 o'clock in the night for Kaspeke

over the Kosia Mountains and onto the Paruparu-Siuema plains, a journey of some 6 hours on foot.

They carried with them some cooked rice to feed themselves and some of the kids with whatever other property they could carry. One of my uncles, who was shifting some personal property into a cave, was nearly shot by a PNGDF patrol.

They walked most of night and rested at a place called Biuaka near Paruparu. By midday, the next day, they had arrived at Kaspeke, in the hinterland of the Koiare coast.

At Kaspeke my grandmother and my uncle and his elder sister, cleared a piece of land at a place called Kire and made gardens. Some of my relatives were airlifted from Karato Airfield to Arawa by BougAir.

Grandmother remained at Kaspeke for a few weeks but then Uncle John Ibouko arrived from Toku in the Tumpusiong Valley, where he was married, to let her know that her daughters from St Mary's Asitavi High School were in Arawa and that Grandpa's health was worsening.

Grandmother did not hesitate because she wanted to see her husband in Kaino. She left early the next morning with her family.

They walked for about an hour towards Panguna in the east before arriving at Siuema, the largest Avaipa village, very early in the morning.

By the time the sun was high and clear Grandmother had begun to feel that things were not well so she told her family of children to pray as they walked.

Her feelings were right because at a crossing on the Naniuka River just past Siuema they bumped into an ambush set by the PNGDF. The soldiers directed

them to the side and frisked them. They removed the knapsack that grandmother was carrying and searched it.

Then they angrily asked them if they had any information about the militants. They were interrupted when a soldier appeared from behind some bushes and ordered them to leave immediately.

So, with my Uncle Ibouko leading, they walked until they reached the Kuraro River. Then they began hearing heavy gunfire from the region of Siuema Village.

With ever increasing fear they climbed the Dai slopes to the ridge that borders the Tumpusiong Valley and the Avaipa area. As they went the entire village of Siuema was being enveloped in thick smoke and deafening gunfire.

Arriving safely at the Toku Care Centre Grandmother felt relieved and ready to travel to Arawa, even though she knew there were numerous PNGDF checkpoints set up to frisk Bougainvilleans.

In the flickering fire and the warmth of the house-cook every one marvelled at my Grandmother's tales of escape.

GUNSHIPS IN ACTION OVER KUPE

STORY TELLING OFTEN went on until dawn. It was Kaino's way of finding peace in the air of fear and hopelessness. The old people took a break when they stood by the road to farewell us students going to Arawa to attend school; they then mingled back into the spell of war gossip and stories.

But early one weekend, when my brother and I were not in school, the story telling was interrupted by heavy gunfire in the Kupe Mountains. The story tellers and listeners now were witnesses to a confrontation back in those greenish mountains we had left behind.

Out of that incident none had a better story of surviving the brutal rage of the PNG government than my cheerful and laughing relative Louis Kepetu.

After we had to evacuate our villages and moved to Kaino, Louis and his wife was one of the families that preferred to go into hiding in the jungles and caves of the Crown Prince Range. Some others had escaped further into the jungles but did not bother to visit their homes out of fear.

Along with other villagers from Sirona Louis and his wife cleaned out a cave near the village where they

spent the nights and part of the day. It was only after carefully observing the scene below that they would come out of the bush and pass the rest of the day in the village.

Kupe is made up of two main villages: Sirona and Nengkenaro, both separated by a gorge. Sirona, the home of Louis Kepetu, is glued to the top of a cliff that forms the western side of the gorge. Nearby, there is another smaller ravine that runs into this gorge from the south. This is the foot of the great mountain Kaupara that once hosted a repeater station on its peak which was visible from Arawa. On the other side of the peak is the Panguna Valley.

On this hurtful day, Louis and his family's observations were not that reliable.

During the night a patrol of the PNGDF had reached the empty village of Nengkenaro, the majority of whose occupants, including me and my family, were already in Kaino. They were not burning the houses so their presence went unnoticed.

At the hideout, Louis had asked his brother, Akora, and another male relative to come to Sirona early and collect some dry coconuts while he and his wife fetched some cassava from the garden so they could spend the day making *tamatama*, a traditional Kieta dish made from cassava and coconut milk mashed in a mortar with a pestle.

Having collected everything as planned the party was at Louis' house. He was inside the *hauskuk* processing the beaten food. The young men were outside mashing more of the mixture with the mortar and pestle. Louis' wife had gone to the next hamlet searching for food to take back to the hideout.

As Akora was busy with the pestle mashing the

ingredients that his friend was feeding into the mortar, someone whistled at them. They looked towards the source and to their shock saw a group of Redskin soldiers with their guns aimed at them ready to fire.

They looked in the other direction but there were other soldiers approaching from there too. Their only option to escape was the cliff, some 500-700 meters high but with occasional plants, orchids, ferns and other creepers attached to it which they could hang on to.

Without Louis' knowledge they darted over the cliff like skiers down a snow slope. They were over the edge and gone, with their bodies carrying with them plants and other debris as the PNGDF men rushed to fire at them.

Louis, alarmed by the sound of heavy boots, popped out of the *hauskuk* and bumped into the soldiers running for the cliff with their guns and hand grenades to unleash on the escapees.

Not sure if their bullets and grenades and done the job they all turned on the terrified and crying Louis and began beating him. One of them shot the mortar with his gun while a bunch of them kicked all the food he was working on.

He remembered well the words of the first PNG soldier who approached him with anger: *'Tete bai yu dai, yu stink kok. Kuapim Francis Ona! Acting Rambo nabaut lo kain liklik ailan hia olsem tru yupla gat kain gun olsem army gat.'* Today you will die, you stink penis. Fuck Francis Ona! Acting Rambo on a tiny island like this as if you have the type of guns the army has.

He was punched by every soldier who wanted a chance to vent his anger on him till he was weak.

They gun-butted, kicked and punched him at will; his eyes could not see much and his ears could not hear, and blood was all over his body. Then they tied his hands behind him and began pushing him along in front of them towards Nengkenaro.

Upon hearing the gunfire down at Kaino the whole population gathered around. We watched with the high expectation that some of our homes would go up in flames, as had happened in Panguna and other areas.

As we watched two army helicopters appeared above Sirona; one headed towards the old 1930s Kupe gold mine while the other went round to the south. From these opposite angles their heavy machine guns began rocking our Kupe. The choppers kept passing each other above Sirona firing their guns. When they had completed one run they then repeated it again.

Our women were crying as we watched the choppers attacking our homes.

In the airborne attack a little seven year old called Kaumonu was left behind crying by his parents as they ran for their lives with his infant sister. Eleven year old Kopuru dropped her little brother, Monona, as she lost sight of her mother.

A man called Nukua was calling to his family: 'Come and see the helicopter, they have placed a generator on it' without knowing that it was machine guns making the noise. It wasn't until he saw a betel nut palm cut down and tree branches falling and pinning his pig to the ground that he ran away.

The firing choppers crisscrossed the jungle and villages until Louis had been brought into Nengkenaro. Then one of the choppers kept hovering

above while the other landed and Louis was thrown into it with some soldiers. They climbed the Kaupara slope leaving behind the rest of the soldiers.

When they arrived at the PNGDF's camp at Panguna, a former BCL worker's residence known as Camp 10 but now turned into an International High School one of the soldiers kicked Louis off the chopper before it had actually touched the ground. He landed semi-conscious amongst a waiting group of soldiers and a dozen stinging fists.

When consciousness returned he found himself in one of the Panguna police cells. Tears ran freely but he made no sound. He could feel life around him but his hands could not reach out; he knew some fellow Bougainvillean prisoners were crying and comforting him in his mother tongue, but he could not see nor answer them for all was dark.

For nearly three months he suffered at the hands of the PNG police and army till one of Kupe's elders, Charles Kam'peii, my father and a south Bougainvillean lawyer, Rueben Siara, fought a lengthy and exhausting legal battle to free him.

THE MILITANT GANG OF KUPE IN ACTION

AFTER LOUIS KEPETU was released he remained with us at Kaino. The PNGDF also stopped molesting our Kupe Mountains with their guns so one day Louis coerced us into walking to one of their hideouts high on a ridge that separates the Turampa area of Kupe from Pooma.

We hiked up the Miang'aa dale, climbed the rugged slopes behind one of Kupe's greatest boulders, Dongnare, and finally discovered a series of unoccupied huts buried beneath the forest canopy. Not much sunlight reached in but this was where my ailing grandfather came to be treated by the witch doctors of the bush.

I explored the vicinity for a few minutes and then, with the other boys, headed to a spot where we could look towards the west and admire our Kupe Mountains clearly. It was so sad. Our home was a weeping deserted mother while we, her children, were in the PNG government cage at Kaino.

With Kupe in desolation and without life and hope my world at Kaino as a kid was still fun in those carefree days. I couldn't care less about the world

around me, including the PNGDF and the militants of the bush who lived off our gardens at Kupe.

We children played marbles nearly every day and when asked to go gardening on the rugged slopes of Kaino's great boulder, Petekeng, we ended up in the bush looking for clusters of *ikə*, a hard small bamboo that infested the Metanung streams, to make pop-guns.

There we played pop-guns regularly with the Kupe militants; enjoying our fun and frustrating the elders with all our noise and the cries from the children who bore the pain from the seed missiles shot from the bamboo pipes. The oldies would eventually come and whip us to painful cries and chase us home early.

In June 1989 the PNG government intensified its crackdown on militants, and in the jungles of Kupe, there was a new person in the midst of the familiar men. My militant friend, Sikoung from Kutu'enung hamlet one day told me that this man was called Itona and was from the Pakia area on the Port-Mine-access road.

One day, in the company of the other boys, I met the militants entering our camp armed with shotguns and brand new rucksacks that I'd never seen before. They told us that they were returning after having a shootout with the PNGDF in Section 4 in the residential area of Arawa town.

Itona was now the leader of the Kupe militants and we had heard that he was taking them out on operations.

The rucksacks were the same as those I'd seen white men carrying before the militancy every weekend hiking across the Crown Prince Range from

Panguna through Kupe and into Arawa. Cars often waited for them at Kaino or sometimes further down at Piruana.

That the militants were bringing goods in their rucksacks to our care centre was obvious. These young men of Kupe with their guns were befriending young Kupe and Bakabori women in our camp. They were rumoured to be eloping regularly into the bush but the women's parents hunted them down and brought them back.

After a few weeks the women would go missing again. What could the irate parents do? The young men had guns and the parents were forced to just endure the heartache of their daughters being owned by the armed militants. When the parents recaptured their daughters the bush-men came and snatched their lovers back by night.

They stole the women and fled into the Kumpou section of Kupe. There they lived on our deserted gardens near the Pomong hamlet. My parents regularly met and chatted with the elopers sometimes telling them to take care of our gardens.

One day my pregnant mama and a number of women returning from Kupe were telling us about their encounter with a Bakabori girl, Ori, and our own Kupe boy, Miringtoro from Kutu'enung. They were spotted at Birareko boulders. The Kupe boy was resting his grubby head on his girl's lap as she searched for lice in his hair with his gun resting to their side.

They just laughed when they saw my mama. She threw them a bunch of ripe bananas accompanied by a stream of merry jokes. After a chit-chat Mama and her company of women left them.

It was that afternoon in late June 1989 when Papa came home with the news that his former boss at the BCL piggery and poultry farm at Mananau in Nagovis, Martin Atobu, who was a local from Damaosi village, had been shot and wounded by the militants in the Tumpusiong Valley, probably by my relatives.

Thus Papa had to divide his time between caring for his former work mate and his other task of driving the PMV bus that belonged to his crippled Manus workmate from the BCL Light Vehicles Workshop.

But things worked out fine because just before he was shot Martin had been offered a residence in Section 9 in Arawa by BCL. His family was there and took over his care in the weeks he was hospitalized at the BCL's Arawa Medical Foundation Hospital, a state-of-the-art health facility.

Martin recuperated in Arawa on the coast while I watched from Kaino in the hinterland. I went to school in town and went back home without paying a visit to Papa's friend.

My brother and I walked or rode into town and back to Kaino every day with the other students. It was a routine event and we were not bothered by the PNGDF soldiers that we came across frequently on the Kaino-Arawa road hunting for their prey, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. We all knew that the BRA never operated in the Bovong valley area anyway.

But one late day in 1989, coming home in a PMV truck owned by a man from the Pomaa Village called Lucas with my father, we came across a BRA checkpoint at Totaisi on the road.

They were armed to the teeth with shotguns,

homemade guns and arrow guns. I saw no familiar faces. But they all talked with the driver and glared fiercely at us weary travellers. They walked around our vehicle with their eyes on us and my heart beat faster wondering what they would do seeing my Redskin papa in the midst of all the Bougainvilleans.

They let us pass through and I felt calmer but I had seen the reality of the BRA militancy. I shared the experience of the road with other peers back at Kaino that night.

Such encounters with the BRA militants became regular. The militant activity began to spread and the stories of their actions became our everyday topic at Kaino. Added to the stories were the reports in newspapers like the *Post Courier* and the *Arawa Bulletin* that the old people regularly brought home from town. More stories of militancy came from Radio North Solomons.

We all knew and heard what the militants were doing in Panguna, around Arawa, at Aropa and far away in South and North Bougainville. Nothing really happened in our valley that captured the headlines except for the wrongful arrest of our innocent Bougainvillean men by the PNGDF.

Papua New Guinea was torturing our innocent men and burning our villages because it could not catch the real militants and their leader, Francis Ona. So, with an ill-trained PNG army, injustice was all over Bougainville. As a result the militant activity also spread as more men joined to fight the infiltrators.

However, our Bovong Valley saw our own militants in action in Kaino one morning.

My brother and I were walking home from school in Arawa with Papa and as we passed Piruana and

approached the Ue Creek below Kaino we were surprised by rice that was scattered on the gravel. As we progressed more and more rice was on the road. Someone had torn the bags of rice and poured them on the road.

We reached home and the news became clear.

During the morning hours when we had left Kaino for Arawa, the local militants from Kupe, who were hitherto only known for eloping with local women, ambushed the Red Cross vehicle that brought care centre supplies every Tuesday. They left the local driver from Sibuna at the SDA Village at Darukini, and took the vehicle, a white Toyota Hilux.

People at Kaino were shocked upon hearing gun shots at Ue. Then, hearing the sound of a climbing vehicle they waited to see who it was. At the fringe of the village they saw the familiar food delivery vehicle appear but it was driven recklessly.

People stood on the road side and watched the vehicle. It went to the end of the road, u-turned and drove back with the familiar Kupe militants on the trailer knifing bales of rice and pouring the content on the road. Cans of meat and noodles also suffered the same fate and a few kids helped themselves to the goodies.

After all the food was dumped, the driver and leader of the militants, Itona, drove the vehicle beyond Kaino. They halted the vehicle at a creek known as Metanung where, before the crisis, the company that was building the Piruana to Kaino feeder road had parked their bulldozers. There they torched the Red Cross vehicle and left for the bush.

People wondered why the incident had happened. Then later, in the night, a story came out that the Red

The Militant Gang of Kupe in Action

Cross employee and driver of the vehicle was said to have been seen transporting PNGDF troops.

Kaino was calm but contemplative that day as people let the incident go and awaited new events. The incident was the portend that militancy, like the upcoming Christmas, was moving into the Bovong Valley area and towards our Kaino Care Centre.

MY RAMBO UNCLE

KAINO SLOWLY BECAME a transit point for the Bougainvillean freedom fighters from around the Panguna area. Here they came during the small breaks in the fighting. They came to rest and for clothing and medication. To most of the fighters from Panguna, Kaino, was a conduit for communications with their relatives who the PNGDF and government had moved into care centres near Arawa.

The PNG soldiers also became regular visitors to our Kaino camp. We did not know what sort of schedules the Redskins were using but on some mornings we came out to see them lying among the dew in their military attire.

We had to be careful where we urinated in case we splashed the eyes of the Australian-trained Redskin soldiers. We saw them having their dinner under the shade of the cocoa trees and swaying coconut palms. Some smiled at our attention while others hated our awareness.

As kids we loved the sight of the soldiers. Once we became aware of the presence of Bougainville's enemies we were always there on the edges staring at them. Sometimes they gave us a share of their

Australia-made patrol rations or the popular BCL lunch packs and an apple. Sometimes we were ignored and given angry eyes, so we left and avoided them.

The school year was fast approaching and the fighting was intensifying around the Kieta District, especially along the Loloho-Panguna Road. Pakia Village was burned and the Redskins were fast departing for their homes in PNG.

It became routine that Papa would escort me and my younger brother to school in Arawa every morning because of the risks that the reckless PNG army was posing for us.

One morning, as we were walking to Arawa, we met a PNG army patrol just before the Piruana Bridge on the Kovei River. From the rise Papa spotted two BCL vehicles, a Mazda truck and a Toyota Hilux, parked at the entrance to the old Totoraki foot trail that ran alongside Bakabori and into the Kupe mountains.

We passed by the vehicles where a bunch of Redskin soldiers were standing with their guns. One of them was preoccupied with a radio that was in the Mazda truck.

From the bridge we saw to our left the body of the patrol. They were moving through a clearing in the cocoa-coconut plantation towards the Bovong River. We were joking as we watched them because we all knew where the Bougainville fighters' trails were. These foreigners were hunting for the BRA where they didn't exist.

We passed and went on into town.

In the afternoon when I returned home I was told some news that excited me; my uncle Davire was

somewhere on the edge of our Kaino camp.

I couldn't recall exactly when I had last seen him but it was sometime in late 1988 when I had visited Mama's original home at Kavarongnau. At that time my uncle was not a gun-wielding militant fighting to close the Panguna Mine.

The Panguna men with my uncle were stationed in a secure location on the west side of Kaino Village towards the Pomaa Valley.

At nightfall Davire arrived in our section of the village. He confidently came and hugged me in the kitchen hut we used. There he was offered food to eat. He was also given some clothing and medicine sent to him by family member, Joseph Kabui and other extended family members in Arawa. Joseph was then the Premier of North Solomons Province.

After hours of storytelling late into the night, Uncle left for the militant's camp.

The BRA men that came with Uncle were mostly from Panguna. They were men I knew from Pangka, Kokore and my Tumpusiong Valley. They stayed with us for a week resting from the cold of the jungles in mountainous Panguna.

On their last day at Kaino the elders roasted a chicken that Joseph had sent from Arawa in an earth oven and wrapped it up for my uncle for his lunch in the bush.

The day was clear and all the Kaino people lined up along the road in the early hours waiting to farewell our fighters. The combatants had to leave early to follow the bush tracks from Kaino to Topinang and over Pavaire and Pomaua into the Sireronsi-Pakia Valley where opportunities existed to attack the PNGDF on the Port-Mine access road.

As we stood for a few minutes chatting about the militants the freedom fighters appeared on a rise near Sirimpau Creek. They were ruggedly dressed and many had dreadlocks. They all had shotguns or other kinds of guns.

All the fighters had one other thing in common; they all had a Catholic rosary as a necklace. Catholics value the rosary as protection, thus the fighters, most being Catholics, wore it as their protection against the Redskin infiltrators of Bougainville.

From the far end of our line the fighters shook hands with every villager, adult or child. We watched them pass and fade into the cocoa-coconut plots that surrounded Kaino camp.

The rebels were gone but after that very first entry into Kaino they began to frequent the care centre and their actions were felt in our midst.

One night, as we were seated in a kitchen hut around a flickering fire telling stories, a single gunshot went off further down the road. Seconds later pellets landed with little thuds upon the iron roof under which we were sitting.

We all scrambled outside to see what was happening. People were rushing to the end of our camp near where Tony Anung and his family lived. I was not allowed to follow because Papa sent me to bed.

But early the next day I went to see what had happened in the night.

The eldest son of one of the community leaders at the care centre, Abel, was a Red Cross employee and had a motorcycle provided by the Red Cross. He had been accused of spying for the PNG government and his family had been raided and his motorcycle burnt

and thrown into the bush by the road near their house.

This attack in the care centre was carried out by rebels. But these rebels, as the story unfolded, were not from Panguna, where there was real fighting, but rather from our direct area.

The regular visitations by the Panguna militants to Kaino were peaceful. To me it was like a family reunion with updates on the cruel actions of the Redskins in our Panguna home.

On one occasion the wife of one local Kupe leader, Aba, died at Kaino. The Panguna rebels were with us through the mourning days. After that they helped the people carry the coffin back into the Kupe Mountains.

The majority of the armed rebels went ahead of the mourners while a few helped shoulder the coffin on the way to the burial site at the Kamarove Plantation Cemetery. Later the mourners returned back to Kaino. I was in school and did not go with the funeral procession.

When I returned in the afternoon I met the mourners on their way home. In the mass of people there were armed men mixed with ordinary Kaino residents, all walking in harmony.

A bunch of kids who had gone to the funeral later told me about what one of the fighters had done. They were all thirsty after digging the grave and one of the BRA men from Kokore village in Panguna put an old Second World War machinegun cartridge into his shotgun and brought down a bunch of green coconuts to drink.

The kids really admired the marksmanship of the man and kept the story floating for weeks.

My Rambo Uncle

When our fighting people had returned back to Panguna the PNGDF soldiers would visit. Both factions missed each other by a day or sometimes by a few hours. Thankfully they never met and Kaino did not face any punitive raids from either side.

The PNG army's brutal fight against the Bougainvilleans was felt elsewhere but not at Kaino.

10
HOME AT LAST

THE REDSKIN ARMY was brutal to the innocent Solomon Islanders of Bougainville. They burnt down homes and tortured innocent men and raped women. But they were demoralized because their sophisticated Australian-donated military hardware was proving ineffective against the Bougainvillean militants.

While we were on school holidays in early January 1990 the PNG Prime Minister, Rabbie Namaliu, proudly declared an all-out war against Bougainville to cement the PNG and BCL exploitation of the wealth at Panguna.

This saw the PNGDF escalating its reckless and brutal campaign against the Bougainvillean people, who were desperately fighting for their rights and dignity as Solomon Islander people. These rights were considered God-given by the Bougainvilleans and they always tried to uphold them. They were first impinged by two conventions: the Anglo-German Convention of 1886 and Anglo-German Convention of 1899. These conventions removed Bougainvilleans from the British Solomon Islands and dumped us into German New Guinea.

While the PNGDF was struggling the BRA was

steadily improving its combat capabilities and its reach. I was amazed in mid-January 1990 when they brought a troop of prisoners liberated from Kuviria, the detention centre 30 kilometres north of Arawa, home to Kaino to be cared for.

Many of the prisoners were weak and in jail uniforms when they arrived to rest and transit onto their respective homes. Our people welcomed them and cared for them and many slept in secure places outside the main village. And then, without notice, the prisoners left us in suspense and were gone.

The story, we learned later, was that the BRA, in collusion with some prisoners, raided the detention centre at dawn killing four warders, a civilian and a young girl. They burned houses and freed about eighty Bougainvillean prisoners. They left behind some twenty Redskins to be saved by the PNGDF.

In February of 1990 my brother and I began to attend the Kaperia Community School in Arawa. The school was more centralized and secure from the potential risk of getting into the cross-fire between the PNGDF and the Bougainvillean rebels.

Since the intensification of the fighting we had left Kaino to dwell in Arawa's central residential area, Section 8, with our relative, Joseph Kabui who was the Premier of the North Solomons Province. Joseph shared a duplex-house with another Provincial Minister, Michael Laimo from Buin.

After both leaders were bashed up by undisciplined PNG police and soldiers the authorities attached military units that guarded their homes 24/7. Wherever the Premier drove in his blue Nissan Patrol there was a BCL vehicle with PNGDF soldiers and their guns close behind.

Other residents also hosted extended family members who had fled from Kavarongnau in Panguna after it was torched by the PNGDF. Thus we were all packed like sardines in the houses but still managed to go to school.

At Kaperia Community School, unlike Peter Lahis Community School, all the students were Bougainvillean, mainly from Kieta. Thus we were able to speak our Nasioi language freely and without any fear of being punished.

One day my Grade 4 teacher from Nagovis in South Bougainville, Mrs. Rumbali, came into our classroom with a broad smile. We had been making a lot of noise but we halted because of her presence.

‘Oh, don’t stop’ she said as she placed her stuff on the table. ‘You should be jubilant because the fighting has ended.’

I remember my class mates eyeing each other in search of the truth. I was lost as I walked home that afternoon.

Upon arriving in the house a relative asked me, ‘Did you see your Uncle Davire down the road?’ I did not answer but the talker continued, saying that the fighters had signed a peace deal with the PNGDF and were now free from harm.

This was March 1990 when the popular BRA strategist, Sam Kauona, representing the Bougainville militants and Leo Nuaia, representing the PNG government, police and army signed the first Bougainville ceasefire. The peace deal paved the way for the defeated and demoralized PNG army to withdraw from Bougainville.

I had realized that something was in the wind when my father had begun regularly taking us home

to Pomong in Kupe, where we began cleaning up our little desolated hamlet and intensifying our gardening activities.

By the end of March nearly all the 3000-4000 people from the high-risk areas of Kieta who had been evacuated into care centres under the PNG government state of emergency orders had left the various camps and the PNG government had ceased providing care.

The Kupe people's departure from Kaino was swift. In a week the people had left for our mountainous homeland in the Crown Prince Range. Kaino Village became empty and lonely as it watched the Kupe people returning day by day to pack up and camel their belongings back to their old home.

At Kupe it was the women who worked hard to rehabilitate our homes while our men were daily walking into the abandoned Redskin squatter settlements and slums that encircled Arawa with their tools dismantling the houses. They stripped the houses for timber and roofing iron and other needed materials and brought them back home to rebuild our destroyed homes.

Every day trucks ferried materials from the Arawa slums back to Kaino. From there human labour transported them to our mountainous homes. New homes made from this totally new type of building material sprouted everywhere in a way that the pre-crisis days had never seen.

Our Kupe houses now had roofing iron and milled timber and our pigsties now had wire fencing. Our living standards generally climbed as we threw away the old sago palm.

In Arawa my relative and the older brother of

Premier Joseph Kabui, Martin Miriori, and his family were given a new residence in Section 11 in Namiru Street so they moved there. About a week later Rose, the Nagovis wife of Joseph Kabui, packed me and my brother's belongings into a plastic shopping bag and ordered us to Section 11 too.

Thus we carried our few belongings in the bag and walked over to Section 11 late that afternoon where we were welcomed.

We resided with Martin Miriori and attended Kaperia Community School and watched the BRA men coming into Arawa regularly on visits from Panguna.

My parents stopped going to Kaino immediately after the signing of the ceasefire. However, my ailing Grandpa was still living in Kaino where a witch doctor was working on him.

When the witch doctor said that Grandpa had completed the medication Papa sent a message to him to wait until the weekend when my brother and I had finished school and we could escort him home to Pomong.

Arriving at Kaino that Friday I went to play with the Kaino kids in the bush until my Auntie Arima and my brother were ready to escorted Grandpa home. I got carried away and spent the night with my friends.

Early the next morning, a Saturday, I decided to walk home by myself. The day was fine so I snailed home chasing birds on the way.

Upon arrival I sensed that the Pomong air was not welcoming me. Nobody was interested in talking to me so I knew what was waiting, a bashing. My own smaller siblings announced my arrival with sarcastic verbal attacks.

Papa came and ordered me before him. He asked a single question, 'Why did not you come yesterday with Grandpa, Aunty and your brother?' A young guava tree branch landed with a thud on my trouser-covered buttocks.

He held my left hand tightly and gave me a good whipping. I hysterically wailed for mercy, propelling him around. After satisfying his anger he ordered me to leave and return back to Kaino and never to set foot in Pomong again.

Still crying I hesitated but Papa came and gave me another harsh session of whipping as my little siblings made fun and laughed at me. I left down the road on which I had come looking back and weeping more. The more I looked back in tears the more verbal intimidation I received from my siblings, who threw lumps of earth at me.

Defeated and crying I walked out of sight and sat on the road side and was crying there while looking back towards home. After a while I stopped weeping, then when the memories came back sharp I started crying again and went on until the afternoon. Late in the afternoon rain fell and I was still there. Nobody came so I got wet and cold.

I crawled weeping into a nearby small cave network where we threw rubbish, especially tin cans and plastic, to hide from the merciless rain. I went from one end of the cave to the other crying till night fall.

I considered walking the Kupe Trail to Kavarongnau in Panguna where my grandmother was living but feared the journey.

When it was dark my aunty came searching for me and took me back to Pomong.

Having been chased away from home I suffered shame and guilt and regularly cried when flashbacks hit me and I remembered some of Papa's previous threats about hanging me for my mischievous behaviour.

I was misbehaving well before the crisis and was not helping Papa so he gave me a whipping one day. Then he took a rope and showed me saying, 'I will hang you if you continue misbehaving in the way I hanged the dog'. He had earlier hanged our dog for stealing eggs laid by our domestic chickens.

Later he threatened me with the same procedure in Kaino when we were with an old relative, Amea. There I was not listening to orders while playing with the only female children in the Kaino neighbourhood.

But I was home in Kupe after my aunty rescued me and she cuddled me throughout the day.

MILITANT REIGN IN ARAWA

KUPE MADE A swift come back with a facelift never before experienced. The old scars of neglect faded. Garden fires were there belching smoke into the clear blue sky of our mountainous home as every day women cleared and planted food for their households.

On the coast the Redskin army of PNG was withdrawing, defeated and demoralized and going back to their own country. Their PNG politicians, who had boasted that they would crush the black rebels of the northern Solomon Archipelago in 1989, watched as they landed in Port Moresby.

People everywhere were cheered that the shameless Redskin parasites from PNG had been chased out of our Solomon island home of Bougainville.

As the PNG occupiers left Bougainville our militants arrived on the streets of Panguna and Arawa joyful about shutting down the Australian mine. They

established their base in Panguna in Francis Ona's village of Guava.

One day Mama and Papa left us in Kupe and went into Arawa to do some shopping. While they were there a band of BRA men entered the popular Haus Bilas shop in downtown Arawa. The BRA men walked around eye-shopping and came to an abrupt halt in front of a shelf containing shoes.

As the genuine shoppers watched they helped themselves to shoes saying: *Kurungtareai shoe nangka poremorung porako kamarie*. 'Wear the shoes for we have suffered in the cold jungles for this land'.

Their bare feet were now shod with brand new shoes as they left without paying. People were shocked with their strange and lawless behaviour.

My parents came home later and recounted the scene. But what could we do? The BRA men had the guns and were feared by all Bougainvilleans.

I returned back to Kaperia Community School after the first term break. Shortly afterwards our Namiru Street was raided by BRA men from Panguna. As we sat under our house early one morning a BCL Nissan Urban maintenance vehicle screeched into the street.

They halted in front of the third house from us that was occupied by a Siwai family. We stood to watch the event unfold. The BRA men scolded the house owner then went inside and removed all the

phone connections and came out.

Then they drove away with the husband of the family, who was suspected of communicating with PNG agents.

The entire neighbourhood stood and watched with sympathy as our south Bougainvillean brothers had their harmony disrupted by the unorganized BRA. Some went to the family and consoled them.

Later in the afternoon, the BRA returned the father and in the following days the innocent family left for their home.

Days after the incident I was strolling with some students along the main Marimari Road in Arawa and came to a halt close to the Red Cross compound across from the Post Office.

Before us, in a grassed space between the Red Cross Centre and the concrete remains of a former supermarket and community centre, a drunken BRA man was putting on a disgraceful show by driving a vehicle recklessly over the wet lawn.

The armed man, with his gun held out of the window, was spinning and skidding the BCL vehicle as commuters watched. Many bystanders condemned the act and warned us kids not to go near or watch such stupidity and risk being injured.

Every day my brother and I took a back road to school. We went from our street to the end of the Section 10 road and the start of Section 9 and then took to the Section 8 foot bridge over the Bovong River to the Amion Road and down to Section 5,

where our school was located.

Sometimes, when there were too many people about, we took the security patrol road along the Bovong River banks to Ikorl Place in Section 6 and then went on to Kongon Place and the Amion Road, from where it was three streets down to the main school gate.

Everyday new events were unfolding for us.

One day I picked up a .50 calibre WW2 anti-aircraft gun cartridge from in front of the two Bovo Stores, one operated by some Kongara people and the other by an Engan man married into a Kupe family.

I had never seen a cartridge before and I felt happy when I picked it up. The first thought I had was to ask my uncle Davire for a gun so I could fire my first shot. I kept it for a long time; keeping it carefully hidden under my pillow every night when I slept. I showed my fellow students at school and kept it in my pocket wherever I walked.

Then one night, Davire and some other BRA men arrived from Buka in an ex-BCL Mazda truck from Arawa. I told him I had a cartridge and he was interested so I hesitantly handed it over to him.

A few days later I was doing some dishes in the house when Martin Miriori drove away. I watched him go in his Nissan Sunny down the street towards town. I particularly admired that vehicle.

To our amazement, a few hours later, we saw Martin walking back into our street. He came and sat

silently for a few minutes and later announced that a BRA man had pointed a gun at him and ordered him out of the car and then took off with it. Shocked, he had to walk home.

Our home was two weeks without a car. Then a Land Cruiser arrived. The Miriori family drove in it to Buka and back. We drove around Kieta in it too. Then one day another BRA man forced my relative out of the vehicle at gun point and took the Land Cruiser.

Soon after this, and back at Kaperia, we were assembled in the main school hall and our head teacher, Mr. Bagaia, a Redskin married in Koromira, announced that the school was now shutting down temporarily and we were to go home. My brother and I left Section 11 for the Kupe Mountains.

PNG did not want Bougainvilleans to be educated because it had been chased away from the Panguna mine that it loved so much. In April 1990 a 'confidential' plan for the re-conquest of Bougainville had been formulated by the Department of Defence's Defensive Intelligence Branch with Australian input. Its two aims included a total blockade around Bougainville and deliberately setting Bougainvilleans against each other³.

Our Bougainvillean politicians did not waste any time and formed a government in May 1990. They

³ Field, J. Michael, *Chronology of the Bougainville Civil War*, 30 January, 1998.

had decided to stand up to the Australian and PNG blockade of our island and to stop the foreigners regaining our island's wealth at Panguna.

I was out of school and with Papa, who had now resumed his job working as catechist at the Our Lady of Mercy Church.

For our independence day celebrations in Arawa I heard that the coastal people were fishing and the mountain people were rearing pigs and growing food. Singsings were rehearsed everywhere and I knew that the day would be a significant one for us.

On the day of celebrations and the declaration of Bougainville independence, 17 May 1990, I was not in Arawa but in Kupe. It was said that people from all over Bougainville were present and they celebrated till late into the night with joy and tears.

For Kupe, the village elders like Piamo, were composing songs about the long years of struggle against exploitation, indoctrination and genocide. They had sung and practiced for weeks so they could go and perform in Arawa. Every day I visited the main village I saw and heard villagers singing with guitars and bamboo flutes. Wherever people were gathered, even in the gardens, I heard them singing the freedom songs.

One popular line of a lyric I heard and had kept in my mind went:

'1-9-5-7 Bougainville bruk lus istat, busat ipait lo en? Ol lapun olsem Andrew Naru, Paul Lapun na Lovai; liklik denai, John Mirio na plenty mo...Kam olsem lo Buka,

Buin...Sivai, Nagovisi, Tinputz na Wakunai....'.

'1-9-5-7 When Bougainville broke away, who fought for it? All the elders, Andrew Naru, Paul Lapun and Lovai; John Mirio and plenty more also helped. . . from Buka, Buin, Sivai, Nagovisi, Pinputz and Wakunai ...'

I've lost most of the lyrics to time. But it was a favourite one for the crowds and I heard it after the celebrations from people who had been sharing their feelings at Arawa.

Papa was then given a BCL house in Section 19 in Arawa, right in front of the main parish church, the Our Lady of Mercy.

There were now no squatter settlements around the town. On the streets every person I saw was a Bougainvillean! The Our Lady of Mercy church was now a Bougainvillean church.

I was also not abused on the streets of Arawa by my Papa's people, as I was in the past.

Arawa was free!

THE FOE IS BACK IN BUKA

I WAS FREE to travel in the midst of my own people of the northern Solomons again. Whenever I felt like running into the Kupe Mountains I went alone, for I had no fear of the Redskin slums at the edge of town where I had been previously shot at with pebbles and slings.

We had occupied the house at Section 19 for about two weeks when the BCL powerhouse at Loloho came to a halt. One day we tried to cook on the electric stove but to our dismay there was no power. Everyone began to erect small huts for cooking. Arawa was now a dark township at night.

Soon after the businesses in town ceased to operate people began looting. Imported goods were no more as small, seemingly independent, BRA groups began to control life with their guns.

As I watched rubbish in the streets grow, people looted or broke into shops, offices, schools, unoccupied BCL buildings and government and private residential houses. Other people went to the main wharves of Loloho and Kieta and broke into shipping containers to loot and become rich with new property.

Nearly all the people with guns, who had probably never seen the town and material wealth before, now had a vehicle and a house in the urban centres around Kieta and were living affluent lifestyles.

In Arawa we didn't know what the many BRA groups were doing in other parts of Bougainville. People said that the BRA was fighting people who were betraying Bougainville to PNG in the north. They were also rounding up anti-Bougainvillean persons.

In Arawa it did not take very long before we noticed PNGDF boats out at sea and planes in the air.

In September 1990 the PNGDF invaded Buka Island and the BRA began sending men to the north. Supported by locals, known as the Buka Liberation Force (BLF), they slowly moved towards Buka Passage.

In September one of Kupe's sons who had gone north, Sikoung, from Kutu'enung hamlet was killed by the PNGDF crossing Buka Passage. Many tales arrived in Kupe; some said he was shot and buried with others somewhere in the middle of Buka town in a mass grave, others claimed that he and his mates were shot and dumped at sea.

His old mama, Okai, and wife, Ionu, wept and wept for days. Seeing the body of the deceased as one weeps brings some comfort but weeping with nothing but an old photograph was very painful for the entire family. But still they managed a funeral and slowly began to live with the pain. More and more Bougainville deaths were occurring in the north every month.

I didn't participate in the funeral but I heard how

it was conducted. The family placed a photograph of Sikoung in the midst of an array of flowers and wept for nearly a week.

Later on they held a *kepunu*, a traditional feast for ending the mourning period.

The Redskin invaders of Bougainville left defeated and demoralized in March 1990 but the leaders of the Haku area in Buka signed the *Kavieng Agreement* on 5 October 1990 and re-invited them back.

Their return in September was restricted to Buka Island. It was rumoured that the people of Buka wanted to remain a province of PNG; its leaders told the Redskins to forget about the rest of Bougainville.

But in April of 1991 the Redskin army crossed the narrow Buka Passage and landed on the northern tip of Bougainville against the wishes of our interim government. More of the late Sikoung's brothers were seen leaving to fight the enemy in the north.

I heard people saying the PNGDF was recklessly murdering the innocent and powerless Bougainvilleans that they captured and were raping women.

When they first came to our island the PNGDF also raped Bougainville women and terrorized our people and leaders. They also terrorized the few whitemen and businessmen of Bougainville and looted properties in Panguna, Arawa and Kieta and loaded it onto their ships when they left.

Now they were back fighting to re-take Bougainville because Michael Somare and Rabbie Namaliu could not sleep without the Panguna Mine operating.

While pain and suffering was occurring in the north, my hometown Arawa was still relatively

peaceful however.

ARAWA'S STREETS OF UNCERTAINTY

ARAWA PROVIDED PEACE and freedom for me as men were dying in the north from PNG guns, women were being raped and people were fleeing away from the infiltrators.

Despite the return of the exploiters, our government, the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) had established itself in Arawa. It established a school at the former Bovo International Primary School site along the Erama Road; it had a police department in town; it had set up Erama Military Barracks; we had medical services; and we also had a radio broadcasting service known as *Radio Free Bougainville* that was based in the former post office building in the centre of town.

I regularly visited the radio station to watch my relative, Joseph Kabui, talking on radio. I sometimes went to Erama Military Barracks to spend time with the BRA men from Kupe and I also partook in looting my hometown.

Being age 12 and seeing people now grabbing what

they wanted from the BCL and government properties, I decided to experiment. When I was in Section 8 I broke into a house left by a white man with my aunties from Kavarongnau and we helped ourselves to a few of the things that remained. In Section 11 I broke into the main office of the deserted Bovo International Primary School and a storeroom alongside my Kongara friends who lived one street up at Erang Place. Then we lied to the neighbour saying that we had seen the building broken into by looters.

On Namiru Street I broke into a house to remove a wall-mirror. I also participated in breaking and entering houses in Section 37 and 35, searching for a few goodies the Redskins and whitemen might have forgotten.

Most of the time we just took a few tins of fish and, sometimes, the fire extinguisher to play with. In the houses in Section 8, 11 and 19, where whitemen had lived, we found expensive kitchen items and bedding and so on, which we took for our own homes.

This illegal way of helping ourselves during the blockade was necessary because the only operating shop, Kina Trading, in the Arawa industrial zone could not meet the needs of the population and was fast running out of supplies.

In the lawless Bougainville looting became a culture that flourished with people becoming rich with new belongings.

Around Arawa sago leaves were replaced by galvanized roofing iron; water was brought straight to homes by makeshift metal piping or rubber hoses taken from warehouses or retail shops. With kerosene out of stock solar power from panels removed from repeater stations and warehouses became popular.

In 1990 I was pre-occupied with looting and I didn't have any idea of the politics in the air. The adults were aware of developments however.

With the BRA ruling with their guns things were in their favour.

One day we went dive fishing at Loloho with our neighbour from Section 19, Aileen Korokoro. Papa was pretty good at this art and, with no tin meat available, people spent most of their time at sea fishing.

We were on the beach playing while Papa went out to sea with his fishing gun. He had a good catch. On our return we came onto a checkpoint at the former Country Club junction. A lone car was parked on the traffic island in the middle of the road and armed men stood by with guns.

Our driver slowed down but we were directed to drive on. I looked back from the van and recognized Peter Sisione from Pooma village, who was a good friend of my family. The eyes of the men at the checkpoint looked angry.

No one knew why they had set up this checkpoint but at home our neighbour from Damara, Aba, told us a confused story.

During the night a BRA group had raided and killed another BRA group made up entirely of brothers from Kongara. The raid, he said, was because the band of armed brothers, led by a family elder called Bozaar, was causing a lot of harm to the public.

The brothers, about 10 of them with their followers, were at their base in a popular building known as the Pineapple House at Birempa, or Camp 5, on the Port-Mine-access road when they were raided in the early hours of the morning. They were all asleep when the other group stormed into their home and shot all of them.

Nine of the brothers were killed instantly and only one fled and survived. After that the killers loaded the bodies into vehicles and dumped them somewhere.

I later learned that the brothers had been a fighting machine. People said they were the first lot to capture police guns somewhere at Aropa when they attacked and killed a police patrol. It was said that jealousy of their exploits and power struggles among the developing warlords was the reason for the killings.

We travelled along Arawa's main street, the rubbish strewn Marimari Road every day and kept our distance from the Toyota Hilux in the car park of the Arawa General Hospital Emergency Ward that was used to ferry the bodies to their dump site.

The double cab Hilux was tainted with blood and flesh and flies hovered around it and stray dogs fought to lick it when it was parked there.

One day in August me, Papa and others went out dive fishing at the reefs beyond the Simpeng Estuary. Looking out to sea towards the east, beyond rocky Pidia Point and Arovo Island, we saw a huge ship in the company of another much smaller vessel.

We kids knew nothing about the day-to-day politics of Bougainville but the ships aroused our curiosity. As a kid who always asked unwelcome questions of my papa, I was fortunate to have the clouds effaced from my juvenile mind.

Papa lectured me, explaining that the ships were New Zealand military ships that had come to Bougainville to enable Bougainvillean and the PNG leaders to negotiate peace on our island.

A few days later some kids and I were playing at the Our Lady of Mercy Church when a strange looking green chopper appeared in Arawa's azure sky. The sound it made was strange, it was a sharp noise and unlike the familiar heavy sound produced by the Australia-PNGDF ones that I had heard before the ceasefire. At the same time it was much smaller.

It circled and moved towards the centre of town. We saw that it was preparing to land in the former AEL Supermarket area. The kids and I rushed over to see it. We got there as it landed, scattering litter into the air. It was dwarfed by the nearby scarred Whitehouse Building.

We watched as two neatly dressed white soldiers got out. They met the BRA commander from the Eivo area, Cornelius Besia. They chatted with him as

the engine of the machine died away.

A gang of men approached peacefully with their guns from the Whitehouse-Bamboo Corner corridor street. But Besia went over to them and ordered them away so as not to cause fear to the New Zealanders. But the white soldiers were not bothered and began talking to us about the chopper and its role and the gun that was attached beneath the cockpit.

The pair told us that our Bougainville was a tropical paradise. The pair stared at me and smiled and asked me my name. I felt really cool at being picked out by them.

I learned that the helicopter lived with them on the huge New Zealand Navy ship, *HMNZS Endeavour*. They said they would be on Bougainville until 5 August when the PNG and Bougainville leaders would sign the Endeavour Accord to help restore services on Bougainville.

After our informal meeting we watched as the pair got inside, started the engine, smiled at us and took off towards the sea.

Life in Arawa consisted of fishing along the Arawa Bay coastline and gardening on the land formally occupied by the Redskin squatters, which was now free of buildings. The town's staple food was the banana, introduced to our urban areas by the Redskins and which we referred to as *tukuru*.

Every stand of this banana around our town was protected. My papa protected the brae behind the Our Lady of Mercy Church that was infested with it.

The banana also spread into the villages of Kieta.

Other food plants introduced to Arawa by the foreigners was also spread to the mountains of Kieta and beyond.

Every day when we walked into the Kupe Mountains we shouldered strange fruits, bananas, and other exotics to plant at Pomong. We also carried up materials to build pig sties and so on.

Everybody collected anything that could be of use in their rural villages. The government of the day issued authorities to dismantle BCL houses and other structures. These had to be endorsed by the BRA commanders at the Erema Military Barracks. The authorisations showed the location of the house or property to be dismantled.

The BRA allowed people to dismantle BCL houses to restore their homes that had been torched or destroyed by the PNG troops with support from BCL.

My papa once got an authorization to remove some roofing iron to bring home to Pomong. Then, under the orders of the BRA, Arawa's Section 4 was allowed to be dismantled by the people to rebuild their homes.

My papa next dismantled a large building at Camp 8 on the eastern edge of the Arawa Provincial High School sport fields. He began removing the walls of the building at night. The roof had been removed earlier by a construction company, Aropa Builders, for their new building that was under construction.

Papa also got authorization to remove the security fencing from a house in Kirokai Place in Section 17 and shouldered it through the hilly ground around the Arawa Water Reserve tank and into the Our Lady of Mercy Church yard near our house.

Later on he ordered a community group in our main Kupe village to come and collect it and they carried all into the Kupe Mountains to our Pomong hamlet. All this loot was then taken to Kaino by a truck.

Papa wanted the roofing iron and other material for a new house to replace the one built by locals for us way back in 1984 or 85. Papa also wanted to construct a big fence to keep domesticate pigs in.

Papa was working pretty hard during this time of uncertainty. He worked as the Catechist and later as the Eucharistic Minister. He sometimes got into conflicts with the Bougainvillean church men. One day I watched him having a row at the Marimari Chapel with Fr. Chris Baria, who was a new priest ordained at Tunuru mission in early 1991.

I was also serving as an altar boy in the Arawa parish. The other altar boys were from Panguna, a band of brothers from Pomaua, a few from the nearby Mentonung and Widoi villages and one who was from the Bougainvillean island of Nissan.

I loved serving the Catholic mass, especially with Fr. Robert Mark. He had done well preserving the mass during those ugly days and the Arawa parish became the centre of religious activities. Many people

flocked there for Sunday mass.

I remember his conduct of the mass as being very beautiful. As altar boys we sometimes also travelled out to other centres. We once had a picnic together at Loloho's Camp 6 beach.

But our band of altar boys was not that permanent. Many left when they got older and some only came to serve when there was a need for many altar boys to serve at a mass, such as on the feast days in the Catholic calendar.

But there were also boys who had no choice but to serve as altar boys. These were those with diehard parents. The brothers Napoleon and Noel Mirinu from Pomaua, whose father who was the Parish Chairman, were in this category. There was also Frank and Kevin Kabui who were Mirinu brother-cousins. My brother and I were also in this category because our papa was the chief church-man in the Arawa parish. There was also Jeffrey, my relative, and our neighbour Aba's son from Damara. Lastly there was the Nissan boy, Ben who was cared for by the Mirinu family.

Through his church activities Papa made many friends around Kieta and I got to know people from the Widoi area and many others on the streets of Arawa.

As Arawa kids our fun was centred on the sea. Nearly every day was spent fishing and since Papa was good at dive fishing, I went with him on nearly every fishing trip he made. I dived with him and his

band of friends from Kieta all the way to Sipa village; I went along the north coast of Dapitotopu Point to its tip; I dived around the Shell fuel depot at the main Loloho BCL wharf and beyond at Camp 6 beach around Rorovana village.

The days following Christmas saw me happy and wandering around Kieta. I visited Kavarongnau with my BRA uncle, Davire, in his ex-BCL Nissan Sunny and saw my extended family living like tinned fish in the old cocoa fermenting shed built by our relative, Michael Pariu, before the crisis. There were no houses for them in their respective villages. My grandma and her daughters had collected rusting roofing iron and erected a shelter to accommodate them.

Slowly they began to re-start life from scratch, as we did at Kupe. Luckily in my Pomong hamlet the sago thatched houses had not been torched by the PNGDF and people still had them to live in.

In those days my parents and everyone else were working to re-start life in a way that they thought fit for us.

TUKURU TOWN AND GUNBOATS

TO RESTART THE life that had been shattered by the PNGDF and its state of emergency people had to tear down the BCL and Redskin legacies and improvise to carry on.

In January 1991 my relative, Joseph Kabui, was at a meeting in Honiara with the PNG government leading up to the signing of the Honiara Declaration to allow services back into Bougainville.

After several weeks a PNG ship, *MV Cosmaris*, arrived at Kieta with many Bougainvilleans on board who had been stranded in Rabaul by the blockade.

Our people were welcomed home but the ship was taken over by the BRA and they gave an ultimatum to the PNGDF to withdraw from Buka and Wakunai within 24 hours. When they refused to depart the BRA torched the ship.

I was at Arawa that day with Grandpa and we watched the pillar of black smoke rising into the clear afternoon sky. He was wondering what the black smoke in the distance was so I had to tell him that the BRA had burned a ship.

My ailing grandpa was with us in Arawa, where Papa was caring for him. Later Grandma came and

took him back to Kavarongnau.

The Redskin crew of the *MV Cosmaris* was kept at Erama Military Barracks but was then taken over to Choiseul Province and Honiara in the Solomon Islands and then back to their home country.

I went back to school at the former Bovo International Primary School doing Grade 4 in February. Our school was relatively well off because we were able to use all the facilities and materials left in its storerooms. All the teachers had to worry about was educating us.

Our school was made up of an all-Bougainvillean staff and students except for two PNG teachers, Mr. Baguia and Mr. Vengiau, both of whom were married to local women in the Koromira area.

The Our Lady of Mercy Church altar boys team spent every weekend with my papa rehearsing for the Sunday service. Otherwise we were working in the gardens with our respective parents or down by the sea playing.

Every child had a block of floating material with a crate mounted on it to carry things in the water; we called these 'floaters'. We enjoyed the sea and canoed our way beyond the reef. The people fishing along the beach with fishing lines and nets complained that our laughing scared the fish off.

But our careless fun out at sea came to an end when PNGDF boats appeared. In April the PNGDF invaded Bougainville across the narrow Buka Passage and took control of the whole Selau area. Their patrol boats shelled us in Arawa.

It was midday on a clear day when the PNGDF boat came into Arawa Bay. I was at home in Section 19 when it began to fire indiscriminately on the town.

Sitting under the house, I heard the roar of the gun sounding like continuous thunder rolling in the dark sky. It was terrifically deafening and I stood up to look beyond the Peter Lahis Community School but could not see the boat because it was too far away. But our neighbour and relative called and said that it was a PNG boat attacking our town.

Seconds later bullets came flying our way. Bullets pierced through houses with a thudding noise. Our Lady of Mercy Church got its share and the huge water tank above our area was also hit hard. The whole population of Section 19 ran to take cover behind the concrete walls of the church. The Mirinu family that lived much closer to the sea down at Section 21 came running to the church to hide with us.

After a few minutes of reckless firing the bombardment stopped. A truck load of BRA men from Erama Military Barracks arrived in the church yard. They left their truck close to the church and ran down to the beach without saying a word to us.

But after a few minutes the BRA returned to their truck and their leader, Bernard Ionau from Bakabori, who was a colonel, told us that the patrol boat was heading towards Loloho. With a screech of tyres on the tar they accelerated away along the Marimari Road.

The attack was devastating. The rain trees lining the former PA Club beach were all victims and lost their branches. The concrete block remains of a colonial-era copra shed where we usually sheltered during rain had bullet wounds so deep they scared me, I really feared that gun.

Fear engulfed our town and nobody visited the sea

for several days. We had to eat *tukuru* without fish. But after a while we returned cautiously.

As a result of the attack the BRA dug a ditch stretching from the former ARCO Motors to the PA Club lawns as a shelter in case another attack occurred. A new BRA camp was also established by men from Kerei in Section 22 to man the seafront.

This group was led by a BRA strongman but I don't remember his name. He was notorious in town because he was in an adulterous relationship. The affair had driven the woman's Redskin husband back to PNG. The woman was a popular figure in town and I regularly spotted them driving around town when I was walking to and from school.

Despite the regular attacks from the sea by the PNGDF I still attended school. Just like when we were at the Peter Lahis Community School in 1988, we began talking about war on our island in school. Mostly we talked about the BRA fights with the Redskin army that was moving towards us from the north.

We shared tales of war in school, at the gardens and by the sea. However, despite all that, I did not know that in August my relative Joseph Kabui led a team of Bougainvillean leaders, including my papa's old friend, lawyer Reuben Siara from Siwai in South Bougainville, overseas to Geneva to attend a hearing of UN Rights of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples where they accused the PNGDF of causing genocide on my island. I only heard that Joseph had been overseas after he returned home.

But that was his business; my business was to attend school. In December I knocked off early from school since I knew I would not receive the academic

award that I had dreamt of. At the closing of the school year my brother had an award so he and Papa attended the ceremony. I locked myself in the Kupe Mountains in self-pity.

I spent the whole of the Christmas season in Kupe away from the PNGDF guns and the reckless killing of our own people by the BRA.

Just before we completed our school year, the BRA men from Kerei killed an old man from Widoi village outside Arawa for unproven allegations of sorcery.

He was captured in his village while with his family and taken to the BRA camp at Kobuan and after a few days of torturing was beheaded at the BCL's Loloho wharf and sunk into the deep waters of the port alongside other executed political prisoners.

There seemed to be no hope; we had to live in this society with its new rulers who enforced their rules with guns. The new Bougainville masters always had their rifles slung over their shoulders.

In February I was back in school in town. But the school was soon shut because of the continuous PNGDF attacks.

First the PNGDF bombed the Arakabaul Bridge at Manetai and then they began visiting Rorovana Village. This caused the BRA to evacuate the whole population of Rorovana to the Arawa's SSQ flats, which had been turned into a BRA/BIG care centre.

The population of Arawa thus increased. The Rorovana people took control of most of the *tukuru* plots and established a market. They were making a lot of money. The BRA had used bombs and cold chisels to open the safes of all the banks in Arawa and Panguna and cash was flowing.

In May the PNGDF took Torokina Station and the Siwai area in South Bougainville. I heard rumours that BRA attention was now concentrating on the north. Fighters began to leave Arawa heading towards their respective homes near the war front. The PNGDF army now had an ally in the newly forming Bougainville Resistance Forces, commonly called SBIA, after the *South Bougainville Interim Authority*, which had been created by Anthony Anugu in Siwai.

A few weeks later, my papa's old friend, lawyer Reuben Siara and his family, fled from Siwai and were accommodated at the Rumba SDA Mission and School. We visited them with food and often went to Kupe with their family members.

In mid-1992 the PNGDF set up a camp on Tangkanumpe Island outside Loloho. Every night we saw lights on the sea and during the day we saw boats arriving and departing from the island.

Fishing on the Arawa beaches was restricted since the PNGDF boats regularly fired their guns on the unarmed fishermen and women. People began slowly moving out to their villages.

PNGDF planes also began to fire guns at us in town. Once, when I was at Joseph Kabui's house in Section 8, a plane with a fuselage shaped like an egg began circling the town firing at a street market packed with women and children. People said that the plane had been bought from Israel. BRA men opened fire on the plane and it eventually left for the north.

A week later a chopper came to town delivering letters from the sky calling on people to surrender and find peace and regain services. But the next morning a PNGDF plane came and shot at people loitering

around street corners in town. The BRA set up a watch high on the Arawa-Water Tank ridge to shoot at any more of the pestering planes.

One afternoon when I was playing with some kids a plane was heard above the Kieta port. We all hid under a house for safety but this time it was not the plane that fired first but the BRA men on the ridge.

We were surprised and stared at the ridge and the plane as it fled north.

As I watched the changes in my beautiful hometown of Arawa with my juvenile eyes my papa also got some news that shocked him.

Back on his home island of Bali or Unea in the West New Britain Province both his elder and younger brothers had been murdered by their fellow villagers. I know Papa was lost; he could not stand the pain.

The call came through the Red Cross radio network in Arawa that he was needed by his family in Bali.

I was in Kupe caring for our pigs and did not see Papa leaving. But I later heard that they had *tamatama* with Aba's family from Damara in Panguna. During that farewell Papa was joking with Aba's wife, Durinu, about having to leave via Honiara.

They all laughed at that and the next morning Papa was driven to Kieta where he boarded a boat across to Taro town in the Choiseul Province of the Solomon Islands.

Mama was now our boss. We left Arawa and spent most of our time in Kupe caring for our pigs, ducks, chickens and gardens.

Then in the dying days of October the PNG invaders landed on Arawa's door step at the Tunuru

Tukuru Town and Gunboats

Catholic Mission and the Morgan Junction further north.

The Redskin army bombed Arawa and more lives were shattered.

TOURING WITH JOSEPH KABUI

I WAS AT home on the 21 October when Arawa was attacked from the Tunuru Catholic mission. The mortar shelling began at about 3 AM. For Arawa it was a market day when most of the traders from the rural villages woke early to come into town.

Since Pomong hamlet was in an isolated section of the Kupe Mountains we were in the dark about the developments in town. But at midday a wandering band of boys from Nengkenaro Village came and broke the story that Tunuru had been taken by the PNGDF.

All the villagers were moving to spots where they could have a good view of the coastline between Arawa and Loloho and witness the enemy's activities. There was nothing we could do to help our town however.

In the afternoon of the next day a BRA party from the Tumpusiong Valley arrived at Pomong hamlet. All the men in the group were known to me. They were the ones who had protected Joseph Kabui when other

BRA groups were harassing him after the 1990 ceasefire.

Mama prepared food and then, as night settled in, I led the party towards the hamlet of one of grandpa's relative at Antapu in the Dangkua Valley. Reports had reached the Tumpusiong Valley that Joseph Kabui had escaped the attack and was hiding there.

In semi-darkness we crossed the Ingkirerare Ridge and descended to the lonely hamlet at the foot of the Pinitu Boulder. The armed men called at a house where the occupant was listening to news on a transistor radio but the person inside did not bother to answer us so we moved on. The men knew that Joseph would be at Kuri village with a clanswoman called Kavatai.

We walked along the Topinang-Arawa Road and arrived at the village in pitch darkness. In the first block of houses I spotted people from Rorovana Village. In the second lot of houses I saw people from Mosinau in Panguna. In the last group of houses where Kavatai lived we found Joseph listening to the news on a radio.

On the night of the mortar shelling Joseph had not been with his family and was with his personal guard, Francis from Toku village in Tumpusiong. They were asleep when the mortar shells targeted at the leader's house exploded on the fringes of the lawn but did not hit the house directly.

The pair rushed outside and remained there as the attack shifted from Section 8 to Section 7 and a street

where another BRA/BIG leader lived.

We rested at Kuri Village for the night and early in the morning we all went to Section 8 to collect Joseph's belongings.

As we entered Section 8 and Section 7 we spotted a BRA armoured bulldozer built for them by the Irish-born Australian, Harry Baxter, in 1991.

From these men I learned that the BRA-sympathetic Australian had built them three fighting machines in the Panguna Mine pit workshop. Apart from the armoured bulldozer he had also built an armoured personal carrier out of a BCL 10 cubic metre dump truck and an armoured front-end loader.

The armoured personal carrier was not road worthy because it was too heavy with the metal armour and was locked up in Panguna. But the armoured front-end loader was somewhere else in Arawa being used by the BRA.

A bystander standing around the BRA armoured bulldozer told us the beast was being prepared for a raid on the Tunuru Junction PNGDF camp.

We all stayed in the vicinity of Joseph Kabui's residence as he collected his valuable official documents and other things. His Nissan Patrol, which was having mechanical problems, was to be driven to Kaino for safe keeping once it had been fixed by his relatives.

We were stationed at Kuri for about a week. Day after day we went into Arawa scavenging household things left by fleeing residents. We also killed and ate

the domestic chickens that were left behind by their owners. We feasted every day and grew rich with property. Some of our men left for Panguna, via Kupe, shouldering their souvenirs.

I helped myself to some trousers and shirts left littering the floor of a house next door to Joseph Kabui's residence. Then our company left for Tamaisi hamlet at Karikira where a technician, Philip Banas, had set up the Radio Free Bougainville broadcasting station.

We spent two days there while Joseph and Philip did their business.

After Tamaisi we moved to Kaino village, where we rested for a day with a relative, Naomi Tampero and her extended family, and then we headed for the Kupe Mountains. There we spent three days at Pomong hamlet while Joseph rested.

Mama killed a pig and her uncle's body guards feasted for the three days they were in Pomong.

Joseph spent his days at Pomong helping in the garden. He planted coconut and orange trees. His coconut planting was a ritual he practiced wherever he went. He said they would be his memories in the future when the war was over.

Then it was time for him to head for the Tumpusiong Valley in Panguna and beyond to Tadorima in Nagovis, where his wife and children were. I was really sad to see him go so Mama allowed me to accompany him.

Mama gave me some shoes that Papa had bought

in 1991 at Kina Trading. My Uncle, Davire, seeing that I was overloaded, took the shoes and packed them with his gear and we left.

We cut through Nengkenaro Village and headed up the Dong'siro brae into Dongnua on Bougainville's mountain backbone, the Crown Prince Range. We had our parcels of lunch at Bioka, on the Donua trail, where we could see the Panguna Valley and the mine site to the west.

In the afternoon we reached Kavarongnau hamlet in the Tumpusiong Valley. We rested there for a few days. We left behind some of our men and added a new lot from Tumpusiong and the Kosia area in Avaipa and headed for the Sovele area of Nagovis, where Joseph's children and wife were.

We spent about two weeks in the Nagovis area. Joseph toured a number of villages encouraging people to stand firm in faith for our struggle against the evils of exploitation and indoctrination by the PNG government. I listened to one such address that he gave at Sovele Catholic Mission

The entourage went on to visit Bakoram village but I followed my Uncle Davire and we went to Bibiaro, an SDA village, where he was married. I stayed at Bibiaro for two days.

And on one of those days I was a hero for a few hours. That night one of Davire's wife's sisters eloped into the bush with a Siwai man. They were caught on the fringes of the big village and someone ran to tell Davire to go and attack the man. He ran off and they

tracked him but stayed a good distance away because a rumour had spread that he was armed.

Davire sent an errand boy to collect me and a shotgun. I came out of my sleeping room with the gun, loaded it and darted into the cocoa plot in the darkness as people stared in wonder. They thought I was a hard core child fighter from Panguna.

The Siwai man escaped but I felt really proud of the reputation I gained in a place where no one knew who I was.

The next morning I left with my uncle to go back to Tadorima about two hours walk through thick jungles. He was carrying a basket of *kaukau* and I carried the gun with pride.

We met the rest of our party and rested for a day. The next morning we left Tadorima on an ex-BCL dump truck for Kavarongnau. The truck was owned and driven by a man called Toma, who was married in Guava village. We spent a week at Kavarongnau where the men rested with their respective families while Joseph, Davire and I helped the family with their gardens.

Then, on a fine morning, our company left. My extended family members, including my maternal aunts, accompanied us until we passed the Catholic Mission at Deumori and reached the Kokore-Damara ridge where they turned back. I felt sad seeing them fading in the distance as we moved up the trail towards Kokore.

At about midday we reached Kokore Village. It

was bone chillingly cold there, unlike Kavarongnau which was always humid.

We were about to depart when the chief, Simoning, suggested that Joseph spend the night with him and his father, Takinu, so he could give some words of encouragement to the village people the next day. So we slept at the isolated little hamlet of Kokore.

After speaking with the people the next day we departed and the people lined the track and shook hands with us all and wished us a safe journey in these bad times. I saw some mothers in tears.

After Kokore we reached Guava village where Joseph was to meet with Francis Ona.

I was excited about this leg of our tour. I had never seen the man who was so popular in the media. I was also to see the women with guns who guarded him. He had female bodyguards because the men were all needed on the battlefield.

We were resting on a speaker's platform when Francis Ona approached calmly with a broad but a controlled smile. I watched every step he took towards us and he halted where his friend, Joseph Kabui sat.

From a distance I kept my eyes on the elderly men accompanying Francis Ona. He chatted cordially, as I remember, and later gave us a tour of his gun making workshop. There he showed us some huge WW2 cartridges. They were the length of three of my fingers put together and his men were busy building a

gun to fire them. Once this was done they would be testing it by firing it into the Panguna Mine pit.

In the night the two Bougainville leaders met and slept in an enclosed office while we ordinary men were hungry, eating sweet potato and nothing else. In the night we ate tinned fish in a kitchen hut with men from the Kereaka area who had come to collect their guns from Francis Ona's gun makers.

Our Tumpusiong men were frustrated after going hungry in the night and very early in the morning they did not want to waste time hanging around Guava but wanted us to leave immediately. Thus, after a few hours, we departed by foot down to the Panguna Mine where a big ex-BCL truck was waiting to pick us up. The driver was busy running about climbing the power poles for transformer oil to top-up the coconut oil in his fuel tank.

The truck was owned and driven by a man called Kamaung, who was from Guava. He looked old but I saw my companions were relieved not to have to walk.

The old man drove us up the Port-Mine Access Road and slowly down into the Pinenari Valley. I was amazed that there was no life on the road. My people were hiding in the bush.

We drove on at low speed towards the Morgan Junction, which was occupied by the PNGDF. Our intention was to stop at Birempa, sometimes called, Camp 5. We were met there by a lone BRA man, Eugene Moses, the son of the popular Bougainvillean

pre-crisis unionist, the late Henry Moses.

He chatted with our seniors for a few minutes and our transport headed back to Panguna.

We then moved up a narrow trail towards Warawara Village. We passed the village, which was dead and lifeless and climbed mountains for about two hours and finally reached Dongoto, a hamlet of Pomaua Village.

Joseph decided that we should rest there with the people, most of whom had fled from the coast and unsafe villages like Araba and Dongsiro. Besides that, Joseph had connections at Dongoto.

Joseph Kabui hailed from Panguna but the name originated in the Topinang area in the hinterland of Arawa. An old man, Kabui, had decided to call his distant relative after himself many years before. And at Dongoto one of the original Kabui sons, Clement Kabui, was married and residing.

So we rested around in the vicinity of the village while Joseph and Clement talked. Then Clement began calling people to tell them that the leader would like to share some thoughts on the politics of the day before he and his entourage moved on to Pavaire village.

So we spent the afternoon there telling stories and meeting new friends. I was known here as an altar boy from the Our Lady of Mercy Church in Arawa. Some of the boys in the village were my altar mates.

As night came people from the hamlet and the nearby refugee camps arrived with food for us. We

ate and later a bell was rung and Joseph began addressing a crowd. As I remember their faces showed a great deal of uncertainty.

Later we had a prayer meeting in a little chapel and went to sleep.

Our prayers were Bougainvillean. We prayed to God to save Bougainville from the Redskins by making them grow sleepy and weak so that the BRA could kill them and free our island.

Early the next morning I woke early and met my altar boy comrades. I took a tour of the hamlet. One section of it was occupied by families from Morgan Junction, down on the main road. Further up the hill the boys had purposely built a hut to house their bamboo musical instruments that they play and relax with in times of great fear.

I also learned that the Mirinu family, Napoleon and Noel, had already left for the Morgan Junction army camp to go to where their mama was from in Morobe Province in PNG.

The family was allowed to leave because their mother was critically ill and there was no local medical help. The locals had carried her on a stretcher down to a point close to the Morgan Junction camp. From there her family supported their staggering mother towards the PNGDF camp.

The boys told me they had no information about what happened to the family or whether were they mistreated by the enemy or not. It was assumed that since their mama was a Redskin the PNGDF would

not harm them.

Our patrol waited for the sun to dry all the morning dew on the trail and once the sun was high enough we took off for Pavaire village.

On the road we did not meet any people because they were all up in the bush working on their hideouts. We arrived at Pavaire safe and sound.

We were accommodated by Joseph Kabui's former North Solomons Provincial Government acting premier. He also asked Joseph to talk to the Pavaire people, which Joseph cordially agreed to do.

While Joseph and the villagers went to centralized spot to meet some of us rested under the leader's house. Then three people from Tumpusiong arrived telling us that pro-PNG forces from Torokina had raided Konuku Village at Tumpusiong but some of them were captured, their guns removed, and their leader held by the BRA from Nagovis.

The men showed us the captured WW2 American weapon taken from the attackers. It was lethal they said.

On the next day our patrol was split, with some of our men returning back to Tumpusiong as a response to the raid from Torokina. Only a handful of us went down to Kuri.

We had a relaxed walk along the Pavaire-Arawa feeder road through the unkempt coconut and cocoa plots till we reached Kiriano hamlet next to Kuri. There we saw that Joseph Kabui's Nissan Patrol had been brought up from Arawa by his relatives for safe

keeping.

We left the hamlet and moved into Kuri Village.

The Baria family had already begun to move their belongings into the bush beyond Pavaire so there were not so many people in the village. We spent two days at Kuri, collected a few of Joseph Kabui's belongings, and then left for Kaino.

I heard people in our company saying that Joseph Kabui was to be based there with the Radio Free Bougainville broadcasting station.

THE REFUGEE HIGHWAY

OUR COMPANY HAD split in two. One left with Joseph Kabui via Karikira to meet with Philip Banas and I went with the other company that shouldered the few belongings of our leader and came behind. We arrived at Kaino and settled in Naomi Tampero's residence.

I did not spend much time at Kaino because my mama came and we left to go into the Kupe Mountains.

From Kupe I watched the flood of people coming over the Crown Prince Range into the Panguna Valley and beyond into South Bougainville. Since the PNGDF landing at Tunuru and Morgan our people were on the move, forced away by the heavy mortar shelling of Arawa and the surrounding villages. I heard that the first casualty was an expectant mother from Pavaire, who was killed in Section 14.

A handful of our people had tried to remain at the Arawa General Hospital and some more at the Rumba SDA mission and some inland schools.

Then the shocking news arrived in North Nasioi that the Arawa General Hospital had been torched by a Redskin from Enga Province called Kopa, who was

married to a Kongara woman and serving in the BRA.

He and his friends also burned the BCL's Medical Foundation Hospital and several other magnificent buildings in Arawa.

These stories and others were brought by wandering bush kids who shared them with me whenever they visited our isolated hamlet.

There was now a constant flow of refugees up the Kupe trail and over the Crown Prince Range and into the Panguna Valley.

The Rorovana people, who the BRA had settled in the SSQ flats in Arawa were moved to the South Nasioi areas like Marai, Daratue and Kurai. Other people fled to the Damaosi and Karikira areas or beyond the Poruka Ridge into Kongara and Daratue; others fled into the Poma area or beyond to Kongara and Daratue.

These were all people who had once had dreams of making a life in BRA-controlled Arawa. Their fine plans had now been shattered once and for all. I knew they would never make anything out of the life of fear from both sides of the conflict that we were now living.

At Pomong when food sometimes ran out we travelled down to Singkaii to a garden that my parents had established when we were still in Arawa. It was situated on the source of the ridge hosting the massive water tanks above Section 19 and the Arawa High School.

Our clansmen from the area had told us that we could make gardens there. Alongside us in the garden were the family of Aba and Durinu, our neighbours from Section 19, who were now living as refugees somewhere in Dokotoro village between Damaosi

and Karikira.

There we dug sweet potato and the women carried the heavy loads back to Pomong. On a few occasions they also dropped off some *kaukau* at Kaino for our relative Joseph Kabui and the other leaders there. Sometimes Mama gave food to the refugees that were slowly building up in Kupe, either to settle or in transit.

On these trips I learned that Joseph's vehicle at Kiriano had been towed away by the BRA leader Ishmael Toroama and his men. This was done without Joseph's consent but all I heard him say was, 'What can we do when that is the sort of mentality the BRA has, running and grabbing things for themselves in the name of good'.

However, it did not bother him much, he was more concerned about the lost people of Bougainville than running after personal property, as many of the BRA men had been doing since 1990.

Our Pomong hamlet saw more strangers arriving. There were people from Bakabori and Siae and a few of the original Kupe people who had moved to Arawa but had now come back.

Our people secretly made fun of these last people. They had forgotten about Kupe long ago but now, because of the fear of death, they had decided they loved Kupe after all. They were struggling really hard to adapt to the lower living standards and lifestyle however. I saw they did badly in the gardens in the beginning but they were learning fast and they also began to help other refugees.

Day by day individuals with loads bigger than themselves tracked up the Kupe-Panguna trails to cross the Crown Prince Range. Kupe people helped

them to rest, fed them food and helped them with their loads across the rugged terrain into the Panguna Valley.

Sometimes whole families came and our people carried their smaller children and brought them into their homes for a good rest then got them over the range to Panguna.

Beside my Pomong hamlet, the Kumpou dell became the home of the Siae and Bakabori villagers. To our south, at the entrance of the Kupe Valley, the base of the Dongnare Boulder was slowly being explored by another group of Bakabori villagers as a place to build their refugee hideouts.

While Kupe was busy helping the refugees in the dying months of 1992, the BRA in Arawa carried out a raid on the Tunuru Junction PNGDF post.

The BRA, it was said, planned to end the occupation with a stunning raid using their armoured bulldozer. They put the bulldozer on a low loader in Section 6 and moved it a little closer to the Araba Village area on the Arawa-Tunuru section of the road.

The BRA put a professional heavy equipment operator, Tony Kumaisa, in charge of the machine. Most of the able bodied men were reluctant to ride on the machine as riflemen but an old Buka man called Paravin who was married in Pavaire, joined Tony with his homemade gun. Both were about the same age.

The machine was unloaded and as it headed towards the Tunuru Junction the PNGDF began firing at it. But their bullets and grenades could not penetrate it. However, as the two old men moved closer, the deafening sound of bullets and grenades hitting the machine scared them too much and they lost control and ended up in a roadside ditch. They

opened the hatch and fled towards the beach and into Arawa. From Arawa, Paravin headed straight home to the refugee camp at Pavaire.

After this setback, I saw from my mountain home that the BRA concentration in Arawa was slowly diminishing.

In Kupe more roofing iron arrived from coastal villages like Siae to cover the huts erected beneath the canopies of trees. Sago palms on the Birareko Ridge that bordered Kumpou and Pomong also lost their dancing leaves to make thatch for the refugee shelters in Kumpou.

Under the cover of the forest canopies Bougainvilleans were moving on with life.

17
PAPA'S DEATH

LIFE UNDER THE shaded canopies was cool and fun but tainted by danger and the rule of the gun. Papa was away in West New Britain but life went on as usual in the Kupe Mountains.

My isolated Pomong hamlet was now a connecting hub between the main villages of Kupe, Nengkenaro and Sirona and the Kumpou refugee camp. Every day people passed through with information about what was happening in the outside world.

Then one day, to everyone's shock, we were told that Arawa had been captured by the PNG invaders from Tunuru. They had also taken Loloho.

The BRA identified the area in Arawa that was being used as a base by the PNGDF. It was the Whitehouse Building, which was a high rise, brick walled old provincial government office in the centre of town.

We watched as the BRA moved. When the Redskin army was at Tunuru the BRA was in Arawa. Now, with the PNGDF in Arawa, the BRA moved back to Totaisi, in the hinterland. In Kupe more and more young men travelled down to serve with the BRA; most with homemade shotguns made at

Kutu'enung hamlet with materials from Panguna.

The areas between Arawa and Kupe were like a curtain that blocked the world from my view. From being a denizen of modern civilization I had now reverted back to being a bushman. I was like a child marching towards its unknown fate.

As I awaited my fate the BRA celebrated a victory but with a cost. A BRA team led by men from Panguna staged an ambush on a PNGDF transport patrol heading for Arawa from Loloho.

News hit Kupe that the BRA had attacked the truck loaded with soldiers and killed them all and captured their weapons. However, the BRA lost one of their brave fighters from Poaru, a village in Panguna.

After being fired upon the PNGDF soldiers lost control of their vehicle came to a halt in the middle of the road. When it appeared that all the soldiers had been killed a BRA hit man, popularly known as Dominic, rushed to help himself to the soldiers' guns. One of the dying soldiers in his last moment of life squeezed his trigger and shot him.

Beside Dominic another Panguna man was also wounded. With all the Panguna men grieving the Kongara men took ownership of all the guns.

It was a victory for the BRA. The Kupe people were also celebrating as we waited for the dead BRA soldier to be brought into Kupe from where he would be carried over the Crown Prince Range to Panguna. But later in the afternoon the plan was cancelled and the body was carried from the BRA post at Totaisi to Kerei, where vehicles took it to some relatives in South Nasioi, then across Kongara and on to Panguna.

Papa's Death

The wounded BRA man was sent to Taro in Choiseul Province in the Solomon Islands and then to Honiara. This was where most sick and wounded Bougainvilleans went for help.

One day my clansmen from Siriang hamlet, who were now living in the Kumpou dell and who had been travelling the refugee camps in the mountains behind Pomaua gave us a message that my mama's cousin-brother, Steven Nabei, who had got married in the coastal village of Bairima in 1991, had plans to resettle with us in Kupe.

So in the following week we went to Pomaua with relatives from Nengkenaro Village to meet them. They were waiting in their temporary home when we arrived. When they fled Tunuru, after the PNGDF landed, they came to Pomaua to settle. But mortar shelling made the Pomaua area unsafe and Uncle Steven decided to continue his journey to Kupe.

Besides the mortar fire, BRA and PNGDF contacts on the main Arawa-Loloho road were happening and the people at Pomaua were vulnerable to stray PNGDF bullets from the road below.

Later in the afternoon, with all their belongings, like mattresses, bags of clothes and cooking materials, our party set out for Pomong. We took the trails I was familiar with, passing by Pavaire Village into the Dangkua Valley and then up to Kupe.

I was pretty exhausted when we arrived at the Kupe border area at Kutu'enung.

For about a month Uncle Steven and his family were with us at Pomong. During that time a person from Kaino told Mama that Papa had sent a radio message. He had sent the message via the Toksave Program operated by Radio Bougainville in Rabaul.

The message was that he was on his way home. Nobody knew which route he would follow. Toksave stated that he was currently in Rabaul.

To our surprise, he arrived home on the 15 March 1993. A few BRA men from Kupe out on patrol met him on the trail but they knew who he was and ignored him. He had come through Buka, Wakunai and Arawa, all coastal areas controlled by the PNGDF and BRF.

After passing the BRA patrol Papa bumped into Colonel Bernard Ionau just below Pomong hamlet's Kamarove coconut plantation. The colonel was travelling from Bakabori to Kairang hamlet for a meeting being conducted with local leaders and politicians by the BRA/BIG lawyer, Theodore Miriung.

Papa and Colonel Ionau chatted for a few minutes and the BRA man questioned him about his trip from Arawa to Kupe. After the talk Colonel Ionau assured Papa that he was safe in the BRA area.

But on the following morning Colonel Ionau held a meeting at Mape Village below Kamarove with Piamo, an ex-PNGDF soldier and BRA trainer and his BRA sons and others from Kutu'enung. They plotted to kill Papa.

Afterwards Colonel Ionau, who had earlier settled at Sirari hamlet at Nengkenaro, wrote a letter to a BRA faction at Kongara telling them that Papa was 'a threat to Bougainville freedom' and had to be executed.

The local BRA soldiers could not do the killing because they shared the same area of ground as us; they had to get somebody else to do it.

Colonel Ionau gave the letter to some carefree children, Mathew Dengnai and Ori Simou, to hand deliver to the Kongara BRA men at Totaisi in the Turampa area. These men were stationed there to keep watch on developments in Arawa.

So on the morning of the next day a bunch of them arrived at our home. They were men I knew from Kupe Village and Pomaa. The leader was Karuai, who was from Nagovis but married to a Kupe woman, Mere.

I was sitting under the *kavoro* shelter when the armed band of about twelve men arrived. They called to Papa behind our old house and told him that a BRA team at Totaisi wanted to interview him. So they left. Mama followed Papa to Totaisi, which was near the Rumba SDA Mission station outside Arawa. He was interviewed by a BRA man known as Otii, from Kongara. The interview came in the form of an intimidating and reckless threat

In the afternoon they returned. On their way home, Mama told Papa that she was not feeling good about what was happening and they should get home quickly and escape to Arawa. All Papa said was, 'This is our home'.

Very early the next morning, 18 March, Papa prayed a prayer I never heard before.

'Lord, thank you for giving me my wife, Therese, and my children Leonard, Justin, Jessica, Dollorose and Theonilla. Bless our home and the land you gave us. There are times I feel bad towards them. I say sorry for these moments'

After this prayer he ordered us to kill a pig. We did that and were preparing and cooking it at midday when a pair of errand boys from Kaino arrived. One

of them was called Vianney, his comrade was a refugee from Siae called George. Vianney was serving with the BRA and was armed but he was still a little kid. They were formal and told Mama that Ishmael Toroama, a BRA commander, now wanted to interview Papa.

After Mama relayed this information to Papa he lifted Theonilla, who was the last born in the family and held her tightly. He patted some of us and left without having tasted the food he had wanted. Mama and Uncle Steven Nabei followed him to Piruana where the interview was to take place.

Mama had purposely called Uncle Steven because he might know and have some relationships to the people who had called for Papa. For Papa and Mama they were strangers.

At Piruana, there was no sign of Ishmael Toroama. Thus they waited, exchanging stories with the people who had gathered there for the interview.

In the late afternoon armed men arrived for the kill.

The men approached Papa and Mama as they sat chewing betel nut and telling stories. A BRA man from the coastal village Araba, David Dongku, came straight to Papa and ordered him to remove and hand him his wrist watch. Papa did this as people began to move away. They expected the BRA to fire their guns to scare off people.

Everyone fled but Mama stood defending my papa. She brushed away punches aimed at him. Guns were aimed at Papa but she stood in front protecting him. In a gesture of love, the like of which had never been heard of before across Bougainville, she stood by Papa with no fear of death. The BRA men

struggled with her saying, 'This is not your father's nephew' as it is required under customary marriage in Kieta.

In the midst of this a BRA man shouted, 'Shoot them both!' but another BRA man from Panguna, who was not part of their company, told them not to be stupid.

Papa then said to Mama: 'Leave me to death. If we both die, what will happen to our children?'

Mama was then swept away by the blood thirsty men. Then, a cousin-brother of our friend Durinu, fired a shot that penetrated the back of Papa's skull and came out of his face. Papa landed heavily on a the rocky ground.

Seeing that he was still alive and struggling, a man from Karikira fired a second bullet through his chest and Papa came to rest.

Uncle Steven came out of the bushes and held his elder grief stricken sister and ushered her towards home. They were not allowed to take Papa's body home with them.

Papa's body was covered with flies and they were feasting on his mouth as the BRA searched around for possible places to dump him.

They rounded up some by-standers at gun point and ordered them to bury Papa after wrapping him in a canvas sheet. The bystanders dug a hip-deep hole, a few metres from where he had landed.

Then the BRA men got the Kapanasi hamlet residents, Bario and his wife and son, Boirinu, and ordered them to bury the body. At gunpoint and under threat they dragged Papa's body on a rope and placed him into the hole and laid him to rest under

the cocoa and coconut plot of Piruana's Kapanasi hamlet.

Mama and Uncle Steven followed the Kaino road back. At Kaino my relatives, Naomi Tampero's brothers, had prepared some plywood to make a coffin and waited thinking that Mama would be allowed to take the body. Seeing her empty handed they kept silent for fear of the men with guns.

They let Mama and her brother pass into the mountains of Kupe.

Mama and her brother aimed for Kairang hamlet, where Theodore Miriung and the group of leaders from around Kieta were still having their meeting. Mama wanted to seek their help to retrieve Papa's body for proper burial but the meeting dismissed them and the leaders went home.

Defeated and demoralized in their own land and in the midst of their own people, Mama and Uncle Steven headed for our hamlet of Pomong.

At Pomong we had heard nothing of the killing until a gang of four boys arrived and said to us, 'Your papa has been killed'. My Aunty Mary, with her infant gathered around the boys and in a matter of seconds Uncle Steven appeared holding my weak and sobbing mama.

Mama collapsed on the bare ground. Warm tears ran down my cheeks. I was lost.

The messenger boys then left for the main village of Nengkenaro. We were alone till dusk and then we went to sleep.

I did not sleep, hoping to hear Papa's spirit come. As we rested I heard distant voices. They came closer and closer and I recognized Okai, the mother of the

Kutu'enung family. Okai came with her husband, Siraori, and others.

We left our beds and went outside as hysterical weeping echoed around our little hamlet. In the following hours a few more close family friends flocked in from the other Kupe hamlets and the villages of Kupe, Nengkenaro and Sirona. We stayed up for a couple more hours and then went to bed.

On the following days more mourners arrived from more distant places. A few who I knew from the destroyed Arawa General Hospital came, as did our neighbours from Section 19, Aba and his wife, Durinu. They shared the tale of farewell that they had had with Papa in Arawa before he went home to New Britain.

Papa had then joked, saying: 'I am leaving through Solomon, on my return I will come back through PNG to Buka and Arawa, and upon my arrival, you will kill me.' Papa had said this while pointing and laughing at Durinu as they were eating *tamatama*. Durinu said that Papa's words had now become reality.

The Aba family left us early for Dokotoro where they were preparing to continue their journey through Kongara to Damara in Panguna.

Then my extended family members from Kavarongnau came, led by my two grandmothers. They stayed with us until the final day of mourning when our elders hosted what in my traditions is called *dangkinang*.

In this event the elders stand and debate the possible reasons of the loss of the loved one and what can be done for the future welfare of the bereaved family.

There were many wise people stamping their feet on our ground and talking as the smell of cooking pork and taro enveloped us. I was seated on a rock formerly used by Papa as the pulpit of his chapel and listened to the leaders. Many of the leaders argued that we should abandon our desolated Pomong hamlet and move to the main Nengkenaro village. On the other hand my extended family from the Tumpusiong Valley wanted us to return back to our original homeland. This was what I preferred but my Mama was not in the boat with me.

After about a week we had our *kepunu*, a feast that officially ends the mourning period. After that we are allowed to work in the gardens and so on.

Many people helped us. Young women from the main villages came to live with us and help as we prepared for the *kepunu*. Pomong hamlet had enough domestic pigs for the feast so none were needed from elsewhere.

Kupe's well-known PNGDF victim, Louis Kepetu, and his wife, closely supported Mama and the small feast was successfully carried out.

After the *kepunu* we left for Kavarongnau with our extended family.

Our travelling party was really big. All of us, with our relatives from Nengkenaro, loaded the Nabei family's belongings and took off early that morning.

The journey was fun and full of laughter. Most of it was jokes exchanged by the younger carrier boys with Aunt Mary, Uncle Steven Nabei's wife.

We made it over the Crown Prince Range into the Panguna Valley early. By late afternoon we were into the Tumpusiong Valley. We left the Nabei family on the road going to Biroi, a hamlet where my other

Papa's Death

grandmother dwells in the Onove Mountains, and headed for Kavarongnau.

We stayed in Kavarongnau for about a fortnight and after completing the activities related to the Lenten season of the Catholic Church's calendar at Deumori Mission we were back in Kupe and my Mama's favourite place, Pomong.

LIFE IN THE KUPE WILDERNESS

WE HAD LEFT Kavarongnau early in the morning on our trip back to Pomong in order to get past the open gravel landscape of the Panguna Mine site and hide in the safety of the Kaurakaura jungles before the angry tropical sun came along to torture us.

Without little kids it takes about one hour to conquer the trail from Panguna over the Crown Prince Range to Kupe. From the Panguna Mine site we entered the Kaurakaura jungle and then penetrated the mountainous Donua jungle onto the 1930s Kupe Goldfields to finally reach the main Kupe villages of Nengkenaro and Sirona.

On this trip my family and the young Kupe woman escorting us, Toboinu, had an extra person on board. It was our Tumpusiong relative, Dominic, who had fallen in love during our short stay at Kavarongnau with Toboinu.

The new couple stayed with us and became part of our Pomong community. We made gardens together and, as 1993 began to ripen, Pomong started a new

housing project.

My little brother and I had begun to prepare timber for our new house because the old one, which was built before the crisis around 1984, was falling apart. Dominic led our party and we worked together at the labour intensive task of cutting timber.

There were sixteen metal posts already lying idle under our main house. Papa had purchased them before the crisis from our relative, Aba, while the family was still at Section 37. Under BCL's policy of moving its employees to higher standard housing corresponding to their new status after promotion Aba's family was about to be moved to Section 19.

Seeing that the crisis didn't appear to have an end Papa had saved them up until peace occurred on Bougainville and he could build a permanent house. Instead he assigned two local boys Korai and Abero to cut posts from hardwood for the new house.

My brother and I assisted them in finding the slowly decaying boles and securing the hardest parts of the wood and drying them in the sun for days and moving on in the search for more. We were still searching for the last few when Papa came home to be killed by the BRA.

With Dominic we successfully prepared the next tree, which had been felled for a garden above our hamlet. We stocked the posts in the open for the sun to cure and later slowly brought them home. But as the job was progressing Dominic left us to live with his in-laws at Sirona Village.

That left us alone and we were now just my mother and her five children striving to survive without a father in a world that was ruled by the black men and their guns.

But the bush had its freedoms for me. Without Papa and his restrictions on letting me be free to mingle with my peer group of boys in Kupe I learnt to be a man. I walked in freedom with my relatives. My cohort of friends did not commit crimes but were good at hunting, building their own houses and doing their own gardens

A relative, Kevino, from the Kupe border village of Mape came to be with us. He and his family decided to join us out of sympathy. He took over the building of the house using what Dominic had done earlier. We were lucky that Papa had dismantled roofing iron from the former BCL residential block at Camp 8. The camp was in a small enclave on the Kieta-Arawa road between the Arawa Provincial High School to its west; Section 21 to its south; the Simpeng Creek to its east and the Arawa airstrip to its north.

I worked beside Kevino and learned the art of building and our house was up and complete and we moved into it with his family. We also set up a little mini hydro system for lighting using a car windscreen wiper motor that I had removed from an ex-BCL Mazda Dyna that was decaying at Kavarongnau hamlet in Panguna.

There were similar hydro set-ups in the main Kupe

villages. People used alternators from cars and trucks that used friction on carbon rods to produce electricity for their homes. Nobody knew where Kupe got the idea but I first saw it at Arawa High School where Charles Mikua an Eivo man from Mainoki village in Paruparu had constructed a setup using vehicle alternators.

I went there one day in early 1992 to check on the Arawa High School uniform jackets and shorts that he had decided to sell to the public after a thief, Makaki, from Siae broke into the main storeroom and stole some of them and they became popular. Poor Makaki had been taken to the police establishment in Arawa and tortured.

Anyway, Charles Mikua, the science teacher demonstrated his piece of equipment to me. He also told me that he was collaborating with some villagers behind the Our Lady of Mercy Church to construct a bigger one and test it in their village.

Our little hydro setup operated two light bulbs from a torch. Despite its low voltage it made me really proud and we began to sleep under one of the security-giving glowing bulbs.

Then the Kevino family left us and moved away beyond Nengkenaro Village to be with their teenage daughter, Dakoau, who had begun to have a romantic relationship with a young man there.

So once more our little fatherless family was alone in Pomong. The Kumpou dell refugee camp was on a hill to our east and the main Nengkenaro Village

was a thirty minute, uphill and down dale, walk to our west. In our isolated hamlet we lived with our animal friends, a cat and a few chickens. They made enough noise to give life to our hamlet.

Previously we had kept pigs and ducks but with the tragic loss of Papa they had been used for the feeding of mourners and helpers at his mourning feast.

But we still had enough animals, mostly the chickens, for meat to supplement the food from the gardens and the bush.

Many of the boys from Nengkenaro came and camped at Pomong to visit the surrounding bush hunting for freshwater crabs, small bats in caves and birds and mammals that lived and slept in trees. They also gathered wild yams, which we called *itoka*.

Our most popular prey was the bats we called *komera* or *komeuka* or *kukuba* that lived in the dark caves. There were three caves, Betunare, Airitabu and Dibua occupied by bats on the Pomong side of Kupe. We went there with a huge net that was big enough to cover the entrances and trap them.

After silently setting the net we boys then went into the cave making loud noises that had the bats rushing to escape. Instead they ended up in the netting where those manning the cave entrance carefully killed them. Then we brought the catch to Pomong and feasted on them.

I was in the bush alongside other boys of my own age. We paid little heed to BRA activity or the

Redskin army in Arawa, Tunuru and Morgan. But there were many stories that I heard and a few I saw unfolding.

In early 1993 there were a few refugees from Pavaire in our midst. When they later moved back to their village I heard that the whole of Pavaire had turned to the PNGDF side. They also began to attack Topinang and other BRA areas with the Redskin army.

They had even invited the PNGDF to establish a camp in their village. Their young men were armed by the Bougainville Resistance Force that was fighting for PNG interests on Bougainville.

But the Pavaire people were also good to the BRA and other refugees. They had made an uneasy peace with a BRA team led by Glen Tovirika and I saw all the refugees and the BRA flocking to their village and coming back with rice, soap, salt and so on that they had missed out on for ages.

But the peace ended prematurely due to inter-BRA friction. Another BRA group led by Ishmael Toroama had threatened the refugees so the peace that our people enjoyed was halted and the Pavaire men began to attack the BRA again.

On one of the days when the peace process was slowly dying I visited Pavaire with a man called Robert and his wife Iaa and on the way into the village we came across a house that had been destroyed by a grenade launched by the PNGDF to kill the BRA leader, Chris Uma and some of his

entourage.

We had earlier visited Pangkirang hamlet in the Pomaa area where Robert's relatives lived. On that night a resistance fighter from Pavaire called Tauko, who had been a refugee at Kupe, visited us. He brought a plastic bag of goodies like salt, rice and curried chicken. Then, after chatting with us he went back into the night with his .22 rifle.

Later I learned that the BRA leader, Chris Uma, had been visiting to make a peace deal of his own. After the ambush he never came back with his hands stretched out for peace.

At Kupe the local BRA men had moved closer; they were now camping at Bonung, just near Kutu'enung hamlet. And a few people were saying that it would not be long before the BRA would start living in our midst in the bush.

This was because when the PNGDF had begun to infiltrate into our area there was a slow build-up of local men joining the BRF. When the BRA camp at Totaisi broke up the Pomaa-Kupe BRA men resettled at Kaino.

As the BRA sought safer ground and became more reckless towards our people because of suspicion the more our people surrendered to the PNGDF.

One morning the BRA camp at Kaino was raided by the PNGDF and BRF and a BRA fighter from Pomaa Village was killed. Soon afterwards the combined Pomaa and Kupe camp broke up and left for new grounds. The Kupe lot fled to Bonung and

occupied an old cocoa fermenting shed by the Bovong River below Kutu'enung hamlet.

From there they established a workshop to make their own home-made shotguns. They were designed by a man called Mano from Kaino and manufactured by the local boys. They really looked like factory-made guns.

They used power tools powered by a Lister generator that used coconut oil for fuel. The generator came from the PNG Red Cross and was brought to Arawa on the *MV Cosmaris*, which was later torched by the BRA. Also on the ship was a Toyota Hilux and both items had been moved to Kaino by a local relative who worked with the Red Cross, Abel, from Siriang hamlet in Bakabori. The generator also served its purpose in the bush. People shouldered it from refugee camp to refugee camp over the rugged mountains and into dells so people could watch movies or have a little Christmas or New Year dance.

I attended one such event on New Year's Eve in 1994. We had a dance on Nengkenaro's Sinatong Volleyball Field. I just watched from the sidelines until morning. The open air dancing was dominated by armed BRA men from Pooma, Kupe and a few from the Topinang area.

At midnight the armed men celebrated with gunfire. They aimed their guns into the dark night sky and we watched as glowing pellets and bullets left the barrels. The shots echoed throughout the Kupe

valley. We heard no shots of celebration from the occupiers of Bougainville in Arawa.

One of the gunmen, a man called, Mampi, from the Bakabori area got in a row and an exchange of fists with a young local boy. Then, as their fight got rougher, the other boozers stopped them by dragging them apart.

Then, to my surprise, we saw Mampi come running into the centre of the dancing mass. Everyone thought that he was after his foe but he came to a stop and fired a shot from his Kutu'enung made shotgun and then pushed the gun, barrel first, into the muddy earth with a laugh and began dancing around the very tall, single Yamaha speaker where the music was coming from. Many of the terrified people now laughed and returned to the dance arena. I watched all this with interest.

Sometime later the Kupe men who had been at the dance were involved in a murder.

A man called Joe Koredong, of mixed of Buin and Siae parentage dwelling in a satellite village of Pooma called Taako, was murdered by them. I remember people saying that he had had an argument with his wife and left for Arawa. There was a refugee camp there hosting people who had surrendered from Damaosi, Dokotoro, Siae, Sibuna, Topinang, Pavaire, Pooma, Bairima, and Araba villages.

While he was down there he decided to return, hopefully to retrieve his wife and child.

The young gun-making men from Kutu'enung, led

by the chief gunsmith, Mano, went to the refugee camp behind Taako and escorted him to a nearby BRA post on the pretext of an interview, as had been done with my Papa.

But on the way one of the Kupe child soldiers, walking behind him, squeezed the trigger on him. Another innocent Bougainvillean went down in the name of Bougainville freedom.

Late that afternoon, I heard the shocking news. It was on the lips of every mouth in Kupe. The trio, Miriuii from Bakabori, Areku from Kupe and Mano from Kaino, had all fired shots into him and were considered champions of freedom for Bougainville.

But a few days later, shockwaves of fear spread like wildfire across the Kupe Valley because the late Joe Koredong's relatives, on instructions from his mother in Buin, were coming in pursuit of the killers for payback.

The punitive Buin BRA team were said to be led by a known BRA strongman in South Bougainville, Paul Bobby. They were said to be coming via Pomaa to kill any Kupe man who they met.

The Buin people had a reputation for aggression and in terms of fire power the Buin BRA was much better equipped than the Kupe BRA men. This had the Kupe men fleeing into the jungle.

In reality it turned out that the Buin party was made up of a few relatives of the victim who had travelled from the south to see their relative's grave and pay their respects.

This news had the Kupe people again walking around like heroes.

People began to move about after the incident. More local people began to surrender to the PNGDF in Arawa as the BRA became more brutal with their unsubstantiated accusations and punishment of people.

Once they raided my Pomong hamlet to fetch my relative, Naomi Tampero from Kaino Village and her two daughters, Pureu and Kanau. We were playing about under the midday tropical sun when a single .22 shot alerted us.

The men, many of whom had come to Pomong in 1993 to get my papa for his first interview, arrived and straight away called Naomi to the side of our house and began intimidating her. They provided her no chance to counter their attack and all she could do was cry tears of innocence.

While this threatening and bullying talk went on one of the men fired a .22 round to further intimidate her.

Then they ordered her to pack her few belongings and go back to Kaino and not return.

The truth of the issue that the BRA had with Naomi was related to my papa. Since Papa had been killed the local BRA suspected that my mama would decide to surrender to the PNG side.

Naomi's husband was away in Rabaul. He had gone there to do some shopping but the failure of the numerous peace talks between PNG and Bougainville

denied him a safe return back to Bougainville. While he was away Naomi and her daughters began regularly visiting us.

Their visits were part of a bond since time immemorial. Naomi and her matrilineal family and my family had both originated in Enamira, our common ancestral home in the heart of the Tumpusiong Valley in Panguna.

Naomi's ancestors left my line of forefathers and migrated and settled at Kaino but the family connection was not cut or forgotten. In our Bougainvillean societies such oral history and associated relationships is the engine of existence.

During the care centre days of 1989 and 1990 my family had left Kupe and settled at Kaino with Naomi for the duration of the brutal attacks under the PNG state of emergency.

When Papa was killed by the BRA Naomi did not forget us. She came and stayed with us on a regular basis. Whenever she saw that we didn't have enough food she invited us to the Miang'aa dell to harvest food from her gardens.

The BRA thought that Naomi was influencing my mama to surrender to the PNGDF in Arawa, thus they came to stop that plan. We all knew this was false.

But that day, nursing my left hand thumb where I had sliced off the tip with half of my fingernail when we were returning from Naomi's camp with loads of food, I watched my female relative being treated as if

she were a man by those who were said to be fighting for her freedom.

Instead they were harming people's lives and hopes.

Under the guise of reconnaissance patrols down into the lands between Arawa and us, they looted deserted villages and became rich as I watched. Instead of protecting the properties of the Bougainville people who had fled, some to the PNG side and some to the BRA side, they were destroying and looting properties belonging to both sides. Some of the places they pillaged were Tarama in Pavaire and numerous other Pavaire's satellite hamlets as well as the Rumba SDA Mission.

On one of these looting days in late 1993, a troop of armed men from Pomaa Village returning from the deserted Rumba SDA Mission laden with the goodies they had retrieved ran into a PNGDF ambush at Totaisi.

The attack was a shocking surprise for the men who were happily running home with their loot. Some dropped their new belongings and darted for the Bovong River gorge to avoid the storm of bullets that cut down tree branches and leaves before their very eyes.

Luckily, no one perished that day, but many of the men sustained injuries that would remain as scars of sorrow for the rest of their lives.

Every day in Kupe armed men were returning from their patrols with things like water hoses,

stereos, clothes, kitchen wares and many other things and their homes became laden with this property.

People knew that their homes were being looted but there was no law to protect them - it was a BRA world. There was only one way to protest and that was to surrender to the PNGDF in Arawa.

THE WALK TO FREEDOM

THE BUSH HAD a freedom of its own but I also enjoyed the company of the coastal refugees from Siae, Bakabori and Siriang.

At Kupe we had refugee communities around the huge Dongnare Boulder. It was home to runaways from Bakabori on the western side and on the eastern side at Miang'aa dell it hosted local people, mostly from Kaino.

In the neighbouring dell of Kumpou there were people from Siae, Bakabori and Siriang, as well as one or two Siwai and Nagovisi families. Mostly our people fled to the various refugee camps where they had kinship ties or networks.

The Kumpou camp was mostly on land belonging to the Siriang family of Tony Anung, who had marriage ties with the Basikaang clan, thus most of the refugees that settled alongside the family were from that clan.

There was a strong sense of freedom in these refugee camps. Every household had a garden to survive on, people also hunted and travelled to distant

places to trade.

Pomong hamlet was a conduit for crystal salt that was treated and prepared by our Widoi relatives at Pidia Village near the port of Kieta.

They travelled from their refugee camps in the Widoi Mountains around Bunumang to the Pidia Peninsula and camped for weeks with the local BRA. There they worked heating sea water in huge pots till crystals formed.

They packed the salt into bamboo tubes and returned home to use it for bartering with people from distant places. They traded the salt for food that they couldn't produce or obtain because of the PNG-Australia blockade.

To survive people travelled long distances to trade; the BRA also crisscrossed my Kupe homeland to go fighting. Politicians also travelled widely spreading information and updates on local politics.

I attended one of the politician's meetings at Mape village. There were about five politicians from Francis Ona's office in Guava, including Philip Takaung.

There were many of us sitting and listening under a deserted house as the politicians gave speeches about the politics affecting Bougainville. For this purpose they had huge charts pinned to a wall.

All they said was that there were a few very tiny loopholes for Bougainville to address before the nationhood bell would be ringing throughout the Pacific.

I never did figure out what all the writing on the

charts meant. My main worry was that my clothes were wearing out and every week it took a round of sewing to patch the holes to keep my trousers respectable.

My peers in the bush had had no opportunities to receive an education and they too found it difficult to understand the politics. For this reason people began to respond to the daily calls on the radio from the PNG side calling on our people in the BRA controlled bush to surrender and get services from the government. This propaganda was delivered through catchy jingles.

The next group of people, after the Pavaire villagers, to surrender to the PNGDF was from the Dokotoro area. Then the fever came to the Sibuna side, then to the Topinang and Poma areas and, finally, to Kupe.

Early in 1994, a young single mother from Kupe, Tonani, escaped in the night to Arawa. The woman was from Sirona Village and fled after a row with her family. Many also said that she went to look for the Redskin father of her daughter, who she had left behind.

I was shocked at what my clanswoman had done. Since late 1992 the BRA had been spreading the message that most of the people that the Redskins captured or who had surrendered were badly treated. They said that the women were subjected to rape and the men to torture.

Rumours had also been circulated by the BRA that

the reef beyond the Tunuru Catholic Mission was a dumping ground for the bodies of the people that were killed by the PNGDF. Papa had exposed this tale as false and maybe this was one of the reasons for his death. Papa had seen many of the people supposedly raped, tortured and killed by the Redskin army doing fine in the Wakunai Care Centre north of Kieta. Papa said that some of them had even been united with their lost spouses.

Tonani successfully broke through the BRA lines near the Bonung cocoa fermenting shed owned by Tony Anung. This was a revelation for the people in the bush dreaming about rice and tinned fish in Arawa.

After Tonani's walk to freedom others made the attempt. A refugee mother and her child from Siae living with extended family members at Pomong's neighbouring hamlet, Kairang, left in search of freedom but was gunned down by the Redskin army.

There was another refugee family at Kairang. Theresa had two sons. Her elder son, Mangkona was my school mate in 1986 at Piruana Village Tokples School. His father was Theresa's eldest sister's husband. Her next son, 3 year old Brian, was from her short crisis-interrupted marriage to a man from New Ireland.

In early 1990, when all the Redskins were evacuating from Bougainville in fear of their lives, the husband fled, leaving behind his wife and her sons.

Like Tonani before them, Theresa left with her

youngest son in the early dawn for Kiriano, a little satellite hamlet of Pavaire Village on the Arawa-Topinang feeder road. This place was a PNGDF forward-base on the north bank of the Bovong River.

Early the next morning some wandering boys arrived at Pomong and told us that the mother and her child were missing and after an unsuccessful search everyone concluded that they were heading for Arawa. Apparently the BRA was tracking them towards Kiriano on the edge of town.

We had heard heavy gunfire in the early hours of the morning coming from across the mountains in the direction of Kiriano and I was silently wondering about the fate of the family.

I heard the outcome a fortnight later.

Theresa and Brian had successfully cut through the BRA lines onto the Arawa-Topinang Road and were slowly making their way to Kiriano. As they approached the camp at about 4 am a Sepik soldier manning a MAG 58 machinegun and keeping his eyes on the road opened fire. One of his raging bullets pierced the mother through her chest killing her instantly.

When the sun was high enough to scare the BRA away the soldier went to investigate what he had fired at in the night. And there in the moist grass was little Brian sitting calmly on his dead mother's belly with a bullet wound in his tiny wrist.

I learned that people from the Arawa Care Centre had collected Theresa's body from the PNGDF and

had buried it at Mentonung hamlet, outside the old Peter Lahis Community School.

People in Kairang were very sad. Our local people usually met there for Sunday services but I kept my distance.

For Pomong the year 1994 was rushing by without any good things happening. The world around us was becoming cruel. It was especially difficult for us because we were living with the culprits who had killed our Papa.

For most people it became apparent that the only escape from the nightmare being inflicted on them by the BRA was a walk to the areas on the coast controlled by either the PNGDF or the BRF.

And during the final months of 1994 Mama and one of Kupe's most successful visitors to Pavaire Village, Robert Nabe from Kiao hamlet near the coastal Araba Village had begun to plan a walk to freedom for us. Robert's wife, Ia, had been my babysitter in the early 1980s.

Because Robert had a Kupe wife he was based in her homeland. But whenever he felt like eating some rice and tinned meat, he and his family announced that they were going to visit his extended family members in the refugee camps in the Pomaua area. However, on the way they would sneak into Pavaire Village to get the food needed to satisfy their appetites before going on to Pomaua. After having their meal in the PNG controlled area at midnight he and his wife would bury the tins and plastic or

carefully burn them.

Sometimes Robert did the trip by himself and would bring home goodies like salt or tinned meat.

I hadn't heard about Robert and his family's adventures until one day when he and his wife came home and were talking to us about the schools in Arawa that were about to open for Bougainvillean children.

'Primary education will open next year,' I remember Robert saying as he smoked his local tobacco, 'Once the PNGDF and the local resistance fighters secure the edges of Arawa town.' As an afterthought, he said to me: 'What do you think, Sisione? Should we go down to Arawa for you to be educated?'

I was amazed by his stories. He was crossing the BRA lines at will while my papa and Joe Koredong from Pomaa Village had met their fate.

We reflected on a trip we had made earlier to Pavaire. We had escorted a local missionary making his way to PNG to further his education. Our party, including Robert's wife and little child, had waited on the edge of the huge village as Robert and the missionary went to the PNGDF camp area. Then he returned and we continued on to Pangkirang hamlet in Pomaua where his sisters live

In the night Pangkirang had an armed visitor. Tauko, from Pavaire, who was formerly a refugee at Kupe, visited us with goodies in one hand and a .22 rifle in the other.

We chatted as we bushman ate tinned chicken and rice in the cover of the night. Then around 1 o'clock in the morning he left while I was asleep.

So now we were planning to break back through the lines that Papa had broken through in 1993 on his return to his death.

All the Bougainville Interim Government leaders, like my relative Joseph Kabui, now said to be camped in Kongara, hated the Bougainville Radio interviews with people that had surrendered and were calling on others in the bush to come and get services from the PNG government.

They regarded these people as selling Bougainville to the dogs and the infidel PNG government and its lover, BCL. That was why, whenever a person left for Arawa, all his property, like houses, went up in flames.

One such event happened at the Sibuna SDA village where houses belonging to an entire family of one prominent North Nasioi entrepreneur, Amos Ona, went up in flames started by the dirty hands of the BRA.

After learning of Robert Nabe's exploits, Pomong was quiet for a few weeks without any talk of surrendering. Then another relative from Siriang, Robert Itona, who I had known since the 1989 days at Kaino when he was the driver of the Red Cross supply vehicle arrived at Pomong with his family to be with us.

I did not know if Robert Itona, who was a known

hard core BRA man with a captured PNG government-issue weapon, knew the plan my mother had in mind. But to my surprise he was also involved.

In those days BRA men with PNG government weapons were highly respected because they had killed a Redskin to get it. Thus I knew we were safe with him around and that the local spying by the Kupe BRA would halt.

With the Itona family in Pomong the surrender plans developed more. Robert Nabe and Robert Itona met for a few days and a time was assigned for us to take the trail from Kutu'enung through Siriang towards Topinang Village in the Dangkua Valley.

Meanwhile we heard on Robert Itona's radio that the Australian government was attempting to make the Bougainville conflict an internal PNG problem and make it more responsible for solving it. Many people in the bush were saying that Australia was not sleeping well because PNG was its buffer country and it needed it to reopen the Panguna Mine to make itself more economically viable and stable.

I listened to all the news daily but since I was looking forward to all the things that I could do in Arawa I wasn't that much interested. In my childhood dreams I saw a trip with a government ticket to Bali Island in West New Britain where my father came from in PNG.

So one fine late July morning we left from Pomong to scout our escape trail. We went on the pretext of collecting dry coconuts for a *tamatama* in

Siriang. Our little patrol was made up of me, my brother Justin, Robert Nabe and Robert Itona.

Our trail from Pomong through the Kamarove coconut plantation to Kutu'enung and Siriang needed no clearing because it was regularly travelled by people. But beyond Siriang, Robert Itona slashed every little bush while joking with Justin, whose traditional name is Batauri.

'We have to clear all this stuff otherwise they will trap Batauri and the BRA will catch him,' he laughed. Then he would add, 'Just joking Batauri, you will make it through and will be safe.'

By midday we made it to a place on the Siriang-Topinang trail to Namuna. This is a high spot on a sloping ridge bordering the Bakabori brae in the Topinang area. After spending a few minutes with the two men giving us advice and directions for the last segment of the trail from Namuna through the deserted Topinang Village to the Arawa-Pavaire Road used by the PNGDF we returned back to Pomong.

The men went over the plan with us and Mama over some food and later Robert Nabe left for his home.

The period was the perfect one for an escape to Arawa. It was the time when in my society we believe the moon fools the cuscus and makes them easier to hunt. During this period the moon comes up in the morning and remains high in the sky while it is light. The cuscus', seeing the moon, thinks it is still night and keeps looking for food in the bush until the sun

surprises them. Thus caught out they just sleep anywhere and are easy prey for hunters.

On the day of our escape, Mama got up very early and cooked extra food for us to eat on the way and prepared a few loads of our belongings to carry with us.

I woke very early but was dozing in bed when Mama began to wake us up. Outside the moon was full and it was like daylight. We had two pots filled with cooked food. Mama had a knapsack to carry and I only had a little bag hanging on my shoulders.

Tavora and Amea were reluctant to move in the chill of the night but Mama ushered them outside. Tantenani, the last in the family, was calm because we would shoulder her all the way. Pavaire was some three hours walk away. During the walk we would be faced with the unpredictable.

It was peaceful when we left. Standing there we saw our three houses, one hosting the Itona family. Robert Itona had left for Pakia via Panguna to bring back his SLR rifle; he had lent it to someone for an operation somewhere.

We climbed up the Birareko brae to the ridge in the chilly night breeze. From the top we made our way carefully into the silent and innocent Kumpou dell. All the refugees were asleep but the scent of fires made it clear that there were humans there snoring away.

We silently skirted the refugee camp and were soon safe under the cover of the jungle canopy, where

the moonlight intermittently illuminated the darkness.

We emerged into the open no-man's land between Kutu'enung and Siriang. The BRA camp at Bonung was far away down on the banks of the brawling Bovong River. We cut across the Bakabori brae for Topinang.

After some minor confusion and misses of the trail near Siriang we were at Namuna. Mama ordered us to join her in prayer, which I knew she had started at our beloved Pomong as we headed for Topinang.

As we approached the ghostly air of the empty and bush-covered Topinang Village we heard roosters crying in the morning very far away and high on the mountains.

None of us had wristwatches but I knew we were fighting against time. We needed to be somewhere near Pavaire before the sun reached the Poruka Ridge and exposed the foot trails that the BRA could use to follow us.

But we made it to the Dangkua River crossing and I felt safer looking back at the mountains we had left behind. We headed towards the PNG controlled areas. As I walked I wondered whether I would ever come back to this land. I was pondering silently in my broken heart the fact that the BRA would not allow us to return to these dark sleeping mountains.

I had conflicting thoughts. I reasoned that my Bougainville didn't want me and had killed my papa and now I was searching for freedom when I was supposed to be dreaming in Pomong.

We safely crossed the Dangkoa and took the unused Arawa-Topinang feeder road. Though it was a gravel vehicle road it was overgrown with thorny creeping grass. Our little party had to uncomfortably stagger through with our bare feet dancing in pain.

Our feet attained peace when we reached a spot known as Airua. This was the junction on the Arawa-Topinang road where the road branched towards Pavaire. The road was now clear because the PNGDF was using it as the supply route to the soldiers and resistance fighters stationed at Pavaire.

We carefully walked uphill for Pavaire with the day now rapidly unfolding. The surrounding bush shaded the road from direct sun light as we marched and finally reached the distinctive church that can be seen from distant places, including the PNGDF occupied Arawa town below and from the home that we had just left behind in Kupe.

We exposed ourselves before the rise to the church above. Before us was a low rise stretching some metres over finely mowed grass to a house standing on the western edge of the boulder hosting the a few houses belonging to Okanu, mother of the resistance commander, Laurie Patrick.

The morning was fine and peaceful and I saw the first Redskin soldier as we approached the house.

The soldier eyed us but then ignored us as he moved around calling someone further up towards the boulder. Then he reappeared and called to us, 'Yes, morning *olgeta*. *Yupla kam na sidaun*.' 'Good

morning to you all. Come and sit down'. We moved under the house and sat on the chairs provided.

The soldier was an older man. He got himself a betel nut and started chewing.

'*Sidaun na malolo,*' he began. My eyes were on him, as were my ears. '*Ol soldier wokim tea blong yupla. Bai yupla dring na bibain go daun lo Arawa.*' 'Sit down and rest. The soldiers are making tea for you. After you've had a drink you can go down to Arawa'.

I took my cup of tea and the milk brought by a local resistance man and began munching through a packet of biscuits. My younger siblings fought for their share. We were also listening to the soldier, who was from Morobe Province. He said his son was also a soldier.

He said that he had had a dream where a short well-built Redskin man had told him that his children were coming towards Pavaire. At that moment he woke and saw us near the church. It was because of his dream that he had welcomed us and went straight to ordering tea.

Mama related our story about life in the Kupe area and answered a few questions that the old soldier asked her as we sat under the house.

As the sun began to gain height over the Pidia Peninsula to the east of Arawa Bay people in the house began to wake up and stir. Inside the house were two young colleens, Evarini and Nahi, from Topinang who had surrendered on the afternoon of the day before.

They came out and sat with us under the house. Around us were beds covered with army mosquito nets, burning mosquito coils sat on the floor and a few M16 rifles were leaning idly near each bed.

Our gathering was like a village meeting and everyone began to talk freely. I am an introvert and naturally taciturn so I didn't talk much.

Later the old soldier announced that an armoured vehicle was coming to pick us up. I had heard about these vehicles being gifted to the PNGDF by their supporters, the Australians who owned the Panguna Mine.

As the minutes passed well-dressed and fully armed soldiers began to rush in the direction that we had come from. The old soldier announced that the vehicle was coming so we all prepared our belongings for the final walk to freedom in Arawa.

My eyes avoided the mountains of Kupe and Topinang in the distance for they were now my enemies. All my eyes loved now was the ex-BCL township below us, Arawa.

Then we heard an engine climbing slowly up the road that we had come along at dawn. I was excited about seeing the armoured vehicle that I had heard about while in Kupe but to my dismay a Toyota Land Cruiser appeared.

We all piled onto the tray with two soldiers and headed off downhill. The road was in poor condition and I was still afraid of what might be in the bush.

I imagined that the BRA had been tracking us

from Pomong and would now ambush us.

As we reached the Airua junction my heart was in my mouth. The armoured vehicle was there waiting for us, its huge gun facing the Topinang Road ready to maim any BRA man who exposed himself while running after the Pomong family.

The Land Cruiser halted beside the armoured vehicle and one of the soldiers with us said that some of us were to be transferred into the all-metal vehicle.

One of the young Topinang girls went with some of my siblings into the safety of the odd looking vehicle. Then we left to go through Kiriano Village, where other escapees had been killed, and on to Arawa.

We were now in the land occupied by the enemies of Bougainville and who faced the raids the BRA conducted on the unkempt coastal township.

At that moment I thought that Arawa was in love with me.

LIVING IN THE PNGDF'S ARAWA

THE ARMOURED VEHICLE was trailing behind the Land Cruiser with the barrel of its gun snooping towards the bush from the gunner's hatch.

The trees and a few unkempt coconut palms in Section 8 and Section 6 waved a welcome but did not offer much peace of mind to the new comers from Pomong. I was lost for words as our transport headed straight to the old North Solomon Provincial Government houses at Tokunari next to Arawa High School and the Arawa airstrip.

On the way I learned that the Redskin army, including its leaders, was stationed there.

The armoured vehicle deposited its cargo next to us. I was delighted to see the smiling faces of my siblings and the Topinang colleen as they climbed out of the beast.

My company was warmly welcomed into a PNGDF office for some questioning by the military intelligence unit. I never heard what questions were being asked because I stayed outside staring at the

Redskin soldiers.

Later the PNGDF released my mama and the rest of the Pomong-Topinang gang and we were all ushered onto a military Land Cruiser. The new soldier on the vehicle introduced himself as Jimmy; he was in charge of the care centre.

We drove straight to the old BCL single quarters in Section 18 known as the SSQ flats.

The vehicle came to an abrupt halt in front of Block 'A', where Jimmy had an office. I watched him as he marched up a flight of stairs into his office. He sorted out a few papers and came out with his M16 at his side.

He ordered the driver to move forward to the next building, Block 'B', and told us that this was where we were to be housed together.

The SSQ flats are in a three-storied brick building belonging to BCL. The ground floor is a parking lot for those people with vehicles. There were eight self-contained apartments on the second and third floors. To reach the top floor, one has to climb a spiralling flight of stairs.

We were directed to the top floor to an unoccupied apartment that we were to share with the two Topinang colleens. I was a bit nervous living with two strangers but we had no choice and had to do as we were told.

On the ground floor many of our Kieta people had swarmed around mama wishing her and the rest of my family good luck. They shared individual tales

of their own escapes and talked about the different problems between bush politics and PNG government politics affecting innocent people like themselves. I didn't take part and stayed on the top floor.

In no time a truck owned by National Emergency Services arrived. It delivered food, cooking materials and clothing for us, the lost Pomong family.

Still feeling lost, I met Roger Aniona from Damaosi who lived in the apartment to our left on the top floor. To our right, beyond the stairwell, was an empty apartment and beyond that there was a woman, Elizabeth Niniku from Araba Village and her niece Ginang Jaintong. I didn't know who was on the second floor below us and I was then too ashamed to intrude.

But people seemed to be friendly to our family. Opposite us in Block 'C' was a clansman, Hantere from Bairima and his family. He had all his married children and their families with him so the building just housed a big extended family.

I wandered downstairs with my new-found friend Roger Aniona and was met by my mother's cousin, Andrew Nimpauri from Kupe. Andrew had left Kupe in 1989 when we were forced by the PNG government into the Kaino Care Centre.

He had left Bougainville in his teens and grew into a young man in Kimbe in West New Britain. Now he was back on Bougainville fighting the BRA alongside the PNGDF as a resistance fighter. In the bush, at

Kupe, two of his brothers, Akora and Baria were in the BRA fighting the PNGDF.

I wondered what would happen if they met each other on the battlefield. But there he was in front of me talking about nothing but the dirty division of Bougainville with brothers fighting each other on their own land for the benefit of PNG.

We sat as people swarmed around us to listen to our tales and the people in charge of the care centre brought us more rations of rice and other necessities. At dusk a Redskin, Martin married in Pavaire, but from Papa's homeland in West New Britain's Witu Islands came from Loloho in a truck with bedding, a big mattress and a few cooking pots left behind with him by Papa.

The night enveloped the flats that were our new home. Our PNG controlled care centre had residents from all the corners of Kieta but the majority and dominant group came from Araba Village.

Early the next morning, with Roger Nimpauri, I toured our Arawa camp. Arawa was now my home after a two-year absence.

The SSQ flats were outside the old town residential area. Other refugee families occupied the Town House blocks. Most of the Pavaire villagers resided in the old Whitehouse building and the Bamboo Corner block in the heart of Arawa town.

Around both the Town House and the SSQ flats were neighbouring buildings that were bunkers that in the nights the armed civilian home guards occupied.

During the day they were not occupied. An armoured vehicle patrolled regularly giving courage to the pro-PNG resistance fighters.

The PNGDF soldiers resided at Tokunari Village. The old North Solomons Provincial Government office was occupied by a PNGDF mortar platoon and the police lived in the old Arawa Police Station compound.

Beyond the boundaries of the town centre PNGDF soldiers lived at Karukate Hill and Camp 8 near the Arawa High School providing security for the planes that came into the Arawa airstrip. Other PNGDF groups were at Pangkama Village, Kiriano and Tunuru Junction, commonly referred to as 'Box-Cut'. Another group was in the old government township of Kieta and at Morgan Junction. The main base for the Kieta area was Loloho's BCL Camp 6.

Two days later one of the three PNGDF armoured vehicles arrived to pick us up to go to Loloho. We all were welcomed by the PNG soldiers on board and we left for Tokunari.

There we joined a huge 6-wheel camouflaged Isuzu truck loaded with empty drums. We then took to the main Arawa-Loloho road. There were armed soldiers on the Isuzu truck.

With us in the armoured vehicle were the Topinang colleens and three soldiers, two in the driver's section and one sitting with us. Another soldier was on the mobile seat, at our eye-level, controlling the big machinegun.

The gunner was moving freely with his head hidden under the concave cover that looked like a circular washing bowl turned upside down on the vehicle's roof.

The machinegun was housed securely and there was a belt of cartridges hanging down to the ammunition box on the floor.

Our trip was for Mama to go on the Radio Bougainville station that operated from in the pre-crisis Loloho International High School. The man in charge was Emil Tenoa from the Bougainville atoll of Mortlock.

Mama gave a talk calling on her uncle and rebel leader, Joseph Kabui, to embrace peace and settle the Bougainville conflict.

Afterwards we went back to Arawa.

Soon after that Mama engaged in a campaign to retrieve our belongings that Papa had left in Arawa in 1993.

When he had left to walk to Pomong Papa had left cooking pots, clothing and cash that he intended to return and collect if the BRA did not harm him. When he did not return the PNGDF assumed that he had been killed so Papa's relative, Martin from the Witu Islands in West New Britain, took possession of the belongings.

When Mama asked Martin about the belongings he lied and said that he knew nothing about them. Mama reported the case to the PNGDF soldiers who had seen Papa in March 1993.

So Martin, the Witu man, was forced to release all the belongings, including the cash, to avoid hearing from the PNGDF authorities that govern the care centre.

I knew God was not listening. If he was, Bougainville would have been a better place where all of us would care for each other.

But there were people who loved each other in this worst of times on Bougainville. There was no hatred among us as Bougainvillean people. All that the people hated was the politics of the day. Politics were ruthless and had made us victims on our island.

On our return to the SSQ flats there was news that our family friend and clansman from the Kumpou Refugee Camp, Robert Kempatu and a family friend from Sibuna, had arrived and were being interviewed somewhere by the PNGDF.

Robert had been in the Kumpou Refugee Camp when we left. Then, after our surrender, he had gone to the Poma area and escaped into Arawa along the same route that we had followed.

Robert and his friend were housed on the same floor as us and in the apartment just beyond the stairwell. Mama and the young Topinang women cooked for us all.

I was more and more excited because I had now my close relative to roam around with. Before, in the Kupe Mountains, I had regularly joined him in his Kumpou camp and listened to him singing songs about the effect of the crisis on his love life and so

on.

I began to explore Arawa with him.

On the morning after Robert had arrived from Kempatu, the SSQ flats saw another clansman, Hirish, from Pavaire but married in the Daratue area, arrive. He had fled into Arawa after a row with his wife in the BRA camp. The care centre put him in with Robert.

I gained more friends as the days went by. I roamed around regularly with my two clansmen. I was free and had company to go to the Tupukas River, which our camp used for many daily chores.

We bathed, cooked and did everything by the river. Our women had the lower section from the SSQ flats to the Tupukas Bridge and our men used the section near the colonial era cocoa fermenting shed. Vehicles used by PNGDF and a few locals also came here to fetch water or to wash.

After Hirish, another man, Ben from the Kongara area but married in Parini hamlet on the Arawa-Kaino road near the Rumba SDA Mission arrived. He had surrendered for medical reasons. His tooth was decaying and he was suffering great pain. With no medical facilities available in the bush he came out leaving behind his wife and daughter.

Ben was also housed with Hirish and Robert Kempatu. I also began to sleep in the apartment and I had much freedom in Arawa.

A week or so later the PNGDF had the care centre people clear up the former Arawa Technical College

grounds. Then an engineering battalion settled there and Robert, who was heavy equipment fitter, was employed to work with them. People said the new base had been created to spearhead the re-development of Arawa town.

Our people also laboured in an effort to re-development the town. Every morning I saw the adults waking up early to cut the elephant grass around our residential area or the grass and bush along the Arawa-Loloho Road and at the Arawa airstrip.

The care centre bells rang every work day morning and people moved to assigned working places. They also worked at cutting grass for one hour every day. This labour was for our own protection from creeping BRA men who could snipe at us.

I saw my clansmen working hard every day. Their work was evident in the number of vehicles on our roads. They revived the old BCL trucks and equipment lying around Arawa. The BRA homemade armoured vehicle, the front end loader, was also up and running.

The appearance of the loader was a surprise to me. I had never seen it when I was travelling around with Joseph Kabui but here it was now being operated by our care centre people to clean up Arawa. And Robert Kempatu, my clansman, was driving it.

With Robert and a few other local tradesmen, the PNGDF had a lot of other equipment up and running. A huge crane was given life and there was

also a huge BCL D9 bulldozer running around. There were also a number of BCL dump trucks being driven around, making Arawa a noisy place.

Some of our locals also revived a few vehicles that had been left behind in Arawa after the PNGDF attacks were launched from Tunuru in late 1992.

But all of these vehicles only had the Arawa streets to travel around. Their longest available route was from Arawa to Loloho but that was travel that had a risk involving life and death. The BRA was there on the roadside most of the time waiting for the PNGDF and the resistance fighters.

Within the township, our people scavenged for property to improve their living standards. Every day I also saw the PNGDF soldier, Jimmy, the man in charge of the care centre scavenging alongside the Bougainvilleans.

He stockpiled furniture, washing machines, and mattresses and so on in his office or ordered PNGDF transport to take his finds to Tokunari. There were also other Redskin soldiers scavenging for things to take back to PNG. To my juvenile mind this was not right.

Our people joked, saying they must be the poorest people on earth while Bougainvilleans were the wealthiest. People said every ship that came into Loloho took Arawa items like furniture on board that was destined for their poor barracks in PNG.

People also said that everything on Bougainville had stunned the Redskins in military uniform. They

lived in low-quality houses in PNG and the quality of the BCL houses in Arawa were a shock to them. That is why they collected property from Bougainville to ship to their families in PNG.

I knew the PNGDF was not aware that the Bougainvilleans in the care centre were making fun of them, often calling them the garbage collectors of Bougainville who were leaving most of the fighting to the Bougainvilleans.

To the locals, the PNGDF were cowards whose guns only flared up to suppress their fear of the BRA instead of being in response to BRA attacks.

Nearly all PNGDF camps within Arawa and on the outskirts were occupied by local men. The few operations into the BRA controlled areas were carried out by the Bougainvilleans while the Redskins relaxed with the Australian soldiers I saw intermittently in Arawa.

But slowly I saw more Redskin soldiers arriving in Arawa and more grass cutting was done by our locals and more areas in Arawa were being cleared. Arawa was changing despite the gunfire that daily drove fear into my soul.

GOING TO FIGHT IN PANGUNA

IN THE FINAL weeks of July 1994 more PNG soldiers arrived in Arawa. Many of them occupied the former Arawa Technical College where Robert Kempatu was working. They were soldiers from the engineering battalion who were working to revive Arawa.

Our people worked hard to clear the area between the SSQ-Town House perimeter and Section 18. They also cleared the bush around the buildings at the former North Solomons Provincial Government Hostel and beyond.

Soon PNG soldiers settled in the first street of Section 18 and with the help of some local tradesmen began working on the buildings. The buildings were renovated for a field hospital for the army.

Back at our SSQ flats I saw more of our young men heading towards the Tokunari village every day. At the time I knew nothing about the daily shooting that happened down there and beyond at the beach near the Arawa airstrip.

In the care centre the hot topic was PNG politics. There was a visit from an Australian parliamentary group to Bougainville and there were rumours that the PNG Prime Minister, Pias Wingti, had removed the reward of K200 000 on Francis Ona after government officials met with Bougainville rebel leaders in Honiara.

Despite the goodwill gestures from PNG we were still subject to BRA snipers. One day Hirish and I were sitting on our balcony in Block 'B' when we spotted an armed BRA man up on the tank-hill above the former Arawa General Hospital.

A few seconds later he fired. We didn't know where he was shooting but a noisy children's game of 'tins' and the PNGDF construction work on the field hospital seemed likely targets so we waited.

Then we heard the pellets landing on the roof of a building in the field hospital area.

The PNGDF counter attack was alarming. Their bullets darted into the tank hill like rain as we watched. Some minutes later a mortar landed there but not close to the spot where we thought the BRA man had been. We laughed because we knew that the BRA man was not there anymore but dozens of metres away and safe from the attack.

But the PNGDF fired on and on. Tokunari fired; soldiers at the former Provincial Government Office fired, soldiers in Section 18 fired and the armoured vehicle fired for hours.

I was stunned in the way the PNGDF wasted their

resources but, as many people said, they had a constant supply of bullets and guns from Australia and there was no problem.

We were confused still. While the Redskins and Bougainvilleans in PNG thought we were fine the guns kept thundering in Arawa.

One day our care centre had a visit from Miss PNG from Buka. She came in an armoured vehicle.

She acted like a European princess and said little and then went away. Our people condemned her as a 'European dog that needed to stay away from Bougainville and remain in Port Moresby for the Redskins to feast on her'. It was a local resistance fighter laughing and telling us this as we sat in Roger Nimpauri's apartment in Block 'A'. We all laughed too.

But the more spectacular visitor to Arawa was the PNG Prime Minister, Pias Wingti, who landed by boat on the beach in front of Arawa airstrip.

The care centre had prepared for the event beforehand. I listened to all the noise coming out of the main building the people used for religious gatherings, the colonial-era cocoa fermenting shed in the SSQ-Town House area.

Older people were rehearsing in a choir under the leadership of one of Kieta's popular churchmen, Francis Aniona. His son was my friend and neighbour in 'B' Block.

On the day of the visit we all went down to the beach. To my surprise the PNGDF soldiers were

there already and were armed to the teeth. I was in the company of some unarmed resistance fighters. As we waited they poked fun at the PNG soldiers, who were alert and serious with their FAMAS rifles.

The PNGDF soldiers were lined up along the beach as far as the estuary of Simpeng Creek. As I look towards the Bovong Estuary they were there too. Only a few were in our midst and they were active on their communication radios.

We waited and it was announced that the prime minister was on his way. The choir tuned up and the girls carrying greeting leis also got ready.

Out on the Dapitotopu Sea three PNGDF boats appeared; all were approaching us, dragging along behind pillars of white smoke. The smoke looked perfect in the azure sky. Hearts were pumping because it was to be a memorable day for us; we were to see the leader of the country that ruled our island of Bougainville.

As the boats, all armed with huge guns, hit the beach I saw a well-dressed elder from our midst rush into the dirty sea to shoulder the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was looking cool on the shoulders of the Bougainvillean elder and, even before he stood on his own two feet, the girls had necklaces of flowers around his neck.

Then the choir sang to entertain the Redskin leader. My company all made negative comments about the Bougainvilleans who, they said, saw Pias Wingti as a god.

When we left for town the people were still entertaining the PNG leader.

A week later, in the first week of August, I was invited to sleep in Mama's cousin Roger Nimpauri's apartment in Block 'A'. From my point of view this was more practical for my wandering about within the perimeters of our camp.

I came to sleep in Block 'A' but spent my days in Block 'B' with Hirish and Ben because Roger Nimpauri was not always present.

Then one day when we were bored Hirish and Ben decided we should take a walk to the field hospital area. We chatted with the workers there and Ben delivered some medications for the hospital.

On our return we were surprised at the number of vacant buildings between the field hospital and the Town House area, which were only occupied at night by the PNGDF soldiers. We slowed our pace to have good look at them.

There were many soldiers, all Redskins and no Bougainvilleans. As we walked they were busy on the lawn. I saw polished rifles lined up neatly in the sun like lizards basking. Many of the soldiers were still oiling their guns or cleaning their other fighting gear. Not a soul paid any attention to us.

In the following days the PNGDF took over the line of buildings on the edge of the Tupukas Community School and a few more BCL houses in Section 16.

I went there once with Robert Kempatu who was

using the ex-BRA armoured loader to clear up the place. There were a few locals from Puakate Village up the Arawa-Kaino Road who were resistance fighters in the Tupukas camp so I visited them with Hirish and the rest of my friends.

One day I was at Tupukas when the men began gossiping about a vehicle left at Puakate Village so we went to check it out.

Fear crawled up my spine because there was only a single gun with the PNGDF soldier who was driving. We went along the unkempt road until we reached a junction and entered the Puakate feeder road. The vehicle had to crawl around the rotting coconut trunks that had been earlier felled by the locals to prevent PNGDF vehicles gaining access into their homes.

The vehicle wasn't of interest and we returned to Tupukas after digging up the *kongkong* taro left behind by the fleeing locals back in 1992. I felt calmer after I was back and unscathed at the former Tupukas Trade store building owned by a Pavaire businessman who had died around 1991. There I drank a cup of coffee and left for the SSQ flats with Roger Nimpauri and Hirish and our share of the *kongkong* taro.

For Arawa, the August of 1994, was a year of change. Our care centre people worked hard to clear up the Sections in town. The PNGDF stationed at the former Arawa Technical College led the campaign to revive our town.

I only participated in these working bees on a few

occasions. Mostly I went to the Tupukas River to fetch Mama's cooking water. I loved to watch people doing things around our camp however.

A few people developed plots for gardens along the Tupukas River banks and our neighbour Hantere and his children went fishing every day and sold the surplus fish from their catch regularly within the SSQ camp for a few kina. Being a child without skills I could only admire humanity at work despite the clouds of fear we all lived under.

I went to the Town House blocks to admire a one-legged man adzing a new canoe. He was really cool to watch.

There were daily prayers by Catholics in the colonial-era cocoa fermenting shed led by Francis Aniona and also by the SDA in the town area but I didn't attend either. I also stayed away from the children's 'tin-shoot-rebuild' games at the U-turn in front of the camp. Most of the time I just sat on the balcony of 'A' or 'B' Block admiring my peers having fun.

Many of the coastal people in the care centre had canoes down at the Arawa beach area and they had even started garden plots there. But most of the others were just hunters and gatherers. To supplement the rations from the National Emergency Services many people went to gather food in the old gardens of villages deserted by the BRA in 1992 when the PNGDF attacked.

The apartment used by Roger Nimpauri in Block

'A' was coated with smoke stains from the apartment below which had been set alight by the BRA in late 1992 but failed to engulf the rest of the block.

He began to come home with a gun, which he never had before, and every morning as he left, I asked him where he was going that day; he only hesitantly said he was going to work. He had decided to keep me in the dark about his work so I also decided to ignore his change of routine.

After one night when I was left to sleep alone I went early in the morning to Block 'B' and Mama told me what he was doing, 'Your uncle came here last night to tell me to keep him in my prayers because he was going with the PNGDF to recapture the Panguna Mine.'

I was lost for words and sat down on a stool watching Mama cooking.

A few other young men were also absent from the SSQ flats and the Town House. Young men had also gone from the Whitehouse and the Bamboo Corner buildings in Arawa town. They were all camped somewhere at Tokunari.

I knew then that all the mothers and wives were in deep prayer asking God to protect their family members who were going to face the BRA in their sanctum of Panguna.

Robert Kempatu had moved to the former Arawa Technical College PNGDF camp and I was alone in the apartment so I fled from Block 'A' back to Block 'B' and slept with Hirish and Ben.

On the morning of 15 August I was still asleep around 4 am when helicopters started to take-off from a helipad that had been built at Tokunari. Hirish woke me and Ben up and we went outside to the balcony.

We watched as the first Hevilift company helicopter took off followed closely behind by another much bigger one. The flying machines flew towards Pavaire and beyond the great Oving Boulder and were lost from our sight.

‘Roger Nimpauri and the others are inside those choppers,’ Hirish told us, ‘they are going to recapture the Panguna Mine.’ I was surprised that Hirish knew about the operation but had never shared this information with me.

I went back into the room to sleep but then the sound of the helicopters recommenced. I went out to join the watchers again and the choppers appeared right over Kupe’s Dongnua Ridge. We watched as they tracked along the Crown Prince Range from above the 1930’s Kupe goldfields towards the peak of the Kaupara slope known as Perum’paretuu where there had formerly been a Post and Telecommunication Commission repeater station.

The smaller chopper landed while the larger one was still hovering high above.

After a while the smaller chopper took off again and flew low into the Kupe Valley where it dropped papers with a message to the people in the BRA-controlled area to give up war and work for peace and

not fear the PNGDF in Panguna. Then it headed straight for us, went over our roof and down to Tokunari.

Then the larger helicopter also followed.

The two choppers did several more runs between Perum'paretuu and Tokunari until about 6 am, while back in the Crown Prince Range mortar and gun fire was clearly heard.

I was really worried about my close relatives and the coastal refugees in the Kupe Mountains. Their lives would be shattered by the people that the PNG government had sent from across the sea to make war.

But Hirish was laughing. 'We will wait and see what this Redskin army can do out there. At Kapanau, in the Aropa hinterland, a similar PNGDF patrol was chased out like mice running before a cat.' He shared this story as we sat on the balcony watching the Perum'paretuu Peak in the mountains of Kupe.

I was still in Kupe when the PNGDF operation in the Kapanau area that Hirish was talking about had occurred. What I heard was that the fleeing PNGDF patrol had left behind the dead body of a Bougainvillean resistance fighter propped against a coconut palm. When the attacking BRA approached one of them thought that the body was still alive and fired his shotgun at it.

Mortars rumbled in the Kupe Mountains as the people in the SSQ flats watched. Everyone had got up

to look up at the Kaupara brae and Perum'paretuu Peak.

While we watched a chief below, Hantere, was laughing and telling people that, 'Michael Somare and Pias Wingti will never sleep until the Panguna Mine has been re-opened to build their country back up to what it was in the beginning.' Everyone laughed and expressed contempt for the PNG government and its people. But Hantere continued.

'The Germans, English and the Australians couldn't destroy us,' the elderly Hantere was saying, 'They brought in the Redskins to rule and exploit us and now, you see the Redskins trying to completely take over our land. The BRA should stop being irresponsible by destroying Bougainvilleans and save our land because we were a nation long ago.'

Then he pointed at my mama. 'You see, this family has come down here because the BRA killed their father for no good reason. Their rule is lawless. They kill innocent people. They were stealing from us and we also came here. Every day they are threatening our Bougainvillean lives, so where can we find freedom? We are now in Arawa with the PNGDF to find freedom.'

The talk continued. The care centre people were sorry for their brothers and sisters in the BRA controlled areas. There were even prayers dedicated to the safety of the people out there in the bush.

A day later the first rumour was spread about in the centre that people had spotted a chopper landing

in the field hospital area with the first PNGDF casualty. The PNGDF in the hospital area threatened the people so they left.

From all the stories I learned that there was a two front approach to Panguna. The first was on Perum'paretuu by the choppers and the other one was on foot along Panguna's Port-Mine Access Road.

The group that came along the road captured the former BCL employee residential area that had later been turned into a high school known as Camp 10. They stopped there but the attack force at Perum'paretuu was moving towards rebel leader Francis Ona's Guava village and Panguna itself.

On the next morning another rumour circulated that the BRA was really giving the PNGDF and the resistance fighters a hard time in Panguna. They could not move further and the chilly climate of Panguna was affecting them.

A few days later I heard people saying that two PNGDF soldiers were dead in Guava and the PNGDF and the resistance fighters were having trouble evacuating the bodies to Arawa. The BRA was apparently too much of a threat to the helicopters owned by a non-military company Hevilift.

I also heard people condemning the PNGDF helicopters given to them by Australia in 1989 for not being game to rescue the government men in Panguna.

Then I heard that one of the pilots in a smaller helicopter, an Australian presumably, had landed at

the field hospital and was wounded. People said he was shot by the BRA trying to land at Guava to retrieve the bodies of the two soldiers. He fled with a bullet wound in his leg and without the bodies.

A group of seven or eight people from Karikira in the BRA area then came to Arawa with a mother having difficulty delivering her baby. Our care centre people were worried about them arriving while the Redskin army was grieving for their losses at Guava.

I was at home in SSQ flats one afternoon when my friend Roger Aniona came and told us he had spotted the group at the former Arawa Auto Port owned by Shell Limited waiting for PNGDF transport to pick them for interviews at Tokunari.

All Bougainville knew that the PNGDF was undisciplined and cruel. They applied their traditional culture of payback on Bougainvilleans when they were attacked and soldiers were killed or injured. Bougainvilleans in the PNGDF controlled care centres had been killed for trivial reasons after attacks by the BRA. Now there were seven innocent lives that had come from the bush when the Redskins were grieving for their setbacks in Panguna.

I later heard that they were taken by the PNGDF to Tokunari and later brought back to Whitehouse while the expectant mother was delivered to the field hospital with her husband.

Adults seldom passed on details of these developments to the children so I just followed every story as best I could.

During the following week the guns in Arawa were silent and there was peace in town because the BRA was devoting all its energy to the defence of the Panguna Mine.

One morning shock waves engulfed our care centre. Five of the men that came from Karikira had been taken away at midnight by the Redskin army and killed.

The PNGDF had raided the Whitehouse, waking people by poking them with the barrels of their guns. In the dark people were searched with torches and kicks and threats.

They left after taking away the five, one of whom was the elder brother of the man who killed my father. He was the husband of the mother who had come for medical help.

Rumour had it that the five were killed in the dawn hours after being tortured and their bodies were dumped out at sea.

Pias Wingti announced victory and the end of the Bougainville rebellion in Port Moresby without knowing that his army was trapped by the BRA at Panguna. The PNGDF commander, Lieutenant Colonel Jerry Singirok had been wounded by BRA fire in an unsuccessful attempt to fly into Panguna.

On 28 August 1994 the Wingti government lost office, partly as a result of its hollow boast about winning the war on Bougainville by recapturing Panguna. The new government that came in was led by Julius Chan. The new PNG leader flew to Honiara

to beg the BRA/BIG leaders for an immediate ceasefire to rescue the PNGDF at Panguna. The BRA leader, Sam Kauona, agreed to the ceasefire despite objections from BRA field commanders across Bougainville.

In Arawa we heard that a peace deal was being discussed by Julius Chan and Sam Kauona in Honiara. During their talks there was a general ceasefire. There was a proposal about holding a peace conference in Arawa with security provided by a neutral South Pacific Peace Keeping Force.

All this was a strategy to save the PNGDF soldiers and their Bougainvillean fighters from the BRA fighters who were raging around the deserted Panguna mine.

While all these peace stories were in the air my relative, Roger Nimpauri arrived late one afternoon. He walked into the enclosed tarred yard between the tall SSQ flats exhausted and worn out by the constant fear of the BRA.

But he was alive and would see more of what Bougainville was to be offered in the coming days under the new peace deal that people were openly welcoming with tears.

PEACE AND FEAR

ANDREW NIMPAURI WAS fine and unhurt. He was at ease as he marched in fine fashion into the Block 'B' cooking area.

He sat down with a mouthful of betel nut but we knew that he was waiting for the food that was steaming over the flickering fire. He was telling us stories to make sure that he was welcome at the meal that morning.

It was the day after his return from rugged Panguna. Hirish, Ben, Mama and all of us gathered to hear his tales of the PNGDF and the resistance fighters in the Panguna operation. He talked over a plate of steaming rice, noodles and corned beef.

On the track from Perum'paretuu to BCL's Camp 10, which had been occupied by the soldiers who had followed the Port-Mine Access Road, the rebels were camouflaged and in the jungle moving with stealth. The PNGDF soldiers that Roger accompanied were very apprehensive and afraid of attack.

He was talking and joking with a local resistance

fighter at Guava watching some of their mates digging a sleeping hole in the moist soil on a ridge overlooking the village early one foggy morning when shots pierced the air.

To the surprise of the company a senior PNGDF leader and his batman landed heavily on the moist Guava soil.

The army opened fire into the cloud covered ridge without any specific target. Roger didn't fire for a few seconds. Then he realized that the Redskins might get suspicious of his behaviour and he released a few shots into the air.

They were trapped in Guava. The first chopper that came to retrieve the bodies could not make it through the BRA gunfire. Seeing that the choppers could not get to them was demoralizing for the PNGDF soldiers.

After more attempts at rescue by air failed, the PNGDF and the resistance fighters improvised their escape by getting a truck from the mine site going. In the night they shouldered the two bodies down to edge of the Panguna Mine pit and drove in the chilly air of the night to Camp 10.

From Camp 10 the bodies were airlifted to the Arawa field hospital. Then the demoralized PNGDF soldiers and resistance men were evacuated by air back to Arawa.

To Roger Nimpaui the PNGDF were cowards. They were living in fear of the unseen eyes of the BRA.

One day sitting with other resistance fighters at the former Shell Auto Port in Arawa on the Mona Road they laughed at a passing PNGDF vehicle calling them, 'Michael Somare's personal bodyguards deployed to Bougainville on a mission beyond their comprehension.'

I was amazed at the words from the pro-PNG resistance fighters but I enjoyed their jokes about the PNGDF as we chewed betel nut.

With the ceasefire the BRA presence in Arawa diminished and people from the BRA zones began to slowly appear in town.

Roger and our Block 'A' and 'B' men began to feast on the PNGDF patrol rations stored in a room on the ground floor of the Whitehouse Building. I stored Australian army ration packs in the apartment and lived on them for weeks.

While eating rations every day I watched the first week of the ceasefire dawn. Men from the bush first came on fleeting visits. No one stayed for a whole day but slowly they spent longer in town and some started sleeping with close family friends in the Whitehouse, Bamboo Corner, SSQ flats and the Town House areas. Some were admitted to the PNGDF field hospital and I saw bush people travelling to Loloho to see relatives and friends.

Some of our care centre people also began to freely visit their deserted homes and torched villages in the BRA zones.

I joined in one such visit to the Pomaa Valley with

a friend, Roy from Puakate Village, to see his old mother and his other relatives.

We took off early in the morning and arrived in the hideout high above Pomaa Village on the ridge bordering Kupe.

There, in a tiny makeshift iron-roofed hut, we discovered his mother who was overwhelmed to see her son alive and well and broke into tears of joy.

They shared a few tales from both sides of the conflict over a plate of garden food. Later the old woman prepared a basket of garden food for us and we left to go back to Arawa.

My only fear during this walk was the possibility that I would see the men who had killed my papa. I just did not want to see them and I thought they would harm me. I even avoided looking at the place by the side of the road at Kapanasi hamlet where Papa was shot and buried because it was too painful for my heart.

Arawa was dancing in peace but I still feared my papa's killers who were crisscrossing this area regularly. I was lost in a world that seemingly rejected me, yet deep in my heart felt that it was also my Bougainville.

Two days later after the Pomaa visit I spotted one of my papa's killers. He came in the company of other bush-men to visit Arawa.

From my Mama's apartment balcony in Block 'B' fear crept down my spine and across my chest. I thought that he was coming to kill us all and felt like

running away.

I watched as he and the others chatted and laughed as they passed on their way towards the canteen that had been set up in a vacant residential building for single working women over at Aniaka Place. I only felt relief after they were out of sight.

With fear burning in my heart I watched as the ceasefire dragged on until October when the news broke that peace keeping forces from Australia, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga were coming to Arawa.

Hirish and I were busy helping to clean up a building in town that his brother Jonah was planning as a retail outlet. As we were returning to the SSQ flats there was a huge buzzing of helicopters coming in from the sea of Arawa Bay.

Soon they were over Arawa. People also said that there were military ships in the sea off Arawa and Loloho.

The next morning convoy after convoy of Australian military vehicles entered Arawa from Loloho. Huge helicopters were hovering in our sky all day long. The noise from the foreign military was everywhere and both the BRA and the PNGDF and the resistance fighters were on the streets admiring the new comers.

People in the SSQ flats watched as the Australian army secured the whole area of the Arawa High School with barbed wire. Then they set up checkpoints manned by Australian soldiers at the junction of Marimari Road and the Tokunari Road in

front of the burned Arawa General Hospital.

Directly in front of the flats the Tupukas Bridge had Tongan soldiers manning a checkpoint and they were armed to the teeth. The Tongan troops were camped on Simarang Hill in the resettled Dapera Village at Panguna.

Tokunari Village and its surrounds were occupied by the Australian army and they were erecting tent after tent. All through the night men and women in Australian military attire and gear were working.

One morning I went with some visitors from the BRA zone to see for ourselves the Australian military planes landing on the Arawa airstrip bringing in soldiers from other South Pacific countries.

We strolled down the Mona Road past the Whitehouse Building and the supermarket buildings to the Tunuru-Kieta Road and headed east to the next bridge over the Tupukas River near Tokunari and the airstrip.

We stood on the bridge and watched as planes landed and disembarked troops. The PNGDF were withdrawing from Tokunari Village and Loloho in rusty unkempt dump trucks swearing about the well-disciplined and equipped foreign soldiers replacing them.

On the following days more Bougainvillean people were brought into Arawa from as far north as Buka and South Bougainville. Many were housed in the sections cleared by our care centre people.

With a little help from the PNGDF stationed at

the former Arawa Technical College our care centre men had cleared the bush that had covered the Arawa Township and the women had cleaned the insides of the BCL's residential houses.

Rushing against time, maintenance gangs made up of local tradesmen took over the servicing of the houses and the PNGDF revived an old BCL electricity generator at Tokunari to supply power.

The peace conference began on the 10 October on the lawns of Arawa High School. It was guarded by the South Pacific Peace Keeping Force led by the Australian army and air force.

No BIG leaders were present at the Arawa Peace Conference. Out of the many BRA/BIG leaders known across Bougainville only the BRA leader, Ishmael Toroama, attended.

It was a peace effort created in Honiara but no one observed it. The BRA/BIG was said to have boycotted it because the PNG leader, Julius Chan, had ignored all the promises he made in Honiara.

In Honiara he had agreed that all his PNGDF soldiers would be withdrawn to a main base like Loloho while Arawa was to remain neutral for the peace meeting. But the PNGDF remained everywhere except Tokunari.

My people from Kupe frequented the meeting but I did not attend because I knew I had nothing to say.

Despite the ceasefire the BRA continued to attack. One day a PNGDF maintenance crew went to fix a problem with the town water supply and was attacked

by BRA groups from the Panguna area.

The BRA took off with two PNGDF weapons after the attack. I later visited the Arawa field hospital and saw the wounded soldiers. A local plumber, Daniel from Puakate, who was in charge of the Arawa water supply, was also wounded in the wrist but he had not been admitted to hospital.

On the Kieta-Arawa Road two PNGDF soldiers were driving along when they were signalled by some unarmed people who wanted a lift into Arawa. When they pulled up next to them, the men knifed the soldiers and walked away with their guns.

Despite these attacks I was optimistic that the peace conference would be successful. Seeing people from the BRA controlled areas wandering around freely in Arawa I thought the current peace was to last forever and I knew I would be in school soon without the threat of guns.

But the worst threat for me came a few days after the official closing of the Arawa Peace Conference on 14 October.

One day I was wandering about when a Panguna man from Kokore, Raphael Evinu, approached Mama at our Block 'B' home. He had picked up a story that some of Papa's killers were plotting to kill one of us because they thought we had reported one of the five men who had come in with the expectant woman from Karikira and had been killed by the PNGDF.

Mama was hurt to the marrow because she knew she was innocent. She believed the BRA killers

wanted to hunt us down so we wouldn't be able to accuse them of murder.

Mama quickly took us all in truck to Loloho in the hope of boarding a ship and heading for West New Britain. But there were no ships in those weeks and we had to stay with her cousin, Matarina and her family from Antapu, in Topinang Village in Loloho. There we spent two weeks and we were there when the last Australian warship left Bougainville after the peace conference. They left a supply of food with the Loloho care centre people.

Then one fine day at the beginning of our third week in Loloho Robert Kempatu visited us and said we would be leaving. So with Robert we left on the *MV Huris*, a coastal trader, for Buka.

I was sad to be leaving Bougainville because of the fear of the Papa's killers who were now after us.

The sea was calm as we boarded the vessel. People came to say goodbye to their loved ones but my fatherless family had nobody to farewell us. However, seeing Robert Kempatu close by made me feel better, even though I was leaving Kieta forever.

On board there were also some PNGDF army men who were travelling to Buka.

It was my first voyage on a ship and my first trip to Buka. I feared the sea sickness that people had told me about in Loloho but the moon sparkling on the dancing sea made me alive.

After the long trip along the east coast of Bougainville we arrived at the mouth of Buka Passage

on the morning of the next day. I was amazed by the sight; Buka Island was beautiful. The ship slowly made its way to the port and docked that night. There were waiting PNGDF soldiers and people waiting for their friends.

Robert went to search for transport. I felt sad and ashamed that my little family was alone with no friends waiting for us.

The other travellers left and my family was there by itself waiting for someone to see us and save us. Watching the mighty Buka Passage running like the Bovong River in Kieta made me forget my silent weeping for my lost relatives.

If my beloved Papa had been alive we would not be like this; wandering about like nomads in the wilderness.

Then a police van arrived. Inside was a police officer, Morris Itoro from Kupe, who was married to a Kimbe woman from West New Britain. I knew him from before the crisis. He loaded us into the van and drove us to his residence at the Hutjena Police Barracks.

According to Mama we were to depart for Rabaul within the week. However a volcanic eruption at Rabaul had disrupted all the coastal shipping and we were stranded in the police barracks with the Itoro family. All the shipping services between PNG and Bougainville had been interrupted.

I learned that the town of Rabaul had been covered by volcanic dust and the people there had

been were forced into care centres, just like us Bougainvilleans.

There was no way for us to go to West New Britain to see my Papa's people on lonely Bali Island in the midst of the Bismarck Sea anymore. We had to wait for shipping to resume; my little wandering fatherless family had no money to get on one of the aircraft that we saw daily leaving Bougainville.

With this natural impediment to our ambition to cross the Solomon Sea I knew we had no choice but to wait. We left for Hanahan Village further north along the east coast of Buka Island.

During the Arawa Peace Conference Mama had met one of her Bali Island in-laws who had married into Hanahan Village long before the Bougainville conflict. One day, after work, Morris Itoro drove us northward.

We passed through the long chain of villages along the John Teosin Highway, beginning with Hangan, which was just a stone's throw from Hutjena. We went through some of the largest cocoa and coconut plantations I had never seen.

On the road my eyes told me that the Buka people, who had invited PNG and its army back, were good natured. I saw many working in the fermenting sheds loading their copra bags onto platforms.

All the villages I saw were like makeshift settlements, even more so than the refugee camps that I knew in the Kupe Mountains. I saw pigs wandering free in the midst of the people and their

homes.

And when our transport halted at Hanahan the place was no different. The family there was Seventh Day Adventist who regarded pigs as evil but their most beautified hamlet was infiltrated by pigs from the surrounding large Catholic community.

The mixed Bougainville-West New Britain family was fine and it was peaceful. They cared for us and we travelled into the heart of the Buka Island and its thick virgin jungles to garden and wander about. And I discovered much good in life in that part of my Bougainville.

I saw for the first time in my life a chainsaw at work milling timber for the family. They were working on a new house to replace the one we slept in. I admired the chainsaw man at work and wondered if I could ever own a chainsaw for myself but it was just a dream of those days.

After some weeks at Hanahan my sister, Amea, got ill and nearly died so Mama decided we had to leave for Hutjena and continue our journey to West New Britain. Morris Itoro came for us.

But in Hutjena Mama changed course and we were to return to Kieta. I remember I was sad not to be journeying by sea to the Redskin country but I was also glad I was going back to the place that I loved the most.

So, after spending three days at the Hutjena Police Barracks, Morris drove us into the growing Buka town. It was a fine afternoon with a clear blue sky

when we went to catch a PNGDF ship back to Loloho.

The police vehicle we were on made its way into the crowd of people at the Buka wharf. But our ship was not moored there; it was beside the wharf at Kamarau and it was a landing barge. It was very large and much bigger than the *MV Huris*.

It was navy in colour and had two huge guns on either side near the wheelhouse. There were vehicles driving onto the ship to drop off cargo. Most were vehicles with PNGDF personnel with guns.

Towards dusk the ship was ready to go and I started to see people rushing towards it. There were more armed soldiers than civilian passengers. I secured myself a position near the wheelhouse and watched as a red bus was driven onto the ship and the landing ramp was closed.

Out of the red bus came a familiar family from Arawa, a Buka man called Vianney Mala who was married to a Kieta woman from Pangkama Village. They took up their place with us but they looked wealthier than my fatherless family.

Then I heard that the bus belonged to the newly established Kieta administration in Arawa.

We travelled listening to the churning engines of the PNGDF ship through the night and it was calm and peaceful and I was lost in bliss. I was free and out at sea watching the flying fish and enjoying the brilliance of the twinkling stars in the universe.

The PNGDF fed us with rice and tinned fish and I

enjoyed it all.

We reached a spot in the sea off the Torau coastline and I saw the mountains of Kieta. It was dawn and the islands off Loloho and Arawa greeted me with an apprehension that was different to what I had felt upon approaching Buka Island.

We were in Kieta and as the day enveloped our ship all the travellers went to the rail to watch the land of Kieta welcome us with a dull smile.

The ship landed on the beach at Camp 6 at Loloho under the cover of armed PNGDF soldiers, so I knew that the peace conference had not resulted in anything lasting. The Redskin army was still here in the heart of Bougainville.

But I was only concerned about getting back to Arawa and the SSQ flats.

BACK IN KUPE AND SCHOOL

THE BEACH AT Camp 6 was a PNGDF world. It was as if this was a coast somewhere in their Redskin country one weary traveller told me as we sat on board watching the soldiers on the shore. They had guns and every weary traveller observed their commands.

Towards the north end of Camp 6 were the two Hevilift choppers that had been used during the PNGDF effort to recapture the Panguna Mine. Looking from the rails of the ship I also saw small boats dancing on the sea.

The coconut palms were peacefully swaying in the sea breeze, as were the small boats that were equipped with radar systems and were based on Taurato Island in Buin. Their role was to patrol the PNG border and attack the BRA boats that crossed over.

I was walking down the loading ramp when an armed PNGDF soldier barked at the driver of the red bus: *'Fuckin yu! Em no sip blo yu. Yu lukluk na drive.* 'Fuck you! This is not your ship. Look carefully as

you drive.’

I didn’t know what the commotion was about but saw the Buka driver looking shocked and ashamed as he kept the wheels rolling. Many other Bougainvilleans encouraged him to keep driving and said the Redskin soldier was just jealous of him bringing a new vehicle home.

The wandering Redskin nearly had to jump into the hip-deep sea as the bus was driven off the dancing landing barge. He was just in the wrong place on the ramp and was acting like an iron man.

My little lost family took a PNGDF transport truck loaded with cargo and left for Arawa seated in the midst of fuel drums with a few other passengers.

My birth town was calm and changed.

There were more people now occupying the residential sections of Arawa but we were driven back to the SSQ’s Block ‘B’. We arrived to see all the old faces waiting. But now we did not have a home.

We spent our nights in an apartment that an old mentally retarded man, Mathias from Arawa Village, had left.

It was filthy and unhealthy but there was no hope; without a father, a mother cannot dream for more. And so we lived and just hoped.

It was not the Arawa life that we had hoped for but one that we had to struggle with. Mama had to think carefully about what our next step should be

My relative, Louis Kepetu and his wife came for us one day. Louis wanted us to come home to Kupe and

his Sirona Village.

But after about two weeks at Sirona Mama contracted some sort of illness and had a lucky escape from death. We all thought that Mama had become unwell because she thought that she had left the spirit of Papa alone at Pomong. She wanted us to be back in our isolated hamlet and so we moved back across the two valleys to Pomong and its wonders.

Fortunately Robert Itona and his wife had looked after our houses and had defended them from the opportunists who would have torched them.

There was peace at Pomong. The bush was all there with the boulders standing high and singing every windy day. The Siro River, a tributary of the Bovong River, flowed below Pomong and was clean and refreshing. I crossed it on our first day back and felt that I was the master of this side of Kupe.

Mama revived her gardening skills. The land seemed to welcome her. She knew more about it than any of the other Kupe people who gardened on our side of the mountains.

During the festive season at the end of the year we dismantled the old house that was built in the 1980s by local relatives for Papa.

According to Kieta custom we had to dismantle the house with some feasting and Louis Kepetu helped us with all the associated tasks.

On the feasting day some Kupe villagers came along to partake of the meagre but culturally significant feast.

Sadly the Kumpou people were not there because they had returned down to their homes near the coast to restart their lost lives. Some of them also went to clean up BCL houses in Arawa and make a new life there.

As part of Mama's final payment of respect to Papa we all burned a few of his old clothes in a fire. Louis Kepetu, who had been Papa's best friend since before the Bougainville crisis took one of his warm jackets.

Mama got the villagers of Nengkenaro to clear some mature forest for gardens in exchange for cooked and uncooked food. The people appreciated the food and thereafter often came to Pomong to barter for it. This trade resulted in Mama having some of the largest gardens in Kupe.

Although the peace effort was not observed by the BRA and the PNGDF we gained freedom to travel from the BRA area to the PNGDF area and vice versa without being killed by either side.

More people in Kupe regularly visited relatives from other areas like Pavaire in Arawa or Loloho with fresh garden food in exchange for tinned meat and rice. There were no financial activities to earn cash around Kieta so this bartering was carried out among the Kieta people on both sides of the fighting.

Mama traded her garden produce for fish and other items with Papa's cousin Belden, who was married at Pavaire.

In January 1995 the authorities in Arawa began

working on reviving the schools. We had no accommodation in town so Mama began frequenting Arawa searching for people who could help in providing somewhere we could stay while at school.

She was lucky that her patrilineal relative, Monori and his niece, Julie Bareuka in Pavaire, offered her a house in Section 14's Bantoka Street that they had cleaned up and occupied along with two other houses.

The Pomong wanderers occupied the house with another young student, Steven Sioma from Kupe, who was a relative of Louis Kepetu's wife's little brother

Formal PNG education started in Arawa in late January. The Arawa High School that had been cleaned up for the Arawa Peace Conference welcomed Bougainvillean students cordially with teachers collected from around Kieta.

Most of the teachers were not certified but men who had university degrees in other fields, like engineering or business, began teaching students across all the grades that the high school started.

My siblings and I all attended the primary education offered at the former Bovo International Primary School. They used the curriculum of my 1989-1990 community school at Kaperia.

I had been in Grade 4 at Kaperia Community School in 1990 and I walked into a Grade 4 class. However, Mrs Agatha Banako, a teacher from the Panguna area who was familiar with me, forced me

into Grade 5.

All my student mates were all Bougainvilleans but we were more mature because we had missed out on our education during the blockade. Although we hadn't been to school since 1990 we now managed our schooling well.

I really enjoyed learning and my penniless mama did not have to pay school fees because education was free in Kieta.

In February at Oria, just beyond Bougainville's great Luluai River in the Buin area, a commercial plane was attacked by the BRA as it was taking off killing a Bougainvillean civil servant and wounding another female passenger.

The young people around me were happy about the attack, saying that BRA strategies were now improving against PNG.

All flights to Arawa by the Air Link Company ceased because it was feared that there would be more BRA attacks resulting in PNGDF casualties.

Although Papa had been murdered by the BRA I still found myself sympathetic to their cause and could understand the young people's response.

The war was still out there on the edges of Arawa. I sometimes had to run to escape gunfights and the schools often had to close early because of the fear of PNGDF and BRA bullets.

In March the PNG National Executive Council exercised the powers of the suspended North Solomon Provincial Government to make

amendments to the North Solomon Provincial Constitution.

In Kieta people looked forward to celebrating a new government on Bougainville in a few months' time.

I was familiar with the long history of different governments on Bougainville.

We had a colonial government until 1975 and then we had a provincial government from 1976 to 1990. After 1990 we had an interim government set up by the BRA. Now we were on the verge of dancing to the tune of a transitional government.

Thomas Tonama, the disabled son of Oni, the great chief of the Panguna area who had given the green light to Rio Tinto to mine Panguna in the 1960s, liked to share my thoughts on the politics of the day.

He couldn't walk and either just sat or crawled about in the house that his two wives maintained in Bantoka Street. They were blood sisters from Murua in the Banoni area of South Bougainville and cared for him dearly.

I was bringing him updates on the politics happening around Bougainville. I don't know how I became a collector of political facts, rumours and gossip for Thomas but, in return, he told me about the updates that he had.

So, after our return from the first term school break in the Kupe Mountains I was passing through the neighbourhood when he called to me.

‘Hey my one, come over here. Did you hear that?’ I remember his words but I was lost in thought as I took a chair below him.

‘You know,’ he continued, ‘we are having a new government under the lawyer from Poma Village, Theodore Miriung. They called it the Bougainville Transitional Government on the radio news last night.’

In April 1995 hundreds of people were gathered in Buka to witness the swearing-in of the new Bougainville government. In Arawa we saw nothing but listened and gleaned more information. Sporadic PNGDF and BRA confrontation was still the norm.

But Thomas kept me informed. He told me that my relative, Joseph Kabui, the head of the political wing of the BRA, was condemning the ‘transitional government’ as a puppet government without a mandate from the people and would soon collapse. But to many Theodore Miriung was seen as the means to get all the warring factions of Bougainville and PNG together.

The transitional government was vocal about peace on Bougainville. From my classroom I heard about what the people were calling the North Nasioi Peace Committee working to build peace within Kieta.

According to Thomas peace talks were being held in Australia between the BRA, BTG, BIG and other groups.

Thomas then got himself a transistor radio and his

news for me was up to date. I regularly called at his home to listen to him proudly disseminating the latest on Bougainville to any weary soul wandering in the street.

Peace was being preached in Kieta but the guns were still pushing their muzzles into everyday life.

1995 was a good year for me. But not all the Bougainvilleans in Kieta sat next to me in that boat.

In the dying months of my good year I was shocked by a brutal BRA ambush at Araba Village that killed two fathers, one of whom was my grandpa's niece's husband from Damaosi Village outside Arawa.

The men had been driving from Loloho to Arawa. They were small business operators returning home after picking up new stock from a coastal trading ship.

I went to the funeral and was shocked to see the bullet holes that lined the body of their red Toyota Hilux. It was a ruthless attack that killed the men instantly. The vehicle had gone off the road and hit a tree hard but they were already dead.

The saddest part was that each respective family mourned for their father separately in their own houses, even though they were neighbours in Section 10's Burua and Nabaka Streets.

All this sort of pain had become part of our culture. Someone mourns for his or her loved one today and then waits for the next one to be taken by a bullet. God had rejected us and made us scapegoats for BCL and the state and people of PNG to our

west.

I was a kid doing Grade 5 at Kaperia in the old Bovo International Primary School at the end of Section 10. Despite everything I was also still a carefree kid from the Kupe Mountains.

I think it was that attitude that helped me win an academic award in December 1995, the first time in my educational journey, which had begun in 1987.

It was a third prize in primary school English but it made me feel that I mattered as a human. It ended the academic inferiority that I had always nurtured and for which even my own papa had condemned me in 1992.

The handshake and the presentation of the little parcel by a teacher from Kongara, Mr Lazarus Aveinu, at the closing ceremony in the Marimari Chapel liberated me from the ebbing tides of academic glory.

My papa had shouted angrily at me telling me that I would never enter a university when I unconsciously uttered the word while playing underneath our house in Section 19 in 1992.

After the closing ceremony I was now looking forward to winning more prizes in 1996 and obtaining a future place in university.

HIGH SPEED NIGHTMARE

I WAS FEELING great as the 1996 school year dawned over Arawa. We played in the water in a Tupukas River pool called *Emang tave* and talked about school. We were refreshed and mentally clear as slate.

I had taken a tour over Christmas from Kavarongnau to Kosia to Kaspeke to Sipuru and then back to Kavarongnau and Arawa. These were the places across which my extended family was scattered.

Kavarongnau had mostly gone back to the bush and there were only animals and plants there. I could see that Bougainville was still truly at war with itself and everything was up-side-down.

Early one morning my brother Justin and I left Kavarongnau with a drunkard relative, Paul Tumuna. My great grandmother was in the hinterland of Koiare and west of Karato. We spent about a week there running around in the bush.

Then we went back to Kavarongnau. We decided to pass through Sipuru village above Paruparu

Mission and School to pay a visit to my relative, Joseph Kabui, who was stationed there with his family.

It was my first face-to-face meeting with him since 1992. He gave us a tour of his home after a lunch of pineapple.

From there our party headed into the Beriri dell and reached Dotama hamlet where my mama's sister Arima lived. This was where my grandmother had come to from the Bolabe Care Centre in Nagovis in South Bougainville to spend the period 1993 to 1995 avoiding the PNGDF mortar shelling. Justin and I spent the night there while our guide and relative left for Kavarongnau.

On our return trip the anti-education BRA faction at Panguna took us in for questioning at the old Panguna Post Office building.

All their questioning was largely irrelevant but I was asked by Moses Pipiro about the possibility of Sexually Transmitted Diseases spreading in Panguna from the regular travellers in and out of the BRA and PNGDF zones of influence.

All this gave me great topics to discuss back in school and I was cool in my heart.

Politics on Bougainville was going well and every day I heard that my relative, Joseph Kabui and his men were crisscrossing the Bougainville Strait to Honiara to talk about peace in the PNGDF controlled areas.

Bougainvilleans were running after peace on our

island but the Redskins did not seem to want it to prevail until they had secured the Panguna Mine.

One afternoon in January I was crossing our street to our house when Thomas Tonama called me over. 'E, did you hear that your *baran*, Joseph Kabui and the BIG team have been ambushed at sea by the Redskins?' I was lost since I had not heard anything about it.

But he continued his story. 'They had gone to Honiara to talk peace with the Redskin bastards. Reports suggest they had reached some sort of understanding but the PNG people feigned happiness and then got their army to ambush our leaders.

'Really shameless people are these Redskins. Our BRA should chase them out of Bougainville once and for all. I see them carrying their guns in our midst showing off to our widows and I get really mad. I wish I was not disabled so I could slaughter them in the manner they do their pigs at all their useless *singsings*.'

I left him while he engaged another lot of people in his tales.

In February more bad news reached us. My relative, Martin Miriori, who was the BRA/BIG spokesman in Honiara was attacked by a band of PNG agents in his home in Honiara. The culprits attacked the family with firebombs and burned his residence. Luckily the family escaped and were said to be bound overseas.

Around me gunshots became regular. Local

resistance men began to join the BRA and started attacking the PNGDF. Some stole PNGDF-issue guns and disappeared into the bush; a few just left for their own reasons.

On March 23 the PNG government declared an end to the 18 month ceasefire and announced 'Operation High-Speed II', an attempt to end the BRA influence once again.

For this operation the PNGDF increased its presence in Arawa. They now occupied Sections 8 and 13 and introduced an ID system where every individual entering or leaving Arawa had to have a pass approved by the PNGDF leadership and a local chief.

Every adult or child had such a piece of paper and they were checked at exit and entry points in Tokunari Village, at Tunuru Junction and in Sections 13 and 8.

Many of us abused the system. I often avoided Section 13 and left Arawa through Section 12 or along the Tupukas River. I don't remember my reasons but many adults objected because they said this was not an island in Papua or New Guinea belonging to the Redskins for them to keep check us like their kids.

Despite the PNGDF security curtain the BRA continued to infiltrate and attack them. In response the Redskin army threatened the innocent Bougainvilleans living in their care centres.

The BRA often fooled the PNGDF. They would

fire a shot high in the mountains outside Arawa while their men were inside the town. This single shot distracted all the PNGDF guns and mortars while the real BRA patrol was chatting in the market place or were with family members.

Often the BRA would shoot at a particular camp but the numerous terrified PNGDF camps would fire recklessly, as if they were being attacked too.

One such occasion occurred while I was in school listening to my teacher, Mrs Amos from Amion. A former resistance turned BRA patrol fired a shot at some birds above Section 7 west of Section 8. A sleeping resistance fighter who was surprised by the shot fired his gun towards Section 9 to the east across the brawling Bovong River.

The entire Section 8 camp fired all their guns towards the unoccupied Section 9 with some of their stray bullets reaching Section 13. Section 13 responded by firing their guns at Section 9.

The student body was ordered onto the ground with our books but I was laughing because we had seen the scared birds flying away above Section 7 after the first shot. We were laughing and saying that the PNGDF was the world's most stupid army.

As we recovered and got ready to leave for our homes a PNGDF armoured vehicle came to the school entrance and the men inside came and asked us where the BRA was shooting from. The students were amused as the vehicle moved forward up the Erama Road firing its huge mounted gun at Section 9.

After the armoured vehicle had passed a bunch of resistance fighters on foot came and asked us if we had seen the BRA. Again the answer was no but they walked away towards the Bovong River foot bridge with their guns rattling and spilling bullets at the Section 9 houses.

It was a good show of poor performance by PNG's little army wasting Australian military aid.

In another incident a BRA patrol shot at the PNGDF in Section 13. The PNGDF soldiers from as far away as Tokunari rushed for Section 13, including an armoured vehicle. A Land Cruiser load of soldiers from the mortar platoon came and set up in the shade of the huge Pikus tree on the Rumba Road.

We gathered around to have a look at the setup and stood around waiting for the soldiers to start launching mortars towards Rumba SDA Mission where the BRA patrol had been. But from the field hospital the soldiers there began firing towards Section 15.

The friendly soldiers we were with looked confused and told us to be careful of those stupid soldiers firing from the hospital area towards us because a few bullets began hitting the Pikus above us. The band of mortar operators then gave an order to all residence of Bantoka and Doraka Streets to come under the massive cover of the Pikus so they could be safe from the reckless firing from across the Tupukas River.

'Kan ol, ol save tu olsem igat ol man-meri lo bia?' 'The

cunts, don't they know there are people here?' one of the soldiers said, condemning his mates stationed at the hospital. '*Nogut mi tanim mortar ya go lo ol.*' 'Otherwise I will aim this mortar at them.'

But they then left for Section 13.

Soon a residential house on Renu Street went up in flames as bullets hit its gas cylinder. Luckily the occupants were already outside.

Then the PNGDF from the field hospital rushed into Section 15 through Renu Street and took us by surprise. They shouted with all their guns aimed at us, 'Where are those BRA men?'

I was really concerned for my friend, Thomas Tonama in Bantoka Street who could run from the shooting.

One brave heart told the demanding Redskin soldiers that we had not seen the BRA.

Then one angry soldier from behind a barricade of hibiscus shouted at us, '*Fuckin yupla...bai mi brukim yupla olgeta wantem gun ya.*' 'Fuck you lot ... I'll shoot you all with my gun.' He said this to a gathering of men, women and children and a few elderly people with walking sticks.

Then they ordered us all to put our hands in the air and move into the middle of the road, which we did. Men, women, and children, we all had our hands high in the air as we were marched into the middle of the Rumba Road.

I was angry. Why on earth were we being mistreated when we all knew that the BRA shootout

had happened in Section 13? Their own PNGDF men had condemned them as reckless and controlled by fear and here we were losing our dignity to them.

I watched with the rest of the people as the hospital based soldiers went through Bantoka Street looking for the BRA patrol, which was now many kilometres away and safe up on the Arawa-Kaino Road.

Our people regularly said that if only the BRA had the same firepower as the PNGDF the Redskin soldiers would have swum the Solomon Sea back to their country by now.

As far as I was concerned it was both the BRA and PNGDF chasing each other around Arawa that drove fear into my heart.

Once the PNGDF killed a school mate of mine who was a resistance fighter turned BRA rebel in an ambush at Damaosi Junction on the Arawa-Kaino feeder road.

They set up the ambush near the Rumba SDA Mission and got him. I was at home and heard all their shouts and gunshots of jubilation after this success.

A local resistance fighter in Section 13 reported that the all-Redskin patrol returned dancing after their kill and the re-capture of one of their weapons. He saw the returning soldiers led by an armoured vehicle; some were seated on the roof drinking water.

In a payback raid the BRA set up an ambush on the Paluka Road in Section 14. We were surprised by

the roar of gunshots near the canteen in Section 14's Niwoki Street and rushed for cover two streets away.

The BRA shot and wounded two Redskin police officers and captured their rifles. The injured police fled for their lives leaving the goodies they purchased scattered on the tar.

Soon afterwards the PNGDF abused me at Town House. I was taking a walk one Saturday afternoon with boys from Siae and Aropa when we approached a band of armed Redskins, Tolais and Highlanders, basking in the sun.

One of them spotted my bright necklace and said with a sarcastic laugh, '*Hey kiau, yu marit man?*' 'Hey egg, are you are married man?'

I looked around to see who the Redskins were laughing at and realized it was me because I was walking behind my four friends.

The man kept calling to me, '*Hey marit man, yu barim o? Kok yu. Yu save yu werim necklace blo ol marit man?*' 'Hey married man, are you listening? You penis! Do you realize you are wearing a married man's necklace?'

They all laughed as tears built up around my eyes. My friends consoled me with pity and cursed the Redskins as we headed into Aniaka Street.

I was infuriated but what could I do? The BRA who had killed my papa was my enemy and the PNGDF was my enemy for abusing my freedom on the very island my progenitors had left for me.

We cut short our planned walk of going along

Section 18's Karia Street and over the Tupukas River to Section 15's Renu Street and just left for Section 14 in fear.

The PNGDF had recently killed an innocent motorcyclist travelling to Arawa from Kobuan Village. The young man was caught at the checkpoint and tortured to death and his body dumped somewhere to rot. All attempts by the peace committee to retrieve the body failed.

I began to fear the Redskin army in Arawa. Seeing some of them visiting widows in our neighbourhoods I felt like killing them. We had been told stories of how easy it was to steal their guns while they were busy having sex with the women inside.

In our Bantoka Street two widows, one from Pidia on the coast and one from Bakabori near Kupe, entertained PNGDF soldiers in their homes and we talked about killing them and joining the BRA, but we were just children dreaming.

The new round of PNGDF offensives against the BRA was really bad for Arawa.

The PNGDF also brought a huge white helicopter to Arawa. It was bigger than anything I had ever seen before. It was said to be transporting troops during the operation. Many people said that the BRA needed to shoot it down to stop it disturbing us every day.

While the BRA maintained their presence near Kieta Port the PNGDF re-captured Aropa Airport after landing by sea and air. But after a week they

were driven back to Arawa and Loloho. Their armoured vehicle also suffered bullet penetration. At the Koromira Catholic mission the PNGDF swam out into the sea at midnight for a pair of smaller islands while fleeing a BRA raid.

Behind they had left a stock of mortars and ammunition to which the BRA helped itself.

The BRA also disturbed the harmony in Arawa. They once fired a single shot into the air to scare the PNGDF and watch and enjoy the reckless show of firepower.

The shot was fired in the bush near Section 4 while I was near the old post office building. The undisciplined Redskin army fired everywhere. The PNGDF thought the shot heralded a BRA raid involving dozens of men attacking them. We, the ordinary people, knew that the shot had come from by one or two rebels just to disturb Arawa.

The PNGDF were scaring themselves. A soldier in Section 8 hearing gunshots at Tokunari thought Tokunari was under fire and in fear he fired into the jungles in the Pavaire brae. The soldiers at Tunuru Junction, thinking Arawa was under attack, fired into the hills surrounding them to scare the non-existent BRA away.

Our people knew that PNGDF did not worry about wasting ammunition because Australia was there supplying them with arms, equipment and cash by the millions.

And seeing one of the PNGDF armoured vehicles

being used mostly by a team of Australian soldiers in Arawa made everyone conclude that Australia and PNG were together fighting a war to re-open their Panguna Mine.

We bumped into the armoured vehicle once returning from school. There was a meeting of PNG and Australian soldiers at Marimari Chapel and as we came closer to the church grounds we saw armed white men.

And on the armoured vehicle there were white men with guns but no uniforms. One was just resting on the roof of the vehicle in his pants. My friends said these were Australian soldiers training the PNGDF. We took off down the Marimari Road towards the Rumba Road.

Despite all the Australian input into the PNGDF's Operation High-Speed II the BRA punished them and thwarted their plans.

The BRA from Kieta went as far as Buka Island to attack the PNGDF and capture their weapons. In September the whole of Arawa was celebrating a BRA kill in Buin.

I heard people saying that the local resistance fighters had plotted with the BRA from Laguai and killed about ten Redskin soldiers and captured five hostages for mistreating Bougainville women. The mistreatment had occurred before the eyes of the women's spouses and family members at Kangu.

Many of the people in Arawa said the BRA should execute the five hostages. They pointed out that when

the Redskin army captured Bougainvilleans, they killed them and threw their bodies in the sea or disposed of them in secret locations.

After the failure of their second operation the number of PNGDF soldiers in Arawa dwindled but during the operation the PNGDF had mined the whole town. When the operation soldiers left the ordinance remained active.

The first victim was a child from Koromira, who was killed at the Bovong Bridge near the Arawa Police Station.

Little kids were playing at the soccer field while watching a Sunday game and when they were hot they headed for the river to swim under the bridge. Everyone was shocked by the explosion that maimed the 3 year old. The game was halted as people left with sadness.

A week later, beyond Section 16, a Redskin mother, married in Kieta, and her daughter fell victim to a mine. They were out collecting dry coconuts for cooking when the daughter detonated it. The girl was burned but survived in hospital in Buka.

After an angry row within the PNGDF the mines were removed and I began to join others in roaming around Arawa and its surroundings more freely.

In October the reality of the cockeyed efforts of the PNGDF and their advisors came to Arawa. In the second week of the month the pro-peace leader, and Premier of Bougainville, Theodore Miriung, was assassinated by the PNGDF and resistance fighters in

Konga in Siwai while he was with his family.

Our people from all around Kieta gathered at the Town House and in Section 19 to mourn and wait for the body to arrive from Buka for a state funeral.

On the day the body arrived in Arawa people were weeping openly in the streets. I did not see much presence of the PNGDF on the streets as our people cursed them.

People from far and wide across Kieta brought food and live pigs for the funeral held at his residence at Town House. I did not attend but Mama went with some other women from Section 14 and the Bovong Valley and spent the night there.

After the few days of mourning the casket was brought to his home village of Pomaa. Nearly the whole population of Arawa went with it and only a handful of us were left wandering around the streets of the town.

The PNGDF was very quiet during the funeral week. They were presumably nursing their broken hopes in their camps.

What the PNG army, police and their government were dreaming about with all the nightmares the BRA were giving them nobody knew.

THE LAST GUNFIGHT

THE BRA WAS getting the upper hand and increasingly harassing the PNGDF. Every month resistance fighters were deserting and escaping with their arms to join the BRA. The PNGDF feared the Bougainvilleans more and more.

The Redskin army was rapidly losing the trust of the Bougainvilleans on their side and it was becoming obvious that they needed a new strategy. If they could get more military support they felt sure they could crush the Bougainvilleans and there would be celebrations from New Ireland and East New Britain to Sandaun and the Western Province.

Their most daring and shameless plan was exposed in late February 1997, after I had started doing Grade 7 at Arawa High School.

People started hearing reports that the PNG Prime Minister, Julius Chan, and his government had hired foreign mercenaries to crush the BRA and take over Bougainville and mine Panguna to develop their country.

Foreign fighters were not on Bougainville as yet but I was hearing gossip in Arawa. People started sighting African soldiers in Loloho and seeing

massive squads of helicopters and planes on the horizon over the sea at night patrolling the skies of Bougainville.

Returning home from school one afternoon a boy told me that the PNGDF was not going to fight with the BRA anymore; they were going to leave it to these Africans to fight with missiles mounted on planes and helicopters.

He told me that the PNG government wanted to take over our land with maximum force so that we would forever be their slaves and our Solomon Islands identity and dignity would be no more.

I was really angry about the story and told him we should steal guns from the PNGDF soldiers who visited the widows in Bantoka Street and run for the bush to help the BRA. We were kids but we believed in our hearts that we were Solomon Islands people.

I hoped that the BRA would find ways to withstand the might of the foreign mercenaries that people were talking about. I believed that the PNG government was about to do something really inhumane to us and needed to be crushed so our Bougainville could be free.

Many of us were hoping that Bougainville's pro-PNG resistance fighters would now turn against PNG as they had done at Kangu Beach.

But it was not long before PNG's army turned against its own government. Thomas Tonama told me that the PNGDF was angry because the government was spending millions of kina to fund the mercenaries while they were financially starving and scavenging for resources in Arawa. There was also international pressure coming to bear on the PNG government for employing mercenaries.

One day after returning from Kupe I heard that the mercenaries were leaving after the PNGDF and the government could not agree about the deal for killing Bougainvilleans.

PNG, the nation that had inherited the role of ruling and exploiting Bougainville from the colonial administration, was dancing in its own fire as Bougainville watched.

Julius Chan resigned as Prime Minister and the 1997 elections changed the troubled face of PNG politics. A totally strange name to me, Bill Skate, took over the prime ministership from the man who had planned murder in Bougainville in late July.

The elections in Kieta had been plagued with problems. The BRA set up a continuous campaign of threatening government officials in Arawa. One night, just before polling day, we had a night of heavy gunfire.

An innocent father and my clansman from Pavaire was killed in a shootout in Section 6. A day later there was a night time walk by BRA fighters through Arawa shooting at anything they wanted. In Mawi Street in Section 15 a street lamp was shot out and darkness covered the area where I was playing cards with some people outside a house.

The election was suspended for a week and I seriously doubted whether it would occur but it became safer and they progressed.

And the change of leadership paved a cordial way forward for a peace campaign on both sides of the conflict.

In mid-July Mama left for New Zealand for the first Burnham Talks where all the Bougainville factions met to discuss peace. After she and the

delegation arrived back in Arawa one of the peace negotiating leaders, Thomas Batakai, was murdered by the PNGDF.

I was in Section 14 one October day when shots rang out in Section 17. I thought it was just another BRA shoot out and I ignored it but as I was heading towards Section 11, where my uncle Steven Nabei was living, I bumped into two running PNGDF soldiers, one of whom was a highlander who I had known since our 1994 SSQ flats days.

I was mystified about where the pair were coming from a few minutes after the gunshots in Section 17.

But later I heard that the father of one of my school mates at Arawa High School had been shot dead while gardening with his wife. It was said that a PNGDF ambulance from the PNGDF field hospital had been cruising past their home in Section 17's Tendei Street just before the shots were fired.

Later I concluded that the running pair of the PNGDF soldiers I bumped into in Section 14 were responsible but I didn't tell anyone.

I reasoned that they might have shot the Kongara man and then run across the Tupukas Bridge in Section 16 and through the Tupukas Community School and across the Rumba Road and into the unoccupied Section 14 areas beyond Doraka Street. After passing me they must have headed towards the lower parts of Section 11 and then through the elephant grass on the vacant land bordering Sections 14 and 11.

I let the incident go and focused on school. Arawa High School gossiped about nothing but peace on Bougainville and the fact that we had school books despite the PNGDF bombing our poultry project.

But the BRA could not resist the urge to attack their demoralized PNGDF prey. As the BRA gained ground everywhere we saw the resistance fighters, Manetai and Sirovai, fleeing from their homes to the relative safety of Arawa and I knew the BRA was enjoying these developments.

During one of the dying months of 1997 I was in school on a fine morning. We were occupied with our teacher's discourse when rapid semi-automatic gunfire on the road outside disturbed the day.

We looked through the window and saw BRA men on the foot path in the open field leading from the Town House building.

The Redskin teacher who was lecturing us, Mrs Natuai ordered us to march out and lay flat on the moist lawn. All the girls and a few boys went out as she commanded but I remained with three other boys and told her to go and hide.

We stood at the window and watched.

Two resistance fighters from Rorovana were darting up the Marimari Road heading for the vacant College of Distant Education building in front of us. One of them was firing his gun at the BRA.

So we tracked his direction and then spotted the BRA in a sweet potato and cassava garden beside the colonial era fish pond in the old public library and university centre gardens. They were flat on the ground behind the cover of the sweet potato creepers and cassava plants.

The fleeing resistance fighters hid behind the CoDE building out of sight of the BRA. Then we saw a pair of BRA men stand up and move with their guns towards the building. The two hiding resistance fighters saw the BRA men too.

The Last Gunfight

At that instant the Tokunari Village PNGDF began firing up towards the Town House. We watched the bullet storm knocking down tree branches and leaves in torrents around the old fish pond area. The BRA men kept low as debris landed on them and the two Rorovana men fired their three last bullets and headed for the students and landed exhausted with their magazines empty.

Kelly, my school mate from Mamung, was really angry that the BRA had missed the resistance fighters and even suggested we go out and knife the two men and get their M16 rifles.

But the show was still alive and at that moment it was between the band of BRA and the PNGDF at Tokunari.

The PNGDF bullets chased away the people selling garden produce at a small market next to the Town House. In the midst of all this a few students among those on the ground involuntarily urinated as gunfire from an armoured vehicle deafened them. It began moving up towards Marimari Road in front of the burnt Arawa General Hospital.

The vehicle halted and fired down Marimari Road toward Section 19 and the Our Lady of Mercy Church. It also fired a shower of bullets into the wreck of the hospital while the BRA kept low in the sweet potato plot.

The armoured car then moved at a snail's pace as far as the Arawa High School pedestrian crossing and back as a BRA man aimed his gun at it. A bullet from Tokunari nearly hit him and he was down again and the vehicle moved on towards Tokunari.

In that time gap, the whole body of BRA men stood up and moved for the road. A rifleman was out

on the school pedestrian crossing first with his gun aimed towards Tokunari. Then the rest, seven BRA men, rushed for the CoDE building.

The rifleman tracked behind firing shots as Tokunari bullets hit our school fence and the power pole beside him, then off they all went towards the Our Lady of Mercy Church.

The five of us came out to see the students on the lawn and a teacher shouted at us to get down but Kelly laughed and announced that the BRA boys had gone and were now probably laughing and discussing their failure in taking the lives of the two resistance fighters.

Looking towards our library we saw that the two resistance fighters were still on the ground.

I walked out of the gate of Arawa High School that late 1997 day confident that if the violence kept on going I would steal a gun from a wandering PNGDF soldier; shoot him dead, and run home to the mountains of Kieta.

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The years have blurred my memories but the use of the following online resources has helped me shed light on my life and experiences during the Bougainville crisis, particularly in a chronological sense.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leonard Fong Roka was born in 1979 in Arawa, then the capital of the North Solomons Province (Bougainville) in Papua New Guinea. He was the first born in the family and has a younger brother and three sisters.

Leonard had begun his schooling at the Piruana Village Tokples School outside Arawa in 1986. In 1987 he attended Peter Lahis Community School on the eastern edge of Arawa, where his father was the catechist for the Arawa Catholic Parish. He stayed there until 1989 when the Bougainville conflict intensified. In 1990 he and his younger brother were transferred to the centralized Kaperia Community School by their brother⁴, the late

⁴ According to the Nasioi kinship system a person's mother's uncle is a brother.

Joseph Kabui, who was then Premier of the North Solomons.

The classes were halted midway by the PNG blockade on Bougainville. However, the 1994 ceasefire allowed him to re-enrol. He completed Arawa High School in 2000 and graduated from Hutjena Secondary School in 2002 and went to the University of Papua New Guinea in 2003. In 2004 financial difficulties forced him to abandon his studies.

He began writing poetry in 1997 while in Grade 7 at Arawa High School. After leaving university he took up numerous part-time jobs with various organisations in Bougainville. He also began writing short stories and started on this biography.

After 7 years out of the education system, he returned to university and is completing studies in International Relations at Divine Word University in Madang.

This is his third book. His previous works are *The Pomong U'tau of Dreams*, a book of poetry and *Moments in Bougainville*, a book of short stories. Both books are published by Pukpuk Publications.